

## ACC-PARC RESIDENTIAL CARE COMMITTEE

### " CLOSING OF ADMISSIONS AT WESTERN STATE SCHOOL AND HOSPITAL"

#### Background Information

##### Area Served

Western State School and Hospital is the state institution serving mentally retarded citizens from Allegheny and four other counties.

##### Fails Standards

Western State is overcrowded and understaffed by all standards (Medical Assistance (M.A.); Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals (J.C.A.H.); Department of Public Welfare (D.P.W.); and Human decency (ACC-PARC).

##### Admissions

Admission requests are considered by a committee of Western State employees. Requests must be presented by the base service unit of the Mental Health/Mental Retardation system.

Most admissions to Western State are voluntary. Less than 5% have been court committed to the institution.

##### Population Trends

The current population and admissions' requests are continually for less able persons. The present population has been labeled 13% borderline, 13% mild, 29% moderate, and 57% severely profound.

The current population and admissions' requests are continually for more physically handicapped persons; 70% of the residents under age 21 are physically handicapped; 64% of the residents over age 21 are physically handicapped.

##### Avoiding Court Commitments

Western State administrator has worked closely with base service units to fairly consider every admission request. Western State employees believe that this approach has helped MH/MR understand admissions criteria and conditions at Western State. The superintendent feels that closing admissions will force base service units to seek court commitments, destroying the criteria now applied.

##### ACC-PARC & Parents Group Stand

The October 15, 1973 letter from the parents' group president (W.S.S.H.) reflects his opinion that admissions should be closed. (Attached.)



ACC-PARC, the W.S.S.H. Board of Trustees, and the W.S.S.H. parents' group approached lawyers in the fall of 1973 to close admissions at Western State. The legal action was never undertaken.

The ACC-PARC Board supported the W.S.S.H. parents' group resolution of last October 14, 1973. The resolution: (1) closing admissions to W.S.S.H. total care units (2) transferring school boys (spruce lodge, unit IV) to a cottage, using the space to alleviate overcrowding on total care units (3) DPW develop facilities for total care cases, and (4) the parents' group support the construction for a limited number of beds if the proper staff was added. ACC-PARC Board passed a motion to support these demands.

#### Medical Assistance Problems

The State of Pennsylvania fraudulently receives Medical Assistance funds for Western State School and Hospital. One of M.A.'s major requirements is no more than 28 persons on any of those units. Most of the units are above 40 in population. Residents numbered 29-40 have difficulty (do not receive) with S.S.I. benefits because they are not in M.A. approved beds.

#### Lack of Alternatives

Alternative placements to Western State are almost non-existent. Other State institutions with Allegheny County residents want to transfer them closer to Pittsburgh. Private licensed facilities (Interim Care) are being required to reduce population to meet regulations. Less than 10 group homes exist. Only 25 foster homes are available (suffering from inadequate reimbursement for foster families). All these conditions increase the pressure at Western State.

#### Temporary Admissions

Western State has increased the number of temporary admissions. Temporary admissions include respite care, summer program, and time limited stays until an alternative is found. Some temporary admissions become long-term when base service units fail to move residents out. Some of the 40-plus people on units are temporary admissions.

#### Understaffed

Western State will obtain 45 additional staff positions soon. This will still leave Western 100 short of meeting J.C.A.H. staffing requirements. Often, because of absenteeism, only two attendants are caring for residents on a unit. The staff can only perform the minimal duties at this staff/resident ratio.



### New Policy

D.P.W. recently adopted a new admission policy to State schools and hospitals. The new policy includes admission criteria, provision to limit admissions of preschool children, article to limit admission to six months, which may be renewed, the granting of responsibility to base service units and superintendents, and the requiring of a personal plan by base service units for each person. The policy also includes an urging to use alternatives in the community. The policy, known as the Matriculation Policy (5/30/74), is a definition and guideline. It will be a while before this is fully implemented.

### New Construction

There is a plan to build new dormitories on the Western State grounds. The plan does not increase the population. It means the population can be redistributed to meet M.A. standards. It also means the facility may be more appropriate for the increasingly more handicapped and less able residents. The plan is not yet approved several years after it was proposed.

### Unsafe Conditions

The conditions at Western State are inhumane and in many cases dangerous and unsafe for the retarded persons. Injuries and deaths, which could be prevented, occur regularly. Excessive medication, mechanical restraints, solitary confinement, and seclusion are methods commonly used at Western State. Staff can attend to necessary duties, but, does not have time to care personally for the residents.

### Relationship to Parents' Group

During the past two years, the ACC-PARC's Residential Care Committee has improved relations with the parents' group and board of trustees at Western State. If possible, this effort should be made in conjunction with the parents' group, not unilaterally.

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