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Community Corrections in Australia: The Attendance Centre Scheme

BY THOMAS A. REIMAN

Superintendent, Prahran Attendance Centre (Inner Urban), Melbourne, Australia

IN AUSTRALIA, the Government of the State of Victoria has taken what might be seen as yet another step in the direction of what is commonly titled "community based corrections." Realizing that this topic has been the case for much debate, definition and redefinition, we believe that programmes such as the one herein described can only profess to be more humane and proper than traditional corrections has ever even attempted. This is not to say that notably high "success" statistics are not being achieved, only that corrections at any level can and will succeed and fail with varying proportions.

In Victoria, centres known as Attendance Centres have been operating since June of 1976. As is the general case, this programme has stemmed from a variety of similar community based efforts throughout the world.

Historical Background

Following World War II, the United Kingdom established Attendance Centres, correctional programmes designed to deal with young offenders by imposing a loss of leisure time for a specified period. This was a scheme dealing primarily with teenage offenders who normally attend consecutive Saturdays at a prescribed Centre.

An Attendance Centre order was imposed for an offense for which an adult could be sent to prison, for a breach of the requirements of a probation order, or for defaulting in the payment

of a fine. The offender had to be between his 10th and 21st birthdays and had no prior convictions which resulted in institutional care. The Attendance Centre order itself fixed the time of the boy's first attendance and the total number of hours to be attended.

More recent developments have included such programmes as Periodic Detention Centres in New Zealand. These are designed to deal with offenders whose ages range from above the age of 21 and who have uncomplicated backgrounds and are not suffering from "deep seated mental or emotional disability." These Centres are administered by the Probation Service on either a residential or nonresidential basis—depending on individual cases. Offenders spend Wednesday evenings at the Centre involved in group discussions and spend the weekend in the Centre from 7:00 p.m. on Friday evening until late Sunday morning.

The Australian state of Tasmania has, since 1971, operated a community work order scheme which changes a prison sentence into a specified amount of hours to be spent engaged in community work projects. Operating generally on Saturdays, citizens and community organizations are invited to submit proposals for work projects, and much of the actual supervision of offenders is undertaken by citizen volunteers. The scheme in essence is an alternative to imprisonment geared only to restrict an offender's leisure time

The importance of *doing with* a client cannot be overemphasized in programs having direct client contact. By doing, rather than discussing the reason why a client should do (e.g., going with a client to apply for a job rather than suggesting that he do so, helping an inmate with math rather than telling him to get an education), two powerful forces are brought into play that encourage behavior change. The first is modeling behavior (Bandura, 1974). Much of what we learn is through watching the behavior of others and the resulting rewards or lack of rewards for the behavior. By sitting with a client and discussing future behavior with him, a volunteer, by his presence and attention, rewards not the *activity* but merely the *discussion* of future behavior. The client learns to talk seriously about the future but only sees rewards linked to the discussion and not to the act. A second force related to behavior change is the concept of "cognitive dissonance" (Festinger, 1957). The notion that behavior change follows attitude change has been demonstrated to be false. Instead, the reverse is true and is explained by a person's need for consonance between actions and feelings. If a person feels that he does not like camping but finds himself in a tent, he is in a state of dissonance that must be resolved. To do so, he must either deny his statement of feelings or his behavior. The resolution invariably chosen is in favor of behavior. The person will find a "reason" for what he has done. It is obviously important that the behavior for which a person finds a rationale be an appropriate behavior. A number of these can be engaged in by the inmate that will be useful after release from the institution. The process of dissonance resolution strongly maintains the behavior performed.

As inmates find value in doing new behaviors through cognitive dissonance, so do volunteers and staff learn to value the roles each may play. As volunteers meet with inmates, they must also interface with institution staff. Through observing each other they discover they do not have mutually exclusive concerns but instead can see value in what they each do. If this does not occur, the volunteer program will not survive.

McClelland (1965) has suggested 11 propositions that will increase motivation. These should be applied to institution staff who will interface with volunteers as well as to volunteers.

