



DEPARTMENT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

A CATHOLIC CHARITIES AGENCY IN THE DIOCESE OF PATERSON

Providing Help...Creating Hope

HISTORY OF THE DPD



Catholic Social Teaching- at our heart

The DPD is a reflection of Catholic Social Teaching (7 Basic Principles)

1. **Dignity of the Human Person** - *All People are Sacred, Made in the Image and Likeness of God*
2. **Community and the Common Good** - *The Human Person is Both Sacred and Social – When One Suffers We All Suffer*
3. **Rights and Responsibilities** - *People Have a Fundamental Right to Life, Food, Shelter, Health Care, Education and Employment*
4. **Option for the Poor** - *The Moral Test of a Society is How It Treats Its Most Vulnerable Members*
5. **The Dignity of Work and The Rights of Workers** - *The Economy Exists to Serve People, Not the Other Way Around*
6. **Solidarity** - *We are Called to Work Globally for Justice*
7. **Care for God's Creation** - *The Earth is the Lord's – Love, Protect, and Respect It*

Mission

- *With a deeply rooted sense of family, faith and community; and a commitment to excellence, the Department for Persons with Disabilities (DPD) provides residential, vocational, spiritual, and social services to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.*
- *Through competent and compassionate care, DPD empowers each person to become active, contributing, and valued members of their community, and to participate fully in life with dignity and respect.*
- *As a Catholic Charities Agency, DPD strives to end discrimination toward people with disabilities and works for social change by being a voice for justice and advocacy, and convenes others to do the same.*



Vision

Our vision for the Department for Persons with Disabilities is for it to be:

- Recognized as a ministry for people with disabilities where they are fully accepted and loved.
- A place where families of people with disabilities can feel secure that their son, daughter or relative will receive services from a dedicated staff who embody the love of Jesus in the world and who sees each person as a gift from God.
- An effective voice for justice and inclusion of all people with disabilities in society.
- A convener of other persons to assist in the delivery of services and support as well as to advocate for full inclusion.
- We seek to improve the quality of spiritual, civic, social and economic life for people with disabilities and to do the same on a global level by joining with others who share similar values.

History of the DPD –

- The Department for Persons with Disabilities (DPD) was founded in 1965 by Father John Wehrlen, a priest of the Diocese of Paterson.
- The goal was to offer people with disabilities the opportunity which is theirs by right, to live in the community and attain their fullest potential.
- Guided by his vision, hundreds of people - parish volunteers, professional staff, leaders from business, labor and government, friends and neighbors - worked tirelessly to make Father Jack's dream come true.



Billy Ogle, one of the original residents of the first group home - the Murray House - with Fr. Jack Wehrlen

History of the DPD –

- Gruenert Nursery opened for “mentally handicapped” children.
- As a young priest just out of the seminary Fr. Jack was assigned to St. Philip’s Church in Clifton NJ where he first came to know Lucia.
- You will read about this story as told in the words of Father Jack.
- This program was cutting edge for the times.



*Fr. Jack Wehrlen
(circa 1966)*

History of the DPD –

- The vision of the DPD was contrary to the social climate and attitude toward people with disabilities.
- Fr. Jack's work was not easy.
- There were deep prejudices and fears regarding people with developmental disabilities.
- It was difficult to even find a doctor or dentist willing to treat this population of people.
- Consider the official terminology of the time...



Fr. Jack Wehrle
(circa 1966.)

Official terminology in use until the 1970's

Retardation Levels

- To classify scores below 70, psychologists invented a scale of "retardation" - Morons, Imbeciles, and Idiots:
- ✓ Morons - Those with IQs between 51 and 70 (adequate learning skills to complete menial tasks and to communicate)
- ✓ Imbeciles - Those with IQs between 26 and 50 (unable to progress past a mental age of approximately six)
- ✓ Idiots - those with IQs between 0 and 25 (poor motor skills, extremely limited communication, and little response to stimulus)
- **The moron/imbecile/idiot classification system remained in use until the early 1970s!**

Education for all Handicapped Children Act

Education for All Handicapped Children Act



Long title	Education for All Handicapped Children Act
Acronyms (colloquial)	EAHCA/EHA
Enacted by	the 94th United States Congress
Effective	3500

Legislative history

- Passed the Senate on June 18, 1975 (83-10)
- Passed the House on July 29, 1975
- Reported by the joint conference committee on November 14, 1975; agreed to by the House on November 18, 1975 (404-7) and by the Senate on November 19, 1975 (87-7)
- Signed into law by President Gerald Ford on November 30, 1975

November 30, 1975

- At long last an official law was passed that **REQUIRED** all public schools to provide education to children with and type of disability or handicap.
- Up until then some schools may have offered a class but many did not.
- This meant a life at home without the integration into the community that schooling provides.

