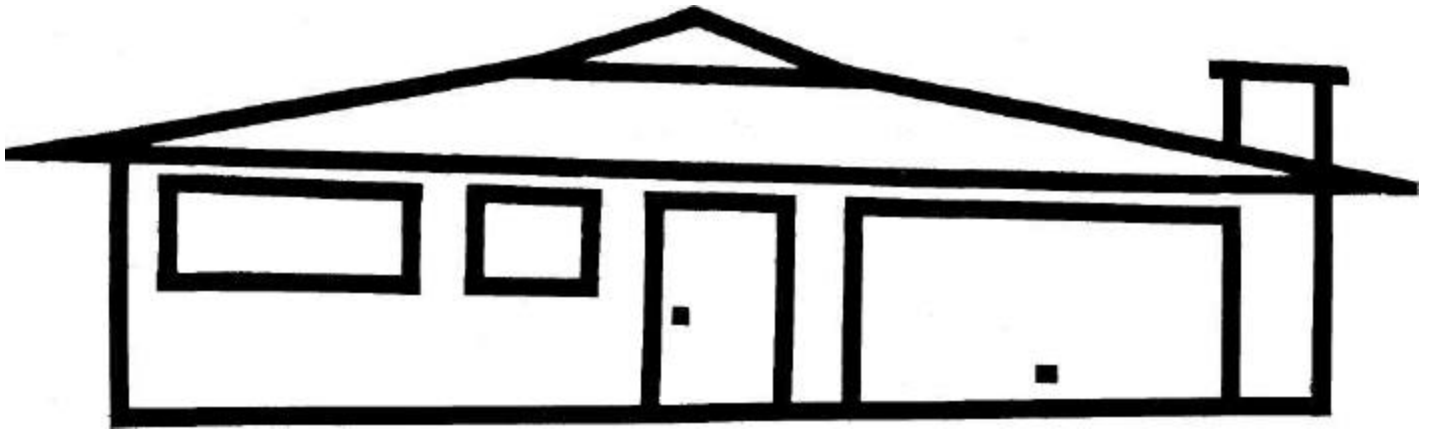


New Neighbors



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And all the people in the pictures.



Some New People Will Be Moving Into Your Neighborhood

Perhaps they've moved in already. If they have, you probably have some questions about your neighbors. You may be a little worried about them. You may be a little concerned about the effect they will have on your neighborhood. They are probably different from your current neighbors since they have disabilities.

We want you to realize that there is no reason for concern.

There are many myths regarding people with disabilities. There is a lot of misinformation. Since you are going to have some disabled people as neighbors, we would like to give some straight information and would especially like to dispel some of the myths.

The people who will be living in your neighborhood have what is called a developmental disability. Mental retardation, cerebral palsy, epilepsy and autism *are all different types of developmental disabilities*. Your new neighbors may have one or more of these conditions. People with these types of disabilities are physically and/or mentally limited in their ability to perform daily living activities. For example, they may need help with basic activities like eating or dressing. On the other hand, they may only need supervision.



One may have difficulty speaking, another may be unable to walk. The skills, abilities, and needs of these people vary *from individual to individual*.

Throughout this material we will refer to developmentally disabled people as people with disabilities or handicaps.

People with these types of disabilities used to be locked away in large institutions. It is now known that most of them can live in communities, in ordinary neighborhoods with the proper assistance and facilities. And California law specifically says that people with these disabilities will live in communities whenever possible.

Still, the myths about handicapped people continue. You've probably heard some of them: "These people are dangerous. These people will bother my children, etc."

We want to dispel these myths, and give you the facts.

They Are Not Dangerous

Some people believe mentally retarded people are dangerous. This is a myth. People who are mentally retarded are no more dangerous than anyone else.

This myth is partly the result of the fact that some people think mental retardation and mental illness are the same. They are not.

If someone is mentally retarded it means that, from childhood, the person has had difficulty learning. In other words, the person, is a slow learner. The degree of learning difficulty will vary from person to person; some have other handicaps that effect their ability to walk, speak, or perform routing activities.

Mental illness is quite different. It is characterized by emotional disturbances that may occur at any time in a person's life.

Still, some people think that if a person is mentally retarded he or she is dangerous, which is untrue and unfair.

Some people also think that if handicapped people live in a neighborhood, crime in that neighborhood will increase. Again, this is a myth.

