

COTSWOLD COMMUNITY

WORKING NOTE NO. 15

by

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Introduction

This note records discussion with staff on the Cotswold Community during a visit on January 5th and 6th, 1976.

The following were the main topics discussed:-

- 1) The possible development of an additional senior management role and function in the Community.
- 2) The role of the Domestic Bursar and the Assistant Domestic Bursar.
- 3) The task, organisation and structure of Bridge House and its relationship to the Oxford Hostel.

1) An Additional Senior Management Role

Senior staff of the Community had done a great deal of work on the question of an additional senior staff role since my last visit but apparently without significant outcome as regards the emergence of a meaningful role and function for an additional senior staff member. I think everyone, including myself, is now agreed that the disadvantage of re-instituting the role of the Head of Group Living would far outweigh any advantages. (See working Note 14). Nor did the selection task at present done by Mike Jinks as Head of the Polytechnic plus a congeries of deputising functions seem to add up to a significant set of tasks and functions which would give meaning to a new senior staff role set in the management system as deputy to the Principal. This would mean that the "deputy" alone of all senior staff members would not have responsibility for a specific and differentiated area of the Community's functioning. The latter point seems to me almost enough argument against setting up such a post at present. I do, however, stress "at present" and think that it might be wise to review the situation from time to time. My reasons for suggesting that are as follows. The Principal's direct command is becoming rather large: there are now nine permanent members of the senior staff group including the Principal, the Head of the Polytechnic, the Bursar, the Domestic Bursar and five Heads of Group Living Units. That seems to me to be beginning to stretch the limits of a viable working group and it could be really difficult if further increases in the size or complexity of the Community's operation required any new member within senior management, e.g. another unit or possibly a closer relationship with the Hostel.

Returning now to the present situation, discussion with present senior staff seemed to indicate that, in fact, fairly easily operated informal arrangements between certain members of the senior staff for deputising for each other during planned absences worked

fairly well. The senior staff in question are the Head of the Polytechnic, the Bursar and Domestic Bursar in particular, but what emerged more clearly in this visit was, in fact, the special position of Trevor Blewett among the Heads of Group Living units. His great experiences in the Community and accumulated skill and knowledge of the work, seem in fact to have led to his developing a type of central role in carrying out deputising functions although this is not “structurally“ recognised and he does not have a Community-wide function in his formal role as Head of Group Living Unit. This participation of Trevor Blewett in the deputising functions does, I think just about make it possible to carry on with the present system, i.e. meaning that there are enough senior staff deputising for each other to give adequate cover without undue stress although I gather the senior staff concerned did not, in fact, have their full leave entitlement away from the Community and could not have done so had they wanted to. Nobody complained much about this, but I am not entirely happy. Staying at home because one wants to is different from staying at home because work demands it.

Further, the deputising system has only really been tested against fairly “normal” working circumstances when the majority of the absences have been planned leave and unplanned absences have been short. I still worry a bit about what might happen if any one of the staff concerned had a sudden unplanned absence and/or a lengthy absence, even planned. I do feel that cover would be a bit thin then.

This leads me to two further points:-

(i) I have been wondering whether, in fact, another senior Head of Group Living Units could be brought in to the central deputising function, both to relieve the burden in general by spreading it more widely, and to give more secure cover in case of unexpected or prolonged absence. Is there, in fact, someone able and willing to develop this role who could work with the senior staff and particularly with Trevor Blewett to explore how best it could be fitted in with the primary responsibility for running his unit? The deputising function in those units would need to be especially well-established in case the Head had to withdraw somewhat in terms of time and/or preoccupations.

(ii) I have been looking also at the role of the Domestic Bursar in this senior group. I will discuss the role more in detail below but wish only to make the point here that if she can take a full deputising function within the limits of being feminine then this would greatly ease the burden. To do this she must be a person of status, authority, experience and professionalism in work with the boys, more than in domestic matters. This is partly, I think, why the role has proved difficult to fill; there are not many such people. The transfer of Jeanne Slinger into this role seems in this context an excellent idea.

The senior staff group carrying deputising functions for each other could thus become the Principal plus four or five others, the Head of the Polytechnic, the Bursar, the Domestic Bursar and one or two Heads of Group Living Units, which would give a much more secure feel to the situation.

This leaves the senior staff in much the same position as before over the somewhat vexed question of telephone answering when the switchboard is not in operation. It does not seem reasonable to ask Group Living Heads to take on this role because of heavy commitments in their Units to work evenings and weekends as against other senior staff whose time commitments to their jobs is more limited. They are not exactly 9.00 – 5.00 jobs, but are not committed to any hours in between breakfast time and bedtime as Group Living staff are. How vexed this question is depends, however, a great deal on how and where the people concerned like to spend their free time. I gather that none of the three people likely to be involved now, Bill Douglas, Mike Jinks and Jeanne Slinger, finds it a particular hardship to spend off-duty time in their quarters, although Barbara Martin and Elizabeth Sampson found this tie unpleasant. The situation, therefore, seems more stable for the present.

