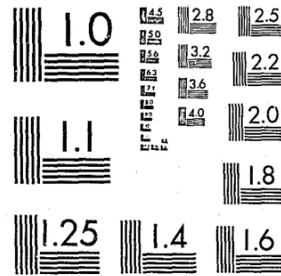


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The Ocean Tides Experiment

Treatment of Serious Juvenile Offenders in an Open Residential Setting

BY CHARLES LINDNER AND BROTHER ROBERT WAGNER*

OCEAN TIDES, a residential treatment center for juveniles, is unique in many respects. Although serving children of all religious denominations, the center is located in the midst of a religious complex operated by the Christian Brothers, a teaching order of the Catholic Church. Congruent with the center's physical facilities, is a chapel, residential quarters for the Christian Brothers, and facilities actively used for administrative and religious purposes.

Equally unusual is the center's physical facilities and site location. The center is housed in an impressive building, located well back from the road and surrounded by greenery, on what was formerly the estate of the Newberry family. The splendors of a past age, including richly carved mahogany paneled conference rooms and oversized fireplaces, are still visible and provide a tone of quiet dignity, often in sharp contrast to the institutional furnishings so typically found in juvenile institutions. Neither would one expect to find a juvenile center situated in the midst of the idyllic surrounding on which the ten acre site is located. The property overlooks the Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island in an area renowned as a summer resort area. Surrounded by equally impressive miniestates, one marvels both at the scenic beauty and the incongruity of the site as a juvenile institution. The natural beauty of the area is, however, seen as a positive force in the overall treatment process. "From its start, Ocean Tides has worked from the premise that the physical surroundings ... are an integral part of climate; they are important and formative context for ... interpersonal programmatic treatment efforts."¹

One of the most distinctive features of Ocean Tides, however, is its admissions policies. As a private (non-governmental) center for juveniles, it has the right to establish its own admissions criteria. Traditionally, private institutions have exercised this privilege so as to exclude children perceived more difficult to handle.

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Through the utilization of high admission criteria, private institutions were more likely to be populated with neglected and dependent children, status offenders, and juveniles who had committed minor acts of delinquency. State training schools, permitted no choice in the selection process, became the traditional "dumping grounds" for those children screened out of the private schools.

Breaking with tradition, Ocean Tides has opted to service the "hard-core" delinquent: the child usually excluded from the private school system. Indeed, the majority of the children were already in placement in the Rhode Island State Training School prior to their conditional removal to Ocean Tides. In essence, Ocean Tides is gambling that they can be successful with children that no other institution really wants.

Ocean Tides is a complex of five facilities, all of which are located within a driving radius of less than one hour. The Narragansett residence is the largest facility and serves as the lynchpin of the group. As a self-contained residential center it is equipped to provide a full range of services, including educational, vocational, counseling and recreational programs. The remaining sites, located in urban settings, are used as group homes.

Placement is made in accordance with individualized treatment needs. Those children, not believed to require a structured residential setting, are instead placed directly into a group home. The majority of the children entering the program, however, require greater structure, at least until some time has been spent in the program, and will accordingly be placed in the Narragansett residence. Upon completion of their stay at Narragansett, averaging 6 months duration, an evaluation will again be made as to the most suitable placement. Although some children will be returned to their own homes upon their discharge from Narragansett, others will first be placed in a group home, so as to ease the transition of home placement. Flexibility of placement, consistent with the Ocean Tides concept of individualized treatment planning, is made feasible by the variety of treatment facilities.

The rural isolation of the Narragansett residence is in direct contrast to the urban setting so familiar to

¹ The Ocean Tides Residential Education Program, Grant Proposal submitted to The Rhode Island Foundation, 6/15/81, p.7.

the children and serves to disrupt prior life styles and substitute a new life experience. Basic to the program is the belief that a restructuring of the child's value system can best be achieved when removed from the environment in which his difficulties were experienced. Although community visitation is encouraged so as to enhance family ties, this visitation is both controlled and carefully monitored.

