

COTSWOLD COMMUNITY

WORKING NOTE NO. 6

by

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August 1972

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Introduction

This note summarises discussions at the Cotswold Community on July 20/21st, 1972.

This was unfortunately a rather rushed consultant visit from the point of view of internal tasks in the Community since a considerable amount of time was spent on external management matters. There was, therefore, inadequate time to work at some of the important internal issues raised; further work needs to be done. The main areas of work were as follows:

- i) The de-centralisation of functions into Group Living units
- ii) the re-centralisation of mid-day meals
- iii) The development of the role of the senior female member of Group Living Unit staff
- iv) Mutual group and individual projection processes
- v) The role of the Bursar and the Domestic Bursar
- vi) The relation with the external management system

i) The De-centralisation of Function into Group Living Units

Further progress had been made in this area with Group Living Units increasingly taking over functions that had previously been centralised. Progress was especially marked in the area of food provision. Work is now going on in the de-centralisation of laundry and sewing. Women staff particularly seemed pleased and confident in taking over these tasks and functions. Further, responsibility for dealing with medical matters has now been delegated effectively into Houses which have their own equipment, with a consequent feeling of satisfaction in having intra-Unit control and authority.

The provision of offices and relevant office equipment in Houses also seemed to have increased the feeling that responsibility is being progressively delegated, which is greatly appreciated. The managerial aspect of staff roles is consequently strengthened. The offices appear to facilitate storing papers in units and this in itself facilitates effective managerial and therapeutic work on the papers. House staff now have a feeling that the papers are in their proper places in relation to both staff and boys, i.e. within the Group Living boundaries. There seems no doubt that this de-centralisation is important in establishing and sustaining the managerial authority of staff.

ii) Re-centralisation of the Mid-day Meal

There now seems growing agreement that it is both more practical and even therapeutically advantageous that boys should eat their mid-day meals, Monday to Friday, in the canteen. This is indeed the model that both children and adults commonly follow in the community at large; further, the use of central kitchen staff and equipment for this purpose would relieve Unit staffs of a burden that would probably put excessive strain on their resources.

A number of questions arise in organising central meals, however. Very important is to what part of the total care system such centralised meals should belong. It does not seem practicable, or managerially desirable, that they should belong only to the “canteen” since questions do arise about professional staff sustaining their authority and discipline. It does not seem appropriate to leave this task entirely to canteen staff. In fact, following the model of society outside it would seem appropriate to regard the canteen as part of the Polytechnic area, i.e. part of the school day, so that staff on duty with boys in the canteen over lunchtime would appropriately be Polytechnic rather than Group Living staff. Authority and discipline would be maintained by them. It would follow also that boys would not sit in Group Living units in the canteen as apparently was formerly done, but should probably be given a free choice of companion as they come from the Polytechnic as is usual in an ordinary school canteen.

Another question is what to do about any boys who are not capable of using the central canteen for reasons of either physical illness, or emotional problems. It would again seem appropriate to follow the general model for the world outside, i.e. that some provision would be made for such boys “at home”, i.e. in Group Living. However it then seems important that such difficulties, even if real, should not be exploited, i.e. that there should be no encouragement of boys to act out in this area. It is important for staff to be clear in this respect about the role of food and feeding the boys. It should not be over-loaded with the desire to make up to boys for early maternal deprivations, it should be forward and not backward-looking. Coping with early deprivations belongs more appropriately to Group Living.

Closely linked with this is the question of the equipment of the canteen. While accepting the need for the canteen to be attractive and comfortable, it seems to me this should be more in the “public building” way and not “homey” as is more appropriate to Group Living.

The re-centralisation of the Monday to Friday lunch could then be effectively balanced by the increasing importance of other meals eaten at home, i.e. in Group Living Units, and all the possibilities of important relationships around this.

It is important that there should be good provision for meals at home. However, once again one need not try to push the analogy too far. It is important to make an effective balance between food preparation in the Houses and “importation” of prepared foods from outside, whether from central kitchens or from other sources. Participation in food

preparation can be therapeutic for boys; on the other hand, it may be unduly demanding on the time and energy of staff. There is a need for Group Living Units to develop their own method of handling this. A great deal of work needs to be done and experience accumulated and communicated.

iii) **The Development of the Role of the House Mother**

Since my last visit to Cotswold terms had come into use in the Community, i.e. Manager and Manageress of Group Living Units, terms which aroused some discomfort in me while I still recognised their relevance to on-going problems. My discomfort, I think, was occasioned by experience that managerial situations which use these terms together are often not very effective. However, the development that lies behind these terms seems important and needs to be worked at, that is, to what extent are the senior full-time women in a house able to act managerially as deputing heads of the houses in the absence of the head of a house.

I think that the emergence of this question at this moment is very much a reflection of the new role taken by Jeanne Slinger which gives her considerable managerial authority and by the return of Pat Drew, bringing her authority and experience to a group living unit. Both of these developments demonstrate the capacity of women to take management roles and operate them effectively. Further, I think it reflects certain recent problems in male leadership, including those around Melvyn Toucher and Derek Nimmo, and the move of Trevor Blewett from the Head of Group Living into being the head of a unit. But there is also a reality about it. There are now in the Community a number of experienced and authoritative house mothers, indeed, possibly these women are more experienced than men other than the heads of houses. Taking up this point then, in a purely rational and practical way, one would suppose that there would be no ipso facto reason against a woman becoming deputing head of house. The crucial managerial factor seems to me to be to select as deputing head the most suitable person available; if that is a woman there seems to be no argument against it.

