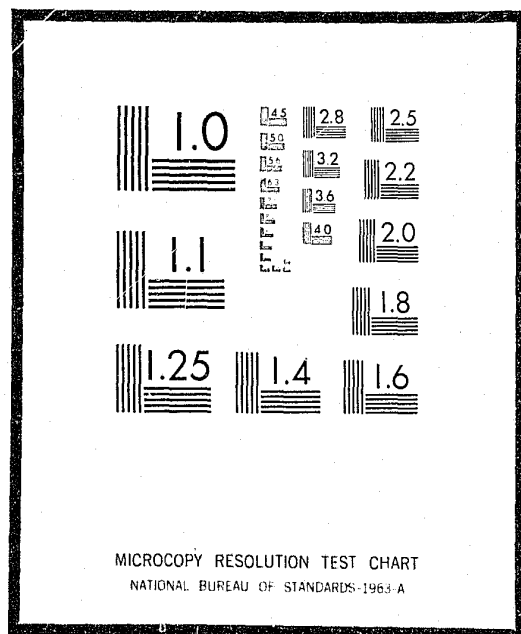


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VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION OPERATIONS  
WITHIN A PRISON SYSTEM: ONE APPROACH  
TO SERVING THE MENTALLY RETARDED  
PUBLIC OFFENDER

William R. Phelps

West Virginia Division of Vocational  
Rehabilitation  
Charleston, West Virginia

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The purpose of this paper is to present one approach to providing vocational rehabilitation for the mentally retarded public offender. The rehabilitation process for prison inmates is described, one southeastern state program is reviewed from an operational point of view and some traits and characteristics of the mentally retarded public offender are identified.			
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VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION OPERATIONS  
WITHIN A PRISON SYSTEM

ONE APPROACH TO SERVING THE MENTALLY  
RETARDED PUBLIC OFFENDER

It is appalling to learn, after studying statistical data, that the majority of crimes committed today are by youths with an average age of 15 years. With dismay we see, despite the many efforts directed toward crime prevention, there is an all-time increase in crime. Rehabilitation of the prisoner while he is incarcerated is one of the many ways to prevent future crimes. Despite the increase in the rehabilitation programs in our prison systems, John and Bill are two of a group of prison inmates who will be neglected, for they are mentally retarded.

John has been diagnosed as a mental retardate. What does this mean in terms of human life? First, John, age 17, can be described as a latent homosexual who is easily influenced by others. He can read on a first-grade level and knows how to do simple addition and subtraction. He cannot tell time, do multiplication or division. John knows no trade and has never held a job over a couple of weeks at a time. He is a hostile, anti-social individual who has few friends in society or among the inmate population. Since he has been incarcerated, he has lost all contact with his family and doesn't know where any member of his family now lives. Because of constant failure and rejection, this young man has grown to believe that he isn't capable of learning, so he doesn't try. To sum it all up, John doesn't even know the earth is round.

The second mentally retarded inmate, Bill, age 18, is achieving on a low, high school level. Bill, like John, does not know any vocational trade for he has never had the opportunity to learn one. Given time and help, he could pass a high school equivalency test and learn to master the techniques of a given vocational trade. He does not suffer from a feeling of rejection or from a sense of inability in doing a job. Most of the time, his behavior is socially accepted, however, on numerous occasions, when faced with problems, his reactions will be

emotionally packed with anger or defiance. This reaction will not be planned or deep rooted personality traits but simply an example of poor judgment in dealing with a given situation. Members of Bill's family write and visit him, showing that some family ties do exist.

Thus we can see that mental retardation varies to the same degree that individual people vary in our everyday society. John and Bill present a special problem within our prison systems today, for there is no effective training program geared to the needs of the mentally retarded. Generally, they are housed with the general inmate population where they could learn further criminal techniques from the professional criminal. The old prison inmate usually uses the other prison inmates like John and Bill for the benefit of his own gains to the detriment of the mentally retarded. It is generally known that our prison inmate population is infected with homosexuals, and the mentally retarded is perfect prey for the homosexual. When the homosexual and the mentally retarded are caught in abnormal sexual acts, both of them are punished equally, thereby doing more damage to the mentally retarded than to the homosexual.