The Narragansett center is located in a building shared with the Christian Brothers. The children's residence, gymnasium, and rooms for supportive services are located on the first floor of one wing of the building. A separate dining area is exclusively used by the boys. The expansive grounds allow for a variety of outdoor recreational activities, including the use of a small fishing boat and swimming at nearby beaches. Visitors are often struck by the absence of physical restraints often found in other juvenile institutions. The freedom of movement enjoyed at Narragansett, whether throughout the building or the ability to leave the grounds at will, is readily apparent. In the absence of barred windows, secure confinement areas, and surrounding walls and fences, the children quickly realize that they have the ability to simply walk away from the center at their choosing. This absence of physical constraints, in effect, serves as a constant reminder to the residents that their stay is totally voluntary, and that the symbolic front door key is in their hands, and their hands alone.

As in most juvenile institutions, each child has his own room both as a means of insuring some degree of privacy and to minimize the potential for assaultive acts or homosexual incidents. Each child is responsible for the cleanliness of his own room, and is also free to decorate according to his own taste. The rooms were decorated with posters, family pictures and drawing not unlike what would be expected in an average college dormitory. Graffiti, a barometer by which the child's attitude toward the institution can often be judged, were totally absent during our unannounced visit, as were carvings on furniture and other acts of vandalism.

In addition to the Narragansett residence, several community based group homes designed to accommodate no more than seven boys, comprise the Ocean Tides complex. The group homes are designed to serve as a transitional bridge preparing the child for a return to life in the community. Those children unable to return to their own families, whether due to the death of one or more parents, severe physical child abuse, or other reasons, will be placed in a group home stressing self-reliance and the development of those special skills which will be needed in a nonfamilial setting. While serving to decrease the depersonaliza-

tion of an institutional setting, the group home provides continued supervision and needed services.

Admissions Criteria

The Ocean Tides program is limited to males, between the ages of 13 and 17, all of whom have been adjudicated to be juvenile delinquents by the family court. Status offenders, generally considered less difficult to supervise, are not part of the Ocean Tides population. Admission to the program is either through a direct court referral, or by removal of the child from the Rhode Island State Training School. In the latter case, a boy confined to the training school may make application to Ocean Tides, and if accepted, may complete his placement in the program in lieu of the training school.

Should a boy be accepted for the program, approval for the transfer must be given by the family court, under a legal disposition known as "Temporary Community Placement." Under this status the training school will continue to retain legal custody of the boy, although his actual physical placement, conditioned on continued good behavior, is with Ocean Tides. Serious behavior violations may result in a return to the training school, but as a safeguard against arbitrary decisionmaking, the courts require a revocation hearing complete with minimal due process guarantees.

Admission criteria are extremely liberal so as to allow for acceptance of the more "difficult" child. As a general rule, the only children barred from admission are those who pose a substantial threat to the safety of the other boys, or whose behavior indicates firesetting, severe mental illness, or acting-out homosexual behavior. In addition, boys who do not appear to be properly motivated are likely to be excluded from the program.

Aside from the limitations cited, the liberality of admission standards is readily apparent. Academic standards as an admission requirement are nonexistent, nor would any specific act of delinquency, per se, serve as a bar to admission. The most concrete evidence of the program's admission policies is illustrated by the population composition. All of the boys were adjudicated to be delinquent; the majority have behavioral histories serious enough to lead to placement in the training school system; many were involved in acts of violence; a significant number were school dropouts or under suspension; the majority were involved in excessive drug or alcohol use, or both. It is probable that the individual profiles of the children in this program would have served to bar them from admission to the majority of voluntary treatment centers.

Treatment Goals

There is a basic similarity in the treatment goals of most juvenile institutions. It is intended that the child will be rehabilitated within the institution so as to allow for a successful reintegration into the community as a well adjusted, productive member of society, and without further serious delinquent behavior. Despite the uniformity of goals, however, significant variation is reflected in treatment methodologies.

