

should be considered a tribute to the farsightedness of the administration of the B.H.O.A. It is our feeling that institutions must give more thought and energy to developing better child care programs based upon a crystallized philosophy. A mental hygiene viewpoint should permeate the institution and be expressed in the environmental setting and in the treatment of each of the children. We should like to see the guidance clinics of the institutions expanded so as to make case-work service available to all children. In most cases additional personnel will be required. This personnel should be qualified through training in an accepted school of social work and by virtue of personality. The next step in the forward march of institutions

should come through greater professionalization of personnel.

With improvements both in program and personnel, there will come a greater recognition and acceptance of the place and function of the institution in a well planned community child care program. The institution should place more stress on preventive aspects in child care and should cooperate with other agencies in programs of prevention. The institution should be a research center and a testing ground for programs of progressive education and child care. It must carry on a program of community interpretation not only in the work which the institution is doing but in all aspects of child development and child health in the community.

### THE INSTITUTION: ITS PLACE AND FUNCTION TODAY

By FRANK J. COHEN

*Lavanburg Corner House, New York, N. Y.*

**T**HE function of the institution in child care has been a much debated subject. For a long while the general trend throughout the country seemed to be in opposition to any kind of institutional placement. I wonder if social workers haven't resisted placing children in institutions more out of their lack of sympathy for the institutional program than from their opposition to group living. If this be the case, then there is certainly a great need for clarification of the purpose and function of the institution in child care. The purpose of this paper is not to recommend building more institutions for child care nor to defend the existence of present institutions, but rather to indicate how institutional residence as a substitute home can be a con-

structive experience for the child. I am not going to discuss so much the advantage of one type of care over another, as try to clarify some of the concepts of institutional child care under the following two headings:

1. Why do children come to an institution and what type of child can best benefit from institutional care?

2. What are some of the factors deserving consideration in institutional child care and what can the institution do to improve their program?

Most of you working in institutions today have come to realize that contrary to the common belief, children placed in institutions are not the normal, adjusted group of children who have to be placed just because of the fact that their homes

have been broken, but rather children who have also become affected by the circumstances which led to separation from their own homes. We can therefore look upon child care institutions as those giving service to problem children. These problems are noted in the cynical attitude towards life, self-centeredness, defeatist attitudes and in identification with radical groups as an expression of defiance of society which is a projection of their dissatisfaction at having been deprived of their own homes. We also know that the percentage of full orphans in institutions represents a negligible number; the largest number have at least one parent living; and a fairly good percentage, both parents living.

To get a general outline of the ideology governing the type of placement selected for a given child I communicated with one of the orphan asylums which has a boarding-out department and got a list of their reasons for the transfer of children from foster homes to the institution. These I found very interesting and illuminating. They form a fairly good statement of why children come to the institution and in a measure represent the function of institutional child care today:

1. Interference of the parent in foster home placement.

2. Children presenting behavior problems with which the average foster mother cannot cope.

3. Children who constantly run away from their foster homes.

4. Children who have been in many foster homes, unable to make an adjustment, showing a great need for a stabilizing environment.

5. The child who has never been able to relate himself to an adult.

6. The child who is in need of group

living and activities.

7. The adolescent rebelling against parental control, needing the impersonal environment where restrictions are a matter of needs of the whole group.

8. The child needing only custodial care.

9. The child joining another sibling making a good adjustment in the institution.

10. Parents definitely requesting institutional placement and indicating a dislike for the foster home.

11. The child placed in the institution awaiting foster home placement, adjusted well, and preferred to remain in the institution.

I have just enumerated eleven reasons as to why children were referred for institutional care by a foster home department. I should like to consider a few pertinent points of view on this problem.

There is a popular belief that you can adjust a child to group living but that does not necessarily mean that you have a child adjusted to the community, where he belongs in normal life. Personally I think this assumption is more theoretical than real. I believe most authorities will agree with me when I say that if you can bring about a wholesome acceptance by the child of the adult in the institution, that his experience has been sufficiently enriched, so that it can be carried over into the community with a fair chance for success. Added to this point is the fact that in bringing about sufficient release of the child in the institution in his daily living, school, and activities, we have succeeded in reducing the tensions and anxieties, all of which are adequate preparations for a satisfactory adjustment in the community at large. Furthermore the fact does remain that institutions are caring for thousands of children who are

being absorbed into the community from year to year and who become useful citizens.