2) The Domestic Bursar and Assistant Domestic Bursar

There seems little to add to the previous Working Note except that the matter seems to have further clarified in the direction there described. I think Barbara Martin is now clear that if she stays in this area of the Community's functioning she would be more appropriately placed and find more congenial work in the Assistant Domestic Bursar's than in the Domestic Bursar's role. Her interests and skills lie in the more domestic side of care for boys, in food provision for example, and in the central services like cooking, laundry and sewing. She has herself stated that she does not much care for and does not particularly want to continue in the senior management aspects of the work of the Domestic Bursar's department.

This would appear to leave the Domestic Bursar's role vacant and there seems to be general agreement that Jeanne Slinger has the capacities and experience to fill this role as a senior management role and Jeanne Slinger herself is eager to take it on. Some further work would need to be done in clarifying the two roles and defining definite areas of responsibility so that the boundaries of the two jobs are not confused and each person knows exactly where she stands. This is especially important since both people will have to carry each other's responsibilities as a deputing function in each other's absences.

If Jeanne Slinger takes over the Domestic Bursar's role and Barbara Martin stays in the Assistant Domestic Bursar's role then this would raise again the question of the employment of Laura Crump and Pat Hancock. It would certainly be distressing, both to them and to the Cotswold Community, to lose their services. Both have stated that they appreciate the importance of there being two full-time residential staff in the Domestic Bursar's Department and accept that they may well not be needed in future. Pat Hancock particularly is herself worried that her own circumstances may make her unreliable and will, in some ways, be relieved if she were not needed, although is certainly willing to go on in her present position if needed.

Finally, it seems that the sooner the changes are made the better for all concerned, although one imagines that her withdrawal from Springfield will not be easy either for the Unit or for Jeanne Slinger herself.

3) **Bridge House**

I found the definition of the task of Bridge House and the related method of work interesting. I also found it very complex and difficult and am not sure I yet have much to offer in the way of ideas or suggestions. I am also very aware of the ill-definition of the boundaries of my consultancy here with Mrs Dockar-Drysdale's and hope I will not overlap or intrude too much.

If I understood correctly, the intention is to use Bridge House as a transitional unit for boys about to leave the Community. The boys there will all, therefore, have come from other units never directly from outside, there being a variety of progressions from the intake units, i.e. the Cottage and Springfield, through Northstead and Larkrise to Bridge House.

There are a number of questions which arise. For example, there is the selection of boys within the other units, usually Northstead and Larkrise, to go into Bridge House. Some clarification of this question is now going on but I gather that in the past the task of Bridge House was made difficult by the fact that the boys there were very mixed in terms of psychological state, therapeutic progress and age. These differences made it difficult for staff to work since the boys themselves needed very different kinds of help and also the differences made for a high level of stress and friction among the boys themselves.

The direction in which selection or intake policy for Bridge House seemed to be going was towards trying to confine entry to Bridge House to boys who have become at least fragilely integrated through experience within the Community, with some treatment success, therefore, and for whom there is some reasonable hope that they will be able to cope with life outside the Community. This would perhaps suggest also that boys should be at the upper end of the age scale and usually heading for employment or only presumably fairly rarely for further education and training. This would imply that, if possible, other boys would leave the Community from another unit, e.g. psychotic boys who may have to go on to another institution, or even boys who are leaving very young, having benefited but who will go into another school and/or residential institution because of their age. I gather, however, that even if it were policy to send to Bridge House only the type of boy described above, it might be quite difficult to carry out this policy since there is pressure to fill vacancies in the Community and this may require space to be made in the intake units by passing boys on, perhaps prematurely, to other units such as Larkrise and Northstead who, in turn, might have to make space by sending boys, also possibly prematurely, to Bridge House.

While of course accepting that such pressures exist any may lead to the difficulties described, e.g. the too mixed boy population, I would also like to reserve judgement on

the exact degree the situation may also be affected by more subtle factors arising from pressures within the Community itself that need not necessarily be regarded as inevitable. What I have to say now is to some extent theoretical and very lightly backed by evidence from my visit so I am sure of the theory, less sure of its precise operation in this situation. The theory has to do with inter-group phenomena, i.e. the complicated relationships that exist between groups that share membership of the same institution; the mutually collusive projective systems, the envies, jealousies, rivalries, and linked with that, all the danger that rational task-orientated policies and activities may be infiltrated by another dynamic that may prevent or mitigate their being successfully carried out. In this context I find it interesting to speculate about the position in inter-group space of Bridge House. It is at the end of the line as far as the internal processing of boys within the Community is concerned. In-so-far as it takes other units' successful boys it could be felt to strip other units of reward and prevent or diminish contact with ultimate results. In-so-far as there must also be uncertainty about results it could also become the repository of anxiety about the future, or indeed be made to fail by being given some "hopeless" boys. Final magic in the way of treatment could also be expected of it with, again, certain failure. These are speculations only and may or may not coincide with reality. The point I want to make is that such phenomena are important to the future functioning of Bridge House which would be helped, therefore, if they could be examined and thus their effect on realistic planning diminished.

