



## Diakonie Stetten and its Residents

The Diakonie Stetten is situated in Kernen and other locations in the Rems valley like Waiblingen, Schorndorf, Schwaebisch Gmuend and Lorch. Some more facilities are offered in Stuttgart, Esslingen, Bad Boll and Aalen. This private institution for aid to people needing assistance, which has close connections to the Evangelical Church, was founded in 1849. In the year 2006 Diakonie Stetten and its different branches supported more than 6.000 disabled, unemployed, educationally handicapped young people, mentally ill people and elderly people. The total number of staff is 3.680 (approx. 30% of them in part-time-employment).

With its long tradition in the aid to mentally handicapped people and the large number of opportunities it offers, Diakonie Stetten is well known in the surrounding area. It is well integrated as far as the population and the special education and social aid programme of the Rems-Murr district is concerned. Every human being with a mental handicap is at the same time an individual personality with unique interests and talents, just like every non handicapped person. Mentally handicapped persons do not want to be the target of sympathy or disdain. They want to live in a manner which corresponds to their talents and their interests. And, like all other people, they form our society with their abilities and their needs. This is our philosophy and it is the basis of our public relations work.

We are sure, that persons with a mental handicap, who are reliant on help from others all their lives, are persons with many special talents and interests, including artistic abilities. Most of the artists in our "Creative Workshop", whose pictures could be seen in more than 40 Exhibitions in Europe and South-America, have lived in Stetten since their childhood. They are at home here. As children they visited the school. As adults they work in one of the many units which are necessary for the management of the institution. They live in one of the houses which give Diakonie Stetten its appearance in the 600-year-old castle which previously belonged to the kings of Wuerttemberg, in one of the terraced houses which were built in 1979 in the village of Hangweide which grew up in the years 1957/1958, or in the cradle of the Hohenstaufen emperors, 30 km away, in Elisabethenberg near Lorch-Waldhausen. Diakonie Stetten is a village with many hamlets. And it is a Christian community.

Many of the handicapped residents in Diakonie Stetten were confirmed in the castle chapel in Stetten, some of them were also baptised there. On Sundays they congregate there or in the church hall in Hangweide, together with the staff, for the church service. Jesus Christ is their saviour too. On workdays they meet for morning or evening prayers. Worship, the singing of old and modern hymns, and the telling of bible stories are the most important elements in the services.

From their homes in Stetten the residents take part in the life of the surrounding village communities. Alone or, if they are not safe in traffic or cannot find their way by themselves together with a member of staff, they go shopping in the local shops or take part in village festivities. They spend their holidays in pensions or holiday villages with their comrades or with travel groups which are open to the handicapped.



During the first 90 years of the Diakonie Stetten's history the staff lived under one roof with the handicapped persons, indeed the teachers and nurses shared the rooms with them. Living together with the handicapped - for the founder of our institution and for all members of staff from 1849 until 1940 this was the unquestioned basis of their work. They brought their professional abilities and skills to the work with the handicapped persons and lived with them in a Christian community.

Dr. Georg Friedrich Mueller was a country doctor in the small village of Riet near Vaihingen-on-Enz. He came from a background of Wuerttemberg pietism. His brother-in-law was the Rev. Haldenwang, who had established one of the first institutions for the handicapped in Germany, in Wildberg, Northern Black Forest, near Calw, in 1837. Like him he looked on aid to the handicapped as care for the whole lives of these persons schooling and job training, religion, medical care and community living were the pillars of this work. Together with a pious teacher, a craftsman, his wife, his mother, and his two unmarried sisters, he started the work in 1849 with twelve multiply handicapped children and adolescents. At mealtimes they all sat around one table.

Dr. Mueller, who was director, physician and house father in one, held three services everyday for all. "We commend the children to the merciful care and healing of Jesus Christ. The word of the Lord and prayer are the means which we use", Dr. Mueller reported. But at the same time he used all the educational and therapeutic means of his time to rehabilitate the handicapped persons as fully as possible. He did not know the word "rehabilitation", but he practised it in 1849. Two hours of sport, gymnastics and water therapy, four hours of practical instruction and two hours of music/art education filled in the hours between the three prayer meetings. In 1854 he built the first gymnasium and introduced remedial gymnastics from Sweden. Going for walks was a very important part of his concept and was used as motor therapy and nature study, as well as for training memory, powers of observation and comradely behaviour. "These measures must not be used just once or twice, but regularly, daily."

From the very beginning straw mattresses, straw shoes and woollen shawls were made in Riet, and the money which was brought in by their sale was used to finance the project; in 1860 the first person to complete his training left the institution as a carpenter with a journeyman's certificate in his pocket. The royal Wuerttemberg government looked kindly on the work of the institution and in 1853 Dr. Mueller received a commission to research the causes of "cretinism" as the phenomenon of mental handicap was called in those days. In 1855 he presented his extensive research results, as a result of which the state changed its planning for aid to the handicapped medical care was considered to be secondary to education and training.