By and large, the time spent in prison by John and Bill is unproductive and serves only to break the few remaining community and family ties and further learn criminal techniques and nurture their hostility toward society. It further reduces the control of delinquent behavior after discharge and detracts from the mentally retarded inmate's limited desirability as an employee. In part, the time spent in prison has only suppressed their behavior techniques and taught them nothing in terms of a vocational trade, furthering their education or augmenting social success. Accordingly, new abnormal problems are added to the old ones, greatly increasing their chances of becoming recidivists.

Recognizing the need for special reform of the retarded prison inmate, it was felt that an effective program was needed to help amend the social, vocational and educational inadequacies during the inmate's incarceration. Through adequate

planning, training and teaching, mentally retarded inmates such as John and Bill can return to society as more productive citizens, tax-paying citizens, thereby, substantially reducing the recidivist rate.

The Correctional Rehabilitation Center, one of the latest areas of development by Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of Correction, is the only chance John and Bill might have. A chance for them was made possible through an expansion grant shortly after the 1965 Vocational Rehabilitation Act Amendments were passed. It is obvious after examining available data, that Vocational Rehabilitation services are desperately needed for all prison inmates, especially for the mentally retarded. Although some people find it questionable and hard to understand why a convicted criminal like John or Bill should be helped, they do - by virtue of being human beings - have the right to make their contribution to society if their behavior can be altered to cope with personal and social stress, and if they can be given training to develop their abilities well enough to find their place in today's labor market.

Through a cooperative agreement between Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of Correction, a Correctional Rehabilitation Center was established to train the mentally retarded youthful first offender felons between the ages of 16 and 21. There are approximately 1,000 mental retardates who qualify for this program; therefore, in order to get a general cross section of all those who might qualify, a screening committee was made up of representatives from the Department of Correction and Vocational Rehabilitation to screen those mental retardates who might profit from evaluation and training at the Correctional Rehabilitation Center. In screening these inmates, a mutual agreement from all representatives on the committee must be reached on each inmate before he is transferred to the Correctional Rehabilitation Center for evaluation and training.

Upon arrival of the inmates at the Correctional Rehabilitation Center, they are assigned to a rehabilitation counselor and processed through orientation and a

30-day evaluation. During evaluation, a comprehensive study is made of the inmate outlining his behavioral, educational and vocational needs. A rehabilitation plan is then prepared according to the findings and geared to the individual needs of each inmate. The rehabilitation plan is never so rigid that it cannot be altered during the rehabilitation process for each inmate.

The general rehabilitation process of each inmate, such as John and Bill, is broken down into eight phases:

1. Referral - The selection of mentally retarded inmates from other prison units by a screening committee comprised of Vocational Rehabilitation and Department of Correction designees. Each referral must be mutually agreed upon by each committee member before the inmate is referred to the Correctional Rehabilitation Center.
2. Orientation - Upon the arrival of the inmate at the Correctional Rehabilitation Center, he is assigned to a rehabilitation counselor according to the geographical location of the inmate. The counselor discusses with the inmate why he was selected for this program, what the Correctional Rehabilitation Center has to offer him, the general rules and policies during the training process, a general review of prison rules and policies, and an introduction to all staff members who will be affiliated with his rehabilitation while he is at the Correctional Rehabilitation Center.
3. Evaluation - A diagnostic procedure to determine, as adequately as possible, the deficiencies of the inmate and a prescription for treatment to correct these deficiencies.
4. Guidance and Counseling - Services provided by the rehabilitation counselor during the entire rehabilitation process, from referral to closure, to insure that the inmate performs with his maximum

abilities and with maximum efforts. Available resources to achieve a maximum potential of rehabilitation of the inmate are brought in as necessary.

5. Training - All clients are involved in academic, vocational and social adjustment training. All teaching is directed on an individual basis, allowing the inmate to progress at his own rate of speed. Physical education is also provided.
6. Prerelease - A retesting period prior to the inmate's prison release to determine how much progress he has made during his training. Those areas he is the weakest in are given special attention, and a general review of all subject matter is covered during this period. Final work is done by the rehabilitation counselor toward job placement for the inmate.
7. Release - This is the processing out of prison by the inmate into social life. This transition is made as smoothly as possible by the counselor for the inmate to alleviate adjustment problems that usually confront the inmate immediately following prison release.
8. Employment and Follow-Up - The counselor will insure that the client is at the job the same day of release or the day after release. This job is in the same area of work the client was trained. Intensive follow-up is made the first 30 days to help the client with unexpected problems. Thereafter, the counselor will regulate follow-up of the client according to the needs.

