

COTSWOLD COMMUNITY

WORKING NOTE NO. 8

by

ISABEL E. P. MENZIES

**Centre for applied Social Research
Tavistock Institute of Human Relations
Belsize Lane
London NW3**

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Introduction

This note summarises discussions at the Cotswold Community on May 11th – 12th, 1973.

A General Comment

This concerns a Community problem which seems to be focussed on the use of cleaning women. Towards the end of my visit and more clearly perhaps afterwards, I realised that this visit had been a curious one in that almost my entire work had been devoted to domestic problems, notably those concerning cleaning women in Group Living Units. That there are real problems in that area I do not doubt, but that they should be so important in themselves as to merit so much of my attention is more debatable. So I found myself wondering what kind of a Community symptom they represented, what role were the women playing in the Community, what was being projected into them.

The discussions about them contrasted vividly with those about other domestic areas which with minor exceptions are reported as operating very satisfactorily indeed, especially following my previous visit. Since I wrote no Working Note on that visit it is worth recording the main points discussed there and the changes implemented.

i) The Laundry

A great deal of dissatisfaction had been expressed with the laundry services to Group Living Units, particularly the loss of clothing and delays. Also the difficulties arose at weekends when the laundry was available for use by house mothers who had their own key and could get in at any time. This had created some difficulties in terms of care of machines since occasionally house mothers forgot they had left machines switched on and they remained on sometimes for many hours before being discovered. Various possible changes were then discussed and have now been implemented, notably a more careful system of recording laundry sent and returned by using laundry books and marking garments. This is reported as very successful in great reduction of losses. With one exception the Group Living Units also reported a quick return of laundry. Secondly, another lock has now been put on the laundry to which Marjorie Stranger and Laura Crump alone have keys. There are now fixed laundry hours for Group Living Units at weekends and Marjorie Stranger and Laura Crump check machines before they lock up. This is also reported as working satisfactorily. There is now no further talk of decentralisation of laundry into houses. The house mothers prefer the present system with the exception of Balderton which still would like its own machine to deal with the

problem of boys who are working outside the Community and need clean working clothes for Monday. Most of the women thought that some kind of trolley would be a help, however, since the laundry bundles can be quite heavy.

ii) **Clothing**

There had been some dissatisfaction on my last visit with the practice of having a central clothing store and uncertainty about what to do about it. The Community needs some emergency clothing stores, for example to supply a boy who arrives inadequately equipped or to replace damaged or lost garments, but house mothers did not seem to feel that the central stores worked that well. Also it cut across the principle of delegating responsibility for clothing into Group Living units. The general argument for the central store was that a wide range of clothing had to be kept to supply boys of unpredictable sizes. However, the suggestion was adopted of keeping stores in Group Living units with the house mothers swapping with each other when necessary to meet definite sizes. I gather this has been done and all stores dispersed to Houses except small amounts which are unsuitable for use, and that the system is working well, indeed it even coped with the emergency of supplying clothing to Springfield boys who had lost a lot of their clothing in the fire.

iii) **The Shop**

On my last visit we also had considerable discussion of the transformation of the central stores into a shop for the use of house mothers and boys and possibly of staff doing personal shopping.

House mothers and boys are now using the store as a shop and both Marjorie Stranger and Laura Crump who run the shop and the customers, are very pleased with the result. On the whole the house mothers do not like the idea of holding a lot of cash and would like the present arrangement to continue of drawing their housekeeping money from Margaret Seymour and using the money to pay their bills to her immediately so that the money would not actually leave her office.

The question of the use of the shop for personal staff shopping remains open. There may be some problems about "legality" and there is also the question of price. It seems reasonable to suppose that staff doing private shopping in the Community shop should pay overhead costs and salaries of staff, as well as the direct cost of goods which is the price charged to house mothers.

To facilitate the operation of the shop and create an appropriate atmosphere, some changes in the building seems desirable. It still looks like central stores. I gather this would not be too difficult to effect.

The contract between these areas and that of the Group Living units' cleaning women again drew my attention sharply to the question of what is going on about cleaning women, that this should be such an area of discontent and stress.

I can only put forward some rather tentative suggestions for further thought and later discussion. These relate very much back to my general comment in Working Note No.7 when I raised questions as to the effect on the Community of having a more difficult client population. I have a feeling that some of this effect may now be appearing as a 'symptom' in a new area. The cleaners themselves state that they do not get "job satisfaction" in working in the houses and do not get the results they would like.