(1) The more reasons a person has to believe

that he should develop a motive in the program, the more likely he is to do so;

(2) A person must feel his involvement is consistent with demands of reality and reason;

(3) A person will be more highly motivated if his definition of his motivation is clearly consistent with that of the program;

(4) There must be a clear link between the program's actions and the volunteer or staff member;

(5) The motivation of the program must be linked to events in the person's everyday life;

(6) He must perceive and experience new motivation as an improvement in current cultural values;

(7) A person should achieve concrete program goals that also relate to his own life;

(8) He should keep records of progress toward his goals;

(9) The atmosphere of orientation should be warm, honest, and supportive; a person should be respected as someone who can guide and direct his own future behavior;

(10) Orientation should dramatize self-study and lift it out of the routine of everyday life; and

(11) Motivation is more likely to increase and persist if the new motive is a sign of membership in a new reference group. Whatever changes occur must be consistent with the person's self-image if he is not to reject them.

The eleventh proposition is most critical. For the volunteer to remain, he must become friends with other volunteers *and* institution staff. Ideally, staff and volunteers will like each other and will do things together away from the institution. When this occurs, it is a clear sign of establishing the setting for program success. Friends working together are more effective than people who are suspicious and untrusting.

As we consider the ramifications of these assumptions, we see why volunteer programs are so difficult to establish and maintain. It is easy to get the impression that volunteer programs are unwanted and unwelcome in the institution. This should never be the case. There is no place where willing people from society are needed more. These restrictions should not deter the institution from actively seeking volunteers, nor volunteers from making contributions to the institutions. It is only that the practice arena has a few more necessary rules that must be followed. Within these restrictions, the volunteer can make tremendous contributions, and the institution can

by requiring work to be undertaken within the community.

The Attendance Centre Idea

Victoria, in establishing Attendance Centres, has incorporated the concept of physical work within the community along with a social counselling component to deal with the more personal side of rehabilitation. The scheme basically functions as a sentencing alternative for those individuals who would previously have been sent to prison. In its initial stages of operation great care has been taken to ensure that the use of Attendance Centres be limited to likely institutional inmates, not those who more appropriately would be dealt with by probation, good behaviour bonds¹ or other established alternatives. As has been proven in many cases a prison alternative must service likely prison inmates exclusively less it become a burden to an overcrowded system of ineffective programmes, all unaware of their place in the criminal justice system.

Attendance Centres incorporate safeguards for the community (i.e., the offender is punished through loss of leisure time and is under direct supervision of the staff of the Attendance Centre throughout his complete period of attendance), and provides for a programme with a counselling component as well as involvement in community work. A general principle of the programme is to encourage social and community responsibilities. The Centres have many advantages in social and economic terms for both the offender and the community.

Primarily, punishment for an offense is carried out. However the offender is permitted to live in the community, continue his normal employment, and thereby support himself and his family. This is economic to the taxpayer and living standards of the family involved are maintained. The decision in the court hopefully indicates to the offender that society is concerned and prepared to help him overcome the problems which may have caused his violation of the law. At the same time

the offender can, to some extent repay the community by undertaking charitable service projects and make a contribution for the public good.

Community Work Component

Community work at an Attendance Centre is geared toward assisting worthy organizations and citizens in completing work that might not have been done in the absence of such a Centre. Preference is given to pensioners and handicapped citizens. The goal here is to establish personal satisfaction in the eyes of the offender as well as gratitude and enlightened understanding on the part of the recipient. An Attendance Centre operates much like a service club, providing such work as gardening, painting, restoration, and general maintenance. Efforts are also made to place individuals in human service volunteer positions such as hospital assistance, swimming lessons, and child care. Programming ideally develops from the specific skills of the offenders.

Social Counselling Component

The social component of an Attendance Centre attempts to address the needs and interests of the offender (hereafter known as the attendee). The Centre will identify the needs and the associated identification of the way in which these needs may, in some way, be met. Often the programmes are organized at a group level in order to encourage wider discussion and the development of the knowledge that the individual is not alone in experiencing various problems. In organizing these programmes, Centres will many times rely on volunteer speakers and group leaders. The use of such people serves to expand the scope of the Centre, providing a wider range of people for the attendee to relate to, and also provides a means by which the principles and practices of the Centre can reach the community in general. An Attendance Centre will attempt to deal with the myriad of social problems and issues that each individual will (or may) face daily. Alcohol and drug dependence, adult literacy, sexuality and human relations, legal aid, bank finance and driver safety are just a few of the issues which may be serviced. Hopefully programming will again stem from the specific needs of the attendees currently being serviced, not the pre-supposed or pre-determined ideals of the staff. In this manner the Centre operates under individualized treatment plans, calculating success through specific

¹ Victorian Statutes: Magistrates (Summary Proceedings) Court Act 1975: Sec. 80 (1).

