

REPORT ON VISIT TO MICHIGAN INSTIUTIONS FOR MENTALLY RETARDED

December 6, 1961

By

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The following observations were made by Gerald F. Walsh, Executive Director of the Minnesota Association for Retarded Children on December 6, 1961, during a visit to the Lapeer State Home and Training School for the mentally retarded.

The first building visited was for orthopedically handicapped retarded, many of whom have had corrective surgery. In this building was located the physical therapy department and many patients here came only for a period of treatment and then went back to other buildings. The orthopedic services of this institution seemed far beyond those of any of our Minnesota Institutions and their efforts at correction seemed to be much further advanced than ours. This building was formerly the hospital for the Lapeer Institution and already had an elevator which is necessary for this type of patient.

The next building we visited was for severely retarded girls from the ages of about 9 to 15 or 16. This building, although built in approximately 1915 or 1916 of sound brick construction was in very poor condition inside. The dormitories were as crowded as any I have seen in Minnesota and although the Michigan Institution staffing is better than in Minnesota; nevertheless, there did not seem to be any better ward staffing than we have in our institutions. In one particular day-room we visited, there were about 70 retarded with one aide on duty, although there were supposed to be two. This aide said that many times there was only one, however. These girls sat around for the most part, had no program within the day-room, although the recreation department people did show movies for them and come over and work with them from time to time. The girls wore blue jeans and blouses rather than dresses, which seemed to have some merit for this reason, they looked neater than some of the more severely retarded in our Minnesota Institutions. This buildings, as well as most buildings at the Lapeer Institution, had their own washers and dryers and did part of their laundry in the building. Some things, because they are afraid they would lose them if they went to the regular laundry some things because of the fact that regular laundry was not able to handle all of the laundry for the entire institution. The dryers and washers were donated by the Lapeer Parents Association. Some of the wards had more distinct undesirable odors than wards I have visited recently in Minnesota.

The next building we visited was for severely retarded boys ages approximately 7 to 12. This building was one that three years ago had been pointed out as the worst building in the instituion. There were many infections and diseases and truly was a problem building. Due to objections by parents and the Associations for Retarded Children as well as the fact that the institution realized something had to be done, an intense effort was made to improve conditions of this building. The entire building was rehabilitated, staff was increased to the point of having two aides on duty with 21 children. The day-rooms had a number of plexoglass type chairs and some special climbing equipment. The bays were playing with building blocks. They probably were as well occupied as any group of retarded I have seen in institutions anyplace. This is the building where there were eight adults in the kitchen with probably 15 boys during mealtime. At this institution, they are now building a new large nursery for nursing type patients. They have a fairly large school program. However, they do cite the fact that more of their patients are of the severely retarded group.

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During the December 6th visit to Michigan, Mr. Walsh also visited the Plymouth State School and Home for the Retarded, which is a new institution and eventually will house 2,500 patients. The first two buildings completed and occupied were the administration and medical-surgery building and a building for toddlers; that is, boys and girls ages approximately 3 or 4 to 6 or 7 years old. We first toured the medical-surgery administration building which was a four-story building. Three stories of this are used for very retarded patients. These floors were divided into separate rooms, housing anywhere from two to four patients each. It appeared that a real effort was being made to get these patients out of their cribs, at least during a part of the day. Each floor had playrooms at either end. Looking at this building, I had the feeling that we in Minnesota were not allowing sufficient space for this type of patient nor were we allowing sufficient space for administrative purposes within the institutions. Perhaps the plan we need to follow is to have one institution where the nursing type retarded can be cared for and where the medical care can be of a very high level as is necessary.

We next visited the building for toddlers, which was built to hold 220 patients. This is a large one-story airy building with high ceilings, good ventilation and many windows. In this building were classrooms, dayrooms and dormitory room. The thing they had done in this building which impressed me was to divide their day rooms into small units so that rather than having one day-room for seventy patients, they had two day-rooms for 30 or 35 patients each. Then, each of the day-rooms was presided over by one attendant. This appeared to be a better plan than having one day-room with 70 patients and two attendants. Noise and confusion was reduced and patients could be divided into more homogeneous groups for activities. I was impressed by this building and also by the fact that attached to the building was a large fenced in play area with permanent overhead shade. There was a concrete play area as well as a grass play area. In the dormitory room, beds were used which had a locker at the head of each bed. This locker could be opened from either side with a key. One side was for hanging clothes and the other had drawers in it. This made it possible for the personal belongings of each patient to be kept right at his bed and also gave more privacy to the dormitory because the locker did divide the room to a certain degree. Many severely retarded in this building were active about the wards and day-rooms. These are the same types of patients which I had observed earlier in Lapeer State School and Hospital, where the patients had, I felt, degenerated due to lack of activities, staff and program. The patients in this building, although severely retarded, were alert and better behaved.

It is my feeling that the retarded, when placed in institutions, can digress if they are not given proper activities and attention. Cost of this building, according to the nursing director, was \$870,000 unequipped. This was approximately \$4,000 per bed. The equipment cost another \$75,000 for a total of \$945,000 for a building housing 220 retarded. This seems quite reasonable when compared with our institutions in Minnesota.

They also had a section in this building for blind retarded and a special section for orthopedically handicapped retarded, with special equipment and physical therapy aides who had a special understanding of the needs of the orthopedically handicapped retarded.

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