The use of paraprofessionals as tutors for retarded reader has proved successful in reducing the number of school failures. Described here is a program that uses paraprofessionals drawn from the school's neighborhood in order to involve the community in solving some of its problems. This program is a psycho-educational service in a hospital mental-health setting which collaborated with the local school district in an attempt to improve reading skills in an extremely depressed urban community. The program was specifically designed to provide individual attention and some opportunity for success for children, among whom were dyslexics, emotionally disturbed children, disruptive children, and those who have been inappropriately taught. The guidelines used for establishing the program are described, as is the ongoing program. Teacher and paraprofessional evaluations and a list of materials used are included. (Author/NH)
Reading failure is so widespread that it is apparent that the traditional educational system is wanting in some important aspects. This problem has been attacked in many ways, as educators have sought the assistance of, among others, the psychologist, the neurologist, and the paraprofessional. While it is still too early to be able to make definitive statements, it appears that it is possible to reduce the number of school failures by using paraprofessionals as tutors for retarded readers.

In the program described here, a psycho-educational service in a hospital mental health setting collaborated with the local school district in an attempt to improve reading skills in an extremely depressed urban community. By using paraprofessionals drawn from the neighborhood, the psycho-educational service involved the community in the solution of some of its problems. Among the retarded readers in these schools are dyslexic children, children with perceptual problems, those who are emotionally disturbed, disruptive children, and those who have been inappropriately taught. As we know, these

categories are not mutually exclusive. Because the pool of retarded readers is so great, this program was not intended to include habitual truants, non-English speaking children, and children with extreme behavior problems; some of these were tutored in the program nevertheless.

Though the etiology of reading retardation is varied, the factor common to all who suffer from this disability is a miserable history of repeated failure, accompanied by feelings of inadequacy, lack of self-esteem, and by withdrawal from the learning situation. These children spend most of the day in a classroom in which the work is above their level of achievement; they are given books they cannot read, and work they cannot do. The teacher is often insensitive to the individual needs of the child, and unequipped to determine his diagnostic profile. Because of administrative pressures, she is too impatient for numerical scores to be able to work slowly and patiently at the elementary level that so many of these children require. The child's withdrawal is sometimes manifested through his inattention to appropriate stimuli, with his attention directed instead to peripheral matters such as the neighboring child and happenings outside the window or in the corridor; disruptive behavior in varying degrees is not uncommon. In short, the child fails to benefit from the classroom, and the class derives little benefit from the child's presence.

This program was specifically designed to provide individual attention and some opportunity for success for these children.
EXPECTATIONS AND GUIDELINES

A program which makes use of the services of paraprofessionals must be realistic about what may be expected from non-credentialed workers whose modal educational level is at or equivalent to high school certification. Hopefully the paraprofessional can fill in the gaps in the child's reading skills by an accepting, patient, systematic presentation of the basic decoding skills, together with providing practice in those readiness skills which the child lacks. This should bring the child to the point where he may experience more successes in his home classroom, and thus become more open to learning there. There will be no miracles of instant success.

At its best, a successful paraprofessional tutoring program can yield the following dividends:

For the child, as a result of his receiving understanding individual instruction at his appropriate educational level, one may expect not only to modify his history of failure and to remove some of his learning problems, but also to improve his self-image and to modify his behavior so that the student, the teacher, and the class achieve an equilibrium appropriate for learning. The school can be more accepting of the child in the classroom if it is known that he is receiving regular assistance. This reinforces the successes of the child in his tutorial progress, and tends to reduce confrontations. In other words, with the success and the attention he experiences in the special tutorial situation, it is hoped that the child will not find it necessary to seek attention in the classroom through disruptive behavior. Hopefully, he will begin to develop an effective learning style.
For the schools, this program can provide enriched services not otherwise available, as well as contact with clinic personnel for on-the-spot consultation; in some cases, it provides a pathway to more specialized clinical services.

