

JA:HMT ke

DWO.71/335/40

DISTRICT WELFARE OFFICER
SENIOR SOCIAL WORKER

21st March, 1972

SUMMARY OF CONTACT WITH RETTA DIXON
1971 - 1972

Early in 1971 Senior Social Worker (Mr Alcorn) suggested that one Social Worker should become responsible for all State children in Retta Dixon Homes. In the past, it had been the practice that children were placed there with very little later follow-up, and rarely any assessment of the suitability of the placement for the particular child.

AIMS OF MY CONTACT

1. To establish and maintain regular contact with each child and thus gain an understanding of his individual needs. This would be used in encouraging greater understanding of each child on the part of cottage parents, and assessing the suitability of the placement.
2. To establish a working relationship with cottage parents with the aim of discussing individual behaviour problems and a more general examination of the role of cottage parents.
3. To look at the strengths and weaknesses of the home itself with a view to future placements.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The home is run by the Aboriginal Inland Mission to provide for "the care of any children in need." Many temporary placements are made privately, e.g. during ill health of mother, or for schooling, and some long term placements are arranged through Welfare Branch, e.g. in the case of large families, or where a child seems to be too old for fostering.

The homes are divided into seven cottages, built in a semi-circle around the Superintendent's cottage. Each cottage functions independently from day to day, except that all food is bought through a central store and allocated to each home.

Cottage parents are recruited through the Mission down South and problems in obtaining staff have meant that more than half the staff are unmarried women in the over 30's age-group. There are no particular qualifications required - just a general "calling" for this type of work.

TYPE OF CONTACT

Initially I was met with some suspicion, the feeling being that once the children were placed there it was the Home's responsibility to meet all their needs. Interference by a Welfare Officer was not called for.

Eventually weekly contact with cottage parents and with the children was established, as well as periodic talks with the Superintendent Mr. Paddimore, to keep everyone in touch.

Visits were usually conducted in the afternoon - firstly to see the houseparents alone, and later in the afternoon to see the children individually or in groups, as they came home from school.

During the first phase of "becoming accepted by the houseparents" my contact seems in retrospect to have been mainly problem-oriented i.e. discussing particular individual problems and attempting to interpret these as I got to know each child. More recently, there has been some discussion of the role of such an institution, and of the cottage parents, and also some examination of how children's needs can best be met by such an institution; e.g. encouraging more positive contact between children and houseparents instead of a "physical care and discipline" role, also examining the need for wider activities for the children.

The following were the groupings in terms of cottages in which I saw the state children.

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| 1. Dennis Kunoth |) | |
| 2. Dean " |) | |
| 3. Tony " |) | Miss Judy Fergusson |
| 4. Jarrell " |) | (House mother) |
| 5. Christopher " |) | |
| 6. Stephen " |) | |
| 7. Leanne " |) | |
| 8. Terry Brown |) | |
| | | |
| 9. Ross Brown |) | Miss Gwen Pratt |
| 10. Sandra " |) | |
| 11. Colleen Walker |) | |
| | | |
| 12. Fred Bedgood |) | Miss Jean Phillips. |
| 13. Christine Barbour |) | |
| 14. Carol " |) | |
| 15. Tania " |) | |
| 16. Wayne Barbour |) | |
| | | |
| 17. John Gordon |) | Mr and Mrs Barnes - now fostered by them. |
| 18. Dennis Winsley |) | Miss Spohn - possibly to be referred to Minta House, Adelaide. |

There is one other ex-State child, Warren Hill, living at Retta Dixon. He is now working and there has been no continuing contact with him.

ASSESSMENT

In terms of establishing contact with the houseparents, this year's efforts have been fairly successful. They are now willing to discuss the children with the Social Worker and within their own limits will try to improve their relationship with the children, e.g. spending more time on the interests of individual children - art work in one particular case - gardening in another; also making wider use of Community facilities.

Individual reports have also been done on each child, and these are on individual case files as follows :-

| | |
|-----------------|---------|
| Browns | 72/167 |
| Kunoth children | 69/25 |
| Bedgood | 71/1063 |
| Barbours | 67/424 |
| Coleen Walker | 71/1053 |

I had hoped to get to know the children far better than I did, and to perhaps establish groups outside the home for them. This would widen their contact outside Retta Dixon and would be a better way to learn about the children. However it did take some time establishing my own role there, and the pattern was interrupted during the Christmas holidays when the children were away on camp.

With regard to the method of assessment used on each child, namely the Bristol Social adjustment Guide. This proved to be quite a valuable means of assessing each child, but I recommend that the Social Worker have a thorough knowledge of each child before applying it. I consulted the cottage parents and the children's teachers in compiling this; and feel that it would be difficult to obtain an objective assessment on one persons opinion.

Most of the children exhibit disturbed behaviour and in most cases there is marked hostility to adults. It would be interesting to compare this group to another group of children, or to repeat the assessment in two years times. All the house parents requested that it be repeated after two years.

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS ON THE HOME

In terms of staffing, the Homes appear to have some serious limitation in the lack of male staff.

There is also the limitation that the children are relatively isolated within an institutional setting, all the cottages being together, and there is little real family atmosphere. The position of the homes also isolates them from the rest of the community.

There is still little understanding of any child with particular behaviour problems - the general idea being to make him conform to the standards of the particular housemother. My overall impression of the home is that it is run along fairly rigid, religious lines, and the children appear to be fairly repressed. This is also the opinion of the teachers, who feel that the non-conforming behaviour at school of most of the Retta Dixon State children, is a reaction to the repressive atmosphere at home.

However, there are some children for whom placement here may be appropriate.

1. Short-term placements where the child is to be returned to his own family.
2. The older child who is difficult to place in foster care because of inability to cope with close family relationships.
3. Perhaps a large family where the brothers and sisters may live together in one cottage.

43

-4-

FUTURE CONTACT

My thoughts on this are as follows:-

1. That contact with the cottage parents is beneficial in that it helps with individual problem behaviour, and encourages the parents to examine their own role in the home.
2. That some follow up on these State children should be made, particularly in view of the limitations of the home.

Contact outside the institution may be helpful, perhaps along the lines of an informal group - as there is some indication that the children are reacting in the school situation to the rather rigid atmosphere at home.

J. A.
(J. AVEI)
Social Worker