

# The Intensive Neighbourhood Care Scheme

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE SCHEME

In 1978 the South Australian Department for Community Welfare released a report called the Development of Services for Young Offenders. The report was a plan of implementation based on the recommendations of:

- (a) The Royal Commission into the Administration of the Juvenile Courts Act,
- (b) The Community Welfare Advisory Committee into Youth Assessment and Training Centres.

The recommendations aimed to ensure that, firstly custodial care is used only for the small number of young people who have offended and who require it. Secondly, to increase the communities knowledge that assistance is available for young people with problems, by providing the assistance locally. Thirdly, to ensure that these young people will experience minimum disruption to their normal lives so that readjustment to the community is less demanding. Finally to enhance the communities' awareness that sanctions against offenders exist, by operating programmes on that local basis rather than "exporting" young people who have offended to distant centres.

One of the major recommendations of the report was the introduction of the Intensive Neighbourhood Care Scheme (I.N.C.). A similar scheme, The Kent Family Placement Project, has been operating in England since 1976. The Scheme has been renamed and was adapted to fit South Australian conditions. The I.N.C. Scheme is aimed to provide rehabilitative care for young people who have offended and who cannot return home. These young people fit into the following categories: Young offenders who were being remanded in custody and could cope in an intensive (virtually 24 hour) personalised care situation for a period of up to 28 days. Secondly, young offenders who could not cope with normal foster or family placements but who require intensive, personalised care and supervision on a one-to-one basis.

As a result of the report on the Development of Services for Young Offenders, a Committee was formed to translate the broad implementation framework that would allow the I.N.C. Scheme to be implemented as soon as was possible. A detailed report on the implementation of the I.N.C. Scheme



was produced in October, 1978. The Scheme became operational in April, 1979.

## Principles of the Scheme

The I.N.C. Scheme aims to prevent young people who have committed offences penetrating too deeply into the Juvenile Justice System. It operates on the assumptions that:

1. The level at which an offender penetrates the system is the level at which that person will recycle through it.
2. A large number of adolescents who offend are suitable for placement with families in the community.

The Scheme operates on the following principles –

### 1. Self Responsibility

The Scheme provides an opportunity for adolescents to demonstrate responsibility by participating in non-secure situations, and in making decisions about their future.

### 2. Community Support

The Scheme provides an opportunity to promote an understanding and caring relationship between the community and the adolescent.

### 3. Personalisation

The Scheme provides a situation which is adopted to meet the needs of the young person at the time, and not to focus on the offence but rather on the individual.

### 4. Localisation

The young offender has a right to remain in her/his local community. Thus allowing her/him to attend her/his school or job and to continue to have relationships with her/his family and the community.

### 5. Normalisation

The Scheme aims to provide a young offender with a life in a family, in a community, which is as normal to her/his own life as is possible. This principle is against the estab-

lishment of special services for adolescents separated from communities and families.

### **Operation of the Scheme**

A child is only placed in an I.N.C. family when s/he would otherwise have been placed in secure care by the Court; therefore a young person can only be placed in an I.N.C. family by the Court. The Department for Community Welfare makes recommendations to the Court, but it is the Court's final decision.

The Scheme is divided into two sections. The first part is the I.N.C. Remand Care. A child is placed in an I.N.C. Remand family for a period of up to 28 days. During this period departmental social workers prepare reports for the Court. The report may be a Social Background Report, which is prepared by the Community Welfare Worker, or an Assessment Panel may be held to examine factors which affect the child. The reports make recommendations to the Court as to what should happen to the child at the completion of the remand period.

The second section of the I.N.C. Scheme is the Support Care. A child is placed into an I.N.C. Support family for a period of between 3 and 6 months. At the commencement of the Support placement a panel meets to decide what areas of the child's behaviour or personality need to be focused on during the support period. These areas often relate to things such as interpersonal relationships, school attendance, young offenders employment situation, and his or her relationship with the natural family. Goals are established which specifically relate to the young person, but, the basic aim of the I.N.C. Support family is to provide individual care and support for the young person, in order to promote new behaviour patterns and survival skills which will help him or her on return to their natural family.

At the completion of the Support programme, the scheme aims for the young person to return to her/his natural family. However, this is not always possible, and a young person may need help in finding alternative accommodation with a family or, in setting themselves up in an independent living style. It is not planned for the young person to remain with the Support family for any longer than six months. However, if the bond between the two parties has become strong during the I.N.C. placement, then there is provision for the I.N.C. family to terminate their contract with the Department for involvement with the I.N.C. Scheme and to foster that young person.

