10-11-1986

Florida Mental Health Banquet [Remarks]

Lowell E. Davis

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital.usfsp.edu/davis_speeches

Recommended Citation
https://digital.usfsp.edu/davis_speeches/19

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the University History: Regional Chancellors prior to 2006 at Digital USFSP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Speeches of Lowell E. Davis by an authorized administrator of Digital USFSP.
You may be aware that I am a newcomer to Pinellas County. I assumed my post at the Bayboro Campus of the University of South Florida in August, after a lengthy career in teaching, research and academic administration at Syracuse University. My academic specialty is biology, and therefore I do not profess to have any expertise in the field of mental health services. Despite the difference in our vantage points, however, I do believe that your organization and the educational institutions in this county have a common goal: the provision of community services and programs that are targeted at developing healthy human beings.

A few days ago I read an article written by Dr. Lloyd D. Johnson entitled "Campus Cocaine." In that article he cited the following data:

1. Approximately 30% of all college students will have used cocaine at least once before they graduate.

2. Students disclose that cocaine is readily available.

3. Until recently, the great majority of students perceived little risk in experimenting with cocaine.

4. To be effective, drug prevention programs need to begin at quite a young age to reach youngsters before some "critical mass" of them already has begun to use drugs and to introduce them to potential new users.

5. Men are more likely than women to use illicit drugs.

6. The drinking of alcoholic beverages has increased among college men but decreased among high school students of both sexes.

7. By the time they reach their middle 20's, up to 80% of young adults have tried an illicit drug other than marijuana.
8. At this time, there are an estimated 5 million users of cocaine, 20 million users of marijuana and 500,000 users of heroin in the United States.

Two days ago (Thursday, 10/9), as I listened to a national newscast, another battery of data was issued from a recently completed study:

1. Cocaine is killing more Americans than ever before.
2. Over 39 million people used cocaine at least once last year.
3. Use of cocaine is on the rise: About 38% of those who are 26 years old and older, with more blacks than whites, are using cocaine.
4. About 44% of 12 to 17 year-olds use cocaine.

The number of alcohol abuses was never cited, nor the multitude of other abuses. Such numbers would probably shock us. It is obvious that these millions of Americans do not enjoy a state of positive mental health.

While the precise definition of mental health still eludes students of the problem and evokes passionate debate when an effort at definition is made, it is generally agreed that mental health encompasses an order of concerns considerably broader than those represented by categorical mental illnesses. We understand mental health to include both illness and health. Most important, mental health includes peoples' feelings of worth in the context of the total cultural and societal systems as well as within the identifiable groups to which they belong. Mental health, then, encompasses the issue of the availability of the "good life" within a given social, political and economic context (Willie).
In a review of the approaches to the study of psychological content of positive mental health suggested by major investigators, the following six conditions were suggested:

1. Attitude of the individual toward himself
2. Degree to which the person realizes his potentialities through action
3. Unification of function in the individual's personality
4. The individual's degree of independence of social influence
5. How the individual sees the world around him
6. Ability to take life as it comes and master it

A look at the six approaches reveals that the individual's capacity to cope with both himself and his environment is involved with each.

We are at war today—at war for the survival of millions of Americans. The battle line is clearly drawn—dependency versus independence. You cannot read the papers or listen to the media without being bombarded with the problem of drug abuse. Doctors, lawyers, airline pilots, truck drivers, government workers, teachers, preachers, college professors, to say nothing of the entertainment world, are all involved in the use and addiction of illicit drugs. Many of us have discussed why the problem of drug abuse exists. We gather together on many occasions to discuss philosophically the problem of drug dependency. For many years we have paid lip service to this mental health problem—probably because it did not touch us or those whom we know. We can no longer be apart from the problem. It touches all of us in some way—morally, financially, ethically and socially.

