

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Leonard Cheshire Foundation
Dorchester Cheshire Homes
18 Alexandra Road
Dorchester
Dorset DT1 2LZ
UK

6th February, 1996

Dear Sir,

In his review of 'Home At Last' (January 1996), Robin Jackson manages to repeat most of the old 'saws' which are regularly put forward by those well-known people with a particular point of view. Their views have for some reason been given recent prominence by 'The Independent'. The latter's slant seems to be that 'parents know best' which is also the cry of supporters of Rescare. Interestingly, one of Jackson's points is that the service provided to the two young women described in the book 'was one that met more closely parents' wishes than daughters' needs' - whoops!

Of course Jackson pushes the party line of 'recommending the development of a range of residential options so that parents are offered a genuine choice' - the latter word no doubt having had a strong influence on the government's decision to bow to demands for (yet more) evaluative research into residential provision.

One of the other old saws Jackson trots out is 'there was no sense in which they were able to feel part of a community'. The logic of such reasoning being that in order to meet this need to feel

part of a community they (and other people with learning disabilities) should perhaps live in a residential village! The degree to which any of us feels able to be a part of the community in which we live varies enormously. Should we set different criteria for measuring the quality of life of people with learning disabilities than for the rest of the population? Clearly there are still some people who would - and do so at every opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

John Smith
Director

Dr. Jackson answers . . .

Aberdeenshire Advocacy Service
4 Bridge Street
Banchory
AB31 3SX
UK

21st February, 1996

Dear Sir,

I trust that when Mr. Smith, as Director of Dorchester Cheshire Homes, discusses professional issues with his staff that he is able to elevate his arguments to a higher level than that evident in his letter of the 6th February. First, I am more than happy to be accused of repeating old 'saws' given that a saw is a maxim, that's to say, a succinct expression of a general truth. Whoops!

Second, RESCARE makes no claims that 'parents know best' but it does encourage policy makers, service providers and front line staff to recognise that parents have a point of view that should not be ignored. Indeed, one of the reasons for RESCARE's existence is because of the arrogant claims made by some professionals that they know best!

Third, Smith is perplexed that *The Independent* has 'for some reason' given prominence to the views of parents. Could it be that this paper, living up to its title, has taken a detached and unbiased view of the facts and has seen the legitimacy of the parents' case.

Fourth, I do not subscribe to the proposition that parents always know best for I recognise that some parents can be overprotective and hinder the development of their childrens' potential. I

therefore find no difficulty in observing that the provision made for the two young women 'was one that met more closely parents' than daughters needs'. Smith really should try to stop pigeon-holing people - a sure sign of a weak argument.

I hope that readers of this correspondence will read the book *Home at Last* for themselves and draw their own conclusions. Readers must ask themselves whether £100,000 for an individual place in a bungalow hermetically sealed from the community in which it was set was an appropriate and sensible form of provision. Smith claims that the logic of my reasoning is that the two young women (and other people with learning disabilities) should perhaps live in a residential village. Perhaps or perhaps not - but currently it is not an option!

Could Mr. Smith perhaps be worried what research into the quality of residential provision for adults with learning disabilities might discover? Some of the difficulties experienced by the project described in *Home at Last* arose from problems endemic in this field: poorly qualified and remunerated staff; inadequate staff induction and training programmes; constant staff turnover

resulting in a lack of continuity in care and treatment; poor leadership; and limited staff supervision.

The simple point that I would like to make is that there should be a range of provision. It would be nonsensical to argue that residential villages should be the only option. There are thousands of adults with learning disabilities who are happily placed in the kind of residential facilities provided by the Dorchester Cheshire Homes. I have no problem with this but unlike Smith I don't see the world through a set of blinkers. As Jonathan Swift observed: 'There's none so blind as they that won't see'.

Yours sincerely,

Robin Jackson