

NEWSLETTER

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PARENTS VISIT THE MINNESOTA SCHOOL AND COLONY

INVITATION FROM DR. E. J. ENGBERG, SUPERINTENDENT - One of the prime functions of the Conference Committee on Mental Deficiency is to provide parents of retarded children, county social workers, and workers in the Department of Public Welfare and its institutions for the mentally defective an opportunity to exchange views and voice problems of mutual concern. Some of the most interesting sessions have revolved about the misunderstandings which arise between parents and the personnel who care for their children in the institution, or about complaints that parents have brought in regarding institutional policies, care of clothing, lack of outdoor recreation, or the medical care given. In some instances these complaints, when later investigated, proved to be well-founded and an attempt was made to correct the situation; in other cases the complaints seemed to have been completely without foundation.

Out of these discussions, however, the members of the Conference Committee gradually became aware that the specific complaints brought to their attention might not represent the real source of parental discomfort. Rather it seemed that parents who made complaints very often felt that they were not aware of everything that took place in the institution and that they were, therefore, particularly afraid of what might be going on there.

It was because of this new awareness of how certain parents felt that I gave a verbal invitation that the various parent groups might send representatives to the Minnesota School and Colony. They could spend a full day there and report back to other parents what they had observed. They would be given an opportunity to see whatever interested them, and to see the institution's program in its everyday operation. No special plans were made in advance as to where the visitors would be taken or what they would see.

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Each parent was asked to send a report and evaluation to be summarized by Mrs. Arthur E. Mostad of the Goodhue County chapter. The summary is unedited.

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REPORT BY THE PARENTS WHO VISITED THE MINNESOTA SCHOOL AND COLONY - On June 22, a group of twenty-three parents representing six of the parents groups in the state made a tour through the School and Colony at Faribault. Seven reports came in representing ten of the group who made the tour. Three

of the reports were from parents who had someone in an institution. The other four reports came from parents who have a child on the waiting list or who are contemplating commitment. The following is a summary of these reports.

All the parents reported that they either had never been through the institution or had not been there for several years.

The hospital care was spoken of in all the reports, possibly because all parents are concerned with the health of their children. The in-training classes created a deep impression on the group. None of the group knew or realized the staff members and the workers received this training in mental health care techniques. One mother remarked that she thought the T.B. patients should not be in the same building as the other hospital patients. The attitude of the group reporting was that the hospital was well staffed and the aides were so very pleasant and took such a personal interest in each patient.

While in the hospital, the group observed some of the wards, the nursery, various observation rooms, the tiny chapel where funerals are held and the morgue. One mother remarked about the inadequacy of equipment in the chapel and suggested that improvements could possibly be a project of the various parents groups. One young couple were very happy to see their child in the hospital. They had visited her before but had never seen the bed or room where she lived. They said that seeing her in the actual surroundings was worth the whole trip to Faribault.

In visiting the laundry, tailor shop, and kitchens, everyone seemed amazed at the immense amount of work carried on each day and how smoothly things seemed to be done. Many of the parents saw a need for larger and better food storage space and kitchen equipment. The food was excellent and the main dining room seemed cheery and pleasant.

The lunch hour was spent in getting acquainted. The group also received information about the Minnesota mental health program and changes and progress in Faribault in the past few years.

Smaller groups visited various places of interest in the afternoon.

The group who visited "Old Main" all reported the same. This building seemed over-crowded, poor dormitory facilities, a possible fire hazard, drab, unhappy looking, and very inadequate. This was the only building of which these things were mentioned.

One couple visited Pines because their son would be there. Their report remarked about the modern facilities of this building and the warm atmosphere of affection for the children.

A St. Paul mother spent part of the afternoon at Cedar, her daughter's dormitory. There she observed the handicraft session and for the first time learned exactly what her daughter was able to do. She stated that her daughter is very happily placed at Cedar.

A group of four went with Dr. Engberg on a tour of the dairy, piggery and farms. A new loafing barn and milking parlor has replaced the dairy barn. This makes the handling of the milk much more sanitary and convenient.

The dormitory for the dairy workers seemed so cherry and pleasant. It was a joy to see this home-like atmosphere. Modern methods of farming also proved itself in that contour farming was being practiced.

