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Misplaced Inmates of the State Home and Training School

MISPLACED INMATES OF THE STATE HOME AND TRAINING SCHOOL

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[The following article is the condensation of an address given by Dr. Sudan before a meeting of the County Judges Association of Colorado. At the same meeting an address was delivered by Assistant Attorney General Frank A. Wachob which was published in the January, 1952 issue of *Dicta*, Volume XXIX, Number 1, at page 27 under the title "Liability of Counties for Support of Inmates in State Institutions." It is suggested that Dr. Sudan's and Mr. Wachob's articles be read together. *Editor.*]

I should like to discuss in this article some misconceptions of a large segment of our State population regarding inmates of the State Homes and Training Schools, at both Ridge and Grand Junction and some of our problems as administrators of these institutions.

First, I think it is unfortunate that many good citizens of Colorado, and also members of the Legislature have had erroneous conceptions concerning our patients in both schools. These are that the inmates of these Homes, for the most part, have a fixed mentality which can in no way be improved, and that custodial care, simple shelter, simple food and a place to concentrate these burdens of unfortunate families is all that is required. That this theme was not in the minds of legislators some 39 years ago is evidenced by the fact that the parent institution at Ridge was built on school land, and the statute which established the institution reads: "The essential object of said school and home shall be mental, moral, physical education and training of feeble-minded children." Also, in outlining the qualifications of the Superintendent, this Statute provides that "He shall be competent to direct the medical, hygiene, educational, and industrial interests of the State Home and Training School".

When this school opened for patient reception in 1912, some 23 boys and 23 girls were organized into various classes of kindergarten, elementary, English, manual, and industrial endeavors. In 1920, because of lack of sufficient capacity at Ridge, the Legislature established the present school at Grand Junction on the site of the School for Indian Boys, which the Federal Government had abandoned in 1916 and turned over to the State, and three of these old Indian School buildings are still in use. This addition to Ridge opened with three academic teachers and gradually declined in this department until, in 1935, there were none. Throughout these years, Ridge did not at any time have more than two academic teachers.

Following recent legislative interest, and an opinion of our Attorney General, these Institutions have again been proclaimed educational in function and intent, and therefore, their academic activities now fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of

Education, while the institutions otherwise are under the direction of the Board of State Public Institutions. Hence it may be stated that we are almost back where we started from many years ago, except for an increased institutional population, an expanded physical plant, and a renewed determination to accept our responsibility to carry out the fundamental object of this institution—the education of the mentally defective child.

OBJECT IS ACADEMIC TRAINING

But again, back to the unfortunate misconception of many of our citizens regarding the status of our pupils—the feeling that, since it is impossible for any institution to return a mentally defective child to its parents or the community a perfectly normal individual, there is little sense in trying to do anything for it at all. Those of us who have accepted the challenge harbor the feeling that the State of Colorado owes an education to every child within its boundaries to the full capacity of the child for accepting or assimilating knowledge. Even if a child is decidedly defective mentally he should have an opportunity, at least equal to that of the normal child, to develop this remnant of mental ability. Who is there to say that this effort in behalf of the mentally defective child is not due its parents in equal proportion to the efforts made in behalf of the normal child? Certainly, many of these children cannot be taken into the Public Schools. Those who are capable of assimilating academic education, we propose to give every opportunity to although we are not at all inclined to the belief that we will produce college professors.

We have at present four academic teachers at Ridge and three at Grand junction, where we could profitably use several more. The enthusiasm these inmates show for school work, and the extent of progress made by many is surprising. Our concept of education, however, does not begin or end in the academic sphere. We feel that every effort in the institution must be educational and that it is educational to train a child in bowel habits. The mother of any normal child recalls full well this aspect of her child's education, and the many trying hours spent at it. We believe that it is education and a worthwhile accomplishment to teach a child, six to eleven years of age, to feed himself or herself perhaps for the first time in its life. We have experienced this accomplishment in some twenty of our inmates who, for their entire institutional existence, had been fed by another inmate or attendant and who, reacting like birds in a nest, had simply opened their mouths for food that was spooned in as by a parent bird. We believe it is education to train a child in personal cleanliness and clean eating habits, even if it is only to teach the child to avoid eating its own feces or besmearing itself with human excreta.

These are but a few of our problems with the very low grade mental defectives. It is not to this type of patient alone that we need to direct educational effort and an equal effort must be directed to the very young patient from three weeks, six months,

or a year of age. We need constantly to remind ourselves of what might be the uninhibited reactions of a normal child in an abnormal environment such as these children experience. A great measure of success in this type of education has been demonstrated in every area of our institution. In the kitchen and all other areas, inmates have been trained as efficient, effective personnel and only a few trained attendants are necessary as guides. In our laundry, five to seven tons of work including finished laundry for attendants, is done every week. Dairy work, farming, cleaning, bed making, diaper changing for seventy or eighty helpless children, four to six times each, daily, is done mainly by trained inmates. In every avenue of effort required for a well functioning institution, the inmate contributes. Education is the answer to harmonious community living and in every area, with rare exception, we view harmonious relations, and evident happiness.

So much for a background. I return to the problems confronting those of us who are charged with the responsibilities of administration.

