

ents to accept agency interest and to recognize the need for their involvement. By enabling the parents to share with him their feelings and facts about their mode of interaction with each other and with their son, and then clarifying with them that they could not expect change from Michael until they, too, were ready to understand and to make changes in themselves, the caseworker was able to engage the parents in on-going casework service. During this ongoing phase, the caseworker handled the parents' defensive attitudes by confronting them with the reality of their behavior. He helped them to understand some of the distortions in roles and relationships which had contributed to family dysfunction. The realistic factor of the father's and son's inability to keep daytime appointments was handled by scheduling evening appointments for them. This latter factor, as well as habitual family avoidance of help, had contributed to this particular family's resistance to casework services. These resistances were met and overcome through casework techniques and administrative approaches.

#### Summary

Most middle-class delinquents do not fit the societal stereotype of a "juvenile delinquent" in terms of appearance and offenses. Despite the apparently healthy picture presented by this group and their families, evidence accumulated at our agency (and nationally)<sup>5</sup> indicates that these youngsters and their families suffer from social and emotional disturbances. The middle-class family has financial means and knowledge of helping resources. For these reasons, we have tended to overlook this group in

<sup>5</sup> Kvaraceus and Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

our attempts at aggressive casework activity.

The Jewish Family and Children's Service of Detroit, through its cooperative referral program with local police and courts, has been able to reach some of these pre-delinquent and delinquent youngsters. Although we have tried to "spark" motivation through the authoritative referral program, we recognize the need for continued efforts to build family motivation. This paper has described some approaches for handling family resistance to using casework services. We have used joint interviews with parents and group interviews including parents and the offender. We give these families immediate service. We have recognized the continuing need for experimentation in the casework management of family anxiety. We have used flexibility around appointment times to engage this group in on-going service. We have attempted to help the family understand the agency's services and the roles to be played by both the worker and the family in the casework effort. A next step in reaching these families may involve the caseworker in a first interview with the family at the police precinct or in the juvenile court building.

Middle-class Jewish families often act on their own initiative in helping their delinquent children. However, their efforts in using private resources seem to relate to avoiding family involvement especially in the areas of family communication and interaction. We feel that the most effective help for these youngsters lies in a family-centered approach. The development of approaches to reach and to serve this group requires continued experimentation in social agencies if we wish to strengthen our efforts to prevent family breakdown and to maintain healthy family functioning.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STRUCTURE IN A GROUP RESIDENCE PROGRAM \*

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#### Levels of Structure

THE material for this paper has been drawn from experiences in the Group Residence Division of the Jewish Child Care Association of New York. This program is carried out in six residential units for adolescents. Four units are apartments each designed for 8 youngsters. Two girls' units have a population that ranges in age from 15 to 18; one of the boys' units has the same age range and the other has boys from 13 to 16 in age. Another residence is housed in a private building and has 16 boys between 15 and 18 years of age. The sixth residence is also in a private building and it houses 30 girls from 16 to 21 in age. With such diversity and extent in this program, we are in a position to have a choice of more than one unit in making an allocation. This calls for a realistic evaluation of all of the factors of structure in each residence before deciding which combination offers the most favorable placement facility for the individual under consideration.

Structure, in a group residence program, connotes a number of dimensions rather than simply the physical limitations. The physical structure of a resi-

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dence is of importance and is a factor that should be given proper consideration, but it is only one of many factors that influence intake policies. Before physical factors are considered, the basic philosophy of the program must be formulated. Its implementation provides another vital element of structure. To make the picture more complete, due consideration must be given to such factors as staff and community facilities. The combination of all of these elements constitutes structure. It must be realized, too, that the total structure is not static but has a changing form as various elements within it shift. Sometimes this shift is deliberate and controlled. Sometimes it is influenced by factors over which there is limited control. This does not mean that structure is completely unstable and unpredictable but it must be appreciated that there are both positive and negative factors that do influence it and change its form and composition over a period of time.

To relate to structure as it is described here, intake must be a live, complex procedure. The decision for or against placement involves a degree of calculated risk based upon a fully considered analysis of the interaction of the individual with the many factors of structure. Full awareness of the structure at the time that a particular

placement is considered as essential as current information about the individual being considered for placement.

In its basic sense, structure is determined by the philosophy of the agency as it is translated into action by the individuals responsible for the operation of the program. It can be influenced by the administrator of the program even though he cannot control all of its factors. His conviction about how the program is to be carried out has a strong influence upon the persons having direct daily contact with the youngsters as well as upon the casework and other professional staff.

