

## Project New Leaf: Humboldt County's Juvenile Hall Treatment Program

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*David Lehman, originally from Texas and raised in Fontana, California, received his A.S. in Police Science at Chaffey Junior College in 1969, and his B.A. degree in Sociology in 1972 from California State University at Fullerton. After graduation, Mr. Lehman performed volunteer work in the juvenile hall in Eureka, California. In September 1973, he began employment with the Humboldt County Probation Department as a group supervisor. In January 1974, under Chief Probation Officer E. Alan Campbell, he was promoted to Deputy Probation Officer I in the Juvenile Intake Division. He secured the position he now holds as coordinator of Project New Leaf, a juvenile hall treatment program, in January of 1975.*

Humboldt is a large, basically rural county in northwestern California. The relatively small size and rural nature of its 105,600 member population is indicative of the type of minors referred to the probation department.

The problem of delinquent youth, the effectiveness of institutional placements, the idea of problem-solving within the community being effective, and the high cost of residential care were all reasons that Humboldt county decided to begin a coed treatment program within the juvenile hall. Prior to the treatment program, minors from Humboldt county who failed on probation and foster care were normally placed in ranches, camps, the California Youth Authority, or other out-of-county institutions.

Late in 1973, the chief probation officer and selected staff began pooling ideas and canvassing other counties within the state that were experimenting with, or had, operating treatment programs at the probation level. Utilizing bits and pieces of other programs, borrowing largely from Solano county's treatment concepts, and implementing their own ideas, this group created a juvenile hall treatment program for Humboldt county. This later became known as Project New Leaf. The project formally began operation in 1974. Since that time, seventy (70) minors, both boys and girls, have participated in the program.

The project operates within the juvenile hall and occupies a single wing with a maximum capacity of eight minors in a 24-hour residential care setting. The program is divided into four separate stages: the first three stages are within the juvenile hall and the last stage is a trial placement within the community. Ideally the community placement involves a return to the natural parents' home.

Since the planning stage, the project's goals and objectives have remained basically the same:

1. To provide an alternative placement within the community for potential ranch, camp, California Youth Authority, or other institutional placements; and thereby, reducing the high cost of such placements while focusing on behavioral therapy for the minor and his or her family.
2. To identify and modify undesirable behavior through testing, behavior modifications techniques, individual, group, and family counseling and the attempt to build a sense of responsibility for one's actions.
3. To provide a high level of individualized academic instruction and experiences through resources and teaching expertise offered by von Humboldt High School. (von Humboldt High School is also housed within the juvenile hall complex.)
4. To provide the juvenile hall staff with experience and training opportunities to expand the overall performance and quality of the juvenile hall operation.
5. Finally, and most importantly, to rebuild troubled family relationships so that a minor leaving the project may successfully rejoin his or her family.

The project coordinator is the only full-time staff member devoted entirely to the program. His job classification is that of Deputy Probation Officer III, and although his immediate supervisor is the Superintendent of Juvenile Hall, the coordinator also works under and with the senior deputy probation officers of the field and intake units, being ultimately responsible to the chief probation officer. While the project coordinator is responsible for setting up individualized goals and programs for minors committed to the project, he is also available to assist the school and juvenile hall with academic planning, instruction, and the daily supervision of the detained minors.

