

Community programme for services to mentally handicapped.

Sri Lanka is half way up the development ladder. There 16.2 million people in our country today. 2% of them are disabled. The number of physically and mentally handicapped persons are proportionally increasing with the population. This situation created a number of problems. The main reason is low income of the ordinary family. Since the establishment of the Department of Social Services in 1948 it is concerned with organising rehabilitation of both physically and mentally handicapped. While service for the physically handicapped are fairly well organized, service for the mentally handicapped are still in formative stage.

At present there are 600 mentally retarded persons in 13 residential institutions in the island. All these institutions except one are managed by voluntary organizations with financial grants from the Department of Social Services. These institutions are providing the inmates treatment facilities including psychotherapy, play therapy group therapy behaviour therapy and drug therapy. Arrangements are now being made to provide individual needs to each inmate.

The main services required for the mentally handicapped are the following :-

- i. Prevention or early detection of mental handicap so far as practicable.
- ii. Comprehensive assessment of the mentally handicapped persons' assets and disabilities, and periodic reassessment.
- iii. Co-ordinated advice, support and practical help for their families.
- iv. Education, social and work training day care and occupation or the opportunity for work according to the handicapped persons' individual capacities.
- v. Residential accommodation according to individual needs.
- vi. Hospital medical, nursing and other services for those require them, as out-patients, day patients or in-patients.

Apart from the services rendered by the Department of Social Services and the Voluntary Organisations, the Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka, and the Dept. of Health services assist in detecting mentally and physically handicapped children.

Hospital Service

Hospitals in Sri Lanka provide only treatment and not residential care. Mentally handicapped children are treated in the Children Hospital or children's wards in other general hospitals.

We are not satisfied with the facilities prevailing in this country in view of the existing shortcomings of services rendered to the disabled. For example there is no proper survey is done. No statistics exist on the probable percentage of retardation. No special wards exist for the mentally retarded in the few children's hospital in the country. Even after the detecting a case there is no agency to take the care of parents left in the family. These children suffer either total rejection or too much of love.

To achieve a better state of service we need a team of doctors and experts to evaluate each child. Therefore the first task before us is the promotion of awareness the precise dimension of the problem and making some sort of extensive survey of its incidents. Arrangements for proper training of workers should be made. Special centres hospital wards and sheltered workshops should be set up throughout the country for the care, treatment training ultimate rehabilitation of those unfortunate people. This working task deserves full financial material and moral support of the Government, other public agencies like Corporations schools hospitals Voluntary organisations teachers, doctors, psychiatrists trained social workers, and indeed the public. Then these mentally handicapped people will succeed in the business of life.

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Sri Lanka.