

THE HARTFEL HOUSE



N88 W17630 Christman Rd
Menomonee Falls, WI 53051



ALICE HARTFEL
1915 - 1997

BACKGROUND FACTS

Cognitively Disabled is the present “politically correct” term for our mentally retarded. It is just one of five classifications of handicapped under the Developmentally Disabled umbrella; the other four being Autism, Epilepsy, Cerebral Palsy, and Traumatic Brain Injuries. Together the Developmentally Disabled total 1 of 33 in our society. Mentally retarded people encompass about one percent of our population. They are further classified as

Mild (IQ 50-70) which are educable to self sufficiency

Moderate (IQ 35-50) which take care of themselves and work in home or sheltered situations

Severe (IQ 20-35) which are limited economically and in self care

Profound (IQ 0-20) which need continual care.

Downs Syndrome is just one of many causes of retardation. The Mongoloid features are not present in all retarded, the majority are physically normal. Being retarded once consigned one to a short life span; 30 years was average; 55 was maximum. Now, improved medicine has greatly improved their life expectancy. Downs Syndrome is a precursor of Alzheimer’s disease.

As late as the 1960s, many Doctors would not tell parents they had a retarded child, just leaving them to discover it. Other Doctors just presented the parents with commitment papers to have the child immediately institutionalized. Sadly, there are cases in Wisconsin’s past where retarded children were forcibly removed from their families.

The majority of retarded people traditionally have, and still do, reside with their parents as long as possible, and then live with their siblings for their remaining years. This is possible because they exude an unconditional love of others. The norm back in the 1930s, 40s and 50s was for them not to have any contact outside their families; they were a stigma to their families. They were hidden away in back rooms and upstairs almost as if the parents were ashamed of them or worried that the state would come and get them as it had done in Nazi Germany where they were the first to go to the gas chambers

Only when the family support network failed, was it necessary for the community to become involved. When the State had to become involved, the people classified as retarded were institutionalized at Northern (Chippewa Falls), Central (Madison), and Southern (Union Grove) Colonies. The Colonies separately warehoused criminals, the insane, disabled and sick (tuberculosis). The Colonies were operated by the Department of Corrections. The Colonies, renamed Centers, reached their peak in the 1960’s and still operate today.

The retarded have long been the object of jokes and ridicule. The taunts, the hurt, and the humiliation is a difficult cross they bear, especially difficult as teenagers. But their child-like innocence, the love they give, and their inability to hold a grudge, are winning them respect in our society.

ALICE HARTFEL

Homer, born to Ed and Alice Hartfel in 1952, was retarded. Alice, with degrees in nursing and social work, was the perfect mother to pursue his health problems. The cause of Homer's retardation was finally diagnosed as PKU. He was then treated with a special diet. He did improve some, but will always be retarded. Ed and Alice had another son, Rick, and he was immediately tested and found with PKU too. Rick was treated for PKU for eight years; when the treatment was terminated, he was found not to be retarded. With her own children as the perfect test case, Alice pursued testing for the PKU condition to where every child born in Wisconsin is now tested at birth. The Hartfel family was with Governor Knowles when he signed the compulsory testing law in 1965. Alice became a national authority on PKU.

Homer was Alice's pride and joy. She needed no official position to push for services for Homer and other retarded citizens. She was assertive, persistent and tactful. She was a professional who challenged other professionals and didn't accept "no" as an answer. She was a strong advocate and an activist when necessary. She was short and stout and loved to hug. She is also described as very kind, pleasant, and compassionate.

Alice was a co-founder of the Menomonee Falls chapter of ARC (Association for Retarded Citizens) in 1956 and was active in ARC at the county and state levels for over 20 years. In 1976, she was given the Wisconsin ARC Hall of Honor award at its convention in Madison.

Alice challenged the outmoded education standard of the time and got Homer mainstreamed thru the Menomonee Falls school system. She pushed for a full public education requirement for all retarded students and was with the Governor again in 1970 when he signed that into law.

In 1962 Alice and Phyllis Waters opened the Menomonee Falls Center sponsored by the Menomonee Falls ARC. Patsy Baer was the only paid teacher. Phyllis was the unpaid Director and Alice the unpaid Parent Counselor. The philosophy was that a handicapped child should have a program in their own community. It started in one room at United Methodist Church and expanded to many rooms at Riverside school. It was incorporated in 1975 as Children's Community Center; its work integrated with the ARC program. In 1992, Children's Community Center built a 20 classroom school on Christman Road right next door to Good Shepherd and the Hartfel House on land purchased from Good Shepherd.

In the 1970's the push to deinstitutionalize the residents of the Colonies was led by the ARC and Alice Hartfel. The modern approach was that the retarded should, after graduation from high school, work in the community and live with their peers in a group home. Alice was Waukesha County Residential Care Coordinator. She appealed the Social Security Administration's decision denying assistance to handicapped adults who worked, but were unable to make enough to support themselves. She appealed this discrimination, and won! For everything she did, she always reminded others that she didn't do it alone, that she had lots of help.

