

Proposed letter to be sent to the Prime Minister and The Times

Dear Mr. Heath,

The discussion of the thalidomide children has called attention to the unsatisfactory state of public services for handicapped children and handicapped adults. By asking the Rowntree Trust to spend £3m in the first instance on its behalf the Government has already acknowledged this fact.

But £3m, or even £6m, is only a tiny fraction of the sums needed annually and the Government should go on to acknowledge that an equitable system of allowances (and pensions) must be introduced not just for the thalidomide children and other severely congenitally handicapped children but all handicapped children and adults, irrespective of type of handicap. The Government should also accept the principle that any system of allowances or services for handicap in childhood must not be separated from a similar system for handicap in adult life. Already there are grave problems when handicapped children reach the school leaving age and there is a marked lack of continuity of care and responsibility.

[The system of financial support should be based on degree of handicap as assessed functionally.] The rate of allowance could then be reviewed periodically. (Allowance or pension) according to degree of handicap must logically be independent of any assessed need for attendance. Because of its ramifications nationally this scheme should be administered by a statutory body which is directly accountable to the public.

In addition to an equitable system of (allowances and pensions) the government should secondly acknowledge the need to develop a system of occupational and social services for far more disabled persons of all ages than are currently registered with local authorities. Work in ordinary industry and in sheltered conditions needs to be better guaranteed. Capital and current grants for accommodation, equipment and transport need to be rapidly expanded or introduced, and nursing, home help, laundry and other welfare services need to be doubled or tripled in scale as quickly as possible.

We are aware that the Government is active in many different respects and that there have been a number of encouraging developments in recent years. But the general development needs to be much faster, and better integrated. Above all, Government resources for the handicapped in our society should be greatly increased.

Yours sincerely,