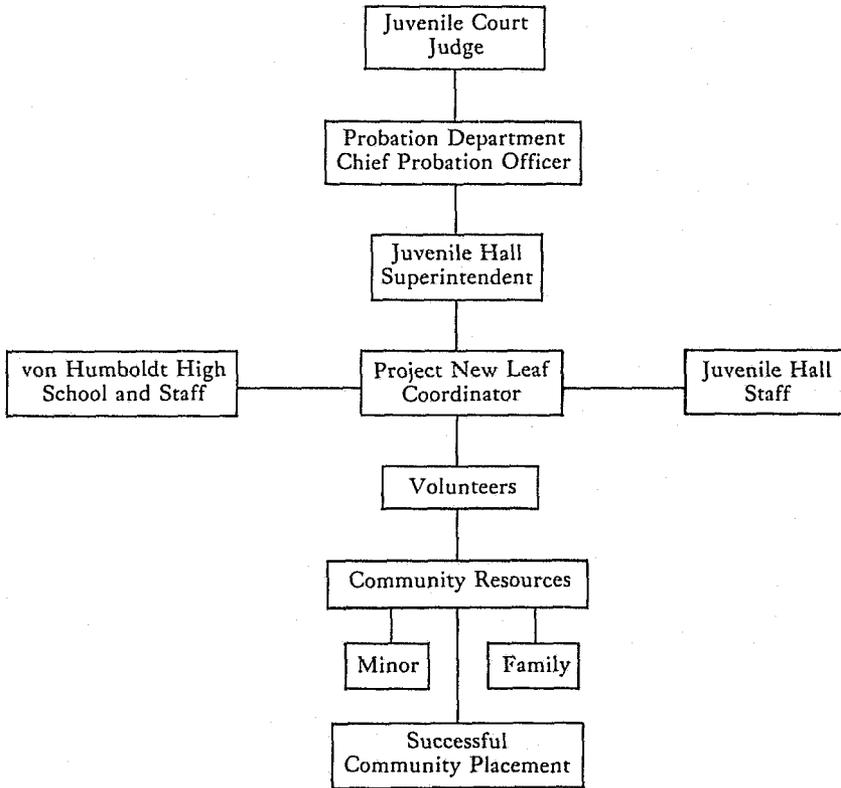
The coordinator is responsible for setting up and participating in individual, group, and family counseling programs. Community resources are researched and utilized as indicated in each individual case and implemented through the coordinator. Court work necessary for the project minors is normally handled by the coordinator as are the monthly, quarterly, and annual reports on the program's progress.

To further show Project New Leaf in relation to the Humboldt county juvenile justice system, the chart on page 23 is provided:

The project centers around three basic programs designed to provide an atmosphere for altering deviant behavior. The first program is a point system which draws from behavior modification and operant conditioning theories. The juvenile hall staff award points to the minors based on individual behavior, group behavior and job performance. The more appropriately a minor performs, the more points he can earn, so that the minor can actually control how fast he progresses. Each stage increases the available rewards, privileges, and responsibilities, so that ideally by the time the fourth stage is attained, the minor is ready to begin a trial community placement. While not perfect (in relation to theory), the point system can and does deal with 1) responsibility for actions, 2) planning and goal achievement, 3) peer interaction, and 4) authority figure interaction:

1. *Responsibility for actions*—Guidelines for behavior, job performance and attitude are clearly spelled out. A great deal of effort to be consistent and objective in awarding points for exhibited behavior, or job performance, is put forward by the staff. With the points, a minor dictates how fast he will progress through the steps and leave juvenile hall. He can also purchase rewards, such as passes, walks, clothing, and room decorations.

2. *Planning and goal achievement*—The project point system provides a structure from which a minor may increase his planning and goal achieve-



ment capabilities. A great deal of thought must be used on a daily basis so that a minor can make points as rapidly as possible, and therefore gain a quicker release from juvenile hall. The points must also be budgeted so that rewards and privileges can be purchased as desired.

A set of goals are also defined during a staff meeting with the minor prior to his beginning the project. These goals are continually referred to during his confinement in juvenile hall and set guidelines for continuing casework.

3. *Peer interaction*—A minor receives points for behavior as an individual; however, he also receives points for the behavior of the group. Therefore, each individual has a vested interest in keeping the group's behavior on an acceptable level.

4. *Authority figure interaction*—While a minor in the project has a great deal of control over his activities through the point system, he must also obey the requests of the juvenile hall staff, teachers, and others. A minor in the project must deal with authority every day.

The second basic program is counseling. This is done on a daily one-to-one level with the staff, on a weekly basis with the family or intended placement, and on a weekly group basis. The counseling services to meet this program are provided through the project coordinator, mental health,

private sources, and volunteers. The counseling offered can and does deal with the following areas:

1. *Family problems*—The counseling helps identify problem areas, improves relationships, and improves communication.
2. *Social and psychological problems*—Many of the minors committed to the project have adjustment problems within the community, as well as their own individual conflicts. Testing can be provided so that programs and needs may be coordinated efficiently.