They deal on a physical level with the dirt and mess caused by boys. How far are they somehow reflecting similar feelings in professional Group Living staff about doing an inadequate job or a less adequate job than they would wish with the "dirtiness" and "messiness", i.e. the illness and lack of integration in the boys themselves. It may be significant here that my visit happened very soon after two major outbreaks of violence, the fire in Springfield and Danny Webb's attack on Margaret Leaker. How far are the cleaners being used to discharge in a relatively harmless and displaced way the counter aggressive feelings raised in staff by boys' aggression and the fear of violence? The cleaners are reported as using rather violent language or it was used about them, e.g. 'shock troupes descending in pairs on units brandishing their mops'. An aggressive attack on dirt and mess is acceptable, whereas it is not acceptable to attack the boys who cause the dirt and the mess.

How much does the cleaners' problem reflect a continuation of the situation I hypothesised in my last report that a dependency subculture might be developed as a means of keeping at bay the feared violence and the counter aggression of the staff? As a member of another similar institution said to me the other day, "the children here expect the place to be run like a hotel". Trevor Blewett has made similar remarks about the boys in the unit. I also had the impression that the standard set by the cleaning women and not reached, might very well be unrealistically high with the professional Group Living staff and the cleaning staff in some collusion about this so as to give gratification to boys and exert a civilising influence. I am reminded here of some of the comments made about the boys recently treating professional staff like servants and slaves and the difficulty in breaking that sub-structure.

I think it might be worth having a look at these suggestions at least and if there is any validity in them to attempt to revise the situation in terms of these mutual projection systems as well as taking what steps are possible to relieve realistic work pressures on the cleaners.

As regards practical steps, several seem to be possible. I gather that there are some 50 domestic hours not at present being used in the Community as a whole. If it were possible to take up this time and deploy extra cleaning time in Group Living units it would obviously be a help.

Then there is the management task within Group Living related to the use of the cleaning women. I get the impression it was no more – that there is an attempt to do everything every day with the exception of Balderstone. If there is any validity in this impression I would question how realistic this is. It would seem to me potentially more satisfactory for the cleaning women if they did a part of the house only each day and were able to do it thoroughly. Then I am not quite sure of the management of cleaning women within the Group Living units; it would seem to me they would need some guidance on working out how often various parts of the house should be done in a week and that there may have to be emergency decisions from time to time rather than their always following a routine. This suggestion is also linked to the role of boys in doing some of the work themselves or at least carrying responsibility for whether they do it or not. While recognising the limited capacities of many boys and the real difficulties of confrontation in this area, I wonder if enough confrontation of boys is being done in this respect. And are the cleaners themselves enough involved in this kind of problem? Debates are going on among Group Living unit staff as to whether cleaners are part of the Group Living team or not. It would seem to me that they must be if they are to work effectively not only domestically but with the implications of their domestic work for boys. How much do they understand the therapeutic implications of their roles, or as I suggested above, are they at present being encouraged to act out the provision of over dependency?

The suggestion had also been made that cleaners should work in house pairs. I am very doubtful if this suggestion is made for practical reasons or whether it is not more for moral support or other defensive reasons. Margaret Leaker seemed quite sure that when she had two cleaners she did not get anything like twice as much work from them. If two women were deployed together in the same house careful management would be needed again to ensure that they are deployed effectively and preferably it would seem to me they should be deployed separately and on different tasks and not together on the same task.

It seems accepted by everyone that no cleaning women could stand the stress or lack of job satisfaction in being fully deployed in Group Living units with no other work in the community. I think one has to accept this at least at present. Its acceptance does, however, increase the management task of Marjorie Stranger and Laura Crump. I am sorry I was not able to discuss the matter with Marjorie Stranger who was on leave. In general, however, I think the management task would entail pretty constant reviews of cleaning needs both of Group Living units and other parts of the Community and perhaps more frequent intervention and redeployment of domestic staff in relation to overall community needs.

Ongoing Development Areas

Decentralisation into Group Living Units

Work has been going on in this area which seems to have led to decisions not to decentralise certain services after all, notably laundry and sewing. The general satisfaction with these services has been discussed above and it seems a realistic decision to relieve the female staff of Group Living units of the work responsibility.

A less satisfactory area of development is, however, the canteen and the midday meal. This has become a kind of “hardy annual” which seems incapable of resolution. I have little to add to my comments in Working Note No.7 except that it would perhaps be worth examining further how much this had also become a depository area for anxieties from elsewhere about the management and therapy of boys.

