

THE CASEWORK CONSULTANT IN CAMP

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FOR some years now many camps operated by social agencies or having close relationships to such agencies have made extensive use of the caseworker in camp. Some (for example, Camp Poyntelle, Wel-Met Camps, Community Service Society Camps, to name but a few) use caseworkers as unit leaders.

The helpfulness of the caseworker in these camps has been so clearly demonstrated that suggestions have appeared in the professional literature that casework services could play an important role in private and organizational camps which have no direct casework contacts available to them. The point has been made that the caseworker has an important contribution to make even in the camp handling only untroubled, "normal" children.^{1, 2, 3}

In 1950 this writer described how the caseworker could be helpful in teaching and supervising counselors.⁴ Bernice

Orchard has elaborated on how the caseworker can function in a consultant capacity.⁵ What I would like to do now is describe in some detail how the part-time consultant can be utilized by private and non-casework agency camps. For the past three years I have served in the capacity of consultant to 3 different children's camps on a part-time basis: Camp Teko (a private day camp operated by Temple Israel in Minneapolis), Camp Yomin (a day camp run by the Emanuel Cohen Center), and Council Camp (a sleep-away camp operated by the Jewish Camping Association of Minneapolis).⁶

As camp consultant there were three main areas in which service seemed appropriate. These areas (staff training, problem behavior, and staff relationships) all had an important bearing on the experiences of all the children at camp.

Staff Training

Any camp director can unhappily testify to the fact that counselor recruiting is a difficult problem. Finding

¹ Adelaide Z. Palumbo, "Social Casework and the Child Camper," *The Child*, Vol. XVII, No. 9, 1953, pp. 144-147.

² Herman D. Stein, "The Case Worker in a Children's Camp," *The Family*, Vol. XXIV, No. 5, 1943, pp. 163-70.

³ Herman D. Stein, "Case Work and Camping," *The Family*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2, 1945, pp. 61-66.

⁴ B. Robert Berg, "Transference and the Camp Counselor," *Social Casework*, Vol. XXXI, No. 5, 1950.

⁵ Bernice Orchard, "Casework-Group Work Collaboration in a Camp," *Social Casework*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 5, 1956, pp. 226-232.

⁶ These services are part of a program of consultation services given by JFCS of Minneapolis, which also acts as consultant to 5 nursery schools and a children's institution.

mature staff, especially males, is a constant struggle. This is particularly so today with the draft continuing, and with the summertime opportunities greater than ever for earning generous salaries. Camps seldom can offer real competition in the money market.

In consequence, the camp staff is often less mature than one would like. Many of the counselors are inexperienced, and more than that, are afraid. They have accepted a job which carries great responsibility, and as the children arrive, become very conscious of their lack of tools. They frantically ask themselves what to do with these kids and how to understand the variety of behavior they encounter. The more fearful and unsure of themselves they are, the more anxiety communicates itself to the campers whose behavior becomes the testier.

The casework consultant's job in training has two important facets. One is the imparting of helpful information about children and their needs. The other is handling counselor anxiety. The more comfortable and sure of himself the counselor is, the more psychic energy he has to give to his job. In relieving staff anxiety I have found several points, repeated over and over, to be particularly helpful. (1) No one is expected to know all the answers. If the counselor doesn't carry the burden of feeling he must be an expert on child development then he can make better use of what he does know. (2) Supervision is meant to be helpful not destructive. A counselor can turn for help without its betraying inadequacy. He does not have to cope with a difficult problem by himself. (3) A child reacts in the light of his previous experiences. Some camp problems may be intimately connected with contemporary or past events outside the counselor's control.

Staff training was done in three main ways:

1. *Orientation Week*

Each of the camps had a training period before campers arrived. Much of this time was devoted to teaching specified program skills. The consultant took responsibility for sessions around child development and problem behavior. There would be a brief presentation and then a long discussion period involving the entire camp staff.⁷

2. *Staff Meetings*

If a particular problem seemed to present difficulties for quite a few staff members, the consultant might talk about it in group discussions. More often staff would raise questions around child behavior and the consultant would take responsibility for leading the discussion and pulling together the conclusions.

