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Some time ago, a young man signed himself in at the psychiatric ward at North Carolina Memorial Hospital in Chapel Hill. He did so under rather unusual circumstances. He was himself an aide at one of the other big state mental hospitals, and he had literally been driven deep into depression by the environment there.

What depressed him was seeing the people he cared for treated as if they were inmates and not patients -- treated as if there were no tomorrow for them. The work load on staff was so tremendous that nothing could really be done in the way of therapy. The patients were not abused. They were just not given much reason to hope, or much way to

help themselves work through their problems.

That situation is merely one result of an attitude which, I am glad to say, is disappearing in our society.

The attitude I am talking about causes people who are laboring under a handicap to be just shut away. We have inflicted this attitude, and the results of it, on far too many people. And I am glad to see a change taking place.

Society has just not seen the error of having no middle ground, nothing between a custodial institution and no care at all, when the needs of those who are suffering are quite different.

Take the case of the physically handicapped. Society

looks at someone in a wheelchair and sees him as someone permanently disabled. Society does not see that the person is in fact trying to make progress for himself, that he has hopes, that he has a goal he is going to reach -- however slowly. Because society has been slow to see it from his point of view, they are quick to treat him as a hopeless case.

I have been fortunate. I have seen a man with Cerebral Palsy come back that long, hard road. I have seen him struggle to educate himself, to communicate and to carve out a profession for himself. And my eyes have been opened. I understand now that we need organizations and institutions which do not have that dead-end mentality.

The sheltered workshop, the half-way house, the clinic

which can provide help without completely shutting the person away from the world -- these are the expressions of a different kind of mentality.

These are the tangible expressions of the mentality of hope and struggle. These say there is a tomorrow, and that the long road to it is worth taking.

The fact that such facilities are growing in number and quality speaks well for us as a society. In a way it shows we are growing up. It shows we are beginning to realize that the old stereotypes about physical and mental health are not true.

I hope society as a whole will be able to understand the struggle of one who is afflicted and who is working to

regain his health. The person is doing a job most people would not be able to do. Those who accomplish it have every right to be triumphant. For it is a triumph to come back from depression or from total disability. It is a triumph to regain one's competence and ability to cope. It is a triumph to realize once again, or maybe for the first time, that the world is a wonderful place to be alive in.

Getting there takes courage and stamina beyond anything most people would believe. It takes an ability to take ten steps forward and nine back. It takes the guts to try hard, fail, and come back for more. That old movie cliché of the psychiatrist who discovers the key to a patient's problem

and cures him in nothing flat is just not so.

The thing society must realize, therefore, is that in the first place, a handicapped person is not standing still, but trying to make progress. And in the second place, it is possible that he can and will make progress.

I hope facilities like this will grow in number, and that such events as this open house will also increase.

Results convince people better than any argument. The more such centers we have, and the more opportunity for people to come in and see what goes on, the fewer misconceptions there are going to be.

The struggle of someone who has a problem, be it a

physical handicap or an emotional illness, is going to be a solitary one, in many ways. Nobody can rehabilitate anybody. People rehabilitate themselves.

But there are ways to help. Counseling and supporting services are indispensable helps. Sheltered workshops are indispensable helps, and wonderful alternatives to hospitalization or extremely limited outpatient care.

But the greatest help is a positive attitude and a positive expectation on the part of the people of the entire community. That is the foundation on which many an example of self-help and rehabilitation will be built. With more of the good work that goes on here and more community involvement, that foundation will be laid well.