

**COTSWOLD COMMUNITY**

**WORKING NOTE NO. 5**

by

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#### **Introduction**

This note summaries discussions at the Cotswold Community on April 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>, 1972. A number of areas of development and problems emerged from these discussions as follows:

- (i) De-centralisation of functions into Group Living Units
- (ii) Authority and Boundary-keeping in Group Living and the Polytechnic
- (iii) Developments in external management.

#### **(i) De-centralisation of Functions into Group Living Units**

The de-centralisation of certain functions into Group Living Units has continued to make progress, particularly as concerns roles and tasks usually delegated to woman staff. My impression was that this was going very well; clarification was increasingly being achieved in the boundaries of roles and tasks. They seemed to have fairly clearly and firmly attributed and responsibility delegated and accepted for their performance. Arrangements for deputing in the absence of the managerially responsible person seemed to be working well.

Further, this de-centralisation seemed to have had two important results; a lessening of tension between house staffs and the people outside Group Living who had performed the function when centralised; and secondly, a notable growth in the capacity of the women staff concerned to take responsibility and authority, operate them effectively and enjoy doing so. This fact seemed connected with a readiness on the part of these women to accept more responsibility of the same kind and to evolve further their “housekeeping” role in the units. The domestic areas mainly involved were food provision, laundry and sewing.

There appear to be a number of arguments in favour of de-centralisation. Firstly there is the realisation of de-centralisation to the therapeutic experience for boys provided by Group Living. This lies not in positive experiences such as the close group of boys and staff, an increase in the “mothering” function of women staff, but also in more “negative” experiences which are beneficial when effectively worked through, e.g. in confrontation with the reality of “scarcity”, adaptation to it and optimising the use of resources. In a sense more such conflicts can be taken into Group Living Units where they can be worked out in small group situations the better, since this lessens the likelihood of paranoid projection systems developing between sub-systems in the Community which would be anti-therapeutic as a model for boys.

Secondly, there is growth in stature of the staff who take on the delegated tasks. This cannot but make them more effective in work with boys, especially as regards providing positive ego-models for identification.

Thirdly, maximising the opportunity for boys, with staff, to have an experience of living as like as possible to that of normal boys living with their families, e.g. to go shopping, to experience conflicts involved in choice, to learn to deploy the limited amounts of money available.

Such experience of the Community as a model of life in the world outside is important but needs to be related to the resources available to operate it. Such considerations are relevant to the important question of where the mid-day meal should be prepared and eaten. At present, only the Rookery boys eat the mid-day meal in the canteen – which effectively deprives them of some typical “canteen” experience, e.g. mixing with other people from outside the home. In fact, a very significant number of people in the community at large now eat their mid-day meal in some form of canteen or restaurant. It would seem appropriate for Cotswold boys to do the same. It is true that there may be boys who are not able to use the canteen, just as there are children in society outside who from time to time cannot go to school and use school meal facilities. I would suggest that it would be quite appropriate to treat them as special cases who could be given a light meal in the Group Living Units with work being done by the boy and staff to facilitate his re-entry into the ordinary life of the Community.

This point is reinforced by the great problems that the Group Living Units would face if they attempted to provide mid-day meals in house. Staff have expressed considerable dislike of the system of collecting meals from the central kitchens to be eaten in the houses to the point where, in some cases, staff seem almost ready to refuse to carry on with that system. Considerable enthusiasm was expressed by some of the woman staff for the alternative of taking over the whole task of providing the mid-day meal in the houses. I felt there were a number of difficulties here: for example, only a few of the women staff seemed to have a realistic appreciation of how much effort and time would be required for preparation. There is, I think, a real danger that too much of the energy and time of women staff would be drawn into this activity and away from other more important work with the boys. This might well be the case even if more domestic help were given to the house, e.g. in the form of cooks or kitchen help. On the whole, my feeling is that mid-day meals in the canteen is the more realistic thing to do.

