

INDIVIDUAL CASEWORK IN JUVENILE JUSTICE CENTRES

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SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN NOVEMBER 1991, THE OFFICE OF JUVENILE Justice¹ has moved towards implementing a program of rehabilitation in juvenile justice (detention) centres. Appendix 1 summarises the various educational, vocational, recreational and skills programs developed in conjunction with the development and implementation of casework at Mount Penang during 1992.

The concept of casework not only leads to the notion of providing services to each individual according to his or her identified needs, it also provides a better approach to the management of juveniles in custody. It provides youth workers with the opportunity to develop insight into the problems experienced by juvenile offenders and the probability that they will learn to communicate with young detainees in a much more effective way. The relationships that develop from appropriate levels of acceptance and empathic understanding can lead to a much more effective control in juvenile justice centres. The option described here is sometimes referred to as a "soft option" yet it is probably the most demanding option for juveniles, because it requires personal commitment and direct involvement from them.

There are many people working with juveniles who lack understanding of what might be achieved using a casework approach to the management of juveniles in custody. For example, the use of casework as a management tool by youth workers requires an understanding of human development, communication and relationships. Because of their lack of understanding, youth workers sometimes have difficulties with the introduction of casework as a legitimate approach to managing juveniles. To overcome this problem a very intensive staff training program was implemented before casework was introduced.

The introduction of casework has also led to the development of a professional services team. This resulted from the coordination of all the existing professional services such as:

- psychological services;

¹. Office of Juvenile Justice became Department of Juvenile Justice in September 1993.

- health care services nursing;
- alcohol and other drug counselling;
- casework services;
- living and social skills trainers.

This professional services team takes a very active role in the guidance and supervision of casework services.

The introduction of casework services has also meant that each young person admitted to Mount Penang has benefited from an individual plan, based on identified need, for training and development during the period of detention, and beyond to his or her eventual return to the community. For many young people, this has been the first time in their lives that authorities have focused on the difficulties they were experiencing, or identified the specific needs to be met.

The introduction of casework services at Mount Penang has specifically included the development of a casework services team as part of the overall professional services approach, under the supervision of the Director of Psychological Services. The casework services team includes:

- one casework manager;
- five casework service officers.

In addition, each youth worker is allocated responsibility for the casework planning for a number of juveniles. This ensures that each detainee from the time of admission, is under the supervision of a key worker who is referred to as the juvenile's caseworker.

Each casework services officer is in charge of an accommodation unit which houses up to 30 young people and is responsible for the supervision of six youth workers carrying out casework duties including the development of each juvenile's casework plan.

Staff Training

To support the introduction of casework at Mount Penang, a review of the staffing structure was undertaken and a new model of management developed.

The review also highlighted a need for the introduction of structured staff training in casework management. Each youth worker was provided with extensive training and tuition in casework assessment, casework planning and implementation.

In addition, TAFE and the Department of Juvenile Justice introduced a tertiary study course in youth work, which is attended by 56 of the 70 youth workers currently at Mount Penang. This study program will lead eventually to a Diploma in Youth Work.

Training in a variety of areas relating to the appropriate management of young people in juvenile justice centres was provided for all staff. Specific "train the trainer" courses were offered to the living skills trainers, social skills trainers and caseworkers. Casework services officers were provided with advanced training in assessment, planning and implementation processes.

Casework Supervision

A model of supervision for casework services was developed to ensure the maximum services to persons in detention were maintained.

Following admission and preliminary assessment, each young person is assigned to an accommodation unit. The unit team leader appoints a youth worker as the caseworker who is then responsible for the initiation of the needs assessment and the development of the casework plan in conjunction with the casework services officers.

Each caseworker has a formal supervised session with the casework services officer in matters of casework at least once each week, and at other times as the need for advice arises. Casework services officers attend weekly meetings with the manager of casework services. The casework supervision session each week requires that all casework conducted during the preceding week be discussed in some detail, and that all transactions are appropriately recorded on the casework file. This is an essential part of the casework supervision process. It gives a clear indication of the rate of casework progress for each juvenile, and tends to highlight any difficulties that are being experienced.

Further, an opportunity to discuss individual cases is provided at the professional services meeting each week. The professional services forum is also used to discuss potential suicide risks and the critical incident counselling process is put in place should this be considered necessary.

