

SUBJECT:

Allegheny County Mental Health/Mental
Retardation Program Memo dated August 21, 1974

DATE: September 17, 1974

TO:

Mr. George Lowe, Jr., Administrator
Allegheny County MH/MR Program

WSSH
RLE
cc: Residential Care
Committee, Ron,
Bob, Bill, Spence
9/27/74
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FROM:

Robert J. Hiltner
Superintendent
Western State School

Western State School applauds the efforts of the Allegheny County Mental Health/Mental Retardation Program to provide a framework within which the orderly planning of community placements for retarded citizens who are residents of State Schools may take place. We wish to indicate our desire to participate with you in the implementation of this plan. The contact person from our staff, who you request, will be Mr. Floree Aquino of our Social Service staff. Mr. Aquino will be assisted by Mr. Richard Crompton.

In the interest of facilitating the implementation of the Allegheny County Plan, we offer the following comments:

1. Monitoring of All Allegheny County Residents:

Western State has, and will continue to welcome the monitoring efforts of Base Service Units. We sincerely hope that all Allegheny County BSU's will feel the urgency of this mandate. We also must hope that in determining residents who are most appropriate for return to the community Western State staff are consulted. Who is considered "most appropriate" is subject to considerable variance in interpretation, we have found.

2. Pre-Discharge Planning:

We support the proposed pre-discharge planning effort. This plan, however, pre-supposes that a steady flow of community placements will be available on a consistent basis over time. If this goal can be achieved, it will, without a doubt, facilitate the orderly and planful placement of residents. Should a steady flow of placement availability fail to be achieved we fear that the requirement that the Service Plans be completed three months prior to placement may become one of those well-intentioned, but ill conceived, requirements that end in becoming a barrier rather than a facilitator of services.

3. Finally, as the Superintendent of a facility for the retarded citizen, I am forced to remind you of certain legal obligations which may take precedence over orderly planning. For example, a resident who was committed when he was under 18 under section 402 or 403 of the MH/MR Act has the right to choose whether he will remain in the institution or leave upon becoming 18 (see Western Regional Office memo of June, 1974). Or, in the case of a resident committed under section 406 of the MH/MR Act, the resident must be released upon reaching optimum benefit from the institution regardless of whether the placement process is ready for him or not.

If we have appeared to be impatient with proposals for an obviously desirable discharge planning process, it is because, knowing as we do the tragedy of inappropriate institutionalization, we feel an obligation to continue to press for better and speedier availability of community placements. I find myself, considering the conditions in Western Pennsylvania institutions, wondering whether even the prospect of ex-residents, "...wandering off into oblivion" is not to be preferred to continued inappropriate institutionalization.

RJH:mc

cc: Mr. C. A. Peters
Mr. J. Colombatto
Dr. R. L. Scott
Mr. L. M. Gallagher

✓ bcc: Robert Nelkin