One blunt cold fact is that we as educators are failing our responsibility of educating our youth. We do not educate them and give them the tools and the ability
to cope with the problems one may face; success, failure, marriage and divorce, abuses and excesses, life in general and death. In many university settings there is an old adage—"publish or perish." Many of our students feel that they too must adhere to a similar adage—"succeed or perish." They define this success as getting the best job which pays the most salary, having the best looking man or woman as a mate, the most expensive car, and in general, a life in the fast lane. It is the business and responsibility of those of us in education to redefine the concept of success and share it with our young people.

Education should not smother our students with success but should be that which consolidates a firm and regular system of character. We should be in the business of making responsible people; therefore, we must develop educational programs which deal with positive mental health issues at all levels of schooling. These programs should help develop the students' ability to cope, withstand stress, adapt to their environments, to follow their convictions and to know self-control.

Let me suggest some specific items which should be elaborated on and considered for implementation:

1. We must revamp our current program on health education. An appropriate, well-planned health education program must be a definite part of the curriculum from preschool education to the Ph.D. The curriculum must contain and explain issues which deal with positive mental health such as:
   a. Self worth, self love, self esteem;
   b. Knowing oneself, knowing what one wants in life, knowing how to get there and having a plan for life
   c. One's unifying all aspects of life
   d. One's successful coping with pressures of all sorts
These items should not be covered superficially, but should be bonafide areas of inquiry and study within the health curriculum on positive mental health.

2. We must return to the teaching of basic values. I realize that such a suggestion might arouse alarm among some people, but I believe that to deal with the young people who are our future we cannot ignore the value system.

The problem of drug abuse in this country has been discussed, addressed and debated in many quarters and yet the problem has not gone away. By the year 2000, if this drug epidemic continues, the consequences will be catastrophic. It is therefore incumbent upon us, the "movers and shakers," those who make policies and administer, to adopt the following plan:

a. Assume leadership in addressing this problem. To assume leadership in this fight will require strong moral courage.

b. Put to work the creative effort which allowed us to orbit the earth and go to the moon on the resolution of these critical social problems.

c. Realize and come to know and accept the fact that the best school of discipline and training, value development and setting of examples, is in the family at home. We must therefore support the concept of home and family and make it strong.

I mentioned earlier that we must return to certain basic values. I am referring to those essential entities which characterize us as human beings in the first place. I am talking about integrity, character, honesty, loyalty, love and caring, faith in an ideal and in one another, respect for each other, hope, compassion, concern, sensitivity, truthfulness, a desire to help a fellow human being, a spirit to forgive, a sense of patience and understanding, and a basic will for independence and survival. And there is more, but we can stop here for now. No—I am not referring to a paragon of virtue—
-I address simply those values for which we may have lost touch and the absence of which may represent the basic root of some of our family and societal problems.

The honorees tonight have been instrumental in addressing various aspects of the problem. Shirley Colletti is known for her work in the substance abuse center. Sister Margaret Freeman, founder of the Free Clinic Spouse Abuse Center certainly knows the effects of substance abuse on marriage and family problems. Dora Harrison, who helped to guide this board in the past and helped to raise funds, is aware of the financial burdens that are caused by substance abuse. Miriam "Bunny" Florsheim, founder of the Hospice Center in Pinellas County, attested to the need to train people in dealing with death and dying. These are all aspects of mental health which should be taught in elementary and secondary schools, colleges and universities. Ruth Grosch is also special. The volunteers here deserve a very special recognition for their work in all areas of mental health.

John Locke, the 1600 English philosopher and inspirer of the American Constitution, stated that:

"The most precious of all possessions is the power over ourselves; power to withstand trial, power to bear suffering, power to front danger; power over pleasure and pain; power to follow our conviction however resisted by menace and scorn; the power of strong reliance in scenes of darkness and storm. He that has not a mastery over his inclination, he that knows not how to resist the importunity of present pleasure or pain for the sake of what reason tells him is fit to be done, wants the true principle of virtue and industry, and is in danger of never being good for anything."
A few minutes or so ago, I mentioned that we are at war for the survival of millions of Americans. This war involves many battles on many fronts. The hardest battles are yet to be fought and the most glorious victories are yet to be won. But all of us here—every single person here—must be a soldier in these battles, and win we must because every person's mental health is at stake.