

COTSWOLD COMMUNITY

WORKING NOTE NO. 11

by

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Introduction

I paid a visit to the Cotswold Community on November 1st/2nd, 1974. We continued work on the functions and responsibilities of the Bursar's Department with reference particularly to the retirement of Marjorie Stranger and the coming into role of Elizabeth Sampson, the new Domestic Bursar. This involved possible de-centralisation of all meal provision and also the relation of her role to the role of Domestic Organiser in the Group Living Units. This work also raised questions about the telephone-cum-boundary function of senior staff in the community.

Work continued on the relationship with the Department of Social Services of Wiltshire County Council and with the Management Committee.

I had a progress report on the work of the Polytechnic and some discussion about the future.

I talked with Richard Balbernie, Bill Douglas, Elizabeth Sampson and the domestic Organisers, Georgina Jocelyn, Barbara Martin, Jane Shaw and Caroline Wright.

The Bursar's Department

i) The Possible De-centralisation of Meal Provision into Group Living Units

This subject has been under consideration for some years and everyone, including myself, now felt that the time has come to make a final decision about what should be done, this would then facilitate planning to carry out such a decision as efficiently as possible.

The present position, if I understand it correctly, is that the Domestic Organiser holds the responsibility for the provision of all meals for her unit, which responsibility she delegates to other staff as she deems appropriate and necessary.

There appear to be some problems in this area which are being worked at by Group Living Units but seem to me to require further clarification. In my discussion with the Domestic Organisers, I reinforced and supported with them the important distinction between the managerial responsibility for the performance of a task and the responsibility for actually performing the task. This distinction is important, not only for the obvious reasons that Domestic Organisers are not always on duty and someone must hold

deputing responsibility in their absence, but also because Domestic Organisers should not be expected to perform the whole task while on duty.

While there are differences between Units in degree, I think that all the Domestic Organisers feel that at present the practice has developed of other staff leaving them to carry out too much of the actual work around food provision and that this interferes with their making a fully effective contribution more directly to the therapeutic task. This is especially important since three of the Domestic Organisers have come into the role from a Child Care or Social Work background, while the fourth, Barbara Martin, also has great concern to contribute to work with boys.

The problem seems to lie mainly, although not wholly, in the relationship between the Domestic Organiser and the male staff leaving the Domestic Organisers feeling they have been somewhat split off into what has become a rather denigrated female role, while the men do not carry their full share of domestic chores but involve themselves, perhaps too much, in more directly boy-orientated activities. Incidentally, I cannot myself see that doing domestic work is necessarily not boy-oriented. The Domestic Organisers recognise the importance of the boy-orientated activities but also feel they can be used as an “excuse” for not helping with domestic tasks in which, after all, boys could be involved also with therapeutic benefit.

To the extent that there is cogency in this summary of the Domestic Organisers views, it represents for me an anti-therapeutic element in the present functioning of Group Living Units. It means that the skills and potential contribution of the Domestic Organisers to the general therapeutic task of the Unit are not being fully used. Also, and task-wise perhaps more important, are the models of males and females and male/female relationships which are being presented to boys. Males do the important work, females are somewhat denigrated, their contribution are respected with an inappropriate sex-based sharing of tasks, which cannot facilitate the introjection of a model more in line with good families in the community at large with more equality between spouses and more sparing of tasks, and with the children also being expected to share tasks within their capacities.

As regards actual meal provision, the present system appears to be that meals are all served in Group Living Units – with some exceptions when a Unit may eat the mid-day meal in the canteen. Breakfast is provided and prepared by Group Living staff with or without the help of boys. The mid-day meal is provided and prepared by the Central Kitchens, taken to Units, re-heated and served by Group Living staff. Tea and supper are provided and prepared by Group Living staff but various items of these meals, like cakes, or pies, can be ordered from the Central Kitchen.

The debate at present concerns whether the full responsibility for providing, preparing and serving the mid-day meal and tea and supper, should be delegated into Group Living Units. If this were done the following staffing changes would seem to be necessary. Each Unit would need a cook-cum-assistant Domestic Organiser, a woman who would probably need some appropriate qualification, trained and experienced in providing meals for moderately large numbers. They would probably provide two meals daily, breakfast

and the mid-day meal, or the mid-day meal and evening meal. There is also implied a change in the role and functions of the two cooks at present in the Central Kitchens who would no longer have meals to prepare. It is envisaged that their new role would include two elements:-

- a) providing certain prepared raw foodstuffs such as peeled potatoes, or chips, using existing Central Kitchen equipment.
- b) acting as a duty for an assistant Domestic Organiser when on days off, leave, and sickness absence and so on.