GOOD SHEPHERD

Founded in 1957, Good Shepherd Catholic Church had constructed a church-school building and a convent to house 8 nuns. By 1971 it became financially necessary to close the school. The convent and most of the school building were vacant and the Parish was in great need of income, but they would only rent space for a sound social purpose. When the vacancies came to Alice Hartfel's attention, she had the ARC approach Fr Francis Eschweiler, Fr Roger Boesch, trustee Don Schneiders and the Parish Council. The Council quickly approved the use of the convent as a group home. It was to be Waukesha County's first. Alice and the ARC put Good Shepherd in contact With New Concepts Foundation of Wisconsin, a non profit corporation established to organize and operate group homes. Negotiations succeeded and in January ,1974 the county's first group home opened in the former convent. When discussion got around to what to call this group home, Phyllis Waters replied "The Hartfel House" and so it was. The ARC made it official. Alice was overwhelmed; she said that she thought that a person had to be dead for their name to be put on a building; and she wasn't dead yet!

Later, the Waukesha County ARC rented 10 classrooms, hall and kitchen from Good Shepherd for teaching young people, male and female, the simple tasks like crafts and hygiene. The venture was well received by the community. The financial advantages to Good Shepherd were pronounced and the ARC met the parish's requirement of a sound social purpose. The parish hall has always been the site of the Hartfel House and ARC parties.

THE HARTFEL HOUSE

The supervised residential home was occupied by 8 developmentally impaired men judged by their therapists and doctors to be ready to be guided in the daily living experience that others might take for granted. Local supervision was difficult for the New Concepts Foundation to find. Bob and Amy Goffee, and Mr. and Mrs. Plack were both short term managers. Then, in a pinch, New Concepts asked Wilma Robinson to come for a week. Alice Hartfel asked her to stay - she did - for 15 years! Wilma and Theodis Robinson and their son , Leajato, got the house running smoothly. Wilma fondly remembers her many contacts with her Good Shepherd neighbors; they were so supportive. Fr Fran even delivered her son's lunch to school (she didn't drive). The Robinsons helped integrate Menomonee Falls and have many tales to tell. Wilma is now a Music Professor at Carroll College in Waukesha. Her son Leajato, a Julliard graduate, is in the nation's music scene.

When the Robinsons moved on in 1989, Barbara and Raymond Price moved in and the house continued to run well. By 1994, New Concepts Foundation was bankrupt ; therefore the future of the house was in doubt. But there was no way that the people of Good Shepherd would let it go away. STEP,Inc , a non profit corporation was established by the Prices with representatives of the parish, community and residents on the Board of Directors. Waukesha County leaders were overjoyed and very supportive; their prize group home would continue - Alice Hartfel's dream would not die!

Improvements were in order for the Hartfel House; Separate utilities in 1995, air conditioning in 1996, managers' apartment built in 1997, bathroom remodeling in 2005 and (after 45 years) a new roof in 2006 were all accomplished with solid planning by the Prices and 'creative' financing by Joe Strazishar, Good Shepherd Parish Administrator.

The Hartfel House has had many angels. The Community League was there to clean and furnish even before the doors opened. The KC's (Council 4240) have been there with Tootsie Rolls, money and fun. And the people of Good Shepherd always help. Speaking of angels- back in the 1990's, resident Jimmy told everyone that his mother had died (He reasoned this because he didn't see her any more.(She had moved to a Florida nursing home). We all laughed at his reasoning, but before you knew it , an angel, The Community League, sent Barbara \$500 to take Jimmy to Florida to visit his mother..

THE RESIDENTS

What has made the Hartfel House a real home is the residents .They are well known and well loved by all.



Andy



Steve



Brian



Mark



Lowell



Bill



Kevin



Jason



Jimmy



Kevin



Bob



Ron

YOUNG FRIENDS



Destiny



Madisyn



Lanacia



Andrew M.

THE VOLUNTEERS



Tom



Fran



Dennis

5



Jim



Ashley



Rob

THE STAFF



Bob Howe



Ellie



John



Tom & Pat Wanger



Mike



Kristin



Jasmin



Travis

THE DIRECTORS



Wilma & Leajato Robinson



Barbara & Raymond Price

WRITER'S NOTE: This paper was prepared for Good Shepherd's 50th anniversary and to answer any question of how and why the Hartfel House is so named. The name selected was outstanding and well deserved. Hartfel House and so much of what Alice did was too late for her son, Homer, but not for others. Alice Hartfel was a pleasant, assertive advocate with a vision.

Sources include Ethel and Mary Clough, Dennis Farrell, Cletus Fleming, Margaret Hartfel, Barbara Price, Wilma Robinson, Phyllis Waters and Pat Wanger Seftar.

Thomas L Dueppen
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