

TRAINING FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

A three year report of
"Occupation Day Center for Mentally Retarded Adults"

March 1963

Prepared by

Jack Tobias
Chief Psychologist

Occupation Day Center
222 East Fifth Street
New York 3, New York

Jack Gorelick
Director

The Occupation Day Center is a project of the New York City Chapter,
Association for the Help of Retarded Children, 200 Park Avenue South,
New York 3, New York

William A. Fraenkel, Ph.D.
Executive Director

/

This project was supported in part, by a demonstration grant, No. OM-294,
from the National Institute of Mental Health, Department of Health, Education
and Welfare, Washington, D. C.

FOREWORD

It is impossible to list all the individuals and agencies to whom this project is indebted. Many are, and will remain, anonymous. This includes the group of determined parents who recognized their children's needs and refused to accept as inevitable that "Nothing is available. " Their quiet insistence on implementing the Association's slogan, "Retarded Children Can Be Helped," provided the impetus for an investigation of the feasibility of a center for severely retarded adults.

Particular appreciation is due to the 83 trainees who came to learn but, in the process, also provided much needed understanding and instruction to the staff. The trainees' responses to staffs efforts acted as the greatest motivation to keep trying and provided the day by day stimulation necessary to attempt continued improvements.

The major costs of the project have been borne by the National Institute of Mental Health, without whose help the program could not have taken its present form. Special thanks are due to the staff of N. I. M. H. for their recognition of the need for this demonstration and for their interest and cooperation through the years.

The great generosity of the Daughters of Israel in making available to the Occupation Day Center the building that has housed the program since its inception has eased the burden of finding and paying for needed space in which to operate. The assurance of their continued support and their agreement to extend more rooms for program purposes provides some assurance of continuation of activities.

A large measure of the success of the program is due to Mr. Arnold Cortazzo who acted as Director during the grant period and who has since transferred his activities to the National Association for Retarded Children.

The Ladies Charity Guild, the Giving Hands and the Caroline League are among the philanthropic groups whose periodic contributions provided the amenities that enriched some features of program. Their continued interest was always welcome.

The time and energies of Mrs. Muriel Geismar, Chairlady of the Committee of the Occupation Day Center were always available. Her readiness to assume responsibility for many chores lightened the load of staff and brightened the days of many trainees.

Most especial thanks are due to Mrs. Deborah Teitler, secretary at the Occupation Day Center, who typed the original manuscript and the finished copy with patience and good humor in the midst of buzzing switchboards and the barrage of visits from trainees.

Jack Gorelick, Director
Occupation Day Center

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| Letter of Transmittal | i |
| Foreword | ii |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter I. Objectives of the Program | 2 |
| Chapter II. Admission and Evaluation Procedures | 6 |
| Chapter III. The Building and the Staff | 12 |
| Chapter IV. Population | 18 |
| Chapter V. Social and Behavioral Characteristics | 32 |
| Chapter VI. Travel Training | 36 |
| Chapter VII. Grooming and Self-Care | 48 |
| Chapter VIII. Orientation to the Community | 54 |
| Chapter IX. Remunerative Work | 58 |
| Chapter X. Academic Instruction | 67 |
| Chapter XI. Domestic Skills | 74 |
| Chapter XII. The Profoundly Retarded Adult in the Day Center | 80 |
| Chapter XIII. Relations with Parents | 93 |
| Chapter XIV. Professional and Public Relations | 100 |
| Chapter XV. Summary of Results and Implications for the Future | 106 |

INTRODUCTION

Since its formation in 1949 the Association for the Help of Retarded Children has been engaged in sponsoring, organizing and promoting community services for retarded children and adults who reside with their families. As an organization of parents, relatives and friends of retardates, the Association is particularly sensitive to the special needs of this disabled group and is most acutely aware of deficiencies in existing services. Because it is a private agency the Association has had the advantage of being able to pioneer in new areas without having to await legislative sanction.