Each phase is an intricate part of the general rehabilitation process and gradually merges from one phase to the next without interruption.

The initial adjustment at the Correctional Rehabilitation Center is rather difficult for the inmate. Realizing that loneliness, homesickness and adjustment to prison routines present some problems for John and Bill during the first few

weeks of their stay at the Correctional Rehabilitation Center, the counselor works with these clients intensively. The inmates need a friend they can trust and a friend they can discuss family and personal problems with. These first few weeks also give the counselor the opportunity to establish the client-counselor rapport which is desperately needed during the entire rehabilitation process.

As early as possible after the arrival of the inmates, the rehabilitation counselor will visit the inmate's hometown for a social history. From the social histories, a comparison is made of their behavior in society with their behavior at the Correctional Rehabilitation Center. This comparison gives the counselor a total picture of the inmate's behavior inside and outside of prison. The counselor uses this information to work on a social adjustment plan to fill the social needs during their rehabilitation training. After about the fourth week of working with a particular inmate, he can generally be classified into one of two groups of delinquent patterns for our purpose. By equating his behavior in society to that inside prison, he is generally classified as an acute or chronic delinquent.

Bill might be classified as the acute delinquent, which is generally the easier of the two types to work with. The prognosis for rehabilitation is greater because he understands himself better. From social histories, we learn that he has closer family and community ties because his family and community have something in common with him. The home is located in a semi-slum area with decent neighbors who have similar standards of living. The parents usually live together and at least one is employed full time. There is less mental illness in the family, however, some alcoholism is found. During the first few weeks of adjustment during incarceration, the acute delinquent, like Bill, can make quicker and better adjustment to prison routines. Like others, he resents being in prison, however, he is obviously taught in early childhood to obey authorities and to make the best of any problems which confront him. Usually the acute delinquent is sent to prison for such crimes as rape, manslaughter, first or second degree murder, forgery and arson. Of course,

there are other criminal offenses, but generally, we have experienced this particular trend. The probable cause for such severe criminal offenses is not so much related to parental guidance and counseling but to poor judgment in spontaneous emotional reaction of the client in a given situation.

John's classification is more like that of a chronic delinquent. The chronic delinquent is the most difficult client to work with. Generally, he is unsocialized and a hostile individual. He is resentful, bitter, and utterly devoid of ever winning the approval of others. He lacks self-confidence and such social techniques as he may have acquired are, for the most part, ego-defense mechanisms. Bullying, direct violence and automatic denials are representatives of his clumsy efforts toward personality integration.

A chronic delinquent such as John has a very maligned family background. If the family is intact (often, it is not), they live in a slum area in an inadequate family dwelling. At times, more than one family is living in the same house. Social histories of clients like John indicate family histories of alcoholism, chronic unemployment, mental illness and often times, family members who have served prison terms before. In certain cases, this is a prestigious factor.

The most typical crimes committed by the chronic delinquent are breaking and entering, larceny, auto larceny, forgery, receiving stolen goods and assault. These social tools of behavior are generally learned in pre-adolescence in order to prove their masculinity to their peer group and to impress family members who behave in the same fashion. In addition, such behavior is direct identification with those people who approve of delinquent behavior.

Needless to say, John, the chronic delinquent, having come from the destitute environment described above, is not inclined to be educationally or vocationally oriented. In general, with mental retardation as a handicap, compounded with the handicap of mal-behavior, he is a very complicated and challenging client for Vocational Rehabilitation. When John UNDERSTANDS that his training and schooling will

be meaningful to him in the future, the rehabilitation process is much easier. Until this point is reached in the rehabilitation process, the rehabilitation team is confronted with human nature in its most unattractive form.

John, Bill and other inmates react to vocational and educational training, guidance and counseling in different ways. Bill may be very anxious to learn. John may be very drab, and still others prove to be completely apathetic. In general, they react to classroom activities and vocational training presumably the same way they reacted to the public schools, that is, they are apprehensive about controlled supervision and teaching and try to find alternate ways to cope with stress during class. Those who think they are doomed for failure and have experienced failure practically all of their lives, are naturally the most difficult to work with. This, no less, is the chronic delinquent. Until they are taught better ways of living, they are perfectly willing to live a life of failure, primarily because this is a learned pattern of life. To break the general trend of failure identification, motivation toward success identification is generally needed among all inmates.

