

COTSWOLD COMMUNITY

WORKING NOTE NO. 22

by

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Introduction

This note records discussions with staff on the Cotswold Community on March the 7th, 1978.

The main areas of work were as follows:-

- 1) The role and functions of focal therapists
- 2) The provision of domestic services for group living units with special reference to laundry
- 3) The staffing of the education section and its relations to group living
- 4) Secretarial services for the Community

1) An Role and Function of the Focal Therapists

Mrs. Dockar-Drysdale was also present at this discussion.

The discussion centred at first on the special needs of boys in the intake units:

(i) for a caretaker, which is essentially a maternal type of role, although it need not necessarily be operated by a woman: it would include the general care of a boy, e.g. getting up and going to bed, washing and cleanliness, care of clothing, reception of the boy on arrival and initiation into the unit and the Community, help in settling and getting acquainted.

(ii) for a talking person who would usually be a different person from the caretaker. The task here is generally helping boys with their difficulties about their inarticulateness and in communication, to help them become more able to use verbal means for therapy and other tasks.

Mrs. Dockar-Drydale and the staff present all seemed to feel that this system had advantages over there being a single person for the boy at this stage. For example it spreads the heavy and stressful burden of carrying a close relationship with those very disturbed boys; it helps cope with the danger of over involvement and permits some detachment. It facilitates work with boys about splitting and similar problems.

It would seem important, however, that one person, probably a caretaker, should still have overall responsibility for the boy, even if the functions are divided. This person would then take on such tasks as collating and coordinating information, relating this to

the work of the therapeutic resource, ensuring that the boy is properly looked after at all times, e.g. arranging for deputing care when the caretaker is off duty.

The question that came up a number of times was about the allocation or assignment of a focal therapist to a boy and especially whether the focal therapist should be assigned to the boy before he entered the unit. There seemed to be some feeling that boys do, or should, choose their own focal therapist but I can see quite a number of problems in this, e.g. I think it important that the boy has someone who specially relates to him and is responsible for him from the very beginning of his stay in the unit (see above). There is also the question of sustaining a reasonable balance between the caseloads of different staff. Boy choice might also give undesirable scope to boys to act out on choice and play off staff members in a situation where they may have little realistic grounds for choice, e.g. not really understanding the role, not being good judges of people or relationships. The “frozen” boy would not be able to make a move towards a person and other boys might tend to distribute themselves too widely in the pattern of meaningless relationships typical of the institutionalised child. Re-assignment could always be done if the first assignment really came unstuck.

Later in the boy’s passage through the Cotswold Community it is apparently more easy to have a single focal therapist as the balance of his need for primary caretaking and other therapeutic activities changes. At the same time as the boy’s capacity for relationships improves, and his range of activities and interests widens, he will relate himself to an increasing number of adults. It seems, however, that it remains important for him to continue to have the “one” person who will keep regular contact with him, e.g. in regular one to one meetings in which, hopefully talking will be done and a relationship of some trust developed. The staff member would also collate and coordinate information about the boy for use of the therapeutic resource and other people working with the boy.

We also discussed briefly problems in the hand over from focal therapist to focal therapist when a boy is transferred from one unit to another. Separation and experience of loss are potentially important learning experiences for boys, especially in view of their previous experiences, and need to be worked at both before and after separation.

2) Domestic Services in Units, Particularly Laundry

The situation about where and how laundry should be done in the Cotswold Community seems to be still somewhat unclear. Looking back on my discussions with people concerned I think my general feeling now is that on the one hand staff tend to accept in principle that it would probably be a therapeutic gain for boys to have the laundry done in units, but on the other hand feel the practical difficulties to be formidable, as indeed they seem to me also, so there was a kind of assumption that the changeover would, or should, take place but at the same time a great deal of preoccupation with what on the face of it seemed to be practical problems but which more and more seemed to me to reflect anxieties beyond the practical.

Starting with laundry staff, I felt myself quite a bit of anxiety about what such a change might mean to them, notably there would be the loss of what seems to be an effective group of the present laundry and sewing staff with good personal relationships and sharing of work. I wondered how they would manage the relative isolation of being within a unit and relating themselves to a wider range of other staff and more closely to boys.

