Leonard Cheshire Resonate Project

File Title: GLC talk to Naidex, Brighton. Recorded: 1978

Duration: 23:36

Transcription Date: 18/02/20

Archive Number: AV-S\_003

Start of Transcription

00:00 Group Captain Leonard Cheshire: This is a talk to the conference at Naidex, Brighton September 21st.

00:10 GLC: Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests and ladies and gentlemen. Well I do find it very difficult to know how to respond to the warmth of the welcome that I have been given and the very warm terms in which your President, your Chairman presented me with this beautiful award … I know perfectly well that I don’t deserve all the things that were said and I was perhaps a little lucky that your President, who was at Oxford at the same time that I was, didn’t disclose certain other *[laughs]* [unclear 01:01 - 01:04]. You won’t, will you? *[laughs]*

01:07 Chairman: As long as you promise to do the same. *[laughs]*

01:16 GLC: I also, am very much aware, that although this beautiful and very symbolic award has been made to me personally, I am part of a great number of people, different nationalities and different backgrounds, working together, and I am only a part. And therefore, in accepting, with the deepest gratitude and appreciation your great generosity and a great privilege that you’ve given me. I accept it on behalf of all those connected with our home, but also I’d like to feel that - if I may say this - That I’d also accept it on behalf of others in so many other different ways who are working amongst disabled people. On behalf of disabled people themselves, who are making such a contribution in their own way to the development and evolution of our society, because I feel very strongly that what we might for the moment call the world of disabled people, is a very united world, I feel very privileged to be a small part of that fraternity of people who are contributing, researching, working, and living with the objective of making life more livable for those who have some kind of disability. I know that we tend to generalize and there is a tendency in the world to talk about the disabled, but there isn’t such a thing or such a group as ‘the disabled’. If we were to look at it literally, at the word ‘disability’, I think we would have to admit that all of us, in one way or another, unless we were totally perfected - which is not possible at any rate until the end of a lifetime - do have a disability. You’ll probably find that I will suddenly lose my train of thought and forget what to say, and I am disabled for that moment … and mercifully over the last 20 or 25 years there has been a great movement to enable the world as a whole to understand that it is not disability about which we are talking and with which we are dealing, but human individuals who happen to have a particular physical or other disability. In my own case, all this happened very unexpectedly. I was suddenly confronted with an elderly man dying of cancer whom the local hospital couldn’t keep because there was nothing more that could be done for him by way or nursing or medical treatment, merely just to care for him ... and I set out purely to help him because there was nobody else to do so. In fact, I had to take him into the house in which I was living, and as best I could, cared for him myself. It was only an interlude to me because at that time - shortly after the war - my mind, like so many other people’s minds, not only then but since … was occupied with a thought … What do we have to do to make this world a united world, a world in which justice and freedom and peace can live? After a war that had taken 55 million lives on all sides what other hope could man have than that mankind as a whole would advance towards a really livable united world? But my thoughts were up in the skies, I was looking for some great wonderful solution: and it was then that the old man Arthur came my way and I was brought down to earth. He wasn’t an interlude, others came, who were in need in one kind or another and the house filled up, and I, who was totally unequipped to deal with even the one old man, was at a total loss to know what to do with a household of 24 disabled people. And I did what many people of my own country do when they are in a jam and can’t see the next step; I formed a committee *[laughs]* and that was a turning point for me because since then I have been able to watch committee after committee form for one purpose or another, either to start a home, or to raise some money or I don't know what and I’ve been able more or less to sit back and watch the process taking place. I find that committees at first worry about money, we all tend to think that if we only had more money how much we could do. Now I’m not attempting to generalize, but I have come to the conclusion that money is never the primary problem, at any rate in our kind of work; its people. In fact, I’ve even come to think that it is much better to be a little poor, because when you are poor you have to try and make do with what you’ve got, you improvise, you feel challenged, you are at your best. And from a religious point of view, you can only do what providence will let you, when you’ve got money you can buy this you can do the other, and in my case my decisions, my ideas, are usually not very sound. If I possessed one quality that has helped homes grow to the extent that they have, is that I’ve never been a good organizer. I always seem to get disorganized when I try to run something, and I find that people if they’re looking at somebody who’s not organized will come forward and say ‘for heaven's sake let's get this in a proper footing’ *[laughs].* If you’re highly organized and do everything beautifully, face it back and say ‘well done’, and so as we sometimes find with the ladies, I think that to look a little helpless is often a good way to get support and help and money *[laughs].*

