

# The Safeguards Letter

A Publication of OHIO SAFEGUARDS

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## AN EXPERIMENT

Readers of The Safeguards Letter may notice a difference this time in the appearance of the Letter. Last fall, OHIO SAFEGUARDS was able to purchase a "Macintosh" computer, and this is the editor's first experience at trying to publish the Letter using this new tool. It hasn't been easy. If you look closely, you'll see that the pages have been numbered using the faithful old typewriter. Other final touches (before walking down to the printer's shop) have been added in the same way. No doubt the "software documentation" (as they call it) tells me, somewhere, how to do these things in a few easy keystrokes, but I haven't found that page yet.

Please let us know what you think about this experiment. Is the type easier or harder to read? Which "look" to the Letter do you like better--or do you have ideas about another "look" that would be worth a try as well? We'd love to hear from you!

## PASS WORKSHOP "IN THE WORKS"

OHIO SAFEGUARDS is making plans for the 1990 offering of the workshop entitled "An Introduction to the Role of Values in Services, through the Use of PASS 3." Dates and the location for this workshop have not yet been finalized, but we expect that it will be in the late summer or early fall somewhere in the Cleveland area. OHIO SAFEGUARDS is working in partnership with the North Central Region of the Ohio Interagency Training Network, at Case Western Reserve University, to offer this

workshop. We hope that a more-detailed announcement about the workshop will be able to be released soon.

People who plan to attend the PASS workshop will explore some of the ways that our society usually responds to people who are viewed as "different"--especially the ways we act through organized helping forms or "human services". The workshop will help participants learn about human service procedures that affect the dignity, growth, and rights of people who receive services. This workshop is designed for anyone who is interested in developing, delivering, or monitoring/evaluating services in order to improve their responsiveness to people who use them.

Readers interested in making sure that they receive a flyer announcing details about the PASS workshop can contact:

OHIO SAFEGUARDS  
P.O. Box 1943, Chillicothe, Ohio 45601  
(614) 773-6191

or

North Central Training Network  
Office of Comm. Health, CWRU  
2119 Abington, Cleveland, Ohio  
(216) 368-3660

## CALLING ABOUT A DREAM

The phone rang while I was putting the groceries away. I often regard the phone as an annoyance, and I knew right away that was my attitude about this call. My groceries had already been in my car for hours. I wanted to get them taken care of, now. How can it take me so long to do such a simple task? I was puzzled as I heard the operator's voice tell the caller, "Go ahead, sir." Not collect, and not female. Then I heard Bill's voice. "Sandy, are you there?"

He's been in Tampa working the fairs. He'd already lost \$2.10 in the phones before we got connected. He had worked out something with the operator to get it back when we finished our call. He said he had seven more dollars in quarters. I could tell he was celebrating something. He'd made a decision, a big one. He wants to move to Tampa by the end of this year. Not because of the warm weather, but because he's found an Army recruiter who said "Maybe." Maybe there's a way for Bill to get into military service. "Maybe" is closer to "yes" than anything any recruiting official has ever said to Bill.

Bill asked me if I remembered how long he'd been dreaming about getting a "job" with the military. We agreed that it had been a long time. As best I can recall that dream was alive when we met, when he was seventeen. Next year he'll celebrate his 30th. "I was honest with him. I told him about where I grew up, my speech, a bad education, my time with the law, and my age, and my slow learning. But I have to live in Florida, for six months. So maybe in about a year. He said it wasn't guaranteed."

I didn't know what to say, and ended up telling him I thought he sure seemed happy about it, and that it sure seemed like a lot to think about. I told him I'd look forward to talking about it when he got back to Ohio. That won't be our first conversation about Bill and the Army. Because Bill and I see the military and military service from pretty different points-of-view, it nearly always makes for a lively discussion. For Bill the Army has been his career of choice. One of his older brothers was in the service. There's the uniform, and the weapons, and the authority. It's respectable, and secure. It's been a long time dream.

I've never seen the military in those positive ways. Given my preference for non-violent theory and practice and my political views about power and oppression, there don't seem to be any benefits. The military is more like a nightmare than a dream to me. But the phone call from Bill that day reminded me of several things that seem important. The "interruption" I was annoyed about turned out to be a conversation with a long-time friend. I'm determined to begin to think about the phone more as my friend Jane Morgan does. She often answers her phone by saying, "I hope this is good news!"