The next endeavor – Camp Alexander



- Fr. Jack wanted next to address the need for respite for the parents.
- By providing a safe and loving environment during the summers parents were afforded the opportunity to do other things.
- This was staffed 100% by volunteers.

*Circa 1974 in West Milford, NJ.
Later relocated to a brand new facility in
Jefferson Township, NJ
with the help of countless donors and
volunteers.*

History of the DPD – Told by our founder Fr. Jack Wehrle

What motivated you to become a priest?

- At an early age, I was driven towards priesthood. My grandmother's brother was a priest and a great influence in my life. I had a very typical childhood. I went to St. Joseph's Grammar School and St. Peter's Prep High School. The clergy there were very supportive and also helped prepare me for a life dedicated to the church.

You were in your early 30's when you were appointed Executive Director of DPD. What led you to want to help those with disabilities?

- Quite simply, no one was doing anything for them. The Catholic Church should always be there to help the most vulnerable in our society. Our Church should be an all-inclusive church. It all began very innocently with a catechetical program at St. Phillips Church in Clifton where I was stationed at the time. We developed a program for people with disabilities to participate more fully in life and in the community and it all grew from there.

History of the DPD – Told by our founder Fr. Jack Wehrle

Where were any families or individuals from your parish who were instrumental in those early days?

- Yes, one of the most defining moments in my life and the one that really motivated me to jumpstart the Department occurred in the early 1960's. I was stationed at St. Phillip Church. One evening, I heard a knock at the back door of the rectory and to my surprise it was a detective from the Clifton Police Department. He said "we need a priest." The officer didn't give me details and I had no clue what it was about, but I soon found out that a tragedy occurred that we may have been able to prevent.
- One of our parishioners, Lucia had a young son with a neurological impairment. She didn't have any help with taking care of him and there were no services offered back then. She was a single mother of three, whose husband had left her to fend for herself emotionally and financially. She felt alone, overwhelmed and isolated. Her third young child, an infant at the time, was also believed to have a developmental disability. That evening, she took the lives of herself and her three children. That was a very poignant wake up call for me. Many of the young parents of children with disabilities needed support and the church was just not giving it to them. Lucia's story motivated me to do more for those in need.

History of the DPD –

Told by our founder Fr. Jack Wehrlen

After Lucia, how did you formally institute the Department? How did you help it grow into what it is today?

- One day out of the blue, I received a letter from then Bishop Navagh appointing me head of the Department of Special Education. I called him and said “what do I do?” He simply responded by saying “help the disabled,” so I did. I suppose that he heard of the catechetical program but I never advertised it or sought publicity. I am glad that he also saw the need for more services.
- We started with a preschool program at St. Phillips in Clifton. From the nursery, we developed a summer camp in West Milford. We realized that we were capable of taking care of people with disabilities overnight and could provide a long-term solution and from there the Murray House came to be with the incredible, untiring support and love of the Murray Family, their friends and countless volunteers.

Bishop James J. Navagh, LLD, DD

Served: 1963-1965

Most Rev. James Johnston Navagh, D.D., L.L.D.

Born at Buffalo, New York, April 4, 1901; Ordained a priest, December 21, 1929; Ordained Titular Bishop of Ombi and Auxiliary Bishop of Raleigh, North Carolina, September 24, 1952; Appointed Seventh Bishop of Ogdensburg, New York, May 2, 1957; Appointed Fourth Bishop of Paterson, February 12, 1963; Died at Rome, October 2, 1965; Buried at Calvary Cemetery, Paterson.



History of the DPD – Told by our founder Fr. Jack Wehrlen

- The Murrays came to us with their young son Jimmy back in the St. Phillip's preschool days and they never left.
- Unfortunately, Jimmy Murray died shortly before the Murray House opened. But the Murray family, now into the third generation serves as a beacon of hope for all families with a child who has a developmental disability.

