

The Development of Community Treatment as a Partial Alternative of Institutionalization

The paper is concerned with the development of community treatment of delinquent adolescents in this State. This development has taken place within the last decade, it is not yet complete, and probably never will be, because the task keeps changing its form in response to what we have learned from our own experience, and the experience of others. It also changes in response to new ideas that we have, and with which we are experimenting, but most of all it changes in response to a world that keeps changing and demanding that we adapt to it.

Most people enter this field with a high degree of motivation, high ideals and an enormous amount of goodwill. All of this can take a great deal of battering over the years for a variety of reasons. What is particularly wearing is that there are very few easy answers, and the policies that are developed rarely satisfy all concerned. In a dynamic pattern of events the answers we think we have, are quickly challenged; and today's solution may become tomorrow's obstacle to progress. However I am sure that the review of progress which this conference aims to provide will help us to see that the struggle is worthwhile even though it seems to have no end. It is certainly encouraging to me that our work in developing community based services for delinquent adolescents has been seen as worthy of inclusion as one of the valuable developments of recent years.

Juvenile crime

In order to examine the roles of the Social Welfare Department and Community Treatment programme, these roles need to be located in the overall pattern of juvenile crime, and also in relation to the dispositional system of the Childrens Court. Only some of the young people engaged in juvenile crime are apprehended, and only some of those apprehended are proceeded against in the Childrens Court. (See Figure 1). Many are given an official warning by the police, and no further action is taken against them.

Of those who do reach the Court, some have their cases adjourned by the Court on condition that they be of good behaviour in the intervening period, others are fined, whilst some are placed on good behaviour bonds. If the offence, or pattern of offending is regarded as

more serious, the Magistrate may place the young person on a Supervision Order or a Probation Order. Finally there are the most severe dispositions, i.e. admitting the young person to the care of the Social Welfare Department as a ward of the State, or if the young person is more than 14 years of age, to either admit him, or her, as ward, or sentence them to a period at a Youth Training Centre.

It is at this more serious end of the dispositional system that the phenomenon of the Community Treatment Programme becomes significant. However, before exploring that in detail, it is worth noting that no official action is taken against a sizeable proportion of young offenders, and that the police through the official police warning system, and the Childrens Court, through adjournment and the higher dispositions, both act as diversion systems. That is, they divert another significant proportion of young people away from the correctional systems per se.

The Youth Welfare Division of the S.W.D. has the task of providing for younger people aged 14-17 either admitted to the care of the Department as wards, or sentenced to a Youth Training Centre (Y.T.C.). It does this directly through its own statutory agencies and facilities, or through the voluntary agencies which it supports and supervises.

It is important to note that because, as indicated above, many delinquents are not charged, and many of those who are charged are dealt with by the courts on lighter dispositions, those who are actually handed over to the Department for attention are only a minor portion of the whole.

Prior to 1970, the Department provided supervision on probation by individual probation officers typically seeing the young person for an hour once per week. For those who breached the conditions of their probation order, the next step usually taken by the courts was to admit them to a Youth Training Centre (Y.T.C.) if they were 15-17 years of age. It is evident that it is a very big step for the young person to go from supervision for one hour per week to "round the clock" supervision every day of the week for several months. A typical period in custody for a state ward at that time was about six months.

Alternatives to institutions

This observed gap between probation on one hand and custodial placement in an institution on the other became a matter for some concern. This concern was accompanied by other concerns that were being felt in the late sixties. At this time there was also a great deal of questioning of the effectiveness of institutions. It was strongly argued that many young people, especially those coming into custody for the first time, might be damaged by the negative aspects of institutionalization.(1)

At this time there were also optimistic claims from the U.S.A., and particularly from the California Youth Authority, that their Community Treatment Programme was providing a viable alternative to institutionalization. They claimed a higher success rate in terms of recidivism and at less cost to the State.

Finally and probably most significantly of all was the problem of sheer weight of numbers. In the same way that the results of the post war baby boom, and the post war immigration programme were being felt in schools, S.W.D. facilities and associated facilities were suffering from acute overcrowding. Running an institution like Turana Y.T.C. became a preoccupation with accommodation problems. These were all strong pressures to consider alternatives.

