

# Access Press

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*History Note*

## Let them write their friends!

by Luther Granquist

In the summer of 1945, the State School for the Feeble-Minded and Colony for Epileptics in Faribault transferred more than 200 children, those considered to be "educable," to the State Public School in Owatonna. At the end of July of that year, M. R. Vevle, the superintendent of the State Public School, wrote to Dr. E. J. Engberg, the superintendent at Faribault:

I am enclosing herewith some letters written by the children at the State Public School to their friends at Faribault. I do not know if you wish to allow this correspondence between the children that have been transferred and those that have remained at your institution. When you have time to consider the matter, will you let me know what your recommendation is.

Superintendent Engberg responded on August 3, 1945:

We received your letter and also the correspondence from our former patients to their friends and relatives here. We believe that it would be satisfactory for your children to write once a month, particularly if they write such fine letters as they have been doing. As you know many of them have other members of their families here or do not have any relatives who are particularly interested in them.

Two decades later, Dr. David Vail, the Medical Director of the Minnesota Department of Public Welfare, decried such actions and attitudes. The "total institution" dehumanizes, he wrote, by severely limiting the capacity for self-determination of the people there. Vail also emphasized that dehumanization can be a problem "in any situation where one person is responsible for making the day-by-day decisions regarding the comfort and welfare of other persons." Anyone who has ever attended an interdisciplinary team meeting or a care conference should agree.

*The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, [www.mnddc.org](http://www.mnddc.org) or [www.mncdd.org](http://www.mncdd.org) and [www.partnersinpolicymaking.com](http://www.partnersinpolicymaking.com) ■*



Photo from Front Page



Yeah! Times have changed.

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