Where at any time after the commencement of the hearing of an information a Court is satisfied that a defendant is guilty of the offence charged and it appears to the Court to be expedient to do so having regard to all the circumstances including the nature of the offence and the character and antecedents of the defendant and whether or not the defendant has pleaded guilty the Court, without proceeding to conviction, may adjourn the further hearing to a time and place to be fixed (such time being not more than twelve months thereafter) and allow the person charged to go at large upon his entering into a recognizance for a reasonable amount and with or without surety or sureties at the discretion of the Court conditioned for his appearance at the time and place so fixed, for his good behaviour in the meantime and for the observance of any special conditions the Court thinks proper to impose.

gains of the attendees, not overall ease of administration.

The Legislative Beginning

The legislation empowering the creation and operation of Attendance Centres has basic components as well as unique specifications which enhance the overall concept. The provisions of the Social Welfare Act, Crimes Act, and Maintenance Act include:

(1) Judges, Magistrates and Justices of the Peace can, in lieu of a period of imprisonment permit an offender to serve that period in an Attendance Centre.

(2) The offences eligible for this type of sentence are serious in character (enough to warrant a prison sentence in the absence of an Attendance Centre).

(3) Sentences are to be of between 1 and 12 months.

(4) Hours of Attendance are not to exceed 18 per week, and periods of attendance are not to exceed three (in one week).

(5) Workers compensation will apply in case of accidents.

(6) The attendee can be directed to counselling and instructed to undertake charitable work programmes.

(7) The Director-General of the Social Welfare Department has powers to move a prisoner into an Attendance Centre programme from one of the State's prisons.

(8) Applications to vary the order may be made by either the Director-General of Social Welfare or the offender.

In addition to this, the most enhancing legislative provision is a maximum limit on population at an Attendance Centre at any one time. It has been clear to the Victorian Government that a great deal of valuable, progressive programmes become ineffective due to inevitable overcrowding. By law, the maximum number of attendees is set at 40; possibly seen as unfair to the 41st offender, but the most logical way to ensure adequate servicing of the needs of the offenders in the programme. Courts have the option of adjourning a case until such time as a vacancy occurs, but at no time will the number of 40 be exceeded at an Attendance Centre.

The Offender Before the Court

An offender comes to an Attendance Centre directly from Court. Once guilt is established, the

staff of the Attendance Centre is called upon to interview and assess the offender. The goals of such an interview are to humanize the system to the point where the offender understands what he is faced with and what an Attendance Centre sentence will entail. Thus he becomes a part of his future rather than a passive, mystified audience. In determining the suitability of an offender for admittance, the Court as well as the staff of the specified Centre will look at specific/social factors. These include:

(1) Is the offender a stable resident of the region?

(2) Has he been in, or likely to be in, regular employment?

(3) Does he have local family supports?

(4) Was his crime devoid of extreme violence?

(5) Does he understand the requirements of, and is he motivated toward, the programme?

(6) Is he in reasonably good health?

(7) Has he previously been of reasonably good behaviour, or is he likely to have the personal desire to become interested in his personal rehabilitation?

If most of these answers are in the positive, there will be a good likelihood of his being eligible for the programme.

Hopefully, the staff and the Court recognize the subjective nature of such a decision, and in this light an attempt will be made to establish if in fact there is room for personal growth within an offender. If such is the case, acceptance is generally granted. Following this acceptance, the offender must also agree to such an order. It is a basic philosophy that rehabilitation is achieved only in those cases where an offender makes the personal commitment to change, rather than the correctional system attempting to change the individual.

