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18

YOUTH AUTHORITY QUARTERLY

FIGHTING DELINQUENCY WITH PEOPLE

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In this time of pervasive fear among people in the community about the damages of crime and delinquency, it is the people themselves who are rising in increasing numbers to work with young offenders. And frequently, such involvement has been extremely beneficial, not only for the offenders but for the helping volunteers as well.

I'm feeling a bit like a weary traveler who set out on a fun holiday jaunt that turned into a contest of skill and endurance. The destination has remained constant, the route, however, has led me through a crazy maze of my own feelings, actions and reactions. What I wanted to do was to inform and entertain you with selected vignettes illustrating how effective the volunteer/parolee match has been as staged by the cast of characters in the Citizen's Initiative Parole Re-Entry Project.

What I'm about to do is give you a backstage glimpse of both the philosophy and practice I see as a script, not just for those involved in CIP but for others in the community and the department.

Today is Jan. 31, 1978, and there have been 17 murders in Sacramento County this month. The East Area rapist claimed his 29th and 30th victims Saturday night and the Youth Authority has had two ward deaths in a month. The ever present web of violence which surrounds our lives seems to be closing in more and more rapidly like the innocent dolphin caught in the tuna fisherman's net. My life and that of my family and friends will no longer be the same. I have checked the locked windows and doors so many times I'll wear the locks out; there is no such thing as a casual late evening stroll in the moonlight, or sleeping with windows wide open for the fresh, cold winter air.

I feel exactly like the character in the movie "Network" who told his TV viewing audience to stand up, go to the window and shout "I'm mad as hell and I'm not putting up with it any more." Only what is "it"? Violence? Loss of social controls? De-humanization? "Doing our own thing?" The problem is I don't know what the problems is!

Yet we all can see the results; elderly people who are virtual prisoners in their own homes. Parents and children who are totally out of synchronization with themselves and each other; formerly trusting people who now spend considerable time and energy trying to keep safe from God knows what senseless attack.

Our homes and communities are no longer the open, friendly places they once were. The "I don't want to get involved" attitude that was initially attributed to New York City is happening here in California with such a force that it's becoming . . . "and what's more I don't care, let them destroy themselves". At least that was when the death and violence was among the poor, and the "druggers" and in the ghetto and barrio. But now . . . it's here, with us, in the heartland of California. Certainly not all of the atrocities are the handiwork of Youth Authority parolees, but the records show us that many are.

Doom and Gloom, sounds like the headlines of a reactionary newspaper, that is *not* my intent but oddly enough the closer "it" comes to ME the closer to "law 'n order" I sound. So much for my reactions. From what I hear and the questions staff are being asked at recruitment talks and college class presentations, others, young and old alike, are asking themselves the same questions. Then they want some answers from us, from the experts, from corrections, from the Youth Authority. Answers we don't have. But some involvement? We can offer. It is the process of:

1. Restating the problem:

Communities are unsafe; people are afraid of crime and criminals; parolees both receive and react to that fear, which often results in their failing on parole.

2. Finding alternative solutions:

Educate and involve the community in the correctional process to include: prevention of crime, and support of the ex-offender to the degree that "the social bonds between youth conventional society are strengthened through experiencing acceptable, responsible and gratifying roles and relationships."¹

3. Developing resources:

People are the one resource we can consistently depend upon; there is an unending supply, they come in every life style, size and age, they have the greatest resilience, and they are priceless. (We couldn't afford to pay for their true value.)

Step right up and I'll show you what I mean. "David" is a Youth Authority "graduate," he is 20 and had managed to pick up a few college credits while in the institution, upon parole he and a most unlikely volunteer were matched. "Richard" is a straight, insurance type from Montgomery Street in San Francisco. The two of them were concentrating on getting David enrolled in Junior College and back into the world of school. David mentioned he had written a story he was especially pleased with, Richard read it and invited him to join a group in San Francisco for lunch. The upshot? David is now a published author, his story printed in a science fiction magazine. The unique ingredient was influence. David obviously has the talent but Youth Authority parolees don't frequent the social

¹ Knight, Doug, "Preventing Crime and Delinquency"; January 1975, California Youth Authority.

circles in which influence of that nature is found. He could have spent months and years developing what Richard provided on a moments notice.

A Complicated Philosophy

A nice story, but too superficial. The philosophy behind involving community people, ordinary folks, as volunteers with our wards and parolees is far more complicated than it appears. On the surface we are just bringing extra people into contact with our young men and women in an effort to "normalize" the institutional experience and to enrich existing programs and services. That is true, valuable and justifiable; but the other aspects, some of which are intangible but many of which are measurable, are the things I'm most concerned with now. These are, in fact, causing me some of the discomfort I feel.