An additional check of the casework program takes place each month when the Unit Administration is required to report on progress at a formal supervision session. This action ensures that casework for each juvenile is completed and kept up to date. Further, it reinforces the process of accountability for each officer involved in the delivery of casework services.

The process of supervision described above ensures that each juvenile admitted to Mount Penang receives the best possible care and attention whilst in custody. Further, it ensures that casework planning occurs for each juvenile in a highly professional manner.

Information Gathering

Casework planning commences the day the juvenile is admitted. During the admission and induction process, information is collected for the development of an individual's casework plan.

- The juvenile is interviewed by the duty administrative officer and a determination is made concerning which dormitory would best suit his² individual needs.
- The admissions officer completes the induction procedure, collecting information about the family, including family dynamics; the young person's educational history; and any prior contact with the juvenile justice system. Parents/guardians are contacted and advised that the juvenile is in custody. In the case of Aboriginal boys, the relevant Aboriginal Legal Services and liaison officers are contacted. Those people are also advised that they are welcome to make a contribution to the young person's casework plan. A list of critical dates is prepared. This list outlines dates when the juvenile will be eligible for inclusion in community based activities, when leave will become available and so on. The induction process includes the completion of questionnaires about the use of alcohol and other drugs. This questionnaire is processed for follow up by the alcohol and other drugs counsellor.
- Within 24 hours of admission, the resident psychologist is expected to interview the juvenile for the purpose of compiling a psychological screening report. This report provides information on intelligence, literacy skills, social skills and personality. The report is expected to include recommendations concerning urgent casework intervention that might be required.
- Following admission, each juvenile undergoes a preliminary medical assessment. Recommendations from this are included in the casework plan.
- The juvenile is then assigned to an accommodation unit, introduced to the staff and provisions are made for appropriate introduction to other juveniles.

Developing the Plan

To ascertain and meet the individual needs of detained juveniles extensive assessments are made, as mentioned above. Other contributors towards the development of the casework plans include the Juvenile Justice Officer (Community) who supervised the adolescent during the court proceeding, family members, and significant others. Reports from welfare agencies are also referred to. The young person makes a major contribution in terms of the details of the plan: those things that he considers important; setting aims and objectives to be achieved during the period of detention; establishing priorities for the implementation of the casework plan; and, taking action on critical issues. The case plan includes information on:

². Mt. Penang has male clients only.

- future accommodation needs, social needs and legal needs;
- factors which will affect the juveniles whilst in custody: how they are likely to fit into the group to which they have been assigned; and how they will be affected by being in detention;
- current emotional needs, including indicators of stability or instability;
- educational, vocational, recreational and physical health needs.

Other factors considered before proceeding include the role of the caseworker in developing the plan. Casework planning is essentially a subjective event. It is difficult, if not impossible, to prevent our own personal characteristics from at times clouding our views of juvenile offenders whose criminal activities we might find offensive. While this may seem to be a statement of the obvious, it is important that we keep in mind that at every stage of developing the case plan, this subjective influence is at work.

It is also important to note that during the data collection interviews, the caseworker's personality and background can and will determine what he/she sees; what he/she overlooks and how he/she perceives the juvenile's predicament and, importantly, how the juvenile responds. So even during the early stage of collecting the demographic data on admission, the information about the juvenile can be consciously or unconsciously selected, pruned and coloured. Because of the probability of unconscious bias occurring, it is necessary to ensure that intensive staff training is provided to help restrict if not eradicate the effect of negative bias. Further, the introduction of training for intensive casework supervision will also help keep this to a minimum.

In preparing a casework plan, further selection occurs. The caseworker selects from all the information available, that which fits the background for which that person professes some understanding, and sifts away information that is considered unnecessary. To a significant degree, this sifting, selecting and interpreting is influenced by the caseworker's interpretation of human behaviour. It is important to point out that although the caseworker's theory may not be blatantly apparent, he/she still has a theory and interprets the juvenile offender's predicament from that point of view. As noted above, constant monitoring and evaluation of case plans will help keep such selective interpretations of casework information to a minimum.

The first step in developing the casework plan is to establish aims and objectives for the juvenile during the period of detention. The plan should take into account factors which could restrict the implementation of any part of the plan. For example, internal planning should take account of tasks which can be accomplished by involvement in individual unit programs. These tasks include any skills training, and in particular, educational training, vocational training, social and living skills training, and recreational skills training.