The basic operation is that the offender is sentenced to a term of imprisonment, however he is allowed to serve that period of time at the Centre. He is required to attend for a maximum period of 18 hours per week for a period of from 1 to 12 months, depending on the sentence he would have received under traditional sentencing procedures. Attendances are three times weekly; two 4-hour evening sessions during the week and a 10-hour Saturday session. Ideally the evenings are used for human growth and development programming. This involves both group and individual counselling on personal/social issues. Most Centres are also equipped with a small metal and

TABLE 1.—First 174 individuals sentenced to Attendance Centre Programme, June 7, 1976 - May 30, 1977.

Range of Offences	Months Sentenced to Attendance Centre											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Drive while under period of disqualification	23	27	15	2	3	2		1				
Theft/theft of motor car		1	6	3	1	19			2			4
Assault	1		6	3		3	1		1			5
Burglary						3			3			2
Robbery						1						5
Driving offences, including exceeding legal limit of blood alcohol level at .05%	2	4	6	1		1						*1
Drug related offence (possession and/or use)				1		2		1				
Possession of or receiving stolen property		1	2		1							2
Deception						1			1			
Other offences (i.e., shoplifting, indecent language) etc.			3			1						

*culpable driving

wood workshop where small items are made for donations and community work projects. Saturday's community work is supervised either by paid staff or ideally by the group or individual for whom the work is being done.

Range and Type of Offender Serviced by Attendance Centre Orders

The above table (1) gives a breakdown of convicted offence and length of sentence of the first 174 individuals sentenced to an Attendance Centre. These figures have been derived from two Centres covering 22 sentencing law courts.

Under Victorian Statute, driving whilst under a period of disqualification carries a mandatory prison sentence (Australian correctional service defines jail and prison in similar context). Thus the 73 individuals sentenced under that offence would have several comparable prison sentences. Of the others it is assumed, taking into account discretionary power of law courts, that similar prison terms would have been substituted. Statistical evaluation is currently being undertaken to study length of sentence of comparable offences prior to the opening of the attendance centres.

Administration of the Centre

The staffing of an Attendance Centre includes a superintendent responsible to both the Social Welfare Department as well as the local law courts, a stenographer who functions as the administrative officer, a programme supervisor responsible for Saturday work projects (their identification, organization and implementation), and a social worker responsible for evening pro-

grammes and servicing the personal/social needs of the attendees. In some Centres, tradesmen are hired as Saturday work supervisors to assist with specific projects.

A Personal Assessment

As superintendent of the first Attendance Centre in Victoria, I have a unique situation in which to assess the success and failure of the scheme in operation. After 10 months of operation certain factors stand out. Obviously success and failure are noted by the manner in which we define them, but regardless of that mechanism the scheme has had a positive beginning. The Centre has met with great public acceptance, a factor vital to the existence of any community based effort. A great percentage of attendees see the Centre as a type of "Second Chance" (their own words); a realistic opportunity. This may in part be due to their agreeing to attend, and secondly the fact that they are responsible for the bulk of the programming and personal rehabilitation. Thus corrections for the first time offers them support and alternatives, not coercive ostracism.

Recognizing the great value of volunteers in correctional programming as well as incorporating "community" in such areas, Attendance Centres rely heavily on the assistance of volunteer services. In increasing numbers volunteers have offered their time, service, and skills, recognizing the Centres as an integral part of community service and community life. It is the view of the Victorian Social Welfare Department that Welfare Services are not the sole responsibility

of paid public servants, rather than positive programming stems from integration through communication and the active assistance of all concerned citizens. Thus volunteers assist in programmes, counselling and public relations, to the mutual benefit of all concerned parties.

