

SOCIAL CASE WORK AS A TECHNIQUE IN THE TREATMENT OF CRIME

By PHILIP HEIMLICH

Jewish Board of Guardians, New York, N. Y.

WITHIN the past generation social mindedness has been seeping into the prison system gradually but surely. The concept of punishment is being supplemented with thoughts of rehabilitation and restoration. Today prisons have instituted classification clinics composed of administrative and professional heads of the various departments. However, their recommendations can only be as effective as the equipment at their command. The duties of the classification committee are to assemble data covering the life of the subject before them and to plan his program in the institution. They are limited in making practical recommendations because of the many "lacks" confronting them, as for example, the lack of trained personnel; lack of industrial activities for inmates; lack of school facilities, especially vocational; lack of spare time activities under supervision; lack of individual therapy; and lack of normal relationship with family and friends.

Try as I might, I could not find a definition of social case work that would adequately cover its meaning for the question under discussion. Classification and social case work are considered synonymous by many penologists. Dr. Cantor, in his book "Crime and Society," tries to define social case work by discussing its objectives and measures. For myself, I can only say that social case work, in its narrowest sense, deals with the treatment of the individual client, who

in this instance is an offender against prevailing laws in his community. To understand a person commonly termed a criminal and to treat him properly, the worker, whether he is a law enforcing agent, a probation or parole officer, or a staff member in a penal institution, should possess some knowledge and training in the fields of causation and treatment. These include:

- 1) A history of the subject which covers his physical and mental make-up, his attainments, aptitudes and outlook on life.
- 2) Social relationships which have to do with his family, associates, economic status, religious, political and fraternal affiliations.
- 3) Ability to understand and interpret criminal laws and procedures and rulings of commissions.

For the purpose of this paper, permit me to limit my observations to prisons. They are large structures built to house persons securely, as a punishment for committing crime. Rehabilitation and socialization are only secondary. The man incarcerated finds himself in abnormal, concentrated surroundings where he must control his emotions, desires and thoughts to a point of mental and physical breakdown, unless he can in some degree adjust himself to accept a relationship based on authoritarian groupings. The system in use is considered unsuccessful by the layman because 60% of inmates in prison are recidivists.

Classification boards have been es-

tablished in many prisons and include psychiatrists and psychologists. Their findings are used for diagnostic and testing purposes and have very little correlation with education and work-assignment programs. There is only a pretense at therapy.

Social case work can be an invaluable factor in institutional management. It can be effective in making adjustments among prisoners and minimizing problems of discipline. A social case worker in a penal institution must not only have the qualifications previously mentioned but should possess a sympathetic, patient and understanding nature. He must be sufficiently skillful to avoid making decisions for his clients but able to direct them to the proper solutions. The worker should be in a position to be helpful in reality situations which may occur during the period of confinement, whether in the prison or the home.

Take the case of Johnny, whose father would commonly be considered an habitual criminal, and who some five years ago was sentenced to a term of twenty to thirty years for participating in a planned holdup with four other men. The boy was living with his mother. At the time of the father's arrest, Johnny was 11 years of age. He was a bright and apt pupil in school but presented slight behavior difficulties at home. Like most normal boys he desired skates, a football and other playthings. The mother, who was on relief, could not afford to supply these. She became fretful lest the boy follow his father's footsteps, and appealed to a social agency. Johnny was assigned to a Big Brother who endeavored to fulfill some of the needs and desires of the youngster. The boy was sent to summer camp. Then the mother became very ill and died. It appeared that it would be necessary for Johnny to go to an asylum. This was considered an undesirable arrangement for this particular child. Both to him and his father, the orphanage carried depressive institutional implications. The agency was successful in placing him with a maternal aunt who had just been married and who was fond of the boy. The plan was accepted by the Board of Child Welfare, who transferred to the aunt the allowance they had been granting the mother. The successful handling of this child's prob-

lems produced a complete personality change in the father. It was interesting to note his change of attitude towards authority and his reversal from blind aggressiveness to understanding.

Social case work, to be effective, must also be applied to the family of the inmate. When a man is sent to prison, there is a sudden disintegration of the family, not only economically but morally. Efforts must be made to restore the family to as near normalcy as possible. Here is where the intelligent social case worker can prove his worth. He must be acquainted with agencies equipped to be helpful, especially in those cases where the father has been removed from the home. Examples of this type are numerous, but one will suffice.

