64-TMR-ARC
ARC Speech etc.

TALK ON MENTAL RETARDATION FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS *

I have been asked to speak to you this evening about mental retardation. It is my hope to arouse your concern about these children and adults who, in Minnesota, total more than 100,000.

Mental retardation is a condition characterized by the faulty development of intelligence, which impairs an individual's ability to learn and to adapt to the demands of society. Most people with an IQ below 70 have significant difficulties adjusting adequately to their environment.

By far the vast majority of the retarded-- more than four-fifths -- are only mildly affected, which means that with the help of special education and other services, they can become independent adults, living and working in their communities and contributing to the society in which they live.

About ten per cent of the retarded are moderately affected; with the help of special services, they, too, can become at least partially self-supporting.

A very small percentage of the retarded -- about one in 30 -- are severely or profoundly retarded, and they require constant supervision or care.

In the United States, in 1960, there were 5.4 million retarded. This was based on a total population of 179 million. By 1970, based on an estimated population of 214 million, there will be 6.4 million retarded -- a one million increase.

Causes of retardation are numerous. Over 100 have been identified, such as:

- Infections of the mother during pregnancy
- Toxic agents affecting mother and child
- Conditions due to physical or traumatic damage
- Metabolic disorders
- Mongolism and diseases of unknown origin
- Infectious childhood diseases
- Deprivations of early life, and
- Brain damage due to physical harm

We know this is a big problem. We know that retarded children can be and *are born to people at all levels* of our society. The retarded and their families total 15 to 20 million, or 10 per cent of the United States' population.

We know the figures -- but what do each of us in this room -- unless we have a retarded child in the family -- know of the anguish, the heartache, the special wisdom, and yes, even the joy, that can come from having a retarded child?

The past president of our Association, who is a father of a retarded child, said recently that he has come to realize that the greatest problem of the retarded is that they are generally regarded as *something less than real people.* And yet if we would only listen to those who have a retarded member of the family, or to those who know or work intimately with the retarded, we would find out that each retarded is an individual, with *human* needs like our own. Most of us in this room would bristle with indignation if someone told us that we had fewer needs, were somehow less worthy and *less* human than persons with IQ's of 180 or more. And yet this is the attitude which many of us -- perhaps unconsciously -- have toward the retarded.

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* Prepared by the Minnesota Association for Retarded Children
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Humble though the retarded may be in intellectual gifts, we can learn from them and by knowing them. I would like to read what one mother wrote about how she learned from her retarded son.

"He never spoke a word in his life," she wrote, "yet he taught me more than all the books I ever read. He never walked a step, yet he led me to heights I never could have climbed alone. He lived only a few short years, yet he lives forever in all the children I meet . . .

"It was a long ago morning when a famous child specialist told me that my son had a severe brain injury, his coordination was poor, his digestion was faulty, and that he would always be a helpless, afflicted child. I took my son home. I was a widow and could afford no help. At first I would not admit that my handsome child was different. I beat my heart out against the bars of rebellion. Then began the lessons he taught me.

"After a weary night, I would look at my child, and over his face would come his radiant smile. If he could smile, I thought, so could I. So we smiled together -- my first lesson.

"Then I found he responded to a happy voice. I read him gay stories, and bought him little live things to see and try to touch. He loved music, so I sang to him. As we laughed together, bitterness faded and life was better.

"I had, at first, from shock and pride, kept away from people. My young pleasure-loving friends shied away, but I found we attracted people with discerning hearts . . . I learned not to judge people, but to look into their hearts. We made many friends.

"Then at last I found God. He walked with us through our darkest days. We were never alone. I learned patience and trust."

This is what just one mother learned from her retarded child.

As we think of ways to help the retarded, we need to know where and how they are served -- <u>if, indeed, they are being served.</u>

In Minnesota, over 6,000, or about 6% are in state institutions. 750 are on a waiting list for admission. Waiting time is now about three years. 5,000 are in special public school classes -- but special classes are serving only about 2 out of every 10 mentally retarded children who need this service.

Vocational rehabilitation has made some progress but it reaches only 3% of all mentally retarded.

There are other scattered services, including:

- Day Activity Centers
- Camping Programs
- Recreation Programs
- Religious Education Classes

Where do we <u>stand now</u> ! Where do we <u>go now</u> ! What can you <u>do now</u> !

