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Direct subsidy

As we reach the conclusion of this book, I regret very much that some strategies and mechanisms for implementing the principle of normalization have received little or no coverage. Perceptive readers will note that there should have been at least two additional chapters: one to explore the potential future role of organizations representing the interests of the handicapped and disadvantaged; and one to analyze the role and contribution of the law. Fortunately, the role of action groups is at least touched upon in the chapter by Bengt Nirje, but an analysis of the full relevance and potential impact of the law must await another occasion.

In this chapter, I wish to elaborate upon one administrative mechanism which is not major by itself, but which can be a most valuable tool in selected instances, and in combination with other approaches. I am referring to the utilization of direct financial subsidy of handicapped individuals or their families which would enable them to attain a culturally normative solution to their problems.

Direct subsidy

In our society, a highly valued and time-honored custom is to work out one's problems on one's own, and usually within one's own home or family setting. One may disagree with this cultural value, but one cannot deny its reality, nor its implication to the implementation of the principle of normalization.

One implication would appear to be that at least up to a point, human management structures should provide the type of service which maximizes a person's opportunity to resolve problems in traditional and valued ways. One such service appears to be the provision of direct subsidies.

Some forms of subsidy are quite traditional themselves; others may not be. Since the normalization principle is not only concerned with normative behavior and appearance, but also with normative means, those means should be favored which are well understood and accepted by the public.

Foster placement is such a form of family subsidy that is well understood and accepted: a family is paid to shelter or raise somebody else's child who has special problems, *e.g.* whose home is disordered or has dissolved. Only socio-political attitudes have prevented us from generalizing this option to include families who raise their own very special child. Perhaps only agency traditions and dynamics have prevented us from subsidizing the adoption of handicapped children, as discussed in the chapter on 'Additional implications of the normalization principle'.

These attitudes and traditions have cost us dearly. For instance, the cost of life-long institutional residence for a retarded person has been estimated to range between \$100,000 and \$300,000. In fact, even by 1969, the cost of

capital construction of institutional space was in some instances as high as \$40,000 per place, and as of June, 1972, the figure of \$50,000 is being mentioned in the plans of one institution in the United States. A small portion of such sums applied to family subsidy may often suffice to serve a person within his home, or at least to avoid special residential placement. In many cases, this sum may amount to no more than a few hundred dollars at a time, or per year.

For instance, there are many cases where institutional placement is sought because of the stresses created by the fact that a wife or mother is overworked; here, a family subsidy might permit the purchase of a washer, a dryer, a dishwasher, and/or the hiring of a housekeeper for a half-day a week. In other cases, living quarters may be too cramped or inappropriate to accommodate a hyperactive child; a subsidy here might permit a move to more spacious quarters, the addition of a room, installation of a yard fence, and/or the purchase of some outdoor play equipment that affords the child constructive activity. In yet other instances, the direct or indirect cost of special treatment may threaten to impoverish a family; subsidy here might pay for such treatment, for special gadgets, special clothing, cab fare, *etc.* I have witnessed repeated instances where two weeks' vacation at \$30-\$50 per day would probably have been of as much, or more, help to a 'nervous housewife' than a month's residence in a psychiatric treatment center, at \$50-\$100 per day.

Direct subsidy to persons or families can be a powerful adjunct to the armamentarium of tools useful in implementing normalization. Its utility is maximal in a human management system or administrative structure where it can be combined with other new and old helping forms. However, it should never be proposed – as it sometimes is – as the single or even major means for service structuring. Used by itself, direct subsidy cannot assure that adequate planning, priority setting, manpower training, and other important systemic functions will be carried out.

Family subsidy is one of the most efficient service options imaginable. It already exists in many – often indirect – forms, as when certain treatment expenses of poor or dependent persons are paid by various public programs. The socio-political climate is now such as to permit expansion of this option, and the formulation of some new direct forms of subsidy. These forms should be applied not merely to the poor, but also to those middle class families where extreme management options, such as residential placement, are often invoked because of conditions which are actually alleviative by modest, perhaps even short-term, expenditure of money.

Direct subsidy carries with it certain dangers. Among these are abuse, and administrative chaos. Both of these can be minimized by the establishment of human management decision-making (*i.e.* option-offering) centers discussed in some detail elsewhere (Wolfensberger, 1969a). In brief, these centers would coordinate human services in a field or area, and offer clients, or their families, as many options as appear feasible and economic. One of these options might often be money, either in lieu of agency service, or in order for clients to purchase such a service on their own on the open market, as proposed in one model by Cooke (1969).

Especially within the context of new administrative structures and human

management systems, direct subsidy can be combined with other new helping forms in developing a strong armamentarium for the implementation of the principle of normalization.