

ATTACHMENT
"A"**REMEDIES FOR WRONGS****Updating Programs for****Delinquent Girls**

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AMONG the hundred girls who live with me on the campus of the Alabama State Training School for Girls in Chalkville, and among the hundreds of young persons with problems (not problem children) with whom I have worked for more than twenty years, most have had worse things done to them than they will ever do to anyone else. For the most part adult evils and frustrations have been lowered with vengeance upon them. Many of the young women at the state school have had more fearful experiences and have faced more rejection by their eighteenth birthday than each of us will ever know in our entire lives. Because of this, these young adults often are filled with self-hatred and feel worthless; they have indeed been pushed beyond their thresholds of control and they act accordingly. Many young women at our state training school are trying to get the staff and other girls to reject them as most other adults and peers have done in the past.

Behind the words of a girl who shouts into my office, "I hate you, Dr. Slack. You make me sick"; behind the punch I receive now and again in my side when one of them is trying to make a point; behind a girl's hostility, adult-hating mannerisms, sullenness, and her tough broad swagger, there exist more indications of sincerity, more real strengths, more adaptability and survival

mechanisms than we give her credit for. One can't help wonder how this young woman has learned to cope as well as she has in an environment which seems to elicit failure and the destruction of the individual.

In working with young adults, we must be realistic and alert to the wrongs which have affected these students, and we have to be candid about our problems and our shortcomings in helping them.

But the question persists; it arises again and again. How can any of us go about the job of reaching out to these youths? And this doesn't mean working with them through the old medical-model approach which views a girl as a sick person who might get better if she takes our prescription of treatment willingly and is then very grateful for what we have done. There is more to treatment than this—more variables than that old medical model—more things which influence the rehabilitation of young people. For one thing, the quality of the total milieu on a campus counts, and it is in the quality of interpersonal relationships within that milieu where the real values lie—where the new life-giving forces can be felt—both for students and staff.

In a milieu or within the limited environment on a campus of a training school for youth, there is the need to stress the importance of consistency and caring for each and every young woman, all this within an aura of stability and support. This work can't be done with a staff that is content to settle for a quiet eight-hour tour of duty, watching these young women instead of working with them. Creating an environment where people care for one another and grow up and grow forth in it is difficult. This caring environment will not be created by those of us on the staff who walk around clutching our framed credentials, protecting our forty-hour, Monday to Friday, work-week. It will not be created by those of us who go about seeking to reinforce our shaky identities in so many rigid ways which show these young women on our campus that we are inflexible rather than involved.

Let me share some crude examples of what the above really means. I wave back to girls who wave in to me while I sit at my desk; I call back my hello to them, even when important bureaucratic visitors are with me; I invite them into the office to greet our guests. I may stand up and hug a girl who has come in just for that. I make myself do these things even when I can feel the tensions in me rise when I'm interrupted. But I take the time because it matters. On visiting day those girls who have no company (35-40) come up to the superintendent's cottage where my husband and I spend the two hours with them. He and I also attend and participate in the Sunday school program each Sunday at 10:30 in the morning although the Billy Graham or Norman Vincent Peale messages are not exactly what we would voluntarily select for ourselves. We do it to share with them and participate with them in their programs, and give them an example of a man and a woman who love each other—and are making it together. It is my contention that an institution such as the State Training School for Girls needs firm encouragement from the top to create a caring environment both through constructive programming and individual self-involvement.

The tendency on the part of a superintendent is to make infants of the staff rather than give them responsibility and decision-making powers in concert with these young women to create an involved and a caring environment. Too often the tremendous pressures upon the superintendent are to make the staff help her achieve tranquility on the campus rather than treatment. Maturity in oneself, caring about others, respect for others comes from an assumption of responsibility that allows one to do both of these things: to mature and to care. This growing up has to be accomplished in the lives of the staff, the young women in their care, and especially in the superintendent. Learning how to cope and how to care is fostered through individual decision-making. If a staff and the young people under their care are relieved of most campus responsibilities except the responsibility to adjust and conform, it is no surprise that both the staff and the girls are ill-prepared to decide things in their own minds when

faced with difficulties. This includes such things as the girl who is lost when she returns home to alcoholic parents, or the staff member who cannot move ahead or press on when a superintendent is not on campus or an immediate superior is not available.

The stifling and harnessing of the human mind and the human heart can occur subtly, but are just as definite and just as insidious over a long period of time as an immediate formal lock-up procedure. This harnessing of the human mind and heart occurs basically because the top authority figures in the institution are not willing to share their authority. When your authority is shared with someone, it says to that staff member that you respect him or her. You have confidence in that persons abilities.

