

Welfare head suspect as a credible judge

Sharon, Pa.

Editor, The Herald.

After reading all the stories in The Herald for the past few days regarding Dr. James H. McClelland, Mrs. Helene Wohlgemuth, Polk State School and assorted persons connected with Dr. McClelland on his sudden departure, I still can't believe that Mrs. Wohlgemuth was actually permitted to fire him.

Mrs. Wohlgemuth admitted that she had "never operated an institution," and I wonder how often she's been in contact with the seriously retarded.

She considers the cages, playpens or whatever one wants to call them "dehumanizing." Yet how many mothers with perfectly normal children have kept them in playpens so they wouldn't hurt themselves?

The combination of a child's mind and an adult's strength could really be hazardous, for themselves and for

other patients.

As for the tops of the playpens (cages, whatever), my son was only 14 months old when he learned how to get out of his. How can she expect a fully physically grown person to stay put without the top?

Any child is happier with other people, and I really think that the cages were the most humane way of keeping them under control. At least that way, they can move around (unlike a straight jacket) and they can get a child's enjoyment out of watching the less violent patients (unlike sedation or isolation).

Maybe she really did have the best interests of the patients at heart, but maybe she would have been wiser to spend more than two hours in Polk and really found out what it's like to be in contact with retarded persons day in and day out.

In two hours, how on earth can she know as much as someone who has devoted 32 years to the mentally retarded?

And if she knew enough to fire Dr. McClelland, why didn't she know enough to suggest something more humane than the cages. BRAVO

I've never known of anyone to be fired for something that one person thought was a mistake in judgment until Mrs. Wohlgemuth visited Polk.

And I'm sure I'm not the only one who wonders whether Dr. McClelland was fired for using the best method he knew to restrain violent and potentially harmful patients or for something else that has nothing to do with the patients and cages at all.

Mrs. Mary K. Zahniser