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caring for youth

Essays on Alternative Services

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alternative group foster homes:

A New Place for Young People to Live

A HISTORY OF CHILD PLACEMENT

Children who leave home or are abandoned by or separated from their parents are an evocative group, the frequent source in myth and legend of heroes, heroines, and monsters, the locus in many societies of strong and often inexplicable fears and concerns, fantasies and hopes. The history of the way they have been treated in the United States, a country which has consistently maintained that the "home is the highest and finest product of civilization,"[1] presents a mirror to the development of our society.

The communities of colonial New England were tight theocratic worlds in which the patriarchal family was the primary building block and model of authority.[2] All people who lived outside families were suspect as potential sources of destruction and discontent; relying on biblical precedent ("God settleth the solitary in families"—Psalms 68:6), the authorities placed single older people, and orphans and bastards as well, in family settings. The arrangement was economical as well as moral: The community was relieved of the burden of supporting these people, and their labor was available to the families that took them in. When morality and economics clashed—as in the case of a family too poor to support its own children—economics won: The children were "bound out" as apprentices to other families.[3]

An accelerated rate of immigration, the importation of large numbers of young servants, industrialization, and urbanization combined in the late 18th and early 19th centuries to increase the numbers of American children who could or did not live with their parents, and to decrease the other familial living situations available to them. With cheap servant labor available, chil-

[1] J.K. Whittaker (1972, p. 56), quoting from *Proceedings of the Conference on the Care of Dependent Children* (U.S. Gov't. Printing Office, 1909).

[2] See Bremner et al., Vol. 1, pp. 1-63.

[3] Ibid., pp. 64-71, 103-184.

agents of the juvenile system which paid them—supervisors of, rather than advocates for, the children whom they placed. Child labor laws were inoperative in rural areas and, for a long time, inefficient in industries where economics dictated the use of children as workers.

During this period, child welfare agencies and juvenile courts collaborated to create group foster homes[9]—living situations in which several to a dozen young people were placed with foster parents or child care workers. These group homes represented community-based extensions of institutional care, and an economically advantageous variation on individual foster care. In general they were thought to be particularly suitable for adolescents, for whom they provided a compromise between the intimacy and dependence of family life and the independence of adulthood.

In the first decades of the 20th century, the developing fields of psychiatry, psychology, and psychoanalysis, and their elaboration in the child guidance movement were already influencing procedures and shaping attitudes in every aspect of child placement. According to the early workers in these fields, children were to be understood in the light of their feelings and motives, not simply as the sum of their behaviors—as young people with special needs and as rapidly developing adolescents, not simply as small or irresponsible adults. At its best this perspective helped child guidance workers to train foster parents and child care workers who were able to "identify with the child despite his behavior,"[10] whose "change in attitude" permitted the child to live out the fullness of his own life with them.

Often, however, psychological understanding degenerated to psychiatric name-calling. Instead of being viewed as a slipped gear in the economic machinery, a public shame or nuisance, children came to be seen as damaged or sick individuals who required diagnosis, treatment, and cure. Though the vocabulary and technology changed, the stigmatization and isolation of earlier institutions remained. In many psychiatric institutions, tranquilizing drugs, electroshock treatment, and the seclusion room have simply replaced beatings, repetitive and useless tasks, and solitary confinement. A manipulative group therapy could be used to bring about the same degree of conformity as moral suasion. Nor did high-powered psychological testing and heavily credentialed caseworkers make foster care more loving or intelligent.[11] Many foster parents are still simply the lowest bidders at the social welfare vendue.

