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ABSTRACT

This short report provides a brief description of a research project presenting an alternative approach to delinquency treatment. Achievement Place is a family-sized residential treatment home for pre-delinquent and delinquent youngsters. Six to eight boys, aged 12-16, live in a renovated house located in their own community. A specially trained couple, serving as teaching-parents, help to provide a family milieu in which they teach the boys new social, self-help, and academic behaviors through the use of a token reinforcement system. The report outlines the project goals, reinforcement system, training of teaching-parents, community controls, and community savings operating within the Achievement Place program. (SJI)

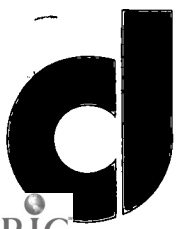
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ACHIEVEMENT PLACE: a model for delinquency treatment

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Research Report - 1



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Research Report - 1

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What, Where, & Who

Achievement Place is a family-sized residential treatment home for pre-delinquent and delinquent youngsters. Located in Lawrence, Kansas, this pilot project provides a model for an innovative alternative to the institutionalization of young delinquents.

Six to eight boys, ranging in ages from 12 to 16, live in a renovated house located within their own community. A specially trained couple, serving as teaching-parents, lives in the home with the boys, providing a family milieu in which they teach the boys new social, self-help, and academic behaviors through the use of a token reinforcement system.

The boys who live at Achievement Place have been declared either delinquent or dependent-neglected by the County Juvenile Court. These are youngsters who have serious delinquent and behavior problems such as stealing, running away, vandalism, and chronic school disruption. They are recommended to the home by the County Department of Social Welfare and are accepted with the concurrence of the teaching-parents and the board of directors, who are representative of the Lawrence community.

Goals

The goals of Achievement Place are to teach the boys socially acceptable behavior and the self-help, academic, and prevocational skills necessary to change the behavior patterns which led them into difficulty. The boys learn basic social amenities and become responsible for carrying out assigned chores in connection with running the house, such as cleaning and helping to prepare and serve meals. They are helped to overcome reading and speaking difficulties, to improve their study habits, and to acquire the skills required in job interview situations. The boys also learn self-governing procedures through participation in setting up their own behavioral rules and sanctions.

System

The modification of the boys' behavior is brought about through adherence to a clearly defined point system. The boys can win or lose points depending on their behavior, and the points earned can be used to purchase privileges. The boys participate in "family" meetings where they discuss specific behaviors and help decide how many points should be at stake. Their participation in this decisionmaking process not only provides the boys with the experience of self-governing procedures, but also reinforces their awareness and sense of responsibility in regard to their own behavior.

The teaching-parents give and take points in a calm, consistent, and systematic fashion within the framework of a carefully designed reward system. When the boys first come to Achievement Place they receive immediate feedback through points concerning specific behaviors. Gradually, they move from receiving points on a daily basis to receiving them weekly. Eventually, the boys are placed on a merit system which utilizes verbal feedback in place of points. This system encourages the accumulation of points and facilitates the delay of gratification, as the boys must work hard to gain many desired privileges which are not immediately available. In this way, they achieve a better grasp of the reward system in real life situations so that they can function more successfully when they leave Achievement Place.

Teaching- Parents

The key to the effectiveness of the Achievement Place program lies with the highly trained teaching-parents. The University of Kansas offers a specialization for teaching-parents which can lead to either certification or an M.A. degree. The university program includes training in behavior modification procedures,

remedial education techniques, juvenile law, community relations, and supervised experience as a teaching-parent in an Achievement Place home. An integral part of this training program is the evaluation trainees receive at regular intervals from parents and teachers of the children, the children themselves, parole officers, and teaching supervisors. Only trainees who receive high evaluation are certified as teaching-parents. The training prepares them to carry out their multifaceted roles as teachers, surrogate parents, and advocates for the program in the community.

Community Controls

The 12-member board of directors is responsible for the physical facility and finances of Achievement Place. The board also participates in setting goals and evaluating programs. Having community control and involvement not only facilitates acceptance of the program by the community, but frees the teaching-parents from many administrative burdens and permits them to function in the day-to-day teacher-parent capacity for which they are especially prepared.

Community Savings

Cost estimates indicate substantial savings in this type of program as compared with large institutional facilities. Operating expenses per child at Achievement Place are approximately \$4,000 a year as compared with costs of some \$8,500-\$9,000 per child in an institutional training school. Initial cost per bed for renovating an older house is estimated at \$6,000-\$8,000, while \$20,000-\$30,000 per bed is estimated for building a large institution.

But the largest and most valuable saving to a community is in

the future of its children. By remaining in the community, the troubled youngsters avoid the harmful experience of institutionalization and the frequently severe adjustment problems on returning home. While receiving help in a family setting and a familiar school situation, they have the opportunity to develop the skills that will enable them to live and work in the community more successfully. As the boys improve their behavior, their teachers, parents, and members of the community become more accepting in their attitudes toward them. This further reinforces the boys' desire to maintain their new and improved behavior. Thus, a most valuable and essential communication and mutual learning process occurs. The boys and the community both learn that they can live harmoniously with each other.

The researchers, Elery L. Philips, Dean L. Fixsen, and Montrose M. Wolf, have prepared resource materials which describe all phases of their program. These can be obtained by writing to:

Dr. Dean Fixsen
Bureau of Child Research
University of Kansas
Lawrence, Kansas 66044

An Achievement Place home, operating on the principles described above, has also been developed for the rehabilitation of pre-delinquent and delinquent girls.

