

**COTSWOLD COMMUNITY**

**WORKING NOTE NO. 9**

by

**ISABEL E. P. MENZIES**

**Centre for Applied Social Research  
Tavistock Institute of Human Relations  
Belsize Lane  
London NW3 5BA**

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#### **Introduction**

This note summarises discussions at the Cotswold Community on September 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, 1973.

I found the Community much more settled on this visit, with a good recovery from the shock effects of the violence which preceded my last visit. This was linked, I felt, with a recovered ability among professional staff to work at tasks and problems in their own roles and relationships and to seek help with significant areas of their management problems. The Note will be mainly concerned with my explorations of these problems with relevant staff.

#### **Management Roles and Tasks in Group Living Units**

This exploration centred mainly around the problem of effective management of Group Living Units when the head of the unit is off duty; the task is, therefore, that of deputising for the head of the house, to ensure that on-going work is effectively accomplished and the staff on duty are effectively organised around the task. This would include ensuring that effective delegation and deputising are also carried out in relation to sub-tasks, e.g. between female staff about food provision, or between men in the responsibility for the management of boys.

Basically, the problem was precipitated by the difficulty in finding a second senior full-time man for each Group Living Unit, a problem that hopefully may disappear if the new establishments requested are granted. However, it is worth noting that even if there were two full-time senior men, they could both be absent from the unit at the same time and there would have to be another effective deputy temporarily.

I found what I thought was some confusion in terminology that may reflect some confusion in thinking about the problem. The term used for the role under discussion seemed frequently to be either continuity-management or boy-management, which tended to introduce some confusion into the definition of the role and into thinking about the person most appropriate for the role: neither of those terms for me delineates the whole of the task in question. Direct boy-management is a management sub-task and continuity is a necessary service to management, which can and must be provided for management by all staff though in varying degrees according to roles and responsibilities.

For me the basic concept is that of deputising for the head of the Unit, carrying his delegated authority in his absence and an overall responsibility for the performance of the primary task of the unit, and derived from that, for the performance of such sub-tasks as

continued to be appropriate in his absence. I sense an unwillingness to use the term or concept of deputy, but certainly the idea of deputising is to me essential. The basic skill required, therefore, is management skill, particularly self management and task organisation. This should not be confused with boy-management even if that is the most crucial and difficult sub-task, nor with continuity although again continuity is essential to management.

Within that framework, one can then look at appropriate staff to hold the deputising role. It seems to me that no other role within Group Living or outside it necessarily makes a person the obvious choice, nor on the other hand debars him, from the deputising role. The essential point is the managerial competence of the person concerned and his general experience, the authority he can exercise on his own behalf or have deputed from the head of the Unit and the support he can mobilise from other staff. It would seem best for each Group Living Unit to find its own way in this, using its own resources as effectively as possible.

In theory, therefore, the choice of a deputising head would be among all staff; in practice at present, because of such factors as experience, skill, authority and time-commitment, choice seems to be between the Polytechnic staff working in Group Living Units and the therapeutic resource person. Aside from the question of management skill, there are pros and cons for both roles. The therapeutic resource person has the advantage of full-time work in Group Living and of being a major container of the information and continuity which are an important service to effective management. A disadvantage is said to be some inconsistency between the role of therapeutic resource and management; this I do not quite understand and wonder if there is not some confusion between therapeutic resource and therapy. The latter might be inconsistent with management. On the other hand, I do recognise that some of the therapeutic resource people do not like management roles, and do not claim to be effective in them. Experienced Polytechnic staff have the asset of long experience of the task and security in it and of authority partly carried over from their Polytechnic role. Their main disadvantage is relatively short time-commitment to Group Living which inevitably means they would have to lean heavily on other staff for continuity.

The possibility of using a therapeutic resource person as a deputising head raises also the question of whether the role can be effectively carried by a female member of Group Living. In theory again, I do not see why not. The crucial question, for me, would be her management capacity and whether she could have enough personal and delegated authority backed by the head of the Unit, and could mobilise effective backing from the male staff. This is where it is essential to sustain the distinction between overall Unit management and boy management, the latter probably being of necessity a male role needing masculine authority. A male deputising head of house carrying out boy-management is, in effect, delegating a sub-task to himself: a female deputising head would delegate it to a male subordinate.

Whatever arrangement is made by each Group Living Unit, it would seem important that it is explicit so that both boys and staff are aware of it and can work with it. In particular, it

is important to ensure that the deputising head is supported by the full, delegated authority of the head of the Unit and clearly carries responsibility to him for the functioning of his Unit in his absence. It is important also that the delegation is clearly known outside the Unit to support the boundary-control function of whoever is temporarily in charge and to ensure that someone is directly responsible for the Unit to whoever is, at the time, in overall charge of the Community.

### **Work Loads and the Working Hours of Professional Staff**

During my visit and afterwards, I found I became increasingly concerned with the work loads and the time commitment of staff; in fact it was not in a single case possible to get an accurate estimate of the time actually worked by staff. Seventy hours a week seemed to be the “official” commitment: there is good reason to suppose it is greater. I could not help feeling that the situation is in urgent need of examination and that staff cannot carry that commitment for long, especially since the work itself is so stressful.