The treatment approach utilized by Ocean Tides is based on the traditional concepts of reality therapy as developed by Glasser.² Consistent with the principles underlying reality therapy, Ocean Tides rejects the premise that delinquent behavior is a manifestation of "illness," and instead views such behavior as the performance of an irresponsible act. "The crux of the theory is personal responsibility for one's own behavior, which is equated with mental health."³ In its approach to treatment many of the more important concepts of reality therapy are employed including, involvement as the foundation of therapy; responsibility for one's own behavior; critical self-evaluation; development of and a commitment to, planned responsible behavior; and the rejection of excuses for irresponsible behavior.⁴ Reality therapy is viewed, then, as a "... system of ideas designed to help those who identify with failure learn to gain a successful identity ..."⁵

Treatment services are provided through three interrelated program components: education; group living; and social services. Regularly scheduled staff conferences are held to insure communication between staff of the various components. The director of treatment services has overall responsibility for treatment and is responsible for insuring coordination of treatment program components.

Education as a Treatment Component

The Narragansett residential center maintains its own school, which all children are required to attend. As the school is fully accredited, credits earned are transferable to the public school system. The majority of the children entering the Narragansett school are found to have serious educational deficiencies. Daniel Maloney, school principal, reported that: "Most kids have not been in school the year before they got here."⁶ Many of the boys, labeled as failures by the

public school system, have lost faith in their ability to succeed in an academic setting. For many, continued attendance in the public school system was no longer a viable alternative.

Several innovative techniques are utilized to meet the special needs of these children. In addition to a standardized school program, strong emphasis is placed on remedial work. Individual educational goals are established for each child, realistically prepared to allow for goal attainment. Successful goal achievement, even of a limited nature, serves as a catalyst in breaking the pattern of failure, and developing self-motivation. The smallness of the class, usually consisting of four or five children, allows for individualized attention for each child. Personalized assignments are designed to allow each child to work at his own pace. Careful monitoring of each child's progress, made possible by the small class size, insures that the child will not be able to escape into anonymity.

Most important in the educational process is the emphasis placed on teacher involvement. In recognition of the academic failure identity shared by so many of the boys, the program stresses the development of a personal relationship between teacher and child. The teacher is not seen merely as a provider of knowledge, but as a motivating force for educational growth. Educational staff are selected not only on the basis of their teaching abilities, but because they are warm, supportive persons. Trust is stressed in the relationship, because "The kids do sense that someone cares about them. Even though they may not think they can learn, they feel they can, because of the relationship with the instructors."⁷

Based on periodic academic testing, it is reported that: "... boys average better than one and one-half months progress in reading for each month in the Ocean Tides school program. In mathematics, boys average better than two months progress for each month in the school program."⁸ Maloney further reports that based on his experience at the school he feels that "... it is possible to make up two years' work in six months because of the individual teaching instruction of each student."⁹

In addition to the school located at the Narragansett site, Ocean Tides also operates a school in Providence for children in the group home program requiring smaller classes and individualized attention. The majority of group home children, of course, attend the public school system.

Group Living as a Treatment Component

The total living experience within the Narragansett residence is viewed as part of the treatment process.

All activities and experiences of the child during his waking hours should contribute to the ongoing therapeutic process, thereby requiring that the entire institutional community share in the child's growth and development. The concept of treatment of Ocean Tides, therefore, utilizes the group living experience as a major therapeutic tool allowing for growth through a controlled opportunity to practice responsible behavior and to test alternative modes of behavior. Harkins states that "... it is useful to think of Ocean Tides as a program of human development. That is, Ocean Tides can be thought of both as teaching necessary human skills (both directly and by example) and as providing a supervised, coordinated and progressively changing setting in which to observe and practice various developmental skills."¹⁰

Consistent with the basic concepts of reality therapy is the stress placed at Ocean Tides on the need for positive interaction between staff and the children. "For Reality Therapy to work, the therapist or helper must become involved with the person he is trying to help; the therapist, therefore, must be warm, personal, and friendly. No one can break the intense self-involvement of failure by being aloof, impersonal, or emotionally distant."¹¹ To insure and intensify involvement, staff are neither classified as treatment or custodial personnel, either by label or by functional work assignments. Treatment is the responsibility of all staff, pursued in their normal work functions, rather than the responsibility on any one segment of staff. Treatment specialists, when employed, generally serve in consultative roles, rather than in the provision of direct services.