In recent years a variety of new developments—socioeconomic and political, as well as therapeutic and biological—have altered the accepted ideas about adolescents and their placement. Young people come to physiological maturity considerably earlier than they did half a century ago. The increase and spread of affluence and technology have made most of them unneces-

[9]See Gula; Scher; Rabinow; Herstein; Fisher; Wolins and Pillavin; Whittaker; Jewett.
[10]See Bremner et al., Vol. 2, p. 436.
[11]See Whittaker, pp. 51-61; Mnookin.

sary as workers but powerful as consumers. The mass media, particularly television, have provided them with vast amounts of information from which to form their opinions and on which to base their actions. Concurrently, their social and legal status has changed. The 1967 Supreme Court decision *In re Gault* held that children in juvenile court were constitutionally entitled to certain due process guarantees previously granted only to adults in criminal court.[12] Juvenile correctional officials have begun[13] to dismantle degrading systems of institutional care. The voting age has been lowered to 18. Recently, young people, following the example of blacks, women, and old people, have formed liberation groups[14] to insure their civil rights and their right of self-determination.

In this climate of social and political change increasing numbers of young people and their adult advocates have begun to demand that adolescents be allowed to live autonomously—at or away from home—in settings in which their rights and integrity are respected. And they are beginning to create settings—natural social experiments—where this takes place.

ALTERNATIVE SERVICES

During the last ten years the needs and demands of some young people have begun to be met and articulated by new helpers and new institutions. These people and their projects owe their origins to a "youth culture" and a "counterculture" which are themselves both influences on and heirs to powerful political and social forces: the civil rights movement of the late 1950s and 60s, the antiwar movement, and the women's movement. These workers in "alternative services" affirm the experience of young people in its autonomous integrity, not as a promise of future achievement or reflection of parental or societal ideals.

Among the first of the services they created were runaway houses, refuges for some of the estimated 600,000 to 1,000,000[15] young people who each year left their homes or the institutions to which they had been confined. Runaway houses offered young people a protected alternative to a street life which made them vulnerable to exploitation as well as to arrest and involuntary return home. Since 1967 their numbers have grown from a handful in large cities to well over one hundred in communities of every size.[16]

The people who founded the early runaway houses were more likely to be the natural helpers of the "hip" community—ministers, organizers, street people—than those certified by schools of social work, psychology, or criminology. As sympathizers with, if not participants in, both radical politics and

[12] See Rodham.
[13] See Ohlin et al.
[14] See publications of "The Youth Liberation Front" (Ann Arbor, Mich.), including the newspaper, *FPS*.
[15] See U.S. Senate, Hearings on S. 2829 (1972).
[16] See *National Directory of Runaway Centers* (1974).

the counterculture, they tended to see running away not as a symptom of individual psychopathology or as evidence of criminality, but as a sign of familial disorder and of a society in turmoil. They believed that in a supportive context, running away could become running toward, an act of hope rather than a gesture of petulance or despair.

Once in a runaway house, young people were automatically given the kind of respect that they rarely experienced in the adult world or from its institutions or professional helpers. The workers in the house believed that the young runaways were capable of making the decisions that affected their lives. They tried to listen to the young people, to sympathize without labeling or coercing or trying to "do things for [their] own good."

For those young people whose homes were confusing and disturbing but not intolerable, a few days at a runaway house and some individual and family counseling could provide the support necessary to weather a crisis or understand a particular dilemma; for those who were already all but independent it was a reassuring way station. But significant numbers of young people left runaway houses after a few days or weeks to return home, only to become embroiled in the same futile destructiveness which had originally forced them to leave. Others, written off by their parents, left home to bum around or live on the street, only until they were picked up by the police—to be committed, or recommitted, to mental or penal institutions.

The latter young people returned over and over to runaway houses, often leaving in their wake legal, social service, and mental health agencies which had made multiple attempts at institutional and foster placement, at counseling and therapy. Between their periodic flights to runaway houses some wrote plaintive letters: "Can I stay at Runaway House for good?" "Isn't there any place I can go?"

