



Angela Jiminez for The New York Times

Ronn Edwards with Glenda Myrick, being sketched by Robert Latchmann at the Brooklyn Bureau of Community Service.

## Giving Clients Skills to Make Life Easier

By KARI HASKELL

Three murals in the office of Ronn Edwards depict landmarks in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens. The images on canvases are as colorful as the real world the artists have discovered through programs offered at the Brooklyn Bureau for Community Service. The bureau is one of the seven agencies supported by the Neediest Cases.

Mr. Edwards, 38, is the coordinator for the residential habilitation program, which is part of the comprehensive job training and socialization services offered at the bureau for disabled adults.

The program focuses on teaching life skills. "My staff go into homes one to three times a week to teach various skills -- cooking, cleaning, travel training -- the whole spectrum of independent living," Mr. Edwards said during an interview at

the bureau's offices. Working in a client's home is a vital component of a program that is supported by the Neediest Cases. "The New York Times money enables us to do things we are not normally able to do."

The fund is unusual because it provides money for essentials like furniture, computers and clothing for job interviews. Recently, Mr. Edwards was able to draw a little over \$100 to move donated furniture into the home of a disabled couple, a brother and sister. Without a dining room table, they were eating on an old sofa.

"We had a family able to donate a living room and dining room set, but the glitch was getting it from one place to another," Mr. Edwards said. "But with The New York Times Neediest Cases Fund we could do it."

The small amount had a positive impact. "It helps her feel better about herself

and her outlook on things," he said about the sister.

Mr. Edwards has also drawn from the fund to buy beds, including one for an obese autistic man. Because of his size and weight, he needed a very sturdy bed, and one had to be custom made. And last year money was used to buy a computer for a homebound boy on dialysis so he could stay connected with his friends.

Helping clients stay connected with one another is an important aspect of the bureau's services. In 1999, Mr. Edwards started a recreational program to foster friendships among members of the staff and clients. They meet for a bowling night, art classes, day trips and softball games. "Now, they call each other, and meet outside of classes," he said.

"Once you raise someone's expectations, you raise their self-confidence."