An example of this is a conviction that no boy or girl will ever be punished by being removed from a residence. Changes in placement may be necessary if a youngster's behavior reveals that he is not benefitting from the placement. The change is never made impulsively and without the child's involvement. The child may not be given the final decision to stay if it is felt that it is best for him to go, but he and all other members of the group come to know that no one will be thrown out because he did not behave. This is an important factor in structure to be considered in intake for it is an assurance that no child under consideration will be subjected to the trauma of precipitous rejection. For the staff as well as for children this becomes a built-in factor. The staff learns not to demand that a child be removed as punishment and the group learns that no one has to fear this. The staff is encouraged to try harder to work with the difficult adolescent and this greater interest in helping the child to make a better adjustment can be a vital factor in his doing so; the staff derives the satisfaction of achieving results which do follow in most instances where real effort is made. The conviction "from the top," so to speak, carries over into many other

areas as well. To be successful, it must be implemented by personal efforts of support to house staff and by direct contacts with the youngsters themselves so that there is an atmosphere of total involvement that gives substance and strength to this aspect of structure.

#### Adolescent Needs

Within the framework of agency conviction about basic concepts of child care, consideration must be given to factors which are of specific significance to the age group under consideration and to the special needs of the particular individuals within the group. The adolescent period covers a fairly wide range in age as well as in behavior manifestations. It is not the intent of this paper to discuss the theoretical base for a program of residence service to disturbed adolescents but rather to deal with practical aspects of operation that influence intake. It is pertinent, however, to list some of the characteristics which distinguish this group from others served in the child care agency. The adolescent period is marked by both physical and emotional maturation. It is a period of turmoil and contradictions, marked by a striving for independence and adulthood coupled with a strong pull toward dependence. There is more reaching-out and attempting to deal with unfamiliar aspects of life. Success or failure of a venture often results in behavior that is difficult to live with. Failure brings frustration and a retreat to dependence coupled with anger for having this need. Projection onto the adult for all the real or fancied wrongs of the world is ever present. Success, too, can bring with it exaggerated behavior. Group influences are particularly prominent at this time and they can be good as well as bad. Secretiveness, hypersensitivity, repetition of earlier behavior, food and clothing fads

are encountered in the adolescent. The literature describes even the adolescent behavior which falls within "normal" limits in terms that sound pathological. When the adolescents in a group residence program have deeply rooted emotional problems added to the problems of "normal" adolescence, there is presented a challenging group for which to provide a program of service.

To offer a program that provides a therapeutic placement experience for disturbed adolescents requires a practical application of theoretical considerations. Structure is a means of doing this. Without making an exhaustive listing of the needs of the adolescent which must be reflected in structure, a few pertinent ones are noted. The adolescent requires: 1) a living situation that has limits to which he can relate; 2) adults who reflect maturity in their behavior; 3) a peer group that does not have too much extreme in age or behavior; 4) living quarters that provide for some degree of privacy; 5) community resources such as schools, recreational facilities, work opportunities that do not make overwhelming demands upon him; 6) professional assistance to help in dealing with personal problems, family relationships, peer relationships; 7) the security of knowing that food, clothing, financial aid, medical care, and so on, are always provided for him no matter what his behavior; 8) the security of knowing that he will have competent assistance to aid in making plans for the future after he leaves placement.

These needs are interdependent. Although they may be described separately, the relative importance of one is always influenced by the significance that others have to a particular individual. The disturbed adolescent is very sensitive to all factors in his environment. His personality development is uneven, he has not developed beyond

an early stage in some areas and in times of stress he may easily regress in others.

#### The Variables of Size and Age Range

The size of a unit is an important factor to be considered at intake. The apartment or private dwelling residence, smaller in size than the institution and more centrally located, provides a more homelike atmosphere than can be offered in a large setting. Some youngsters cannot tolerate the intimacy of living in a group of 6 to 8, and their admission to such a unit would not be indicated. A larger setting of 12 to 16 that provides the opportunity to live less closely with the others, to "spread out" more, acts to relieve anxiety and tension so that the youngster can benefit more from the facilities provided for him. Others who may not be able to tolerate or be tolerated in a foster home may often profit from placement in a group residence where less intimate relationships are required. Some disturbed adolescents may be helped to tolerate closer living in a gradual fashion so that they may later move to a smaller setting or be better prepared for making an adequate adjustment after leaving placement. At times, the welfare of the total group must be considered. Even though an individual may be able eventually to live in a small setting with a fair degree of comfort, his extended inability to do so may be so disruptive to the rest of the group that for the sake of the others placement should be made in a larger setting.