One of the greatest motivational goals that we have at the Correctional Rehabilitation Center is to allow inmates like John and Bill to prove themselves worthy to attend a learning lab. Of course, to meet the standards to attend these learning labs, the inmate must have obtained a 4.0 achievement level, show that he is trustworthy, and above all, show a genuine interest to better himself socially, educationally, and vocationally. Those inmates who are permitted to attend these learning labs during the day attend four two-hour sessions each day. They have certain standards to conform to during this time, and the least infraction will violate their privilege to continue. It must be said that it is a terrific struggle for some of the inmates to comply with the rules and regulations, but it teaches them they can conform to minimum standards of behavior. As long as they conform with rules and regulations, they are permitted to continue their study at the learning labs.

Periodic meetings are conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning labs among the inmates who attend. Among the many things that are talked about and discussed are :

1. Learning is fun if they can progress at their own rate of speed, which promotes competition within themselves.
2. They would like to spend an equal amount of time in academic study to that spent in vocational trade study and practice. In addition, they do not want any time taken away from them that they can spend in group counseling sessions.
3. They are more receptive toward supervision than before.
4. They enjoy enduring more responsibility.
5. Above all, they are more self-disciplined than before, because within themselves they have found self-worth.

Each trade offered is broken down into minute elements of study to insure that each inmate will learn the basic fundamentals of each trade. Each inmate progresses at his own rate of speed, which takes into account individual differences. Probably the most amazing factor in vocational training is when the inmates who have never done constructive work before learn they do have abilities which have been unidentified and now they have the opportunity to develop these abilities to master certain trade techniques. Their mastery is slow in comparison to the average, but it is in proportion to fellow classmates.

Group counseling is used quite extensively to develop interaction and personal communication. Free speech is advocated by the counselor so that the inmate may discuss any problems which confront him. The counseling sessions are supervised by the counselor but are conducted and carried out by the inmates. They are at liberty to select their own chairman, and the chairman regulates the counseling sessions.

Many results are observed from group counseling sessions. Perhaps the most outstanding ones are helping inmates like John and Bill develop verbal communication techniques, voicing their approval or disapproval about certain issues and policies, developing personal and social problem solving techniques and developing general social techniques.

The Correctional Rehabilitation team consists of the following staff members: a supervisor, rehabilitation counselor, job placement specialist, job evaluator, three vocational trade instructors, rehabilitation aide, special education teacher and a stenographer. All of these team members came from different walks of life, however, they have one thing in common: They are interested in the mentally retarded youthful first offender. Their training in Vocational Rehabilitation had to be speedy to meet the needs of the program, and with their dedication and effort, they have come a long way and are doing an excellent job in the training area.

Under semi-standard facility conditions of operating the Correctional Rehabilitation Center, it is believed that it has proven its worth in terms of the rehabilitation of the mentally retarded youthful first offender felon. There are many factors contributing to the success of the operation:

1. The amount of time we have to provide guidance and counseling, special education and job training for each inmate.
2. Inability of the client to drop out of training when he feels like it.
3. Developing good work habits of the client.
4. Developing sociably accepted standards of living.
5. Instant, satisfactory job placement after prison release or parole. (This reduces idleness).
6. Follow-up after employment.

It is believed that a more effective job could be done if adequate facilities were available to accomplish the objectives that we have set out to accomplish.

What does the production of this program mean in terms of John and Bill? John will not get a Ph.D. Degree, but in less than 18 months, he will move from a first-grade achievement level to a low, fourth-grade achievement level, and he will qualify and be placed in a job as a brick mason. He is still not a socialite, but he has made a few friends. He is still somewhat a bully, but not as much of the time, for he has now constructive ways to spend his time. Most important, he feels he is capable of learning and doing something for himself, a feeling which he has never had before.

For Bill, he will be getting out on parole soon, and he will make a fairly good cook. He is about prepared to take his high school equivalency exam. Perhaps he will not pass it, but he has found within himself how to better cope with failure and he is motivated enough to work until he passes it. He has not completely eliminated his impulsive actions, but he had made improvement. He has also picked up qualities that have made him a leader among other inmates and will be a much better citizen in society than he was before he came to prison.