Dr. Mueller drew personal consequences from this awareness. In 1860 he passed the directorship of the institution on to his brother-in-law, the teacher Johann Landenberger, who can be described as one of the fathers of modern education of the mentally handicapped. Under his directorship the aid for mentally handicapped children and adolescents was so good that the stream of entrants to the institution continued to swell. Soon there were 200 persons in care. So in 1864 Landenberger purchased Stetten Castle from the royal house of Wuerttemberg and, by making alterations, created small groups with from six up to a maximum of ten residents, which were the real homes of the handicapped persons inside the institution. He trained the carers of the groups, who lived with the handicapped in their rooms, in the principles of special education.



The first World War and the twenties with inflation and joblessness led to the financial and consequentially to the professional downfall of the work. In 1940 the Third Reich ordered the closure of the Diakonie Stetten and the murder of roughly half of this times 750 residents. At that time only faith in Jesus Christ could nourish the hope that the 400 Stettener who did not lose their lives could one day return home. When Inspector Ludwig Schlaich began rebuilding the institution in 1945 many old Stettener returned. And many "new" handicapped persons crowded into the living quarters, workshops and schools. 20 years later there were 1.100 handicapped persons living in the Diakonie Stetten.

In the first 15 years after the war there were practically no facilities for the handicapped other than those run by the churches. From 1965 the tremendous build-up of a modern system of aids for the handicapped occurred. It became a principle that all handicapped people should be able to reach the necessary facilities from their parent's home and receive every possible means of support, thus enabling them to lead as independent a life as possible. A network of infant training schemes, special kindergartens, special schools, work shops, residences and leisure-time facilities spread over the whole of Germany, as was the case in all the industrial nations of the world. The things which Dr. Georg Friedrich Mueller had, as a result of his faith and practical experience, considered to be necessary for mentally handicapped persons were incorporated into legislation 120 years later as the legal right of all persons with a handicap.

The work with the residents of our institution profited from this up swing. It was possible to resume, and in many cases to develop further, the qualified work which had been done between 1849 and 1914. The biblical foundations of our work were recalled. What it was not possible to maintain was the tradition that all the staff lived with the handicapped persons. Today only a few members of staff live nearby the residents and this certainly means a reduction in quality of life for the latter. We see a partial compensation for this in the increased participation by the handicapped in the lives of persons outside the hospital.

What are the main improvements in our work today?

1. Our "School for the Mentally Handicapped" has no lower limit. Every child, no matter how severely handicapped it is, visits the school and receives appropriate and differentiated training of his potential. As was the case 150 years ago the personal relationship of the teacher to the pupil, motor therapy, water therapy and practical instruction are the main factors. The period of schooling lasts between 12 and 18 years.

2. The school career is followed directly by life-long training and support in the sheltered workshop, called Remstal Werkstaetten. Today every adult with a mental handicap can go daily from his home to his job in the workshop.

3. Severely handicapped persons who cannot meet the demands of the sheltered workshop receive daily support and schooling from specialists in a manner which is appropriate for adults in the "Heilpaedagogische Foerderung".

4. An important element which has been recognised in the last few years is the fact that training of the handicapped persons does not end with their entry into adult life, but should be continued life-long. Thus for the great majority of handicapped persons it is not enough that they can go to work



everyday in the sheltered workshop. Every person who is employed in the workshop needs additional stimulation and help from educators besides that which he receives in his work. Just as it has been recognised that, in many fields, life-long training is necessary, and indeed vital, for non-handicapped persons, we know today that adult education is necessary for the mentally handicapped if they are to lead a life which reflects their abilities and their potential. As examples, apart from physiotherapy and occupational therapy, we can mention music therapy, art therapy, therapy on horseback, lay drama and party games, tuition in reading and writing, training in handling of money and road drill, festivities, dancing, primary communication and stimulation, etc.

Every mentally handicapped person needs those forms of stimulation which are suited to him and his potential and he must be able to choose from a selection. Thus every workshop and every residence for the handicapped must have on offer a large number of developmental aids and a broad programme of educational and therapeutic courses in the manner of the adult education system. The courses must be held by trained and experienced professionals and must be seen, on the one hand, as a preliminary step towards the integration of the mentally handicapped into normal adult education, but also, on the other, as a long-term parallel scheme, since only a small number of those employed in the workshops and hardly anyone with a profound handicap can take part integrative classes.

Among persons with a mental handicap there are without doubt always some who possess artistic talent. We must assume that 10% of those who work in a sheltered workshop have this talent. They should be given opportunities to develop their potential further under tuition. The employees of the sheltered workshop should be freed from their regular work for their creative activity. The time in the "Creative Workshop" should be counted as working hours, even though "only" pictures are produced.

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