Bill's call was a reminder that dreams last a long time and that some dreams take a very long time to become real--or to be let go of. He reminded me, too, that one of the gifts in this life is sharing good news about a dream with someone you trust will understand just how important the news is.

I don't know what's going to happen. I guess it's possible that some day next year I'll attend the end-of-boot-camp event. I do know that we'll continue to celebrate our friendship, because fidelity in our friendship is a dream we both have.

Sandra Landis

## JUST QUOTES

After all, the future is quite meaningless and unimportant unless, sooner or later, it is going to become the present.

Alan Watts, Wisdom and Insecurity

Burnout comes when you are worrying about profits.

Ray Bradbury, Interview

## E.I. Blues.

Jack Pealer

*Frankly, I'm getting a little nervous about some aspects of the "early intervention" movement. It's terrific to see so many people who understand the importance of early attention to the learning of young children who have developmental difficulties. But---recently I've been seeing signs, within this movement, of surging professionalism such as that which afflicts so much else in human services (witness: "infant psychiatry" as a new specialty), of increasing complexity in organizations that are being set up (collaboratively, of course), and of the construction--with state bond money--of "centers" where young children could be bused for "needed services." Haven't we been this way before?*

*I thought that one way I could express myself about all this would be to re-state some things that I first wrote six years ago, in a short essay in The Greffsun Letter (the predecessor to The Safeguards Letter). So, here goes--from February, 1984:*

We have been reminded lots of times that human beings tend to think in binary terms. One favorite pair of images is that of light and darkness. I want to borrow that imagery to share a few thoughts about

what we in human services are increasingly urged to do for young children with disabilities. If Burton Blatt can write about the "dark side of the mirror", and George Lucas about the "dark side of the force," then I'll risk the indulgence of the "dark side of early intervention."

First, though, I ought to look at the "light" side. What are the things that we human service workers increasingly see as desirable and necessary for young children? What do we know about growth and learning that makes most of us anxious or even frantic about the need to start early in trying to affect the development of a child with a handicapping condition? I want to summarize the reasons for our anxiety by inserting two paragraphs from The Tangled Wing by Melvin Konner:

In a stunning experiment on experience and the brain, rat pups were raised in rich or poor environments. The favored pups, selected at random, grew up in a world full of toys and other pups. A control group grew up under ordinary laboratory conditions. A third group was impoverished; even the relatively low level of stimulation available in the ordinary laboratory was withheld from them.

These different conditions stamped differences in the brain. In the visual part of the brain, where patterns taken from the eye are converted into usable thought, those same pyramidal cells so crucial to higher mental life appeared changed under the cold eye of the microscope. Not changed in their basic placement or overall structure, but in the finer

aspects of structure the impact of experience was evident. Animals raised in a rich environment had more small branches far out along the main trunks of the dendrites... more spines could be counted for each unit of length in the rats that had stimulation during growth. (pp. 60-61)

Rat pups are not human infants, and the same experiments worked on rat pups will not, we hope, be deliberately tried on human babies. But, what if the inference I draw from the above quote is right? It seems possible that the human brain and nervous system are analogous to our muscles--if not used, especially at an early age, they may "atrophy" (the analogy is not exact). So, what we human service workers worry about, with good reason, is the likelihood that systematic deprivation of human babies will bring about irreversible differences in the structure and functioning of those babies' brains. And our worrying about this leads us to consider certain kinds of responses--services--in the hope and expectation that we can help babies avoid or minimize loss of brain functioning. In other words, as we usually put it, we want to help children "grow to the maximum of their potential." It's good that we know what we do about the growth of young children. It's right that we, sometimes desperately, try everything we can think of to assist that growth. This is the "light" side of early intervention.

