

# UCPD Center Helps Youth Cope With Cerebral Palsy

**Special To The Post**  
Markesha Wright was only a baby when doctors diagnosed her as having cerebral palsy. Like many instances of the disorder, no one knew exactly what caused it to happen to her.

At one time, parents of pre-schoolers like Markesha would have been left to their own resources to help her cope with its effects. A permanent motor condition usually due to brain damage prior to, during or following birth, cerebral palsy is not curable in the usual sense.

However, with proper training and therapy, it can be managed. A crucial factor is to begin this training early in the child's life. United Cerebral Palsy's Development Center was established over 20 years ago for children like Markesha who need such intensive one-on-one therapy. Located in Myers Park Baptist Church, it is a branch of United Cerebral Palsy of North Carolina and is licensed by the Child Day Care Licensing Office of the N.C. Department of Human Resources.

A local Advisory Council in Charlotte oversees the operation of the center and raises money to keep it operational. This year's fund drive began January 4th.

Markesha, who is now almost four, has been at the center for two years. Granddaughter of Eula Mae Wright of 679 Fairwood Ave., she and the other pre-schoolers attend the center daily as they would any other developmental pre-school program.

But unlike other children, Markesha and her schoolmates are given individual speech and physical therapy and special education in such areas as fine motor and cognitive skills. The goals is to prepare each child for the least restrictive environment when he or she reaches age five and can enter public school.

This idea of "mainstreaming" children with special needs is one which center director Anne Laukaitis believes is very important.



Markesha Wright, granddaughter of Eula Mae Wright of 679 Fairwood Avenue, will be four this month. She is a student at United Cerebral Palsy's Development Center of Charlotte, and is with speech therapist, Louise Hampton.

## MARKESHA WRIGHT

...Four year old "angel"

Mrs. Laukaitis points out that there is a lot of misunderstanding about cerebral palsy. "Cerebral" refers to the brain and "palsy" to a disorder of movement or posture. It is neither progressive nor communicable, but with appropriate early training the effects can be controlled and minimized.

From a clinical standpoint, cerebral palsy is characterized by an inability to fully control motor function. Depending upon which part of the brain has been damaged and the degree of involvement of the central nervous system, one or more of the following may occur: spasms, involuntary movement; disturbance in gait and mobility; seizures, abnormal sensation and perception; impairment of sight, hearing or speech, and mental retardation.

It is estimated that between 500,000 and 700,000 children and adults in the United States have one or

more symptoms of cerebral palsy. Currently 7,000 to 9,000 babies are born each year with the condition, and another 1,200 to 1,500 pre-school-age children acquire cerebral palsy annually - the result of causes such as head injuries through traffic accidents, falls or child abuse.

While the local Development Center was founded in the early 1960's, the Charlotte UCP chapter has in just the last year expanded its services significantly. Licensed physical therapist Jenny Barringer is now at the center 11 hours a week, while physical therapy assistant Monda Griffin is there 16 hours a week. Recently a part-time social worker, Bryn Anderson, was also hired, bringing the part-time staff to four. Ms. Laukaitis and three others are full-time.

With the bolstering of these support services, Laukaitis is "very excited about the future of the center. We now have the

best opportunity we've ever had to improve the physical functioning of these children.

"We're making an all-out effort to see that when they reach public school age they can function as normally as they possibly can," she says.

One new device with enormous possibilities is a simpler computer purchased for the center by speech therapist Louise Hampton. This device allows the child to communicate who cannot physically manage to form

words. "The computer can help the child indicate what he wants or needs, like a drink of water, just by pushing a button," explains Ms. Laukaitis. "It's a wonderful application of engineering to medicine."

The current fund drive, headed by Doug Mitchell and Irwin Coffield, aims to raise \$25,000 in one-on-one solicitations by about 100 volunteers from now through February. Additional promotional activities and a major fund-raising event are planned throughout the spring. The eventual goal is \$75,000.

UCP is a non-profit organization supported pri-

marily by contributions from the private sector. Some additional funds come from state and federal sources. However, the biggest portion of its income is derived from the annual fund campaign.

Persons interested in making a donation may call the UCP fund drive office, 1125 E. Morehead St., Suite 205, at 375-6188.

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Continued From Page 1A  
most jobs in North Carolina need to be increased. "North Carolina pays the lowest industrial wages of any state in the nation," Gilmore stressed. "That's why many major corporations are opening operations in our state. They know the few native North Carolinians they hire can be easily hired at minimum wage."

While Gilmore admitted the state needs to continue attracting businesses, he argued that companies offering minimum must be prevented from moving to the state.

"That doesn't help our state grow financially. It costs our state money because more people will be relying on welfare programs," he maintained.

Through an open door policy Gilmore feels certain he can prevent a large proportion of North Carolina's potential problems from ever occurring. "Too many major decisions are made behind closed doors," stated the 1969 graduate of North Carolina State University. He wants the state government to maintain an open meeting policy, whereby people in all the state's communities can express their views about an issue which could have direct affect on their lives. The former Deputy Secretary of the Department of Human Resources insisted, "We've got to raise the windows, let in some fresh air and make many of these closed-door issues public business."

Gilmore is a native of Julian, (N.C.). He is the president and co-owner of Gilmore Plant and Bulb Company. He gained recent publicity after successfully challenging a contributions ruling interpreted by State Elections Director, Alex Brock.

In the black communities Gilmore is probably best known for single-handedly appointing Jesse Jackson

into the National Young Democratic Convention in 1984. Before that, the organization was segregated. The three-term State House legislator has other ideas in mind which he has made a part of his platform. As a gubernatorial candidate he has pledged to appoint blacks, women, educators and local elected officials (especially county commissioners) to the Advisory Budget Commission. He also pledged to create a climate in state government which will allow more black vendors the opportunity to supply necessary goods and services to governmental agencies and institutions.

Gilmore wants to see more women and blacks appointed to the decision-making boards and committees in state government. "As governor I will see to it that the number of women and blacks appointed to these positions are at least equal to the percentage of those minorities in the state," Gilmore commented.

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