A committee was set up to consider the practicability of an attendance centre as an alternative to institutionalization for youths, and to advise the Minister on what steps should be taken. The result was the Hawthorn Y.W.S. which was set up in 1970 as an experiment on short term non-residential care for 14-17 year old youths.*(2)

The concept of the Y.W.S. stems partly from concepts of the aetiology of delinquency, partly from the Department's concept of its mandate or assigned role for intervention, and partly from the priorities the Department placed on certain levels of intervention.

The Committee's beliefs about the aetiology of delinquency seemed to reflect acceptance of both person-centred(3) and social-system-centred explanations.(4)

The Committee was less concerned in analysing their task in terms of systems theories than a similar committee would be today, but there is enough stated or implied in various documents prepared during the late 60's to provide material for a rough analysis in systems theory terms.

If we use a framework in which we identify four social systems as possible targets for intervention — the individual, the organization, the community, and society — it is clear that the Committee saw its intervention task as tackling the first two, i.e. the individual and the organization, and gave a lower priority to the importance of the community, and society in general.

The programme proposed, centred mainly on the individual and the significant others in his, or her, immediate network, with a heavy reliance on group work, particularly "Guided Group Interaction". This was based on a belief in the paramount importance of the peer group(5) as the dominant influence among the range of causal factors leading to delinquent behaviour.

*The peak years for adolescent offending are at 14, 15 and 16 years of age.

Intermediate steps

The Committee's other main target for intervention in the terms of the conceptual framework to which I have just referred, was "the organization", i.e. the Victorian Childrens Court and the Victoria juvenile correction system. They saw the need for an intermediate step between probation and incarceration, and therefore the need to modify the existing system to allow this.

Although it was not clearly articulated as such until later, the intervention strategy of altering the correctional system to allow for an intermediate stage was an "eleventh hour" diversion system aimed at minimizing the further penetration into the criminal justice system of young persons who had already penetrated to some extent.(6)

The two remaining social systems in our conceptual framework were acknowledged as being of importance in the aetiology of delinquency, but of less priority in terms of the Department's immediate problems in carrying out its assigned role. Although the pattern of intervention became known as "Community Treatment", there was very little direct interaction with the community allowed in the planning. The interaction with the community that did occur was, at least initially, largely incidental to the operations of the interventions directed at the individual and the organization.

Similarly, it was clearly recognized that institutionalized young offenders were predominantly from the lower socio-economic stratum of society. Accordingly "society", the fourth level in the conceptual framework, was a potential target for intervention. However, society did not appear to be considered by the Committee to be a target for intervention. The literature from the U.S.A., especially from the California Youth Authority, emphasised working with individuals.(7) This fact, together with the fact that the institutions in Victoria was seriously overcrowded, were responsible for the Committee's emphasis on influencing the individual and the organizations impinging on him, rather than on influencing the community and society in which he lived.

Given these priorities, Hawthorn provided very effective intervention, and its establishment in April, 1970 was a major milestone in juvenile corrections in

Australia. It became the model for the other Youth Welfare Service which followed in Victoria, and for the "Youth Project Centre" in South Australia.(8). While each of these subsequently developed centres had many variations on the original Hawthorn centre, most of the basic programme components of Hawthorn were continued in each of them.

These basic components were a non-residential treatment programme, based on part time attendance, as an alternative to incarceration; for a middle teens group of young offenders, who had previously had probation, but had continued to offend. The major goals were prevention of re-offending and the avoidance of institutionalization for the youths.

Hawthorn's approach was also characterized by the goals of differential treatment, the use of "I Level" theory as a diagnostic instrument, and as a guide to treatment planning.(9) The treatment programme relied very heavily on group work based on "Guided Group Interaction" principles.

Although it was never set out as one of its formal goals, one of Hawthorn's outstanding features, to my mind, was the basic attitudes of staff to youths, and youths to staff. Hawthorn was characterized by informality and an impressive degree of real acceptance and liking on both sides. In fact "sides" were much less evident than in the "them against us" attitudes that prevailed in most correctional institutions. Frank and open communication was much more common than it had been in the past.

Following respectably low re-offending rates at Hawthorn, and a continuing problem of overcrowding in institutions, plans for another Y.W.S. were considered.

