



Preventative- Treatment Programs for Children Involved in Crime:

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Children are affected by crime in two ways; those they commit and those they have committed against them. Child abuse, in various forms (physical beatings, emotional/psychological deprivation and pornography) is a crime committed against children that is causing growing concern in the community. Child abuse, along with delinquent behaviour seems to be associated with lack of appropriate parenting skills (Ullman and Krasner, 1975, p.p. 482-483). The Adelaide Central Mission Child Care Services' Staff, have, over the past three years implemented two very innovative programs designed to combat these two types of criminal behaviour. They are the Home Based Intervention Program and Hove Treatment Cottage. Both programs use Behaviour Modification techniques as the therapeutic means to deal with these problems.

HOVE COTTAGE PROGRAM

Is there a need?

Youths exhibiting anti-social behaviour are generally termed delinquents, and are characterized by impulsiveness, low frustration tolerance and a lack of empathy for the feelings of others. They seek immediate gratification of their needs and are egocentric (Conger, 1977 p.p.580). These behaviours often lead youths into criminal activities. There is also much evidence which suggests that these socio-pathic behaviours presenting in childhood will, if not corrected, continue into adulthood (Robins, 1966). As reported by Beuhler, Patterson and Furniss (1966), this particular group of youths is also one of the most difficult with whom to implement treatment programs. According to Robins (1970) only about half of these "conduct disorders" will be solved with traditional treatment methods and as Page (1975) points out, punishment seems to have no real deterring effect upon anti-social behaviour.

The authors of this article, who between them have over 15 years experience of Government run, residential facilities for problem youth, consider there are inadequacies in such facilities. The bureaucratic structures and politicking which affect these centres, make effective therapeutic programs difficult to implement and monitor. The centres generally serve as "places of punishment" where the youths enter with a "suitcase full of problems", place it neatly under their bed, and months later walk out of the centre with the same "suitcase" full of problems. The "suitcase", had in fact, not been opened and the problems inside not dealt with.

This problem can occur for a number of reasons. Firstly, that due to staff rostering and turnover, appropriate modelling and consistency in programming for behaviour change is unlikely to occur. Secondly, the youths are placed with peers who are exhibiting inappropriate behaviour and to survive with these peers, they must conform. Thirdly, the youths natural environment usually undergoes little or no change while he is out of it and so he returns to the same problems.

Program

Programs based on behavioural principles have been shown to be effective in increasing the appropriate social behaviour of delinquent youths (Jessness and De Risi, 1973; Mann and Moss, 1973). The Hove Cottage program is based on a very successful program from the United States, known as Achievement Place (Phillips, Phillips, Fixsen and Wolf, 1971). The Hove program then, is a community-based, family-style, treatment program for delinquent or "pre-delinquent" youths. This program aims to teach deviant children, social and survival skills necessary for them to remain outside of the community's institutions; that is, to curb the offending/anti-social behaviour. These desirable behaviours are established and then maintained through a number of factors, with the combination of all factors being more important than any one single factor.

These factors include, the Teachers-Parents' (live-in cottage parents) modelling of, and instruction in, the appropriate responses to a given situation, their social interaction with other residents and their parents and that token reinforcement is made contingent upon these behaviours being elicited. A four-step behaviour modification token economy system is the structure used to implement the therapeutic program for the youths at the cottage. They attend local schools, and if necessary school programs are introduced to help with problem areas. There is a therapist attached to the cottage who works with the youths' families. When the youths return home on weekends, the therapist works with the families using behavioural techniques to over-come problems occurring in the home/community. As Wahler (1969) points out, the parents of many "anti-social" children are quite lax in providing discipline, so the therapist is able to concentrate on issues such as appropriate disciplining techniques and better communication between family members.

Evaluation, Accountability and Problems Encountered

The effectiveness of the type of program has been amply demonstrated in a number of replications of the Achievement Place model. From their investigation, Liberman, Ferris, Salgado (1975), concluded that ". . . procedures are capable of successful dissemination, with desirable behaviour changes produced among residents. . ." According to Phillips et al (1973) this community based program allows the youths to receive more individual care than they would in an institution, keeps the youth in closer contact with the community to which he will return, and teaches important social, family and community living skills that could not be acquired in an institution. Extensive evaluation of the Hove Program has been carried out, and this has allowed necessary modifications to

the program to be instituted. Although this initial investigation revealed inadequacies in the monitoring system and the frequency with which target behaviours were consequenced 78% of the youths successfully returned to their homes in 1978/79. There was a remarkable improvement in scholastic achievement by all youths, which enhanced their acceptance by classmates, teachers, and their non-delinquent peers.

The cost of the Hove Cottage program is about one third that of similar cottages run by the Government. This is in keeping with Foreyt, Rockwood, Davis, Desvousges and Hollingsworth (1975) who found that effective token economy systems not only perform a service to the individual and society, but make good economic sense. Hence, it may be argued that a concept such as the Hove Cottage program represents the most economical treatment package, for use with "difficult" populations.

