

Safeguards Letters  
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## **Hidden Children**

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This summer has offered me several occasions to think about children - children I know intimately and children who are unknown to me. Memorial Day was quite a beginning for our summer. My younger son graduated from high school. My youngest brother, his wife and their daughters, came to visit and celebrate with us. It was the first visit to our home by these little girls. For several days, I got to watch and play with my nieces, who are three and one and a half years of age.

In June, I spent a week in Atlanta as a member of an evaluation team. The organization we visited promotes children citizen advocacy and other personal forms of advocacy with people in Georgia who are described as having a developmental disability, I heard the sad news that at least a dozen youngsters in Georgia had been admitted to state institutions during the past year. I began to think about the children back home. I realized that I didn't know whether children in Ohio were being responded to in the same way. I knew there had been a time when many children grew up in Ohio institutions. I remembered my first visit to Columbus State institution in 1971. I saw a lot of children that day.

In July, I was invited by a young mother to visit with her and her children in southeastern Ohio. Her youngest is two and a half, and he had just entered a preschool program at a nearby church. I did visit and was delighted to meet her little son. He had just finished swimming with the other children in his class. He's the youngest in the class and the only child in the class who has a developmental disability. I was pleased that this little one was being welcomed into a class of typical youngsters by regular teachers. I was very aware, however, of my sense that this is still a very rare event. My image of most other two and a half year olds with Down syndrome is they're climbing or being lifted onto a bus with other children who also have disabilities to be transported to the special school.

In early August, I began the work of organizing practicum sites for an upcoming PASS course. I saw this as a perfect opportunity to learn a bit more about how children in Ohio are being responded to by organizations and programs. I aimed to recruit two programs that serve children for the PASS course.

I brainstormed a short list of programs for children that I thought would accommodate a PASS team and that would offer examples of what was going on for kids in Ohio in 1989. Then I began to make calls to people I know who were associated with these programs. I was sufficiently encouraged by my initial calls to proceed in recruiting two programs for school aged children, one privately operated, the other operated through a local public

school district. The PASS course took place in late September. Neither school age program participated. It was not feasible, given the respective administrative constraints operating inside the prospective sponsoring organizations.

The situation in the public school program was interesting and informative. I scheduled a meeting with the two (I thought) administrators involved in a decision about participation in the PASS course. I had already talked with the classroom teacher and a parent in the district who was familiar with the program. Both were enthusiastic about the idea. The two people I met with seemed to think that the idea of participation in PASS had merit. The idea of assessing the quality of the classroom experience from the point of view of the students was interesting to them and not something they had thought a lot about.

It turned out, though, that there were just too many people in the way for it to happen this year anyway. As we sat and talked that day, we discovered that there were 11 people inside the school administrative staff, plus the parents of each student, who would have to say yes before a PASS team could visit. The PASS team visit fell under the school's category of "research", and would have been therefore covered by the research policy manual. The steps one would take to qualify as an acceptable research event, were specified in an 11 page document. We were able to tentatively set a timetable for working through the process. It seemed that the conversation that day would have been the appropriate time to start establishing credentials within the district so that a visit by a PASS team would be feasible during the 1990 91 year,

I've decided to continue to think about the children here at home and continue to look for them, With rare exception, I limited, my limited search for children this summer has only increased my concern. I know that some children continue to be deliberately hidden from us. Some are hidden by distance and separation, some by layers of bureaucracy. Nearly all are kept strangers to us in our day-to-day life.