There is another David, one who was "matched" with a female college student volunteer. Their main objective was to get David a driver's license, he refused help with job-hunting but some day wanted to go on to college. He had a history going back nine years. Smoking dope and drinking "made me lazy," he said; so motivation was a problem as well as a distrust of adults and authority figures. Within a week of release and during the following two months, David allegedly assaulted and raped four females. The "match" didn't work out, David avoided his original commitment to get to DMV for the driver's test and their contact was by phone only.

That is *not* a nice story. It frightened and shocked me. How fine the line is we daily tread. When my imagination gets fired up I envision myself as Lady Justice with the scales in my two hands, one marked "GOOD EFFECTS" and the other marked "RISK."

In years past, when the ward population of the Youth Authority was younger, less violent and the emphasis of corrections was more treatment-oriented, having volunteers enter the institutions posed few questions or special problems—at least to most. After all there weren't too many of "them," they could be sight-supervised fairly easily and it was pretty good PR with the community. Parole poses an entirely new set of questions and problems, all enhanced by the "new" ward profile. The RISK is so great, but the need is greater still. What happens if we avoid the leadership role? Though my logic may escape you, as it has others, there seem to be few options.

All youths committed to the Youth Authority *are* released, a simple fact, yet the public still hasn't gotten the message. These young people are our responsibility; they belong in our community and they will return. You will wait in line next to them at the supermarket, sit next to them at the movies, pump gas with them at the gas station, and they will be dating our sons and daughters. The choice seems to be between being a part of the problem or becoming a part of the solution, from victim to activist.

We know that changes in behavior and attitude can occur if the motivation to change is present. For many parolees that motivation is missing. What's in it for them?

As Doug Knight says, they need to have "a stake in a particular kind of life, a vested interest in a life framework that binds the individual more

or less to 'legitimate' behavior". Where does the payoff come from? How do we show acceptance of these young people?

Fortunately "Chris" hasn't learned that some people cannot be motivated to change. While Jimmy was still in the institution she visited and they discussed his desire to graduate from high school. She was full of ideas and enthusiasm, after 20 years as a "drop out" she had recently gotten her GED and was presently attending junior college. Jimmy's chances of success were slim, for in the last two times on parole he was back on violations within three months. He appeared "institutionalized" at 17, the parole agent agreed that at least working with a volunteer wouldn't hurt Jimmy, he had offered him numerous options in the past and at this point had alienated the agent and everyone else in the office. To the amazement of all Jimmy is now a graduate, working, and has been on the street seven months. His reaction?

"I've done things I never did before and wouldn't have done if it hadn't been for the extra push she gave me. I talked a lot about school but the hassle of enrollment and records was just too much."

Matching Parolee and Volunteer

The "match" between parolee and volunteer is the delight and despair of coordinators. It's like the nursery rhyme of the little girl with the curl right in the middle of her forehead. When they are good they are very, very good and when they are bad they are horrid. Its all part of the RISK vs. GOOD EFFECT balancing out.

Ingrid is typical of many.

The confusion on her face was obvious. She had come into our office as a referral, looking for the Youth Authority. But surely this was a mistake, for everyone was standing around, cake and coffee in hand, laughing and singing our off-key rendition of 'Happy Birthday'. No one seemed in charge, yet immediately two or three people offered cake, a chair, and a hearty "Hi, what can we do for you?"

Hesitatingly she choose her words, "Yah, Ay wish to be volunteer". Her English was limited, her youth almost painfully fresh. We assured her she had come to the right place and that we were celebrating the birthday of one of the office volunteers. Soon the party roar died down as volunteers, staff and a couple of parolees drifted off to different offices, returning to work on the business of the day. Ingrid and I began talking.

She had a unique twist to a fairly familiar story. An instructor at Sacramento City College had mentioned the need for people to work with Youth Authority parolees, assisting them in their initial steps back into the community—looking for employment, enrolling in school, developing new and hopefully positive social contacts and other similarly mundane but vital activities.

Having just moved to Sacramento and the U.S. only six weeks before, she felt a bit lost but was eager to learn about the city and its habits. CIP sounded like a program where she could learn and be of help at the same time.

Ingrid was open to the challenge. She didn't know the city but felt that was incidental. She had time available to share with someone else and youthful offenders interested her. The problems of delinquency in her

country were not so severe but were increasing and she would like to learn what she could to take home with her.