People with retardation have no impact on crime in a neighborhood. They are more often the victims of crime than they are criminals.



They Will Not Lower Property Values



Some people believe that if people with disabilities move into the neighborhood, property values will drop. This is another myth.

Studies have been conducted throughout the country where disabled people have moved into residential neighborhoods. All of the studies have shown that there is no relationship between property values and residences for people who are disabled. (Summaries of these studies are available from Project OPEN, Community Association for Retarded, listed on the last page).

Experiences in California have been interesting. When handicapped or disabled people have moved into an existing residence, the appearances of the residence have often improved. The new residents have worked to improve the appearances of their home so that they will be better accepted by the neighborhood. In such cases, it is safe to assume that property values will only be affected positively.

New homes built especially for handicapped people look like other residential homes. It is unlikely that a group home would decrease property values in your neighborhood.

They Will Not Loiter And Disrupt The Neighborhood

Some people believe that if disabled people move into a neighborhood they will "hang around," loiter, or otherwise disrupt the neighborhood. This is yet another myth.

People with disabilities have things to do during the day just as you and your children do. They have various responsibilities related to their individual abilities.

If they are children, they attend school just as your kids do. Commonly the children will ride a bus to the local public school to attend special classes. If the children are too young for school, they will attend special programs designed to help them develop skills. The programs are similar to the nursery school or day care center your child may attend, but the activities are designed for children with handicaps and learning problems.

If the disabled people in your neighborhood are adults, they will be involved in a variety of activities. Like the adults in your family, some may have jobs. Others may be in vocational programs preparing them for jobs.

Some of your neighbors may be too handicapped for employment at this time. These individuals participate in programs where they develop the skills they need for daily living. The programs may teach them how to feed themselves, how to count change, or how to use public transportation. Usually such programs are held away from the home, and transportation is provided to and from the programs.

Your new neighbor's days will be as full as your days are. They have responsibilities to fulfill just as you do.



They Will Fit In

Some people think that people who have handicaps just won't fit into their neighborhood. This is another myth. In a way, you can understand why the myth still persists.

For years, people who were handicapped were locked away. They were kept at home, out of sight of the neighbors, or in large, overcrowded institutions located away from ordinary communities. Many people have grown up without ever knowing a person who was handicapped, and as a result myths and misconceptions have developed.

In recent years, treatment of handicapped and disabled people has changed dramatically. They are becoming as much a part of the community as they are able.

When people who are disabled move into a neighborhood, they are provided with the means to live as normal a life as possible. They will use community recreational facilities, shopping and entertainment, health care, and other services. They will use the same community services you use. This is their right.

As your neighbors begin to use community facilities, hopefully you will get to know them. When you do, you may be surprised to find they don't fit preconceived notions. You will find that in many ways, people who are disabled are more like you than they are unlike you. Their handicaps do make them different, sometimes physically as well as mentally. But you will find that they are individuals with the same wants and needs you have.

You will also find they can fit into your neighborhood. And, they will be good neighbors.



The Facts They Are People First...

With feeling, hopes, pride, and dreams... just like you and I,

As you learn more about your new neighbors, you will see how they can fit into your new neighborhood. No doubt you will want to know more about the types of disabilities they have.

First, a warning. People who have handicaps are individuals. Terms like mental retardation or cerebral palsy refer to groups of people with similar handicapping conditions. This means that these terms or "labels" can be misleading. So it is important to remember that when these terms are used they represent general descriptions. Many people have more ability than the term implies. Some have less.

The most common term you will hear concerning your new neighbors is mental retardation.

Today, people are said to have mental retardation. (They are not considered victims of the condition.). This means that the person has an impaired ability to learn. The person, in a sense, can be called a slow learner.

In most cases, we do not know the cause of the condition. It could be caused by a genetic disorder or a car accident. By and large, experts do not know what, specifically, causes most occurrences of mental retardation.

When you think of a mentally retarded person as a slow learner, it's important to remember that this does not simply refer to academic skills. It refers to all areas of learning. For example, someone who is severely handicapped may have difficulty learning how to feed or dress himself. Some of your new neighbors might be this handicapped.



Many people who are mentally retarded have other disabilities. Some may have epilepsy, a nerve disorder resulting in seizures. Or they may have cerebral palsy, a nerve and muscle disorder.

