

THE FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS, INC.

April 10, 1975

Mr. Harvey Liebergott  
Director : Recruitment and Information Program  
Bureau of Education for the Handicapped

Harvey,

I have received your letter of April 4, 1975, in which you suggest that we might be funded to conduct a six month pilot project for discovering the capabilities and limitations of consumer organizations to provide information and referral on a regional basis. That strikes me as an excellent idea, and one which the Federation would be pleased to develop.

Our initial proposal to you anticipated the direct provision of information and referral services to parents over the course of a fifteen month project. Of that period, we expected to devote the final ten months primarily to direct services. Our initial five month start-up period suggested the development of resource files, training of volunteer aides, and consultation with parent groups, to develop the initial necessary bases for later service provision.

We visualize your six month pilot as requiring basically the same activities as we initially suggested for our start-up period, but involving more formal and more frequent interaction with the National Center, more thinking and research on the relations between the discovered needs of parents and the appropriateness of responses at national, state, and local levels, and the development of models for accountability and for longer term survival of regional centers without government support.

Your suggestions will require some shifts in emphasis from our initial proposal. If we are to view the project as a test of various models of service delivery, we will naturally have to spend as much time studying our means as our ends. We will still be responding to parental requests in the latter stages of the pilot, but our responses will be of a more limited number in order for us to develop more carefully a system or model that other organizations could use. Where we might have been satisfied, for example, to use our connections with various individuals in the educational system to place children quickly, we will now attempt to deal with the educational system as though we did not have special connections. We will relate childrens' needs to the law and perform careful follow-up of the calls or letters received throughout the system of operations to see if the law is responsive in its implementation.

Essentially we foresee expending a good deal of effort upon an internal accountability mechanism. We will develop a general system of handling and responding to calls or letters which will serve the functions of 1) gathering all necessary information from the parent requesting aid; 2) providing an appropriate response; 3) and following up to determine the success or failure of the parent to ultimately obtain needed services. This general outline can be broken out more specifically.

1) Gathering essential information. When the I and R center receives a call or letter, we will file the request not only by name and date, etc., but also according to the stage of progress at which the parents contact us; i.e., by where a parent stands with regard to having his child diagnosed, dealing with the schools on the curricular needs of his child, etc.. Therefore our first step toward developing an internal system will be to create a guideline questionnaire for use by office staff and volunteers in interviewing parents over the telephone and for following up with a call within one week of receiving a letter.

2) Providing an appropriate response within one week. As our initial proposal suggested, responses will vary in kind and degree relating to the level of needs of the parent. It will be the responsibility of central office personnel to locate the appropriate volunteer or parent group best suited to handle each request. But where we were concerned before only with satisfying a parent's need, even if that meant using professional level personnel who might not be generally available to parent organizations in other states, now we will attempt to determine the level of capabilities that rank-and-file members of parent organizations might have and how they might use their skills or experience to help other parents.

3) Follow-up. It will be a continuing central office function to contact the parent group or individual to whom parents were referred to ensure that their response has been timely and appropriate. Scheduling of follow-up contacts will frequently approximate Chapter 766 administrative guidelines for performing various activities. For example, if the initial advice to a parent suggested that a Core Evaluation be obtained from the local schools, we would check to see if one had been obtained within thirty working days, which is the regulatory limit provided under the law.

Because the implementation of the law is just beginning, and its regulations have not been tested, we would expect many questions to remain as to the best method of providing I and R services. Regarding substantive matters, it may be that if a school system fails to complete a Core Evaluation within the thirty working days mandated, it is because it is performing a more careful evaluation than is normally required, and it would be wrong to conclude that its failure to meet regulatory guidelines reflected "foot-dragging". This in turn could mean that we would find it more effective to assign one person full time to follow up activities, rather than placing that respons-

ibility in each referral upon the individual who initially received the call, to assure that one person developed a close knowledge of the records of individual school systems. Many such issues will arise, and we hope that if we document our failures as well as our successes, as implied by the new emphasis as a pilot, that our project will be judged as an evaluation of I and R needs and not just as a provider of services. We are willing to put off serving some parents directly because we believe that information we can provide to BEH about which approaches do not work will be more important to more parents in the long run than the immediate placing of large numbers of children in Massachusetts. We expect to make some false starts, that is inherent in the very process of experimentation. The essential point is to develop a working model.

We enclose a budget revised for six months, reflecting an approximate 50 percent reduction in paid staff. The revised emphasis on system building should enable the project to properly proceed despite a reduced budget.

In anticipation of possible later funding, as well as longer term survival of the center, may we suggest that items be purchased rather than leased where this is economically efficient. For example, electric typewriters rent for \$35.00 per month, while equivalent machines can be purchased for \$350.00 - a break even point of 10 months. In the event that future funding is not obtained, Federation members would be willing to make up differences in cost between renting and purchasing.

We look forward to developing the project,

Martha Ziegler  
Director