I have talked about ten minutes; during this time, two retarded children have been born. We'll call one of them David. David's mother and father, like most parents, looked forward eagerly to the birth of their child. They wondered whether David would be a boy or a girl, and if a boy, whether he'd be interested in sports or be a mathematical whiz; whether he'd be a doctor or lawyer, a soldier or engineer.

The chances are that they do not know yet that David is retarded. When they do find out, their hopes, their dreams, their speculations will all be shattered, to be replaced by shock, bewilderment, and near despair over their child's future.

Thus we have failed in our first mission -- to prevent David's retardation from occuring. There is hope, however, for future Davids. More money, more effort is going into research and someday we hope to have the means of preventing many forms of retardation.

Right now, in fact, if we applied all our present knowledge we could prevent many cases of retardation. For example, we need greater safeguards for expectant mothers against radiation and harmful drugs.

But David is with us now, and the responsibilities facing his parents are overwhelming. In many communities there are no special facilities of any kind to help David and his family and others like them. Those of you who have normal children -- imagine for one moment, if you will, what you would do if suddenly, tomorrow, there were no schools or church to which to send your child; no park for him to play in; no opportunity for him to leave his home and meet and play with other children. Retarded children need these opportunities as much--if not more--than normal children; yet too often, the only world they know is defined by the walls of their home or by the walls of an institution which is grossly understaffed and overcrowded.

What are our responsibilities to David and his family? How do we help?

We need an aroused and concerned public. People can't help if they don't know the problem. We need to tell them.

We need more and better tax supported services. To get these, we need to urge local and state officials to appropriate necessary funds.

We must recognize this problem as our responsibility. There are tragic situations in our state institutions which must be changed.

The program to improve services to the mentally retarded is a crusade. We need to "feel" the human misery and despair. The kind of despair a mother in Austin feels when told by her family doctor that "Tom will be dead in a year if the institution continues to treat him this way". The kind of despair that a mother in Hutchinson felt when told her third child was also mentally retarded due to a metabolic disorder.

And by the way, I should note here that the disorder from which her children suffer --called PKU-- can now be corrected by a special diet. Research has uncovered a means of detecting this disorder in infants, and a special diet, if instituted early, can prevent this type of retardation from occurring.

David is only a few minutes old now. We cannot predict what is ahead for him and his parents -- just as we cannot predict the future of any child. But for the normal child and his parents, there is a certain amount of security -- some assurance that the nation's resources, its institutions and organizations, will be there to help him live, learn, and develop his potential. Our job is to see that society provides this same measure of security for David and all other retarded children.

Speaking to delegates at the First White House Conference on Mental Retardation held this fall, the late President Kennedy said:

(quote) "Never in the history of man has it been possible to achieve greater gains against this grave and complex problem. The retarded child will emerge from the attic of society and take his place in the school playground; and the retarded adult will move from a back bedroom or institutional ward to the day center and workshop.

"There can be no greater evidence of American vitality, intelligence, and humanitarian tradition." (End of quote)

This is our first mission -- to recognize retarded children and adults as fellow human beings, deserving of human love and kindness -- and perhaps most imporrtant -- of human dignity.

A young boy in Mankato learned a lot about love and understanding and respect. In closing, I would like to read what he wrote about "A Person Who Has Influenced Me".

By Scott K. Meyer
9th Grade English
October 1, 1959

"He has been laughed at, made fun of, stoned, beaten up, yet he has influenced me more than any other one thing or person.

"Once he was told to go into a garage and stand against a wall. Then a bunch of bullies threw stones at him. Many times people have backed away when they met him on streets. He's been jeered at and poked fun at. Why then, has he influenced my life so much?

"He and I were always together when we were small. We grew up together, learned to walk together, and were steady companions. As we grew older, we began taking part in social life together. We tramped through woods and cornfields together.

"When we were about 7 or 8 years old, we went together to the school playground. We had planned to take part in the summer recreational program. As we walked on the playground, the kids started pointing, laughing. When we went to swing on the swings, kids got off and ran away. Then they started throwing stones. I could never figure out why this happened.

"The most happy times we have had together were at the YMCA. I joined when I was about ten. Then he joined. At the Y the boys understood him, played with him, and made friends with him. Through the Y, he found understanding and friendship. This and school, besides home, were the only places where he found companionship.

"In our family, we feel as if he was a blessing in disguise. He has taught us how to love and understand people unlike us. People with handicaps. He has taught us how to help others, too. This person of whom I am speaking is a mentally retarded boy. He is one of the finest people I have known -- my brother, Jeff."