The trouble is that many of us--the same people who are worrying so much about kids--are human service workers. We're pretty powerful folks, as it turns out! Being powerful and authoritative people we routinely seek out answers or solutions that are consistent with the sources of our authority: human service organizations, agencies, and professional credentials. And the usual response that we've learned (from these sources) to make to almost anything that worries us (as the potentially

underdeveloped brains of young children worry us) is the discovery of categories of children who fit into programs we devise. In other words, a typical response is: early **labeling** and early **schooling**. These are offered despite all that we know about the social effects of labels and despite our growing suspicion that schools may not be the best way to assist the learning of any child. These usual responses reveal the "dark" side of early intervention. *And, in 1990, if we establish "centers" built with "MR/DD" money, do we think that all our talk--our language--about integration will prevent these places from the strong possibility that they'll segregate some children? Our talk can change like the wind in the night. Buildings will be around for a long time.*

Six (*now twelve*) years ago in Wisconsin I visited a program that gave me my first insight into this sort of thing. I was "floating" with a PASS team that was performing a practicum assessment of an early childhood program where children with disabilities and children without disabilities were, supposedly, grouped together. I arrived at the program during the team's interview with program administrators, and I listened as one administrator complained about the lack of cooperation she experienced from the parents--and particularly about those parents' "lack of acceptance" of their children's disabilities. This is a common sort of complaint from human service workers: if you don't agree with my view of what the problem is and how it should be solved (or even whether there is a problem), then it will be hard to get help from me. What the program administrator was saying--about young children--was that she couldn't help very much until the parents caved in to her point-of-view about the children's capabilities or potentials. The implication for families was: we can help your child best if you will limit your expectations for her/him to what we expect of "retarded" behavior!

Don't we know what such expectations produce? Can't we recognize

that such giving-in to limited expectations is equivalent to starting young children on a long downward spiral? It seems to me that considerable credit is due to those parents at the Wisconsin program who were "uncooperative" and who wouldn't accept such a future for their children. They seem

to have had a sense about the long-term danger of segregated "help" and early myopic judgments about their children. Somehow, they were aware of the "dark" side of early intervention. They were heroes to me then, and other parents like them remain heroes to me now.

ORWELL "DOWN AND OUT"

Sandra Landis

Have you been looking for an easy to read, relevant critique of western culture's social and spiritual policies? If so, pick up a copy of George Orwell's Down and Out in Paris and London. There's a copy (spotted at a used book sale) available in the OHIO SAFEGUARDS library. Ordinarily it might be kind of hard to find because it was published in 1933.

Mr. Orwell's topic is poverty. The narrative is of Orwell's experiences of what in the 90's we call the "working poor/homeless" person, and, although the experiences occurred in 1930 and 1931, the scene is a familiar, contemporary one. Some things, like being frightened, cold, and hungry, just don't change very much.

The fact that Mr. Orwell spent time on the streets and highways of France and England prior to writing this "report" lend chilling correctness to his closing words:

"My story ends here. It is a fairly trivial story, and I can only hope that it has been interesting in the same way as a travel diary is interesting. I can say, 'Here is the world that awaits you if you are ever penniless.' Some day I want to explore that world more thoroughly. I should like to know people like Mario and Paddy and Bill the moocher, not from casual encounters, but intimately; I should like to understand what really goes on in the souls of plongeurs and tramps and Embankment sleepers. At present I do not feel that I have seen more than the fringe of poverty"

Still, I can point to one or two things I have definitely learned by being hard up. I shall never again think that all tramps are drunken scoundrels, nor expect a beggar to be grateful when I give him a penny, nor be surprised if men out of work lack energy, nor subscribe to the Salvation Army, nor pawn my clothes, nor refuse a handbill, nor enjoy a meal at a smart restaurant. That is a beginning."

A VIEW FROM CHILLICOTHE

"Being a Board Member"

For six years I was a member of the Board of public agency in the town where I live. I served two terms--the most allowed by the law--between 1984 and 1989. I've been away from the Board for a few months now, and I think enough time has passed that it is OK for me to try to collect my thoughts about being a Board member.

The agency that I helped to govern is the one, in our town, that organizes and delivers help to people who are called mentally retarded or developmentally disabled. In some ways the Board's purpose doesn't matter so much, with regard to my feelings about my functioning as a member of it. I suspect that many Boards have similar characteristics or act in similar ways. The reason I mention the purpose is because "developmental disability" is something I'm supposed to know a lot about. I've worked for almost twenty years in organizations that have to do with developmental disability. This is not so much a comment on the Board as it is "background" on the experience that I brought to Board membership.