The only exception to what has been said above, would be mid-day meals at weekends which in the community at large are eaten in Living units, i.e. homes, and become a very central part of life of the unit. This is linked to the provision of meals other than mid-day meals. The argument in favour of having all meals other than the Monday to Friday lunches in the Group Living Units is very strong, matching the outside community model. The problem of providing these other meals is also much less.

However, I would stress the importance of not pursuing the family model too closely, or even the fantasy of a family model, for example, the notion that all food would be

prepared from scratch in the Group Living Units. Families, after all, now buy a great deal of pre-processed food. In other words, it would seem important to explore further the relation of Group Living Units to the central kitchen and stores as regards food processing to achieve an optimal balance between the use of central equipment and staff on the one hand, and house equipment and staff on the other. There seems no particular virtue in house staff doing things like peeling potatoes if central kitchens have machines to do this, at least until it is demonstrably therapeutic in the relationship with the boys.

To summarise, it seems that it is practicable and therapeutic to de-centralise all meals except Monday to Friday lunches into Group Living Units. The precise relation the central kitchen and stores develop with Group Living Units needs further exploration to determine how central kitchen and stores can maximally contribute to Group Living Units, and also to explore how Growth Living staff can most effectively carry out their task of providing food without undue preoccupation with that task, which might distract them from work with boys.

Very much linked with this is the question of the future deployment of the present central kitchen staff. Certain of the women staff seem to hope for their deployment into Group Living Units. At present my feeling is, that they would be more effectively deployed in the Community as a whole if they remain centralised, providing Monday to Friday lunches for all the boys, and some staff, in the central dining room, and helping Group Living Units to provide all other meals in a way which needs to be explored and worked out in detail. For example, how far they can provide prepared foods, and so on, and also what can be made of deep-freezing of pre-cooked meals to be “brought” as required by house mothers.

As regards laundry and sewing, a great deal of the laundry within Group Living Units is, of course, laundry which in a family would be done at home or at least by the housewife in a laundrette, as is the case also with the sewing. From the point of view of the “model”, therefore, it seems appropriate to bring it into the Group Living Units. Also, it would appear to be beneficial to give to the female staff of the Units the greater control over their own resources of clothes and soft household equipment that would arise if laundry and sewing were de-centralised. There are many arguments in favour of de-centralisation: some new equipment would be needed, but apparently this would not be difficult to get, partly in exchange for existing equipment. There are apparently already four sewing machines in the Community; the provision of a fifth would mean that the Group Living Units could all have one for the use of female staff when necessary and the central sewing women could also have their own. It does seem reasonable from the practical point of view that she as the “expert” should have her own equipment which she could take around with her and care for herself and not have to use sewing machines “messed about by other people”.

There appears to be a general agreement among Group Living staff and laundry and sewing staff, that a workable plan would be to have laundry and sewing staff deployed for two half days per week in each of the Group Living Units, with the fifth day devoted to central laundry and sewing, but more detailed exploration of this plan is still necessary.

If the plan should be put into operation it would be important that all staff concerned should be absolutely clear about the delegation of authority and responsibility, i.e. that when Group Living Units laundry and sewing staff come under the authority of appropriate members of the house staff; only when doing central work would they be directly under the authority of Miss Stranger. Ultimate authority as far as concerns the Community as a whole would be with Miss Stranger, with whom house staffs would have to negotiate if they wished to raise problems about the work of laundry and sewing staff when in their Units.

**(ii) Authority and Boundary-keeping in Group Living and the Polytechnic.**

Group Living Units seemed to be in rather more difficulties than usual about boundary keeping and authority. I did rather little work on this problem, but a few questions did occur to me that could perhaps be looked at.

(a) I wondered how far the difficulties were connected with the way that staff outside Group Living actually relate to Group Living: how well they sustain the boundaries: do they effectively attribute authority to Group Living staff, or subtly detract from it?

