

COTSWOLD COMMUNITY

WORKING NOTE NO. 13

by

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Introduction

This note records discussions during my visit to the Cotswold Community on June 9th and 10th, 1975. The main topics discussed were as follows:

- 1) Acting management in Group Living Units.
- 2) The role and function of the Domestic Bursar.
- 3) Developments in the Polytechnic.

1) Acting Management in Group Living Units

I discussed this topic mainly with Richard Balbernie and with the four Heads of Group Living Units, Trevor Blewett, Chris Hawkes, Trevor Peacock and John Whitwell, although it came in incidentally also in discussions with Bill Douglas and Mike Jinks.

Since my previous visit the staff had clearly given a great deal of thought to this matter and had clarified the situation considerably. It now seemed to be clearly established that the most appropriate person in role to be the acting Head of a Group Living Unit was the Therapeutic Resource Manager, since he or she was likely to have the fullest overall view of boys and of the state of the Unit and would also be a senior person with considerable experience of work in the Community. The differentiation between overall Unit management and the delegated sub-task of boy management seemed also to be more firmly established. It is now clearly seen that the role of acting Head of Unit can be carried by either a man or woman Therapeutic Resource Manager equally well, although a woman would need more backing by a man carrying the sub-task of boy management than a man would.

It seemed widely accepted that should neither the Head of the Unit nor the Therapeutic Resource Manager be available, the Domestic Organiser would become the acting Head of the Unit, as the other senior person with extensive knowledge of the Unit as a whole and of boys and also as a person of considerable experience. Again the fact that the Domestic Organiser is a woman is no bar to her holding the role, provided she has effective backing from a man in the boy management role.

The only doubts about this arrangement were expressed by Chris Hawkes who seemed to feel most the need for the backing of a senior man as acting Head and as a support for his own role. However, I would think this stems perhaps more from his own special and temporary circumstances than from general principles, that is, that he has very recently taken over a Unit then in considerable difficulty with a particularly heavy workload, and is understandably feeling the strain and is in particular need of support.

This raises the general question of support and backing for new Heads of Units moving into role. While some of this support should of course come from experienced staff within the Unit itself, support would also need to be given from outside, notably by Richard Balbernie as his immediate superior, and by other established Heads of Group Living Units.

However, this development still leaves some uncertainty about the role of the fourth full-time child care staff member, a man, in group Living Units. On the whole there seems general agreement that this fourth staff member is necessary. The development of the role seems to depend very much on the division of labour between the Head of house and this fourth member. This is on the assumption, which seems justified, that the role of Therapeutic Resource Manager and Domestic Organiser are well established and defined and that it would seem neither necessary nor appropriate to change them in any significant way; the only exception to that statement being the present development towards incorporating within the Domestic Organiser's role the task of developing the "cultural aspects" of group Living Units through the quality of physical provision and the general way of living in the Unit.

The role definition, therefore, centres on the relation of the fourth staff member role with that of the Head of the Unit. The focus of the role would lie mainly in work with boys, including organising activities with them. Discussion with John Whitwell threw a good deal of light on the possible delineation of the role. He had recently found his young CSV a very good staff member, and the experience led him to put forward the idea, with which I agreed, that this would be a suitable position for a young, relatively inexperienced man who would be trained and well supported to gain experience in that role. The role would be seen as essentially transitional and temporary, i.e. the person in the role would either move into another role if he developed appropriately and such a role was available, or he would move to another post outside.

Wastage from this role has in fact tended to be high and what I am suggesting now is that this "wastage" might in fact explicitly be built into the role and accepted as desirable, both from the point of view of the person and from the point of view of the work.

In addition to the focal elements of the role in work with boys, the Head of the Unit could also delegate some other tasks to this man. I would suggest that these need not be rigidly defined as part of the role but could be a matter of arrangement between the staff in each Group Living Unit as is appropriate for the work of the Unit and congenial to the staff concerned. Tasks that could be and at present are delegated include the various administrative tasks such as looking after boys' pocket money, gardening, and so on.

2) **The Role and Function of the Domestic Bursar**

Since my last visit the role and function of the Domestic Bursar have been taken out of the Bursar's department, the Domestic Bursar now being directly responsible to Richard

Balbernie and the post carrying a status and position equal to that of the Bursar, Heads of Group Living Units and the Head of the Polytechnic, and full membership of senior management.

While this does seem to be an appropriate change, my discussions with the people most directly concerned indicated that a good deal of work remains to be done to clarify the new role, functions and role relationships. It is particularly important that this should be done quickly and effectively since Barbara Martin is in the process of getting into the role of Domestic Bursar and the lack of clarity appears to be adding to her stress and difficulty in taking up her post. Also important in Barbara Martin's case is that she needs help also in getting out of the role of Domestic Organiser and developing a wider perspective in relation to her new job.

The other staff who need mainly to be concerned in this operation appear to be Richard Balbernie, Bill Douglass, Laura Crump and Pat Hancock. With respect to Richard Balbernie, I think that general support and availability are very important at present and in particular assistance in clarifying role relationships, notably authority relationships, advisory and service relationships. For example, the role has authority over the staff in the Domestic Bursar's own area such as staff in the kitchens, laundry and sewing rooms, these are advisory and service functions to the Domestic Organisers, and the "inspectorial" function in relation to adequate maintenance of Group Living equipment. It seems also important to clarify the proper channels of communication with or approaches to other staff and so on.

