

ADDRESS BEFORE EDINA CHAPTER, JAYCEES, NOVEMBER 15, 1965

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COMMUNITY NEEDS OF THE MENTALLY RETARDED

In the Fall of 1963, our parent organization, the National Association for Retarded Children held its Annual Convention in Washington, D.C., and at that time, we were privileged to be visited by our late President John F. Kennedy. These are a few of the words he spoke on that occasion:


"This tragic human waste which, of course, affects not only the child but the family which is involved, can and must be stopped. I think we have an obligation of country, especially a country as rich as ours... to block this and stop it."

He was speaking, of course, of the problem of Mental Retardation. And I am here tonight to tell you how, by acceptance of this responsibility on the part of a community - our community and we as citizens of it - this tragic human waste can be stopped.

Before we discuss the community needs of the retarded, perhaps we should pause for a minute to make sure we have in mind some of the basic facts about mental retardation - what it is - how it is caused - and how many mentally retarded there are.

But first let me make it clear that I come to you as a layman and not as a professional in this field. Thus I speak as a layman, and should you ask any questions of a technical nature which you wish answered, I will be glad to try to secure the information and forward it to you if you will see me after the meeting.

Now, first of all, what is mental retardation? I think of the mentally retarded as those whose mental development has not kept pace with their physical development. We think of a child of six, for example, as mentally able to begin to learn to read and write. But if his mental growth has been retarded so that his mental age is only four, he is not mentally ready to try to learn to read and write and he is entirely out of place when put in the first grade along with children whose mental growth has been normal. We must be careful to note that



these children are not mentally deranged. They are not mentally ill. They merely lack the mental ability we usually associate with their age.

What causes mental retardation? Very little is known, largely because until recent years there has been little research in this field. Experts say there are 200 causes, some occurring before birth, some during birth, and some after birth. Before birth, the mother may contract an infection such as German measles, which affects the brain cells of the unborn child. Or it may be lack of oxygen for a few seconds during birth. Or, after birth, it may be an injury to the brain caused by a fall or by high fever in connection with a childhood disease.

Is there a cure for mental retardation? There is no known cure. The brain cells have been damaged. New cells cannot be grown, just as you cannot grow a new arm. It is possible, however, through long periods of training to teach other portions of the brain to take over some of the functions of the damaged portion, just as people with one hand learn to do many of the things you and I do with our two hands.

Where are these mentally retarded children and adults? Everywhere. Mental retardation is no respecter of race, of family background, or of social standing. A retarded child may be born to a college president just as well as to a migrant laborer. As far as we know, the percentage of retarded children is no different here in our State from what it is in others; no different in the United States from what it is in France.

What do the mentally retarded look like? Most, not all, but most of them look normal and grow up to look like other adults. Some few - like those with Down's Syndrome and the more severely retarded - do look different... but at least 75% look little if any different from normal people.

How many are there? Generally educators class those with an I.Q. (intelligence quotient) below 70 as mentally retarded. Three percent of the population is the accepted estimate today - that is three out of every one hundred persons is mentally retarded.

Three percent may not sound like many, but mental retardation is the most extensive of the crippling conditions which affect our children. Three percent means 30 out of every 1,000 children as compared with blindness - 2 out of every 1,000 - rheumatic heart - 7 out of every 1,000 and cerebral palsy - 3.5 out of every 1,000. In other words, 30 mentally retarded per 1,000 as compared with a total not half this many for all the other major crippling conditions put together.

What can they do? With adequate education and proper training, the mentally retarded adolescent or adult can perform routine tasks such as operating simple machines in a factory, washing cars, repairing shoes, working in a laundry, in a filling station or mowing the lawn. It may take them a longer time to learn to do a job, but once they learn, they usually can be depended upon to perform their tasks more faithfully than the more intelligent - because they are satisfied with menial jobs that soon become boring to the average person.

With this background of basic information in mind, let's take a look at the community needs of the mentally retarded child and adult.

