



Allegheny County Chapter

OF THE PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION FOR RETARDED CHILDREN, INC.

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TO: All ACC Staff

FROM: C. A. Peters, Executive Director

SUBJECT: State School and Hospital and State-Subsidized Interim
Care Facilities for Mentally Retarded

INTRODUCTION

Apparently, staff has not been adequately briefed on the situation concerning the above. Our agency representatives have visited thirteen facilities to date. Permit me to summarize our position.

STATE SCHOOLS AND HOSPITALS

Most Allegheny County residents in State schools and hospitals are in Polk State School and Hospital or Western State School and Hospital. There are, however, residents at Ebensburg and Cresson State Schools and Hospitals and at a few other locations. All of the State schools and hospitals are hopelessly understaffed and underprogrammed. Polk, as an example, has a rated bed capacity (and this is optimistic), of 2,000. Capacity is in excess of 3,000. Conditions at most State schools and hospitals are deplorable due to either (or both) a shortage of staff or poor physical conditions.

INTERIM CARE FACILITIES

There are 58 licensed interim care facilities in Pennsylvania. Of these, 31 or more are private (i.e., profit-making) proprietary. By and large, these tend to be worse than private non-profit facilities. Most of the interim care facilities are located in the northeast (Poconos) region and near Philadelphia. Conditions generally range from outstanding to "snake pit" quality. In the "snake pits" ACC has estimated that an owner of a proprietary facility may net \$2,000 annually per resident out of \$11.50 per day for each retarded individual placed in his care.

ALTERNATIVES

The immediate alternative appears to be to close interim care "snake pits" and upgrade the interim care facilities that are "salvageable". In either case ACC will try to work with the Department of Public Welfare to move Allegheny County residents closer to home.

The immediate alternative for State schools and hospitals is an influx of staff, particularly child care workers, due to financial pressure from the Federal government and a concerned citizenry.

We also anticipate the Right to Education Action will have some very positive impacts on both State schools and hospitals and interim care facilities over the next two years.

The long range alternative (and contrary to publicity, it is long range) is the development of group homes for most or all residents of both State schools and hospitals and interim care facilities.

Approximately eight residents will be accommodated in any group home. Of that number one-half to one-third, by regulation, must come out of state institutions. If you divide eight into the number of individuals now residing in State schools and hospitals and interim care facilities, you can see why this is a very long-term proposition. (1600 residents divided by eight) To accommodate all Allegheny County residents, 200 homes would be needed. This number is complicated by the shortage of funds and community resistance to such programs.

BASE SERVICE UNIT/ACC RESPONSIBILITY

ACC's State School & Hospital and Interim Care Committee of the Board with 1st Vice-President Ginny Thornburgh as Chairman (Bob Nelkin, staff) has been inspecting each residential facility where Allegheny County children are housed. This monitoring function is more appropriate to Base Service Unit responsibility and has been so assigned by MH/MR.

The State School & Hospital and Interim Care Committee will, however, meet on a regular basis, conduct surprise visits and function as an advocate for residents of the facilities. As policy, the Committee will cooperate with the Department of Public Welfare to achieve the goals specified (in summary) below. Conversely, ACC will move energetically and unilaterally if the safety of residents is at stake.

SUMMARY Allegheny County Chapter's objectives are to:

- 1) Make State schools and hospitals and interim care facilities as safe as possible.
- 2) Improve programs in State schools and hospitals and interim care.
- 3) Simultaneously return residents to facilities as close to Allegheny County as possible.
- 4) Open community residential facilities as rapidly as possible to accommodate institutional population and potential population.

PSEUDO MENTALLY RETARDED DELINQUENTS

Many interim care facilities (and State schools & hospitals) house low functioning residents placed by court order due to difficulty with the law. The diagnosis of these adolescents (which results in institutionalization in an MR facility) is often questionable. Even if we assume the adequacy of diagnosis, ACC questions whether a viable program can be conducted for these functional mentally retarded and simultaneously in the same facility for the more severely retarded.