

A family agency encounters the problem of feeble-mindedness with great frequency, both among adults and children. Every possible combination, feeble-minded parents with normal children, normal parents with feeble-minded children and all the others appear in our families under care. The problem as a whole has always been recognized there are related problems of which we are increasingly conscious in connection with the training of staff.

First - The problem of promoting or how to promote intelligent grasp of what feeble-mindedness is and is not.

Second - The problem of strengthening treatment by adequate supervision.

In the journal "Mental Hygiene" for July 1933 there is an article by Myra Shimberg and Wally Reichenberg - "The Success and Failure of Subnormal Problem Children in the Community." Much in the article is entirely applicable to the subnormal adult and would be of value to all family case workers. Dr. Walter Fernald, writing in 1912 is quoted as saying - "The feeble-minded are a parasitic, predatory class, never capable of self support or of managing their own affairs." This point of view is by no means entirely eradicated among laymen and the family case worker - probably most other case workers - repeatedly finds herself having to explain away this harsh, hopeless version so firmly rooted in the minds of too many relatives and friends of the subnormal. To explain it away she must herself intelligently understand what feeble-mindedness is and is not. I wish I might say that all family case workers can make such explanations or interpretations adequately. I can not say that but I can say that many family workers can do so and that there is progress all the time in this direction.

Intelligent grasp of the problem of feeble-mindedness must include - or lead to - understanding of what to do about it. The family case worker who understands that the feeble-minded are "all kinds of people" - that they have personality assets or lacks, emotional control or none is supervising the feeble-minded in the families in her care with interest and imagination. Her work is complicated by the fact that she must consider the whole family group, not the subnormal individual only but if she succeeds so much greater the success.

The Family Welfare Association is indebted to the State Research Bureau for the examinations which make it possible to decide what may reasonably be expected of our subnormal men, women and children. That I believe has been and still is our greatest weakness - we expect too much or too little of the feeble-minded. But we are learning that many of them can be assets in their homes and in work which fits them - not that they are "parasitic and predatory." It is our hope that recognition and supervision may become active earlier and earlier in work with the subnormal so that they may be spared at least some of the upsets and losses which are too often their lot because they can not measure up to normal demands.

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