THE HOME BASED INTERVENTION PROGRAM

Two Pronged Attack at Crime Prevention

As discussed earlier in the article, children commit crime and have crimes committed against them. The Hove Cottage program is mainly directed at the population of youths who commit crime. The Home Based Intervention Program was formulated as an intervention measure for both types of crime. Ford and Dawson (1977), when writing about the battered child syndrome, stated that "What Australia needs to avoid at this time is the expenditure of a great deal of time, effort, and money on diagnosing the battered child syndrome. Instead, the major emphasis here, should be on implementing and evaluation various treatment programs. Recent evidence from the United States suggests that fewer than 10% of abused children have parents who are mentally ill. the majority of child abuse then seems to occur among the "normal" population. Further, it is suggested that there are as much as six times the incidence of child abuse among those who plan their pregnancy, compared with those who have unwanted pregnancies.

Implementing the Program

Berkowitz and Graziano (1972) suggests that it is unlikely that behaviour problems are going to be exhibited in office interviews. It is also suggested that the office environment is artificial (Berkowitz and Graziano, 1972) and it is more appropriate to work in the home. Zeilberger, Sampen and Sloane (1968) suggest that it is the parents who are maintaining many appropriate and inappropriate behaviours that the child may be showing. Therefore it would seem more appropriate to work with the parents in their own home.

On the basis of the above facts, the present program was designed to teach parents of "problem" or anti-social children or parents who may be potential child abusers, new parenting skills to combat presenting or potential problems. Initially the program was modelled on the work of Christopherson (1973), Christopherson, Arnold, Hill and Quilitch (1972) and Ford, Christopherson, Phillips, Fixen and Wolf (1973). The aim of the program is to teach parents to be the change agents of their children's behaviour in their own homes. The teaching is done by therapists trained in Behaviour Modification, and specializing in token/point systems and behavioural contracting (Cowling, 1978).

Dilemma

The authors have stated it is likely that deviant behaviour exhibited by young people and child abuse by adults, can be related to poor parenting skills. It is also suggested that it is the parents who teach and maintain the appropriate and inappropriate behaviour of their children.

It is argued then, that if the parents are maintaining deviant behaviour or are Modelling destructive, abusive behaviour, then their children will develop with poor skills also.

Unfortunately, some of the treatment that is offered these people, requires an attitude change by them. However evidence suggests that a behaviour change is necessary before an attitude change will occur (Bem 1967). Further Festinger (1964) and Wicker (1969) in Ullman and Krasner (1975) suggest that "persuasive communication", designed to change attitudes, lead to little consequent observable behaviour change. It would seem that counselling people with deviant behaviour problems or placing them in institutional care is inappropriate. It is in appropriate because counselling doesn't deal with the behaviours when they occur, or teach new methods of dealing with these situations. Taking an offender away from the environment that is maintaining deviant behaviour and teaching him to "survive" in an alien environment, is unlikely to provide the skills that he requires. The person must learn the skills to deal with his environment while he is there.

This is particularly true for parents who are child abusers. As previously stated, less than 10% are psychopathic and enjoy hurting their children. For the rest, who are "normal", but unskilled and frustrated parents, removing the child will not teach new appropriate skills to deal with these problems. By removing the child the parents attitude may change (for better or worse) but the skills will not. Is it therefore fair that parents and children are deprived of each other because of ignorance and the opportunity to learn? This is the dilemma.

An Answer

It has been suggested by many, that the best way to change behaviour of children is to change their parent's behaviour. To help parents who are child abusers, it is also necessary to teach them appropriate skills to deal with their particular problems. Ullman and Krasner (1975) suggest that an important reason why parents abuse their children is, that they "do not know how to deal with the situation they found themselves in as parents".

The approach used by the therapists of Child Care is to teach parents how to increase their effectiveness, humaneness and competence with their children.

As stated earlier, there are two programmes designed to meet this need. The Home Treatment Cottage caters for families who have become so destructive that a home programme would fail. Although the child is separated from the family, the family is continually involved and assisted to regain its former status.

The Home Based Intervention Programme aims to teach appropriate skills to the family while they are still living together.

One criticism of the behavioural approach, is that it does not take into account "symptom substitution". That is, if you deal with the presenting problem and the reason for the problem has not been, then it will be manifested in some other deviant way.

The overwhelming evidence suggests that properly constructed and well implemented behavioural change programs do not lead to automatic "symptom substitution" (Mischel, 1968 p.p.263). In fact, empirical evidence suggests that this phenomena rarely, if ever occurs (Ullman and Krasner, 1975, p.p.163).

The reason that there is not an automatic substitution of behaviour is as follows: ". . .the clients are freed from the debilitating emotional reactions and constricting crippling

avoidance patterns, they may become more free to behave in new adaptive ways that in turn lead to more positive consequences for them." (Mischel, 1968 p.p.263).

The results of three years intervention by therapists in the Home Based Intervention Programme suggests that parents can change behaviour, maintain this change (for up to an average of 24.5 months) and deal effectively with new problems as they arise.

Parents have rated the average change in appropriate behaviour of children under 10 years as over 100% and across all children, 11 months to 16 years, as over 70%. This change and the fact that the parents have maintained it suggests strongly that behaviour change programs do significantly increase appropriate behaviour. For this to have occurred, there must have been a substantial and lasting behaviour change made by the parents.

In conclusion, the authors suggest that, if the courts are going to be seen as effectively dealing with destructive and inappropriate behaviour as mentioned above, they need programs that at present do not exist in large enough numbers. The courts need to be able to recommend that people be taught new appropriate ways of dealing with their behaviour problems in their environment. This can not happen unless more programs of the nature mentioned are provided in the community. Those programs that do exist must be appropriately supported and utilized to the exclusion of programs that do not provide adequate treatment.

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