
3 Things You Should Know About The Treatment Of The Mentally Disabled During The Great Depression

Living conditions for persons with disabilities within the early nineteenth century were harsh, particularly in industrial areas. Persons who lived in impoverishment, whether or not it had been as a result of being unmarried, orphaned, alcoholic, or due to physical or mental disabilities, typically were put into poorhouses, or almshouses. Wealthier folks tended to keep their kids with disabilities at home.

While the quantity of training schools raised, the commitment to training failed to. The schools quickly became asylums, providing custodial care for an increasing range of people with developmental disabilities. As enrollment increased, the commitment to education was mostly abandoned. Pupils became "inmates." Through the 1870's and 1880's, some institutions continued a policy of admitting persons of a young age who were considered to be benefiting the foremost from instruction. However by 1875, a variety of states began building custodial institutions. Although some individuals believed that the original training schools were thriving, education as a goal was sacrificed for the larger concern of housing a quickly growing range of persons of all ages with all levels of disability.

So as to exist, the institutions had to alter their focus from a training atmosphere to a custodial atmosphere. The goal of educating pupils forever within the community was modified to training inmates to work within the institution. Rather than an education, higher-functioning inmates were taught practical skills and used as laborers to cut back prices. Institution superintendents began asking the states to pay for destitute custodial care, arguing that this would relieve communities of their poorhouses and almshouses. Providing persons with disabilities with safety and shelter, they argued, was the greatest they could do. This was the start of what David Vail later described as the dehumanizing process. In contrast to the early training schools, the new institutions no longer encouraged interaction with the community. They were placed in rural areas and away from the view of the general public.

In 1924, the Commonwealth of Virginia passes a state law that permits for sterilization (without consent) of people found to be: "feeble-minded, insane, depressed, mentally handicapped, epileptic and other." Alcoholics, criminals and drug addicts also are sterilized. then in 1927, Supreme Court case *Buck v. Bell* rules that it's not a violation of the constitutional rights of disabled individuals to forcibly sterilize them against their will. The Supreme Court has never formally overturned this decision, however in later years, federal and state courts have severely criticized and questioned the legal reasoning underlying the decision.