The value of retaining retarded people in the community is an increasingly acceptable concept to both lay and professional groups. Some of the lags in community provisions for the younger retarded child have, among other things, been overcome with the expansion of school facilities, diagnostic and clinical services, and improved parent education. Increasing numbers of parents of retarded children are no longer compelled to resort to the State School as the only alternative available to them. Many parents have always found it emotionally impossible to accept placement away from the home.

The improvement in services to the child defers rather than solves the parent's problem. By the nature of the disability, retarded persons require greater or lesser care and supervision throughout their life. At the age when most schools drop their responsibility, parents are again faced with the pressure of trying to meet the needs of the retarded member of the family. For many, this becomes a major mental health problem and whole family groups are adversely affected by the presence of a retarded young adult who is receiving no professional help or training and is becoming an increasing burden.

The sheltered workshop, as a community resource for the vocational rehabilitation of retarded adults, is able to meet some of this need. It has become obvious, however, that there are sizeable numbers of retardates for whom the i workshops are not the most suitable facility and for whom a different kind of program is needed. The Occupation Day Center was organized to develop such a program and to demonstrate its utility for a group of retarded adults who were considered unfeasible for vocational training either in competitive industry or in a sheltered workshop. With the support of the National Institute of Mental Health under grant #OM 294, this facility has been in operation since September 1, 1959 and offers this report on its first three years of activity.

This report will cover three major phases of the Occupation Day Center's activities.

1. An explanation of its objectives and a detailed description of the People who needed its services.
2. A description of the program that evolved from these objectives, the reasons for including specific training goals, and the effectiveness of the Program in improving skills and behavior. It provides an answer to those who ask, "What do they do all day?"
3. The impact of the program on parents, professional groups and the public.

Chapter I

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM

The general philosophy underlying all programs sponsored by the Association for the Help of Retarded Children may be summarized under the following headings:

1. Provide activities satisfying to the retarded.
2. Train and equip the retarded for better adaptation to a community environment by developing maximum use of their potential.
3. Help the retarded become more independent members of a family group.
4. Relieve the pressures and consequent tensions created by the unmet needs of the retarded family member.
5. Develop improved understanding by the parent so that the retarded person may achieve a greater degree of independence.

The orientation towards community living in no way diminishes the benefits that accrue to those retardates who may eventually be placed in state institutions or residential schools. Even under optimal community conditions an undetermined percentage of retarded persons will be unable to remain in their homes. It is felt that the retarded person who has had the benefit of a training and activity program will be a better citizen in the institution as well as in the community. The development of skills in independent living and the ability to work and live with others can be an asset to the economy of the institution and can result in greater emotional security for the individual. The programs developed for the severely retarded adult in the community can lead to a more gratifying and meaningful life in the institution, should placement become necessary.

These broad goals are generally applicable to all age groups and all levels of retardation. They must be translated into more specific items of program for the different categories of retarded people who need some form of assistance. The Occupation Day Center limited its objectives to a group of mentally retarded young adults who were considered unfeasible for vocational training in sheltered workshops.

The continued spread of sheltered workshops as a necessary form of post-school vocational training indicates the need for community facilities for retarded adults. Although the workshops are adapted to local conditions and therefore vary in size, quality of staff and in the nature of their training programs, most of them share two closely related objectives: 1. To train for competitive employment those retarded adults who are amenable to such training; 2. To provide long-term or permanent employment in a sheltered work environment for retarded adults whose potential skills are not currently acceptable in competitive trades or who, for other reasons, cannot be hired.

Without adequate precedents on which to base such decisions, criteria for admission to the workshops were at first kept purposely flexible and were

frequently determined on an ad hoc basis. The availability of space and staff or the influence of the referring agency were frequently stronger determinants of admission than objective measures, past history, or impressions based on intake interviews. The dearth of alternate community facilities was often the critical reason for accepting a client.

