

TWO REPORTS

Outreach! - Ruth Hess
and
Street Children - Strathcona - Max Plater

power 3b

OUTREACH!

August 29th, 1973

By Ruth Hess

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OUTREACH

This report encompasses my thoughts concerning Outreach, as well as the immediate area of which it is a part. I deal with two distinct but linked issues:

- I. A critique of Outreach
- II. Recommendations for C.A.S. involvement in that part of Strathcona which I became familiar with.

I. Critique of Outreach

I have now been working with Outreach for three months. During this period of time, I have been both a participant and an observer of the project. Like the other workers, I have been involved in 'doing my own thing', in establishing my own goals and creating my own job. I have learned a great deal about the street scene and I have learned from some of the other workers about ways of relating to these kids and to the scene. However, at no point did I feel that I was part of a close team. My identification with Outreach served one purpose in that it provided me with a home base from which to work; it helped me to identify the kids and it helped them to identify me. The Outreach staff could be best described as an amorphous team.

Some of the workers may attribute this analysis of Outreach staff to the fact that I am a social worker and, therefore, somewhat of an outsider. This is true in relation to myself and the other seconded social worker, but the rest of Outreach does not appear like a close team either. My experience with meetings has been excruciatingly frustrating. They never start punctually and generally do not last very long. Discussion in depth is rare. When questioned about this lack of discussion, the more verbal staff will attribute it to the nonverbal nature of the staff and to the limited attention span of the kids-turned-staff. Although true, this does not account for the total picture. Lack of strong leadership, lack of accountability for work done and most important; a lack of direction or goal, I believe, are most responsible for this state of affairs.

Outreach appears to be lacking a consistent goal or philosophy of operation. Theoretically the goal is, I believe, to present the kids with alternatives to the self-destructive life styles which they are living and to instill in them a sense of pride and self worth. That sounds awfully nice but, the paths to this goal nor the goal itself are quite so clear. Far too often, Outreach appeared to be more of a haven for protecting the kids from consequences of their actions rather than as a direction setter. This was especially true with the crash pad program which has since been discontinued.

In order to continue existing, Outreach needs the support of established agencies. However it is difficult for them to support such a program with such a vague set of goals. Representatives from these agencies can only judge the program from what is most visible to them and that is the newspaper, The Resistance, and the policies which the paper and its proponents follow. It is important for the Outreach project to come up with a precise policy statement or the equivalent thereof, by which others can judge them and give them support or not.

Outreach has a history of evictions from their rented premises because of vandalism. I acknowledge the fact that the kids are very difficult to work with. I also believe that the vandalism and other destructive behaviour could be somewhat controlled, at least on Outreach premises, if the workers were willing to set limits. Most of the workers are uncomfortable in the role of limit setter, apparently fearing that this role would alienate the kids from them. I strongly disagree with this philosophy. Outreach's clientele are children and as such they need adults to set limits for them until they are able to set their own controls. Setting limits is an especially difficult task for the 'kids-turned-staff'. I agree with the realization that some of the workers have come to, that hiring kids has not proved to be a good idea. It places the kids in a position of having to be authority figures amongst their peers or it provides them with an easy income. Outreach is presently involved in re-evaluating this practice.

up services to the group homes I described. As I am writing this, I am realizing the need for several social workers - perhaps a team?

4. Since there are many kids in the area who are not being served by one of these projects and since projects seem to have a tendency to attract a set group of kids; C.A.S. could be involved in sponsoring other similar projects.

5. Since the Strathcona area is heavily populated with Chinese residents and native Indian residents as well as 'poor whites', it would be helpful to have Chinese and native Indian social workers and community workers in this area.

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STREET CHILDREN - STRATHCONA

July 31st, 1973

By Max Plater

STREET CHILDREN - STRATHCONA

This report applies only to the group of street kids who are part of the non-Chinese Strathcona population. ALL youths in this category are school drop-outs having usually completed grades seven or eight. This is not to suggest that all school drop-outs are street kids but those young people who are least motivated and bored end up roaming the streets. This is the group which should be of most concern to those interested in mental health.

Life On The Street

Street kids can usually be found in the Main and Hastings area known as 'the drag'. Most of these young people are between the ages of 15 - 19, but some are younger. They frequent the pool halls and cafes of this area with their friends as there is 'nothing else to do'. For many, this is the most exciting thing they can think of. Excitement in many forms is usually close at hand. There are usually some people being searched or arrested by the police. There are fights among some of the old drunks. There is a party somewhere or cheap drugs. Somebody suggests a B and E. The average street kid does not go to bed until 3 - 4 a.m.! They usually sleep all day and are ready to go downtown again when they get up at supper time - if they have a place to stay.

The most common forms of delinquency these young people become involved in are petty thefts, breaking and entering, car theft, shoplifting, muggings, and purse snatching. Delinquent acts are seldom premeditated and most occur under the influence of alcohol, drugs or solvents. Crime and drug use are a means of relieving boredom, generating excitement and gaining prestige among peers. Drugs of various kinds are used commonly.

Most street kids come from a background of broken homes. 70 - 80% are native Indians and the rest are Caucasian. A large number of these young people have been in care all their lives and have been through a succession of foster homes and group homes. Others have been taken into care after coming to the courts because of repeated delinquency. Still others are unknown to the child

care agencies.

Due to an emotionally impoverished background, friends are of paramount importance. Most will not do any thing or go anywhere without their friends. The attention span of most street kids is very short as they are hyperactive. Rock music, violent movies, camping, a few sports, alcohol, solvents and drugs are the sum total of the continuing interests of many. These young people are often depressed and suicide attempts are common.

For many, this way of life will inevitably result in prison sentences, hospitalization, emotional breakdowns, alcoholism and heroin addiction. Most of this illegal and self-destructive behaviour is the expression of young people for whom life is so painful that this lifestyle is the only way they can find minimal happiness. It is most distinctly a problem of mental health.

Remedial Work

Once a child has become a street kid, he or she is already quite disturbed. At this point, remedial work is necessary and prevention is too late.

A community youth worker concerned primarily with mental health could be of tremendous value in developing remedial programs for street kids and preventive programs for younger kids. A good relationship with child care agencies would be essential if viable programs are to be developed. Counselling, agency referrals and documentation of problems from the standpoint of mental health would all be important facets of this kind of job. Some time would have to be spent on the street if the worker is to understand the emotional functions of street life.

Recommendations

In addition to treatment and follow-up, more preventive action is needed in a number of areas:

1. More group home facilities need to be established. Homes composed entirely of street kids would probably be a more effective means of reaching them. A street kid usually feels threatened and lonely when placed in a group home where he or she is the only street kid and the

2. For young people who are exceptionally depressed and attempt suicide, special facilities are needed where the kids can be kept behind lock and key for their own protection and for assessment.
3. New and varied placement facilities are needed for the hyperactive and unmotivated drop-out.
4. Remedial education programs are needed for disturbed young people.
5. Locally based job counselling and employment services are badly needed. Special programs are needed in order to teach young drop-outs how to function within a regular work situation.
6. More recreational programs are needed for youth on evenings and especially weekends.
7. More social services need to be available on weekends and at night. For the average street kid, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. are sleeping hours. A Social worker or probation officer is often needed at night or on weekends.
8. More effective means need to be found for detecting the neglected child at an early age, before a lot of emotional damage has occurred.
9. An alternative to residency in McLean and Raymur housing projects needs to be found for single parent families. Those families experiencing especially great problems should have first choice in new housing programs built by the government.

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