

Access Press

Volume 19, Number 3

Minnesota's Disability



Community Newspaper

March 10, 2008

Access Press -- Bringing News and Information to People with Disabilities since 1990

[E-text Version](#)
[In This Issue](#)
[Theater Review Updates](#)
[At A Glance](#)
[Upcoming Events](#)
[Performances](#)
[Organizations](#)
[Back Issues](#)
[About Us](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Subscribe](#)
[Advertise in Access Press](#)

History Note

The Welsch Case, 1972

Expert testimony spelled doom for Minnesota institutions

by Luther Granquist

Thirty-five years ago this week three national experts on habilitation of persons with mental retardation reviewed conditions at Cambridge State Hospital. Gunnar Dybwad, James Clements, and David Rosen described what they saw to Federal Judge Earl R. Larson in September 1973 in the Welsch case, a class action on behalf of persons with mental retardation in Minnesota's state hospitals. They convinced him that all persons, regardless of the severity of their disability, could grow and develop if provided needed training in an appropriate environment. Judge Larson ordered changes to improve conditions. Later orders in that case contributed to the closing of all the state institutions in Minnesota for persons with developmental disabilities.

Gunnar Dybwad, an early leader of the National Association for Retarded Children (now the Arc), had seen institutions around the world. In Welsch and other similar cases, he taught judges the history of confining persons with mental retardation in institutions and emphasized the potential these persons had. Jim Clements, a medical doctor from Georgia, taught lawyers around the country how to try these institution cases. Dave Rosen, who helped develop community alternatives in Michigan for persons with mental retardation, provided down to earth direction on how to change a system. The legacy of their visit to Cambridge can be seen today—empty spaces where “cottages” once housed 1955 people. ■

Each month of 2008, Access Press will feature an important person or persons in disability history: local, regional or national.

[Search Site](#)


Gunnar Dybwad

Access Press
 (651) 644 - 2133

 Tim Benjamin
 Publisher &
 Editor-in-Chief