Accepting then that at least the aim of policy would be to have in Bridge House only boys who have developed through treatment some modicum of an identity that could be worked with the hoping that most boys will be like that and that they are of an age to lead a relatively independent life outside, one can approach the question of objectives of care and how the objectives can best be pursued.

Given that situation I would see the role of Bridge House as essentially to work with transition, not as a further treatment unit. It would straddle the boundary between the Cotswold Community and the outside community, itself having one foot on each side of the boundary as it were, and would help the boys to get from having two feet inside to standing securely on their own two feet outside. In this context I think I found some of the questions being debated perhaps a little irrelevant although understandable, e.g. should Bridge House provide a facilitating environment or not? When I say "understandable" I mean understandable against the background that staff themselves have of the tasks of the Community and especially their experience of roles and tasks in the earlier stages of treatment. When I say "irrelevant" I mean that I do not think I really see Bridge House as a treatment situation in a narrow sense, so that treatment-based concepts may have only limited relevance. I see the transition task as different. I may be saying also that it is necessary first for staff to develop a different frame of reference and extricate themselves from a 'facilitating environment' frame of reference before they can help to support the identity of boys and so increase their aptitude for life in the Community at large. I do incidentally think that some experiential losses are inevitable however strongly and successfully the institution fights against them and some special remedial experiences will always be necessary and that this is part of the task of Bridge House. In-so-far as Bridge House might stand away from the general treatment culture of

the Cotswold Community this might, of course, intensify the inter-group processes against which I have warned above, since Bridge House would be perceived as not being fully inside the Community boundary.

At this point in discussion with staff, and in my own thinking, I began to have a strong déjà-vu feeling and realised that I was back with my own end-of-World-War-II experiences in working with British Prisoners-of-War from Germany and then from the Far East. While in Civil Resettlement Units these men were still in the Army, but not quite of it: they were not under psychiatric treatment and yet they needed help about their disturbed and distanced position vis-à-vis ordinary society, more than ordinary servicemen did, e.g. with their anti-authority attitudes developed in relationship to the imprisoning power, their estrangement from society, and so on, into a positive acceptance of functioning there. The problems then could be seen as centring around how to promote independence and the capacity for the mature mutual dependency, how to help boys relate to meaningful situations in external society, to employment, to living conditions whether back in the family, in the Hostel, or independently, how to relate to other meaningful institutions in external society and so on. Or to put it in yet another framework, Bridge House might be seen as providing a relatively secure and known base from which boys could “take the temperature of the water” in outside society, making explorations of different kinds and of different durations, and returning to base at Bridge House, both to find there a situation where they could temporarily regress somewhat again if necessary (as the normal boy might at home), when coming back after stressful excursions into the outside world, and to find help from staff in working through and coming to terms with what they had found outside and must ultimately learn to cope with adequately. This would be quite a difficult inter-linked set of tasks, it seems to me, though not too unlike that of parents bringing up normal adolescents at home, knowing when to allow or facilitate regressions to more childish states, e.g. how much staff might care for boys’ possessions and how much they should be boys’ own responsibility so that they themselves might suffer from the consequences of inadequate care.

The function of facilitating transition and de-institutionalisation seems to me to imply that in terms of activities and relationships boys should be withdrawing from inside the Community and orientating themselves outwards, e.g. away from the Polytechnic and other internal work activities into training and employment outside where they can learn to operate with ordinary people in ordinary situations. It implies also that boys’ relationship with the outside world while in Bridge House and preparing to leave the Cotswold Community needs to be through activities and organisations which are likely to have real significance in terms of ordinary life outside as far as it would be possible to arrange that and I am sure it would not be easy, e.g. I know it is not easy to find enough suitable employment opportunities. I did not discuss trial living-out opportunities very much, but I imagine that they may be even more difficult to organise. The kinds of leisure-term outings that are being arranged for boys are important in this way but in a sense they are peripheral to the core of living outside, working and living with others. In view of the difficulty of finding and providing adequate work and residential experience for boys while still based in Bridge House, it seems to me important that staff should help provide opportunities for boys to learn by proxy, that is, that maximum use be made of

the experiences of boys who do go out to brief the others; to help them test their fantasies about life outside and to help them to relate realistically to what they will experience and to have to learn to cope with once they leave.

I think in other words, I am seeing Bridge House less as an advanced treatment unit than as a unit with a special and specific task to do, in getting boys successfully back across the boundary into the outside world. This is a task which only too many institutions do not see as an essential part of their service to clients, e.g. most hospitals and too many schools, with consequent loss of the benefits ultimately of belonging to the institution. The task as I see it then is to stabilise the benefits of membership of the Cotswold Community and to orientate them to usefulness for life outside. This would, of course, be very therapeutic but therapeutic in a different sense from the treatment policies and activities of the other units.

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