A number of difficulties immediately suggest themselves and are, I think, a source of appropriate anxiety for all concerned, notably whether it would, in fact, be possible to find five or even six women with the necessary qualifications who would be willing to work within the Cotswold circumstances, especially since they would also need enough capacity to empathise with the therapeutic staff and sustain relationships with boys. Further, professional staff who know the present Central Kitchen staff well believe that while they function effectively as a pair in Central Kitchens, they would not function anything like as well apart, nor would they easily sustain the new deputing role with constantly changing relationships and demands as they move from Group Living to Group Living Unit. So with the present staff, that part of the plan was reckoned not to be feasible. Further, the possibility of breakdown in the system is obvious, for example, that an assistant Domestic Organiser resigns or is on long absence for whatever reason with possible delays in replacement or difficulty in arranging deputising. In such an eventuality the burden on the Group Living staff to sustain adequate food provision with all other commitments would be difficult if not impossible. Obviously the main burden would fall on the Domestic Organisers who, in my opinion, were rightly anxious about it. Indeed, even if it worked well it would mean an increase in the domestic aspects of the Domestic Organiser role since she would have managerial responsibility for the assistant Domestic Organisers and more overall responsibility for food provision. The Domestic Organisers are again, I think, rightly anxious about that.

The doubts about whether the arrangements would be viable were fully experienced by Richard Balbernie and Bill Douglas, to a considerable extent by Elizabeth Sampson and certainly by me. In fact, I do not really see how it could work reliably and since that is so, I think that to try to do it would impose an undesirable and unnecessary strain on Group Living staff, particularly the Domestic Organisers and would risk their being pushed further into a "housekeeper role" and away from work with boys.

In fact, examination of this question with all the people concerned seemed to show considerable agreement if not unanimity that it would not be a viable proposition to decentralise all meal provision into Group Living Units, and that it would probably be more efficient and certainly more appropriate and reliable to continue something like the present system, that is that mid-day meals would be provided in to by Central Kitchens for Group Living Units and the prepared components of other meals could be ordered by Group Living Units from Central Kitchens when they wanted them. It seemed, therefore,

that a final decision should now be made to continue that system. The technical task which follows concerns particularly the most effective way of providing the mid-day meal and especially the problem raised, particularly by Elizabeth Sampson, about the present system of re-heating meals. It would be desirable then to explore whether effective heated containers can be provided for transporting meals from Central Kitchens to Group Living Units.

ii) **The Role of Domestic Bursar**

A great deal of work is going on between particularly Bill Douglas and Elizabeth Sampson about the precise definition of her role and role relationships. As I picked up the problems here they seem to focus round the complicated boundaries between the domestic functions and responsibilities in Group Living Units and the contribution of the Domestic Bursar to their efficient performance. There is, I think, a non-continuity of experience between those of us who have worked over years starting with Pat Hancock to clarify this boundary and to establish the independent authority of the Group Living Units over their own domestic affairs with the Domestic Bursar in a service and advisory function, and that of Elizabeth Sampson who has come from a different experience and had been accustomed to having staff directly under her own authority. I think the therapeutic task requires that Elizabeth Sampson be helped to recognise and support the boundary which is, I think, at present rather difficult for her through lack of experience rather than unwillingness.

This problem was brought to my attention mainly apropos of “shopping”. The Domestic Organisers are and, in fact within the system as evolved should be, responsible for food “shopping” for their units. They are, therefore, and must be free to decide where they will shop. In this respect I think it is important that a concept of “central stores” is “lost” and is replaced by the concept of a Community “shop” – a shop which would have to compete with other retail outlets for customers. Elizabeth Sampson has spotted the wholesalers’ goods as provided through central stores are sometimes more expensive than goods bought at cash-and-carry stores which has led her to propose that Domestic Organisers should purchase such goods at the cash-and-carry and that central stores would not provide those goods. This idea seems to me, however, to contain several misconceptions. Firstly, the misconception that the Domestic Bursar can make that kind of decision (or suggestion). Again, while I do not disregard the importance of getting lowest prices, it is only one consideration. It must be balanced against the difficulties for Domestic Organisers of excursions to cash-and-carry stores, possible dis-economies in their time, and so on. Also, in theory, a Community shop could use cash-and-carry stores instead of wholesalers and give the Domestic Organisers economies in that way. The suggestion also somehow attacks the idea of a Community shop which, like all efficient shops, would follow the demand of its customers. Important in all this is, I think, Elizabeth Sampson’s concern that the most efficient organisation should be evolved, and linked with that, a wish perhaps to be authoritative in pursuing this efficiency. This, however, may be contrary to an organisation evolved in pursuance of the therapeutic task, implying maximum devolution towards boys. To caricature this appears to mean that

