

Living in the Community — with support

Some people said to us, 'You can serve the mildly retarded but you can never serve the moderately, severely, profoundly retarded.' So, the bulk of our system now serves severely and profoundly retarded people. Most moderately and mildly retarded people have moved into some kind of independence or semi-independence.

They said, 'You will never be able to serve the really problematic people with maladaptive behaviours, the ones who beat their heads against the wall and bite people and kick and scratch and hurt themselves.' So we set up a behaviour shaping program and brought all of the children back from the institution to serve them in that program.

Then they said, 'You can't serve kids who are medically fragile, near death.' So we set up a Developmental Maximation Unit and have been serving them regularly and moving them back into their own homes and into our regular Residences.

'But,' they said, 'You can't serve large numbers.' So last year we brought 100 people into our Residential System.

They said, 'You can't do it cheaply,' so last year again, in spite of bringing 100 new people in, in spite of all of the start up costs that go with that, in spite of a 10% cost of living increase to our staff and a 15% inflation rate we still reduced our total costs below what they would have been if we had used group homes as our only option.

They said, 'You can't serve the legal offenders.' So we set up a program for legal offenders called the Structured Correctional Program.

But this year they said, 'You can't do it without money.' And they are right. You can't do it without money. We tried like hell and you can't do it without money.

As long as you tend to shove the money in other directions like institutions, the community-based Residential Program, won't go and you'll be right about that. You'll be able to say, 'I told you so.'

The choice is yours.

Extract from speech delivered by Ed Skarnulis, Director of Residential Services, Encor, Omaha, Nebraska, to a meeting in the State of Iowa, 1975, from Ethel Temby's notes.

Ed Skarnulis is a social worker who is now an Associate Professor in the University of Nebraska, Medical Centre.

Note: Eastern Nebraska, (U.S.A.), has demonstrated since 1970 how an effective system of comprehensive services for family support, vocational training and living in the local community can be achieved. They have shown it can be developed quickly and that the philosophy inspiring it attracts recruits for staffing the range of services.