

June 18, 1973

Mr. Ford Thompson
Department of Public Welfare
Office of the Secretary
Health and Welfare Building
Harrisburg, PA. 17120

Dear Ford,

This is to further our conversation at the Convention in which you asked for my ideas for programs.

First, the transfer of 1,000 people from Polk State School and Hospital is a must. At this time, it seems to me the best way to do that would be to return the Allegheny County residents to facilities in or near Allegheny County. I specify this group because there may be facility space available (Marcy?, Woodville?, Mayview?, Dixmont?) and because the supportive services are better developed. Assuming this is achieved, we might consider Allegheny County residents of other State Schools and Hospitals.

There may be a method getting ombudsman into Polk and Western State School and Hospitals. One would be to pick one or more young, gung-ho persons on Polk staff and assign them, on a temporary basis, to Western and vice versa. A preferable device may be to contract with Allegheny County Chapter to perform this service. I suggest them because of their experience and because Allegheny County has more residents in State Schools and Hospitals than any other in the Western Region. For example, one in three Polk patients are from Allegheny County.

Norman Taylor and I kicked around an idea that is worth exploring. Why not take some areas of the "campus" at Polk and Western and develop them as public parks? Maintenance could be performed, for pay, by the students. One spin-off would be to get the public aware of the institutions.

Mr. Ford Thompson
June 18, 1973

-2-

On this subject, how about an appeal to church and social organizations, or the military reserve, to construct a day-camp, or even residential camp, or creative play yards on the grounds? The last would be done using telephone poles, wire spools, tires, etc., etc. Again, you have the plus of getting the public involved with the institutions.

On the subject of getting the public in institutions, I think all volunteer programs at State Schools and Hospitals must be rethought and revitalized. A Foster Grandparent Program at both Polk and Western State Schools and Hospitals would be a real plus.

Because of the Polk furor, there is a tendency to focus on the institutions and their improvement. Clearly, something must be done, but our over-riding concern must remain the removal of people from institutions. Along these lines, foster homes for both children and adults should be vigorously pursued. Possibly, we might use interim-care money for this purpose. I would like to do this on a region-wide basis. If necessary, we might go the demonstration route, possibly with a program in a rural county, urban county, and suburban county. We can probably anticipate some problems from the Child Welfare people. At the County level, you will have to work with, under, or around them. There should be no problem with the MH/MR age of 18.

Each State School and Hospital must be directed to establish a co-ed pre-release, minimum supervision unit on campus, but as far as possible from the main campus. Renting of homes in Franklin and Canonsburg will be explored. Home economic and copability skills plus trial weekends in Pittsburgh should form the basis of the program.

Also, a pre-release social worker should be assigned to meet with parents of potential releases in their homes. The worker also would establish parent discussion groups in communities where a number of parents reside. The purpose would be to reduce anxieties. The practice of giving parents two weeks written notice before release has to stop. With an annual cost of \$10,000 at Western State School and Hospital, we only have to achieve success with two cases that would have failed to make the transition to justify the worker economically.

A two- or three-day workshop should be held for child care and other patient contact staff at Polk State School and Hospital and another at Western State School and Hospital. The purpose would be to explain the principle of dispersal, advantage of community living to the mentally retarded, and to ameliorate any anxiety about possible threats to staff employment from dispersal of State School and Hospital patients.

Mr. Ford Thompson
June 18, 1973

-3-

On this subject, Transitional Services is now being evaluated, because of ARC and three base service unit complaints, by Allegheny County MH/MR. We have to be very careful how we deal with them until that evaluation is finished.

The Vocational Technical School program, at Polk, might be applicable to Western, or how about (as part of pre-release) starting a workshop on the grounds at both State Schools and Hospitals?

On the subject of consumer involvement, Polk clearly needs a patient's group comparable to the one at Western. Again, it would seem, because the largest concentration of parents are there, that Allegheny County might be the focus for this.

I will probably be using the Regional Evaluation Task Force as a nucleus to establish a Consumer Advisory Committee to the Commissioner. A region-wide workshop of DPW, the education system, and consumers has already been discussed with the PARC Regional Vice-President and PARC Executive Director. November, National Mental Retardation Month, would be the target date.

The local MH/MR County programs. I have the impression that no one, at least of the County administrators, knows whether their mental retardation programs are good, bad, or indifferent. A mechanism for evaluation must be developed. The Regional mental retardation staff must be so structured to offer technical assistance. Regional staff does not have that capacity now. Also, there is the impression that many of the County programs are excessively mental health oriented. Erie and Dorothy Blacklock's program in McKean County are notable exceptions. A goal then must be to expand County interests into the mental retardation field.

Right to Education must be vigorously pursued by the two State Schools and Hospitals and local MH/MR programs. Obviously, it hasn't been at Polk and, in my opinion, in some County programs. Allegheny County MH/MR, by funding a "compliance officer" for the ARC local Chapter, has been the most vigorous. From DPW's point of view, it is simple dollars. Every individual that is retained in public school saves us \$1,500 per year. If they are kept in school as opposed to an institution, we save \$30 per day.

Understand these are only ideas. Once I find out how much room there is to move, other possibilities will probably present themselves. If there is a theme, it will be "Partnership Between Knowledgeable Consumers and Responsive Government."

Mr. Ford Thompson
June 18, 1973

I have the impression that the Western Region is moving more vigorously to solve the problem of mental retardation than any other. It is my fondest hope that we can accelerate the resolution of these problems.

Best personal wishes,

C. A. Peters
Executive Director

CAP:cmw
cc: Norman Taylor