Within the same unit, large or small, the age range is a factor of structure that must be evaluated as part of the intake consideration. A setup which is organized to meet the requirements of the younger adolescent group of 12 to 15 years of age will not be best for an older adolescent even though the size

of the unit may be correct. Many of the needs of all adolescents may be similar but the different needs at various stages of adolescence must be regarded as equally important. A good illustration of this is the situation of a boy who came to a residence after a long history of placement in foster homes and institutions. He needed the feeling of acceptance and intimacy that he could receive in a smaller residence. He did remarkably well for a period of over a year even though he was a little older and bigger than the other boys. As his size and age began to be more pronounced and as the different needs of an older adolescent began to be more obvious, he began to feel more and more frustrated. The operation of the unit was structured around the needs of the younger group and it would have been disruptive to the younger boys if different procedures around curfew, smoking, and so on, were made for one boy. Their feelings of deprivation and need for special privileges would have been stimulated by one boy's having what would have been considered "privileges" that were not given to them although these "privileges" were not appropriate for the rest of the group. When this boy was moved to a larger setting with older boys, he began to gain more from his placement experience despite the fact that a smaller setting would have been the more preferable placement. If he were to be a candidate for intake at this time, the age factor as part of the structure of the smaller unit would have militated against his admission to it. In the final decision on the correct residence for any youngster, the ideal may not always be attainable. The best constellation of factors must be decided upon and the decision for placement made, taking into account the demands of reality.

#### The Behavior "Culture" in the Residence Unit

In addition to the age factor, another element that must be considered is the type and balance of manifested behavior in the group. In a small unit particularly, too much destructive, acting-out behavior militates against an effective therapeutic environment. In a larger unit, too great a concentration of overtly expressed pathology is a negative factor also, but here again the size of the unit plays a role. Its bigness offers more opportunity to tolerate difficult behavior than does the smaller residence. It is fairly well established that exposure of an individual to a particular type of behavior does not necessarily cause that individual to adopt that form of behavior. However, the tone of the environment may influence strongly the latent pathology of an individual and play a significant role in making it manifest or helping to keep it under control. Success in controlling strong feelings, the expression of which can be destructive to the individual, is one beneficial way of aiding him to gain more confidence in his ability to function more adequately. There may be an element of "contagion" that touches some members of a group if they are susceptible to stimuli to acting-out or impulsive behavior. Sometimes the exposure to specific types of acting-out behavior brings about great discomfort and fear. Sometimes such exposure causes the feelings to break through and be openly expressed in behavior. As an example, four girls lived together for over a year in one residence. While they had many differences, they all had in common a great deal of hostility to their mothers for abandoning them and this feeling was expressed to their house-mothers as mother substitutes. They banded together and formed a separate closed group within the residence. It

was "one for all and all for one" against the "mother." They engaged in much acting-out behavior such as breaking curfew, going out in cars with men they met casually, staying out all night on one occasion. As the group broke up due to first one and then another terminating placement, it was revealing to see that when only two girls were left their behavior became more modified so that they did not present any unusual problems of management. Interestingly enough, the two that left earlier did well when they had little contact with each other or with the other two members of the original group.

In another residence two girls were able to stimulate three others to engage in much destructive, defiant behavior that was so pronounced that the house-mothers had to seek assistance to bring the situation under control. While a number of the other girls did not join the group, they were able to say later that they were so frightened by the activity that they ran to their rooms and cried because they were afraid that they would not be able to control their feelings and would join the instigators. They felt such loss of control to be so destructive to them as individuals, that they experienced temptation as a severely traumatic incident. The implications for intake of the pathology in the make-up of the group are most important, as this illustration shows. It would be a determining factor against the placement of new girls in this group if they needed an environment that would not offer such strong stimulation to their weakly controlled feelings of aggression.

The make-up of the group in terms of old and new members is significant. Some groups are able to maintain themselves because the members have worked out a balance of forces. The introduction of a new member into the group demands that the staff adequately pre-

pare the group and to appraise the influence the presence of the new member will have on the total group stability. Sometimes the addition of a new individual can have highly beneficial results but these factors must be evaluated carefully at intake.

#### House Staff

Within each residence one of the basic factors is the house staff. Many other elements of structure can be minimized if the human element meets the requirements set for it. The individuals who spend most of their time with the youngsters have a tremendous affect on them. They have a great part in maintaining the tone of the residence. Their own maturity or lack of it plays a crucial role. If they are mature, the manner in which they help the youngsters to deal with such factors, for example, as carrying out household chores, observing curfew and adhering to a study schedule is of great importance in making these parts of residence living constructive experiences. The opportunity to live closely with adults whose behavior can be a model to emulate and from which to take strength is a unique one for most of the adolescents in placement. Immature, undisciplined and inconsistent behavior by house staff can have a most destructive effect. The ability by staff to tolerate the weaknesses of others and to be strong and consistent is a foundation upon which to build a firm structure that will have positive therapeutic values. For many reasons, including their emotional disturbances, the adolescents in placement are unusually sensitive to others. The adult who is truly a giving and strong person will be known and respected despite some personal idiosyncrasies that may be unpleasant at times. The action, expressed through behavior, and not the

word is the all important factor. The staff member who cannot say "no" and who can be controlled and manipulated is not the one who is best for the group or best liked and respected by it. All of the youngsters are looking for limits and for sources of strength. Most of them have such low opinions of themselves that they think very little of the adult whom they can control. This does not mean that they are looking for rigidity and harshness. Tenderness and understanding are eagerly sought. These characteristics are most beneficial when they are found in an individual who has strength.

