

COTSWOLD COMMUNITY

WORKING NOTE NO. 4

by

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Introduction

This note is a summary of discussions at the Cotswold Community on January 21st/22nd, 1972, and of the conclusion and indications for further exploration that emerged there from.

The focus of the work on this visit was with the staff of the Group Living Units and with those people who are closely concerned with them in managerial and service/advisory functions, i.e. Richard Balbernie, Trevor Blewett, Bill Douglas and Marjorie Stranger. The discussions were focused on:

- (i) An exploration of managerial tasks, roles, functions and relationships within each Group Living Unit, and
- (ii) An examination of transactions across Unit boundaries with other staff in managerial, service and advisory roles in relation to them.

(i) Exploration of the Internal Management Relationships within Group Living Units

Since my last exploration with the staffs of Group Living Units, there seems to have been considerable further work done in developing the concept of management within Group Living Units, but much remains still to be done.

The Heads of the Unit themselves varied considerably in the extent to which they were able or willing to see themselves as manager of a sizeable staff, collectively engaged in a task of providing homes for groups of disturbed boys, homes with the therapeutic task of helping prepare the boys to live more adequately in the wider society outside the Community, or alternatively, as a member of a rather unstructured team providing therapy. The differences seem correlated in that position and experienced the demands and rewards of the role. However, there remains a general problem of the conflict between the staff perception of themselves as “therapists” for disturbed boys and their perception of themselves as managers of a work-task and its staff, providing an adequate home in a therapeutic way. The distinction may be subtle but is important. A basic feeling of conflict may emerge between therapy and management and seems to make it difficult for staff in managerial roles to see themselves as managers of a home-providing and therapeutic team rather than directly as therapists. I think this needs more working out, particularly in view of the importance of giving to boys a model for identification of a man with structured ego-functioning and with a capacity to be authoritative in a good way.

While progress has been made in clarifying managerial roles and relationships within Units, it seems also from what I heard that the development has gone farther in the relationship of the Heads of houses of female staff and of female staff to their deputed tasks than has yet happened with male Group Living staff.

Discussion with house staff seemed to indicate that often by implicit rather than explicit decision the “feminine” tasks of the house had been differentiated out and effectively delegated to the two or three women staff in the Unit. A good deal of clarity had been achieved as to which staff member was responsible ultimately for what; further, an easy workable system of deputing for each other in each other’s absence seemed to have been developed. Although it was not perhaps very explicit, I felt that in the area of feminine roles and tasks there is good understanding of the difference between responsibility for the performance of a task and actually performing it (see Working note 3) and that people were reasonably clear who was ultimately responsible for seeing a task was performed and who, in fact, could be called upon by that person to carry out the task from time to time. Although obviously such problems will need to be continuously worked at in order to sustain a good level of functioning, all I heard led me to believe that such work goes on, that responsibility for delegated tasks is well accepted by women staff, and that deputing between female staff members in the absence of the ultimately responsible person works satisfactorily.

I was asked particularly to look at the question of deployment and responsibility for cleaning women deployed part-time in Group Living Units who are formally members of Miss Stranger’s staff. Theoretically, the position seemed to me quite clear, i.e. that once Miss Stranger has deployed cleaning women into Group Living Units and they have crossed the boundary of the Units they become staff of Group Living Units and thus come under the authority of a member of the Group Living Unit team, effectively a woman staff member to whom the Head of the House has delegated responsibility for the cleaning tasks.

There seemed to be problems about operating this theory mainly it appears arising from various misconceptions. In Group Living Units it emerged that female staff were uncertain about whether part-time domestic staff would, in fact, accept the authority of house staff and carry out their instructions. Group Living staff appear to have the impression that part-time cleaning women would regard themselves as responsible to someone outside Group Living and, indeed, that they would still obey Pat Drew’s orders and that there was a rigid set of instructions. On the other hand, Marjorie Stranger reported that cleaning women experienced the lack of guidance and direction in the houses and would welcome more of this.

