

Presidential advisor praises people who operate homes for retarded

By CRAIG PIECHURA

Local efforts to place the retarded in residential homes instead of new institutions received official commendation Tuesday from Fred Krause, executive director of the President's Committee on Mental Retardation.

Krause spoke at the Sheraton-Southfield Tuesday and gave certificates of appreciation Tuesday to representatives of state agencies and private organizations.

But the community placement work done by the staff of the Macomb-Oakland Regional Center (MORC), operated by the Michigan Department of Mental Health, was singled out for special praise. The Macomb-Oakland Regional Center is one of 29 programs in the United States cited by the presidential commission as model programs that should be duplicated elsewhere. The federal report, released in May, is titled "Mental Retardation: The Leading Edge - Service Programs That Work."

"What we saw here is real break from tradition," Krause said. "The tradition is to add or build institutions in out-of-the-way locations, distant from other community help systems."

Nationally, Krause said, the committee's goal in 1969 was to remove one-third of the 200,000 retarded persons from institutions. Recent figures, he said, show 130,000 persons still housed in institutions.

And in Macomb and Oakland alone, Krause said, more than 1,000 retarded have been placed in homes since 1972 and no new persons have been put in an institutional environment.

In THE TWO counties there are 55 group homes run by non-profit corporations, and 150 community training homes, in which families offer room, board and supervision to mildly retarded persons as well as teaching them intensive developmental skills.

The Macomb-Oakland Regional Center for the retarded, built in 1975 by the state of Michigan, can house up to 93 individuals on a temporary basis until suitable placement is found. However, Krause said, the Mount Clemens facility is a far cry from the five new institutions state officials wanted built back in 1971.

"That is an institution for 65 people," Krause said. "In 10 years' time, that could've become an institution for 2,085 people."

But local people pointed out different directions, different ways of approaching the problem, while Mississippi and Alabama are still building 400 to 500-bed facilities for the retarded.

Macomb and Oakland officials deserve credit, said Krause, because they didn't "get caught up in the old problem of making institutions better."

The extent of local cooperation between state, county, public and private organizations that paved the way for residential homes for the retarded is "unprecedented," Krause claimed.

Krause made no attempt to gloss over recent abuses reported at the Plymouth State Home in Northville, stating that institutions breed institutional behavior.

He also recognized that community opposition to neighborhood placement of the retarded is a growing problem that may have to be fought in court on zoning grounds.

IN ACCEPTING the accolade Gerald Provencal, director of the Macomb-Oakland Regional Center, said if his group did anything special, it "sensed the urgency" of removing the retarded from institutions.

"The idea was not to get six people out who don't belong," Provencal said. "We said 'We want them all out.'"

Most counties have at least one "showcase" residential home for the retarded, Provencal said, "and they let the rest rock away on the back ward... A solution, no matter how eloquently stated, isn't really a solution unless it affects you."

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