

This is a part of the Indiana Disability History Project series:  
From Segregation to Integration, Oral History about the Education of Children with Disabilities\*.

- **Lesson 1: Children with Disabilities in the Age of Institutions**
- **Lesson 2: Educating Children with Disabilities without Public Schools**
- **Lesson 3: Students with Disabilities in Segregated Public Education (1960s and 1970s)**
- **Lesson 4: The Integration of Students with Disabilities into Classrooms (1970s– 2000s)**

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# Children with Disabilities in the Age of Institutions



INDIANA INSTITUTE ON DISABILITY AND COMMUNITY  
**CENTER FOR HEALTH EQUITY**



**GOVERNOR'S  
COUNCIL FOR  
PEOPLE WITH  
DISABILITIES**



TEACHER NOTES: Lesson 1: Children with Disabilities in the Age of Institutions



Opening: excerpt from It's a Terrible Place (Bonnie Smith)

- Runtime: 54 sec.

**Admitting Children to Institutions (Sue Beecher)**



**Guiding Question**

Sue Beecher remembers having a job where she placed children in institutions.

- **How did she feel about that later in her life?**

**Things to Know**

- Before the 1970s, many children with disabilities lived in institutions. Some were called “hospitals”, but the children didn’t get well and go home. They stayed for many years.
- New Castle State Hospital (later known as New Castle State Developmental Center) closed in 1998.
- Otis Bowen was the Governor of Indiana from 1973 to 1981.

 Children with Disabilities in the Age of Institutions 

## Notes for Teacher

**Video Description:** “I assisted with some admissions of children. I’m not proud of that.”

In the late 1970s, Sue Beecher worked in the outpatient clinic at New Castle State Hospital in New Castle, Indiana. As part of her job, she had to assist with admitting children into the institution. It was something Sue did not enjoy doing. During this time, many parents did not have the resources to care for a child with disabilities at home. Once admitted to the institution, many children had little interaction with their family.

TEACHER NOTES: Lesson 1: Children with Disabilities in the Age of Institutions



Video 1: Admitting Children to Institutions (Sue Beecher)

- Runtime: 2 min. 43 sec.

**It's a Terrible Place (Bonnie Smith)**



**Guiding Question**

When Bonnie's son, Brooks, was placed in an institution, she was told she could not visit her son for the first several months.

- **Why wasn't Bonnie able to visit her son?**

**Things to Know**

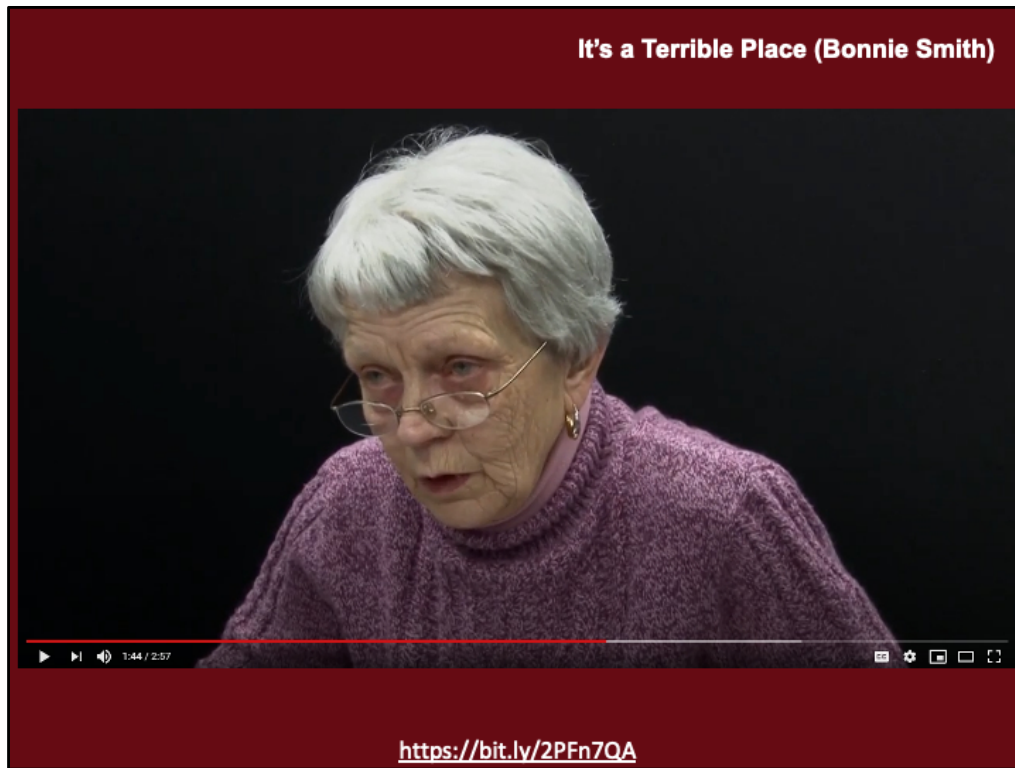
- Brooks entered Madison State Hospital in the 1970s. Later on, children and adults with disabilities were moved out of Indiana institutions and back into their communities. Brooks eventually moved into a **group home** near his family.
- Madison State Hospital is located in the southeastern part of Indiana.