The degree and nature of staff involvement is, of course, dependent upon the quality of the agency personnel. In this respect Ocean Tides has several advantages over most juvenile institutions. As a small, private facility it is able to hire selectively, restricted neither by union or civil service constraints. Counselors tend to be recent college graduates, some of whom are pursuing graduate studies in nearby universities. Almost all are only a few years older than the residents. Other staff members are Christian Brothers whose participation is voluntary and devoid of any financial consideration. Supplemental services are provided by volunteers from nearby colleges and the community, whose participation is also by choice. In addition, the smallness of the institution allows for a greater awareness of the activities and attitudes of all staff.

All children are required to participate in daily peer group counseling sessions. Unlike confrontation groups, these sessions are designed to be mutually supportive, utilizing self-help concepts. The counseling sessions allow the boys to test their attitudes and behavior against their peers, evaluate alternatives, and assume commitments for more responsible behavior. It is hoped that the involvement developed in the group sessions will be carried over into all aspects of institutional life.

Social Service (Family/Child Support Program) as a Treatment Concept

The impact of family as a factor in the effectiveness of treatment programs for juvenile delinquents is well recognized. The family can serve as a positive force, providing support and cooperation, or as a destructive influence, undermining the best of programs. Satir's reference to the "identified patient," cautions that the juvenile delinquent is often the "symptom" of a dysfunctional family.¹² To provide therapeutic intervention for the child while ignoring the family, when the ultimate goal is the return of the child to the troubled home, is self-limiting at best. Indeed, some argue that a limited treatment approach of this nature might even prove destructive in certain situations.¹³ These concerns are especially relevant at Ocean Tides where the age of the population suggests that most of the children will eventually return to the home. Even where a return to the home is no longer feasible, family ties will often be maintained.

Unless contraindicated, the program seeks to maintain and improve the family relationship through continued interaction between family and child. Weekend visitation to the home is encouraged, and it is suggested in turn that the parents visit the facility. Parents are advised of the social worker assigned to the child and encouraged to freely communicate with the worker. Regularly scheduled meetings serve to inform the parents of the child's progress. Key to the program is regularly scheduled sessions of joint family counseling, focusing not on the child, but on the family as an entity.

In addition, parent peer group counseling sessions are used as a tool in reducing parent/child conflict. Ocean Tides parents meet weekly in groups of approximately ten, with counselors serving as group leaders. Through the process of a mutual sharing of experiences with their peers, parents soon learn that their difficulties are not unique. The support received from others helps in coping with their problems and provides greater understanding of the dynamics underlying family interaction. Efforts are made to encourage group members to evaluate their attitudes

² William Glasser, *Reality Therapy*, New York: Harper and Row, 1965.

³ William Glasser and Leonard M. Zunin, "Reality Therapy," in Raymond J. Corsini (ed.), *Current Psychotherapies*, 2nd Edition. Itasca, Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, 1979, p. 302.

⁴ William Glasser, *The Identity Society*, Revised Edition. New York: Harper and Row, 1975, pp. 74-98.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁶ "The Ocean Tides Youth Program," *The Visitor*, Narragansett, Rhode Island, October 29, 1981, p. 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸ Grant Proposal, op. cit., Section 3(B)4.

⁹ "The Ocean Tides Youth Program," op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁰ William Harkins, "The Nature of Treatment at Ocean Tides," September 1980, p. 7. (Unpublished Paper.)

¹¹ William Glasser, *Reality Therapy*, op. cit., p. 74.

¹² Michael J. Lillyquist, *Understanding and Changing Criminal Behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980, p. 222.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

and behavior, against their peers. Emphasis is placed on improving parental skills in the area of communication, setting limits, and conflict resolution.

Recreational Programs

All of the boys at the Narragansett site are required to participate in recreational activities, unless precluded for reasons of health. Recreational activities are scheduled for 2 hours a day during the week, and on three evenings. In addition, the boys are allowed to participate in "free time activities" in which they are permitted to choose their own recreational activity.

A large, well-furnished indoor gymnasium serves as the focal point of free-time activities. Full-court basketball, usually including members of staff, are among the most popular activities. In good weather, basketball, volley ball, and frisbee are played on the expansive grounds. Access to the center's boat allows for water sports, including swimming, water-skiing and fishing.