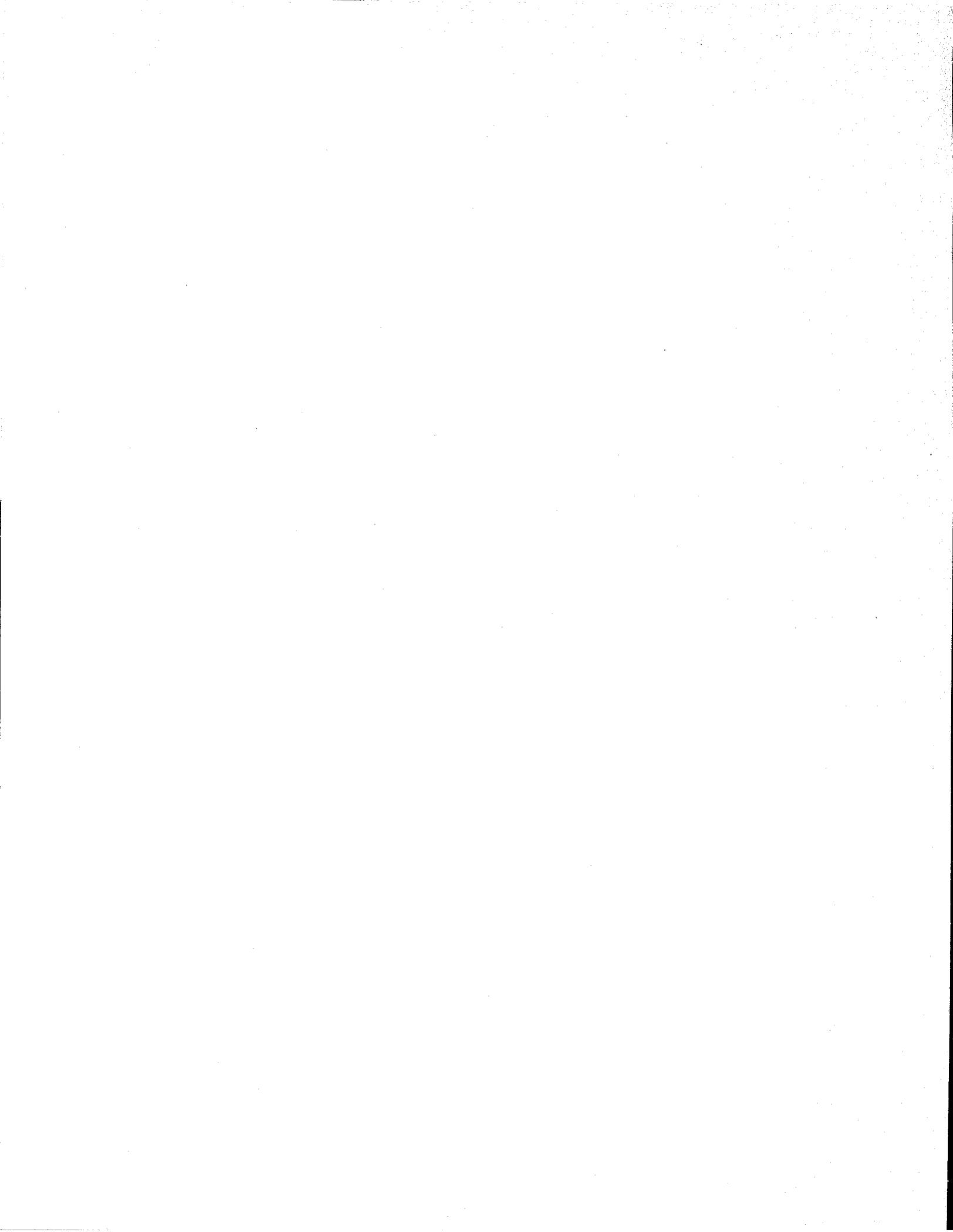
One hundred seventy-four attendees have passed through or are currently in the Attendance Centre programme. At this point, 10 percent may be defined as failures, as they have re-offended either during or after conclusion of their programme. In all other cases, substantial progress has been made in terms of personal maturity and community responsibility.

Thus, the Victorian Attendance Centre scheme

² George G. Killinger and Paul F. Cromwell, Jr. *Alternatives to Imprisonment—Corrections in the Community—Selected Readings*. St. Paul, Minn. West Publishing Co. p. 130.

is clearly developing as a successful community based correctional venture. Already the prison populations are making a notable decline and plans are developing for more Centres in the near future. These Centres are offering an alternative to traditional corrections, providing guidance and social acceptance; one of the most promising developments in corrections today.

The task of corrections therefore includes building or rebuilding solid ties between the offender and the community, integrating or reintegrating the offender into community life, restoring family ties, obtaining employment and education, securing in a larger sense a place for the offender in the routine functioning of society This requires not only efforts directed toward changing the individual offender, which has been almost the exclusive focus of rehabilitation, but also mobilization and change of the community and its institutions.²



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