One mother had this paragraph: "I did not see any room where there were any toys, blocks, or tricycles and wondered afterward if there were any such play rooms. Apparently the Christmas toys had all disappeared. Possibly there would be an opportunity to spread the gifts around the year." Another report also mentioned that the auditorium and recreation facilities were decidedly antiquated. Still another mentioned the carnival and picnic which one cottage of girls was enjoying that day and how well organized it was. The group as a whole seemed to think that the recreation was well carried out considering the inadequate supply of facilities.

The chaplain explained briefly his work. In her report, one mother explained her reaction in this way: "I was shocked that there is no actual church - this I feel to be the duty of the various denominations in the state and the parents to bring it to their attention." Another wrote thus; "To see such an earnest worker ministering to these people is gratifying to parents whose greatest comfort in bearing their cross lies in fellowship with God."

One happy, little sidelight of the afternoon was the privilege of listening to the rhythm band composed of youngsters of school age.

The overall picture from all reports was one of surprise and amazement. There seemed a need for more of a staff, but the ones who were there were well trained and took such a personal, friendly attitude toward the patients. One couple stated that they had dreaded to send their child to the institution, but after this trip, they were looking forward to it.

The group could see many future improvements - some large, some small; but all reports stated that they realize there is a shortage of funds. The day as a whole proved to be one of great satisfaction, and it was asked if such a program could be carried out again.

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REPORT ON VACATIONS - A rough count shows that 1018 persons left the institutions for the mentally deficient or epileptic for a visit or vacation during the months of May, June and July. The Department of Public Welfare is ready, at the end of this vacation period, to re-evaluate its policy of only one visit or vacation during the vacation period except where medical or psychological reasons indicate it should be broken; and also its policy of limiting any vacation to 60 days. Discussion at the August meeting of the Conference Committee will be helpful in considering a broadening of the policy regarding these vacations.

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STATE FAIR - Again the Conference Committee is sponsoring the booth of the Division of Child Welfare and Guardianship of the Department of Public Welfare. A parent and a staff member of a welfare board will be present at all times to answer questions relating to planning for the mentally retarded.

Fair dates - August 28 through September 6.

Location of booth - In State Exhibits building located just inside 3rd Snelling Avenue gate, North from Como Avenue - back of Highway Maintenance building.

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A NEW PRIVATE INSTITUTION - The Vasa Children's Home in Red Wing, Minnesota, has been an institution for normal dependent children since 1865. Beginning about September 1st it will be used for 50 mentally retarded children from between the ages of 2 and 13 years - both ambulatory and non-ambulatory. No child will be admitted who has not already been committed to the guardianship of the Commissioner of Public Welfare. The Board of Christian Service located at 1954 University Avenue, St. Paul, the Lutheran agency administratively responsible for Vasa, will accept all inquiries and requests for service for children at the Home. The intent of this program is to provide care, more or less on a temporary basis, for children who will later be moved into a state institution or possibly return to their own homes. Although Lutheran youngsters will be given some priority, children of all colors, races and creeds may be received. The fee will probably be set at \$100 a month, with costs of some medical care and clothing charged in addition.

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REPORT OF CAMP GIVEN CONFERENCE COMMITTEE - When the Salvation Army through its Camp Directors, Colonel and Mrs. Martin, approached Mrs. Laura Swanson Zemlin about the mentally retarded using their camping facilities at Silver Lake, Mrs. Zemlin called together a camp committee consisting of Mr. Frank Monson, President of the Minneapolis Parents' Group, Mrs. Louise Fraser, Director of Home Study School, and Manford Hall, Hennepin County Welfare Board, and herself.

As a result of the work of the committee, two camping periods of six days each were arranged for the month of July. Mrs. Fran Guzie was the director and Erleen and Manford Hall were the counselors. There were 21 campers enrolled for each period, and the first group consisted mostly of those persons from Opportunity Workshop and Fraser School in Minneapolis, while the second group included eight from the Minneapolis area and 13 from the institutions. These were all persons who would not have had vacations, and plans were made with the approval of the welfare boards of their home counties. The institutions have expressed great appreciation for this pleasure brought to those to whom Hennepin County residents have no direct responsibility.

The Conference Committee on Mental Deficiency is a discussion group made up of representatives from organized groups of parents of retarded children, staff members of the Department of Public Welfare, and representatives of county welfare boards and the state institutions.

Purpose of the Committee is three-fold: (1) To provide free discussion of any problem connected with planning and care for retarded children; (2) to provide a place where group representative can criticize or make suggestions for retarded child care; and (3) to plan and work cooperatively toward a better program for and a greater understanding of the mentally retarded.