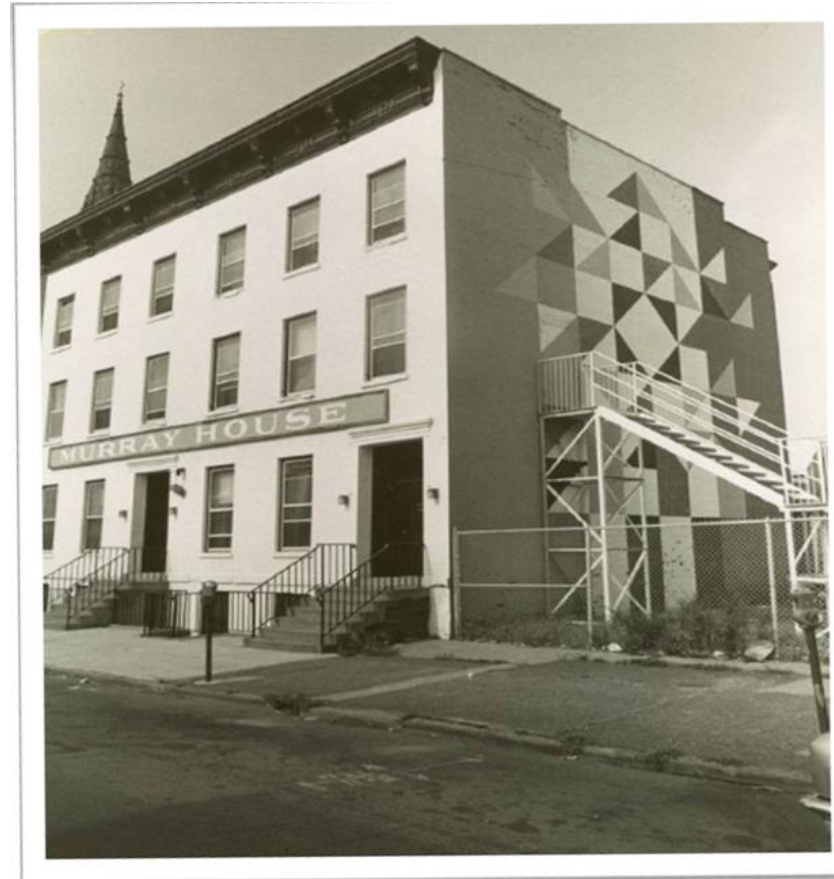


**JAMES J.
MURRAY**
July 13, 1951 -
May 29, 1969

History of the DPD – Told by our founder Fr. Jack Wehrle

- There was an abandoned building on Main Street in downtown Paterson that the Diocese controlled. It had been used by the Franciscans and was the Paterson Catholic Community Center. It wasn't pretty, but it was much better than institutionalization or being forgotten!
- We were one of the pioneers in New Jersey to provide community integration and inclusion for people with special needs. Murray House is now the longest running group home in the state of New Jersey for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- In our early days, it was all volunteer work and fundraising. Kind local parishioners often held card parties, tricky trays and garage sales to help with funding. We scrimped and saved and did what we could to make it all work.

God bless our benefactors!



History of the DPD – Told by our founder Fr. Jack Wehrle

Tell us about yourself.

- I earned a degree in Special Education and taught at William Paterson University. This helped me connect with the Special Ed. community and learn more about how to serve our population. I also was able to connect to many college students, who in turn volunteered at our camps, nursery and Murray House.
- I never took a salary from DPD. I lived down at Murray House. We didn't have any money in the beginning. We literally lived from hand to mouth. It was all made possible through volunteer work and there is some beauty in that.
- We took risks in those early days. I asked Bishop Casey for 100 acres of prime land in Morris County - and he gave it to me!

How did you find the first people to move into Murray House (1st group home)?

- They found us! Before the days of the internet or even before any kind of a formal referral process through the state, it was all word of mouth. There was such a great need and so few community based services, we were in high demand. I remember one of our first residents, Claire Reilly, who just passed away last year. Her family came all the way from Smithtown Long Island. I don't know how she heard about us, but it certainly wasn't Google!

History of the DPD – Told by our founder Fr. Jack Wehrle

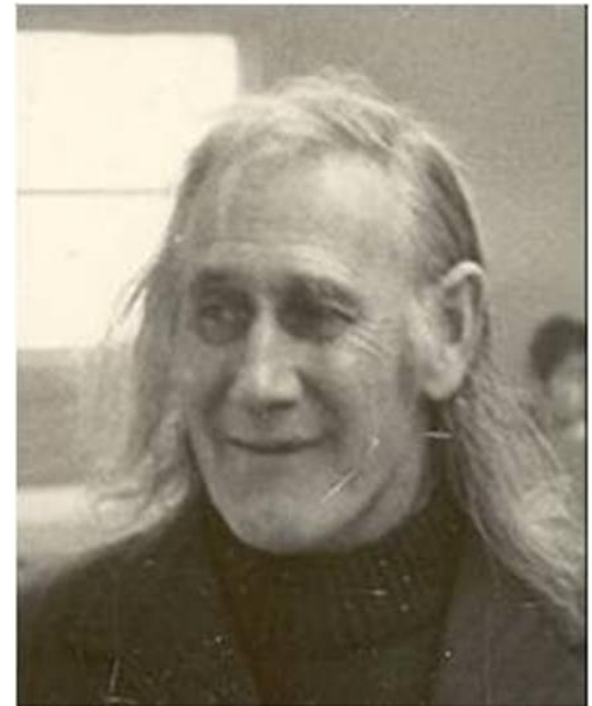
What religious Bible verse resonates with you when reflecting on your mission?