Because of these conditions and for other reasons, some of your new neighbors may have other handicaps. Some may be unable to walk; others may be mobile with the use of a wheelchair or walker. Others may have speech impairments, causing their speech to be slurred and difficult to understand. Some may have disorders that have resulted in physical deformities. Also, it is not uncommon for seriously handicapped people to have medical problems. The problems could include heart, lung, or kidney disease.

Now you can see how some of the myths about disabled people develop. For example, someone may meet a person with mental retardation who has a speech impairment. Too often he assumes that the person is not smart enough to talk. This would be untrue since the person's inability to talk may be unrelated to learning. Or someone sees a person he thinks "looks" mentally retarded. People sometimes incorrectly think that because a person has a certain appearance, he is dangerous. This is as faulty as judging anyone by appearance.



Your new neighbors will have varying degrees of ability. Some may be severely handicapped and require close supervision/care and attention within the home. Others may have mild handicaps not affecting their ability to ride a bus to school or work alone. Whatever the degree of the person's handicap, the state will provide a variety of services to meet that person's individual needs as he or she lives in your community. Your new neighbor was carefully matched to his or her residence. Professionals make sure that the residence can provide the type of living arrangement needed for the individual.

The type of home, the amount of supervision available, and the presence of community services were all considered. Every effort has been made to ensure that your community can meet the special needs of your new neighbors.

Group Homes

Maybe lately you have noticed several disabled people living in a private residence. If this is the case, you may have just discovered that you have a group home in your neighborhood.

A group home provides a community residence for persons with handicaps.

Group homes provide disabled people with a family environment. They tend to be like other houses, with approximately six people living in the home.

Group home managers are special people. They have a commitment to helping people who are disabled to live as independently as possible.

There are many group homes throughout the state of California. They are home to large numbers of people with disabilities. Group homes have enabled thousands of people to leave institutions and live in ordinary neighborhoods.

The residents of these homes range from infants to adults. Generally speaking, group home residents are relatively independent and capable. Group homes give the residents the opportunity to use community facilities, shopping, recreation, church, and employment.





Children in the group home who are too young for school attend special programs for children with handicaps. School-age children attend special education classes in regular public schools. Adults participate in a variety of programs depending on their abilities. Such programs might include job training programs as well as academic programs. You will also find that many of the adults hold jobs in the community.

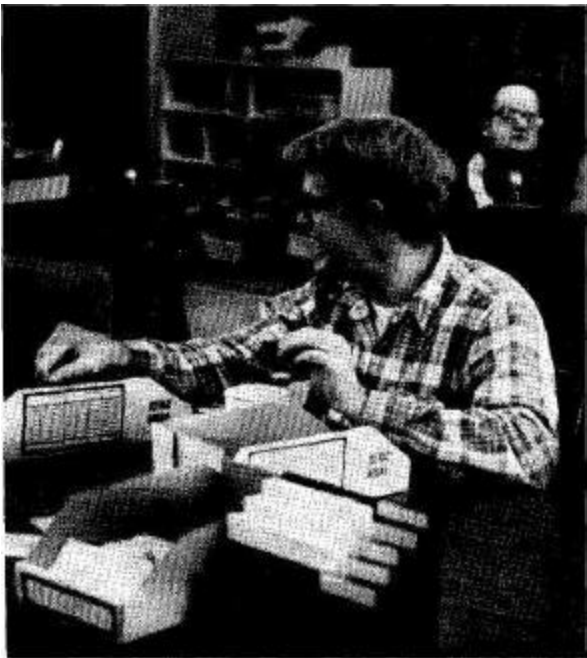
You may have a group home in your neighborhood and not even realize it. They fit in. And the residents make good neighbors.

The Activities

All along we have referred to the fact that the people who will be living in your neighborhood will be participating in special daytime programs. We thought you might like to know about those programs.

Activities range from stimulation programs for handicapped newborns to job training programs for adults.

There is something unique about all of these programs: most are not run by the state. Most of the programs are run by non-profit organizations in your community. You are probably familiar with some of these organizations: San Francisco Association for Retarded Citizens, United Cerebral Palsy Association of Santa Clara/San Mateo Counties, Society for Children & Adults with Autism, Community Association for Retarded, Poplar Center, Spectrum, and many others. The State of California contracts with these organizations to provide services and programs for disabled people. This arrangement has proved to be especially effective. It ensures that programs will be run by and for persons in your community. The arrangement provides local jobs and services.