I am not, as I think is well known, an advocate of a staff week comparable to conventional 35-45 hours in other jobs. This is certainly too short to give adequate involvement in residential childcare tasks. I find it difficult to suggest what would be a reasonable working week. Probably, however, something like 50-60 hours, especially if some of that time can be repaid in additional leave. I feel it is urgent that something be done to reduce staff hours, even if the situation is complicated by there being some staff posts at present unfilled. My reasons for saying this are outlined below.

Firstly, I do not believe that staff can function to anything like full capacity for so many hours a week and there is danger in their functioning under capacity, since this might increase the risk of their being involved in anti-therapeutic collusive acting-out with boys. The crucial task of holding on to their own reality and to their sensitivity and appropriate responsiveness must become very difficult over such long periods of time. In particular, I feel that staff are deprived of an essential component of their own support systems in such circumstances; that is, the time and the freedom to think things out quietly for themselves, or to talk things out informally within leisure time with chosen partners – spouses, friends or colleagues – with a view to resolving their own work-provoked disturbances and to effect closure. Sustaining this habit of quiet thought is crucial.

This has been put forward as a particular problem by Polytechnic staff who have somewhat different demands put on them from Group Living staff, i.e. the problem of changing from sub-system to sub-system and from role to role. I would stress the need for time to effect some closure in the relation with one sub-system and its role and relationships before taking up another. The present need for Polytechnic staff to be in action effectively in Group Living Units immediately after the end of the Polytechnic day is a serious deprivation, in my opinion, and is felt as stressful by staff, the more so that some of these men have to move in to deputing head of Unit roles and functions. There is, in my opinion, an urgent need for them to have time both to work on the Polytechnic

day as a staff group and to work over their own experiences individually before changing role into Group Living roles and responsibilities.

Polytechnic staff are, I think rightly, concerned also about the effect of their Group Living commitment on their actual work in the Polytechnic, particularly in the effectiveness of teaching during the Polytechnic day depends to some extent on what preparation they have been able to do in advance, a feature of all teaching situations. They feel at the moment that they are not able to do adequate preparation. In the special circumstances of the Cotswold Community such preparation would relate not only to the narrow educational task, but also to the complex task of dealing with disturbed boys in groups, having time to try to understand the experience in the group of boys, and so to prepare to deal with them at their next meeting, a special aspect of the closure I have referred to above.

I wonder whether this does not reflect another aspect of a tendency to devalue the educational task as such as against the perhaps more obviously therapeutic task of Group Living.

Another reason why I feel there is a serious situation, concerns the implicit message that may be conveyed to boys by the present situation and a possible anti-therapeutic effect. Boys cannot be unaware of the excessive commitment of staff; what does this mean to them in terms of staff views of boys' needs, of the dangers and untrustworthiness of boys, or alternatively, of the need of boys about the staff as people, and as models for boys, in their relationship with their private lives, their responsibilities for their own families, for their leisure, for existing as full and rounded people? There is the danger that staff will present themselves to boys as people who have, and are able to have, no effective life outside the narrow work situation.

I think then that it is urgent to review the present situation, while being aware that it is extremely difficult to make any significant changes at present. All I can suggest is that there are possibilities that might be examined and I feel should be and that I am willing to look at these possibilities with staff. These are as follows:-

- (i) What is the minimal staff necessary to hold the situation with boys at any particular time of day?
- (ii) The paper work. I have no doubt that the paper work is useful but I think that there may be a need to examine whether in present circumstances the therapeutic return justifies the time spent on it.
- (iii) The meeting system. Again, I have no doubt that this is useful, but think one should take a look as to whether the results actually justify the time and effort spent on it.

The crucial problem, I suppose, is that of cutting one's coat according to one's cloth. While I have no doubt that the Cotswold Community has a justifiable claim to high resources in view of its special task, and that it will get relatively high resources, it is also

true that they cannot be unlimited. I think there is a need to take stock and to decide how best to deploy these limited resources and I do not think the problem can or should be solved by chronic over-working of staff.

### **Relationships with the Wiltshire County Council**

I find it extraordinarily difficult to sort out the nature of the problems in this area. That there are considerable and difficult problems is indisputable. On the other hand, the need to work out some effective modus vivendi with Wiltshire seems also indisputable since there does not seem to be any effective option.

I think it also perhaps important to raise the issue of how far the present situation could be described as teething troubles which with goodwill on both sides could be overcome. (My recent visit to the Department of Social Services impressed me that there is considerable goodwill there whatever the difficulties.) There is a very real problem; it seems, in learning to handle the new relationships appropriately, indeed in just learning what these new relationships are. It cannot be easy to affect transfer from old and trusted relationships to the new ones but I feel that it is important that Cotswold too can compromise here. It may be also important to recognise that the Department of Social Services itself is not entirely a free agent and is bound by the rules and routines of the local authority of which they are a part.

I think it is important to distinguish between those aspects of local authority functioning and relationships which directly impinge on the therapeutic task and those which do not. Compromise in the latter areas may make it more possible to sustain differences as regards the former, and to get more freedom of action in those areas which are directly task-related.

My recent contact with Wiltshire leads me to believe that the specialness of Cotswold is fully recognised; on the other hand, they are bounded in what they can do by County Council factors and cannot necessarily grant all that is asked.

I have no doubt that the situation is difficult for both sides and if I am to help effectively, I need much more detailed contact with both sides, separately and together.

**Isabel E. P Menzies**

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