Over the last several years, workers in some runaway houses have created group foster homes to answer these dilemmas and needs, to provide more or less permanent places for young people who could or would not stay elsewhere. But in making use of the structure and financing of the group foster homes, workers in alternative services have tried to transform the homes' spirit. They are trying to create real alternatives to institutions and to conventional "agency operated" group homes, as well as to the family situations to which the young people can't or won't return—that is, they are trying to create communal households which will respect the rights of young people to run their own lives, extended families in which power can be democratically distributed and decisions collectively made.

TWO ALTERNATIVE GROUP FOSTER HOMES

I was a consultant for 18 months at Markham House and for 20 months at Frye House: a participant observer in weekly "house meetings" of young people and counselors at which "anything" could be discussed; an advisor to

the staff; and a confidant—with varying degrees of frequency and intimacy—to individual young people and staff members.

After a brief history of each of the houses and of my introduction to them, I will discuss several developmental issues which seem to me to be both common and critical to their evolution; the different ways these issues were met in the two houses; and the implications and consequences of their responses for each of the houses. Though the presentation will be roughly chronological, it is important to keep in mind that all of these issues were of some importance throughout my consultation with both houses.

I stopped consulting with Markham 18 months ago, and with Frye 14 months ago. I am still in touch with several of the young people who lived in each of the houses and sometimes still visit Frye.

The houses are not precisely comparable, nor do I wish to present them as such. Although both Frye House and Markham House owe their origins to runaway houses, each of them has peculiar characteristics of location, community, ideology, and personality which shaped its development and helped to determine its usefulness to young people.

Frye House: Setting

Frye House opened two years after its parent runaway house, several blocks from it, in the integrated hip neighborhood which borders the ghetto and buffers the wealthy white section of the city. The first location was temporary and barnlike, easily large enough for the two counselors and eight young people who, after several months, occupied it. The house was opened with a few dollars borrowed from the runaway house, a small foundation grant, and the promise of "payment for services" from social service departments which were planning to place young people there.

For many months the young paraprofessionals (a man, 23, and a woman, 24) who staffed Frye House groped for some coherent philosophy and structure. Though they had previously worked at the runaway house, they were often overwhelmed by the variety, complexity, and intensity of the problems of the young people who came to live with them. What kind of house and what kind of counseling could accommodate white runaways from middle-class suburban homes, black street kids, tough-talking "delinquents," indifferent "hippies," and spaced-out "flower children"?

The counselors were shaken and pressured by the violent clash of life styles, the noise, the angry discontent, and the disruptive behavior. Neighbors and friends who had volunteered at runaway house sustained them while they weathered some storms, but increasingly they felt compelled to get control over the house. They moved to another building, reduced the number of young people to six (three boys and three girls), and made only fitful attempts to hold onto the most disruptive and alien of their charges. Concurrently, the counselors' political perspective—their vision of the house as a

democratic family, of the young people as independent and respected participants—began to erode. Under the influence of a mental health consultant, the young people metamorphosed to patients and children, the counselors to therapists and parents.

Even after this consultant left, the counselors maintained self-consciously therapeutic and conventionally parental roles. Young people who were applying for admission to the house were interviewed first by a new psychiatric consultant, then screened by the counselors. Though house rules were discussed and disputed by the young people, they were promulgated and enforced by the counselors. All of the young people were required "for their own good" to be in school or to work; all of them followed routines for cooking and cleaning established by the counselors; all had to obey rules and regulations considered appropriate to their age—curfews and, in the house, abstention from sex, liquor, and drugs.

When I arrived at Frye there were new counselors: Ann, who had lived in the house for five months, and Fred, who had been there for three. They had asked me to come over because of Tom, a 17-year-old boy who had lived in the house for almost a year. We sat in the living room on shabby overstuffed furniture. The house was cool and, except for us, empty and quiet in the late afternoon.

Ann told me that when she first arrived, Tom had been quiet, appealing, and tractable. But over the last few months he had begun to "change." Both she and Fred now thought that he was becoming increasingly "crazy" and maybe "dangerous." He accused them of not caring about him and of wanting to destroy him. In his room, he screamed at unseen tormentors. Questioned about his feelings, he became enraged and abusive.