Programs For Children

Experts have found that the severity of handicap can be reduced if training begins when the child is very young.

If your handicapped neighbor is an infant, chances are he or she is already in a program. Such programs are called 'infant stimulation. They can help a handicapped child develop better coordination and muscle use and control.



Pre-school children, between the ages of three and five, participate in pre-school. These programs help the children develop various types of skills. Some of the skills are the same ones you taught your own children: how to speak, dress, and feed themselves, etc. Because the children are handicapped, they require special teaching methods. But the extent of this training cannot be minimized.

It might take weeks, even months, to teach a severely handicapped child something we take for granted, such as raising a spoon to his mouth. But the important thing is that with the proper training he or she can be taught.



Handicapped school-age children who live in your neighborhood will attend public schools whenever possible. All school systems are required to have special education programs for handicapped children. These programs provide the children with academic training suited to their abilities. In addition, the programs also provide training in daily living skills: how to count change, how to use the telephone, etc.

Programs For Adults

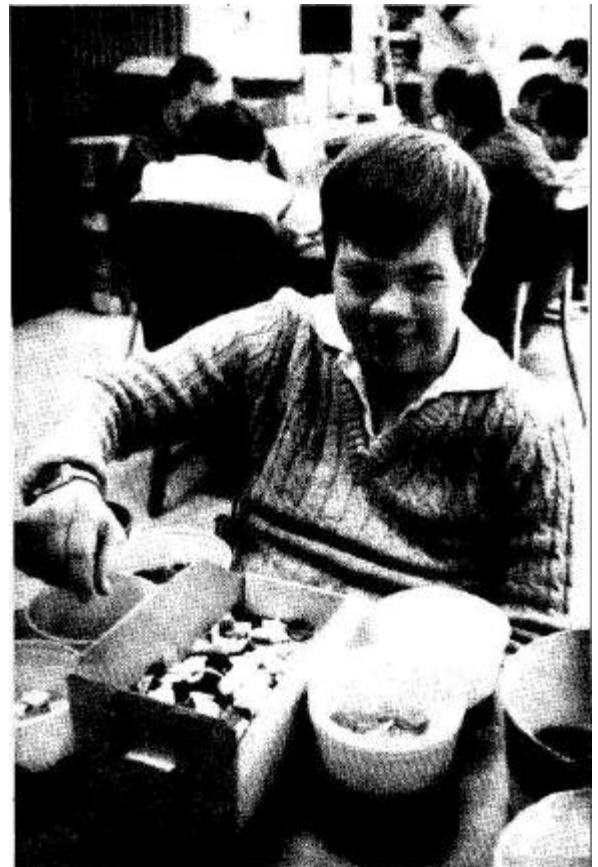
Programs for adults vary according to the person's individual needs and abilities. For example, a severely handicapped adult who has spent most of his life in an institution would require an intensive day training and activities program. Such programs might teach the person how to dress appropriately for the weather. A more able person would be taught how to use a washing machine, how to make simple meals, or how to use public transportation.

There are adult programs throughout the state aimed at providing disabled people with work training and experiences. Work Activity Centers provide disabled people with controlled situations where they can learn good work habits (e.g., punctuality) and skills. Many of the workshops are actually small assembly shops and the participants are paid.

The goal of many adult programs is to provide the handicapped person with the skills needed to compete in the open job market. Specific vocational training programs provide disabled people with specific skills for specific jobs. In many instances, the programs place the individual in a job.

As you can see, your new or potential neighbors do many of the same things you and your children do during the week: they go to school, vocational training, and work.

And on the weekends they will do many of the same things you also do: use public recreation facilities, go shopping, or just watch a ballgame on television.