- I would say, Matthew 19:14 when Jesus said, “*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.*” Though not all of the people we served were children, many of them had child-like innocence and purity. Jesus had time for children and the most vulnerable of his time and there is room in God’s House for everybody.

Walter's Story

On August 17, 1973 Walter Barton saved a life, here's his story:

Walter came to Murray House, Paterson, in 1972 after his mother passed away. We never knew exactly how old Walter was, but somewhere in his 60's was everyone's best guess. Dealing with extensive deafness Walter did not speak much, but one of the few phrases that he mastered was, "None of Your Business," which was his response to most questions. Walter was quite a character and had a great sense of humor. He had qualities that brought out the best in everyone.





During the summer of 1973, Walter moved to one of our programs in Jefferson Township. One of his favorite tasks to do daily was to check the mail. He would check the mail several times a day and took great pride in bringing the mail home and handing it out to his housemates.

One hot summer day, Walter went to the mailbox and came back with quite a surprise – a newborn infant, hours old, wrapped in an old army blanket!

The police were immediately called. It was a miracle; Walter saved this beautiful newborn's life. It was something we never forgot, and it was certainly something that Walter never forgot. After the shock wore off, Walter was furious and would often say, "They took my baby; where is she?" He never did quite understand and was always a little suspicious. All we ever really knew after that was that the baby was fine and that she was adopted.

Twenty one years later, on December 29, 1994, a woman (the baby) came to Jefferson Township. She had a news-clipping from 21 years prior that her adoptive parents had given her. She introduced herself to us and was elated to meet the people that were there at the time.

She was a pre-med student at an Ivy League school and was so happy to hear the story of Walter and to know that he saved her life. We know that Walter is smiling down on “his baby” and the DPD Family from heaven!

About us

DPD Services

- DPD provides residential and vocational services to adults with Developmental Disabilities.
- We are a Catholic Charities Agency in the Diocese of Paterson – serving Morris, Passaic and Sussex Counties.
- We care for 74 adults residentially and 65 adults attend our day activity program - Gruenert Center.

Overview Of DPD – What separates us from the rest?

The DPD is the only provider agency for adults with disabilities in the State of New Jersey internationally accredited by the Council on Accreditation (COA).

- Began serving adults with disabilities over 50 years ago.
- Operates the longest running group home in the state of New Jersey, the Murray House in Clifton.
- One of the largest Catholic Charities Agency providing care for adults with developmental disabilities in the United States.
- Empowers residents to be active and involved in their communities.
- Has a dedicated network of over 100 volunteers.
- Provides information and referrals and support coordination for families of adults with developmental disabilities living in the community.
- Provides pastoral care for former residents who now reside in nursing homes.
- Seeks to improve the quality of spiritual, civic, social and economic life for people with disabilities and to do the same on a global level by joining with others who share similar values.

“People Need Friends”



“People Need Friends”

- Our volunteer program is called **“People Need Friends.”**
- Founded in 1990 under the leadership of Sister Joan Gercke.
- The aim is to enhance the lives of our residents by bringing friends into their lives for planned visits either in their homes or in the community as individuals or an activity in the home.



“People Need Friends”

- The goal is to add enjoyment, appreciation and friendship for our residents and to give them something to look forward to.
- Although their staff care for them and provide for their needs, volunteers add something extra to their lives that only friends can do.



“People Need Friends”

- Some of our residents have little or no family connections and few friends outside of the Department.
- Some expressed desire to do things and go places with someone other than those with whom they live or work.
- The staff also saw that for some people what was really needed to make their lives fuller were things to look forward to and the human need to feel the joy of friendship.



“People Need Friends”

- At any given time there are over 100 volunteers actively involved in the DPD in a variety of ways.
- The volunteers are selected for membership after a formal Interview, Orientation and detailed Volunteer Application, References, Electronic fingerprinting, Sex Registry check and Motor Vehicle Checks are completed.
- All volunteers complete a sign-in sheet at every visit or afterwards on-line at <https://ministry.dpd.org/log-in-your-hours>
- This information is important to us and also is considered when we go through the accreditation process.
- Please be sure that your hours are counted!

“People Need Friends”



- You can read about the various ways people are volunteering on this website.
- **What you can't read about is how much you are appreciated. We thank God for you everyday!**