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## Book reviews

### **The Careless Society: Community and its Counterfeits**

John McKnight. New York: Basic Books, 1995, pp. 194.

#### **Preface**

Periodically, a leader in a field will compile a collection of articles, essays, and other publications under one cover for the reader to follow a sequence of thought along a common topic. McKnight does just that in bringing the current series of chapters to a recent focus. His wisdom and insights must be read carefully as we evaluate the effectiveness of our current delivery of services and supports for persons with disabilities. The reader of 'The Careless Society' will certainly find ample evidence that the receiver of supports is not often the direct beneficiary of funds designated for their betterment.

John McKnight assembles a series of journal articles and adds his updated thoughts on the process of building communities that include the capacities of all its members. Community is defined as the social place used by family, friends, neighbours, neighborhood associations, clubs, civic groups, local enterprises, churches, ethnic associations, synagogues, local unions, local government and local media. There is a potent argument raised about the harm many professional services do in the lives of the very people they are intended to help. This book is an indictment of the waste of public funds by many professionals as they control both the quantity and quality dimensions of human service delivery. 'The Careless Society' will be remembered as a warning to

those of us in the helping profession not to do more harm than good in the lives of the people we intend to serve.

#### *The general highlights of this book*

- McKnight keenly understands the generic principles of providing supports to people who are labelled because of deficiencies in their lives. He does this primarily by shifting the focus of our initial assessment of a person's contributions in this direction.
- Examples of how people from diverse walks of life can contribute to the betterment of society are provided by focusing on people in the prison systems, persons of low income, and individuals with disabilities.
- Many questions surface through the book, the central one of which is — who really benefits from the distribution of money — the people who provide the services or the individuals who receive the services? For example, McKnight alerts the reader that a 1984 study by the Community Services Society of New York City indicated that only 37% of money allocated to help low income citizens actually reaches those individuals in the form of cash income.
- The reader is again cautioned that many services, after a period of time, produce effects just the opposite of those intended by that service.
- What is measured as a criterion of success tends to be from the perspective of the provider of services in both quantity and quality.

- The foundation for building strong communities lies within the associational life within each community.
- The answers to most of the community's challenges can be found within the community itself if members of that community have both the authority and tools to effect change.
- The book is one that yearns to be read from different vantage points...and will be long regarded with differing degrees of acceptance depending on how threatened or reinforced one's own values are with the values espoused by McKnight.
- There is a strong argument against the curricularizing of community building in order to develop experts with degrees who will then go forth to build better communities. McKnight heeds the advice of E.F. Schumacher who valued the collective expertise existing within one's own community but that may need to be nurtured to bring out the talents of each person within that community.

#### *Specific areas of excellence*

- 'Community guides...bring a person into the web of community life...Attributes of a community guide include not trying to fix the person, the guides themselves are well connected in the interrelationships of community life, achieve their ends because they are trusted by their community peers and not because they have institutional authority, believe strongly that the community is a reservoir of hospitality that is waiting to be offered, and finally they learn that they must say good-bye to the person they guide into community life' (pp. 119–122). Instead of professionalizing the role of connecting people back into their communities, McKnight suggests that many community members already have such expertise because of their natural ties and connections in their communities.
- 'Through the propagation of belief in authoritative expertise, professionals cut through the social fabric of community and sow clienthood where citizenship once grew' (p.10). Labeling an individual as 'client' presents attributes of an 'us-them' mentality. An emphasis of roles based on differences permeates the relationship instead of a person of equal status seeking supports through the assistance of a fellow community member.
- 'This economic need for need creates a demand for redefining conditions as deficiencies' (p.29). As professionals run out of people to treat and provide services, they must widen the definition of who needs help in order to justify their own professional livelihoods. This point of view can be quite disconcerting to individuals who have devoted much of their lives to establish an expertise that could be in jeopardy of atrophy through lack of customer need. To ward off this possibility, many professionals emphasize even more how valuable their service is for an expanding group of citizens. 'Brigitte Berger suggests, in a recent article, that baldness will soon be defined as a disease because underemployed dermatologists will decree it to be one' (p.47).
- 'There is no greater power than the right to define the questions' (p.48). Individuals who control the types of questions from which funds flow to answer are in extremely powerful positions. When we look at quality of life from the perspective of the receiver of those supports, we are relinquishing control of the questions of how successful we have been in promoting enhanced lifestyles in others.
- 'The health system assaults these healthful domains, providing interventions that replace stories with studies, friends with professionals, obligations with fees, and wisdom with technology' (p.68).
- 'We may have reached that point where there are more people in Chicago who derive an income from serving the poor people' (p.97). This finding is one of the many paradoxes uncovered by McKnight throughout several vignettes in several chapters.
- 'There are at least four structurally negative characteristics of the human service tool:
  - ... seeing individuals primarily in terms of their needs
  - ... its effect on public budgets