All of us who work in the field of corrections are aware that authority, or what is sometimes more crudely referred to as "power" in correctional institutions, is not readily shared. For one thing, correctional institutions are often patterned after another model, not medical, but military model with strata of authority arranged in such a way that the superintendent or warden, at the top, has an absolute say-so about matters in much the same way as the general in the army or the captain of the ship or president of the corporation. Let me add that I am not deluded into thinking that the word of the superintendent is really law or that the superintendent has real control of the power which is supposedly invested in the office. We are all too aware today of the fact the power is never what it seems. There are so many situations in which the person at the head of something has less control over things than the person at the bottom. Nevertheless, in most government institutions most of the time, the warden or the superintendent is the captain of the ship—the boat does not sail without her and, should it go down, she must sink with it. In this sense, the warden or the superintendent does hold a certain authority or power within the institution and this power may be used for good or evil, and effectively or ineffectively. It is the use of such power that I wish to focus on now in an effort to show how we can share power in order to update treatment programs for juveniles.

There are four strategic points for shared authority with staff and teenagers for the updating of treatment programs for a correctional institution. The first point is that authority must be shared from the top down. This means that from the warden or superintendent on down, power (and accompanying responsibility) must be delegated. This delegation must not exclude the young inmate who should be given as much power over her own life and that of other inmates as she can effectively use for rehabilitation. Examples are home furloughs, or Christmas shopping without institutional supervision.

The second point is that, although it is hard work to share authority, when it is shared properly nothing is lost. That is, when one person gives another person the freedom to decide what is best for herself, the first person does not really lose anything. Power is not surrendered just because it is shared.

Third, authority can never be actually shared in a general way. Authority must be made specific. It must be clear to everyone what authority or power, what decisions over what resources, what functions, and so on are being given to whom, for what purpose, with what consequences, with what means of looking at the outcomes . . . and for what period of time. Think for a minute about a program of community recreation-girls from a state training school bowling in a local center or swimming in a local YWCA. Whose responsibility is it?

The sharing of power or authority in a correctional institution does not mean the rule of laissez faire or everybody doing what she or he pleases all the time. It means instead the specific delegation of specific freedoms, authorities, and responsibilities to specific individuals or groups for specific periods of time. An obvious example is the following: it would be impossible to allow every young person and every staff member to smoke cigarettes in an institution anytime and anywhere. Fire laws would be violated and serious harm might come to many. However, it is possible to allow a group of young persons to decide on smoking rules within the institution for themselves and for specific periods of time as long as the means for looking at the outcome of

their decisions and programs is also specified and clear to all. About six months ago our institution never allowed smoking for anyone. Now a fact sheet is studied by each girl on the hazards of smoking. She is then tested. If she passes it, she smokes. If she fails the test, she studies the fact sheet again and is tested again. This program is worked through campus council, composed of student-elected representatives from the student body. Smoking breaks are frequent but regulated as to areas.

The last point is that for a staff member to accept the concept of shared authority, the receiver must be able to identify positively with the giver. The receiver of the new authority must be convinced that the person giving the authority does so in the best interest of all and with positive motives, not just out of laziness or lack of concern or unwillingness to accept responsibility herself. Very often in institutions—especially those with teenagers as clients—the idea of punitive authority or punishment on the part of the staff is viewed by the teenager as synonymous with staff interest, concern, and even a substitute for the parental love the child misses so badly. Thus, as you try to create an atmosphere of freedom, freedom is hard to take; the young detainee is likely to feel that when she is left up to her own devices, nobody cares about her. For this reason, the authority figures within the institution must go to great lengths to establish this atmosphere of freedom and caring and to establish an “image” of concern for each individual within the institution. Throughout our new programs at Chalkville, the girl now has more freedom to decide things, but the staff are really interested in what she decides. It is not that we wish to maintain forever a maternal-paternal position in relation to the teenager—it is just that we must reach the young woman where she “is at,” and work from there, gradually increasing the amount of authority and responsibility which is shared with her.

In conclusion, in working with juveniles in a training school, we need a diversified set of program offerings with the shared authority concept. We need to rekindle and talk about our faith in the potential of the young people in our care and those who

take care of them. And, it has to come from the top down. Girls adjudicated to our schools have to assume some responsibility in programs that affect them so directly. In these same programs staff have to be turned loose, so that they are encouraged to develop a “we” feeling—a feeling that all of us fellow workers are involved in the treatment effort of changing delinquent-type attitudes and values.