For the paraprofessional (and the community) the program provides a dignified entry into the schools as members of the staff performing tutorial services (rather than serving cookies and taking children to the bathroom). It provides an opportunity to observe the schools from within, thus giving insights into school problems and providing the opportunity for knowledgeable evaluation of the schools. This type of program prepares parents with limited schooling to take an active role in the education of their own children and enlarges their horizon for personal advancement. One of its important functions is to provide healthy cooperation and respect between lay and professional people, thus helping to minimize the growing anti-professionalism in the community.

For the psycho-educational service, this is an opportunity to demonstrate to the schools and the community how a mental health center can build a model program, using mental health principles and techniques, which the schools may adopt, adapt, or emulate in order to provide more effective service.

Following are our guidelines and observations relating to the setting up of a program of collaboration between a mental health service and the public schools.

1. It is important for the mental health service to acquire the
trust and confidence of school personnel; this takes time. It is important to deliver on all promises, and to refrain from "over-promising." Commitments must be clearly stated so that the schools do not have unrealistic expectations; unrealistic goals and expectations are powerful impediments to a trusting relationship. The schools require assurance that the mental health service has "nothing up its sleeves." One early concern of school personnel was that mental health agencies are interested only in publishing papers, and that the service would be "paper-oriented." They were apprehensive lest the language be "mental health jargon", which often proves operationally useless in the classroom. Our service, however, leans heavily on its special educators most of whom are former classroom teachers and who therefore speak the language of the teacher, and have respect for her and her problems. In addition to providing consultation to the schools and collaborating on special programs, our psycho-educational service includes an out-patient Learning Disabilities Clinic, based at the hospital, to which the schools are invited to refer children with serious learning problems for more intensive evaluation and tutoring. Thus, a back-up service is available at the hospital to demonstrate how children with serious learning problems may be helped; this back-up service was helpful in gaining trust and confidence.

2. The professional direction of the program must be in the hands of an agency independent of the schools which it serves. This provides the greatest opportunity for finding the most direct, innovative and efficient channels for providing the necessary services to the school and children. Planning for remedial work on an individual basis is a
new concept for the schools. If this program had been initially set up by school personnel within the school building, it would have developed as a package of "more of the same". An independent agency can question the restrictions and limitations which the schools attempt to impose. In addition, the independent agency can act as a shield for the paraprofessional staff, protecting them to a large extent from the administrative and bureaucratic pressures which are so common in these programs.

3. The program must provide assistance without asking for assistance. Schools with a great number of problems find it difficult to absorb special services. They are usually overcrowded and beset with emergencies, with no time, energy or space to spare for these special services. Setting up a program in schools of this kind requires a special kind of diplomacy. The best course is consciously to avoid being burdensome, and to ask for as little as possible, consistent with providing a helpful program.

4. In selecting paraprofessionals for this type of program, it is most important to try to gauge their interest in children, flexibility, and ability to follow instructions and work under adverse conditions; reading level and academic background are less important. Paraprofessionals can be trained to tutor effectively if they are provided with a very carefully structured program; they must be supervised and supported at every step to shield them from bewilderment and frustration. It is helpful to share with them the problems that arise, so that the strengths and limitations of the collaborative role are clear to them.

5. The program must be clearly interpreted to teaching staff, so that conflicts between them and the paraprofessionals can be avoided.
Such interpretation and communication must be ongoing, during the life of the program; after trust is established, both teacher and reading helper can be more effective if they continue to share their experiences.

**THE PROGRAM**

Fifteen parent paraprofessionals were brought directly into four schools to tutor 107 children individually during the school day under the supervision of the Psycho-Educational Division of Psychiatry Services of the Coney Island Hospital. Children were selected for this program whose reading skills were close to first grade level and whose grade placement was third to sixth grades. A highly structured remedial program was laid out so that the tutors could confidently and competently provide instruction in word attack skills. In addition to frequent observation and review of lesson plans by the hospital team in the schools, the Reading Helpers (as the paraprofessionals were called) met weekly at the hospital to discuss problems and teaching techniques.

During its first year, funds for this program were provided by State Urban Education Aid, channeled through the New York City Board of Education; these funds were made available to the local district late in the school year, so that the program ran for only four months — from February 12 through the middle of June.