They raised a long list of relevant and sensible questions about the possible change, e.g. about drying clothes. They believed that it would be necessary to take them to the laundry for drying, in which case it might be as well to do the whole washing and drying operation there. They were also worried about such things as toilet facilities in units, meal and rest breaks. These questions seemed to me to reflect the need to be able to get out of units and continue to have a place for rest and relaxation, an uneasiness about getting too embedded in these units and about separation from their present group. There was uncertainty about authority – who would be boss – and about delegations of responsibilities. This all added up for me, however, to anxiety about the whole proposed plan rather than about the specific questions themselves, since many of them would have had quite simple answers, some of which indeed I could give immediately, e.g. who would choose and pay for soap powders?

Some of this anxiety was reflected also among the domestic organisers. They begin to see their “command” growing rather large and expressed some doubt about it. They expressed uneasiness about managing older women more expert in the area of work than they were themselves. Some already seemed to find it difficult to manage their cleaners. They thought that in the event they would be able to cope but one should not perhaps underestimate the considerable management component in having a group of three to four older women engaged in various domestic tasks in units with the need to manage flexible deployment in relation to changing work loads and so on. This raises the issue for me as to whether this might detract from essential involvement with boy centred tasks.

To summarise, there is very general agreement that cooking should be done wholly in units and that steps be taken to organise that as soon as possible but with part-time cooks. By contrast, there are great doubts about laundry, with wishes to postpone moving it into units and evident relief in units which cannot accommodate a laundry without significant building or alterations. If decisions have to be made quickly about the laundry my hunch at the present would be that it might be well to retain the present arrangements. But having said that I would like to add that I think it would then be desirable that careful attention be paid to the possible institutionalising effect of which group living staff are to some extent aware, e.g. of boys’ unawareness of the work involved, the actual contributions of laundry and sewing staff, and consequently their possibly unrealistic and excessive demands for laundry services. There would be need for staff to work with boys and staff to work together on washing and ironing in units when the boys are able to do this and ready to learn the skills involved. I know that this is done to a considerable extent already but I think could perhaps be increased. If the central laundry services are maintained meantime it would not seem impossible to revise the system in certain ways later if it seemed desirable and when people are ready, e.g. it would not be too difficult, I

would have thought, to move ironing and mending with appropriate staff into units, even if washing and drying equipment remained centralised.

3) The Staffing of the Education Section and its Relation to Group Living

The education section appear to have gone a long way in clarifying internal staff roles and functions, and in establishing staff requirements. This is shown in a chart they did in January, 1978, i.e. one full-time teacher each for The Bridge House and Larkrise groups, plus a third teacher to give support to both groups and supply craft skills. Two full-time teachers each for The Cottage, Springfield and Northstead groups. This would mean nine teachers in all plus the one half-time teacher to stay with the unintegrated groups, three new teachers thus being required.

The rationale for that staffing is that it is possible for one teacher to work with a group of integrated boys quite successfully. On the other hand education section staff feel that two teachers are necessary working together with a single group of unintegrated boys quite successfully. On the other hand education section staff feel that two teachers are necessary working together with a single group of unintegrated boys if the group is to be maintained effectively and at the same time individual work can be done with boys who do not relate too well in a group and who need more individual attention, remedial teaching and other sorts. The idea would be to have a relatively inexperienced teacher working with each of the experienced men now running these groups. Having two teachers would also help to ensure effective continuity when one of them has to be absent.

The education staff also seemed to be in agreement that they prefer to have the same group of boys in the education section as they work with in the group living, and that this is beneficial to boys. Continuity is improved, the staff know the boys better, and feel more a part of the treatment set up.