After a very straightforward conversation, our joint opinion was that it would suit her interests and needs better for her to consider the volunteer programs at the County Probation Department and Children's Protective Services. She wasn't old enough, street-wise enough, tough enough, not . . . something, enough, or perhaps too much. There was a trusting eagerness that made her appear so vulnerable. None of these by themselves are necessarily valid reasons to turn down a volunteer. How DO we decide who is suitable to work with Youth Authority wards? Every volunteer coordinator in our Department has had to develop his or her own list of necessary and desirable characteristics as well as those that are universally used. In spite of the rational appearing approach that a listing of qualities signifies, I know that for me selection is often reduced to intuition. It's a feeling that emerges from the tone of voice, a choice of words, an apparent degree of flexibility, an awareness of and willingness to discuss their own needs and expectations in becoming a volunteer. I strongly resist the idea that a certain personality "type" makes a good volunteer as opposed to any other types. The same holds for age, sex, social background, education, race, marital status, you name the category.

When interviewing a volunteer I always look for that special quirk that interests them in corrections. Frequently the standard response to "why do you want to volunteer HERE?" is, "I like (get along with, understand) kids". That kind of a vague response is far from enough, it might in fact, be a reason to refer them elsewhere. Depending upon the interviewee's age it could be a person who doesn't get along with adult peers because he cannot control them; or understands "kids" because he or she is one and knows "how the system is out to screw over us." Could be system is—but as a part of that system our intent in involving volunteers is to improve its capabilities—not play destructive games.

In 1973, Dr. Ivan Scheier of the National Information Center on Volunteerism directed an LEAA grant to test some theories using a variety of attitude, personality and temperament measuring testing tools relative to the volunteer/client match. After extensive work they found little to support a dependence on tests such as FIRO B, ACTIVITY/INTEREST INVENTORY, 16-PF and a COLOR TEST, as a determiner of compatibility of the volunteer/client match. In fact . . . "these (tests) are intended as a supplement to your personal judgment and intuition; in no sense are they to be construed as a replacement".²

There is an historical debate that continues concerning matching volunteers, the lines are drawn and redrawn with every new variable added. There aren't two camps, there are dozens. Should males be matched with females? Dr. Scheier's study indicated that the compatibility of the match was enhanced if volunteers and clients were of the same sex, but it didn't mention outcome. Handicapped volunteers also were noted, along with all minority volunteers, as being significant to moderately strong on the scale of compatibility, more so than Anglos, regardless of race of the client. What I liked best of all in the study was a ringer that the staff threw in when Dr. Scheier was out of town. They worked with a consultant from

² Scheier, Dr. Ivan, *Matching Volunteers to Clients*, National Information Center on Volunteerism; 1973, Boulder, Colorado. Pg. 43

the Colorado Astrological Association who compiled data on the birthdays of 75 pairs of client/volunteer combinations. The result was that one of the three "strongest discriminators" for predicting client/volunteer compatibility was by astrological sun signs.³

Regardless of the means by which two people are matched, the relationship is supposed to accomplish specific objectives. In the Citizen's Initiative Project volunteers and wards work together during the first three months of parole. With the assistance of the project staff or another volunteer they develop a contract that covers the activities they will be involved in to deal with the wards' initial re-entry needs.

Take the case of Charles, who started visiting Steven shortly before he was to be paroled. Steven's mother was ill and hospitalized, coincidentally, where Charles works. The young man was worried about his mother and so asked Charles to see her and tell her he was to be released soon. When Charles visited the mother she was greatly relieved to hear about Steven, and asked Charles to visit her second son, who also was incarcerated in Stockton. All three family members were out of contact with each other, worried, and somehow not able to work out a means of communication. Charles served as the link visiting each in turn and offering reassurances to all. Who needs that kind of soap opera hassle?

Obviously lots of people! There are more than 5,000 volunteers involved with Youth Authority wards yearly. For most this is not a one-sided 'I-give-and-you-take' relationship but more of an exchange, an equal partnership where both can learn and grow.

"What this recognizes is that the lines between 'helper' and 'helpee' are almost non-existent, for we now recognize the volunteer and client do indeed help each other, but in different ways".⁴ The relationship is synergistic, where the total effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects. And there is no accounting for why.

So here we are, the end of a journey, with no sure fire resolutions to crime or fear, but a reaffirmation for me that it takes people to make change occur and the more we have involved the sooner it can happen.

³ IBID; p. 27, in the Appendix.

⁴ Wilson, Marlene. *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs*, 1976. Volunteer Management Association, Boulder, Colorado.

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