

access for the handicapped

I was approached in early February to conduct an introductory video workshop at the Chislon Spastic Centre in Seddon. The group I was introduced to comprised four men and four women with varying physical handicaps. Video was a whole new experience for them and relating to handicapped people a new experience for me.

The first workshop was rather a formal affair concerned primarily with the use of the equipment. The second workshop we forgot about the equipment completely and talked about the problems handicapped people face in their day to day life.

The group decided that the best way to gain experience in the video medium was to do a videotape about what goes on at the Chislon Centre.

After that they felt they would perhaps do a more critical tape on the general lack of facilities available for handicapped people in society. The group insisted that each member should attempt all the different tasks required to produce a videotape.

I was at first skeptical that some of the members of the group who had very little control over their limbs would be able to perform some of the procedures needed to work the camera or VTR (video tape recorder). But, by persistence, patience and the willingness to extend themselves they have all achieved competence with the use of the equipment.

In many ways the workshops have benefited me more than the group. They have made me reassess many of my own values and the example of their attitudes to life in general has made me appreciate the nobleness of the human spirit and its ability to rise above physical handicaps and shine on and out.

They have a keen desire to learn and video has become a useful tool in enabling them to creatively express and extend themselves in a visual medium which until the advent of cheap videotape equipment was previously denied them.

They are now almost self-sufficient as a local fund raising group has donated money for their own equipment. My role has become redundant as they are now competent in most areas of production and my visits now are purely social.

A group from the Victorian Society of Crippled Children and Adults has undertaken a similar project and is progressing with equal enthusiasm.

Mac Gudgeon