I would like at this time to touch on one point which I know is one that most institutional executives seek to avoid and that is the fact that a great many children are placed in institutions because there are not enough suitable foster homes available. Personally I cannot see why we should want to avoid facing this situation openly. It is a practical one where the institution is fulfilling a definite community need. We cannot control the circumstances which lead to the placement of a child, but we can control our treatment of him while in the institution. How we execute and carry out that responsibility is worthy of review, and what we are doing today towards discharging that responsibility is subject matter worthy of discussion.

Let us in institutional work face the facts frankly. What are some of the major criticisms levelled at institutional child care and why is there so much feeling against placing children in institutions? How is this criticism being met by the institutions? These questions lead me into the second and final topic of my paper and merit your fullest consideration.

With increasing knowledge and technique in the development of professional case work, we are in a far better position today to give intelligent care. Foster home bureaus have shown considerable progress in their work by using trained psychiatric case workers to carry out their program. Just as it is necessary for field workers from foster home bureaus to be so qualified, so is it essential for institutional personnel to be equally qualified. We have experimented with such a program at Lavanburg-Corner House for the

past four years and have found a case-work-group-work program within the institution a very effective one. In our observations of the boys who come under our care at Lavanburg-Corner House, we find that a great percentage of these boys showed evidence of serious behavior deviations in their earlier years of residence within the institution as well as in the foster homes. If these problems are treated at the institution while the child is in the formative stage, then perhaps the need for aftercare service will become greatly reduced. There is no question in my mind that the greatest problem of the aftercare department of any institution in child care today is that of coping with the problems of those children who left the institution unprepared to assume an independent status in the community because of their maladjustment.

The authoritarian principle which ruled in institutions for a good many years has been considerably modified. Perhaps it may be in need of still greater modification. Just as it is necessary, in providing homes for children, to seek out foster parents who can be understanding of the problems of the children who come under their care, so is it essential for an institution to keep this requisite in mind in formulating its program. We must not content ourselves with the fact that we are providing food, clothing, and shelter for the child and in this way are discharging our responsibility. A careful study of each child should be required upon admission to the institution. Whatever information is lacking upon admission should be augmented after the child has come into the institution, so that careful planning may be carried out accordingly.

Our concepts of discipline have to be carefully thought through. We must give

a great deal more thought to the difference between the application of limitation and that of punishment. While one may imply the other, nevertheless punishment, however justified, may appear severe to the child, while on the other hand, limitation with a sense of justice has the reverse effect. The feelings and interest of a child are oftentimes lost because of the hundreds of children requiring our attention. Yet it need not be so. It is not enough for any institution to set itself up as the sole force in determining a child's future interest. It is true that children do not always know what they want; and we cannot always expect them to know. Yet it is equally true that if they were given a sense of participation as well as direction, their acceptance of their particular situation would be received with greater approval. What is more important than the actual consideration is the sense of justice which the child must feel. In a measure we can understand why the child may feel deprived of that sense of justice in living through the experiences that led to separation from his home. This is a critical period in a child's life, when he must look upon the world as a cold, friendless place in which to live. Our job should be to change that concept. It must permeate the entire institution. The child must feel it in contact with the porter as well as with the counsellor. What I am saying about institutional child care can well apply to any kind of foster home care. Whatever deficiency can be found in one type of care will be found in the other. The individualized attention which a child may receive from a worker through his placement in a foster home can be equally well sustained in the institution.

Because of the mores of institutional care, we have grown to accept rigid rou-

tines which apply to the child's total living. While to a certain degree routines are necessities in group living as well as in foster home living, they nevertheless can be modified to the degree where the child will feel a sense of freedom within his limitations. We must learn to minimize our protective attitudes and permit the children a greater sense of participation in the formulation of and in the carrying out of the institutional program. Because of the very fact that we have a controlled situation, we can build independence through the interactions within the institution proper through the development of initiative and leadership; not through authoritarian principles, but rather through stimulation so essential in any well organized setting.

Most of the children who come under our care are from marginal homes. By and large they have been deprived of the satisfactory love elements so essential to their emotional growth. As a compensating medium they demand of us material things. It is the constant satisfying of these demands which makes for the dependency. This dependency results not so much from satisfying the material needs but from the fact that it becomes tied up with the substitute love satisfaction. We must therefore strive to overcome or at least minimize its effect by creating an environment where the child may get love satisfactions through personal contact. Because of the many types of personality in an institutional setting, the child has some choice in selecting the person best adapted to his needs.