3. *Individual Conferences*

There was considerable flexibility in training through conferences. Counselors were supervised directly by a unit leader. The unit leader was an older person than the counselor and had much camp counseling experience. When the counselor needed help with problems with which the unit leader did not feel he was expert enough to assist, two possibilities were considered. In some instances the consultant worked with the unit head on the problem and the unit leader then attempted to help the counselor with it. On other occasions the consultant worked directly with the counselor. The determining factor was the working relationship between the counselor and his supervisor and the plan followed was dependent on the unit leader's

⁷ Perry Roth, Director of Council Camp in 1957, observes that "this is probably the most highly participated in part of orientation." Mr. Roth also felt that the "general role of the caseworker to staff was 'the good father' who accepted their problems and staff felt that something would come of their complaints."

evaluation of which approach would be most helpful.

Problem Behavior

The casework consultant has an important contribution to make where a child is presenting problem behavior. The fact that he has the opportunity to observe the child is frequently of the greatest importance and influences the kind of assistance he can offer. The following illustration points this up:

Camp had been in session 5 days when the consultant arrived for his first three day visit. The unit leader of the youngest age group was anxiously awaiting his arrival and asked what immediate attention be given the youngest group of boys. These 8 year olds (8 of them) were all quite unhappy as evidenced by their verbal attacks on camp and their complaints of its many restrictions. Both the unit leader and the group's counselor felt the nucleus of the unrest consisted of Timmy and Sam. These boys were most verbal in their resistance to adult authority and loudly expressed dissatisfaction with camp. The counselor and unit leader suggested specifically that since these boys reinforced each others' negativism they should be split up—either placed in separate groups or perhaps sent home. The camp staff were mainly concerned over who should be moved, and where.

The camp consultant spent the entire day with the group and did not leave it until the boys were in bed. He discovered that rather than being subjected to too many restrictions the youngsters had almost no controls at all. Without limits and direction they became anxious and querulous. Each time they successfully defied the counselor they became more unhappy and upset. As the youngest group in camp, this was their first experience away from home. They were still of the age when parental super-

vision was necessary in meeting their basic body needs and in maintenance of cleanliness. Yet at camp none had brushed his teeth for five days, washed, or changed clothes! One little boy went to bed wearing a wet bathing suit.

The consultant met with the camp director and unit leader to share his findings. He described the experiences of the group and outlined the kind of care they should have been having. His specific recommendations were not that any youngsters be moved but that a carefully structured program be set up for this group. Because it seemed unlikely that the group's counselor could establish a new atmosphere, he was moved and a firmer individual took over the group. The consultant suggested a rather firm, almost militaristic regime for the group at first as they needed emphatically clear limits. This meant very close supervision, marching together as a group, and firm (but warm) controls.

The consultant's plan was put into effect and at staff meeting the next night interpreted in detail to the entire staff. There was considerable resistance to the limits imposed, some staff questioning whether such firmness wouldn't spoil the children's fun and make the whole camp experience an unpleasant one. However, all agreed the program should be given a chance. The group of boys almost immediately responded with relief to the new set-up. Their reaction to the counselor's controls, and the careful attention paid to their body needs, was one of satisfaction. Group spirit was considerably raised and letters home reflected a new attitude, one which said, "boy, camp is fun." At the end of the camping period each youngster announced his intention of returning for the next year.

The consultant's chance to observe the group aided him in being really helpful. Had he recommended action only on the basis of a description of the

two "problem" boys he would have been considerable off base.

The camp consultant was able to offer assistance in cases of problem behavior through one of four ways:

1. Through the unit head. In this way the unit head was able to assist the counselor or the child directly by using the insights he obtained in his conference with the consultant.

2. Through the counselor. Here the consultant worked directly with the counselor to enable him to understand and help the child.

