

I'm very sorry not to be able to be in Washington to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Rosemary Dybwad awards. I'm especially sorry because in 1980, after my trip to the U.S. on a Dybwad award, Bob Perske and I attempted to circulate all the previous recipients with a view of eventually forming an association of Rosemary Dybwad award winners. I hope that that idea might possibly be revived at the present conference.

My trip to the United States in 1979 involved looking at the growing self-advocacy movement. This was a new phenomenon to me, and I was extremely impressed to meet the self-advocacy groups, particularly Project II in Omaha and the Mohawks and Squaws in Boston. On my return to Britain, I was keen to discover whether anything like that existed here. I was delighted to discover that it did. Self-advocacy is alive and well in Britain, as witnessed by the fact that 18 people from Britain recently attended the International Conference of Self-advocates held in Washington State earlier this year.

The experiences of self-advocates in the United States and Britain formed the basis for our book, We Can Speak for Ourselves, by Paul Williams and Bonnie Shoultz, published now in the states by Indiana University Press. The book has sold well in Britain, and has formed part of the basis for the expansion of the self-advocacy movement over here. Most British self-advocacy groups are service-based. In particular, day services for adults with mental handicaps in Britain often have committees of clients who attend the service, which with varying degrees of staff or sometimes independent external help, have regular meetings and discuss their own interests, take decisions and act on them. These groups are nearly always advised by members of staff of the services, with the accompanying inherent conflicts of interest that have been pointed out by many writers on advocacy.

There are very few examples yet in Britain of independent self-advocacy groups, that is, groups that are organized outside of the framework of services. This is possibly because of a lack of tradition of external advocacy on behalf of people with mental handicaps in Britain. There has in the past been no strong movement for advocacy on behalf of people with mental handicaps, over and above the usual representation of their interests by parent groups. Citizen advocacy is just beginning in Britain, and there is an organization called the Advocacy Alliance which is running a small number of projects seeking and supporting advocates for people living in institutional settings.

Hopefully, the growth of citizen advocacy will lead to the emergence of people who are able to act as independent advisors to self-advocacy groups. The linking of citizen advocacy and self-advocacy seems a promising way ahead in Britain.

There are already an impressive number of service-related self-advocacy groups, and increasingly, these are likely to get together in wider organizations. Indeed, the group of people who went to the conference in Washington State this year came back with a tentative proposal that the next International Conference be held in England in four years. It remains to be seen whether resources can be mobilized to enable this to happen. If it does happen, it will be a major boost to the self-advocacy movement over here.

As in the United States, many people in Britain have been amazed by the possibilities when people with mental handicaps can be supported in self-advocacy endeavors. We have had a number of people with quite severe handicaps speaking very competently to groups of students and professionals, standing up at conferences and addressing audiences of several hundred people. Representatives from

Britain have also attended several conferences of the International League of Societies for Persons with Mental Handicap. This joining in of people with mental handicaps with people without those handicaps is, I think, a most necessary feature to be retained in any development of self-advocacy by people with mental handicaps themselves. On my trip to the United States in 1979, I was privileged to be accompanied by a man with mental handicap, Alan Saloman, and that gave an extremely valuable complexion to the whole visit.

Normalization, or social role valorization, is about enabling people with handicaps to take their place alongside the rest of us in valued society. It would be an enormous tragedy if self-advocacy were simply an extension of the segregation of handicapped people from valued people. To avoid this, I believe we must work particularly hard on ways of encouraging participation between people with mental handicaps and people without those handicaps. To achieve this, work is required on both sides. Work is well in progress in developing the abilities of people with mental handicaps to advocate on their own behalf and to represent one another.

We are perhaps rather less developed in our ability to persuade ordinary people in society that people with handicaps have an equal value with them, and should participate in all the opportunities and activities that are available in ordinary society. To this end, the image we portray of people with handicaps, the way we speak about them, and the way we structure services for them, are vitally important. And I believe that any development of self-advocacy in the future must be closely allied to the adoption of normalization or social role valorization principles in the general task of public education and the structuring of our services. The development of self-advocacy is thus not an isolated phenomenon; it is an

essential part, and it is itself supported by, development of all aspects of our attempts to help and assist people in society who have special needs.

Fortunately, developments in these other areas are beginning to happen in Britain alongside the development of self-advocacy. Hopefully, in the future, those of us concerned with service provision can ally our efforts to those of people with mental handicaps in the form of their self-advocacy groups, so that we can all work together and involve each other in the way ahead.

My best wishes to all those at the conference in the task of trying to reduce the differences between ourselves and those we serve.

(The above is the text of a tape recording made by Paul Williams for the International Symposium on Mental Retardation, October, 1984)