

# An exercise in co-operation by

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This is a short article about co-operation and, in a sense, may be considered as an answer to a plea made by Sgt. C. H. Fogarty, B.A.M. Phil.(Cantab.), M.A.I.E.S., in his address to a seminar held under the auspices of the A.C.P.C. at Burnie, Tasmania, on 27th October, 1978. (Refer A.C.P.C. Forum, Vol. 1, No. 4.) In essence the plea was for public, departmental and community co-operation with police officers who, it was rightly claimed, had a real and pertinent role to play not only as "crime fighters" but as helping agents in the community.

A rather gloomy and, at times, scathing commentary was offered on the lack of liaison between departments associated with welfare, between community groups and government services and, above all perhaps, between the police and society at large. The larger the community the wider the gap, it was implied, and only by making a purposeful, planned effort to integrate the social influences involved could any meaningful progress be made. Many of the well-aimed shots found a home.

As a community, however, the town of Burnie, population approximately 20,000, is emerging steadily, if not dramatically, from the backwaters of bureaucratic lethargy, apathy and attitudes of non co-operativeness between Public Service departments, the police force and major social organisations which determine the health and welfare of a small town. A number of factors have been involved; good relationships between departments on a personal basis, meetings between officers to promote such relationships and to obtain better liaison between their respective departments and meetings between police, probation officers and members of the judiciary. Good communications generally have created a good welfare rapport which in turn has improved the overall efficiency of most of our welfare agencies.

One project which has been undertaken stands out as a major factor both from the point of view of liaison and in meeting a problem formerly acute and effecting all agencies. This has been the promotion, creation and continuing support of the Oakleigh House emergency accommodation facility. The hostel, usually known simply as "Oakleigh" or "The Hostel". Opened in October 1976. Two years' work preceded the opening involving fund raising, political lobbying, submissions to both State and Federal Governments and combatting public opinion, which at one stage was much opposed to the project. The latter problem was overcome largely by the active participation and support offered by the local Salvation Army Corps.

Government grants were also won with the assurance that the operation of the hostel would be the responsibility of the Army working in conjunction with the supporting Advisory Council. The latter body is, composed of welfare agency representatives, police, laymen and the Corps officer-in-charge. The Council meets on a weekly basis and discusses problems of general administration, needs of clientele, fund raising, matters of security and any miscellaneous matters pertinent to the efficient running of the hostel. The level of interdepartmental co-operation is high and the relationship between Council members is excellent.

The general aims of the hostel are to generate a helpful and homely atmosphere, to assist any homeless person regardless of sex, age or creed, to rehabilitate the clientele as swiftly as possible, to give assistance with both humanity and efficiency, to preserve and promote good relations between the hostel and the community and as far as is possible to promote a spirit of independence both for the clientele and the facility generally. Independence for the hostel includes the preservation of its general philosophy towards those being helped and while the financial dependance on our community is substantial, Oakleigh



House has not made demands on the local Corps for funds and to date the operating costs have been met by contributions from clientele, State Government grants, Federal Government subsidy under the provisions of the Homeless Persons Assistance Scheme and donations from the community. Clientele contributions are substantial and account for approximately 50% of operating costs. Financial independence in these terms, while hardly up to Treasury requirements, must be liberally interpreted both in terms of concept, operation and cost factors.

As Chairman of the Advisory Council and Senior Probation and Parole Officer for the N.W. District of Tasmania, the writer has been truly impressed by the calibre of work achieved by the hostel staff, a man and wife of mature years, with the active assistance of the various government departments, both State and Federal. The Council has also been much impressed by the good will and active help that has been forthcoming from Service Clubs, Church groups of various denominations and many private individuals. Co-operation has been afforded by medical practitioners, hospital staff and the State Mental Health Officers in many urgent situations.

Police co-operation has been excellent and, while the hostel is a normally peaceful precinct offering little scope for traditional police activity, the role of helper obviously affords many police officers great satisfaction. Arbitrary arrest for vagrancy is now a rarity and alcoholics who are resident at Oakleigh, not an uncommon occurrence, are rarely prosecuted. Police co-operation is essential for the hostels security and when inquiries are made, following an interview at the Probation Office with unknown clients, the results of police inquiries are quickly transmitted through the writer's office. Police records are not uncommon amongst male clientele, but do not preclude assistance or accommodation. Neither, of course, does lack of finance. Clientele are made aware that the inquiries have been made. While their behaviour is acceptable their accommodation and assistance are secure and the response has always been good. A strong element of crime prevention is involved in this exercise. Since the hostel commenced its operation the incidence of crime attributed to clients while in residence is

almost non-existent. In two years the hostel has accommodated over 500 persons with an average admission lasting seven days. The track record, therefore, for a multi-purpose hostel, the first of its kind in Tasmania, is more than acceptable in this particular respect.

