

Borstal and After-Care

— Post A.C.T.O.

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THE ADMINISTRATION of after-care by the Institution does give impetus to some basic re-thinking. In this regard I refer to its effect on the primary purpose of an institution. There has been a tendency in the past for institutions to be somewhat inward-looking to the detriment of policy and achievement.

This new responsibility does emphasise the fact that an inmate is a temporary resident within the institution and that the institution is not an end in itself. It may well be accepted as part of the inmate's life experience and that such experience can be beneficial or harmful in the light of the quality of this experience. The old description of an institution being "a nice tidy unit of its own" is very much a relic of antiquated thinking.

The other area of development is in the role of the housemaster. Hitherto he has been dividing his attention between the management of a "house" and a degree of welfare work. Now his duties will be much more specific.

(1) THE INSTITUTION

There has been quite a deal of

confusion concerning the purpose and tasks of the institution. There has been a swinging policy which reflected very much the anxieties and personalities of the administration. This can be seen by examining any institutional programme over a lengthy period. There tends to be shifting of direction and of emphasis whenever the senior staff are moved. This is not meant as a criticism but rather an appreciation of the facts as they exist. Indeed the origins of the Borstal system lay in the desire to do good and particularly during the 1930's to alleviate poverty which often resulted in a high degree of paternalism. This policy tended to stunt growth as it seemed to say that the administration knew the inmates' problems and often their solution without taking a very careful look at the factors involved. Indeed this paternalism could be seen as a defence mechanism to avoid becoming too involved in the inmates' problems. This matter of involvement is very difficult as it tends to make very heavy demands, not only intellectually but emotionally upon the staff.

Development has continued in an uncertain fashion until the recent publication of the A.C.T.O. Report* which specifies amongst other things that the institution is a social rehabilitation agency. This could mean that the institution looks in a diagnostic manner at the problems presented by the inmate population and then is equipped to construct a rehabilitation programme, in which the inmate is fully involved. Hence the acceptance by the institution of the primary task as serving inmate human needs and that these inmate needs have a high priority. The acceptance of this role means that the institution tends to look outwards to society. Indeed, in the after-care process, there is a link with non-institutional agencies, i.e. the probation officer and thereby to the inmate's own domestic situation. There could then be a greater understanding of the inmate's problem in that staff would have an intelligent feedback of cultural patterns, industrial opportunities, parental attitudes and sibling relationships. Thus the institution is seen as an agency seeking information and initiating enquiries rather than the passive role hitherto. Indeed a problem of institutional life is that the criteria demanded tends to be that of the institution rather than that of an open society. Obviously there are problems involved as a reference to the literature of treatment versus security clearly illustrates. However, in this apparent division of opinion, the ideas behind this

problem have not yet been fully tested in a borstal institution. This probably has encouraged the growth of the institution to see its own ends as paramount.

The fact that the central after-care based in London has been acting as go-between, has allowed the institution to accept a somewhat less responsible position. The Borstal Association has tended to make itself responsible for an inmate's after-care so that the institute was at all times shielded. Now that the institution is itself the agency dealing directly with other field agencies, the quality and nature of its work will be much more exposed. Indeed the removal of this protection could be an opportunity for positive growth and development within the institution itself so that decision making is seen to be both effective and positive.

(2) HOUSEMASTERS

As mentioned above, the role of the housemaster has been fairly confused. A study of housemasters' roles throughout the service would produce a marked lack of uniformity. Indeed in a recent analysis of the housemaster's time, it was found that a great deal of time was spent on institutional functions as opposed to inmate demands. With the after-care very much in the hands of the housemaster, it will mean that he will have to write fairly frequent and intelligent reports on each inmate. The mere volume of work is bound to make greater inroads on his time and therefore by sheer pressure of

hours, squeeze out other activities. Just to refer to some of these new duties, there is the P.S.I.†, an examination of previous institution files, e.g. approved school, a clearing of outstanding debts or fines, the P.S. Reception Notes‡, the quarterly reports, making home leave enquiries and ultimately preparing the discharge write-up. This is without referring to the normal flow of correspondence between the probation officer and the housemaster.

As these enquiries must be thorough and all data correct, the housemaster will have to be prepared to spend time with this task. This then has to be linked with a fairly intensive interview with the inmate purely to prepare the ground for after-care. The quality of this work will depend on not only the housemaster's ability and technical competence, but also upon the depth of the relationship between him and the inmates. The day of the superficial interview is gone, and a policy of more positive, deeper interviews must be embarked upon.

We are all painfully aware of outstanding fines and undeclared offences cropping up at a very late stage of the lad's training with embarrassing results. In any case there is not much sense in engaging on rehabilitation if there are some nagging doubts of possible legal action. Hence, of course, the probation officer will be involved; information has to be fed to him so that he can decide what action to

take, based on information given by the housemaster.

The P.S. Reception Notes which is the next paper submission, is the beginning of an analysis and the basis of a possible treatment programme. Obviously such reports must be preceded by intelligent interviews which will be time demanding. This forms the basis of the inmate's whole training and includes such factors as: physical and mental health, educational problems, vocational and/or industrial training, reaction to peers, shrewd assessment of family relationships, attitude to authority and to institution. In other words an assessment of the inmate and what plans are being evolved to assist him to return to society as a more responsible character able to accept the demands in a sensible manner.

Since this involves the probation officer, discussion can take place not only within the institution, but also in the district in which the lad will live. At this point the probation officer will relate the housemaster's report not only to the employment possibilities but also to the social and domestic situation. This involvement with probation officers will lead to an increase in visiting so that the real problems which contributed to the lad's delinquency will be brought into the institution for serious discussion.

This will provide an opportunity to engage other members of the staff in this process. I particularly refer to the reference in the

A.C.T.O. report to group work and casework. By training and bringing staff into the programme at an intelligent social worker's level, the bottleneck of the housemaster can be overcome. Hence the traditional role of the housemaster as the social worker and other staff with a purely disciplinary function can be overcome. For too long the potentialities and abilities of all grades of staff have to some extent been neglected with damaging effect upon the programme. As the house officers have probably more face-to-face contact with the inmate than any other staff member, it is essential that these officers are brought fully into any rehabilitative programme. In this respect, group counselling could afford such an opportunity so that the officer might assist the inmate to bring his problems to the surface and work through negative attitudes and thereby enable him to form some positive relationship with an adult. This will not only benefit the inmate, but the house officer too, so assisting the development of a therapeutic community where the inmate's needs are brought to light, recognised and dealt with. With the

emergence of this small group technique, the inmate would have a more ready availability of a staff member.

The housemaster would then be the supervisor of group work in his house and be responsible for this aspect of social re-education.

This demands a high quality performance by the housemaster and I would refer to the academic qualifications which have been mentioned in recent advertisements for A.G.s in May 1964. The housemaster's role is becoming quite specific in that he is a social worker expected to have the skills and understanding attitude and techniques of a trained person.

This is not meant to be a criticism of the service but rather an appreciation of the future development on looking into the future to try and ascertain the shape and structure of the institution. In all large agencies, there tends to develop an inertia which militates against change. Possibly the external prod of the A.C.T.O. report has been the prod which the borstal service required. It does suggest more specific roles of an institution and its staff and probably will produce less swinging policies in the future.

REFERENCES

* Report by the Advisory Council for the Treatment of the Offender—on After Care.

† Form notifying the Principal Probation Officer of lad's arrival in his training borstal.

‡ Form sent to Probation Officer clearly outlining proposed training plan.