Residential Group Care as a Socializing Environment: Toward a Broader Perspective

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ABSTRACT: Residential group care has often been viewed as antithetical to healthy normalizing developmental processes for troubled or "at-risk" children and youth, yet it appears in other settings to be the method of choice for leadership preparation for the elite. This chapter examines group care generically and attempts to bring implications from programs in the latter category to bear on those in the former.

KEY WORDS: mainstreaming group care environments; residential child and youth care programming; organized camping; service learning; youth development in group care programs; groupwork.

Much attention and energy have been devoted in recent years to questions concerning the validity of residential group care as an intervention modality with children and youth at risk, and the idea of "normalization" to dilute the supposedly negative consequences of institutional living. Yet residential group care in other settings—such as residential "prep" schools—continues to be the method of choice for developing the children of the elite for societal leadership roles. What implications might this paradox have for residential child and youth care work services?

In approaching this question, the analysis that follows proposes a new typology of residential settings, suggesting that currently ascendant models in child and youth care are closely associated with and have

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much to learn from the apparently successful approaches of group care programs that continue to serve more privileged elements of the population. It then suggests how this knowledge might be tapped for application in the child and youth care work domain.¹

Organizational theorists as well as policy makers and practitioners in group care often suggest, explicitly or implicitly, that the central characteristic of residential settings for youth is their relative separation from the outside world. It is claimed, for example, that the greater the separation, the more capable the setting is of reducing the influence of potential conflicts (Wheeler, 1966), and the more effectively it operates. This notion seems to have guided the formulation of two key concepts in this field: "total institutions" (Goffman, 1961) and "powerful environments" (Bloom, 1964). The idea of normalization (Wolfensberger, 1972), on the other hand, suggests that isolation may promote efficiency but not effectiveness. In this connection, the objectives of the program in question are crucial. This is the focus of the typology to be proposed.²

Categories of Residential Group Care Settings

From this perspective, there appear to be three broad categories of residential group care settings: those that seek simply to provide custodial "support" services to enable other, essentially unrelated processes to take place ("Incidental" group care settings); those that seek to use the group care setting to help to eliminate residential "traits" that are perceived as undesirable ("Remedial" settings); and those that seek to use the setting more broadly to promote some sort of socialization ("Socializing" settings). Most settings in the latter two categories share the assumption that prolonged and continuous stay in a residential setting can be used by those who maintain the setting to help them to achieve specific objectives. The assumption is that the group care setting itself can exert pressure on residents to internalize pre-selected modes of behavior and sets of norms through constant exposure to these influences, if the setting is "programmed" properly.

1. "Incidental" Group Care Settings

Although it can be argued that residential settings are people-changing organizations irrespective of the founder's and the staff's intentions, there are residential settings in which no *deliberate* use is made of the "power" of the residential situation. Those who run them are less interested in "changing" the inmates than in providing for physical needs, such as food, lodging, and protection, while other processes take

place. These might simply be normal developmental processes, as in many traditional, custodial orphanages and correctional settings, or they might be curative ones, as in long-term hospitals for such ailments as tuberculosis. Some such institutions have, historically, provided shelter to residents suffering from chronic illnesses or severe physical handicaps assumed to be incurable; other (e.g., prisons) have been designed for punishment. Likewise, college dormitories provide residence away from home without, in most cases, the expectation that the group living situation will be used consciously (except perhaps by the resident himself or herself) to produce personal change.

2. Remedial Settings

Remedial settings function on the assumption that their residents suffer from a specific weakness, deficiency, or deviance. These characteristics define and constrain the resident's existential situation and must be eliminated if the inmates are to be "cured," or made "adaptive" to the environment, or made "normal." In this respect, remedial settings follow a medical or hospital model (Carlebach, 1970). Thus, the problem or deficit is perceived as stemming largely from within the resident rather than from social situations, although the latter may be viewed as an essential element in the "cure." Separation from the outside environment is viewed as beneficial because it allows the care givers to treat, rehabilitate, and cure the problem away from the potentially "re-infecting" influence of other social agents, such as peers, and because it reduces the likelihood of "infecting" others with the same condition ("isolation"). In general, this is the ideology that underlies much of the development of the residential treatment center model in the United States (Barnes & Kelman, 1974; Taylor, 1973; Weber & Haberlein, 1972), although less "clinically"-oriented residential "treatment" models have emerged over the last two or three decades (e.g., the Teaching-Family Model: Wolf, Phillips, Fixsen, Braukmann, Kirigin, Willner, & Schumaker, 1976, and the more socially contextual approaches described below). With few exceptions, similar personal deficit perspectives have governed not only custodial approaches in juvenile corrections, but also rehabilitation-oriented efforts in this domain until recent years (Ohlin, 1973).