A limitation of the Hawthorn programme was the initial narrowness of the client group, i.e. probationers, not previously institutionalized and with a reasonable degree of home support. Many of the young persons crowding the institutions were wards of the State, some with quite long histories of institutionalization, and many with precarious family situations. By September 1970 it was found necessary to develop a programme at Hawthorn for wards but problems of accessibility and inadequate family support were persistent limitations.(10)

The Brunswick programme

The problem was further overcome by designing the next Y.W.S. to cater for wards. This was the Brunswick Y.W.S. opened in March, 1972. The clients were entirely wards (14-18 years), most of whom were diverted from Turana to Brunswick about two weeks after entry into Turana from court. About one quarter were long term wards who had been in Turana for some time or had been there on previous occasions, had re-offended and been returned to Turana.

As well as providing a part-time attendance programme, Brunswick provided a hostel for short term transitional accommodation for about one-third of its clientele who were homeless, or who had family problems that required some resolution before they returned home. A typical hostel stay was 4-6 weeks. Once they returned home, or to some substitute form of accommodation such as private board, they attended on a part-time basis like the other youths.(11)

The programme placed less emphasis on group work than did the Hawthorn programme, and made greater use of one-to-one counselling, support, and supervision. Staff also endeavoured to become very knowledgeable about the youth "network" of family peers etc. and endeavoured to manipulate this network to promote the re-integration of the youths with the more positive elements of the network, and to reduce the youths contact with the more negative elements in the network. Staff also played the role of advocate with schools, employer etc. to assist youths to gain a toe-hold in the opportunity structure.

Again, re-offending was respectably low, and it was five months before any boy was returned to Turana either on charges, or by "Director's Orders".(12) In fact, results at Hawthorn and Brunswick were such that the Department became committed to a policy of developing more youth Welfare Services.(13) It was also at this time that a decision was taken to scrap plans for another Youth Training Centre at Bundoora, and to continue developing alternatives to institutions. The Premier's pre-election speech in 1973 committed the Government to the provision of four more Youth Welfare Services.

Windsor and Grassmere

The year 1973 was also marked by two more important milestones. The Windsor Youth Welfare Service, and the Grassmere Centre, were both opened in that year.

Windsor was the first centre for girls. Like Brunswick, Windsor had a hostel as part of its services, but unlike Brunswick the majority of the clients initially lived in the hostel. This was due to the circumstances of the initial group of girls catered for. There was a high proportion of long term wards, many of whom were from extremely troubled backgrounds. Although it made use of "I Level" theory and "Guided Group Interaction" it introduced the use of Transactional Analysis to the field, and for a while T.A. was the major treatment modality at Windsor.

While some T.A. concepts remain influential in Windsor's approach to its task of intervention, it no longer has a T.A. centred programme. During 1975 and 1976 Windsor developed a programme based on a theory developed at Windsor. It is called the theory of

Alternative Resource Development. It is not possible to elaborate it sufficiently here to do it justice, but two points are worth at least mentioning. The theory emphasises the reduction of anxiety, whereas previously acclaimed approaches from the U.S. such as G.G.I. and P.P.C. (Positive Peer Culture) emphasise heightening anxiety as an essential ingredient for effective group work. Most peer-group-based theories also emphasise the influence of the peer group as a source of controlling and modifying behaviour. They assume that the information that the group members will use in this process will almost entirely be elicited from the group. The theory argues that this does not happen. It argues that the lack of information coming forward in the group results from the fact that many of the young people lack a repertoire of alternative behaviour and that this fact is of central importance in accounting for the inappropriate, deviant, or offending behaviour of those young people. The Windsor group work is based on techniques of skillfully feeding in information that helps the group to understand and internalize many social and emotional skills and responses which will expand their repertoire of possible legitimate responses to the difficult situations in which they are likely to find themselves.(14)

Results in terms of management of the girls' behaviour while involved in the programme, and the girls' ability to cope with the pressure of living in the

community, are impressive. The rate of intake of girls to Windsor has more than doubled, and yet returns to custody have become far less frequent. Re-offending has occurred at a very low level.

The first voluntary agency into the field was the Grassmere Centre, but being a voluntary agency is only one of its interesting features. This agency is the subject of an entire paper being presented at this conference so I will mention it only briefly here.