3. In some instances, where it seemed direct professional handling was indicated, the consultant worked directly with the child. This was tried particularly in instances where it seemed that future casework help would be needed by the child. By direct contact with the child the consultant would be prepared to discuss the child's difficulties with the parents from first hand observations and with a view to referral to a social agency.

4. The consultant could make other recommendations or suggestions. At times he was able to recommend specific handling of the child. Sometimes various manipulations seemed indicated. These might be a shift in or from the group; sending the child home as unready for the camp experience; or a shift in the staff.

Staff Relationships

It is a truism to observe that a happy staff means happy campers and a discontented staff means unhappy campers. Counselors work under considerable pressure, especially in a sleep-away camp. It is not an easy job to be sensitive to the individual needs of eight youngsters and to meet those individual needs. Generally, when he is successful, the emotionally healthy counselor feels his needs are met.

However, in addition to working well with the children the counselor wants some other satisfactions. He craves recognition by others of his good work. He seeks some status, achieved by an acceptance of him as he is and as a result of an appreciation of the contribution he is making. He needs the companionship of other staff members, not just as colleagues but as social beings. Because he works hard he needs opportunities to relax and unwind.

The degree to which the counselor is able to meet his own needs is reflected in his job performance. This means that the consultant must assume responsibility, when indicated, for helping staff in their relationships not only with the campers but with each other. The cue as to where the consultant should give his attention must be provided either by the camp supervisory staff or by the individual himself. The consultant can assist either by his suggestions to the supervisory staff or by working directly with the individual.

Two examples of the consultant's activity around staff relationships follow:

The director of camp had been concerned about the staff's lack of resourcefulness in providing recreational outlets for themselves after taps. He had many years of camping experience and had never seen a group so apparently unable to make their own fun. The lack of pleasurable after-work activities was resulting in a let-down of enthusiastic leadership during the day. As the director and the consultant analyzed the situation it seemed clear that the group really lacked the essentials to provide fun for themselves. The few counselors who were thought capable of giving the necessary leadership were absorbed in camp "love" affairs and obtained sufficient gratification without the group. It became apparent that if the group

couldn't do the job then key staff would have to do it for them.

The director, program director, their wives, and the nurse planned an elaborate Shakespearean party. Clever invitations were sent to each staff member, all of whom had to attend as some Shakespearean character. One happy feature of the evening was a side of beef roasted to a turn over an outside pit. In addition, a ping-pong tournament was started and various other activities set up. One night the consultant gave a lecture on the oedipus complex. This was meant more for entertainment than education and the counselors in particular were fascinated. As a result of this approach staff morale perked up noticeably.

The second illustration of how the consultant can work in the area of staff relationships describes a situation in which the two top administrative people in camp, the director and program director, had a basic personality conflict. The direct result was that they seldom communicated with each other and more or less operated independently of each other. Indirectly, the result was of grave consequence. The staff sensing the unspoken conflict began playing one against the other to meet its own needs. The divided loyalties contributed to a general poor morale, and at one point great hostility accumulated and was close to being discharged against the director.

Both the director and program director were mature individuals and were able to sit down with the consultant to think through the situation. Resolution of the basic personality conflict was out of the question, it would have involved a complete personality change on someone's part. However, a better working relationship could be set up which involved only superficial concessions.

As a result of the consultation, daily conferences (for as brief or long as was indicated by the day's business) were set up between camp director and program director. This closer working together was made known to the staff and was one of several simultaneous moves which contributed to an immediate improvement in the atmosphere of staff interpersonal relationships.⁸

Conclusions

This paper has discussed several roles of the casework consultant in residence at a camp: a role in staff training, by imparting helpful information about children to staff and in handling counselor anxiety; a role with respect to problem behavior in children; and a role in keeping staff relationships at a high functioning level. It points to the desirability of having a full-time (if optimal) or part-time (as a necessary compromise) caseworker in residence.

⁸ The camp director felt that freer expression of feelings resulted between the program director and himself.