Domestic Organisers must be allowed to make their own mistakes which the Domestic Bursar must learn to accept that she cannot control although she may review the situation and advise.

The Domestic Organisers are also anxious about the development. As one said, she “felt very threatened by it”. I think they feel that implicit in this would be a further whittling down of their role and authority.

Further work needs to be done here I feel in relation to the service that the Domestic Bursar can provide to further and ease the task of the Domestic Organisers and I think central to this is the task of providing optimally for their needs through the Community shop. In this respect, any extension of the facilities provided such as she had suggested by improved refrigeration facilities, would be important.

To summarise, I think work needs to be done towards clarifying and consolidating the role of the Domestic Bursar as a facilitator of, rather than as an authority over, the function of Domestic Organisers in Group Living Units.

iii) The Boundary Control Function of Senior Staff

This concerned the operation of the telephone switchboard function at times when the main switchboard is not being operated by Margaret Seymour or a deputy for her, and relates as I understand it, only to in-coming calls since out-going calls are automatic.

The problem was raised and clarified for me by Elizabeth Sampson, who, coming new to the situation, saw it with a more detached eye than anyone, including me, has previously done. The main point of clarification for me was that this was not, in fact, as I had always supposed from previous discussion with staff, a potential “emergency” or “crisis function”, but was for the most part a matter of directing in-coming calls to the appropriate person, many calls being personal or quite routine. Such few “emergency” calls as do come through are, in any case, not dealt with by the person on the switchboard but referred to the appropriate person, e.g. the senior professional person then on duty in a Group Living Unit. This was high-lighted by Elizabeth Sampson who was certain that, at any rate as yet, she had neither the skills nor the experience to cope herself with emergencies.

The burden on the few senior staff who operate this function, namely Richard Balbernie (?), Bill Douglas, Elizabeth Sampson and Mike Jinks, is very considerable and in particular may tie them to the Community in their off-duty time. Reference has already been made to this problem in Working Note 10, where the need to spread the burden was stressed. Formal separation of the telephone switchboard aspects from the emergency aspects of the task would seem to facilitate a clearer definition of both functions and of the persons appropriate to carry each. There seems to me no reason why any responsible member of staff should not carry the telephone switchboard role, certainly all professional staff, taking cognisance of the fact that hearing indications of stress, e.g. in

the caller's voice and presentation, may be important. If this function were thus spread, I understand that the duty would fall on a staff member approximately once a month. I understand also that this would mean staff working from the main switchboard, since it is not possible to provide switchboard equipment in their own accommodation as it is at present provided, I think, in the living accommodation of Bill Douglas, Mike Jinks and Elizabeth Sampson. Hesitant as one is to add to the burden of staff, particularly in Group Living Units, the spreading of this duty would seem to be fairer and would mitigate what seems at present to be a quite unnecessary and inappropriate burden on a very few people. One should perhaps, however, in view of the equipment situation distinguish between weekend, evening, and night duty, with weekend and evening duties being spread while night calls might continue to be taken in rotation by the people who have equipment for it.

The question of emergencies comes in then as quite distinct. The first resource would seem to me to be the Group Living staff since boys are located case-wise within Group Living Units at all times when Margaret Seymour is not operating the main switchboard and since they, especially with their therapeutic resource staff, are more au fait with the totality of the situation for their own group of boys. Back-up support for them, should coping with the emergency prove beyond their local resources, needs further clarification. In fact, only Richard Balbernie and probably Mike Jinks, outside Group Living Units have enough knowledge of boys to stand-in. Bill Douglas does not in his role probably have enough knowledge and Elizabeth Sampson in role certainly would not. One supposes that there is, in fact, already in existence a system for dealing with such emergencies as do arise. It may only be a matter of clarifying and formalising these arrangements and, as already suggested, distinguishing the emergency service more adequately from the telephone answering service.

