

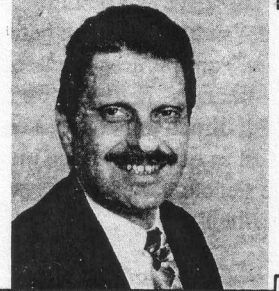
## "LIVING IN NEW KINDS OF SITUATIONS"

A PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PRIVATE RESIDENTIAL RESOURCES  
(Serving People With Mental Retardation and Other Developmental Disabilities)

### TRAINING FOR TODAY

*It's All In How You Say It*

By Thomas E. Pomeranz, Ed.D.



#### "AN INSTITUTION IS NOT A PLACE, IT'S A STATE OF MIND"

In the April issue I initiated this article with a warning that our failure to be vigilant can result in the best of residential environments becoming institutions. In that article I presented the following areas that must be addressed in training to assure that staff manage these issues to prevent the emergence of an institution.

- \* Segregation of staff from the people they serve,
- \* Limiting choices, and
- \* Failing to assure that people have adequate privacy.

These and the following items must be continually addressed in our training in order that we are most effective in conveying our message of independence for the people we serve.

4. **Restricting Life's Functions To The Home** - Certainly, it can be convenient to all of one's daily activities in the home. (Avoiding the hassle of transportation, not having to deal with aggressive behaviors in public, etc.)

Institutions tend to be self-contained; with recreation, education, health care delivered within the confines of the institution. I'm sure you have seen it happen. First, we avoid the barber shop by having staff cut the hair of the people they serve. Then the doctor's office becomes off-limits by scheduling the physician to conduct examinations in the home, and so it goes. Insidiously, opportunities for community participation dwindle and the institution begins to take a foothold.

Train To Utilize The Resources Of The Community - Don't take the shortcut! Inspire staff to put forth the effort, as demanding as it may be, that is usually required to achieve maximum opportunities for community participation. Our staff training must emphasize that the most effective habilitation opportunities are found through participation in life's everyday activities when they are conducted in their natural environment. It is through those interactions at the grocery store, bank and laundromat that relationships

are formed. Relationships with individuals who do not get paid for the relationship, or are not related to the individual, serve as the arch enemy of the institution.

5. **Limiting Individualization** - Institutional Environments fail to celebrate the uniqueness of the individuals served. The environment is void of those artifacts which proclaim "I am special." Upon observation, the visitor is struck by the absence of "things" that reflect the individual's hobbies, religious orientation or favorite color. The environment described is one which reflects humans doing rather than humans being.

Train Staff To Encourage And Nurture Individualization - Anyone can decorate a room or a living space as if it came from the Sears Catalog. Go further than that--train staff to encourage and/or assist people in personalizing their living environment. Staff should encourage people to make their favorite colors prominent, displaying their hobbies, pictures of

friends and loved ones.

Guide staff to strive to create personal space that reflects the qualities of the individuals who live there.

Everyone is a unique individual. Living environments that reflect the unique qualities and attributes of the individual are more likely to illicit from staff behaviors that are attuned to meeting each person's needs.

#### 6. **Being Directive In**

**Communication** - In an institutional setting, one can identify staff from those being served by the tone of voice and the words chosen to communicate the staffs' thoughts.

Directive vocalizations/commands (i.e. "sit here", "come here", "do it now") are phrases frequently commanded in the institutional setting. Such directive language communicates to all in listening range that staff view the people they serve as subservient and not their equal.

**Train The Staff To Speak As They Wish To Be Spoken To** - Listen to how staff speak to both those they serve and to one another.

Are they asking or telling? Do staff speak to co-workers in a non-directive manner and speak to the people they serve in a directive tone or style? A people first mindset is one in which everyone is treated equally and spoken to with respect. Listen to yourself and others--you may be surprised.

Tape record staff (with their permission) while they interact with those whom they serve. Analyze the tapes with staff during training sessions. The goal must be that when listening to the tapes the listener is unable to determine whether the staff is speaking to a person served or to another staff member.

#### 7. **Denying Dignity Of Risk** -

Institutions deny the dignity of risk. Institutional environments are narrowly focused on protective oversight--protecting people from harm. Materials, supplies and equipment which hold great promise for habilitative opportunity are stripped from the environment for the potential risk they present. People served are denied opportunities in activities which challenge their skills (i.e. riding bicycles, ironing clothes, etc.).

The opportunities for risk suffer from a regression toward the mean. That is, the least restrictive alternative is determined by the individual with the most challenging behavior or the greatest extent of medical fragility. Thus the size of the group and its extent of heterogeneity serve to determine opportunities for risk.

**Train To Practice Risk** - While an institution protects, a non-institutionalized environment balances its responsibility to protect from harm with its responsibility to provide enlightened risk to achieve active habilitation.

Staff should be trained to practice moderate risk-taking with the individuals served. Risk-taking is essential in the habilitation process. Environments that are void of risk are void of dignity. All habilitation involves a certain amount of risk. Training staff to achieve a balance between protective oversight and the dignity of risk is a hallmark of a quality training program.

From these conclusions two things follow: (1) Habilitative opportunity comes from extending choice, freedom of movement, respecting privacy, working with people as equals and enlightened risk-taking. (2) Dignity and respect result only from a non-institutionalized environment.

Our state of mind can make all the difference!