Realistic limits that are not used as threats but are employed to help the individual to come to grips with his problems are most essential aspects of a program. The adolescent, particularly the disturbed one, becomes frightened by the largeness of the universe against which he rebels so often if he has no more clearly structured "world" to hit out against. The amorphousness of the universe increases his frustration and anxiety. It is so vague that he accomplishes nothing by attacking it. If he has a better defined environment of a size that he can comprehend, he can tackle it with more comfort and he can be helped to deal with his struggle and hopefully to come to terms with it. This was clearly stated by one 18-year-old boy who wanted a number of restrictions imposed upon the group because it had been behaving so poorly. When asked why he wanted so many restrictions, he replied that then he could have something specific to be angry at; now he had to be angry at the whole world and he found this too frustrating.

In a positive sense, a clear defining of limits may help to make anger easier to tolerate and it can provide a structure that can be dealt with constructively because of its tangible limits. Youngsters often test out adults to see if they will

really impose limits. When they do, it usually has a most salutary effect. One girl was continually testing the limits as her way of seeking controls. After a number of incidents had been handled by staff consistently within the limits defined but without too much lasting effect, she was told that if she continued to engage in one particular type of behavior it would be necessary to hospitalize her. Soon after this she repeated the behavior and was told that she would have to go to the hospital. She refused to go voluntarily with her social worker, so it was necessary to call an ambulance. When she got to the hospital she was over the rage she had developed earlier around going and posed no management problem. In fact, she seemed relieved to be there. For this youngster, like for so many others, it is a big relief to have temptation safely out of the way.

#### Community Resources

The degree of cooperation secured from the community and the availability of a variety of resources are important in providing a well-rounded program. One of the essential foundation stones of a group residence program is its use of community resources in place of built-in resources found in institutions. The problem of securing the involvement of schools, employers, and recreational sources is a tremendous one. Its positive solution may be an important factor in the success or failure of the placement offered to disturbed youngsters. If a youngster is too disturbed to use community facilities such as schools or employment sources, he generally cannot be served properly in a residence. The degree of cooperation that can be secured from schools, for example, may well be a determining factor regarding placement. If special programs can be worked out, if there is tolerance for difficult behavior, if there is a desire to serve

the adolescent and work with the agency, many disturbed adolescents can be helped to secure an education. This is a most therapeutic tool in the rehabilitation of the individual, since ability to succeed in such an important area as schooling has tremendous meaning. This has been proved again and again in situations where the school's good cooperation has been secured. In other cases, the unwillingness of the school to tolerate the disturbed youngster has resulted in most negative results. Opportunities for employment that make demands that do not frighten the youngster help him to succeed in another important area. While it is unrealistic to expect employers to make all sorts of special concessions, it is sometimes possible to find an employer who is willing to tolerate personality problems and this is often sufficient to make for success. In other instances the availability of work is all that is needed. The youngster can do the rest without special assistance.

Recreational and cultural facilities that provide for a range of interests help to round out the structure. Here, too, assistance is needed. Many of the adolescents are fearful about moving into activities outside the residence. The receptivity of the community to them and its sensitivity to their insecurities can make the difference between a positive experience and another failure. We plan to add the services of a full-time group worker to our program. He will work directly with groups of youngsters and also act as a liaison between the agency and the community in

order to seek out resources and to help our youngsters to utilize them.

#### Professional Staff

The caseworker in the program plays a vital role from the time that admission is being considered until after the youngster leaves the residence. No program can operate adequately without casework service. The caseworker helps each youngster to deal with his basic problems of placement, with his relationship to the other members of the group and the house staff, with his family and other persons close to him, as well as with the numerous parts of the community to which he must relate. The psychiatrist, providing a full program of diagnostic and treatment services, the psychologist and other professional personnel round out the structure and help to make it meet the essential needs of those it is set up to serve.

In summary, structure in a group residence program has been described as being composed of many factors that play an important role in meeting the needs of disturbed adolescents in this type of placement. The availability and interaction of the many structural elements should be viewed as the background upon which intake must project the needs of the individual youngster being considered for placement. The importance of various elements of the program have different degrees of significance for different individuals. The skill in successful intake is to match, within the confines of reality, needs of the individual with that constellation of factors of structure which suit him best.