Relationships with Wiltshire County Council

The general impression I gained about relationships with Wiltshire County Council is that the situation has eased somewhat although many difficulties remain. Some easement has come through Cotswold staff becoming better acquainted with the Wiltshire County Council staff with whom they have to relate, giving the general benefit which comes from friendly relations, becoming more certain of whom to approach for particular matters, and also becoming more able to identify people and areas in the Wiltshire County Council who function and respond more effectively. Difficulties still arise, however, through the slowness and sometimes the rigidity of local authority routines which, inevitably, compare unfavourably with the services provided by the Rainer Foundation.

(i) The Supply Problem

The main problem raised by everyone who discussed relations with Wiltshire County Council concerned the provision of supplies through the County Council. Budgeting cuts and inflation make it extremely important to get all supplies from the cheapest possible

sources and the Cotswold Community have over the years developed considerable skill in finding and exploiting bargains from suppliers. The need or pressure to operate through the Wiltshire County Council for many purchases now mean that such cheap sources of supply cannot be so effectively used since speed may be of the essence and the local authority procedures are too slow. It would be important to investigate with the Wiltshire County Council whether, in fact, more autonomy might be given for expenditures within defined limits, so that optimum benefit may be obtained from financial resources. A related problem concerns building works within the Community which can often be completed more cheaply and efficiently with the Community's own manpower resources and with supplies bought by the community than by County Council workers and supplies, or by outside contractors arranged through the County Council. The carrying out of such work independently by the Cotswold Community is not always easy to arrange, however.

(ii) The Management Committee

Further work was done on the role and functions of the Management Committee and the service it performs for the Community. This seemed to reinforce the view that the Committee is not in the ordinary sense "management". It does not seem that it can effectively make decisions which are binding on the local authority in relation to the Community; management ultimately comes from the County Council through the Department of Social Services and is deputed to Mr Banner.

This does not mean, however, that the Committee may not be extremely influential in the advice it may give to the Community itself and in its effect on the local authority's relationship with the Community. The working committee consists in effect of County Councillors since none of the professional advisors has as yet ever attended a meeting. Not only, then, do they have ultimate authority personally through membership of the County Council but also they can be, and are, extremely influential through being involved in a complicated network of other committee membership with other County Councillors not members of the Management Committee who, in turn, may affect Cotswold Community functioning in important ways.

It thus seems of the greatest importance to ensure that the Management Committee is kept in touch with the wider aspects of the Cotswold Community's relationship with the Department of Social Services and the County Council, so that it can exert influence helpfully when that seems necessary and appropriate. The matter of supply sources described above may well be a case in point. As County Councillors, the Management Committee members should indeed be concerned in a general way with the most effective deployment of County Council financial resources. A related problem is the clarification with Management Committee and so with the County Council of differences between the Cotswold Community and typical children's home, e.g. in size and complexity, in the nature of the task and the possibility that this may make appropriate different management techniques and routines.

The Polytechnic

I had a long progress report from Mike Jinks which I found most encouraging. Notable in this was much more emphasis than I had ever heard before on the primary task of the Polytechnic, i.e. education. I felt it had moved more effectively into focus, with education seen as itself of great therapeutic importance but at the same time, education being differentiated more effectively from the general therapeutic task of the Community, this being now more the background and less the foreground of the operation.

A major development at present is the differentiation out of educational procedures for integrated and for unintegrated boys, with benefit to both. Plans for more separate accommodation for each group are now being discussed and if realised would, I think, further facilitates the educational development of both groups.

Other Matters

i) Overtime Pay

Richard Balbernie expressed to me considerable disquiet about the decision to pay residential child-care workers overtime for hours worked above a fixed number (40/45 hours per week?). This seems to me, as to him, an extremely inappropriate way of reimbursing professional people for the long hours they spend on duty as against paying them an appropriate salary and delegating to them their work situation, and within their own management, the decision about how they will actually perform their task. It is the task that is paid for and not the hours worked although effective control of hours is desirable. I support, therefore, his wishes to have a fixed addition, e.g. 15 hours a week rather than some method of accounting for hours worked.

ii) A Fifth Unit

Plans are proceeding for the development of a Fifth Unit in the Cotswold Community which would bring the boy complement up to 60. This has many important aspects and would require a good deal of attention to management problems, but I think particularly important is the possibility that it would allow the Cotswold Community to reduce the cost per boy which in the present inflationary situation seems vital.

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