

YOU AND I
by Elaine Popovich

I am a resident. You reside.

I am admitted. You move in.

I am aggressive. You are assertive.

I have behavior problems. You are rude.

I am noncompliant. You don't like being told what to do.

When I ask you out for dinner, it is an outing. When you ask someone out, it is a date.

I made mistakes during my check-writing program. Someday I might get a bank account. You forgot to record some withdrawals from your account. The bank called to remind you.

I wanted to talk with the nice-looking person behind us at the grocery store. I was told that it is inappropriate to talk to strangers. You met your spouse in the produce department. Neither of you could find the bean sprouts.

I celebrated my birthday yesterday with five other residents and two staff members. I hope my family sends a card. Your family threw you a surprise party. Your brother couldn't make it from out of state. It sounded wonderful!

My case manager sends a report every month to my guardian. It says everything I did wrong and some things I did right. You are still mad at your sister for calling your Mom after you got that speeding ticket.

I am learning household skills. You hate housework.

I am learning leisure skills. Your shirt says you are a "Couch Potato."

After I do my budget program tonight, I might get to go to McDonald's if I have enough money. You were glad that the new French restaurant took your charge card.

My case manager, psychologist, R. N., occupational and physical therapist, nutritionist and house staff set goals for me for the next year. You haven't decided what you want out of life.

Someday I will be discharged . . . maybe. You will move onward and upward.

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Throughout history, people with physical and mental disabilities have been abandoned at birth, banished from society, used as court jesters, drowned and burned during The Inquisition, gassed in Nazi Germany, and still continue to be segregated, institutionalized, tortured in the name of behavior management, abused, raped, euthanized, and murdered.

Now, for the first time, people with disabilities are taking their rightful place as fully contributing citizens.

The danger is that we will respond with remediation and benevolence rather than equity and respect. And so, we offer you:

A Credo for Support

Do not see my disability as the problem. Recognize that my disability is an attribute.

Do not see my disability as a deficit. It is you who see me as deviant and helpless.

Do not try to fix me because I am not broken. Support me. I can make my contribution to the community in my own way.

Do not see me as your client. I am your fellow citizen. See me as your neighbor. Remember, none of us can be self-sufficient.

Do not try to modify my behavior. Be still & listen. What you define as inappropriate may be my attempt to communicate with you in the only way I can.

Do not try to change me, you have no right. Help me learn what I want to know.

Do not hide your uncertainty behind “professional” distance. Be a person who listens and does not take my struggle away from me by trying to make it all better. Do not use theories and strategies on me. Be with me. And when we struggle with each other, let that give use to self-reflection.

Do not try to control me. I have a right to my power as a person. What you call non-compliance or manipulation may actually be the only way I can exert some control over my life.

Do not teach me to be obedient, submissive and polite. I need to feel entitled to say No if I am to protect myself.

Do not be charitable towards me. The last thing the world needs is another Jerry Lewis.

Do not try to be my friend. I deserve more than that. Get to know me, we may become friends.

Do not help me, even if it does make you feel good. Ask me if I need your help. Let me show you how you can assist me.

Do not admire me. A desire to live a full life does not warrant adoration. Respect me, for respect presumes equality.

Do not tell, correct, and lead. Listen, support, and follow. Do not work on me. Work with me!

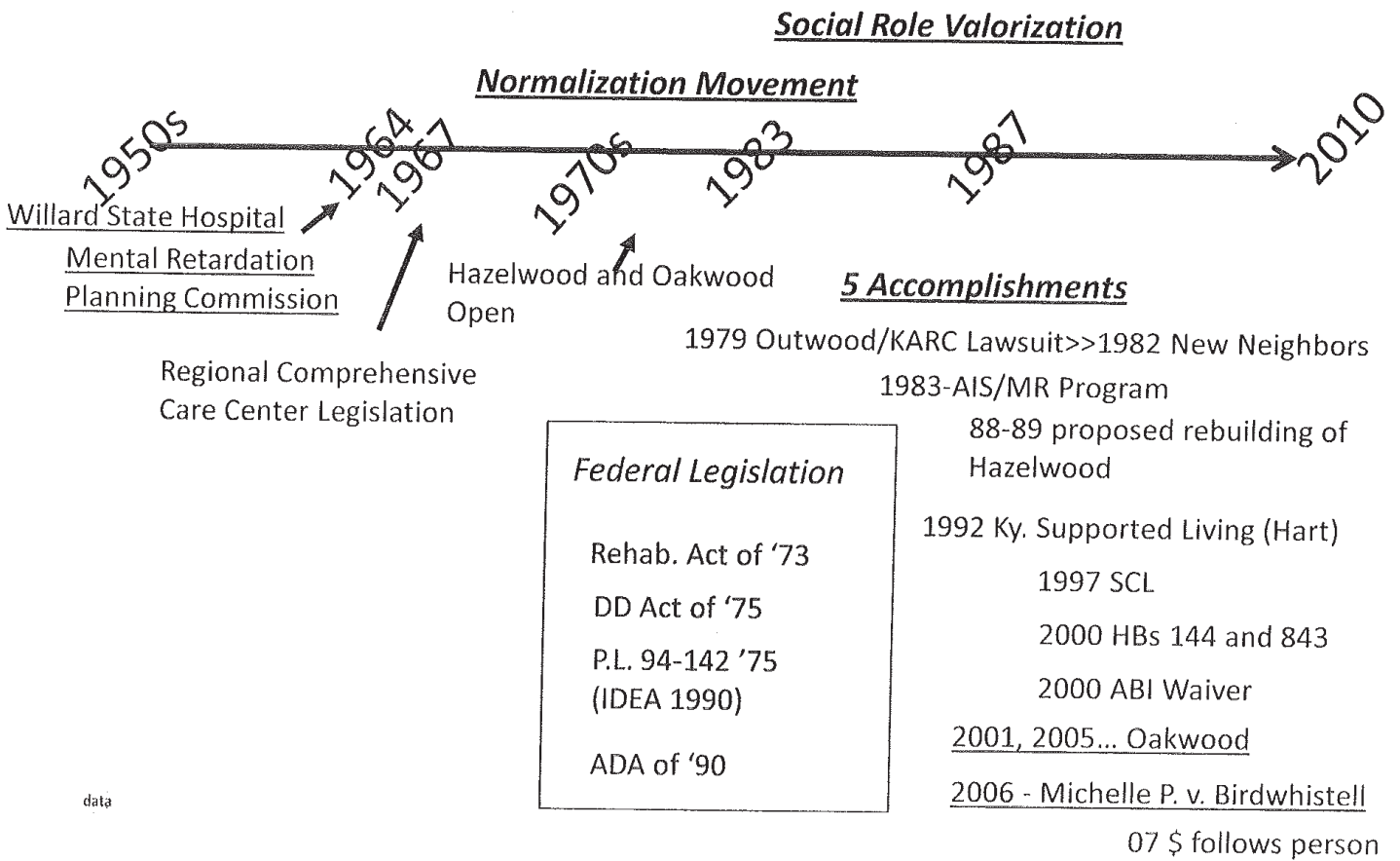
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