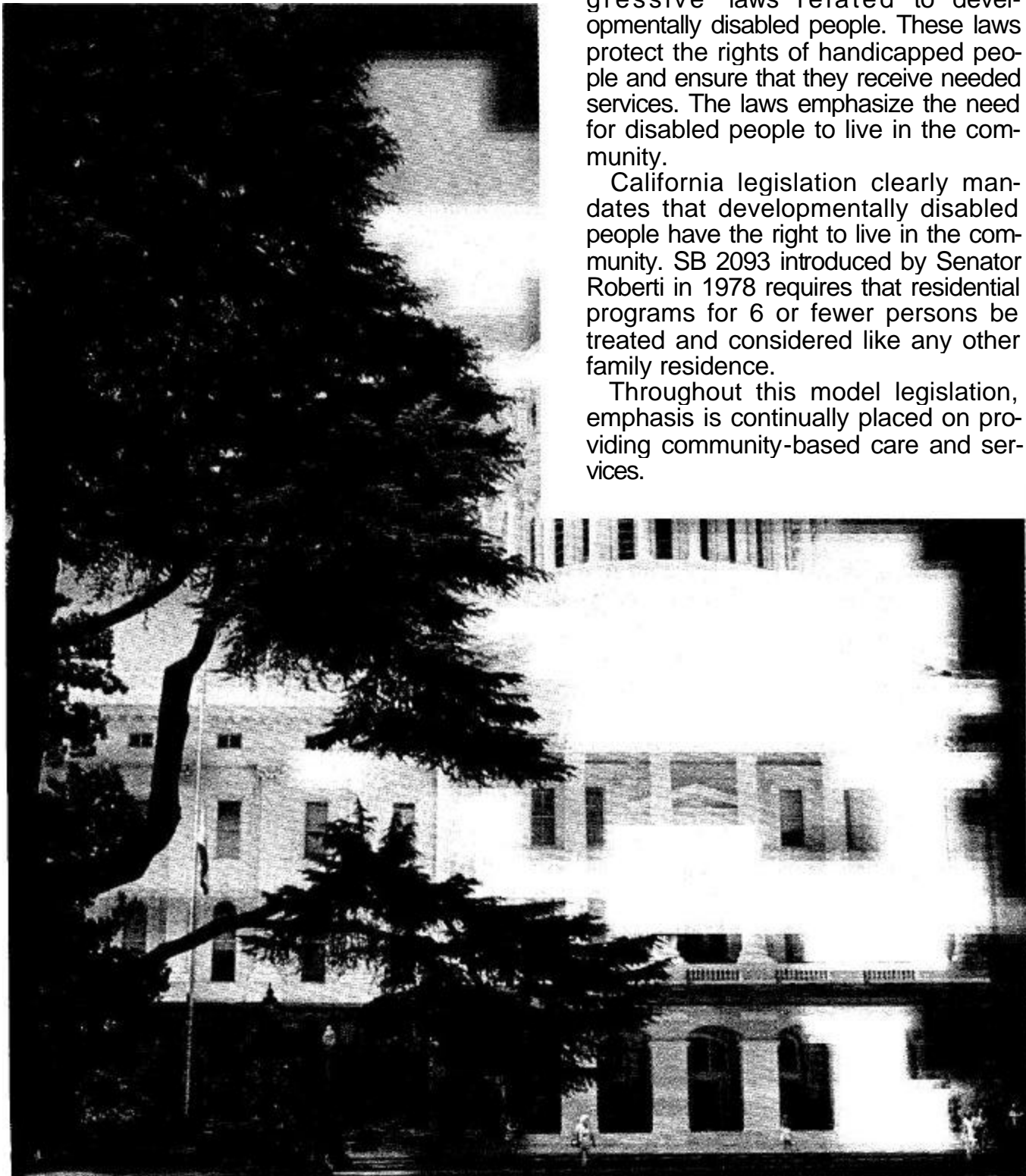
The Reasons

It's The Law

California has very clear and progressive laws related to developmentally disabled people. These laws protect the rights of handicapped people and ensure that they receive needed services. The laws emphasize the need for disabled people to live in the community.

California legislation clearly mandates that developmentally disabled people have the right to live in the community. SB 2093 introduced by Senator Roberti in 1978 requires that residential programs for 6 or fewer persons be treated and considered like any other family residence.

Throughout this model legislation, emphasis is continually placed on providing community-based care and services.



It's Our Responsibility

In the past twenty years, we have come to realize that handicapped people can accomplish far more than ever imagined with the proper training and care. With this realization, we can no longer justify the wholesale placement of handicapped people in isolated institutions.

We have a responsibility to provide the most humane and effective care possible to handicapped people. That type of care can best be provided in ordinary neighborhoods.



It Makes Sense

We believe that, based on all information provided so far, you will come to a logical conclusion: it makes sense.

The integrity of the individual is a treasured concept in American society. We pride ourselves on our ability to provide for individual freedoms and rights among a diverse population.

We cannot lose sight of the fact that disabled people are a part of that American melting pot. And it makes sense that they should have an active part in our communities and neighborhoods.

For More Information Contact:

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