The Evolution of the New Role for Jeanne Slinger

Jeanne and I discussed her developing role at some length and achieved some clarification. As Jeanne described her role she subsumed most of the work under what she called “central co-ordination”. This has two components which appear to have been clearly delegated to her.

i) Case Conferences

It is her responsibility to arrange case conferences about boys already in the Community. This she described as largely an administrative and organisational task calling on little professional skill. She arranged for the relevant people to be present, e.g. Mike Jinks from the Polytechnic, relevant staff from Group Living, a social worker, parents, sometimes the boy and Jeanne Slinger herself.

ii) Referrals

This concerns boys referred to the Community and their selection or rejection. She makes a résumé of available material, decides who should take part in the procedure and arranges conferences of such people as heads of Group Living units, therapeutic resource people, female staff members, possibly Mike Jinks, Mrs. Dockar-Drysdale, sometimes Dr. Woodhead and Jeanne Slinger herself. This she described as being a more professional task centering around work with social workers, parents and boys. What is not clear to me is how much responsibility Jeanne takes for pre-selection and rejection of boys referred, that is those who are rejected without this conferencing, and how much of this decision remains with Richard Balbernie.

Jeanne found it difficult to estimate how much time those tasks would occupy in a week, certainly much less than a full-time job.

The other job components seem to have been less clarified and probably need further work.

(a) Communication

This seems mainly communication between Group Living units and Richard Balbernie, but it was not completely clear and one wonders how far it is a hangover of Jeanne's previous management role between the two and how far it is necessary, useful function. I had understood that one aspect of the role of Head of Group Living was to shorten the line of communication and facilitate direct communication between Heads of units and Richard Balbernie in a way parallel to the relationship between Mike Jinks in the Polytechnic and Richard Balbernie.

This task was closely interwoven with giving help and support to Heads of units and one again wonders how much of a hangover is here from the structure. There are a number of people who already have such functions, notably Richard Balbernie managerially, Bill Douglas, Marjorie Stranger and Laura Crump in such areas as finance, supplies, domestic matters. Mrs. Dockar-Drysdale on the "therapeutic side" and boy management, and myself on the managerial side. Is there a gap in this organisation which Jeanne Slinger could usefully fill or does she and Group Living units need help to disentangle themselves effectively from the remnants of the old organisation?

(b) Boundary control

This was Jeanne's term for it, but is actually more complicated than that and contains two elements.

i) What is usually called 'boundary control' and refers in this context to there being a senior staff member who holds the Community boundary out of normal office hours when the central switchboard is closed. As I understand it this role is shared in rotation by Richard Balbernie, Bill Douglas, Mike Jinks, Marjorie Stranger and sometimes Jeanne. This person is responsible for any transactions across the boundary at such times,

ii) An internal role mainly concerned with mobilising the internal resources of the Community when necessary to work with those transactions across the boundary or to deal with crises internally, e.g. if the police report finding a boy who has absconded, if such an ascendance has been discovered internally, or if emergency action needs to be taken to hospitalise a boy who cannot be contained.

Jeanne has regarded this second task as part of her role still and was finding some difficulty in the fact that she was not always called in to do it. I find myself challenging her view and again wondering how far it is a carry over from the old organisation. The cross boundary transactions are likely to be largely linked with Group Living since this is

where the boys are usually located when the transactions take place. The first question I would ask is whether one person should perform both tasks. There are advantages in everything being dealt with through one person which would make co-ordination easier, this person then being able to call on others for help when necessary. Among other things this would give staff more really free time. Or the person on the boundary could have a named deputy on call who would take over internal co-ordination. I am fairly certain it is now inappropriate for Jeanne Slinger to carry the whole of the internal role in any case, whether it goes into one role with boundary control or they become two separate roles, which I think would then both need to rotate.

If not already done it would be important to have duty rosters circulated to all key people and areas and bedside key telephones so that people can easily find out who to call.

(c) “Medical”

Jeanne Slinger has an incidental task which stems from her nursing skill and experience and which relates to co-ordination of the operation of general medical and casualty services. Much has been delegated to other people in various areas, notably in Group Living units. These people carry out routine procedures such as relatively simple first aid. Jeanne is called in for more serious matters when they need more help. She also sustains a liaison with the casualty department at Cirencester Hospital and feels her professional background facilitates effective contact. This seems a relevant and useful function for Jeanne to carry, a relevant help, support and service role because of her professional background which no one else has. But it is incidental to rather than an essential component of, a senior management role in the Community.

Apart from the difficulties discussed above two main problems seem to arise at present in her role. One, is it sufficient in quantity? Two, is it high enough in professional level to be in itself a higher management role? If it is deficient in either, and both Jeanne and I feel it may very well be, then there are likely to be difficulties, particularly in that Jeanne with her concern about her work and her generally high level of activity, most understandably find it difficult not to infiltrate into other roles and functions that belong elsewhere. This may be a part of the confusion noted above. Obviously there is a great deal still to be done in sorting out with the components of this role if there really is a need for the role at all.

Isabel E.P. Menzies

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