There seems to be a view in the Community that the Polytechnic staff are more authoritative and experienced than Group Living staff, a view that may have some reality about it, but perhaps less than is expressed. Something of that view seemed to be carried over into Group Living when Polytechnic staff enter the Group Living area as E.D.A. staff. It did not seem to be clearly and fully realised that they are at the point no longer Polytechnic staff under Mike Jinks, but Group Living staff under the head of the Group Living Unit. Also I question whether these part-time staff should really be used as deputing heads of houses rather than the second full-time male child-care worker, or even possibly a female worker. I realise that these people may be less experienced, but I also suspect that the role and functions they have been given and their relation with teachers on E.D.A. may well be preventing their growth in experience and effectiveness. One should perhaps note here what has happened to women since they were given more responsibility and authority.

(b) I was also struck by a curious blurring of the boundaries between the Polytechnic and Group Living. Group Living staff talked of “now being in the Polytechnic” in a way that conveyed the message that they really meant “in” – i.e. “of” – not just using the facilities of the Polytechnic for work with boys. Similarly, there seemed to be a move to get Polytechnic staff more into Group Living, this culminating in the suggestion that Polytechnic staff might work four days in the Polytechnic and the fifth day, or its equivalent, in Group Living with Group Living staff standing-in for them in the Polytechnic. The main reason for this was to share week-end work more equally between Group Living and Polytechnic staff, an aim with which one can sympathise. But even superficial consideration of the details of such a plan showed that it would cause a very great disruption in both areas, through notably in groups of boys in the Polytechnic and their relationship with staff. I did not feel there was any serious likelihood that this plan

would be put into operation, but the fact that it was even put forward and considered seemed to me a serious “symptom” of some problem in the Community, the Polytechnic being just as much involved in this boundary blurring as Group Living.

It was my feeling, therefore, that in both areas there is a need for tightening boundaries and authority, clarifying roles and authority-relationships both between and within the two areas. Further, I think it might benefit both sides to take stock of their own primary task and how effectively they carry it out. The primary task in my opinion is not “therapy”: the primary task of the Polytechnic is to provide education as effectively as possible, through in such a way as also to be therapeutic. Similarly, the primary task of Group Living is to provide residential services and general care for the boys who temporarily lack a family and also to be therapeutic.

### **(iii) External Management**

There are clearly very important developmental tasks to be done here. The setting up of the Management Committee now requires that the Community carefully explores and develops its relationships with the Committee. There seems to be a considerable amount of goodwill to the Community, both within the Department of Social Services and in Committee members, though with some notable exceptions, unfortunately.

The Committee itself is obviously too large to be a really effective working group and, therefore, is likely to be very much influenced by its chairman, by the Department of Social Services, and by its more authoritative members. Offers have already been made of pre-committee meeting work with Group Captain Willan and Geoffrey Banner. This could provide a great safeguard if it were developed and handled well. So also could the provision of “professional advisors”, an important part of whose role will be to establish “professional authority” effectively on the committee so as to ensure proper professional sanctioning.

It would be important also to recognise and accept “accountability”. This has two aspects, firstly accountability to the “owners”, the people who pay and who, therefore, must have some authority, an authority which one hopes will be exercised with knowledge and sensitivity. There is work to be done in developing these characteristics among the committee members. Secondly, there is professional accountability for the quality of the work which is more likely to be operated through the Department of Social services and the professional advisers on the committee.

It is important also to explore how far it would be possible, in turn, to work with the Management Committee to carry out some model-building of relations between an institution of this kind and its local authority. One area that comes immediately to mind is financial. It has always seemed to me desirable and efficient that an institution have a total budget to be managed internally. A recent discussion with Bill Douglas disclosed that he is of the same opinion and would like to operate that way and that Geoffrey

Banner had once been head of an institution which operated its finances that way and found it satisfactory.

Another area is the way in which the committee exercises its inspectorial functions and relates itself to the work of the Community across the boundaries. While it is clearly important that the committee should have the opportunity to operate its inspectorial and sanctioning functions realistically, it is also important that this should be done without disruption to the work of the Community. Techniques need to be worked out for the relationship between the committee and the Community in this respect. In all the work to be done in this area, it does seem important to sustain a co-operative relationship both with Group Captain Willan as representing elected members of the local authority, and of the professional members as represented by Geoffrey Banner. Their protection and sanctioning seems to be a necessary element in getting freedom to continue to operate as is desirable within the Community.

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