

## Best Practices in Supported Employment

### WILLOWBROOK

In 1965, Senator Robert Kennedy, accompanied by a television crew, toured the Willowbrook State School in New York and described what he saw during his visit:

*"I think that at the state institution for the mentally retarded, and I think that particularly at Willowbrook, we have a situation that borders on a snake pit, and that the children live in filth, that many of our fellow citizens are suffering tremendously because lack of attention, lack of imagination, lack of adequate manpower. There is very little future for these children, for those who are in these institutions. Both need a tremendous overhauling. I'm not saying that those who are the attendants there, or who run the institutions, are at fault – I think all of us are at fault and I think it's just long overdue that something be done about it."* -Robert Kennedy, 1965 (MNDDC [Kennedy], Date Published)

In 1966, Burton Blatt, a professor at Syracuse University, and Fred Kaplan echoed Senator Kennedy's attack on institutions with their photographic essay entitled *Christmas in Purgatory* (Blatt, B., and Kaplan, F., 1974). Using a hidden camera, Blatt and Kaplan captured life inside the public institutions. The following year, their essay was published in *Look* magazine (Taylor, Ph.D, Steven J, 2006) and drew a large reader response. In this essay, Dr. Blatt declared that *"there is a hell on earth, and in America there is a special inferno – the institution"* (Blatt and Kaplan, 1974).

In the late 60's Scandinavia, Dr. Bengt Nirje, Secretary General of the Swedish Parents Association for Mentally Retarded Children, worked with others in formalizing the principle of normalization (Nirje, Bengt, 1969). He described this principle as a normal rhythm of the day (eating, sleeping); a normal routine (living, working, schooling); normal developmental experiences; the chance to make choices; and the right to live, work and play in normal communities.

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