The client group includes both sexes and a wider age span (10-18 years) than the other Youth Welfare Services. Approximately 75% of the Grassmere funds are provided by the S.W.D. and the agency raises the balance itself.

Grassmere was from the start, and still remains, a very "local" centre. It is situated in Doveton near Dandenong. Doveton is a predominantly Housing Commission suburb, poorly serviced, and somewhat isolated. Grassmere's clientele is mainly drawn from the immediate locality. Because of this, and the isolation, and because Grassmere, as a voluntary agency, asks for, and more importantly, receives support from the locality, it has probably established more linkages with the local community than the statutory Youth Welfare Services.(15)

This interaction with the community has been influential in some of the ways in which the programme

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has developed at Grassmere, but for more information on this I refer you to the session on Grassmere.

Western youth welfare

The Western Youth Welfare Service, which was begun in 1975, is a bigger programme than the others, and has greater resources of staff, buildings, and equipment. It is located at Ascot Vale and is designed to serve the needs of the Western and North Western Suburban Regions. It started off as a small programme because the originally purchased buildings required renovation, and it has built up gradually as rooms have become available to use. Only now are the buildings completed.

It has a core attendance programme, a hostel with a capacity for 10, and education and work preparation programmes run jointly with S.W.D. In addition, a satellite programme is run by Western Y.W.S. staff members and a staff member from the S.W.D. regional office located at the N.O.W. centre in Coburg. The Coburg programme provides some support and counselling services, but on a voluntary drop-in basis.

The original programme at Western was fairly intensive, and based mainly on the Positive Peer Culture model. Its intensity was a strength in one way, in that it proved a valuable change agent for some youths, but for others its intensity elicited a negative reaction and overall it was not effective in managing large numbers of youths. Over the past ten months it has been considerably modified and is now effectively managing large numbers of youths.

The core programme emphasises the development of the youth's social skills. Also, like the Windsor programme it strongly emphasises the reduction of anxiety, whereas the previous approaches had emphasised the heightening of anxiety. It is our belief that programmes that heighten anxiety are dangerous instruments in the attempt to modify the behaviour of acting out adolescents. While in many theories heightened anxiety is seen as a goad to behaviour change, it is equally a goad to running away, or to avoidance of the anxiety-raising situation, or to impulsive acting-out behaviour. It is now considered by Y.W.D. that approaches to treatment incorporating heightened anxiety are more suited to security settings than to open and community-based settings.

During 1975, two hostels, Sunshine and Swinbourne, were modified to become Specialist Hostels. This development stems more from the difficulties experienced in trying to accommodate the more socially incompetent people with more than usually persistent behavior problems. Hostels had previously mainly relied on husband and wife teams backed by one domestic staff member. This approach had proved adequate for the more manageable young people, but could not cope with the more difficult youngsters. (Table 1 shows that

as well as new services opening three hostels closed down). By supplying additional staff and introducing some programmed approaches to basic social skills learning, and having a greater capacity to provide support and assistance, Sunshine and Swinbourne are now catering for the more difficult, hard to place youngsters. There are still many difficulties to be worked through in this area, but the recognition that special difficulties need to be matched with extra resources and a specialised approach has been an important breakthrough.(16)

The Ivanhoe Hostel reopened in 1976 as a "Specialist" Hostel incorporating similar principles to Sunshine and Swinbourne. And in early 1977 the "Four Flats" Programme opened combining some of these principles but also supplying a semi-independent situation in flats but with support available as needed.

Another significant event that occurred during 1975 was the closure of the Morning Star Y.T.C. While this closure was the result of an independent decision made by the Order of Franciscan Friars who administered the centre, it is interesting to note that the network of Youth Welfare Services had so markedly reduced the population of Turana, that Turana was able to absorb the Morning Star population without difficulty. Thus by overcrowding was much less of a problem than previously, and the range of placement options had become wider and more diverse. Treatment approaches were also more diverse, and centres were trying various ways of modifying and extending the basic ingredients with which they had begun.

A new phase of development

I stated earlier that I inferred that the Committee saw as the target systems for intervention, the individual and the organization; and that the Community and the wider society was seen as less important. However, two developments in 1975 were indicative of a new phase of development that involved intervention in these two social systems.