These are complicated and I think that Barbara Martin should have explicit help with this and not be left to acquire knowledge by trial and error with the possibility of her making unnecessary mistakes. Earlier Working Notes in which some of these matters were discussed might be a help to her. She also seems to me to need to have someone in a senior position to whom she can take problems and from whom she can seek advice.

Bill Douglas could also perform some of these functions, in particular clarifying relationships between the Domestic Bursar's department and his own department and helping the Domestic Bursar to become familiar with people outside the Community with whom she needs to have relationships, such as suppliers both within and outside Wiltshire County Council, and advisory services she could call on in the Wiltshire County Council and elsewhere. The support of the Bursar is important here in helping Barbara Martin get into her role.

A particular case of the relationship between the department concerns the question of deputising for the Bursar when absent from the Community. Bill Douglas did not feel that it was now appropriate to delegate to the Domestic Bursar since she is now outside his department. In fact it is not easy to find an appropriate deputy as there is no-one within the Bursar's department itself. Nor did it seem appropriate to ask Richard Balbernie to deputise, since his own relationships with Wiltshire County Council are already very complicated. It seemed to Bill Douglas that Mike Jinks might be the most appropriate person to carry out certain continuous internal functions and to mediate the

relationship with Wiltshire County Council when necessary, though in fact this aspect of the role can to some extent be held at bay by preparation beforehand or allowing things to await Bill Douglas's return. Certainly as regards the Domestic Bursar's role this seems a reasonable plan but again it perhaps needs to be clarified.

As regards subordinates, Barbara Martin has at present excellent support within her own department from a number of experienced staff of all kinds but especially from Laura Crump and Pat Hancock whose long experience in role is of great help. The future is less certain however. The present plan is that when Laura Crump retires from full-time employment she will continue to work two days per week on a non-residential basis as Pat Hancock does at present, but Barbara Martin and Pat Hancock regard this as a doubtful proposition. For one thing Pat Hancock regards herself as unreliable since family commitments could at any time temporarily or even permanently interfere with her continuing her part-time work. Also they stressed the importance for the Domestic Bursar of having a full-time resident deputy, not so much in relation to the workload, as for purposes of mutual support especially since part-time non-residential staff are not available in the evenings or at weekends to facilitate appropriate off-duty and effective deputising, and also to allow informal off-duty contact which gives a great deal of mutual support. Further, a full-time duty would also seem necessary if the suggestion made in my last Working Note was carried out, i.e. to delegate fully to the Assistant Domestic Bursar the shop, the laundry, the sewing room and the kitchens.

I think this situation might need to be reviewed by the Autumn when Barbara Martin will be more effectively in role, less dependent on the experience of Laura Crump and Pat Hancock and in a position to help a new Assistant Domestic Bursar get into role. The feeling they expressed, with which I agreed, is that a new Assistant Bursar should come from the child care side rather than institutional management since sensitivity to the impact of her role on work with boys is important, and it is felt that the institutional management side is not too difficult to learn.

The much vexed question of telephone duties also arises here. They do still fall very heavily on the three staff members responsible for them and although Barbara Martin does not at present object to doing them, this would not necessarily continue. The Assistant Domestic Bursar might well make a fourth person for telephone duties, especially now her job has been upgraded.

3) Developments in the Polytechnic

Mike Jinks reported that developments within the Polytechnic itself seemed to be going well. Developments in the grouping of boys within the Polytechnic seemed to be effective and in particular academic progress seems to be improving.

The main problem Mike Jinks discussed with me, as did some of the Heads of Group Living Units, was what appears to be considerable splitting in boys' attitude and behaviour between the Polytechnic and Group Living Units, with a tendency to more

“ego” type behaviour in the Polytechnic and to more “id” type behaviour in the Group Living Units. This splitting was not in fact felt to be very helpful in the treatment of the boys. A good deal of thought had been given to ways in which such splitting could be reduced. One idea put forward was that it might help if the Polytechnic staff who worked with particular groups of boys in the Polytechnic continued working with these boys when they were acting as staff members in Group Living Units. I expressed some doubts about this procedure. Partly my doubts stemmed from the fact that such splitting is in a sense “normal”, that is healthy boys living at home and going to ordinary schools also have this split in their relationships, although of course less violent: and indeed children whose parents are teachers in their school often experience a difficulty in reconciling the two relationships. Home gives a more relaxed situation when indeed more regressed behaviour may show than at school. It seemed to me potentially more useful to give the same opportunity for the splitting and to work at it, even if that might mean stress for staff. Working at it would in this case probably needs closer contact between “home” and “school” than is necessary in the normal outside situation, with close staff communication and working together across the Polytechnic/Group Living boundary at the way boys or groups of boys manipulate relationships and playing staff and staff roles off against one another. I did not feel that I really had enough opportunity, however, either to discuss or think about this problem with staff members and would hope to do further work on my next visit.

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