The I.N.C. families are expected to sign a legal contract with the Department to provide care and support for young offenders who are placed with them. The Department pays remand families \$12 per day, plus a \$3 a day "on-call" allowance, and Support families \$15 per day for caring for a young person.

The Scheme was implemented and operates at a Regional level within the Department. This allows for the scheme to be locally based and implemented in a manner that suits local conditions. Regional operation is important as there is a great difference between urban and country situations. Regionalisation of the scheme adheres to the principles of community support, localisation and normalisation.

### **Role of Natural Family**

The young person's natural family is involved in the I.N.C. placement wherever possible. The natural parents are involved in the decision making when an initial I.N.C. recommendation is made to Court. Parents are encouraged to visit and have contact with young people while they are living with I.N.C. families. An area of potential difficulty was the relationship between the I.N.C. family and the natural family. However this has not proved to be a problem. In many cases, I.N.C.

families have developed a close and supportive relationship with the natural family. This has proved constructive, when the young person returns home, parents have learnt new methods of coping with his/her behaviour.

### **Selection**

The selection of I.N.C. families is a crucial area in the operation of the Scheme. For the purposes of the scheme, a family is defined as "any two adults" between the ages of 25 and 55 who share the same house, who are prepared to undergo a training programme and, who are equally prepared to sign the legal contract with the Department. The basis on which selection is made relates to factors such as physical fitness, maturity, the quality of relationship in the family, the flexibility of all people living in the house, commitment to participate in the scheme, activities of the family as a unit and flexible attitudes towards areas such as youth, unemployment, sex, race, violence, drugs and alcohol, and offending behaviour. Initially families are selected for training. The families become involved in approximately nine training sessions which take place on a weekly basis in the evening. The final selection does not take place until the completion of the training programme.

### **Training**

The training programme consists of approximately nine sessions. The material covered in these sessions relates to skill development, and information giving. The families who are selected have basic skills in areas of human relationships, the training programme attempts to sharpen these skills and to focus them on areas of young offenders and their values, communication skills, individual development in dealing with difficult behaviour, and development of crisis intervention skills. I.N.C. families are provided with information on areas such as Court systems, Departmental operation of the Scheme, department and community services and a thorough knowledge of the principles and philosophy of the scheme.

### **Matching**

The matching process is an extremely important element in the operation of the scheme. Prior to the commencement of a remand or a support placement, the needs of the child are matched with the skills and qualities of the I.N.C. family. The matching process is more difficult in the case of I.N.C. remand. A remand placement must be made in a 24 hour period. Therefore, the matching is performed on the basis of information which is available about the child from police, Community Welfare Worker, and anyone else involved, and, the qualities of the I.N.C. family. In the case of I.N.C. Support the matching is a more careful process. It is initiated at the Assessment Panel during a remand period, and intensifies in ways such as outings and meals with the family and the young person prior to the final placement of the child with the family. In all cases the young person must agree to an I.N.C. placement before that placement is recommended to Court.

### **Family Support Systems**

A further factor which is crucial in the operation of the I.N.C. Scheme is the quality and consistency of support that the I.N.C. families receive. This support system has developed in four areas —

- in each region of the Department a team of social workers provides a 24 hour a day "on-call" system, this provides the families with a crisis back-up service should difficulties arise in the placement.
- the I.N.C. families meet to share their experiences, the feelings they have in providing care to young people who have offended. These meetings also have an on-going training component.

each I.N.C. family has their own individual support person. This person has the role of a supervisor for the family, and is able to help in problem situations.

the I.N.C. families have also developed their own informal support network. They meet regularly for joint social activities. This has proved to be most constructive in the operation of the scheme.

#### CURRENT SITUATION

There are currently 30 I.N.C. families operating in South Australia. Since April, over 40 I.N.C. placements have been

successfully implemented. Some of the expected difficulties such as absconding, aggressive behaviour towards I.N.C. families, and damage to property have occurred, but to a much lesser extent than might have been expected. In the time of operation of the scheme, there have been approximately 5 abscondings, and in all but 3 cases, the young offenders have been returned to the I.N.C. family.

The I.N.C. Scheme is not a preventative scheme, and does not attempt to offer answers to all adolescents who offend. It is however, an attempt to prevent offenders penetrating into secure institutions, and to reduce the rate of recidivism. The results so far are very promising.



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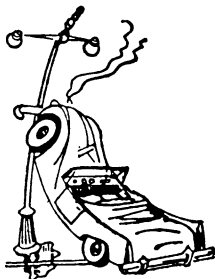
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