In general, the production of this program has been somewhat slow in comparison to other programs of Vocational Rehabilitation in terms of rehabilitation closures. However, it is believed that society will profit in the long run by returning to society a more productive citizen with less chance of recidivism and an individual who can talk with a potential delinquent and perhaps turn that delinquent back into a productive citizen rather than becoming a delinquent. All of the inmates who have been discharged or paroled directly from the Correctional Rehabilitation Center have been placed directly on a job the day following their release. The average wage of these inmates is \$1.60 per hour. This \$1.60 per hour is to be compared with no money earned prior to their incarceration. In the long run, the amount

of taxes that will be paid by these retardates and the amount of taxes they will save tax payers in the future, will pay for their rehabilitation training during their tenure at the Correctional Rehabilitation Center.

\*State described is located in Southeastern United States.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

### PERSONAL DATA:

Name: William R. Phelps  
Address: 873 Observatory Drive, St. Albans, West Virginia 25177  
Office Address: 2019 Washington Street, East, P & G Building, Charleston  
West Virginia 25305  
Telephone: Area Code 304 -- 727-2776 (Residence)  
304 -- 348-2379 (Office)  
Date of Birth: March 4, 1931  
Place of Birth: Hurricane, West Virginia  
Marital Status: Married

### EDUCATION:

134 Hrs. - A.B. 1954 Glenville State College - Major Subject: Psychology & Education  
49 Hrs. - M.S. 1957 West Virginia University - Major Subject: Rehab. Counseling  
70 Hrs. - M.A. 1965 Marshall University - Major Subject: Clinical Psychology  
22 Hrs. - 1959 University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri- Major Subject:  
Counseling Psychology  
4 Hrs. Columbia University - Major Subject: Rehabilitation Counseling  
Mental Retardation  
279 Sem. Hrs.

### CERTIFICATION:

Certified Psychologist, West Virginia Psychological Association  
Licensed Psychologist (State of W. Va.) License #22  
Teacher Certification (Secondary Education) State of West Virginia

### MILITARY SERVICE:

None

### EXPERIENCE:

Cabell County Board of Education, 620 20th Street, Huntington, West Virginia  
(Summers of 1947 and 1948) Laborer  
Hudson Motor Car Company, Jefferson Avenue, Detroit, Michigan  
(1949-50) Assembly Line Work  
Babcock and Wilcox Company, Barberton, Ohio  
(Summers of 1951, 1952, 1953) Plant Maintenance Helper  
Putnam County Department of Welfare, Winfield, West Virginia  
(1954-1955) Social Caseworker  
Putnam County Board of Education, Winfield, West Virginia  
High School Instructor - Poca High School - 1955  
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Charleston, West Virginia  
Rehabilitation Counselor - 1955-59  
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Charleston, West Virginia  
State Psychologist - 1959-61  
West Virginia Rehabilitation Center, Institute, West Virginia  
Assistant Administrator - 1961-62  
West Virginia Rehabilitation Center, Institute, West Virginia  
Project Director - Mentally Retarded Females - 1962-65  
West Virginia Rehabilitation Center, Institute, West Virginia  
Assistant Administrator - 1965-66  
West Virginia Rehabilitation Center, Institute, West Virginia  
Administrator, July 1, 1966 - January 1, 1968  
Regional Counselor Training Center, Charleston, West Virginia  
Program Director, January 1, 1968 to Present



Lecturer, Mental Retardation Training Institute, Butner, North Carolina  
(University of N.C.)  
Vocational Witness - Social Security Administration (Bureau of Hearings and Appeals)

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American Psychological Association - APA  
West Virginia Psychological Association  
American Personnel and Guidance Association - APGA  
National Rehabilitation Counseling Association - NRA  
American Rehabilitation Counseling Association - APCA  
West Virginia Welfare Conference, Inc.  
American Association on Mental Deficiency - AAMD  
National Association for Retarded Children  
West Virginia Rehabilitation Association (Board of Directors)  
West Virginia Mental Health Association, Inc.  
West Virginia Association for Retarded Children, Inc.  
West Virginia Guidance Association  
International Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, Inc. (IARF)

CIVIC, SOCIAL, OR FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS:

Kivans International, Capital Group  
Highlawn Baptist Church, St. Albans, West Virginia 25177  
Kanawha Valley Area Psychologists

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