

# Research shows retarded can do complex work

Mentally retarded adults are capable of holding down productive and complicated jobs, a University of Michigan research study shows.

And the mere fact of working appears to significantly increase their sense of self-esteem and self-confidence.

These and other findings from a three-year federally funded project seem to mandate a complete rethink of programming for the mentally retarded, according to the study.

"Mental health workers who have spent their time taking retarded adults to zoos and bowling alleys could be far better occupied supervising them in factories or sheltered workshops," says Kevin P. Lynch, a research scientist at the U-M Institute for the Study of Mental Retardation and Related Disabilities (ISMRRD).

"They want to work and they can work—often at a pace approximating that of the non-handicapped population."

The project provided comprehensive vocational evaluation and training to

some 35 adult clients during the three year period. The training was carried on at a similar workshop at the institute, where the clients learned to operate specialized equipment and assemble 15 and 20-piece industrial items.

"Many of the clients' parents and social workers were amazed at their accomplishments. These are severely handicapped workers," reminds Lynch. "Most of them had multiple physical and emotional handicaps in addition to being mentally retarded."

"They grew up before special education became mandatory for the handicapped," he adds. "Some had never been institutionalized. They had never been exposed to the concept of doing a job for a designated period of time each day and seeing it through to completion."

"Programs for the severely mentally retarded have instead consisted almost exclusively of social/recreational activities, like those designed for preschoolers," Lynch says.

"These have only served to emphasize to retarded adults what they are

already acutely aware of—that they are different from other people. And what sets them apart is not their appearance or behavior, but the fact that they don't work in a work-oriented society."

"The few vocational programs that do exist for the handicapped have been designed to determine work capability," he adds. The ISMRRD project presumed at the onset that all people are capable, and proceeded to train them.

"We've learned a tremendous amount about training methods," Lynch observes. "For example, we have developed an entirely positive teaching approach. Words like 'don't' and 'can't' are removed from the vocabulary. All of their lives, the mentally retarded have been reminded of their inferiorities. We stress what they can do instead."

"Our clients have learned to drive tractors, to do maintenance work, to drive and assemble 20-piece flush valve units. It has been traditionally assumed that the mentally retarded are capable of only simple, monotonous tasks, like sanding wood blocks or stringing beads. Our experience has shown that they are capable of very

complicated tasks, as long as the environment is kept simple."

A third phase of the project, job placement, has met with more limited success. Although nearly all of the 35 clients were trained for some degree of outside employment, only seven are currently working in the community.

"We found in the course of the project that 'sheltered workshops'—supervised assembly work designed specifically for the handicapped—are practically non-existent," Lynch says. "This is disturbing, because, due to the new federal legislation mandating special education, we will be graduating large numbers of handicapped adults into communities which are in no way ready to employ them."

Lynch expresses optimism for the long run, however. "There are alternatives to placement in the traditional job settings," he notes. "For example, entire businesses in areas like grounds maintenance or snow removal could be staffed by adults who are mentally retarded."

"We have consulted with over 350 agencies throughout the United States and already see evidence of many changes in approaches to basic programming for the handicapped," he adds.

"This project has conclusively dispelled the notion that retarded persons

are somehow unconscious or uncaring about the differences between them and other persons. They are aware that they have limitations, but they are equally aware, as a result of this project, that they are capable of things that are difficult and important."

"We have witnessed enormous personality changes in the people we've been associated with. And the reason is that for the mentally retarded, just like other adults, work is the central factor in determining their self-image and self-worth."

## VOTE Rogers & Ritter

### for O.C.C. Trustees

June 12, 1978

Paid for by Gerald Faye, Oakland Community College Faculty  
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P.K., Romeo

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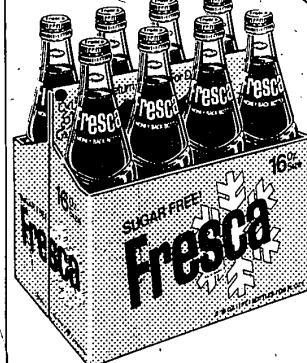
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