 Children with Disabilities in the Age of Institutions 

## Notes for Teacher

**Video Description:** In the 1970s, Bonnie Smith could no longer care for her teenage son Brooks, who had a disability. Bonnie and her husband agreed to admit Brooks to Madison State Hospital, which was about two hours from his hometown. The hospital staff would not allow them to visit Brooks for several months. When they visited Brooks at Thanksgiving, he showed up in dirty clothes that did not belong to him. Bonnie discovered all of his clothes were stolen.

TEACHER NOTES: Lesson 1: Children with Disabilities in the Age of Institutions



Video 2: It's a Terrible Place (Bonnie Smith)

- Runtime: 1 min. 33 sec.

**School Experiences at Muscatatuck State Developmental Center**



**Guiding Question**

In this video, we learn what school was like for children placed in Muscatatuck.

- **If children misbehaved in school at the institution, were they allowed to stay in the classroom?**

**Things to Know**

- In the 1950s and '60s, many children with disabilities in southern Indiana were sent away from their families to an **institution** called **Muscatatuck** State School.
- Children who lived at Muscatatuck often stayed there through adulthood.
- Some children with disabilities attended school at Muscatatuck because the local public schools would not accept them. They lived with their families.

 **Children with Disabilities in the Age of Institutions** 

## Notes for Teacher

**Video Description:** In the 1950s and 60s, there were so few educational opportunities for children with disabilities that for some parents, putting their child in an institution was the only way they could get any schooling. This video contains excerpts from audio recordings of interviews with former staff and family of staff who worked at Muscatatuck State School, later called Muscatatuck State Developmental Center. In audio format with still photos, the speakers describe what school was like for children who attended school at the institution in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. They mention classroom challenges for teachers, punishment of students that could be very severe, and positive experiences some students had who participated in a music program.

**Content Advisory:** This video contains references to abusive practices experienced by an individual confined in an institution.

(Check out the resource, “Online Exhibit about the Muscatatuck Institution”, in Lesson Plan)



TEACHER NOTES: Lesson 1: Children with Disabilities in the Age of Institutions



Video 3: School Experiences at Muscatatuck State Development Center

- Runtime: 3 min. 32 sec.

**Looking Back is Difficult (Paul Shankland)**



**Guiding Question**

Paul was young when he had a job at an institution.

- **How did his feelings about the place change over time?**

**Things to Know**

- Fort Wayne State Hospital was originally called the Indiana School for Feeble Minded Youth when it opened in 1890.
- Renamed the Fort Wayne State Developmental Center, the institution closed in 2007. It was the last state institution for people with intellectual disabilities to close in Indiana.

 Children with Disabilities in the Age of Institutions 

## Notes for Teacher

**Video Description:** Paul Shankland was an activity therapy aide working with children with disabilities at the Fort Wayne State Hospital and Training Center from 1964 to 1971. At the time, Paul had a lot of fun with the children. However, as he began to see the mistreatment of individuals, he realized life in the institution was not very good. Even today, it makes him sad to think about the abuse he saw, and that there was nothing he could do to help.

TEACHER NOTES: Lesson 1: Children with Disabilities in the Age of Institutions



Video 4: Looking Back is Difficult (Paul Shankland)

- Runtime: 1 min. 18 sec.



**Discussion/Debrief**

Admitting Children to Institutions with **Sue Beecher**:

- **In the past, many parents chose to place their children in institutions instead of caring for them at home. What does Sue Beecher say are some of the reasons the parents did that?**

It's a Terrible Place with **Bonnie Smith**:

- **In the 1970s, Bonnie and her husband found that they couldn't take care of their son Brooks. He was placed in an institution. What happened when they went to visit him there at Thanksgiving? Do you think Brooks was being well taken care of? Why or why not?**

 Children with Disabilities in the Age of Institutions 

The prospective answers of each question are available in [LP1-debrief-answers.pdf](#)



**Discussion/Debrief**

School Experiences at Muscatatuck State Developmental Center

- **One of the speakers described how children who misbehaved were placed in a room by themselves, what they called a “quiet room.” What do you think that was like for the child? How might the experience have affected them and their education?**

Looking Back is Difficult with **Paul Shankland**

- **Paul says about his job, “I didn’t know a lot that I know now.” What do you think are some of the things he learned later on?**

 Children with Disabilities in the Age of Institutions 

The prospective answers of each question are available in [LP1-debrief-answers.pdf](#)

## Glossary

- **Group home:** a residence where multiple, unrelated people with disabilities live together and receive support from staff 24 hours a day
- **Institution:** a large facility where people with disabilities live and receive care, often in a confined setting and without their consent
- **Intellectual disability:** a lifelong condition related to thinking that can cause a person to develop and learn more slowly or differently
- **Muscatatuck:** the name of the state institution is commonly pronounced "mus-CA-tuh-tuck," saying the middle syllable like you would the word "cat"

