

AN EVALUATION  
OF THE  
TOWN OF HOOKSETT  
YOUTH SERVICES OFFICER

NOV 1978

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ACQUISITION

GRANT NUMBER

78-II-A2081 E01

PROJECT PERIOD

January 6, 1978-- January 31, 1978

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November 14, 1978

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### Background

In August, 1976, the New Hampshire Governor's Commission on Crime and Delinquency approved a grant to the Town of Hooksett for the establishment of a full time Youth Services Officer for the Hooksett District Court. A staff evaluation, completed in July, 1977, concluded that the project was an overwhelming success and, therefore, continuation of funding was recommended.

In January, 1978, this Commission approved a grant in the amount of \$6,359 to the Town of Hooksett to continue support of the Youth Services Officer. Grant funds were apportioned as follows:

Federal	\$6,025
Commission	334
Total	6,359

The project period has been established as January 6, 1978 through January 31, 1979.

### Project Description

The youths of Hooksett, Allenstown and Pembroke were to be served through this project. The Youth Services Officer was to work under the auspices of the Hooksett District Court and in cooperation with the Police Departments in the tri-town area.

The foremost goal of this program was to reduce the incidence of juvenile crime and delinquency. That goal was to be met through the achievement of the following specific objectives.

1. To establish five crisis homes for temporary placement of abused or neglected children, delinquents and P.I.N.S.
2. To divert 75% of juvenile cases from the court.
3. To maintain near zero commitment level to YDC.
4. To maintain recidivism rate of diverted youth at 20% or lower.
5. To maintain recidivism rate of court referred youth at 15% or lower.
6. To visit each elementary, junior high, and high school at least once to discuss the program.
7. To continue monthly meetings of the Diversion Committee as an advisory board to the Youth Services Officer.

The specific responsibilities of the Youth Services Officer are as follows:

1. To act as a liaison among the courts, police and community agencies in all juvenile cases under the direct supervision of the Hooksett District Court.
2. To investigate, where appropriate, cases involving juveniles and juvenile offenders.
3. To assist in the determination of offenders to be diverted from court action into other appropriate community based treatment programs.
4. To work with probation officers and other youth service agencies to identify a network of services potentially useful in juvenile cases.
5. To develop, with the supervision of the court, general guidelines regarding processing and diverting youthful offenders.

### Project Operation

The Hooksett Youth Officer (YSO) serves the Towns of Hooksett, Pembroke, and Allenstown. The area encompasses 102 square miles and has a combined population of 17,000. The tri-town area served includes four elementary schools, three junior high schools, and three high schools.

The position of Youth Services Officer is currently filled by Ms. Debra Brousseau who was hired on February 23, 1978. Ms. Brousseau graduated from Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts with a BA degree in Social Rehabilitation. Ms. Brousseau had previously worked as an intern at the N. H. Youth Development Center and at the N. H. Governor's Commission on Crime and Delinquency. She has also worked as a volunteer probation officer and a social history volunteer with the Worcester Court.

The YSO deals with all cases of delinquency, neglect or abuse, and persons in need of supervision in the three towns served by the Hooksett District Court. Referrals are received from police departments, parents, welfare, schools, the State Police, and any other appropriate source.

The YSO has been in contact with 89 youths during the period February 23, 1978 through October 31, 1978. Program statistics for that period indicate the following sources of referral.

Parents	7
Allenstown Police Department	13
Hooksett Police Department	26
Pembroke Police Department	11
Candia Police Department	1
Allenstown School Department	4
Hooksett School Department	5
Pembroke School Department	1
Manchester Office of Youth Services	1
Division of Welfare	1
YDC Parole	3
Manchester Probation Department	1

Merrimack County Sheriff's Department	1
Suncook Child and Youth Services	1
Prior YSO cases	13

Once a referral is received the youth's parent or guardian is notified. The YSO then investigates all pertinent information relative to the child. In all cases the family and school situation is assessed. The YSO, the Police Chief or detective from the appropriate town, and the referral agent review the case to determine whether diversion or court action is most appropriate.

Following is a list of guidelines established by the YSO to determine if diversion is appropriate.