While this seems a good internal arrangement for the education section the staff envisaged that it might cause some problems in group living in that it would mean the deployment there of three more men each doing approximately 30 hours a week, presumably in The Cottage, Springfield and Northstead. They were anxious least this should mean some over weighing of group living staff by education staff. They also felt it might lead to some under employment of staff with a consequent loss of challenge and effectiveness. They thought the problem might be even greater if one of the additional teachers was a woman, thus over staffing the group living unit with women. I can certainly see the problem here, although without knowing much more about the possibilities in group living I do not know how serious it is. The next step would appear to be to take a look at the possibilities for meaningful work for another staff member in the three units and/or whether it might make sense to reduce the amount of time that each man does. This in turn is not an easy question since I know that a certain minimum of time and other commitment is necessary before the staff member can make a meaningful contribution to the work with boys.

4) Secretarial Services for the Community

The community has an establishment for two full-time secretaries. I gather that this could not be increased at present without withdrawing resources from some other source in the Community. The problem therefore is how best to deploy this amount of secretarial time in relation to work that needs to be done. At present the position is that one secretary, Mrs. Williams, works full-time for Mr. Balbernie, although she helps out with other work when she has time available. This is a fairly straightforward job.

The second secretary, Mrs. Stuart, has a very complicated work load. She is the Bursar's secretary but also does shorthand and typing for Mike Jinks and John Whitwell, and copy typing for group living staff and Jeanne Slinger.

The problems in such an arrangement are self evident, e.g. in control of the total work load, assigning priorities to work for different people, exercising authority over "consumers", e.g. ensuring that she gets work soon enough for it to be carried out in time and in turn under whose authority this secretary comes. At present she seems to come under the authority of the Bursar, who does not, however, feel knowledgeable or competent to exercise the authority fully, e.g. over priorities in the group living aspects of work. An attempt is made to rationalise the work at present largely on a time basis, i.e. group living work in the morning, the Bursar's work from 1.30 to 4.00, Mike Jinks' work from 4.00 to 5.00, but this is not terribly satisfactory. It also appears that the total work load is heavy.

Bill Douglas and I discussed the possibility of there being two part-time jobs, one for a secretary to John Whitwell, who would also cover all group living work. This would have the great advantage that the secretary would be responsible to John Whitwell, who would have the authority to require the effective cooperation of group living staff with the secretary, e.g. in getting their work in in time, and would also have the knowledge, experience and authority to assign priorities in the work. The other part-time secretary would be for the Bursar, and she would also work for Mike Jinks and Jeanne Slinger, a much less complicated job with less problems about priorities and so on.

I can see the rationale for separating the two jobs, but it does not seem to imply necessarily the employment of two different people, one person could occupy both jobs and this would appear to have certain advantages, notably for Bill Douglas and John Whitwell, in their contacts across the Cotswold Community boundary. It can adversely affect public relations across the boundary, e.g. with County Hall, or other outsiders if neither the professional person nor his secretary is available to deal on the spot with enquiries, appointments and so on, in a business-like and friendly way. The advantage of having one person in the two part-time jobs would be that she will be knowledgeable about the work of both people, could keep both their diaries, and be able to deal with telephone and other enquiries for one of them even while engaged in the part-time job for the other. This would also allow some flexibility in adjusting the deployment of her time to the balance of work in the two areas with the cooperation of Bill Douglas and John

Whitwell. There is, of course, the familiar danger of splitting the two bosses but this should not be unmanageable.

The other question I raised was whether secretarial time could be more effectively used if it was supplemented by more “mechanisation” both photo-copying and tape recorders. The latter are a great saving of secretarial time as against taking shorthand, even if both the secretary and the professional person may miss the personal relationship involved in the latter. Use of the tape recorders also introduces more flexibility into the system, since the two people are no longer dependent on being together to get the work done. This would be particularly useful for professional staff in doing the work at the most convenient time. Tape recorders would also probably be more efficient than “legible” manuscripts for copy typing if people can learn to dictate straight on to tape or to dictate from just rough notes.

And lastly I think one should perhaps take a look at how much of the paper production is really necessary. Note the famous Marks & Spencer “paper-chase” when it suddenly struck Lord Seiff to enquire why there was so much paper about – and then there wasn’t.

More seriously, I think it important to try out various ways of rationalising the load and it would then be more possible to estimate how much secretarial time is necessary and how best to deploy it.

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