The third basic program is provided through von Humboldt High School and deals with academic problem areas. The school is small, yet it is extremely capable for the following reasons:

1. Special funding through the State for I.W.E.N., (Individuals With Exceptional Needs) and others.
2. An effective teacher-to-pupil ratio is offered.
3. Academic testing and a careful review of school transcripts allow for tailor-made pupil contracts.
4. Professionalism and a good working relationship with other area schools create an opportunity for scholastic advancement and remedial assistance for the members of Project New Leaf.

These basic programs are provided within a semi-secure community based program which responds well to the needs of the community. To get a better idea of the type of minors referred to Project New Leaf and how they respond to this type of program, the following case briefs are presented:

### ***Roger***

Roger is a sixteen year old boy with a past probation history of beyond control, runaway, and criminal behavior (malicious mischief and burglary). His parents are separated and an older married sister and a younger brother also experienced delinquent activity. Roger's mother receives welfare assistance and does not work. Another sister remains with the mother and has not been involved with the probation department. Past placements included the natural mother, the natural father, and a foster home. If the project were not in existence, Roger would surely have been placed in a boys' ranch. Roger was thought to be borderline retarded.

During staffing, Roger's needs were discussed and appropriate goals and plans were devised. The treatment plan involved extensive interagency involvement. Since being committed to the project, Roger received no new referrals within one year. One high point which stands out in Roger's particular case is that prior to beginning the project he could only read at the second semester level of kindergarten. Upon leaving to return to his mother after 132 days of involvement with the project, Roger could read at near fourth grade level. Roger's self-esteem was extremely low when committed. As he completed the project and advanced his reading skills, Roger's self-esteem also increased. Currently he is continuing to do well.

### ***Robert***

Robert is a fourteen year old male with a past probation record of criminal activity including burglaries and auto theft. Again, as in Roger's case, without a community based program in the juvenile hall, Robert would

surely have been committed to a boys' ranch out of county. Robert's parents are young and went through a particularly stormy separation and divorce. He has an older and younger sister with two younger brothers. The three oldest children, ages fifteen and a half, fourteen and thirteen, are all involved with juvenile probation. All of the children live with their mother, who resides in a low cost housing area and receives welfare assistance. The low cost housing area is one of high delinquent activity within Eureka.

