

## SOME ASPECTS OF REHABILITATION IN AUSTRALIA

*The Twelfth Rehabilitation Congress is to be held in Sydney in August and September 1972, and the International Society for Rehabilitation of the Disabled has dedicated an issue of its Review to Australia's activities in this field.<sup>1</sup> Before giving some extracts from an article which deals with the more striking aspects of the development of the rehabilitation services, we should recall that from the very outset mutual aid in Australia was the basis of the services provided for the sick, the poor and the handicapped. The tradition of community service was maintained, and voluntary organizations are now playing a vital humanitarian role. We need only mention the splendid work which the Australian Red Cross is doing in a number of important social sectors, such as Units for the Aged, Health in the Home, the Library Services, the Picture Library and the National Talking Book Library.*

### **Special Education Facilities**

In Australia, about 78% of all children are in government schools controlled by State Education Departments. The remaining 22% are in private or denominational schools. In practice, State Education authorities are beginning to accept responsibility for the education of the handicapped. Generally, the policy is being adopted and progressively put into practice of making necessary educational provision for the handicapped in a normal school setting among non-handicapped children, usually in small groups or a special class. Special schools continue to be provided in the larger centres of population for children with severe disabilities. But at the same time state authorities are accepting and subsidizing the educational work of voluntary organizations, as in the fields of education of the visually handicapped, hearing

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<sup>1</sup> *International Rehabilitation Review*, New York, Vol. XXII, Nos. 3 and 4.

impaired, the physically handicapped (including the cerebral palsied) and the mentally handicapped. The traditional practice of setting up special schools for the severely handicapped who cannot be really integrated into a normal school still continues, but as the policy of integration is being increasingly practised, the proportion of children placed in special schools is decreasing. Within the special schools, attention is being given to the preparation of handicapped children for transfer to a normal school setting at an early age, as this is considered advisable and warranted by the special resources of the normal school provided by the specially trained teachers either full-time on the staff or visiting teachers. The most outstanding over-all development in special education provision over the past decade has been in the field of the mentally handicapped. The states are making good provision for the mildly and moderately mentally handicapped, but voluntary organizations, with some state help, still bear the responsibility for the education of the severely mentally handicapped and their preparation for social adequacy.

Growing attention is being given to meeting the need for adequate professional preparation of staff in the special education field—teachers, psychologists, vocational counsellors. Courses in at least some teachers' colleges are being broadened so that all students become concerned with the education of the handicapped, and a growing number of teachers are undertaking post-graduate studies in special education. At the higher levels of professional teaching and in research, there is more concern with the total care of the child without reference to diagnostic labels recognizing that the handicapped child frequently has multiple disabilities—not the least of which are the social conditions under which he has to live and learn and work. Good team-work practised in many centres is creating more concern with educational and social pediatrics, and with the social and vocational preparation of the handicapped for life and work, whether in sheltered or open employment. Some development has occurred, too, in the parent counselling program for the handicapped child before school age is reached.

Pre-schools have broadened their outlook and more readily accept children with disabilities, recognizing the therapeutic

value of early social integration with children not hampered in speech or motor skills. Vocational guidance and assessment begins at primary school level. Children attending special schools for the handicapped, classes for the handicapped integrated with ordinary classes, and those who find a place in the normal school receive the benefit of this program throughout their school years. In addition, at school leaving age they have the opportunity to take vocational guidance tests in the government vocational bureau and there receive advice and help in the selection of careers.

### **Sheltered workshops**

For many handicapped people a more practical form of assessment is found in the sheltered workshops. Workshops fill a threefold purpose in Australia. They provide—

1. opportunity to assess attitudes and ability and to assist in social adjustment
2. training in skilled work, in semi-skilled work and process work, and
3. permanent employment for those whose disabilities prevent their entering into competitive employment; such sheltered employment is sometimes at award rates or more. Sometimes slow workers are able to achieve the satisfaction of full-time employment while continuing to receive social service benefits.

Some 10,000 handicapped people are working in sheltered workshops. With the exception of some workshops for patients in institutions, all sheltered workshops throughout Australia have been established by non-profit organizations such as voluntary or religious bodies. Many workshops are for one type of disability (blind, cerebral palsied, mentally retarded), but the majority are multi-diagnostic; the trend to the multi-diagnostic workshop is particularly apparent in the country areas.

Commonwealth Government subsidies for sheltered workshops first became available in 1967. The subsidies on land, buildings, plant and equipment, gave great impetus to the shel-

tered workshop movement, and 124 workshops throughout the nation have been able to meet the criteria required by the government to become eligible for capital subsidies and more recently to receive subsidies for the payment of salaries and wages of staff whose duties relate specifically to the training of handicapped employees or those required to give personal service or additional supervision. Such staff are considered only if they are additional to what would be required in open industry. Many workshops cannot meet the requirements of the government in regard to wages paid because of the severity of handicap of the workers. The Commonwealth Rehabilitation Scheme of the Australian Government, administered by the Department of Social Services, offers pre-vocational training and medical rehabilitation, and provision is often made for on-the-job training in commerce or industry. The training period is limited to three years and all patients are expected to be able to complete training and to undertake full-time employment at the end of that period or even earlier. The Commonwealth Government has recently legislated to give subsidies to voluntary organizations who provide training programs for young people, and such training programs must commence before the age of twenty-one.

Australia has a high rate of employment. Unemployment at present is less than 1% of the work force. This situation has allowed workshops to experiment in the employment of people with greater depths of disability than may have been possible in a less affluent society. Considerable adaptation of standard machinery and the break-up of work into simple procedures has provided opportunities for training and light employment for many severely handicapped people. Attitudes towards handicapped workers are reasonably good and employers accept handicapped workers who are qualified for jobs. Handicapped people themselves find it difficult to convince employers of their capabilities, and the Commonwealth Department of Labour and National Service through the Commonwealth Employment Service gives assistance in all district employment offices, and training courses are provided for staff involved. Voluntary agencies, as far as possible, use the services of the Commonwealth Employment Service, but assistance is given by them, particularly to those with severe

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handicaps, where some supporting assistance must be given, to ensure that transport, environment and communication are conducive to a situation satisfactory to both employer and employee.

Efforts were made earlier to stimulate the employment of the handicapped through "Employ the Handicapped" weeks, and more recently through a campaign directed specifically at major employers to encourage the adoption of policies to employ handicapped people with qualifications for jobs offered, giving equal opportunity to the handicapped and able-bodied applicants. A quota system for the employment of the handicapped does not operate and is not favoured in Australia.

Services to physically handicapped children are well developed and have been largely the responsibility of crippled children's societies since the 1920's. These are voluntary bodies operating at state level and which provide a wide range of services. For fund-raising purposes they retain the reference to children in their title but most, now, have extended their services to include adult handicapped. Generally the services are concentrated in cities, children being brought in for long-term treatment and schooling. A network of country clinics helps to locate needy children, to provide parent counselling, supervision of treatment and appliances, maintain the children in their homes, and follow up after discharge from hospital.

Cerebral palsied children and those suffering the effects of spina bifida, epilepsy and muscular dystrophy are usually included in these services. Spastic societies, one in each capital city, provide a high standard of service to cerebral palsied children and adults, providing medical and welfare services from a very early age and continuing an intensive program into adulthood. The services are state-wide with special provision for rural children, and workshops are a feature of their work.

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