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Title:

Speech at opening of Regency Park Crippled Children's Centre

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SPEECH BY THE PREMIER, DON DUNSTAN, AT OPENING OF REGENCY PARK CRIPPLED CHILDRENS' CENTRE. 27.2.76.

Your Excellency and Lady Oliphant, Dr. Paterson, Mr. Prime Minister and Mrs. Fraser, Your Grace and Mrs. Rayner, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls :

Thank you very much for your kind remarks, Dr. Paterson.

Today is a memorable occasion for all of us, because this centre here at Regency Park has been built with the support of a tremendous number of South Australians.

The public appeals have been very generously supported by the people of the State, and there have been fund raising efforts by groups in all parts of South Australia.

The Regency Park Centre has been possible because the community has involved itself with the plight of handicapped children. We have decided to help those children who, through no fault of their own, require special care and guidance.

The most encouraging aspect about Regency Park is that the community's involvement is reciprocated by bringing the children who will learn and live at this Centre back into the community.

Handicapped people need Centres such as Regency Park, where they can receive highly skilled treatment from dedicated medical and other staff.

But facilities for handicapped people should provide more than just treatment for the immediate problems of the handicapped. The role of a Centre such as Regency Park is also to involve the community and to give handicapped people the experiences and examples of the others.

Dr. Paterson has already outlined the philosophy behind Regency Park, which will welcome children from the local community to the pre-school and kindergarten facilities to give the handicapped children the stimuli of mixing with people who do not share their disabilities.

As well, the community generally will be involved in the Centre with local organisations being able to use the rooms, sporting facilities and auditoriums.

This is a marvellous outlook, because not only will Regency Park gain from the activities of local, interested groups, but more importantly, the children who regard Regency Park Centre as their home will be able to face the day that they must leave here with more confidence and experience.

The risk of centres for the handicapped becoming socially isolated is always present, and the consequences of handicapped children having too little experience of the rest of the community are traumatic.

It is essential that centres designed primarily for care and treatment of handicapped people do not become introspective communities, because when the time comes for the handicapped teenager to leave them, social isolation and emotional disturbance often follows the removal of a familiar supporting environment.

As we have seen from the public's response to the appeals for Regency Park, the community recognises and supports the work done at centres such as this. But there is an even greater need for the community to realise that specialised help for handicapped children is only the starting point of their lives, and that each of them has to accept some responsibility for helping handicapped people in everyday situations.

We are still not a very welcoming community when children with differences come among us, and while many people have given generously in financial terms, most of us still don't realise the need for us to give equally as generously in terms of emotional and social support for handicapped children in our immediate neighbourhood.

A handicapped teenager or adult has to face a social isolation which people who do not have their disabilities cannot even imagine. As well, the families of handicapped children have a need for community support and understanding, because even the most simple family outings or occurrences are made more complicated if one of the children are handicapped. Our responsibilities to the children and their families does not end with fine buildings such as Regency Park - we must carry out concern and sympathy through to the handicapped who live near us or with whom we come into contact in daily life.

Much is being done to make the community aware of these specialised needs of the handicapped in the community. Last month the Christian Education Department of the Baptist Church ran a camp for physically handicapped and physically fit teenagers. 30 young people and 11 leaders took part, and it was so successful that a similar event has been organised for next January.

This is a very welcome illustration that groups in the community - and in this case especially welcome because it involved teenagers helping other, less fortunate teenagers - are accepting their responsibilities and helping the handicapped live lives as near to normal as possible.

This has been the State Government's policy, and we have been able to encourage more families of handicapped children to take them back into the family environment. Five years ago there were about 500 children in centres for the handicapped, but today there are only 300. Through the Department of Community Welfare the Government has provided funds to individuals and groups who are working to make the day to day life of handicapped children more enjoyable and more relevant to their future lives. The Department of Community Welfare works very closely with voluntary agencies and has established a group of social workers in localised community facilities. We want handicapped people to share in community life.

Centres such as Regency Park will greatly help the children be able to do this. I am very pleased that my Government has helped the Crippled Children's Association by providing land and through financial support for the Appeals. And I am very pleased that our Government's philosophy on the provision of necessary help for disadvantaged groups in the community is so much in accord with the philosophy of this marvellous centre here.

On behalf of the Government of the people of South Australia, I congratulate the Crippled Children's Association for the work they have done to build Regency Park.

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