

~~Mr. 822,500 per year
T. id
S. Diller (24 years)
B. 1971~~

(all 11,250 return
per person per year)

CONFIDENTIAL

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February 16, 1971

Mr. Richard Loring
Mental Health-Mental Retardation
Administrator
P. O. Box 1048
Oil City, PA 16301

Dear Mr. Loring:

This is in response to your request for suggestions regarding ways in which the four-county Mental Health-Mental Retardation agency could be helpful in assisting the State in its efforts to reduce the population of Polk State School.

Background

The State of Pennsylvania has adopted a policy of reducing the population at state institutions for the mentally retarded by returning more capable retarded persons to the community. Most of these persons will probably be adults who were placed in state schools many years ago--prior to the advent of special education and other community based services for the retarded. Pennsylvania's action is not unique. Many other states are taking similar steps to eliminate overcrowding, to preserve the institution for those very severely handicapped persons who cannot function in the community, and to provide the mildly and moderately retarded with maximum opportunity for normal living.

It has been estimated that as many as 900 retarded persons at Polk State School could be discharged during the next few years if proper community placements can be developed.

Some Questions of Concern

The proposed shifting of large numbers of retarded persons from Polk School to the community raises numerous questions:

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1. What process will be used to guarantee that those discharged will be properly selected and placed?
2. What kinds of opportunities will be made available to those discharged?
3. On what basis will decisions be made to determine the communities in which discharged persons will be placed?
4. What follow-up and continuing surveillance will be provided to assure that discharged retarded persons are being properly served after initial placement?
5. What fiscal, professional manpower, and facility resources will be available to guarantee successful community placements?
6. To what extent is the community (general public) prepared to integrate large numbers of the retarded into the mainstream of community affairs?
7. What will be the effects of a major reduction in Polk's population on the economy of Venango County? (Polk is the second largest employer in the community and an important source of income to many businesses in the area.)
8. What will be the fiscal and manpower impact on the county school districts, United Fund, and other agencies when services to large numbers of retarded persons are shifted from state to local jurisdictions?

The above general questions are only an indication of the kinds of issues that should be resolved. They illustrate the fact that the State's policy--however valid--creates a whole new set of problems--and opportunities.

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A Unique Opportunity for Establishing a Model Program

The issues we have raised can be viewed as problems and obstacles--and can be used as a rationale for rejecting or slowing down the implementation of the State's new policy. (The community, the state institution, and many families of the retarded can be expected to resist the changes required. Such resistance is normal in these circumstances.)

On the other hand, the present situation can be viewed as a remarkable new opportunity to improve the conditions at Polk, provide a fuller life for the retarded, and enrich the general community's social and economic condition. In our opinion, the four-county Mental Health-Mental Retardation agency, in conjunction with the Polk School, can seize this opportunity to create a model community service system for the retarded. If this is done, not only can the issues be resolved in this particular situation, but a model will be established for similar situations in other parts of the State and nation.

What are the special conditions that create a unique opportunity to develop a model program in this area?

1. The four-county Mental Health-Mental Retardation agency has established close ties with the State School and with a wide range of community agencies, and is now in an excellent position to assume responsibility for designing a model program and guiding its implementation.
2. Although some of the retarded persons to be discharged from Polk may be placed far from the State School, it is possible that the majority (particularly those with little or no close family ties) could be best served in communities close to Polk. This alternative may be desirable for many reasons:
 - a. Many Polk employees and their families are integrated in the life of the surrounding community and have helped to create a higher level of understanding and

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tolerance of the retarded than might be expected in areas where mental retardation is less evident and stereotypes more prevalent. In addition, many townspeople have visited the institution and many of the retarded at Polk are involved in community activities with nonretarded persons. (For example--nonretarded children play basketball in the Polk gym and retarded youth from Polk attend the Vo-Tech school in Oil City.)

b. The Polk School contains a large staff experienced in working with the retarded. This source of generally scarce skilled manpower could provide some of the personnel required to operate successful community programs--(thus also reducing the economic impact of potential lay-offs resulting from a one-third reduction of students at Polk).

- c. Many of the students who would be discharged have lived at Polk for many years and have become totally dependent (institutionalized). It is possible that the transition from institution to community may be less traumatic in some cases if the institution--or its personnel--continue to provide certain services, thus providing continuity and a more gradual "weaning" for the seriously institutionalized and dependent person. (There are of course, obvious dangers if overdependence would be perpetuated and integration inhibited by a too readily available institutional service. On the other hand, in some cases the choice at present is too dichotomized--total community or total institution--thus resulting in a hesitancy to place and continued institutionalization.)
3. The area surrounding Polk, although basically rural, is remarkably well endowed with a network of over thirty-five health, education, and welfare agencies. These agencies would be the base on which a community service system for the retarded could be constructed. Many of these agencies now serve the retarded (i.e., Y.M.C.A., schools, etc.) and others could integrate the retarded, given adequate planning

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and support. It should also be noted that at the present time, thirteen of these agencies plan to relocate their programs on a single site--a health, education, and welfare complex--which will be located within ten miles of the Polk School. This remarkable development will result in a potentially nonfragmented and well coordinated service system which could offer the retarded a very wide range of support services.

These are some of the reasons why we believe that the State's policy--if properly executed--creates an unusual opportunity to design a model program offering a complete continuum of service, from complete institutional care (at Polk) to various levels of increasingly independent and integrated community living. Unfortunately, such a development will not occur spontaneously.

Required Actions

If the idea of developing a model program is sound, a number of steps will be required.

1. The four-county MH-MR agency should take the initiative to conduct a major project--over the next two years. In addition, agreements for cooperative work on the proposed project should be secured from Polk State School as well as other agencies who would be involved (i.e., schools, D.P.A., etc.). It would be desirable if the request for the project funds needed would be endorsed by such agencies.
2. If a decision is made to proceed, a specific research, planning, and community organization project plan should be developed and a budget request prepared for a two-year project. The project plan would define the procedures needed to answer the questions we have posed, and the steps that would be taken to develop a model program which would meet fiscal, manpower, program, and facility needs. This step (designing a detailed proposal) should probably be taken only after the State indicates some interest in the

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proposed project. (Developing the proposal will require considerable work and should not be done unless there is some encouragement from the State.)

3. A formal request for funds for a two-year research, planning, and community organization effort should be made to the State as soon as possible if the development of the model program is to have maximum value--(e.g., before large numbers of Polk residents are discharged). Although it is difficult to estimate the exact cost of the project prior to designing the specific work tasks, we expect that the total effort could cost as much as \$75,000 over a two year period.

In summary, there is an excellent opportunity to conduct a highly significant and important project in the field of mental retardation. The project could result in a model community program and a new type of relationship between a state institution and other agencies. The project has statewide and national value and the interest and resources required to do the work are available. Needless to say, we would be delighted to participate in every possible way in this exciting effort.

Sincerely yours,

Arthur Bolton

Arthur Bolton

AB:rb

cc: Miss Mary Lou Bower