3. Socializing Settings

Socializing settings have also been referred to as "mediatory settings" (Lubeck & Empey, 1968) and are frequently viewed as educationally or developmentally oriented and holistic in approach. Their modes of intervention focus on residents' social interactions among themselves

and with others, rather than on remedying specific traits, presumed to be deficient, within the individual's personality. Although remedial and socializing settings sometimes cater to the same kinds of residents, the latter relate to the resident's problems as occurring as a result and in the context of social forces rather than as outcomes of particular personal traits or behaviors (e.g., Project Re-Ed: Hobbs, 1966).

Socializing institutions can be classified into three major groups: mainstreaming, autonomizing, and designating settings.

A. Mainstreaming settings are those intended to introduce children from weaker social and economic strata to the social and cultural mainstream of a given society. The idea is usually that rehabilitation will be achieved once residents have gained access to social resources, primarily involving education and training, characteristic of their mainstream peers. The assumption underlying such programs is that once residents gain adequate educational opportunity and achievement, their future position on the mobility ladder, in comparison to that of their parents, will improve: educational enhancement will lead to socioeconomic mainstreaming. Since they view education as central in residents' social habilitation, these settings often view themselves as residential schools. Most institutions for at risk and troubled youth that operate in the socializing rather than the remedial mode are in this category.

Israel's youth villages provide an example of mainstreaming residential settings. These institutions now primarily admit youths whose backgrounds are characterized by Oriental ethnicity, low parental level of education and income, and recent immigration to the country (first or second generation). The school within the youth village resembles an ordinary secondary school in the Israeli society. In addition, the daily schedule includes intensive social activities that allow for a great deal of peer interaction and modelling, and often several hours of work on the youth village farm. In spite of ideologies which attribute equal importance to schooling, work, and social interaction, however, it seems that the two latter fields of activity are frequently considered as means for assisting the students in the acquisition of schooling, which is perceived by staff, parents, and often by the students themselves as the key mainstreaming activity (Kashti, 1974). In the United States, the Job Corps program was developed to meet a similar need in the context of a high rate of youth unemployment (Smilansky, Kashti, & Arieli, 1982).

B. Autonomizing settings have emerged as a challenge to those who perceive education primarily as a means of preserving the culture and passing on the heritage to the younger generation. These settings, which seem to cater mainly to middle-class youth, maintain norms and values that emphasize the individual and his or her expressed needs.

The resident's continuous exposure to expressive, non-competitive values is designed to help the setting achieve its aim. A radical example of a setting of this type is Summerhill (Neill, 1960), which was founded in Great Britain.

C. Designating settings are elitist residential settings that are designed and designated to prepare their students to assume positions of power and prestige in their respective societies, and they generally recruit from the higher strata in the society. They prepare their residents to assume the statuses, roles, and power characteristic of their families' social group, such as through political and economic leadership. American Prep Schools (Cookson & Persell, 1985), English Public Schools (Walford, 1986), and Israeli high school yeshivas (Smilansky, Kashti, & Arieli, 1982), are examples. Military or naval designating residential schools (e.g., West Point) also designate their students for specific roles, but they usually recruit them more on the basis of ability than on such ascriptive criteria as family background. Their curricula are designed to ensure the internalization of norms regarded as suitable for an army or naval officer. "Avant-garde" designating residential settings are those that seek to prepare their residents not for specific roles in a given class system, but for the presumed society of the future. Students are selected on the basis of distinctive personal characteristics or ideological affinities. An example is the Israeli Kibbutz, which has functioned as an avant-garde setting for disadvantaged youth from urban centers, who were admitted to the "Youth Society" affiliated with the kibbutz to educate them in the light of its "pioneering" and Zionist ideology.

Opportunities and Risks of the Socializing Residential Setting

Early child and youth care settings were largely what has been referred to above as "incidental," in which the specifics of group life were viewed as important only in that they provided a setting in which other, more crucial processes could occur. This orientation survives today mostly in highly specialized programs dealing with physical maladies and in maximum security, custodial residential facilities. "Medical model" or what have been cited here as "remedial" programs have, in many cases, given way to broader, socializing or developmental orientations, the characteristics of which frequently parallel those of organizations working with normal and elite populations. Some of these characteristics are illuminated in the following discussion of the opportunities and risks they share.