Paraprofessionals were drawn primarily from the area serviced by the schools; their ethnic distribution was similar to that of the children; the majority were black. Only two were male; all but two of the women were married. Eleven had children, either of pre-school or school age. Two Reading Helpers had no high school diploma or equiva-
lency certificate; one had two years of college. Reading levels of the Reading Helpers, even those having the diploma or certificate, ranged from 4.1 to 11.4, as measured with the Metropolitan Achievement Test, Elementary Level. Helpers who had not earned the high school diploma or equivalency certificate were paid $1.75 per hour for 25 hours weekly; high school graduates earned $2.25 per hour; those with two years of college were paid $2.50 an hour.

Reading Helpers worked from 9 to 3 daily; with one hour for lunch; five periods daily were devoted to individual meetings with children, one period for preparation. Some children were tutored twice weekly; some were tutored four times weekly. Professional staff consulted with the principal of each school in making decisions on the number of sessions to be provided for each child. In the school that had the most serious problems, it was decided that all children in this program should be seen four times weekly. On the fifth day, Friday, the Reading Helpers attended a training conference at the hospital; they returned to their respective schools on Friday afternoons to provide extra individual time for those children who they felt required it. When a child was absent, the leading Helper gave extra time to one of the other children on her list. When a Reading Helper was out -- she was sorely missed, but there was no way of replacing her. Fortunately, the attendance of the paraprofessionals was excellent; and the rate of turnover was very low -- only one left the program because of severe personal problems, and she was replaced quickly.

Initial referrals for the tutorial program were made by the classroom teachers. The criteria were presented to them, and they provided
a list of children who met those criteria. The school's administrative staff and corrective reading teacher reviewed the list to eliminate possible duplication of service. The children were then interviewed by the staff of the Psycho-Educational Division, called Reading Consultants in this program. Interviews were brief, including individual administration of the Wide Range Achievement Test; this provided an initial assessment of the child's reading level and word attack skills. Although the school had recently administered the Metropolitan Achievement Test, it was our finding that the children referred to us generally read more poorly than their test scores on the Metropolitan would indicate -- and that many of them in fact were only on the readiness level.

In three of the schools, the Reading Helpers met with their children in one room assigned to the program. They quickly set up individual cubbies or "offices", using the movable furniture in such a way as to establish privacy and assure a minimum of distractions. They used whatever blackboard space was available, and taped up blank sheets of newsprint to substitute for blackboards, when necessary. Books were displayed on a table in the room, but clutter was discouraged. In the fourth school, the cafeteria served as home base for the program. At the same time, it also served as home base for several other programs such as milk dispensation for all classrooms, small group instruction, and a mother's sewing circle. The noise level was incredibly high, distractions were unavoidable, and for a time it seemed as though the program would collapse here. In addition to the pedagogical discomforts of the work space, the Reading Helpers were exposed to the intrusion of curious and insensitive adults, including teachers. Fortunately, the
group was bored by their common unhappy plight and their appreciation of how badly the children in this school needed the help they offered. They remained in that school to the very end. It is worth noting that when the program was renewed for a second year, this group preferred to remain in this school, rather than be transferred to one with more comfortable conditions.

Each tutor went to the classroom to pick up and also to return each child before and after every tutorial session. Sessions were scheduled to interfere as little as possible with classroom activities that the child liked, participated in, or from which he seemed to profit. Each teacher was therefore consulted before the schedule was set.

The Reading Helpers were given intensive training and supervision. They met for three days at the hospital, and then were placed in the schools to receive in-service (on the job) training, including weekly group conferences at the hospital and weekly visits at the school by the Reading Consultant.

The curriculum for the three days of intensive orientation and training, and for the ensuing Friday morning sessions, included discussion of how children learn, why children fail to learn, the purpose of schooling, and the behaviors displayed by children who fail to learn. The skills involved in learning to read were analyzed; it was pointed out that the children in this program lack many of these skills. For example, some children did not yet know right from left, many had problems of auditory discrimination, few knew all of the consonants, and all had difficulty with the vowels.

