

EDMONTON WELFARE COUNCIL
YOUTH SERVICES DIVISION

SUB-COMMITTEE ON JUVENILE COURT
REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE ON JUVENILE CORRECTIONS

As a sub-committee of the total group, we have considered the Juvenile Court and its attendant services. We have attempted to ascertain present lacks in the process of dealing with juveniles appearing in Edmonton Juvenile Court, and we have attempted to suggest areas that should be examined with a view to making changes that would improve the effectiveness of the Court.

Staffing is a primary consideration in all aspects of service to the Juvenile Court. It will be noted that in addition to the separate heading Probation Staff, references are also made to staffing under several of the other headings.

- I. Diagnosis - An accurate assessment of each Juvenile and his family coming before the Court, assists the Judge in understanding the situation with which he must deal.

At present, the majority of these evaluations are made by the probation social workers with the availability of consultation from a supervisor. Where the social worker or the Judge believes it advisable to have a psychiatric opinion, referrals are made to the Provincial Guidance Clinic or the Alberta Hospital. Where it seems that psychological testing is necessary in order to gain proper understanding, referrals may be made to the Pupil Personnel Service of either school board, or to the Guidance Clinic. If any social agency or clinical team, or psychiatrist, has knowledge of a family, permission for release of information is obtained from the parents, and the resource involved is used to assist the Court's understanding of the juvenile and his family.

To the degree that treatment is dependent upon accurate and full understanding, it is thought desirable to make more liberal use of psychological and psychiatric services.

There are in the neighborhood of 500 juveniles per year appearing in Juvenile Court for the first time. Of these, 50% to 60% receive a period of probation. The volume appears sufficient to merit the investigation and planning of policy which would be aimed at ensuring the availability of proper diagnostic service.

The psychological and psychiatric resources presently accepting referrals of juveniles appearing before the Court, are already overtaxed by other referral sources. Increased use of such resources would require expansion on their part in order to meet the need.

The City Welfare Department provides several social services, (Family Court Counselling, Child Protection Services, Social Assistance, and Juvenile Probation) for city residents under one administration. This arrangement allows for the sharing of files and facilitates communication. A study of a few years ago showed that at that time, more than one-third of the Department's total clientele received more than one of the services of the Department. In the interest of the best possible communication, it may be advisable that staff providing psychological and psychiatric services for people appearing in Juvenile Court, should be responsible to this same administration.

The recommendation of the sub-committee is: that the Juvenile Court requires more readily accessible psychological and psychiatric services for diagnostic purposes. The service should be provided by permanent staff retained for this purpose under the administration of the City Welfare Department. Staff for such a unit should include as a minimum, a clinical psychologist, and psychiatric consultation as required.

- II. Treatment - It is recognized that treatment is interrelated with diagnosis. However, it merits a separate category. Often the misconception seems to occur that a correct and complete diagnosis ensures that the client will automatically be helped. There must be more emphasis on treatment services.

Perhaps one reason treatment seems to be less readily obtained than diagnosis is because of the large number of diverse facilities required for an adequate treatment program.

A few mandatory components of a dynamic treatment program attendant to the Juvenile Court are: Probation services offered by skilled case-workers and group workers, neighborhood houses, foster homes, group homes, and closed treatment centres.

Apart from recognizing the necessity of skilled treatment staff, and the fact that delinquency must be approached on many sides by many people, the sub-committee believe that we have insufficient knowledge to make concrete recommendations.

III. Probation Staff - There is concern about the large turnover in staff of probation workers. Such turnover must severely limit the development and effectiveness of treatment techniques. Serious and imaginative consideration must be given to policies respecting staff. Salaries and size of caseloads are two of the more obvious factors involved. It is recommended that every effort needs to be made to recruit and hold qualified, skilled staff.

IV. Statistics - The total treatment program should undergo constant re-evaluating and reshaping. For this purpose it is important to establish a central coordinated unit to keep a comprehensive statistics file of records and information on Juveniles.

Comprehensive statistics could reasonably be expected to describe: the type of offences, where the juveniles come from, something of their living circumstances, and something about the juveniles themselves. Such information would help to distinguish who it is the Court is attempting to serve, and what it is the Court must help resolve. Trends could be determined which would assist planning.

Depending on what such statistics revealed, it may be that consideration should be given to having various specialists available: e.g., a credit and budget consultant, homemaker, job placement officer, and volunteer, are a few possibilities.

The importance of gaining and using the information that could be so gleaned indicates the need for research staff to be responsible for this area.

A second important function of comprehensive statistics is as an aid to

evaluating the various court dispositions, methods of treatment, and police techniques.

- V. Communication & Coordination - The Juvenile Investigation Branch of the City Police, the Juvenile Court, and the City Welfare staff, need to have close communication, and a smooth coordination of their efforts. Otherwise, the differing frame of reference for each of these institutions can act as a barrier among them.

A greater amount of personal contact would help break down any barrier. Suggestions arose such as having a social worker attached to the Juvenile Investigation Branch, having the Police Court worker and/or probation intake worker housed at the Court, having probation workers make more use of the Police as an informal as well as formal source of information.

The monthly joint meeting held with Juvenile Court, City Police, and City and Provincial Welfare representation, were considered a good idea. It is recommended that these meetings should be encouraged and perhaps expanded if feasible.

It is further recommended that the in-service training of both Police and Welfare staff should include inter-departmental lectures and field experience.

Communication and coordination among Police, Court, and Probation workers is important for consistent and just treatment of juveniles. This matter should receive renewed attention, appreciation, and effort by the parties concerned.

- VI. Follow-Up on Cases not Charged - Inasmuch as the great majority of juveniles appearing in Juvenile Court for the first time have previously been warned by the Police, the question arises: Is enough being done to offer service, following the Juvenile's first brush with the law?

The present arrangement is that the Police forward to the City Welfare Department a copy of their reports which give the details of their investigation. This they do regardless of whether they have charged the juvenile or not. Where charges are not laid, the report comes to the intake supervisor and then to an intake worker, who telephones or

writes a letter, offering counselling services. From the time of the Police investigation until the time the letter is received, one week may elapse. Most people do not respond to this offer of help.

In view of the general shift toward prevention, it seems in order to examine closely the possibility of getting needed help to more families earlier.

Apparently some communities in the United States have experienced good results with having a social worker on duty with the Police. The usual arrangement is that this person is intended to be available to go with the Police on calls involving family trouble. Such calls are most often a welfare matter, rather than a Police matter, and the social worker can offer assistance right at the time of crisis.

It is recommended that a social worker of the Department of City Welfare be assigned to the Police Department to advise families immediately subsequent to police investigation, and to coordinate efforts of the Welfare and the Police.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Juvenile Court requires more readily accessible psychological and psychiatric services for diagnostic purposes, and that the services should be provided by permanent staff retained for this purpose under the administration of the City Welfare Department.
2. That every effort be made to develop staff policies that would attract and hold qualified, skilled staff.
3. That research for statistics be established in our community.
4. That the monthly joint meetings held with Juvenile Court, City Police and City and Provincial Welfare representation, be encouraged and expanded.
5. That the in-service training of both Police and Welfare staff include inter-departmental lectures and field experiences.

6. That a social worker of the Department of City Welfare be assigned to the Police Department to advise families immediately subsequent to Police investigation, and to coordinate efforts of the Welfare and the Police.

D. Peirce

April 12, 1966
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