That's important because I assumed, on becoming a member of this particular Board, that I would be able to bring what I know to bear, with some effectiveness, on the problems that face the organization the Board governs. I assumed that having experience with "developmental disability" would help me better understand the Board's work. I assumed that my "expertise" would somehow automatically result in my understanding clearly what was happening in the organization. It didn't turn out that way. For six years I went to meetings once a month. I served on various committees. I read, thoroughly, all the papers that were mailed to me about the Board's business. I visited the programs and took part in some educational or planning events that the organization's staff arranged. I met the legal requirements for "in-service training" for Board members. And, more than six years later, I think I understand the organization only slightly better than I did when I took my oath of office in January, 1984.

Take the budget (please!), for example. The Board I served on could not get control of the growth of its budget. The Board, like Congress, could not slow down the pace of increases in levels of spending, even when the members of the Board understood the likely future consequences of those increases. The Board's chief executive officer worked hard analyzing the past pattern of budget-expansion and shared his analysis with the Board. Committees met and studied the financial situation. The Board devoted significant meeting time to discussing finance and even passed a resolution (like Gramm-Rudman) that stated its commitment to restraint in the growth of the budget. A few months later the same Board (with me as Chair) approved a new budget with an 8-10% increase--about the same rate as that which we had deplored and voted to avoid. I don't think this happened because Board members were cynical nor because they lacked the courage to make harder decisions. I think it happened at least partly because the organization we "governed" is so complicated--so many people doing so many things--that it is very hard to understand. Each Board member devotes a good bit of time to the duties of membership. But even that perhaps substantial contribution of time and attention is not enough for someone to know, to understand what is going on, or to relate that understanding to a decision like a vote on a budget. I often got the feeling that I was helping make decisions in the dark with winds swirling around me. I don't mean to fault anyone--not my fellow Board members (who worked faithfully) and certainly not the organization's staff. Even with my experience, I didn't--and, in the time I was able to give to the Board I couldn't--know enough to act more wisely than I did.

Another thought. The results of a survey, conducted by the National Center for Education Information, were summarized in the Chillicothe Gazette on February 28, 1989. The study surveyed presidents of public school boards across the United States. Among the reported findings was that "... the longer people have been on school boards, the more co-opted they are by the system and the more resistant to any changes in it.... Generally, board presidents who have been members of their boards for short times were found to want changes in numerous areas of education. Those who have been on their boards 10 years or more, 26 percent of the total, are more resistant to changes." My inference from these findings is that there is something about Board membership that makes me less worthy of being trusted by people who use the organization's services, because I've become caught up in supporting the organization's

purposes, perhaps at the expense of those who use services. The longer I was a Board member, the more likely it may have been that forces like group identity, loyalty to the group's work, and (conscious or unconscious) adherence to the group's customs or traditions had the effect of dulling my sense of what would have been different and better directions to take. So, there's a disadvantage in experience, sometimes. Columnist Ellen Goodman remarked, in a recent column, that we "... may have to learn once again that ideal public service is, by definition, temporary."

Would I try Board membership again? Probably, if the chance comes along. As I have, for the last several years, gone about the business of "evaluating" the performance of various human service organizations, I've often found myself talking about Boards. I've been saying things like: Boards represent an organization's connection to the future; Boards are a point-of-stability as human service workers come and go in an organization; Boards serve as a link between an organization and its community and the citizenry thereof--a link to local values and interests. Boards, in summary, are the rocks on which things rest, in organizations that are trying to bring about changed lives for people. After some experience as a Board member, I now have more difficulty in saying and believing those confident assertions about Boards. It turns out that Boards have all the frailties and make all the mistakes that should be expected of groups of humans. But--and this seems important--the failure of Boards to reach the ideals we set for them doesn't make them less necessary. Until some other forms of governance are invented, organizations will need good Boards, for all the reasons stated above, even though those reasons sometimes sound hollow to me now. And good Boards, of course, require good members.

Jack Pealer