As these new facilities matured with experience and critically reexamined their objectives and program, new needs became apparent. It had been relatively simple to establish an upper limit of acceptability based on legal definitions of retardation but the- determination of lower limits was far more complex. A review of the adjustment of some long-term trainees attending existing workshop programs suggested the need for a distinctively different setting. It seemed questionable whether a "work-oriented facility with controlled working environment and individualized vocational goals, which utilizes work experience and related services for assisting the handicapped person to progress toward normal living and a productive vocational status"¹ was the optimal training device for retarded adults with the following observable deficiencies.

1. Some trainees are unable to participate meaningfully in the social life of the workshop and in those parts of program that are not directly related to work. They either resist attending group meetings because they cannot cope with the level of the discussion or else attend with no awareness of the issues that are considered.

Unstructured social relationships may consist largely of physical contacts or proximity, are restricted to the sparsest verbalizations, or take on the - nature of "parallel" conversations where each participant in the conversation talks of matters that concern him without regard for what the other is saying.

2. Some trainees perceive the staff as teachers or parents and tend to be childlike in relations with adults. They do not quite understand why they are being required to do specific operations and seem to work mainly in order to please the supervisor. Beyond this personal relationship they appear to see no reason for working. Their individual production records and pay slips are symbols of what "good" children they are and they eagerly thrust them out for the observation of visitors and staff.

3. Intellectual limitations narrow the scope of possible job operations. Some workshop trainees are unable to manage a large proportion of available contracts and are restricted to certain kinds of work only. They may be forced into idleness because they cannot achieve the requisite skill that most others master with relative ease.

-
1. Nat'l. Institute on Workshop Standards, Experimental Evaluative Instrument
 - Based on Standards for Sheltered Workshops Recommended by National Institute on Workshop Standards. Washington, D. C.: The Institute, 1960.
-

4. The workshop is a facility for earning money and should be used for this purpose. Trainees who consistently fall below a critical minimum, either because of disinterest in pay or lack of ability, are not making appropriate use of the facility.

5. Retarded adults with I.Q.'s below 40 are generally unable to participate adequately in a work-oriented environment.

6. The inability to cope with some basic skills of independent living makes a workshop program questionably valid for some retarded adults. For example, it is felt that those retarded adults who cannot be trusted to travel alone after long periods of instruction are probably insufficiently mature for full participation in a work program.

The identification of those retarded adults who are unsuitable for existing workshop programs cannot be specified by objective measurements alone, although these are generally suggestive. Some less tangible criteria, along the dimensions exemplified, are necessary. The ultimate requirement may be to select for special training those persons whose need for the skills of daily living in the community is greater than their need for vocational training. Otherwise necessary facets of education may be ignored in favor of the development of job skills.

The Occupation Day Center was intended to close the lag in services for the group of retardates over age 17 who are unable to achieve marginal levels in a work-oriented program. The Occupation Day Center not only intended to help the severely retarded adult achieve greater social competence but felt it could reduce the feeling of crisis for families whose children had been occupied in school and were now left with no organized activity.

A summary of the specific goals proposed to the National Institute of Mental Health when the Occupation Day Center was initiated follows:

1. To help the retarded remain in the community by providing them with a socially acceptable way to spend their days.

2. To train the retarded adolescent and young adult in the skills of daily living, such as independence in traveling, homemaking, grooming, etc., in order to establish maximum self-sufficiency.

3. To ascertain the extent of growth possible as a result of such training and its significance in the ability of the individual to function more successfully in the community or in an institution.

4. To devise training methods, techniques and procedures that could be used by other communities and institutions.

5. To work with public, private and state schools to develop curricula for the younger retardate of this intellectual level, and also to share with them the information and knowledge that would be gained. |

6. To reduce the anxiety level of parents, and to help them develop more positive attitudes towards their problem. §

7. To explore the functions of various professional disciplines in | such a program.

8. To try to determine which community agency should assume responsibility for administering programs of this type.

This report describes the procedures that were developed to achieve these goals and the partial results that may be observed at the end of a three year trial period.



DOMESTIC CHORES ARE NEVER DONE

In the Occupation Day Center, as in the home, maintenance and sanitation is a constant need. The use of varied cleansing materials and equipment is practiced as part of the training in Usefulness in the Home.