Utilization of Community Resources

Resources from within the community are utilized to enrich the services of the professional staff. A small number of student interns from the University of Rhode Island have been involved in providing tutorial services for the boys, as have a number of Christian Brothers living at the Narragansett site, but not officially on the staff. Other members of the Christian Brothers Order voluntarily participate in arts and crafts instruction, recreational programs, and provide indirect services such as fund raising and job development.

Volunteers have been most creatively used in the development of a Summer Apprenticeship Program, which provides summer employment for boys at the Narragansett site. Staff, together with volunteers, have been successful in soliciting numerous employment opportunities in the local community for those boys choosing to participate in the program. Through the cooperation of community leaders, local businesses, and several municipal agencies, the boys have had the opportunity to work at local beach clubs, summer camps, and youth centers. Others have worked with local gardeners and some have found maintenance work with the highway department. The Apprenticeship Program is designed to provide the boys with a constructive work experience while at the same time encouraging independence thru employment. A small portion of their earnings may be spent without restrictions, whereas the larger portion is deposited in a bank under the child's name. The funds may be subsequently withdrawn for special needs, with the remaining monies given to the boy upon his

discharge. Understandably popular, almost all of the boys voluntarily participate in the program. Several proudly relate that the bank account is the first they ever had.

Behavioral Controls and Discipline

Discipline is less of a problem at Ocean Tides than in most juvenile institutions. Every child is a volunteer in the sense that he is in the program by choice, as participation represents an alternative to more restrictive institutionalization. The boys are aware that failure in the program may well lead to placement at the state training school. The deterrent effect of so unpleasant an alternative is obvious.

Behavior problems are relatively minor. Serious acts of violence, sexual assaults, use of weapons, or extensive property damage are rare. Typical behavior problems include such acts as the throwing of food during meals, fistfights, petty thefts, and failure to perform assigned chores. An attitude of trust, coupled with heightened expectations and personal accountability, may also contribute to improved behavior. The absence of screened or barred windows, security fences, and other physical constraints is apparent. The boys, for example, know that they are free to abscond, but if they do, they will be held accountable for their acts.

The size of the institution, both in terms of population and physical facilities, contributes to its manageability. With an average population of only 21 boys, there is a high degree of intimacy. In effect, the smallness of the facility lessens the degree of depersonalization while increasing interactional intensity.

The architectural design of the Narragansett site may also serve as a control on serious misbehavior. Individual rooms, as contrasted to dormitory style quarters, affords greater privacy, protection, and manageability. Moreover, the location of all living quarters on one floor of a single wing of the building lessens the potential of trouble spots for misbehavior, such as isolated areas, unsupervised stairwells and other infrequently used areas.

Although serious misbehavior is rare, minor episodes of misconduct occur and must be dealt with. Sanctions for misbehavior may only be imposed in accordance with officially promulgated, written guidelines. Official policy suggests that punishment be as closely rated to the nature of the misconduct as possible, so as to make the sanction more meaningful, thereby increasing the deterrent effect. For example, a child throwing food in the cafeteria, would be required to remain after the others leave so as to help in the clean-up. A boy refusing to participate in the mandatory recreational activities, would be assigned

extra workouts in the gymnasium. In assigning extra chores, however, it is required that the activity must not be overly strenuous and must take into account the child's age and health. Corporal punishment in any form is officially prohibited as are the use of isolation rooms, nonmedically prescribed tranquilizers, or dietary restrictions. In actuality, the most frequently used form of punishment is the denial of privileges. For example, boys might be denied television time, attendance at a movie, or an evening of swimming at a local pool.

Numerous safeguards are employed to lessen the possibility of staff abuse of the boys. Among these are written, published guidelines, strong supervisory controls, and unannounced inspection tours by administration. The institution also employs a somewhat unique policy of requiring that all visitors touring the institution be guided by one of the boys, unaccompanied by a member of staff. This serves to insure that the boys have an opportunity to freely discuss their experiences without the constraints of a staff member's presence. In this way there is always the opportunity for free, uncensored communication with outsiders.