10:19: Now, our homes - if I may very briefly mention this - are trying to provide for those who live in them, for disabled people, who at the moment that they come into the home have nowhere else to go or by the virtue of the severity of their disability are not able to live either at home or an independent life in the community. We are trying to give them a home that really will be home, ‘my home’, in which - within of course the limits of the needs of others living there - I can do as I like, I can choose the kind of life that I want. I know that there are some people who feel that a residential home such as this is a backwards step, that it’s impeding the process of integrating disabled people into the community. Now I know that integration is the goal for which we should all be working, but integration, in our view, is not a question of architectural design or location of your apartment or house, it’s primarily attitudes. People have said to me, ‘if you build one flat, in a block of flats, perfectly designed for a disabled person, and give him all the help that you wanted, he would be totally integrated’. But he wouldn’t because who can he tell how the other occupants of those block of flats will respond? He might be totally isolated. The way to integrate somebody who cannot easily live on his own, in my humble opinion, is to provide a home which itself - a group home I mean - which itself is integrated. In our case, every single home has been conceived, built, financed and run by the local community, there is virtually no control from the top. We have never gone to a country or a place with money and said, ‘Would you build a home?’. When I first went to India, in response to a request in 1955 with 2 helpers, my total resources were £100 and the English homes were not in favor of our having gone, and everything since that day, in the 22 years since then, has been built by Indians with Indian money so that there are now 22 homes in India. That means that each home has a feeling of belonging to the community, that people who have built it and are working with it are identified with it, its success is their success and therefore, the disabled residents who live in it, feel that they also belong to the community, there is a two-way coming and going. But I going to say that it is not enough, to provide a home where the residents can live for the rest if their lives. That home, one hopes should be a steppingstone, somebody who comes into it from perhaps a very dependent situation, or following a traumatic accident, begins to gain confidence; he sees other people worse than himself doing things he thought he could never do. He learns how to look after himself, he sees what technology can do, his horizons broaden and there comes the day when he says ‘I’d like to get married. Would you give me the married accommodation?’ or ‘I would like to step out into the world and try it on my own’.

15:28: In Toronto, we have - or the Canadian homes - have their Clarendon Project where they’ve taken over the whole floor of a block of flats, or a block of apartments and they have converted it into two beautiful bed sitting rooms with a little kitchenette and everything. They are a halfway house so those who come in will gain confidence and prepare themselves to go out and live their own life alone in the community. When I asked them a year or two ago ‘Is this what you want?’ they said ‘Yes, but had it not been for this home we would never have thought of taking the next step. And secondly, we would never have taken that step unless we knew that should it fail, we could come back here’. And it illustrates what, to me, is that basic need of all of us whatever our physical state and that is of security, all of us, to be honest, need the security of a home or something that equivalates to a home that we feel that's mine, if I runaway and I don't like it and it doesn't work, I can come back. I think security must be the starting point, onto which should be built everything that we can do to enable disabled people to achieve greater independence. You, I know have been talking to a large extent, about rehabilitation in different ways, and I can't leave this platform without expressing my tremendous admiration for the whole field of rehabilitation in the broad, widest sense. Including social workers, those who work for sheltered workshops, those who are working to provide better aids and gadgets, the whole field, I feel privileged to be a little part of this big movement that has so many aspects.

18:06: But I would like to conclude by mentioning one aspect of rehabilitation which, although will be known to you, has perhaps not been discussed during this week. I came by accident into the world of disabled people, thinking that it was I who had something to give – that I was being asked been asked to do something - and as best as I could, I did it. I know that it was little, I know that whoever we are as human beings we can do a little and that we will always find ourselves faced with innumerable hopes of doing more we can never fulfill. But I have found that whatever I might have to give, in fact, I was receiving a great deal more in return. To begin with, I was receiving an example, an example of how the human spirit triumphs - can triumph - over diversity. I would even say that it becomes stronger, more resilient, more sensitive to other people’s needs, more mature, under the challenger of adversity, in whatever form it might take and when we think, people like myself, more able bodied, how easily we get upset by such a little thing, that is nothing, but we get upset. And we walk into the next room, and we see people, who in terms of mobility and freedom of action, have lost almost everything, and yet are not thinking of what they have lost, of what might have been, but what is and what can be, what an example that is. But more than that, I find that we are faced with a challenge, that in the disabled people we know, we see not only themselves and other disabled people, we see a whole section of our human family who is living under deprivation of some kind. Be it great poverty, or even great injustice and we feel impelled to come out of ourselves for a little while at least, become involved in their needs and the more we do that, the more fulfilled we ourselves become. It's in thinking of somebody else that we in fact find not only our own happiness, but I believe, the solution to our own problems, whether they are personal or even material. And today if we want to see a more united and a more livable world, we have got to out and do something about that section of the world that is living under such poverty, and I believe that there is no group of people in the entire world that can in fact make such an impact on that problem, as our world of disabled people and those involved with it, because disability jumps every barrier of race and belief. We are one group that could speak with one voice, governments will never do enough for the poor, unless they are pressurized, unless it is a question of votes, of getting back into power and I feel that in doing our own work - which is to make those amongst us … better off to give them more independence - we should also be looking outwards to others who are waiting for somebody to come to their help.

22:59: I count it a very, very, great privilege that you have so kindly given me this award and given me such a warm welcome, and I assure you that it's a morning that I shall always remember, and to every one of you, when you return to your homes wherever they may be, I offer my warmest wishes for the success of your work, the fulfillment of your hopes. And I thank you for your kindness to me. [applause]

23:30: Speech Ends

23:36: End of Recording

End of Transcription