

# A CENTER FOR THE HANDICAPPED

Abdelsalem Harrath

**T**he vision of community leaders in Tunisia, coupled with the moral and financial support of the U.S. Department of Defense Humanitarian Assistance Program, has significantly improved lives and learning opportunities for handicapped children in the town of Sidi Bou Ali.

The community lacked sufficient funds to meet the educational needs of the town's mentally challenged children. Moreover, the number of handicapped children from surrounding areas was increasing, making the building of a new school that could address their needs a real emergency. Plans, revolutionary in concept, called for a social assistance center within a school infrastructure.

The Department of Defense Humanitarian Assistance Program, by way of the U.S. Embassy in Tunis, generously supplied the necessary financial support and technical equipment to construct the institution. The result was a new, fully furnished and equipped facility that is enhancing the quality of education for, and permitting the admission of, increasing numbers of handicapped children.



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An immediate result was seen in the behavior of the 66 children enrolled in the school. Real progress has been made in enhancing their autonomy. Some children with severe limitations are now relatively independent and more confident in their contact with the people and facilities around them. Others have improved their capabilities in speaking and



*The Social Assistance Center for Mentally Handicapped Children in Sidi Bou Ali, Tunisia, which was constructed with financial support from the U.S. Department of Defense Humanitarian Assistance Program and assistance from the U.S. Embassy.*

producing handicraft work. The most amazing results were revealed when some students were successfully integrated into the public school system.

On a wider scale, the institution has stirred the national conscience and created new attitudes and awareness among the public toward the handicapped. People are more compassionate and understanding of the challenges and issues facing such children, and the school's mandate of integration is a concrete example of the democratization of education in society. ■

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