When parents first suspect that their child is handicapped, the need to see someone for advice and consultation is overwhelming. For this reason, diagnostic clinics are one of the first needs in the community. These are reliable centers where a child may be taken for testing and where parents may receive the guidance necessary in dealing with the mental handicap. Doctors, psychologists and social workers examine the children and advise the parents as to what the capabilities of each child are likely to be.

The next need is for acceptance.....acceptance of retarded children - and retarded adults - for what they are and for what they can do - not for what we would like them to be or what we would like them to do. In our present society we have come to accept the physically handicapped. We have learned that the man who has lost a leg can be fitted with an

artificial leg and trained to do a new job. He can be a productive member of society rather than sit on the street holding out a tin cup. We have come to accept the blind, to determine the jobs they can do, and to train them for these jobs.


But in our modern society some of us have come to worship intelligence. We look up to the nuclear physicist who understands the physics of the atomic bomb and the engineer who develops a still bigger electronic computer, but we are inclined to look down our noses at these children and adults of limited intelligence who find it most difficult to learn to read and write.

Once we learn in our community to accept them for what they are and what they can do, then we are ready to consider ways and means of providing the training necessary to develop their abilities and so enable them to become productive within the limits of their abilities.

Once a small child has been diagnosed as being mentally handicapped, the first constructive step which can be provided in the community for him is a pre-school class. He needs to begin to play with children of equal abilities, to learn to get along in a group situation, to take care of small needs of his own, to understand instruction. More than any other child, he needs this preparation for the big step - the first step for normal children - that of entering kindergarten.

In most communities today the first facilities specifically provided for the mentally retarded are special classes in the public school. In our larger schools, grades have been divided to provide classes for the slow learners.

This has helped to some extent, but has not taken care of the more severely retarded. For the most part, classes for these children have been organized by their own parents when school officials have taken the position that they are not a responsibility of the public schools since they will never be able to read or write. However, as a result of special legislation in some States, this situation is being corrected.



Thus, in some States, we now have two types of special classes for retarded children - the special classes for those who are considered educable since they can learn to read and write - and special classes for the more severely retarded who are referred to as "trainable" since they cannot learn to read and write but can be trained to do simple and repetitive tasks. Our State is one of these: mandatory legislation for the educables; permissive legislation for the trainables.

Next, to bridge the gap between special classes and regular employment, the community needs to provide training centers, and fortunately these are becoming more numerous in larger cities across the country.

It has been observed that, in most special classes, the pupils begin to lose interest when they reach the age of about 14. Many are not mentally capable of studying high school subjects and they become bored with continuous work on reading, writing and arithmetic. They need training in the use of their hands, but here again they do not fit into the programs of regular vocational high schools since the programs are geared to children of higher intelligence. Training centers have developed, therefore, to fit the special needs of these young people.

In the training centers, simple tasks are learned in an effort to find out the work each young person can do and to prepare him or her for gainful employment. The goal is, of course, full-time employment and often this is accomplished by a middle step of on-the-job training in industry.

As these training centers graduate more and more capable and useful young men and women, another need arises in the community and that is one of acceptance on the part of the employer. What I am saying now is slightly repetitive of the point I made earlier about acceptance of the mentally retarded - but this need cannot be emphasized too often. The National Association for Retarded Children makes an award annually to the Employer of the Year. Through the screening of candidates for this award, the Association has learned of many, many businesses and industries where the mentally retarded are proving to their employers that employing the handicapped is good business. More employers need to know this and to open their doors to the mentally retarded young people seeking work to do.

For the mentally retarded who are unable to hold regular jobs in industry, sheltered workshops are being developed in many communities, such as our Opportunity Workshop. Here sub-contract work is obtained from local industries, thereby providing a form of employment for the severely retarded and, at the same time, doing a job that industry had difficulty getting done by its regular employees. In some communities the need also arises for day care centers for those who cannot work even in a sheltered situation. Although the number of young people requiring this kind of center is relatively small, the requirement is nevertheless one of great importance. In the center the young people and young adults are given the training necessary to take care of their personal needs, make them less of a burden on their families, and avoid the high expense that would be involved should they be placed in institutions. In Hennepin County, MARC's Daytime Activity Center (DTAC) serves 65 children, with another 50 on the waiting list.