A large site with several buildings was purchased by the Department at North Carlton with the aim of providing a complex of complementary services for youth, with a strong emphasis on acutely disadvantaged youth. It is not to be run directly by the Department or by a single agency, but by a committee of management made up of community representatives.(17) It is intended that this will involve the community in thinking about how that community is catering, or failing to cater, for its disadvantaged and at-risk youth. Some of the services have begun operating and are listed in Table 1.

Aboriginal youth support

Another project established in 1975 was the Aboriginal Youth Support Unit. This small unit was set up with a brief that included providing direct assistance

to individual aboriginal youth, making sure that aboriginals were not disadvantaged by the correctional system on account of their aboriginality, looking for ways to improve the access and power of the aboriginal youth — aboriginal community network, in having their needs as a community attended to and responded to.(18)

The Department is currently in the process of purchasing a hostel building for aboriginal youth. Staff members have been recruited to run the hostel, and four out of the five staff are aborigines. Leaders of the aboriginal network took part in the process of locating, and selecting, the staff of the hostel and the support unit. Another attempt to meet the needs of this group and increase their power is to be made next week when the Y.W.S.'s co-ordinator of Aboriginal Youth Services will be meeting with the Attorney General to discuss the possibility of an Aboriginal sitting on the bench as an Honorary Magistrate alongside the S.S.M. in the Childrens Court. So far, the Attorney General had responded positively to the proposition.

These then are examples of the more recent trends in handling the problems of offending adolescents. They represent only a beginning in the process of intervention into the wider "community" and "society" systems, but they also represent a shift in emphasis, and priority, from the high priority that was given to the immediate problem of dealing with the vastly increased number of bodies placed with the Department, that was the major preoccupation of the period 1965-75. This does not mean that there is not still a great deal to be done in the "individual" and "organization" systems. At present there is a disproportionate number of young persons from non-metropolitan regions and from the southern suburbs in Turana and Winlaton. This is because the Y.W.S. alternatives have been developed in the metropolitan area where the majority of young offenders in the state live. But it is now important to ensure that we do not overlook the needs of the provincial and rural regions simply because we are over the pressure of numbers crisis. An inappropriate placement for a country or southern suburban boy or girl, is just as wrong, as is an inappropriate placement for a boy or girl from the metropolitan area. To meet this need, the Department is working on an adaptation of a Y.W.S. and a Specialist Hostel that will be known as a Youth Support Unit and be geared to the needs of the non-metropolitan regions,(19) Plans for services as Springvale & Frankston are also being processed.

There are also the special needs of young people where the major problem is social incompetence and/or intellectual dullness. These are young persons who seem "slow" and not able to manage work or interaction with peers or with most of their environment but are not sufficiently retarded to become the concern of the M.H.A.

While these individual and organization targets are important even more work lies ahead in tackling the wider systems of "community" & "society".

During 1976 following discussion between the Department of Youth, Sport and Recreation and S.W.D., some clarification was reached on demarcation between Departments. It was determined that the field of prevention was to become the responsibility of S.W.D.'s Youth Welfare Division. A series of meetings between Y.W.D. staff and youth workers, street contact workers, and representatives of voluntary agencies looked at possibilities in prevention. One outcome is a policy proposal entitled "Youth Option Support Scheme" (Y.O.S.S.).

This scheme is a proposed state-wide funding programme for implementation at regional and local levels. The scheme will offer assistance to groups who wish to develop a greater range of options and support for excluded young people in Victoria. It would aim to facilitate and foster a range of services and approaches towards preventing exclusion and its resultant social effects, and to reduce or avoid penetration into the juvenile justice Welfare systems.

Funds would originate from the Social Welfare Department and would be allocated and managed according to published decision-making criteria by a Departmental Standing Committee. Within a few weeks it may be clear whether this policy will be adopted by the Government.

Past, Present and Future

This brings us up to the present day, and some reflection on what has been achieved and what is yet to be done is appropriate at this point.

First, let us consider the achievements, starting first with the Youth Welfare Services which, after all, were our beginning point. A brief comparison with the California Youth Authority's Community Treatment Programme is useful.

In the Californian programme, to be "eligible" a youth had to be committed to the C.Y.A. for the first time.(20). By contrast, the Victorian practice has been to place in community treatment programmes youths ranging from those who were not offenders and first offenders to those who had in the vicinity of 30-40 offences over a period of offending of up to 5-6 years.