- ... its impact upon community and associational life
- ... they can create, in the aggregate, environments that contradict the potential positive effect of any one program (pp. 103–107).
- ‘The greatest “service” our society provides is the opportunity to express our unique capacities, to have a decent income and to join with our fellow citizens in creating productive communities’ (p.114). This statement of philosophy is at the heart of person-centered planning for individuals receiving supports in employment, recreation, home living, and general community presence and participation.
- ‘Our goal should be clear. We are seeking nothing less than a life surrounded by the richness and diversity of community. A collective life. A common life. An everyday life. A powerful life that gains its joy from the creativity and connectedness that come when we join in association to create an inclusive world’ (p.123).

#### *Areas in which this publication can be enhanced*

- A companion publication by John Kretzmann and John McKnight titled: ‘Building Community From the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community’s Assets’ will provide the interested reader with several strategies for approaching the values espoused in McKnight’s most recent book.
- Expand our reading in the area of community development and gain an increasingly clearer picture of the realities of building strong, cohesive communities that include citizens of a wide range of diversity.
- Periodically examine our sources of motivation and reinforcement when promoting the current system of services and supports on behalf of the individuals for whom we locate services.

#### *Common threads throughout this publication*

- Professionals need to re-examine their roles in

the lives of people who are labeled based on their deficiencies. Future supports should build upon the skills, competencies, and assets of people instead of remaining focussed on ways to fix deficiencies.

- The power to effectively create positive change rests with the people who currently receive supports. Self-advocacy begins with an awareness that local remedies rely on the collective wisdom of people with disabilities and their designated support persons.
- Services that call themselves community-based seldom involve citizens of that community in the building of relationships and supports for people with disabilities.

#### *Recommendations of its utility to rehabilitation professionals*

- The chapters of this book need to be read over several times. Some of this content will challenge our current outlook on providing supports and cause some friction between our current course of action and the path suggested by McKnight.
- If the rhetoric of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments (choice and self-determination) are to be realized, there must be strong attention paid to the content of this book. Quality-of-life outcomes are best achieved when the power shifts from the provider and funder of supports to the receiver of those funds. McKnight outlines several cautions and provides numerous insights toward making these values become reality.
- This book has influenced me to think differently about my role in the lives of the individuals for whom I provide support. I think it will do the same for you.

*Ernest L. Pancsofar, Ph.D.*  
Book Review Editor

#### **Closing the Shop: Conversion from Sheltered to Integrated Work**

Stephen T. Murphy and Patricia Rogan. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, 1995.

This book by Murphy and Rogan is timely. As national leaders in rehabilitation services call for a more aggressive agenda for expanding integrated employment opportunities for people with disabilities, the continuation of segregated day centers and sheltered workshops is called into question. Murphy and Rogan, two established leaders in supported employment, have developed a cogent and convincing argument for replacing segregated services with integrated employment, not simply adding supported employment as another step on the questionable continuum of adult services.

I was impressed by the first sentence of this book: 'Sheltered workshops are one of the last bastions of therapeutic paternalism facing people with disabilities' (p.ix). The authors are clear about the purpose of their book and the values that they bring to its writing. Despite this clear and strong philosophical perspective, the authors are still able to clarify the reasons that are frequently used by proponents of segregated programs for the continued existence of sheltered workshops. The initial chapter, which provides an excellent historical base for the development of these positions, assists the reader in understanding both perspectives clearly.

After this initial chapter, Murphy and Rogan provide an in-depth description of the conversion of an agency in New York, Pioneer, with which Murphy was closely associated as executive director. These chapters provide a credibility to the entire book as the authors can speak from first-hand experience about the challenges of conversion, and, above all, about the viability of such organizational change. Subsequent chapters profile the conversion efforts of three additional rehabilitation agencies: Kaposia, Inc., in Minnesota; Avatrac in Colorado; and New Horizons in Wisconsin. These chapters are also presented as agency case studies with liberal use of direct quotations from agency executive directors. The final two chapters highlight common issues in the process of conversion and then discuss such efforts in terms of a broader national agenda to refocus energy on expanding integrated employment opportunities while reducing segregated options.