Opportunities

Alternative Opportunities for Achievement. Socializing residential settings usually offer residents a multi-dimensional program (Kahane, 1981): residents are engaged together in several kinds of intrinsically satisfying and socially prestigious activities, the most common of which, in addition to schooling, are social life and work. As in a family, this range of activities opens a variety of opportunities for experiencing achievement and success. Students at a regular day school, on the other hand, are often evaluated in that setting almost solely on the basis of their academic achievements in the context of an instrumental curriculum. In many academic day schools (as in most residential programs not in the "socializing" category), they would be less able to experience achievement and to exhibit success in alternative domains, such as contribution to the community, group leadership, or excellence at work. These have been characterized as comprising the "expressive curriculum" of a socializing program—"expressive" in that they are viewed as satisfying in themselves (Lambert, Millham, & Bullock, 1970).

Thus, the expressive curriculum may be particularly important to educationally disadvantaged students in socializing residential settings. Since the level of self-esteem in one domain often influences its level in others, and since the level of self-esteem in a given domain often influences the level of the actual behavior in that domain—it seems reasonable to assume that high self-esteem in an expressive domain, such as leadership, will eventually lead to the development of high self-esteem in the scholastic field and, in turn, will be reflected in students' actual academic achievements.

The expressive curriculum can be criticized, however, on the grounds that it may serve as a control mechanism for residents who do not do well academically. Rather than continuing to strive to help students with a history of school failure to make academic progress, staff in the socializing residential setting may use the expressive curriculum (social activities, work, arts, etc.) as a means for keeping the "losers" somehow occupied and content. In spite of its "progressive" pedagogical connotations, critics may suggest, the expressive curriculum has very little to contribute toward the ultimate instrumental objective of education for much of the residential child and youth care work clientele, which is largely upward social mobility (Sharp & Green, 1975; Woods, 1979).

Self-Governance. The continuous, collective life situation within the socializing residential setting provides ample opportunities for youth to experience leadership, responsibility, and sharing, both informally and through instruments of self-government (Grupper & Eisikovits, 1986). In discussions one of the authors held with both direct care

workers and residents, however, several interviewees cynically or angrily pointed out that seemingly autonomous self-governance institutions are sometimes highly controlled by the staff (Arieli, 1988). Those residents who participate actively tend to be those who opt to support the powerful staff members who are ideologically interested in such "democratic presentations of the institutional self." This supportive attitude characterizes youths who have an interest in rewarding the formal order of the residential school for the prestigious position of "successful student" it allots them. Disadvantaged youths, on the other hand, tend not to enjoy such recognition and are less inclined to join the "democratic game" and to support a system which does not allot prestigious positions to them. Similar processes have been observed by Lacey (1970) in a day school and, one is tempted to add, by all of us in the world at large. They are often closely related to the referral that led to the placement in the first place, whether for manipulative youth who "play the game" too well or for resistive ones who reject it.

Belongingness. Group care practitioners often suggest that the continuous and intensive peer interaction within socializing residential settings tends to provide residents with experiences of reciprocity, collective commitment, identity, and sharing that transcend similar experiences in such other out-of-home programs as foster care (see, for example, Arieli & Feuerstein, 1987; Feuerstein, 1987). It is further suggested that this feeling is particularly enhanced in settings with ideologically unifying objectives (Wolins, 1980). Thus, in many countries, residential settings are sometimes called "homes" to denote the function they are expected to fill in their residents' emotional lives—but research on the roles of students in residential schools tends to refute this wide belief. In an Israeli study, for example, ten samples of residential school youth all demurred from the suggestion that their residential setting could be regarded as a home (Arieli, Kashti, & Shlasky, 1983).

Risks

Cultural and Family Severance. Goffman (1961) pointed out the tendency of total institutions to blur inmates' individual identities. More recent observers of residential care often claim that the intensive exposure of residents to the culture and value-system of the staff tends to result in the severance of children from their original collective identities and ethnic culture, although many residential agencies do try to recruit staff members who are culturally similar to the residents. Resocialization and reacculturation—processes enhanced by the total life situation—are considered by some to be psychologically hazardous

and morally unjust, although from another perspective they are often viewed as the very purpose of the institution.

However, a symmetrically opposite process of cultural identity reinforcement, rather than dilution, may be operative. Most residential settings are populated largely by youth from relatively homogeneous socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Since residents are exposed to their peers more than to the staff, their shared cultural heritage may often be reinforced by their continuous and intensive interaction with one another. Polsky (1962) has also pointed out that, under certain circumstances, institutional residents can co-opt staff members into their "deviant" culture rather than being "co-opted" by what they view as the staff's "straight" cultural orientation.