In spelling out the community needs of the mentally retarded thus far I haven't mentioned one very important need - and that is the need for recreation facilities. Quite naturally, play times are needed for retarded children, just as they are for other children. Retarded boys and girls do very well in their own Boy and Girl Scout Troops with the standards for passing badge tests lowered a little. They relax beautifully in swimming and take just like other kids to camping experiences. Teen-agers and adults need their own gathering places to dance and sing and bowl and watch TV.

So far I have been talking in generalities about the broad range of facilities which need to be provided in all communities to provide a full life and full opportunity for retarded children and adults.

Now I would like to talk about some specifics - namely what our community is providing and what you, as a community member, can do to help round out these programs. MARC's program includes the Daytime Activity Center; Day and Residence Camp; Teen-Y Toppers; Fun Club; Christmas for the Mentally Retarded; Trainable Classes (the result of a eight-year battle); Legislative effort; Monthly membership meetings; Mothers club;

Service Club; Speakers Bureau and Parent Counseling.

What can you do? My first suggestion is - become acquainted with MARC. This is one of 1,000 now organized throughout the country. Each is dedicated to helping retarded children and adults - each needs support from civic-minded citizens.

There are, then, at least two major areas in which you can be of assistance in fulfilling the community needs of the retarded child and adult.


First, you can help provide public education. Most people have little or no knowledge about retarded children, and many have ideas which are grossly exaggerated and inaccurate. You can help by telling people the facts and spreading the word. You can help build acceptance which is the first and foremost need.

Second, you can provide leadership. Our Association, MARC, needs men and women with special projects. For example, establishment of a training center or sheltered workshop requires business and professional men who can furnish talents in the way of advice on labor relations, law, building and construction problems. You would find it a source of satisfaction, I am sure, to lend your talents on a special project in the field which interests you most.

This year, as well as last year, the Advertising Council is carrying on a nation-wide public education campaign on the subject of mental retardation. I would like to read for you the copy which appears on one of the posters in that campaign:

"100 years ago, people didn't know much about the mentally retarded. So they shut them away. But with what we now know, 85% of them could help support themselves with proper training. So why don't we let them?"

The role of the Jaycees. In my opening remarks, I referred to our National Convention at Washington, D.C. in 1963 in which the late President Kennedy addressed the Convention. At this same convention was Dr. Ronald E. Goldstein, D.D.S., of Atlanta, Georgia - the National Chairman, Junior Chamber of Commerce. He announced that in July, 1963, a Committee on



Mental Health and Mental Retardation had been formed by the Jaycees. This program was supported by the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation - Sears Roebuck and the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation.

Dr. Goldstein stated: "...the Jaycees can provide a valuable service to humanity with the adoption and operation of a national mental health program - mental illness and mental retardation - through the use of its' inherent assets - namely, talent and time - local chapters can fill a need that exists in all communities."

The Jaycees were established 42 years ago - you have 5,000 independent chapters and 225,000 active members in the U.S. between the ages of 21 - 36. You consider yourselves as young men of action, and have many permanent working committees on the national, state and local levels, such as the Uniform Vehicle Code Committee, the Junior Sports Activities Committee and the Health and Safety Committee.

As present and future parents you are concerned with the prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of the mentally retarded.

The National Jaycee Committee on Mental Health and Mental Retardation (MH & MR) has, since October, 1963, established a National Advisory Board to advise you on Activities your chapter may participate in to the best advantage. In addition, the National Committee has appointed a State Committee (Minn. MR Chairman, Seldon Caswell, 2529 E. 7th Ave., North St. Paul).

In December, 1963, this Advisory Board drafted a "Comprehensive Plan of Action" for distribution to Jaycee Chairmen on the State and local levels - the emphasis was on:

the education of Jaycees and Mrs. Jaycees and their communities in the problems of MH and MR
further, in addition to this need of understanding, emphasis was placed on Activities geared toward prevention, early detection and care.