1. The youth must be under 18 years old.
2. The youth must reside in Allenstown, Hooksett, or Pembroke.
3. The seriousness of the offense.
4. Previous police involvement and the extent of that involvement.
5. Behavioral problems in the home and school and extent of those problems.
6. Resources available to handle youth without court orders.
7. Attitude of all parties concerning diversion and the program which will be designed for the case.
8. Each case will be looked at individually which will allow for flexibility among these guidelines.

According to the grant proposal, if a decision regarding diversion could not be reached due to the difficulty of the case a diversion

committee would be convened to provide advice, suggestions, and support to the YSO. The Diversion Committee is comprised of six members including two police chiefs, a police detective, two guidance personnel, and a school principal. The committee was to meet informally on the first tuesday of each month. In actuality, however, the Youth Services Officer seeks advise from members of the Diversion Committee on an individual basis. Only those members who have a particular interest in or relationship with the child in question are contacted for advice on that child's case.

According to Judge Khfory, and police officials who serve as members on the committee, Ms. Brousseau's current handling of the diversion component is preferable to the manner proposed in the grant. Several members concurred that the diversion component under this arrangement allows for more expediency and productivity.

Of the eighty-nine youths served by the Youth Services Officer during the period February 23 through October 31, fifty youths entered the court diversion program, twenty-seven went to court, and twelve merely required counseling by the YSO.

Youths diverted from the court are usually seen by the YSO at least every other week or more often if deemed necessary. The following agencies and programs have been utilized by youths in the diversion program during the period February 23 through October 31:

- Division of Welfare
- Manchester Mental Health
- Tour of YDC
- Private Psychologist
- Concord Mental Health
- Living with Sister
- Manchester Probation
- School Counselor
- Conway Court
- Parole Officer (YDC)
- Foster Placement
- Restitution

Many of the cases brought before the court are eventually referred back to the YSO by order of the Judge. In these cases the youths are assigned to the YSO under the conditions and terms that she may require for an indeterminate time. The terms of the probation closely follow the rules established by the New Hampshire Probation Department. Currently twenty-seven cases are assigned by the court to the YSO in this manner.

In the initial visit the YSO usually sees the parent and the child. Thereafter the child is seen weekly by the YSO. Periodically, the YSO obtains progress reports from the schools, family, and any other appropriate agency. Monthly reports concerning findings are maintained by the Youth Services Officer.

In addition, the YSO has established five crisis homes during this grant period. During the period February 23 through October 31, these crisis homes have been used on four occasions.

The YSO was also to participate in a variety of educational programs and public awareness activities aimed towards the prevention of juvenile crime and delinquency and promotion of juvenile court diversion. In reference to educational programs, Ms. Brousseau has participated in the following seminars:

- N. H. Laws Relating to Juvenile Offenses
- Legal Limitations and Provisions
- Child Abuse Workshop
- Juvenile Prosecutors School
- Child Abuse Seminar
- Court Diversion Symposium

Ms. Brousseau has also participated in "Teen Years Talk", a program presented by the Hooksett Congregational Church and is in continuous contact with those schools in the area served by this grant.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

During the period February 23, 1978 through October 31, 1978, the YSO has been in contact with eighty-nine youths, seventy-seven of whom were possible candidates for court. Of these seventy-seven youths, fifty (65%) were diverted from the court through the project's court diversion program.

It was proposed in the grant that the recidivism rate of diverted youth remain at 20 percent or lower. The recidivism rate of diverted youth has exceeded expectations with an actual rate of only 10 percent. The YSO also anticipated maintaining the recidivism rate of court referred youth at 15 percent or lower. Program statistics indicate the recidivism rate of court referred youth to be at 11 percent.

This writer conducted interviews with each police officials from the tri-town area responsible for handling juveniles as well as Judge Kfhory of the Hooksett District Court. All fully concurred that they were satisfied with Ms. Brousseau's performance and found her recommendations for disposition highly reliable. In addition, this project appears to have gained great support in all other areas of the service community, as well.

One potential technical problem was identified by this office and is worthy of recognition. There is a possibility of a conflict of interest where the Youth Services Officer counsels, investigates, develops an alternative program, and diverts a particular juvenile and then brings that same juvenile before the District Court Justice for judicial determination as a juvenile delinquent. All agencies involved in the program are aware of this; however, no problems have arisen from this situation.



The program, as a whole, is operating quite successfully. No administrative or programmatic difficulties were identified by this writer. Therefore, continuation of funding on a 75/25 basis, as consistent with Commission policy is recommended.



**END**