It did not seem difficult in this case to make a move towards the theoretical position where domestic staff come under the authority of Group Living staff when they have crossed the boundary into Group Living Units. The task now is for Group Living staff to clarify to whom domestic workers in the Units are responsible and for Unit staff members

to be clear about what they want domestic workers to do and to exercise appropriate authority over them.

The issue is somewhat complicated by the fact that ultimately all the domestic workers concerned are on Miss Stranger's staff. A Group Living Unit staff member has, therefore, no ultimate power of 'hire and fire' over domestic staff. If such staff member is unsatisfactory, the way of dealing with the situation would be through the Head of the house to Marjorie Stranger, who would be asked to review her allocations, this not necessarily implying dismissal from the Community.

The delegation of tasks and responsibilities to male staff seems to have been much less effectively clarified than to female staff, partly no doubt because the Head of the Unit himself is male and it is, therefore easy for him to see conventionally male tasks such as maintenance or gardening as directly in his own province. There seems to be danger from this that Heads of Units feel a compulsive obligation to do, or oversee, such tasks themselves, which they find very persecuting, and that because of other pressures on Heads of houses these tasks do not, in fact, get done. It would appear that there is some urgent need for male tasks in the Units to be reviewed and clear decisions made about who should be responsible for seeing they are competently performed. I stress the importance of the Head of house delegating tasks to his subordinates so that he is more free to view the overall performance of his staff, particularly in relation to the care of boys.

(ii) Transactions Across the Boundaries of the Living Group Units

Several important issues arose concerning transactions across the boundaries of Group Living Units and in their relation to other parts of the Community. Very important is the need to differentiate managerial, advisory, service and inspectorial functions. The managerial channels are theoretically clear. Trevor Blewett is the Head of Group Living and Jeanne Slinger is now his deputy, Trevor Blewett in turn being responsible to Richard Balbernie. Managerially, the Heads of Group Living are responsible to Trevor Blewett, or to Jeanne Slinger in his absence. There are several important implications of this. This theoretical position emphasises the importance of viewing the Heads of group Living Units as being firmly in control of the boundaries of their Units, and being responsible for ensuring that the members of their Unit team perform their own delegated tasks effectively, in other words, to ensure that the responsibility for the efficient functioning of Units is fairly and squarely on the Head of the Unit. This would imply in turn, that Trevor Blewett has responsibility for ensuring that all Heads of Units, in fact, do this effectively.

In particular, he needs to carry out a continuous review of the work of Units and of their Heads. How he will do this will depend on the kind of feed-back which exists and which he can organise, e.g. the feed-back he gets from visits to Units, from others of his staff visiting Units, from reports of other staff outside Group Living such as Marjorie Stranger, or Bill Douglas. It is important that if such feed-back leads Trevor Blewett to decide that any Unit is not functioning effectively then that he takes managerial action through the

proper channels, i.e. through the Head of the house, who must himself be given the chance to retrieve the situation by taking such action as is necessary with his staff. If the Head of the house fails to do this then it is up to Trevor Blewett again to decide what further managerial action is required, e.g. to repeat his request for action, to offer consultant help and so on.

In other words, the responsibility for seeing that a Group Living Unit functions effectively is on the Head of the Unit; the responsibility for seeing the Head of the Unit functions effectively is on the Head of Group Living.

This implies that where there is dissatisfaction outside a Group Living Unit with any part of the Unit's functioning, the first mode of approach to the problem is through managerial channels in Group Living. In every case, the difficulties should first be raised managerially with the Heads of Units who need to be given the opportunity to put things right through managerial action with their staff. It is important that the Heads of Units are not by-passed by direct managerial action from outside which would weaken the authority in the Unit of Head of the Unit and thus make it more difficult for them to develop and sustain a true managerial role.

Inevitably, difficult situations may arise because of the fact that the number of hours Units must be staffed means that the Head of a Unit is not always on duty. I feel that it is important here to distinguish between general long-term matters, and short-term matters, particularly crises, i.e. when general matters of unit management are in question they would be taken up with the Head of the Unit initially, however, in a crisis situation such as if a boy absconds, then the matter would be dealt with through the deputing Head then on duty.

