Leonard Cheshire Project Resonate

File Title: 'Madison NJ', address by GLC. Recorded?

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Start of Transcription

00:00 to 00:07: *applause*

00:08: Geoffrey Leonard Cheshire: Mr Chairman, Mrs Fenwick, very distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to try and tell you what an honour and what a pleasure it is for me to be here today on this platform, as your guest. There are moments in a lifetime when you sense that something very special and unusual is taking place, and this, I would like to assure you, is one of them. In the year of I.Y.D.P., the year dedicated to disabled people, the world over, many happy and meaningful things have taken place, in which it's been my pleasure and privilege to participate.

But this is something unique. When David Graville told you something of the steps that had been taken, that have led up to that moment, I don't think he really, out of modesty, let you know what an achievement this is. I have watched it from a distance, and from time to time I have come here to see for myself how things are going. It has taken 10 years to bring this fine home into being. Some people may think this is a very long time to take to start a home. But, I know from what I have seen over the last 30 years or more, that each new project is individual. In a way, it's unique; it has its own problems and its own particular circumstances in which it develops. What is, to me, so great about this, is the fact that, despite many many set backs, despite the doubts of many people, not only here but further afield, that this would ever come about. David and his team have never lost faith, they kept meeting nearly every fortnight, and they persevered in their determination to bring this about. An idea that was first brought here by Margaret Simmons - I can't see Margaret, but, she's here somewhere – …

3.20 to 3:22: *in the audience:* There [faint, unclear]

3: 24: GLC: my special thanks to you, Margaret. And you, in turn, brought Ronald Travers, my long-standing friend and my deputy, and between you, you found David. That committee financed itself, the money to keep it going came out of their own pockets, a measure of their faith in the project. And to me, David, you stand out in my memory, you and your team, as a man of faith who never lost - or perhaps there's just one occasion - ...

4:09 to 4:14: *laughters*

4:10 to 4:12: *Man in audience*: Say no more.

4:15: GLC: I came over to visit, and I had a little feeling in my bone you were gonna tell me it's no good, but you didn't.

4:16: *faint* *laughter*

4:23: And today, we stand on the threshold of something quite new. It isn't just another home, a new home. It is something different in kind. All the work that has gone into it, to me, has been as if laying the foundations on which to build something great. And coming here yesterday and spending the 2 or 3 hours that I did as your guests, the residents of this home to whom this home now belongs, and whose guests we are today, was something very moving and very poignant. And I do thank you with all my heart for the welcome you gave me. You not only welcomed me, but you gave me great encouragement, you gave me a feeling that a great deal was going to grow, out of your home.

5:37: If, for a moment, we ask ourselves what is it, that this home is meaning to achieve and to be. First, I think, its purpose is to give security, a sense of belonging, for those who live in it, the residents. I think all of us, whoever we are, need a feeling of security, a feeling that this is my home, my home in which I have my own part, in which I can develop as I want to, and to which, of course, I make my contribution. It is a home, in which those who live, will feel part and parcel of a community around it, not isolated, but a part of you. And that is made possible because of all the community has done to bring it into being. It's a home that belongs to the community. And so now, we have a team, a family, made out of those who've given, those who've worked, and those who live here. And in this home, will be demonstrated by the residents, how to give meaning and purpose to a life that has, in a sense, been broken, or in part broken, by disability.

I think that the human spirit is demonstrated most truly, and rises to its greatest hights, in the face of difficulty and adversity. And, I think that the example of those who have to carry the burden of disability, and yet who can lead such normal, cheerful, purposeful life, is a priceless one. One, which we all of us need, and can benefit from. At the same time, I think we have to be very careful when we talk about disability, and be sure that we know what we mean.

8:25: We tend, sometimes, to talk about the disabled, as if, somehow, they form a separate group. But, that isn't true. Disability, I know, usually mean somebody who suffers a physical impairment, or perhaps a mental impairment. But the word means more than that. It embraces any shortcoming, any impairment in us as a person. And which of us has not got an impairment or a shortcoming? Which of us is not, in one way or another, disabled? I think we must be very careful not to think that a disabled person is somehow different from us. Above all, we must remember that a disabled person is a person. Above everything else, a person who happens to have a disability. We should never think in terms of ideal solutions because they don't exist, not in the absolute.

What we need to provide, as society, is the widest possible range of options for housing or living to disabled people, so that there is a real freedom of choice so that each can decide what he or she would like. And in that wide range options, our little homes form just one single option.

10:19: In no way, are we suggesting that this is the perfect solution to the problem of disability. For some, this will be a home in which they will live for a while, and then move out to greater independence, for others a home for life. But disability applies not just to the individual, it applies to the whole human family, our one single human family of which we form a part. We can truthfully say that the human family itself is disabled; it is disabled by divisions, misunderstandings, by deprivation, by injustice. And our task, each of us, individually and collectively, should be to try and fight against that disability. To give the whole human family greater freedom, to rise to its full potential. In this year, International Year of Disabled People, we are all trying in our own communities to provide more opportunities for the disable person to take his rightful place in society. But we need also to look beyond that, to the whole international community, to the human family in its entirety. And, I would like to think that each of our homes - and this one in particular since it is pioneering a new venture in the United States - will, as it becomes established, begin to reach out to those who are in need, or who are deprived in one way or another, outside the home itself. Both in the local community and in the world as a whole.

12:58: In my own view, the greatest problem that the human family faces today is the scale of injustice throughout the world, and I talk particularly of the injustice of the totally poor who are unable to help themselves. If we say, 'how are we going to do anything about that?', we, who are just ordinary individuals, the answer must be step by step. We should each look at ourselves and say 'what can I do ?' And I believe that this home will prove to be one step in an ever-continuing journey that will reach always outwards, to others in need. In the disabled person, by virtue of his - if you'll allow me to say this - relative helplessness, I see symbolised the total helplessness of the utterly poor in the world. And so to me, being amongst the residents of this home, makes me want to reach out, in so far as I can, to help others in the developing parts of the world who are in need. I find that my own life has been made richer and more fulfilled because of the privilege of sharing in some small way, during these years, in the struggle of disabled people to achieve greater independence. I feel very privileged to be able to do that. I feel particularly privileged to be with you today. And, I would like to extend my warmest thanks to all those who brought this home into being. My warmest wishes for the future, and the growing success of this home.

15:36 But above all, and finally, I want to express my warm personal thanks to you, the residents. Amongst the many things you have taught me, you have taught me the true nature of human achievement. The human achievement lies not in the achievement itself, it lies in what we have done relative to our opportunities and our resources. In other words, with what we have put into it. And I think of the example of those, who are either deprived or disabled, and yet can forget what might have been, and concentrate on what they can do, and give such meaning and such cheerfulness to their lives, is the example that I would most like to be able to follow myself, if only I could. So my final word is to you, to whom this home belongs, thank you for inviting me to be your guest, and in a moment to perform the opening ceremony. Thank you very much indeed.

17:04: speech ends.

17:05 to 17:09: *applause from the audience*.

17:09: end of recording.

End of transcription