There are some tasks and activities which require approval for involvement in community-based activities. In such cases the juvenile will be expected to move in and out of the community, and to engage in activities

which will contribute to the achievement of his aims and objectives. This part of the plan should be programmed for implementation in the middle or late stages of the juvenile's period in detention. For example, job seeking or work experience is only to be planned for when the juvenile has been approved to go on leave into the community.

Implementation

Casework plans should be both practical and possible. For example, it would be pointless to include long-term counselling in a casework plan if the young person is only going to be at Mount Penang for a few weeks. In fact, all actions included in the casework plan should be considered from the point of view of implementation.

Needs which are critical or life saving should be given priority for action. For example, if a young person is to see a doctor, this should be done in the early stages. Similarly, suicidal or self-harm tendencies clearly require immediate attention and intervention.

Needs which are identified and included in the casework plan should be achievable within the period which the young person will be at the Centre. Young people on remand will have specific needs which must be met within the period of remand. In many cases, this could be limited to fourteen or twenty-eight days. In any event, casework for remanded children should be undertaken from the day of admission.

The casework for remand children should culminate in the preparation of a shelter report to the juvenile justice community officers.

Implementation of casework plans is an ongoing process which requires that stages or objectives are set at regular intervals. These intervals should coincide with the weekly supervision sessions, but need not depend on these sessions. Action which is urgent should be taken as soon as possible. In all cases, a record of both the action required and action to be taken should be committed to the young person's casework file. This action of file development and maintenance is an essential part of the Mount Penang casework process, and is subject to regular review as described above.

Conclusion

The development of a casework model in juvenile justice centres has provided youth workers and other staff with a central focus, one that draws together all aspects of care and rehabilitation for detainees. The introduction of casework services has resulted in some difficulties for the management of juvenile justice centres. Some staff are entrenched in their attitudes and practices. Now they are being asked to apply professional principles to the management of juveniles in custody.

However, the Department of Juvenile Justice in New South Wales, has a commitment to the fundamental task—that of rehabilitation and caring for juveniles in custody. The development of an individual casework approach has created a high level of awareness of the need for all staff to be

appropriately trained if the Department aim is to be realised. The individual casework model is designed to:

- meet the specific needs of juveniles as identified by the assessment process;
- link both custodial and community based services and maintain contact with the juveniles through the whole of the period of supervision by the Department;
- promote a holistic view of the detainees (that is, all aspects of their lives are assessed and major difficulties identified);
- improve the match between existing services, user needs and staff expertise through extensive staff training and considerable extensions to available programs. Staff accountability and responsibility for each detainee and his or her rehabilitation needs are made clear;
- help detainees feel empowered, by allowing them a significant input into the case planning process.

Individual casework is a function by which juvenile justice centres can manage and integrate all the programs and services that assist the Department in meeting its statutory obligations.

APPENDIX 1

Mount Penang Programs¾ Educational, Vocational, Recreational and Social Skills 1992

Mount Penang currently has a school education campus which caters for approximately one-third of all young persons admitted to Mount Penang. It has a very competent and organised Vocational Training Centre.

The Vocational Training Centre during 1992 offered courses in Apprenticeship and Pre-Employment training in seven separate areas:

- carpentry;
- metalwork;
- printing;
- Fibreglass;
- mechanics;
- painting; and
- upholstery.

Boys were accredited by the awarding of TAFE Certification for the completion of these courses.

Other achievements for the past year of young persons at Mount Penang included:

- 33 School Certificates;
- 2 Higher School Certificates;
- one young person completed his first year at university, through a correspondence program;
- Rover Scouts and Venture Scouts were commenced. There were 29 members. These were run in association with the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme;
- 56 Duke of Edinburgh Awards were gained during the year;
- 80 TAFE Certificates were awarded for the completion of:
 - a) Modules in apprenticeship

b) Pre-employment

c) Completion of specific programs;

- there were 32 Aboriginal boys who completed the Basic Certificate of Numeracy and Literacy;
- a specific program was developed in driver safety training;
- introduction of living skills programs;
- specific living skills for minority ethnic groups such as Vietnamese;
- community based life-saving program;
- riding for the disabled;
- specific Aboriginal programs;
- CABE Basic Numeracy and Literacy Certification;
- the planned establishment of an Aboriginal Culture Centre;
- drug & alcohol counselling and education;
- parenting skills;
- living skills;
- social skills;
- recreational services.