A very highly structured instructional program in reading was
presented to the Reading Helpers. They were to teach the children to sound out words, following the sequence which we presented to them. They were to work very slowly and patiently, and to remember that the child would move ahead slowly. Every new "bit" to be taught was to be presented in as many ways as possible -- many we would describe, and others would depend on the Helper's ingenuity. If the child was to learn a letter, "t" for example, he should write it, say it, hear it, touch it, taste it, shape it with his hands, mimic its shape with his body, use sand, velvet, pipe cleaners, blackboard -- in professional terms, use a multi-sensory approach. It was a delight to see how creative some of the tutors were in devising new approaches. In addition, tutors wrote the stories that the children dictated to them -- about themselves, their lives, their interests. Methodology was presented to the tutors in simple terms, with specific instructions for daily activity.

The training session dealt with the details of record-keeping entailed in the program such as the lesson plans, folders for each child's records of attendance, and the responsibility to call the office when they expected to be absent. A serious problem was that of the relationship of the Reading Helper to the school and the school staff, and to the parents of children in the program. Delicate questions of confidentiality of information gleaned from the children or in conference were dealt with in the first session, and several times later during the year when the Helpers reported on difficulties encountered upon the occasional meeting of the parents of the children they tutored.

Role playing during the preliminary training was helpful and pro-
vided relief for some of the tension of the trainees: they dealt with the problems of picking up the child from a hostile teacher, picking up a resistant child, and the various problems which might arise in tutoring. During the second year of the program's operation (this current year), a video-tape machine at the hospital made it possible for each Reading Helper to evaluate her own performance during these sessions; it enriched this aspect of the program. Ongoing training and supervision, in addition to the visits of the Reading Consultants to the schools, included further conferences on problems, methods, the nature of the educational process, and problems of the community.

Tutors were required to write simple daily lesson plans for each child. Each plan called for goals for the day (this might be the teaching of one consonant and the review of two others), specific activities to achieve this goal, comments on what happened during the session, and notes of what to do next time. Plans were reviewed every week by the Reading Consultants who came into the schools regularly to consult with the Helpers there and to review their plans.

Cookies were available at all tutoring sessions. Further incentives were provided in the form of inexpensive toys, felt tipped pens, magic slates, notebooks, and books to read -- all of which the child could earn by demonstrating effort and some small units of success. Every second month a rexographed magazine was issued by the program in each school; in this magazine was included a story, poem or picture by every child in the program in that school.

Children looked forward to their sessions. Several instances were reported in which truants reported to the school building only for their
tutorial sessions, and then left. One 9 year old walked 3 miles to school on a blustery, cold day because he had missed the school bus; ordinarily he would have returned home, but he did not want to miss his tutoring session. When he arrived, he was reminded, to his dismay, that it was Friday -- the day the Reading Helpers met for conference at the hospital instead of at the school.

Several times during the year the Reading Consultant met with the Reading Helpers and the classroom teachers to discuss the children, the methods, and the materials used in the program.

Although we speak of the program as a whole, in fact it varied from one school to another. The climate was critical in setting the tone for the group that worked in that school. Reading Helpers in well organized schools have worked smoothly and effectively from the very outset. In those schools in which it was difficult to find a quiet place to tutor, the work has been far less effective.

The evaluation of the effectiveness of this program must be carefully considered because the usual standardized tests are too "coarse-grained" for children at the lowest levels of achievement. Therefore, in addition to administering the Wide Range Achievement Test, at the end of the four month program, we analyzed the progress of each child based on the word-attack skills he acquired, as reflected in the records kept by the tutor and by the classroom teacher. Questionnaires evaluating each child's participation in the program were filled out by each Reading Helper. In addition, administrative staffs completed questionnaires evaluating the program.

In this group of children who had been marking time for most of
their school careers, all children demonstrated progress when viewed diagnostically. In the four month period covered by this program, every child increased his ability to attack new words. Of the 82 children who remained with the program for its duration, 34 showed between 4 and 7 months progress in reading level, and 5 children made progress ranging from 9 months to 2 years. Children in the remainder of the 107 "slots" in the program moved or were withdrawn because of extended absence, and were replaced by others. It was not possible to compare the effectiveness of the number of weekly tutorial sessions (two as compared to four) because the tutorial situations, and even the student populations, were not comparable.

