

24-HMD-EHM
RETYPE FROM ORIGINAL

The Housing of Mentally Defective Girls
Miss McIntosh

The welfare of girls is rather a large subject to cover in ten minutes. I am, however, going to present for your consideration the one type of girl for whom I wish to enlist your help – I am sure she already has your sympathy. That type of girl is the subnormal, handicapped, usually from birth, by this deficient mental condition.

At the State Conference on Social Work held in Duluth about three weeks ago, Dr. Louis A. Lurie of Cincinnati advanced the startling theory that feeble-mindedness is not hereditary; this seems like a very sweeping statement and literally knocks out the underpinning of our belief that feeble-mindedness is one of the most easily inherited of conditions. I did not attend the conference, hear the paper of the discussion, but I cannot believe that Dr. Lurie means to convey the idea that subnormal parents can have perfectly normal children, generally speaking, though statistics show that occasionally, out of a family of 4 or 5 children born of subnormals, one child may be about normal. Possible the Dr. means that perfectly normal parents will have a mentally deficient child, which, as we all know, does happen. The physical condition has much to do with feeble-mindedness, 12% of which is due to defective eyesight, Dr. Lurie says.

More than 5 years ago, the Women's Welfare League of Mpls. Opened the Club House for Girls, as one of its activities. This has been maintained as an emergency home to give temporary care and supervision to girls of the delinquent or pre-delinquent type, thus preventing them from being put in jail with more hardened characters. Like all new projects, the work developed along somewhat different lines as it progressed. While we have had about every type of delinquency represented in the girls brought to the Club House, we also have had many cases where there was do delinquency on the part of the girl, but rather on the part of the parents. From the opening of its doors, however, the feeble-minded cases have always been with us. On account of working in the dark, so to speak, at first, we failed to keep as careful records as we now have, so the exact number of these cases, is not known. During 1922, 20 subnormal cases of varying degree, spent some time in the Club House, and so far this year, 19 cases are recorded. The rules regarding temporary care have been somewhat relaxed, in keeping them for a long period of time, in order that we might ascertain if it were within the possibilities to make them self-supporting. The above figures represent those who have had the test and been found wanting; we have had many cases whom we considered below normal, but circumstances had not permitted them to fall into the hands of authorities. Some of the cases were brought to the Club House for observation before the test was administered, this method proving of great help to the examiners; the knowledge gained by direct personal contact in the daily life gives a very good indication of lack of mentality and, I believe, should always be given to the higher grade before they are burdened with the stigma of being feeble-minded. Of course, some test must be submitted to, but I am speaking of the moron type. Some cases were paroled to the Sup't of the Club House by the State Board

of Control to see what could be accomplished by clean, healthy wholesome environment, and supervision.

I will briefly detail one or two cases so you may judge for yourselves what may be done to prevent the moron type of subnormal from being a public charge in our already overcrowded state institutions.

One of the first cases was a girl whom we will call Ann because that is not her name. Her home is in one the Dakotas and she came to Mpls. to see the bright lights and enjoy life. Well Ann's dream of a gay life was rudely shattered the moment she alighted from the train, for she was taken in hand by the Travellers Aid and turned over to an organization which finally landed her with the State Board of Control. She was examined and committed, but paroled to our Sup't to see if she would make good, the alternative being the School for Feebleminded at Faribault. Ann was a handful and many a stormy session was held between her and superintendents, but the threat of Faribault always won out and temporarily subdued her. There was no sex history with Ann, but she was boy crazy and flirted outrageously at every opportunity, slipping her name, address, or telephone number to men, in the slyest manner, and I am convinced that only strictest care prevented sex history in her case. To make a long story short, Ann finally made good - went to work which she hated, was the best dressed girl in the Club House, paid her board, made nice Christmas presents to all her family, and everyone in the Club House, besides saving a substantial sum of money. She was permitted to go to her home after being with us for more than a year, and at last account was still there, permission to marry having been refused by the State Board of Control.

Another interesting case, still in the Club House, we will christen Clara. She was brought to us a year ago last August and was then 17 years of age, testing 10-3/4, a high grade moron; she came of good honest parents, from one of the small surrounding towns, but had been led astray by an older sister. I'm sorry to say there was some sex history in Clara's case, but no baby as is usually the case. Clara climbed out on the fire escape and ran away, the second day she was with us, but was caught in St. Paul and returned within a few days. Shortly afterward, she laughed to think how foolish she had been to run away and said if she were ever sent away, she would commit suicide. She is a very attractive looking girl, giving no hint in her appearance of her mental condition, which shows very plainly in the daily life, however. She was so rough and boisterous, so appallingly ignorant showing no training whatever, that the Sup't. despaired of ever toning her down. Her health was not good, so much attention was paid to her physical condition, the most effective work being the examination of her eyes and fitting her to glasses. She isn't the same girl since that was done. All her indifference to sewing has vanished and she is one of the most enthusiastic members of the weekly sewing class, where she formerly confused hearts with diamonds and clubs with spades, she has developed a great keenness in the card games which have become an almost nightly diversion since the Sup't has discovered what a wonderful aid these games are in stimulating the girls' wits and making them concentrate. Clara has worked steadily, paid her board, sent money to her family, dressed well and has a nice bank balance, which she is rapidly increasing, in order that she may attend school and still be independent. This

willingness to attend school comes as the crowing joy to the superintendent who has worked so hard with her, for Clara has refused to listen to all pleas that she gain an education, until recently. She is not allowed to go home, but her father visited her a few weeks ago, **and was visibly impressed with her improvement, although very indignant at the idea of his daughter being branded as feeble-minded.**

I could cite many other interesting cases where the improvement of this type of girl under proper supervision and care, is very marked; the thought I wish to give to this ever increasing army of responsible women is this: - Will it not be worth your while to get behind and put over, a movement, to secure appropriations from our State Legislature, for the purpose of establishing homes in our largest cities, Mpls. St. Paul and Duluth, for the higher grade or moron type of subnormal girl, **make the home self-supporting, thus relieving the pressure in our state institutions and preventing the girls from being public charges.** This is something the State Board of Control is vitally interested in.

Of course, only a small percentage of these girls can ever actually be returned into society as statistics show that while great improvement is made under certain conditions such as prevail in a home like ours, remove those conditions and the girl revert to type. This fact has been demonstrated rather forcibly to us, with a girl who has been with us for over two years, as cook. She improved steadily, until she went home for a month's visit last spring; on return, the change was almost unbelievable, she had retrograded to such an extent. She is again on the up-grade.

Dr. Kuhlmann, Director of Research for the State Board of Control, in a report issued about two years ago, stated that 2% of the population of almost any state, is feeble-minded; that in our state alone, 45000 are of this type, and of this number there are 15000 needing immediate care, 11250 being of the moron type. It is said that further research on his part, has visibly increased these numbers.

Perhaps you would be interested in knowing the division test; idiots test up to 3-3/4 years; imbeciles from 3-3/4 to 7 1/4; high grade morons from 7 1/4 to 11-1/4. 12 is the border line and from 13 to 14 is considered fairly good - dull normalas it is termed, while 16 is normal. In the main only high grade morons are capable of improvement to the point of being self-supporting. With over 11000 of this type needing immediate care, cannot you see how essential these homes are? Will you not work with the State Board of Control in securing the necessary appropriation for establishment of these homes, or work under them and establish one or two yourselves, demonstrating beyond a doubt the feasibility of the experiment to our legislators, so they will see the wisdom of granting money for this purpose.

Then a handwritten message:

Miss Crowley - This sounds jerky for I had to talk like lightning having so short a time. Please do not show it to anyone else.

EHMI

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