The Treatment Continuum

The average time spent by a child in the Narragansett residence is 6 months. Most discharges are discretionary in nature, as determined by a team decision of those who have worked with the boy. This would include the director of treatment, social worker, teacher, and child care staff. Advisory opinions as to discharge readiness would also be solicited from the child as well as his parents. In recognition of the fact that institutional behavior is not necessarily a valid indication of future behavior in the community, strong consideration is given to the evaluation of the child's behavior during home visits.

Based on individual treatment needs, some boys discharged from the Narragansett residence are returned to their families. Others will be transferred into one of three group homes located in an urban setting. These homes are designed to ease the transition from institutional to family life. "The smaller residences provide a nurturing and familial setting in which boys are allowed and expected to participate in the community-at-large. In June 1981, for example, two of the four boys at the Annex House residence graduated from (community) high school(s)."¹⁴

Boys living in group homes continue to receive a full range of social services on an as needed basis. A satellite social services facility, Ocean Tides Services

Center, is located in close proximity to the group homes and provides both counseling and educational supportive services. Community services are utilized for those highly specialized needs unavailable at the Service Center. Intensive family counseling is provided at this time so as to help prepare for the boy's return to the home. Boys in the group homes either attend public school in the community, or an Ocean Tides School, depending on individual needs.

The physical characteristics of the group homes have been designed to reduce any institutional appearance. Buildings are not recognizable by any distinctive outer markings, and are not distinguishable from the surrounding private homes. The furnishings are non-institutional in nature, and the boys' rooms are decorated in accordance with the individual taste of the occupant. Attempts are made to provide as home-like an environment as possible.

Juvenile Delinquency Prevention

Ocean Tides expanded its services in 1979 through the creation of a nonresidential juvenile diversion program. The service is designed to reduce juvenile delinquency through the diversion of juveniles who have committed minor offenses, from official court processing. Children so diverted will instead receive necessary social services within the community. Anticipated advantages of the diversion program include reduced stigmatization, early treatment, and avoidance of the trauma of formal court processing. Furthermore, it is believed that effective diversion may prevent the acquisition of deviant attitudes and criminal skills by limiting the degree of co-mingling between the child and the more experienced delinquent.

Unlike other Ocean Tide programs, the diversion program is open to children of both sexes up to the age of 18, who are charged with delinquent behavior. Treatment techniques within the program are carefully structured to provide an intensive involvement of the child over a 16-week period. Both individual and group counseling are utilized in complementary fashion, with emphasis placed on total family involvement throughout the treatment process. Parents, therefore, participate in parent group meetings and parent/child interaction is incorporated through mandatory family meetings. By design, the target of treatment is the family as a whole. The treatment component of the program is structured so as to provide, as a minimum, and subject to individual case needs:

- 5 parent group meetings;
- 5 peer group meetings;
- 4 family meetings;
- 6 individual meetings for the child.

¹⁴ Grant Proposal, op. cit., Section 1.

The program is currently limited to children residing in Kent County, and who have been brought before the family court. Referrals are made at the direction of a family court judge when it is believed that diversion and community treatment would be the more appropriate response. Resource limitations preclude acceptance of non-court referrals, although in response to requests from the community, an expansion of services is anticipated. Both the need for such a program and judicial acceptance was demonstrated during 1980, the first full year of program operation, with 120 children referred for services.

Summary

The Ocean Tides Residential Education Program provides a comprehensive network of services for juveniles, including a residential center, group homes, and an aftercare program. A juvenile delinquency diversion program was recently added, designed to

screen youngsters out of the juvenile justice system and substitute community-based services.

A unique aspect of the program is that all residents of the Narragansett Center are boys who have been transferred into the program from the Rhode Island State Training School. In effect, Ocean Tides services the more difficult juvenile delinquents: Those whose behavior was deemed by the court to be so serious as to warrant the maximum degree of juvenile custodial care. In this regard the Ocean Tides program can claim a significant degree of success, for it has demonstrated that a number of delinquents, considered serious enough behavior problems as to require confinement to the state training school system, can be treated in less restrictive settings. If the Ocean Tides experience can be replicated in other voluntary residential centers, the numbers of juveniles remanded to state schools may be significantly reduced.

END