

"I shall tell you a great secret, my friend. Do not wait for the last judgment. It takes place every day."

– Albert Camus



Beginning in the late 1960s, and gaining momentum in the '70s and '80s, many parents were fighting, along with their children, for the closure of institutions and for better services in their communities.

RESPONSES TO DISABILITY:

Advocacy for improved institutions and better community services; increased funding for research; parents and professionals begin listening to people with disabilities.



In 1962, President Kennedy formed the President's Panel on Mental Retardation. At this time, the medical profession was considered the final authority on mental retardation and other disabilities. Consequently, the Panel consisted primarily of medical professionals, with an emphasis on prevention and treatment.



Because of the success of parent advocacy, many states poured money into building new and larger state institutions to meet the increasing demand for services. Between 1964 and 1968, \$67,500,000 was allocated for new construction. New buildings were designed to take advantage of discoveries in medicine and operational efficiency.



Institutions, professionals had determined, offered the most appropriate and efficient way to serve people. But the number of persons living in a single institution was still high – as many as 6,000 at Rome State School in New York. Staff-to-resident ratios were as high as fifty-to-one. New facilities served to accommodate more individuals with developmental disabilities, but the "medical model" of treatment did not change.



Niels Erik Bank-Mikkelsen, the director of the Danish national services for mental retardation, visited a state institution in California in the 1960s. His report was read across the country. "I couldn't believe my eyes. It was worse than any institution I have seen in visits to a dozen foreign countries. . . . In our country, we would not be allowed to treat cattle like that."



In 1965, Senator Robert Kennedy toured the Willowbrook State School in New York. Accompanied by a TV crew, he compared the conditions of the institution to that of a snake pit. The next year, Dr. Burton Blatt and photographer Fred Kaplan used a hidden camera to capture life inside of Willowbrook. Their photographic essay, *Christmas in Purgatory*, was published in Life magazine, drawing the largest amount of reader response in the magazine's history. Dr. Blatt declared that "there is a hell on earth, and in America there is a special inferno" - the institution.

ADVOCACY BY PARENTS LEADS TO INCREASED FUNDING, BETTER COMMUNITY SERVICES, AND LARGER INSTITUTIONS.

The concept of "normalization" originated in Denmark in the late 1950s. It meant quite simply allowing persons who lived in institutions to enjoy a normal rhythm of the day. As Benji Nirje put it, "Making available to the mentally retarded patterns and conditions of everyday life which are as close as possible to the norms and patterns of the mainstream of society." Combined with the continuing stories of abuse and neglect in institutions, the normalization principle helped to convince people that individuals with disabilities belong in the community.

By the late 1960s, it was becoming increasingly clear that public institutions were failing to meet even the most basic human needs of the people they were intended to serve.

Gradually, the character of the Parent Movement changed as persons with disabilities, the primary "consumers" of disability services, assumed a more active role in fighting for their rights.

Originally intended as desegregation for students with disabilities, "mainstreaming" often meant dumping students with disabilities into public schools, putting them in regular classes with no supports, or isolating them in special, separate classes for most of the day. As a response to the empty promise of mainstreaming, parents and activists began to call for "integrated" and "inclusive" schools, with students with disabilities participating in the same classroom as nondisabled students.



Swedish Expert Here to Help 'Bridge Gap'

Specialistic services aimed at the children of the handicapped have been meeting increasing demand in a report of the Minnesota Association for the Handicapped (MHA) and other organizations.

Under auspices of his visit to the United States and the Minnesota State Board of Education, Dr. Fred Söder, Director of the Swedish Institute for the Handicapped, will introduce information on the Swedish system of special services to help "bridge" the gap between American and Swedish methods of care and rehabilitation services, and extend it to the Minnesota State Board of Education.

Dr. Söder has been invited to visit the state board of education in the next few weeks.



INVOLVEMENT BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES:

Objects of charity; eternal children; increasing participation in the community.

1935
The League for the Physically Handicapped forms to protest discrimination by the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

1936
The Children's Benevolent League organizes (later known as the Washington Association for Retarded Children).

1938
The March of Dimes begins treatment centers and fundraising for children and adults with polio.

1939
Dr. Foster Kennedy, head of the Euthanasia Society of America, urges legalizing euthanasia for "born defectives who are doomed to remain defective." Hitler commences Aktion T4 "mercy killing" program of the sick and disabled.

1941
U.S. Congress declares war with Japan and enters into World War II.

1942
The population of Rome State School reaches 3,940, with 1,000 living in colonies.

1945
World War II ends. Nazis had murdered 18-26 million people in death camps. Two thousand paraplegic soldiers survive the Second World War, compared with only 400 from World War I.