PHYSICAL DEFECTIVES

In our institution at Grand Junction, we have no fewer than 10 blind children some of whom have been in the institution since early childhood. How could a determination have been made of mental defect in such a handicapped child? Even at this date, who can accurately say that such a child is mentally defective? Placed in an environment such as this child has been, in a bed alongside of a mute person, surrounded by others with like defect, attended by an inmate, who is gentle, but who seldom says a word, how could mental growth be obtained? The child is, perhaps, fed bird-fashion, and returned to bed and its own devises to develop whatever mannerism that may gratify some primitive whim. Certainly, we do not have adequately trained personnel nor proper equipment to deal with problems of this scope. The State does have an institution for educating the blind.

In another area, we have a deaf child and mutes, not one but I believe six at Grand Junction. These are all excellent workers, pleasant of countenance, and of inviting personality but unable to read or write. Information comes to them only through observation of people or objects, yet, they comprehend even crude attempts at direction by signs or motions and are very eager to carry out any task assigned them by such direction. They respond with extreme eagerness in doing whatever tasks are assigned and return anxious to know whether the tasks were properly done. Does this indicate mental defect? Hardly! Retardation because of tremendous handicap, yes. One shamefully feels how unfortunate this individual was in not having had the advantage of proper schooling in an institution adequately equipped to modify this child's handicap in life. Ironically enough, our state also provides a school for this purpose.

We also have the person with an active psychosis. Mingling in abnormal areas with defective, but not insane persons can

mean little but complete mental deterioration for such a person. Time for a possible cure in a proper institution with trained attendants and an attuned environment and competent psychiatric therapy is denied him. Consider the problem of this person's highly agitated mind which, by fear or by delusions, may seek escape or perpetrate vengeance on an innocent helpless spastic person in the same ward.

THE INCORRIGIBLE CHILD

We also have the "problem child," not a mental defective, but one with mental retardation. He or she may be the child of a migratory worker who is never long in any area and whose child, or children, do not have the advantage of a permanent school or environment. The father dies, or the parents separate, and the child who is trying to find his place in life becomes a problem to the mother, and to the community. The Welfare workers become involved and not infrequently the child is branded a mental defective and finds his way to our institutions rather than to a school properly equipped to handle this problem.

Since our homes and training schools are not equipped or staffed as correctional or penal institutions, it is hardly justice to charge us with the responsibility of any child or patient other than a mental defective. In justice to many parents of mentally defective children who have applied for admission but who cannot be admitted for want of available space, our misfits should be distributed to proper areas and, with the cooperation of our County Courts, this should not entail too great a difficulty.

When a mentally deficient inmate become a definite psychopath it would be of great aid, and we feel only proper, for the County Judge having jurisdiction, to transfer custody of this patient from our institution to the State Hospital or the Colorado Psychopathic Hospital for study or care.

Concerning applications for admission of new patients to the State Home and Training School we know that some believe that there is discrimination or that capricious attitudes emanate from the administrators of these institutions. We are at all times ready to admit every patient for whom we have a space. In many areas, we are now extremely overcrowded. One of these areas is that for the younger children, especially at Ridge. The crowding here borders upon the criminal, and no private institution in our state would be permitted by our State Board of Health to continue such congestion. The extreme proximity of beds in a ward should be no less than three feet, yet ours do not exceed six to nine inches. Until such a time as we are able to provide more space to relieve our congestion, new admissions to certain areas are impossible. We hope that adequate space and facilities may be provided along lines now projected and that, in the near future, sufficient space for all proper applicants will be available.

With established court procedures and methods for committing patients to our institution, we have no quarrel. We believe in the safeguards provided and feel them essential to the preserva-

tion of human and civil rights. Our courts have been very cooperative in reviewing needs for change of custody and in giving relief as requested, to the extent legally permissible.

In speaking of our misfits, the blind, the deaf, the incorrigible, and the several other types, we do not intend to cast aspersions upon any court. At the time these patients or inmates were committed to our institution, available evidence supplied to the respective court may have been insufficient to warrant any other decision. But after opportunity to study these inmates in our institutions, their status was more readily determinable. We are, however, charged with the responsibility of providing these individuals with the best possible education, and for these specific requirements, other of our state institutions are specifically equipped and have qualified personnel.

To us the question arises, "What legal implement or procedure is necessary, properly to transfer those of our misplaced pupils to other of our state schools—such as for the deaf and blind?"

COLORADO STATUTES

According to Revisor Charles M. Rose, the revised Statutes directed by the 1951 Legislature will be ready for submission to the 1953 Legislature. It is hoped that legislative approval will be obtained; that work on the annotations, to be intensified this fall, may be completed; and that the new Revised Statutes to be published by the State of Colorado will be available late in 1953 or early in 1954.

This revision was sponsored by and has been actively supported by the Colorado Bar Association. Everything possible will be done to secure the adoption of the Revised Statutes by the General Assembly in 1953 and to obtain prompt publication.

Bradford-Robinson, publishers of the 1935 Colorado Statutes Annotated, announce publication of Replacement Volumes 3A and 3B in line with their policy of keeping the Bar supplied with time-saving working tools in the form of up-to-date annotated laws. Replacement of the original Volume 3 was believed desirable because of the condition of many of the books after 15 years of use, and because the pocket supplement now contains 40% as many pages as the original work, making annual republication of pocket parts unduly expensive.