Teachers were unanimous in judging the program to be of positive value to the child. They reported behavioral as well as academic improvement. Following are some of their comments about individual children:

"Program has been helpful to child in the following way: 1. Given him confidence. 2. Helped him to read better. 3. Improved his attitude towards school slightly. 4. Made him more aware of the importance of learning. 5. It has stimulated an interest in science. These positive factors have transferred themselves to me in that it has been easier for me to work with and help him in his class endeavors."

"Gloria's reading is no longer choppy. She now stops when she sees a period at the end of a sentence and often attacks words using her phonics skills."
"This program has been helpful in the respect that it gives the child an incentive to work harder and improve his reading. The one-to-one relationship seems to be very important to the child. It is helpful to me since I do not have to spend class time on a reading problem that does not affect the majority of children."

"It is obvious that Mrs. P. has not only given Joey competent instruction but she has done quite a bit for his self-image."

"He has gotten warmth, friendship and understanding from Mrs. K. He has learned that he can have loyalties and affection towards more than one adult at a time in a school situation. He finally realizes that he can learn to read. He has gone from pre-primer to somewhere in the early part of the second year."

"Juan, because of his inadequacy, has required a great deal of help. The young lady and I worked together and I believe we have given him the initial move, and if Juan continues in this way, I believe he can catch up with his grade in a few years. The desire is there. I tested Juan the
last time (June, 69) and of 67 vocabulary cards he knew 66 immediately (word recognition) and the 67th on the second time around. This is a boy who could not read very simple words in January of 1969."

Some were very candid.

"It has been helpful to me by removing a discipline problem from the class periodically."

The value of taking the child out of the room should not be underestimated.

Reading Helpers discovered individual styles and interests:

"I have found out one thing about Joan. If you give a little time to think she will come out with the right answer."

"It was a pleasure to tutor Willie. This little boy was picked up four times a week and extra. To see him come out of his shell made this program worthwhile. He learned to walk fast, instead of drag; he learned to smile, not look sad; he learned to speak up, not hang his head and mumble. Children like Willie need more of a one-to-one relationship."

"The most pleasing thing about Lewis is that at first he was afraid of being wrong and wouldn't speak up, but now he does."

"This please me most. She jump from one stage to another in just one week. After tutoring with her close to three months, and then that day came it brought warmness in my heart. Like seeing a child walk for the first time. She also feel that she has accomplish start in the right direction."

The Reading Helpers themselves have benefitted tremendously in terms of insights into the learning problems of children, and increased understanding of the school as a social system. To quote them in their unsigned evaluations of the program:

"I have learned to have more patience with my own children.... I don't have time to sit on their back doing their homework with them. And my children have improved in their work in school.... they see their mother working with children that can't do the work on their level."

"I have gained an insight of what is going on in the schools (good, bad and indifferent). I always had an idea of something unpleasant going on, and
put all teachers in one category -- indifferent. Now I feel it is a matter of 50 - 50. 50% still shouldn't be teaching - the other 50% are dedicated, concerned teachers. Most of all, the attitudes of children, which is unbelievable, as to their not getting any encouragement and respect for learning in their own homes."

"I'm learning about some of the personal problems these kids have to overcome in order to pay attention to learning to read, and something about how kids learn."

"I enjoy working and seeing how children react, and find the different reason why they act that way. It will help me as a mother bring up my children."

"I learned to help my children with reading. I understand better the problem the teacher has with the children."

"What is more beautiful then to watch a child struggle with a word and then smile when he has blended it together all by himself."
Several of the Reading Helpers have been stimulated to read a great deal more than they had in the past, and six applied for admission to the local community college. Although their reading levels were tested early in the program, this aspect of the program had not been planned properly, and it was not possible to evaluate the tutors' reading program appropriately; it is our impression that significant changes did appear.

The principals in each of the four schools requested continuation and expansion of the program for the current school year. One of the principals, on being transferred to a school with a middle class population, and therefore not eligible for funding for special services, invited the Psycho-Educational Division to adapt the program in her school this year with volunteer personnel. This is now being done successfully, although it must necessarily be a more modest program.

