

## OHIO SAFEGUARDS

Fifty years ago, nearly complete separation from community life was the rule for most Ohio citizens with developmental disabilities. It may now be hard to remember how complete the divide was. More than ten thousand Ohioans were housed in large state-operated institutions, many more were in various private institutions, and thousands more spent their days either in classrooms that were utterly separate from local school districts or in “workshops” that had little if anything to do with ordinary employment or community economies.

I was one of the Ohioans who, in 1975, became convinced that the principle of normalization (later Social Role Valorization—SRV) offered the key for changing that pattern of separation. As several of us learned more, we became fired to tell others around us about normalization, to arrange formal learning opportunities and to speak as often as we could about the path toward change that our new ideas helped us envision. It took some time to get going. Early in the 1980’s, those of us who wanted to advance normalization in Ohio realized that we needed some kind of tool—an organization to sponsor learning opportunities with normalization as the focus. So, we gathered in Columbus in 1984 to decide how we should proceed. Michael Kendrick, then with the “Normalization Safeguards Project” in western Massachusetts, led our conversation and offered guidance about what might make sense for us. Out of that meeting and following conversations came the intention to organize a private, not-for-profit association that, in a nod to Michael Kendrick’s project, we named “OHIO SAFEGUARDS.” We wanted a mechanism that would enact our responsibility to secure a future for normalization/SRV in Ohio. Our purpose statement said, upfront, that the heart of our work had to involve “the use of culturally valued means to establish and maintain valued social roles for people.”

What we intended to do (and what we did work at) was spelled out more specifically in the OHIO SAFEGUARDS mission statement. We wanted to:

- Strengthen our personal relationships with people who have been socially devalued.
- Formally teach others about normalization/SRV. We mainly wanted to conduct intensive PASS (Program Analysis of Service Systems, Wolfensberger & Glenn) workshops in Ohio, and we did that regularly for several years in the 1980’s and early 1990’s.
- Sponsor other opportunities for people to learn about ways (consistent with SRV) to support people who are in need. For example, every January for several years we organized workshops, led by John O’Brien, that focused on ways to design thoughtful local responses to people’s circumstances. We also worked with the Ohio DD Planning Council to begin teaching and demonstrating methods that included people with disabilities as active developers of plans for their supports—an early effort at “person-centered planning” in Ohio.

- Make OHIO SAFEGUARDS available to offer ideas and thoughtful commentary to Ohio organizations that meant to assist people with disabilities. We worked, again, with the Ohio DD Council to consider the pattern of services in the state and to dream about how things could be if that pattern changed. This work resulted in *The Community Living Paper: Promoting Life in Community for Ohio's Citizens*, issued through the DD Council in 1992
- Make commentary and information based upon our basic values available through publications.

It was our attempt to carry out this last intention that led to The Safeguards Letter. The first issue of the Letter appeared in December 1986.

My friends/colleagues Sandra Landis, John Winnenberg, and I wrote most of the content for the first issues. We initially meant to issue the Letter four times a year—an intention that wavered over time, to be replaced with the promise of an “occasional” issue. I typed the first twelve issues on a Brother electric typewriter and took them for printing at the fondly remembered Lightning Print Shop in downtown Chillicothe, Ohio. Until 1993 we mailed the Letter (about 250 copies in a print-run) from the Chillicothe Post Office. The initial copies went to every county developmental disabilities program in Ohio, to other Ohio agencies/organizations that we thought had at least a bit of an interest in normalization/SRV, and to our friends in colleagues in other parts of North America who we thought might want the Letter. We also sent copies to a few colleagues in Europe. Eventually, of course, time brought change. Typing gave way to word processing. I moved from Chillicothe to another town—and another print shop. Finally, the steadily increased cost of mailing meant that the Letter (near the end of its run) was sent, as a “PDF” attachment via e-mail.

Through the years when the Letter was written and distributed its content gradually became more reflective and personal. The final issue, #56, was a memorial for its co-founder Sandra Landis following her death in 2021. I leave it to readers to consider the extent to which The Safeguards Letter approached achievement of its aims. People with disabilities (and others who find themselves outside the sphere of respected community membership) still are vulnerable to isolation and segregated experiences. Glimmers of better things have flared, however, and to those we hope The Safeguards Letter has contributed a spark.

Jack Pealer, Editor