Take the case of G. A woman brought charges against her husband for raping their 14 year old daughter. The man received a sentence of from five to ten years. After his conviction his wife began to feel remorse for having her husband sent to prison. She became ill because of the newspaper notoriety which brought public disgrace upon her daughter, and because of her feeling of having made an informer of her son of 11, who told on the father. The woman became so neurotic that she was unable to manage the household and gladly consented to accept psychiatric and social treatment for herself and the children.

A social case work unit should include at least the following: Warden, Principal Keeper, Parole Representative, Psychiatrist, Educational Director, Psychologist, Chaplain, Social Worker, Chief of Industries. Before attempting to function as an agency of reformation it should recognize certain fundamentals. It must understand the attitude of hostility and suspicion between prisoner and authority, and vice versa. Sanford Bates, in "Prisons and Beyond," states: "We must understand that many a prisoner retains some measure of self-respect and is concerned about his family. He is filled with anxieties as to what is happening to them.

How are they getting along? Is the rent met? Are the children clothed and fed? How do their playmates receive them? And always the tormenting question, is his wife remaining faithful to him during the years of their separation." The family is important to him, not only because of his attachment to it but because it is the only tie which he has left. By aiding the family, the prisoner is shown that society is not entirely vindictive and is willing to assist him in readjustment. If the two former measures are met, the unit should encounter little difficulty in guiding the prisoner through corrective treatment and training, so as to prepare him for parole, and for the family to receive him.

In order to accomplish these steps there must be a close integration between the work on the inside of the prison, and that on the outside. The social service unit must draw every employee into its scheme, for everybody in the prison from the warden down, is part of the therapy.

When a prisoner is released, he should

be inspired with objectives to strive for, such as citizenship and the privileges that go with it. Unfortunately, he finds himself rebuffed and handicapped on many fronts. He is denied the right to work in many fields without first receiving special dispensation. He is prevented from entering any business for which a license is required. He may not work in places where liquor is sold. If he applies for employment with a large concern where a bond is required, his police record is open for inspection whether one month or twenty years have elapsed between his release and the application for employment.

In conclusion, I believe that it should also be the duty of social case work practitioners dealing with delinquency to use their influence in recommending legislative action so that progressive development can be continued in correctional institutions, and consideration granted those unfortunates outside of prison walls who are endeavoring to raise themselves to the same level as their neighbors.

CASE WORK FUNCTION IN THE INSTITUTION FOR DELINQUENTS

Some Theoretical Considerations

By ABRAHAM J. SIMON

Jewish Board of Guardians, Hawthorne, N. Y.

CURRENT practice in the institutional field indicates a growing utilization of the case work function in the children's institution, particularly in view of the efficacy of that function in successful treatment of the behavior disorders of children. Child guidance clinics, including psychiatrists and case workers, have been added as departments to institutions. These institutions, it must be remembered, have been in operation for many years and have behind them a significant body of experience and principle, as well as a set of mores and attitudes, conscious and unconscious, by which current practice is administered. While these case work departments have been functioning in agencies for several years, there is almost nothing in the literature about the manner in which case workers and institutional personnel have integrated their mutual attitudes and relationships so as to be consistent with the best thinking of each field. There is much to be said on the need to integrate and work cooperatively. But as to what is actually being integrated, why the integration is difficult and what the mechanics of this integrative process may be—with regard to such questions there is a paucity of material. This paper is devoted to a consideration of some of the theoretical questions underlying this problem.

As a social agency, the institution had been flourishing long before case work came on the scene. In the course of its lengthy history and on the basis of its experience, the institution established cer-

tain methods for the practical common sense solution of its daily problems. In scanning this natural history of institutional practice, we can see that it has been concerned with developing good physical maintenance and as ample and satisfactory a staff as funds can provide. It strives to achieve the pattern and atmosphere of a normal home and frequently does approximate this goal. It definitely stresses the establishment and maintenance of affectionate relationships between adult and child.

Of significant concern to the institutional staff is the maintenance of the daily routine, operating on an inflexible time schedule, during the course of which the children are expected to maintain good order, make a presentable appearance, and be generally a credit to the adult and the community. Adherence to this pattern achieves for the child acceptance, rewards, and often indulgence. Consistent and prolonged inability to adhere to the routine within reasonable limits is met generally with first threatened, and then actual rejection, deprivation, and often punishment. The problem child who normally cannot adhere to this daily routine is brought into line by a process of balancing rewards and punishment, coupled with attitudes of acceptance and rejection. The emotional concomitant of this method of handling is an increase in the anxiety of the problem child as he attempts to repress his deviant trends and conform. The adult, meanwhile, hopes that eventually some sincere identification with or genu-