



## *Allegheny County Chapter*

OF THE PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION FOR RETARDED CHILDREN, INC.

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ACC-PARC Residential Care Committee  
Visit to Polk State School and Hospital  
October 11, 1973

Ginny Thornburgh, Jean Isherwood and Bob Nelkin met with Superintendent Joseph Columbatto to determine whether changes were occurring in the care of Polk State School and Hospital residents.

Mr. Columbatto said, "It will be possible to attract physicians to Polk eventually. With overtime pay a physician could earn \$35,000 - \$40,000."

"Medical Schools are now graduating physician's assistants. Is there any way to get the University of Pittsburgh graduates (physician's assistants) to come to Polk." Ginny Thornburgh and Jean Isherwood will check.

"Annual physicals have not been done for years."

"Of the 118 persons in the hospital unit, 62 are long-term residential placements. We are re-evaluating and moving them off the unit".

"There was no nursing supervision of medications."

"The charge that 18 nurses were relieved of duty is not true. They were redeployed to other shifts."

"I've taken the decision making powers from the two physicians."

"There is inadequate staffing in all the cottages in Polk except for Northside Building. We run from .7 to 256% understaffed".

"I would rather remove 1000 residents than get 1200 new staff. After we remove the 1000 residents, I'll need another 430 staff to beef up Social Service and Total Care Units".



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"In order to meet the JCAH's standards with present bed capacity, I need 1,196 new staff. If I reduce the bed capacity to meet JCAH standards I would need 470 new staff."

"To meet Medical Assistance standards at the present bed capacity I would need 772 new staff. If I met the Medical Assistance bed capacity standards, I would need 511 new staff."

"There are no really good delicatessens in the Polk area. Mr. Columbatto would appreciate any contributions of bagles."

"Last week the staff was present at a demonstration in Adaptive Therapeutic Systems Equipment. This equipment helps a child teach himself feeding, etc. \$50,000 worth of these chairs will prove it's worth and furthermore the children will learn to feed themselves."

"The only surgery going on in the Polk Hospital is minor orthopedics surgery by two surgical consultants. Our long range goal is to use the Franklin Hospital, up to now they are afraid to get involved with us."

"I've created a commission on human rights. This commission includes line level persons (Child Care Workers)".

"Only 29 out of 1900 staff are not members of the Unions".

"There were on going studies on absenteeism going back several years. Absenteeism has not increased since we've been here".

"The Legislature should change the benefits relating to accruing sick time. Presently there are no benefits for accruing sick time."

"We are trying to arrange a Personal Services Contract with a painter to do artistic work in the day rooms. This will be stuff that we can move around."

"I've had great support from the dietary workers. They supported the co-educational dining room. For 4 days this co-educational dining room arrangement was sabotaged by the Child Care Workers. They just stood back and let trays fall, etc. It is now working well in both Northside and Southside."

"You have to get to know the area. Mr. Columbatto went on to describe it as a conservative bible belt."



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"The morale is pretty good in the nursery. However, it's pretty bad in Gardenside and areas like that."

"In Connecticut we had a philosophy that it was unconstitutional to give a bed to a family for their lifetime (indicating that the philosophy was short-term intensive treatment)."

"We are doing a staffing conference on 25 to 30 persons per week."

"There was no readiness (for the community) program prior to our coming on."

"The dentists are doing a dental review on each patient once a year. The Dental Department wants me to hire a dental hygienist. I can't guarantee that oral hygiene is being accomplished every day for each resident."

"I don't have a problem. We all have a problem. That's what I tell the people in Harrisburg."

"Parents ought to see where their kids live, but I don't want them just coming in, folding their hands, stand over the staff and observe. If it's mealtime, the parent should feed their kid. If their child needs changed, they should change their child."

"I'm not changing the visitation rules now because I think it would be overwhelming to the parents. They'd have to stop saying Polk is fantastic and the staff wouldn't be able to get their job done."

"The same people live in Cottage #1 that lived there before. No one else has moved into Cottage #1. Cottage #1 reform started prior to me coming in and I have left it alone."

In response to questions about what sort of punishment is permitted, "I would deprive someone of a movie or a week-end dance, etc. There is no corporal punishment. Last week we dismissed a staff person for use of corporal punishment."

"I would like to have an autopsy on every death."

"I would welcome an advocate "from ACC-PARC" in 10 months. Right now we got to give our staff a chance. We're professionals and we should be advocates also."

"You can't just issue directives. I could dictate a policy right now, have it typed up and published. But you have to substitute something positive for the something negative you are removing."



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"There are four major cottages where restraints are being used: Gardenside, Meadowside, Woodside and Lakeside. Our goal is to reduce the numbers, hours and time, people are in restraints."

In response to the question how people, if tied to their beds, get out in case of fire, "They are tied to the beds with a clove hitch which is easy for another person to pull out."

"I would like to see us eliminate all bed tops (including crib nets). There are close to 100 crib nets in use now."

"There are 5 living areas with over 90 beds in a room."

"We are shifting population internally, trying to get children with children and adults with adults."

"Some staff are getting hurt without the availability of the cages. Of course some of that is a self fulfilling prophecy."

"We have to stop thinking of institutionalization as long-term care. We have to create waiting lists for Base Service Units (of people coming out of Polk)."

"When the BSU admits someone to Polk, they better tell us what they want us to accomplish (That will have to be in small pieces so that we can accomplish it) and how long we have to accomplish it." He proposes admission procedure changes in term of amendment to the 1966 MH/MR Act.

RN/ps