There is a difference between so-called mass living and group living. Regardless of the number of children who come under the guidance of any one institution, we can reduce the mass to groups within the institution. We can succeed in break-

ing down the loss of an attachment which a child cannot develop for a large mass but which he can succeed in doing in relation to a smaller group. This is another major criticism levelled at institutional child care. It is true that the child does not have a father or mother substitute in the institution that he may find in his own home or in a foster home. It is also equally true that a child may find such substitutes in the personnel of an institution properly staffed and functioning under a carefully planned ideology of treatment. Such a procedure requires an educational program for the personnel themselves. We must develop a greater amount of intra-mural activities in the institution where the child may get the sense of belonging to a group and where substitute love satisfactions may be derived. Such programs have to be carefully conceived and thoughtfully carried out. In this way we can reduce the regimentation effects of mass living and action.

While on the subject of regimentation, I would like to urge that when boys from the institutions are attending school, there ought to be a definite effort made not to distinguish them from the rest of the group. Because of the institution's interest in the boy, the schools, perhaps unwittingly, single them out both as being from the institution and in the threats made because of misbehavior to report them to the institutional authorities. It is factors of this kind which deserve the fullest consideration on the part of the institution to offset any such occurrences. Essentially these children already have the feeling of difference and a sense of inferiority. It should not be increased. What has been said about school should apply to all community contacts.

In conclusion I would like to suggest

the following factors for consideration in an institutional child care set-up:

1. Selective intake policy.

I think there ought to be a well defined policy on the part of the institution to determine the service it can render and how it applies to a given child. There is a great tendency to dump certain types of children into the institution who do not and cannot fit into any kind of average institutional child care program. As a result these children do not profit by their experience in the institution and at the same time interfere with the work of the other children.

2. Adequately trained personnel.

The time has come when all institutions must recognize the need for trained psychiatric case workers within the institution to carry on intensive work with those children who show a need for intensive care. There is also a need for a consultant to the staff. This consultant should be a person experienced in the professional field of social work and especially trained in the problems of children.

3. Breaking down of large dormitories and dining rooms.

I have already touched on this point when I indicated the need for breaking down the work of the institution into smaller groups.

4. Carefully worked out ideology in the handling of discipline.

I think we will all agree that corporal punishment or any similar form of punishment should be definitely abolished. In reference to this point, I was asked by one of my colleagues whether it wasn't an accepted fact that a child may warrant a spanking by his mother and benefit from it in his growing-up process. I wouldn't dispute the point but rather indicate that there is a difference in the love relation-

ship between a child and his mother than can be true in a substitute setting. Furthermore I believe it tends to intensify the child's resentment towards society as a punishing medium which takes on form from the time he is forced to leave his own home. Where a child shows serious deviations in behavior, then such a child should be referred to a trained worker.

5. Record keeping.

I realize that record keeping is an expensive item. It can become bulky and burdensome and it can also be of inestimable value in the efficient carrying out of our work.

I would therefore suggest that all records shall have at least: a. full intake statement not only giving the historical background of the child and his family, but including a full statement of the thinking that went into the reasons for the referral of the child to the institution; b. medical reports containing full explanation of the findings by the physician, indicating how any physical finding will affect the child's social adaptation; c. psychometric reports which indicate the participation of the child at the time and explain whatever recommendations are made; (Undoubtedly many of you have seen reports where recommendations are made for one kind of schooling or another with no basic reason as to why the recommendations were made, and then in discussion with the child find out that he had no knowledge of why he was told to pursue a given course in educational or vocational training other than the fact that he was ordered to do so. It is important to give the child a sense of participation, rather than the rule of authority which he or she grows to expect and resent.); d. school records including full statements of the contacts with the

schools, showing the process of scholastic achievement; e. chronological record of interviews. If the boy has been reported for infraction of house rules, we should have a statement of the discussion with the boy and his attitude, and what action was taken.

6. Intra-mural activities.

I consider this one of the most important phases of institutional living. It is one way of overcoming the effects of mass living and regimentation and a very effective way of giving the child a sense of belonging; of giving him a sense of loyalty and the means whereby he can become attached to groups and to individuals within the group.

7. Educational program for personnel.

This phase of our work has probably been more neglected than any other. An educational program properly conceived and presented to the staff for discussion periodically must result in a more unified understanding of the ideology of the institution and its reasons for seeking to effect a sympathetic and understanding approach to the children.

As a final word to my paper, I would like to make an appeal that we all regard the placement of the child away from the home, whether it be in the institution or in a foster home, as having a single purpose, the happy development of the child. The two phases of placement should operate from a single unit under the guidance of trained and skilled workers. There is no reason for drawing a line of cleavage between the work of the institution and the foster home bureaus. If properly carried out, it should result in a greater interplay in children's being referred from the institutions to foster homes and from foster homes to institutions, depending upon the needs of the child at the given time.