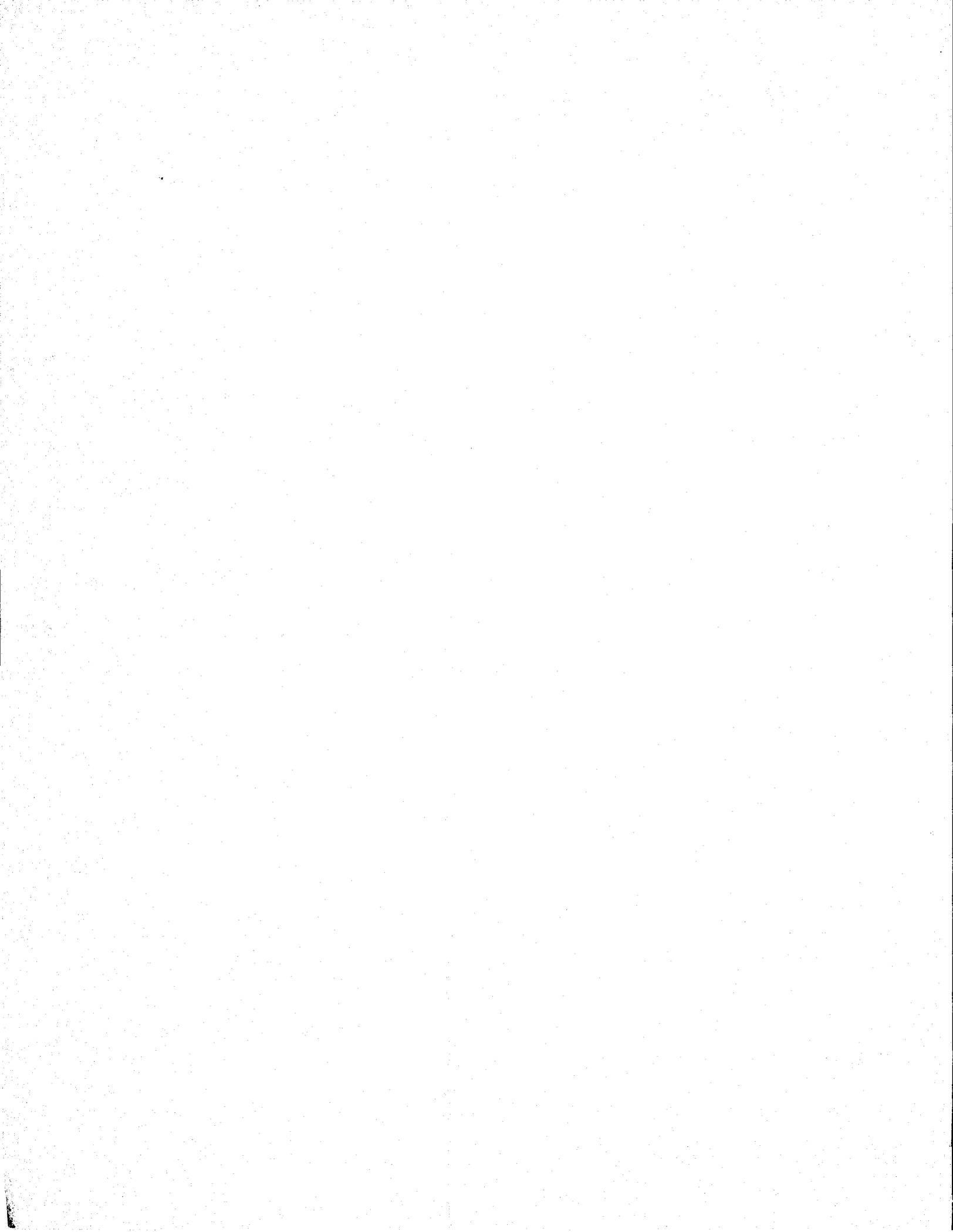
During staffing and goal development, special emphasis was placed on allowing Robert to be instrumental in choosing whether he was going to live with his mother, other relatives, or foster parents at the conclusion of the program. Also, emphasis was directed to improving the parenting skills of Robert's mother. Within this framework, Robert advanced rapidly through the program and made plans to live with his paternal grandparents in Oregon. Six months after having been referred to the New Leaf Program, Robert continues to adjust well within the community in Oregon and has remained referral free.

In both Robert and Roger's cases there were poor social and familial backgrounds. It can safely be said that both of these boys' problems evolved around their adjustment to these situations and that they both responded well to the project's structure and conceptual framework. Of course, all of the minors referred to the program have not adjusted as well as these two. In cases where minors are severely unsocialized, exhibit severe pathology, or are in need of longer, more sophisticated programs of a mental health nature, the results are expectedly lower.

As illustrated, the response of the minors committed to Project New Leaf is as varied as the type of individuals themselves. After three years of following those minors committed to the project, the success rate is eighty (80) percent in preventing further institutionalization. Perhaps even more impressive, when considering the level of deviant behavior patterns established when committed, is the fact that twenty-five (25) percent of those referred are taken off of probation shortly after completing the program and are not referred for further law violations.

In a time period that most communities have experienced severe inflation in the areas of ranch and camp placement, and when delinquent activity has continued to demand increased numbers of placements, Project New Leaf has also exhibited good results. In the fiscal year of 1972-1973, just prior to the beginning of the project, approximately \$27,532 were spent on ranch and camp placements by Humboldt County. During the 1975-1976 fiscal year, while fighting inflation and increasing demands for placements, the project allowed the county to actually reverse trends and spend only \$19,694.

Both in terms of budgetary efficiency and in terms of effectiveness, Project New Leaf has proven that a community based program can be successful. Most dramatically, it has done so without excessive tax dollars being spent for additional buildings, equipment, maintenance, or personnel. Sound intensive casework and coordination of existing social programs and institutions have allowed Project New Leaf to become a model program in terms of community rehabilitation. It is anticipated that the ideas represented within its framework can be beneficial to other communities, large or small.



**END**