The administrative problems on a collaborative program such as this one are enormous; it is a miracle that they have not been incapacitating. If not resolutely combatted, bureaucratic bumbling can easily destroy these programs. For example, materials ordered for the program began to trickle in three months after the program started; now, 13 months later, we are still receiving deliveries from that original order. We are called upon to spend fifteen minutes on the phone justifying a thirty cent voucher for carfare. We have had to deal with delayed and incorrect paychecks for the Reading Helpers. We have had to lay out personal funds for carfare used by the Reading Helpers and for incentives to be used on the program, with the assurance that we would eventually be repaid.
The program is now in its second year, and has been expanded to include a larger number of schools and tutors; it has a duration of 30 weeks, from October 15 to June 15. It is expected that the children will gain even more than last year. Hopefully, the administrative difficulties can be expected to diminish as more experience is obtained with this kind of program. It would be a regrettable loss if, because of bureaucratic rigidity others were discouraged from starting programs like this. We feel that we have created a successful model which may be useful in other communities and school systems.
MATERIALS USED IN THE PARAPROFESSIONAL TUTORIAL PROGRAM

I. TUTOR TRAINING MATERIALS

   Introduction and orientation to the tutorial situation; specific techniques and procedures for teaching reading presented simply; word lists are included.

   Excellent explanation of how a child learns to read, including explanations of the different approaches, and many of the problems children face in learning; very inexpensive.

3. Pocket dictionaries.

II. INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL FOR DEVELOPING BASIC PHONIC SKILLS

   A multi-sensory approach to the teaching of phonics, starting with the presentation of "key objects" to represent sounds; consonants and vowels are presented systematically.

   Specific techniques and procedures for teaching reading presented simply; word lists included.

   Phonics work books which include helpful word lists and exercises that introduce one sound at a time, starting with the short vowel sounds; a knowledge of consonants is presumed.


7. Sandpaper, tracing paper, felt, crayons, clay, pipe-cleaners, "magic slates."

III. SIMPLE READERS THAT EMPHASIZE DECODING


3. Vocabulary Development Booklets (B 1-10), Gould, T.S., L.W. Singer Co., Inc., Syracuse, N.Y. A series of soft cover booklets with a systematic presentation of reading matter which introduces vowel sounds slowly throughout the series; this is supplementary material to the Stern, C., Structural Reading Series Worktexts.

IV. MATERIAL FOR SIGHT WORD INSTRUCTION

1. Vocabulary Cards, Dulch, E.W., Garrard Publishing Co., Champaign, III. The 220 most common basic sight words clearly printed on small flash cards; also available as Popper Word Cards in slightly larger print, divided into two levels.
   Simple puzzles which provide drill in the use of sight words.

V. **SUPPLEMENTARY READERS**

2. **Reading Libraries (K through 6)**, Scholastic Magazines, Englewood, New Jersey.
   Excellent paperback storybooks covering a broad range of reading levels and interests carefully and inexpensively produced; the books may be read to the student by the tutor, or read by the student directly.

VI. **MATERIAL FOR USE WITH STUDENTS WHO HAVE VISUAL-PERCEPTUAL WEAKNESSES**

   Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced Levels. Visual perceptual exercises in soft cover workbooks; most appropriate for early grades.
   Exercises to help develop sequencing skills through finding the alphabet embedded in random letter patterns.

VII. **GAMES**

   Provides drill in auditory discrimination of initial consonants, including blends and digraphs.
2. **Go Fish**, Remedial Education Center, Washington, D.C.
   Card game for drill in isolated consonants and blends.
3. **Grab (Junior and Senior Deck)**, Dorothy /lcock, Inc., Covina, California, (available in four levels of difficulty).
   Card game, using basic sight words.
   "Bingo" game using basic sight vocabulary; cards and lists divided into different levels of difficulty.
5. **Phonics Rummy** (Junior, A, B, C), Phono-Visual Products, Kenworthy Educational Services, John Green, Covington, Kentucky. Rummy game geared towards matching vowels; vowels are printed in red; available in a wide range of levels.

6. Finger puppets.

7. Bean bags.

8. Anagrams.