It is essential to remember the times during which this book has appeared. Sheltered workshops and other segregated services are alive and well and easily found in almost any area. Families of people with disabilities who are leaving special education continue to count themselves lucky to find any service, including segregated services that offer 'protection'. Finally, in most communities, supported employment continues to be viewed as another step in an already established continuum of adult services. Murphy and Rogan's book is an important and visible step toward challenging the current situation with a sense of urgency and commitment.

#### *General highlights*

- The inclusion of perspectives by service recipients and staff at Pioneer provide a valuable glimpse into the change process. In particular, the chapter devoted to perspectives of workshop participants before and after entering community employment is excellent and highlights the critical need to listen to one's customers. As stated by one participant, Jerry, '... Well, sheltered work was a little different. All we did was put useless things together, take them apart, and start over again. That doesn't make you feel very good about yourself...' (p. 102). Perspectives such as these are often overlooked in our analyses of rehabilitation services.
- The clarity of the authors' values and commitment to integrated employment are exemplary. While it is important to understand the arguments for the continuation of segregated services, the acceptance of such perspectives may well impede positive change. Murphy and Rogan have clearly lost patience with the perpetuation of segregated services, and the reader knows this from the outset.
- This book, although addressing such complex issues of needed policy change at the federal level, is above all a practical and useful guide for personnel of rehabilitation agencies who want to make serious changes in their services. In particular, the detailed perspectives of executive directors in excellent material

that could well assist other leaders who are considering positive change to learn from others' experiences.

- Tying the common elements of successful change to a larger agenda for change in rehabilitation services is a strength of the final chapters. This allows readers to understand that agencies face numerous disincentives for change that will continue to impede the replacement of segregated services with integrated employment opportunities until federal policies are revised. This, in turn, highlights once again the importance of agency leadership in making change.
- The forward by Judith Heumann, Assistant Secretary of OSERS, provides an excellent entry into the book and a context for the ensuing chapters.

#### *Specific areas of excellence*

- The in-depth case study of Pioneer is both unique and valuable. The four chapters devoted to this agency's efforts provide readers with greater detail than is generally available. This type of detailed case study should be an example for other agencies who are in the change process, as every example that can be understood adds to our knowledge base about conversion.
- The consumer perspectives before and after entry into integrated employment are superb! For many agencies, the perspectives of consumers are the most important impetus for change. Consumer perspectives as recorded in this book would be valuable for all agencies to record, particularly during the beginning stages of the change process.

#### *Areas in which this publication could be improved*

- The inclusion of perspectives of other stakeholders, particularly participants, in the case studies of Kaposia, New Horizons, and Avatrak, as was included in the earlier chapters on Pioneer, would have been beneficial.

- It would have been beneficial to learn more about how boards of directors reacted to change. These individuals are in critical leadership positions, and it would help readers to better understand their reactions, fears, resistance, risk-taking, and general perceptions to the radical changes that their agencies experienced.
- My major concern is whether or not this book will get into the right hands of agency leaders who are considering conversion. The same clarity of values that makes this book excellent may make it difficult reading for some who need to read it!

#### *Common threads throughout this publication*

- Conversion cannot follow a cook-book approach. Each of the agency profiles, while sharing similarities, have a number of differences about what served as the initial impetus for change and what sustained or enhanced it. Thus, the elements for successful conversion contained in the final chapters are not presented as steps to be followed, but as potentially key points in that agencies cannot change without focused and committed leadership. In addition, the values and beliefs, based upon which the agency changes, must be clarified not only internally, but also externally with all constituents and stakeholders.
- Change requires risk and commitment. None of the agencies profiled knew exactly where their efforts would lead. In several cases, agencies did not start off by trying to eliminate segregated services. Particular risk was required to close future entry to segregated services and to not 'backfill' once individuals left the workshop for integrated employment.
- Change will result in both internal and external resistance. In one case, the agency experienced 100% turnover of staff. Community human service professionals and family members of service recipients were another source of resistance in many cases. Again, clear leadership is essential to meeting this challenge.

*Recommended uses for rehabilitation professionals*

- This text would be extremely valuable for rehabilitation professionals who are currently associated with agencies that are in the process of or are considering changing their services. In particular, agency executive directors and senior management staff could benefit from reading it. In addition, members of boards of directors could well use this book.
- Representatives from vocational rehabilitation, mental retardation/developmental disabilities, or mental health agencies that fund

rehabilitation service agencies should read this book with an eye toward the need for creative and flexible funding strategies to reinforce and support conversion efforts.

- Students in pre-service rehabilitation and special education programs should read this book to better understand the rehabilitation system as it exists today and how it can change for the better.

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