Another interesting and preventative aspect has been a marked decline in the incidence of wife battering. Marital violence accounted for almost % of admissions in the 1976-77 period. In the past year this percentage has been halved and while one could not offer hard statistical evidence to point to the hostel being a deterrent factor influencing this type of behaviour it may well be that the ability to seek refuge, formerly non-existent, has had an effect.

Alcoholism accounted for 15% of admissions last year and this figure would have been equalled, if not exceeded, in 1978. The care of alcoholics, almost invariably males, has in the past year this figure would have been equalled, if not exceeded, in 1978. The care of alcoholics, almost invariably males, has been an interesting exercise. Traditionally, the shelters or homes catering for such cases are strictly segregated in the sense that only males are accommodated. Oakleigh House, accommodating as it does, all and sundry, has a good rehabilitation record in this area which is probably the most difficult. The presence of women and children on the same premises has a marked effect of inhibition with regard to uncontrolled drinking by an alcoholic. At the time of writing two alcoholics are being cared for at the hostel. Since admission both men, one being quite young and the other middle aged, have found and maintained themselves in regular employment. One has banked regularly and amassed nearly \$1,000. Both have admitted their problem and their stay at Oakleigh has substantially helped to control their drinking. Neither has been hassled or been subjected to religious exhortation or intensive "therapy". As the older man put it, "Elsewhere everyone has been on my back telling me not to drink but Oakleigh is like a sanctuary." So much for exhortation. The hostility, denigration and verbal bullying which is frequently doled out in the guise of "counselling" by social workers has been totally absent. Residents who have a drink problem are informed that to remain at Oakleigh one must remain sober but such knowledge is tempered by the reasonable approach of the management, the availability of medical help if required and more often than not, the sympathy of their fellow clientele.

Persons in need of help are often from other States, particularly young people. Parents are often contacted in these cases and informed of the predicament of their offspring. Again, police communications are often used to good effect and many youngsters have been repatriated, their fares being paid by the Attorney-General's Department, whose policy in such cases is both humane and pragmatic. In more difficult cases police have also co-operated to ensure that plane changes are made at major air terminals and that repatriates do, in fact, reach their destinations. Probation Services of other States also co-operate in a similar

manner.

Management of a multi-purpose hostel is not a task for the careless, the dogmatic or the "do-gooder". It is hard, continuous and painstaking graft. It is also very rewarding and it is occasionally comical when our manager, a diminutive South Australian who rejoins in the nickname of Ned, complains that the place is relatively quiet when a week previously he was being run off his feet. A man and wife team is essential, one to provide the necessary firmness and discipline, the other to deal sympathetically with all, to provide good food, maintain standards of hygiene and to be the mother figure. The family configuration is essential and each complement the other in their traditional family roles and in their individual attitudes towards their charges. The management are not trained personnel and have no stereotyped attitudes other than a strong Christian faith. The latter, while it is not hidden, is not paraded. It is reflected mainly in their behaviour and in their optimism. Both freely acknowledge that the support, both collectively and individually, of the members of the Advisory Council is essential to the smooth operation of the hostel and indeed, for their own personal welfare. Too often the managers of such an establishment lack support and consideration by social workers who refer clientele carelessly, failing, in fact, to follow up cases — out of sight out of mind perhaps — and leave the real work to others. This is not good enough. It has been amply demonstrated that hostel management can be overwhelmed by clientele problems or difficult behaviour, may become depressed or fatigued and their efficiency is immediately affected. Proper liaison with welfare officers, police and the community reduces this effect to the minimum and is essential in preventing the inevitable and damaging result, a rapid changeover in management staff. Staff continuity and stability is an essential prerequisite for the multi-purpose hostel if it is to function adequately.

In summary, the experiment in Burnie has been a successful one. A multi-purpose hostel is a viable and, perhaps the only proposition for a small community where a variety of clientele need help and no single department can present an individual case for a separate establishment to assist those of its clientele who are homeless. The economics of the operation are sound enough, bearing in mind that Oakleigh House has been open and working for two years on an operational budget of approximately \$25,000. This amount may be earned by one Government employee in a similar period of time. Over 500 persons have been sheltered, fed, counselled, some found jobs, all rehoused or lodged, many helped by referral to other agencies (including Legal Aid) and of all these persons very few have caused the hostel embarrassment or strife. To cynical social workers, depressed policemen and lay citizens looking for a worthwhile pursuit, I recommend the exercise. One hopes also that the Australian Crime Prevention Council will find something of interest in this brief account and the writer gives thanks for the opportunity to publish it.



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