Despite what we may assume to be a client group with a greater history of offending behaviour in the Victorian Community Treatment programme, it seems that in Victoria there was a much greater readiness to assign youths to community treatment than in California. Between 1961 and 1969 a period of 8 years, 1014 youths had gone through the California Youth Authority C.T.P.

programmes in a State with a total population of 19.5 mill. (approx) in 1969, and presumably a State with at least as great a proportion of delinquent adolescents in its population as the State of Victoria. In Victoria between 1970 and 1976 approximately 1110 youths have been placed in community treatment out of a State population of 3.5 mill.

From these figures even allowing for the many technical differences in the mechanics of the California system and the Victorian system, it seems that those who administer the system in Victoria may have been more willing overall, to assign youths to community treatment instead of the traditional institutions, than were their Californian counterparts.

Programme evaluation

Another means of weighing the impact of the Victorian Community Treatment programme, is to look at the effect it had on the juvenile correctional facilities.

In an examination of the changing patterns in the ways young people were distributed between facilities, the following points emerge:

1. The distribution of wards changed dramatically between May, 1971 and May, 1977. While the numbers in hostels rose very slightly*, the numbers at Turana and Winlaton fell dramatically. There was a correspondingly dramatic increase in the number of wards placed with Youth Welfare Services.
2. The number of young people on Y.T.C. sentence has fallen significantly between May, 1974 and May, 1977. This fall suggests that despite the diversion of large numbers of wards from institutional placement to community based placement there does not appear to have been any increase in offending among these wards which has required them to be sentenced by the Childrens Court for a fixed institution placement (by means of a Y.T.C. sentence).

Another point to consider is that if the Childrens Court had available to it a more flexible order than the Y.T.C. sentence (which can only be served in a Y.T.C.) which allowed extra-mural placement, a sizeable portion of their court order outside the institution. This would further reduce the numbers in institutions.

3. A further inference that is possible from these figures, is that the total number of young people in this network of services has not gone up between 1974 and 1977, but shows a very slight decline, despite a steady rise in population during that same period, i.e. 798 at 25th May, 1974 and 795 at 28th May, 1977. Similarly if those who we may be able to assume to be less serious or less persistent offenders, the probationers and "other" (usually

voluntary attenders or young people on supervision orders) are subtracted from the total and the figures are 711 and 696 respectively. Again a slight decline.

*The numbers in hostels depend directly on bedspace available as there is always a waiting list of young people in need of hostel placement. Several more hostels are needed.

Despite all of what I have just said about non-institutional services, I should make it quite clear that I see the Youth Training Centre as not only a desirable, but an essential part of the line-up of services for youth. Our Childrens Court Act emphasises that the paramount consideration must be the interests of the young person. Very often to make it very clear to a young person that he or she must stop offending, stop running away, or stop fighting with parents, and having stopped be confined with a structure that effectively demands that the young person come to grips with his or her difficulties is very much in the best interest of that young person. The structure and control of the Y.T.C. is still quite often the best means of ensuring this.

One of the great possibilities that is now becoming open to institutions, is that the reduced numbers of inmates now allows the institutions to do the best they can



"The peak years for adolescent offending are 14, 15, 16.

for those under their care. It also gives them more confidence to apply themselves to their task, knowing that most of the young people in the institution very much need to be there.

There is much more that might be said about potential developments in the whole field, especially in the wider "society" sense. The next few years are going to demand a great deal of imagination and effort to be applied to the education and employment areas. Both systems will be under enormous pressure to change. Patterns of living are changing, there are movements here and there, towards a more "network" orientated pattern of family life. All of these things, plus the quality of services for younger children, better foster care and adoption services, better pre-marital counselling, better sex education will all have long term benefits in reducing the numbers of adolescent offenders.

When considering the field of juvenile delinquency, we should try to look as much as possible at the broad canvas. A few trendy or exciting projects here or there can be a distraction that may cause complacency and distract our attention from the large numbers of youngsters for whom life's prospects are still very bleak. But the developments of the past decade are encouraging. If we continue to develop in the ways that have been commenced, the prospects of a diverse, but well integrated, network of preventive and corrective systems is within our grasp.

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