When people outside Group Living are in contact with Group Living they may indeed discover that Heads of Units and their staffs are not keeping up adequate standards. If they wish to intervene, it would again seem important to get the intervention into proper managerial channels, i.e. through the Head of Unit and/or through Trevor Blewett and keeping both informed. It either Trevor Blewett, or the Head of a house, should feel the need for outside help in improving matters then a person coming into a Group Living Unit from outside would come in as a consultant, or adviser, or provider of services; the main people likely to be involved in this would be Trevor Blewett himself, Richard Balbernie, Jeanne Slinger, Bill Douglas, or Marjorie Stranger. It is important here again to recognise the difference between these consultancy and service roles and relationships and the managerial ones. Should a Unit fail to act on advice or use services, then the consultant cannot issue orders, but again would have to go back through managerial channels for the Head of a Unit or Trevor Hewett to act appropriately.

A further point arises about the inspectorial functions related to public accountability, a way in which Group Living Units obviously differs from the ordinary family. Discussion with Bill Douglas and Marjorie Stranger in particular, disclosed that they were somewhat anxious about maintenance problems in Units and were not sure how they could effectively supervise the state of the property for which they are ultimately responsible

and accountable. In discussion it was suggested that there would indeed be some justification for them to have an inspectorial function, paying regular visits to Units at, say, 6-monthly intervals, to go over the house and equipment with the Head of a house and appropriate members of his staff, to report on the conditions of the house and equipment and recommend any necessary action. Further, if such inspection should point to deficiencies in the running of the Units, then again responsibility for dealing managerially with such deficiencies will go back to the Head of the house and/or to the Head of Group Living.

In all this I stress that the most urgent task is to help the Heads of Units get firmly into their roles as managers of their Units, with effective delegation of sub-tasks to members of their staff while they continue to hold overall responsibility. Linked with this is the need to distinguish clearly between management relationships and advisory, consultancy, service and inspectorial functions.

Scarce Resources and Their Deployment

It was clear throughout all the discussions, as always, that the resources available to meet demands and needs are quite inadequate. Nor can one hope that they ever will be fully adequate.

What in some ways is more important, then, than that they should be adequate, is how the inadequacy is managed. There is a crucial but very painful management task for the whole Community and for its sub-systems. Only too often the whole Community can become persecuted or distracted by the idea that “they” should give us more and become involved in attempts to get more from any available source. From the point of view of ego-functioning in the real world, however, it is important for both staff and boys to recognise that life is like that – resources are always limited. The central therapeutic task is how to learn to live with this problem. Staff could help by a realistic approach, i.e. we can’t have everything, how do we make do as best as we can with what we do have? This includes not only the deployment of physical resources, but also of less tangible things like staff times. I feel it important that when staff are over-pressed, as they normally are, a careful review of tasks be done so that some kind of priority can be established and explicit, realistic decisions taken about what tasks shall be done and what tasks not. Only if something of this kind can be done will staff be freed from some of the perpetual persecution of feeling that they can never adequately catch up. It would also be helpful for boys to be involved in some of this kind of planning.

Trevor Blewett’s letter of Management and House Staffing

I have little more to contribute about this. I am struck, however, by the number of female staff who now appear officially on the establishment. I am sure this represents a very important development in the work with the boys, showing not only that women can effectively work with such boys, but also that the situation is not too dangerous. The only

difficulty with this point seems to me that as the proportion of female to male staff changes it may become increasingly difficult to ensure that their female staff are always supported by male staff when on duty. Discussion with the house units suggested that in the recent past this has not always been possible and that female staff have found this something of a strain.

The two models for staffing Group Living Units suggested by Trevor Blewett are not essentially different. I am not really in a position to assess the adequacy of the staffing since I do not have the necessary data.

One point was raised and discussed by Group Living Units, however, which might merit more consideration. If more meals are cooked and served within houses, more domestic help would become necessary. It was felt to be important to have more time from one person rather than more people, since one person would both allow for greater integration in the house team and have more flexible deployment. There was also some suggestion that a suitable role would be rather like that of the old-fashioned “cook-general” who would do some cooking as well as domestic work.

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