However, there may well be complicated problems of the up-holding of the authority of the female when she is in charge and the role of male staff on duty to further her authority and to relate effectively with her. It is obviously important that she is supported not only by subordinates in the managerial role, but also as a female in authority by men who respect and support her authority. From the point of view of therapy it would also be important to match the family situation where a great deal of managerial authority is operated by the mother, although the father in a good family is very much behind her.

From the point of view of the women themselves, it is important to give them the opportunity for such experience. As we have seen, house mothers have in the past reacted well to such a challenge and have grown the more they are given the opportunity for growth. The more they grow the better the care they provide for boys.

iv) Collusive Group and Individual Projective Processes

My interest in this topic was aroused by discussions with Mike Jinks and Ronald Dare, who are still very concerned with the relation between the Polytechnic and Group Living. They raised important issues about this relation and made it clear that though much work has been done since my last visit in clarifying issues between these areas and tightening boundaries, a great deal of further work remains to be done.

The question posed was whether Polytechnic is a service to Group Living, or not, and the focus of concern appeared to be whether the Polytechnic was “justified” in returning a boy to Group Living if he appeared too disturbed or disturbing to be effectively managed in the Polytechnic for his own or other people’s good.

Discussion of such issues aroused a number of questions in my mind. I felt that the problem posed might have been wrongly formulated, i.e. not is the Polytechnic a service to Group Living, but rather, how Polytechnic and Group Living can best work together in the service of boys? This was when I became concerned about possibly anti-therapeutic group and individual projective systems operating between and within the Polytechnic and Group Living. For example, a Polytechnic group could be viewed as an “inter-group exercise group” exported into the Polytechnic from Group Living and vice versa. It would seem important, therefore, to keep in touch with these processes and control rather than be controlled by them. An example quoted led me to suspect that a particular boy in a Polytechnic group who was very difficult for the teacher to manage, and disruptive to the work of the group could, in fact, be a receptacle and actor-out of group forces coming from the other boys in the group, the whole thing very much reflecting something that was going on between Group Living Units as reflected through the boys in the Polytechnic group. The other boys took no responsibility for this disturbed boy’s behaviour and one could only have the suspicion in this case that he and the group were acting out the idea that the Cottage boys are the most, or even impossibly, disturbed. This seemed to be linked to a tendency to see boys perhaps too much as individuals and not enough as themselves being precipitates of group forces and acting under the influences of very powerful projections into them.

In discussion with Mike Jinks and Ronald Dare, and later with house staffs, I became very convinced of the importance of staff being aware of these mutual projection processes and being able to work with them to facilitate understanding of the processes for the benefit of the boys’ therapy, this being true whether the processes are going on within the Polytechnic, within Group Living, or between them. This may be an area where further staff training or “sensitisation” is desirable.

The question was also raised with me as to how far education should be considered as an important factor in the assessment of boys for coming to Cotswold? I should have thought it of importance that some kind of assessment should be made relating the boy’s educational capacity to what the Polytechnic can offer him in the way of education, so that the scarce resources of the Community can be effectively used. A boy who is too educationally backward may be too much of a strain on the Polytechnic and too

disruptive to any group of boys in which he is placed. A boy who is educationally of a very high level may create similar difficulties.

v) **Relation of the Bursar to the Domestic Bursar**

The problem as initially raised could be seen as a particular example of the process described above, in that they experienced a difficulty in their relationship which, on exploration, appeared to be a projection outwards and upwards onto them of an unsolved difficulty between the head of a group living unit and his house mother. This issue was quickly clarified. The discussion also emphasised the distress and confusion that may result when this kind of powerful, unconscious projection goes on. It is all the more important, therefore, to track it down, if possible to anticipate it, or if not, to deal with it as quickly and effectively as possible.

In fact, apart from the kind of difficulties described above, the working relationship of the bursar and the Domestic Bursar and their mutual relationship with other staff, seems to be going fairly smoothly, with Bill Douglas being essentially concerned with overall control and disposal of resources and Marjorie Stranger in a more advisory and limited control-function mainly with the House Mothers. An area for future exploration lies, however, in the fact that as Marjorie Stranger facilitates the process of de-centralisation and delegation of more and more functions and responsibility to the women staff of houses, she is, in fact, lowering the level and reducing the scope of her own job. She has already herself raised the question as to whether she really belongs in top management. It would appear that developments in her role need to be kept continually under review.

Bill Douglas and Marjorie Stranger both report that their inspectorial function in relation to group living units is developing well. They feel happier now in operating their accountability for the physical state of houses and they feel that house staff welcome and work well with their inspections.

On the whole, development seems to be going on well in this area.

vi) **Relation of the Cotswold Community to External Management**

There is not a great deal to add to the previous Working Note following the meeting between Group Captain Williams and Geoffrey Banner from the local authority, Richard Balbernie and Bill Douglas from Cotswold, and myself. I think the meeting established the fact again that there is a great deal of goodwill towards the work of Cotswold Community and that the local authority is willing to support it. One also had the feeling they were willing to make compromises and to try to meet special needs of the Cotswold Community. But I was left with the feeling that there will be a long and possibly difficult period of working out with the local authority how exactly the relationship between Cotswold and Wiltshire County Council is to operate, how much freedom of operation can be granted within the local authority set-up and how much real professional

understanding there will be. The most one can probably say at present is again to stress the importance of trying to sustain the goodwill in the elected and employed officers of the local authority and gradually to find out and come to terms with the way of operating within it.

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August 1972