Professionals in the behavioral sciences sometimes warn residential care agencies that not only young children, but also adolescents should not be involuntarily separated from home and parents and referred to residential programs. It is as if they might suffer from some kind of adolescent "parent deprivation," although this does not seem to be viewed as so significant an issue when the youth involved has chosen to go away, such as to school or to camp. The suggestion that the worst home is better than the best institution still seems to be widely accepted, although this may be viewed differently in the case of the elite socializing institutions, another source of suggestive insights for the child and youth care field. Further, as Dor (1973) and others have pointed out, parents from various backgrounds find it increasingly difficult to understand, empathize with, and guide their adolescent children. Perhaps parents will increasingly turn to professionals to perform traditional parental roles, outside the home if necessary. The sources and implications of such a development are beyond the scope of the present paper, although it should be noted that it is just this tendency among upper class families that was instrumental in the establishment of the elite socializing institution.

Cultural Homogenization. In counterpoint to the issue just discussed, critics of socializing residential settings often view the cultural and socio-economic homogeneity of the resident population, as well as the similarities in educational attainment, as a major problem, especially in settings which cater to the weaker social strata. Learning, particularly social learning, occurs largely through the process of modeling as young people select models for imitation and identification. For such models to be effective, they must be recruited by residents from among peers who have attained those features that are considered worth learning. In a homogeneous setting, critics claim, the availability of such models is too limited, although it seems that socializing residential settings are almost never closed to the extent that residents are entirely deprived of more advanced models.

In addition to other residents and the staff, residents usually interact with members of the encompassing social world. In residential settings that do not include school facilities, they attend neighboring day schools; in those with schools of their own, the school is very often open to day students from nearby communities. There seem t to be relatively few socializing settings that do not initiate some kind of regular encounters between their residents and peers from the outside world (Shlasky, 1987), and this tendency appears to be increasing (Beker, 1981).

Conclusions and Implications

If, as the authors perceive, the "socializing orientation" in residential group care is what such influences as normalization and deinstitution-alization are all about, then we will increasingly be concerned with socializing or youth development perspectives in residential settings for troubled young people and young people at risk. We view this as a positive development for the field of child and youth care work, partly because this orientation is shared by a variety of kinds of residential group care programs that deal with "normal" youth, including the elite, and are widely perceived as successful. On the basis of this common orientation, we can begin to examine their work systematically as a contribution to the knowledge base in the field, as well as to share ours, as appropriate, with this new set of colleagues.

For example, Cookson and Persell (1985), illuminate the dynamics of elite prep schools in the United States. National Service and related programs around the world, many of which are residential in nature, are described by Danzig and Szanton (1986), Dickson (1976), Hebert (1979) [Katimavik, the Canadian Youth Corps], McMullan and Snyder (1986) [Katimavik], Rice (1985) [U.S. Peace Corps], Sherraden and Eberly (1982), and United Nations (1975). Organized resident camping, with a historical literature that addresses many of the concerns of the socializing institution rather directly (e.g., Blumenthal, 1937; Dimock & Hendry, 1929; Lieberman, 1931; Osborne 1937) has, significantly, been applied to populations of troubled and at risk youth as well (Loughmiller, 1965; McNeil, 1957), and has again begun to receive prominence as a resource from a residential socializing perspective (e.g., Robb, 1984, Teschner and Wolter, 1984). In the United Kingdom, Walford (1986) has described the elite British "Public" Schools, and Israeli residential group care settings are examined from this perspective by Arieli, Kashti, and Shlasky (1983), Kashti (1979), Smilansky, Kashti, and Arieli (1982), and Wolins and Gottesman (1971). Descriptions of other relevant group care programs are provided by Wolins (1974).

The future of residential group care has been viewed by many in the

child and youth care work field as bleak, given the combination of ideological and fiscal restraints that have emerged in recent years, together with its spotty (we are generous!) record of effectiveness. The needs are not, however, being met elsewhere, and the socializing perspective can open our eyes and minds to a broader knowledge base that can be applied in our work as we seek to enhance the level of service we can provide to children and youth who are troubled or at risk.

Endnotes

- 1. In this article, "child and youth care" is used to denote services—treatment, corrections, custody—for young people "in trouble" or viewed as "at risk"; "residential group care" refers to the full range of the young people in residential settings, including the "elite."
- 2. The typology is partly based on a previous attempt by two of the authors of this chapter (Kashti & Arieli, 1976).

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