

*Wm. Morgan Jones*

Speech by Robert Morgan  
Attorney General of North Carolina  
Welcome and Opening Remarks  
N. C. Rehabilitation Counseling Association  
Training Session  
Raleigh, North Carolina  
Wednesday, October 27, 1971, 1:30 p.m.

It is a pleasure to participate in the opening of your training session here today. I have enjoyed working with you in serving disabled people through "Rehabilitation Day" and the Eastern Seal program and these common experiences will remain with me as some of the most inspiring, rewarding, and enlightening moments of my life.

The handicapped we saw on "Rehabilitation Day" were some of the happiest and appreciative people I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. It is amazing how insensitive we have been to their needs. They are, in a sense "shut-outs", as opposed to "shut-ins", in the political process and for too long have been ignored in the allocation of our State's financial resources and the structuring of laws to assure all citizens of equal opportunity.

So I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for helping remove the "blindness" from the eyes of many public officials including myself, so we may see more clearly the rehabilitation needs of the people you serve so

ably. As my good friend Bill Kiser -- a victim of cerebral palsy himself -- has so ably stated, "The Constitution may not spell out the rights of disabled people to rehabilitation services, but as human beings we feel we have the right to benefit from, and contribute to, the American way of life."

To be able to welcome such a dedicated group of professionals as you to Raleigh is indeed an honor for me. Although I do not consider myself a professional in the field of rehabilitation, I still feel a very keen responsibility to the handicapped of North Carolina and want to do whatever I can for my fellow citizens who have disabilities.

Each disabled person must have access to the skills of specially trained people -- especially vocational rehabilitation personnel. And we must not forget that you are dependent upon the support of an enlightened public if you are to carry on your work. Therefore, we must work together to broaden the vision of all State leaders and the public in general, to the world of opportunities open to handicapped people. We must make available the broad range of vocational rehabilitation services to all

disabled North Carolinians, and, at the same time, work for progressive legislation to insure proper housing, transportation, barrier free buildings, and the enlightened social climate which the disabled person must have in order to function properly in the community.

The efforts of Vocational Rehabilitation and other related rehabilitation programs have long gone unnoticed. Few people are aware of your major role in the vocational rehabilitation of juvenile and adult offenders, drug offenders, the mentally ill, alcoholics, and mentally retarded; your work with some 40 workshops, the deaf, the blind, 51-years of work with the physically disabled, and recently the more severely physically disabled through a system of comprehensive rehabilitation centers you are trying get funded.

Most important, I do not believe the public understands your potential to serve as the professional advocate for the disabled in the community -- even in city hall -- wherever the need arises. So few people are willing to go beyond the "call of duty" in making certain confused, perhaps destitute, disabled persons do not get lost in the maze of our modern, progressive, social-program laden society.

Recently, I heard of a young lady, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in Winston-Salem, who, upon learning of her client's sentence to hard labor on charges of public drunkenness and disorderly conduct, went to talk to the court and won his release. You see, the young man was severely retarded, and he had pleaded guilty to charges he never understood. His epileptic seizures had been mistaken for disorderly conduct.

Dramatic illustrations such as this one serve to reaffirm my faith in people and the need for advocates like you.

In summary, I see Vocational Rehabilitation personnel as action-oriented, goal-setting, follow-through professionals -- not only desk oriented therapists -- although that role is certainly important. Your mandate and ability to work with the client from bedside, if you please, on through physical and mental restoration, training, to the point of job placement and followup -- providing every reasonable service necessary -- is unique among the helping professions. Your wide range of cooperative programs is indicative of your flexibility in going above and beyond discipline and agency barriers in the best interest of our people.

The "shot in the arm approach" -- one professional being interested in his one service alone -- has to become a part of the past. No man can concentrate on "self-actualization," or attaining a proper work objective if he is starving; if he is in great physical pain, if he does not have any marketable skills, if his family life is falling apart because of illness or some other problem; or if he has experienced so many failures he does not know the meaning of success.

The professional like you, who can see these total needs and identify resources to meet them, will ultimately be more successful. And it is my fondest hope that one day soon North Carolina's disabled will have access to all of these resources through professionals like you.

Surely our State has many demands and limited resources -- but its greatest asset is its people. For too long we have seen most disabled people as problems to be tolerated only through health maintenance and public assistance payments. Compared to social and health programs, we are spending a pittance on rehabilitation in North Carolina. Our newspapers proclaim our vast social problems --

many of which could be greatly alleviated by Vocational Rehabilitation. Yet there is rarely a reference to Vocational Rehabilitation as a major counteracting force. Think of the potential manpower available to North Carolina if we could but see beyond the surface of the disability to the possibility of rehabilitation.

If tomorrow's newspapers would carry screaming headlines of a discovery of gold, oil, or some other natural resource in the State of North Carolina, there would be a great excitement and there is little doubt but what the needed capital to develop and market such resources would be raised very quickly. I submit to you that if we think of our handicapped citizens as resources for rehabilitation; rather than problems to be tolerated, this State can and will find the money, and enact the progressive legislation to make certain you people have the tools to do a good job.

Thank you.