As the planning continued and was implemented between your National Committee and our National Association (NARC) there then resulted a training institute for the Jaycee chairmen of the State Committees.

This training institute, among other things, urged local chapters, such as yours, and our chapter, MARC, to develop a program of education by offering speeches at your meetings, making suitable films and literature available, by organizing guided visits to schools, workshops, activity centers and institutions, and by encouraging volunteer services in community programs.

What about Minnesota? On the State level our State Association, the Minnesota Association for Retarded Children, (Minn. ARC) has met with your state chairman to review the extent of MR within Minnesota, and to discuss how the Jaycees can help meet the total needs of the retarded.

We need persons like yourselves to help convey to other professionals, school board members, city and village officials, legislators and others just what our needs are - for the retarded cannot speak for themselves.

Within seven months after the Advisory Board met, 42 states had established Committees on MH and MR (including Minnesota). As a result of this meeting there was published:

"Doesn't Anyone Care?" - available through Jaycee Mental

Health and Mental Retardation Fund, Box 7, Tulsa, Oklahoma,
price: 50¢ 74101

As I previously stated, the Jaycee program emphasizes local education for Jaycee Chapters and their communities - it stresses the importance of learning about and understanding the nature and characteristics of both Mental Health and Mental Retardation, their distinguishing features, essential differences and their unique needs for service - it emphasizes a program of creating and stimulating job opportunities for the Mentally Retarded who are capable of accepting employment in cooperation with the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped - it emphasizes improved medical care during pregnancy and early childhood and community-sponsored pre-school nurseries; it encourages the establishment of special education programs in public

schools and expansion of special education to meet the total needs - not merely token needs - it encourages Jaycees to include the mentally retarded in their existing recreation programs.

I cannot stress too strongly that (1) all local chapters review the publication, "Doesn't Anyone Care?"; (2) establish a working committee on mental retardation; (3) undertake a worthwhile project for the mentally retarded - you don't have to spend money in order to become involved in helping the mentally retarded; (4) survey what your own community now has for the mentally retarded - you will be shocked to know that there exists but lip service only; (5) become interested in MARC - consider joining MARC or volunteering to serve upon one of our working committees; (6) don't take a back seat to the Mrs. Jaycees!!

What about the Mrs. Jaycees? In Minnesota as elsewhere, they have:

- 1) promoted pre-natal care for pregnant women by supplying surplus food to expectant mothers, transportation to medical centers and baby-sitting services;
- 2) education of the public to inform the public what mental retardation is and how it can be prevented;
- 3) supported educational facilities for the mentally retarded by providing additional school books, educational aids, special equipment, etc.;
- 4) served as volunteers at our Daytime Activity Center and also rendered financial assistance;
- 5) helped finance our capital-and-raising campaign for our State Camp at Annandale.

Examples of projects undertaken by other Jaycee Chapters (local and state):

North Carolina - Project JOB - to hire the MR

Tennessee - Professional scholarships for MH & MR

Nebraska - Operation TRY - Train Retarded Youth - funds raised by sale of honey - achieved \$50,000 statewide goal

Montana - Project JCUMP - JC's understand mental problems

Michigan - Benefit ball - proceeds to build swimming pool for state school

Florida - emphasis on PKU program - now mandatory in Florida,
and just passed by our own legislature

Illinois - operation "other than words" - exhibit of paintings
by the mentally retarded

Minnesota - Mrs. Jaycees' contribution to our DTAC and State Camp

Suggested Projects you may wish to consider:

- 1) Christmas for the Mentally Retarded - 6,000 in our state institutions - founded by Cedric Adams. Pick up gifts at Red Owl and Northwestern National Bank depositories, deliver to warehouse, transport to state institutions (we have no one this year to assist us);
- 2) "Selling One Guy Named Larry" - 16 mm. sound movie; 22 minutes; employment of the mentally retarded - available through MARC at no cost for showing to interested groups, business men, etc; we have projector available, but need volunteers to show the film and locate interested groups.