Something frightening was going on with Tom and neither Ann nor Fred could figure out how to deal with it. They wondered if I could find another place for him, or see him in therapy, or recommend something.

Ann and Fred went on to tell me about themselves and the house. Ann had earlier been an elementary school teacher, and for eight months had been a counselor at the runaway house. Fred had been an Air Force medic, and then a seminarian. Both of them had been active in the antiwar movement as campaigners for liberal candidates and participants in peace demonstrations. They had both come to Frye because they wanted to live and work with young people in a new way, free from the strictures of conventional child care and social service. They were concerned that under pressure from the young people they were falling into disciplinary and parental roles. Their temptation to control and "analyze" Tom's behavior was only the most recent and distressing example.

I told them that I wanted to see Tom not as a psychiatrically ill individual but as a member of their home—to understand his behavior not in the clinical isolation of an interview situation, but in the context of his relationships to those around him. They listened closely, nodding their heads: "Maybe we're too close to really understand what's going on." Their willingness to be self-

critical, their openness to my perspective put me more at ease. When I said that the young people would have to agree to my coming to house meetings—that I did not want to be or to seem to be the counselors' agent—they readily agreed. With this consensus, I began my work at Frye.

Markham House: Setting

Markham was opened in 1971 as a runaway house. Located at first in half a dozen unused rooms of a local religious mission, it developed over five chaotic months into a group foster home on a quiet street of single family houses in a middle-class residential suburb. Markham's director, Allan, made the changes because he felt overwhelmed by the number of runaways and by the contrary pulls and cumulative pressures of probation officers, young people, and families. The kids—local runaways who found their way to the mission and disruptive teenagers deposited there by the police—had made noise all night, smoked dope, and left just before their probation officers arrived for appointments. Their parents were suspicious, the neighbors furious, and the probation officers dissatisfied.

Allan had recently left his job in the public school system in protest against the oppressiveness of the discipline and the monotony of the curriculum. He had set out to provide a human service for young people, a place where, as he put it, "their personhood would be respected." Working with him were several volunteer counselors, students and recent graduates from local colleges, who seemed both confident and sensitive. But after a while the situation had begun to feel wrong—temporary, unsatisfying, uncontrollable. Allan wanted to provide emergency services to the teenagers in the community, but even more he hoped to establish "a safe, stable, caring environment." He raised a few thousand dollars, found a house, and began to fight for a license to provide foster care.

Markham's first few months in its new location were almost as chaotic as those in the mission. Probation officers appeared at all hours with young runaways in tow, begging Allan to take in "just one more"; kids from nearby towns who "hadn't heard" that the runaway house had become a group foster home came by to "crash." Some neighbors offered food and emotional support; others telephoned the police, complaining of noise, drugs, and degeneracy. An air of crisis—to which the young residents responded alternately with solemnity and secret glee—pervaded the house.

Slowly Allan removed himself from the hour-to-hour operation of Markham. He hired three counselors, who did not live at Markham but slept there several nights a week (there was room only for an office, not a staff bedroom). One was a 22-year-old man who had started as a part-time volunteer and then dropped out of college to become the head counselor. The other two were women volunteers who were hired as full-time counselors. Six young people were accepted as residents. Allan, the three counselors, and several volunteers planned the house's "program," together with a psychiatric

social worker who consulted with the staff, a psychologist who saw the young people individually, and a group worker who ran weekly "sensitivity groups" for all the residents.

When I arrived at dinner time, the living-dining room was a jumble of bodies; furniture, and food, or raised voices and rock music. The two-story frame house hardly seemed capable of containing so much activity. The young people ate and nodded hello. Four or five counselors and volunteers were busy tacking down carpets and putting the finishing touches on a coat of paint in the kitchen. Allan explained that neighbors and members of the county council were about to visit, that the house, which had recently been raided by the police "on some trumped-up charge," needed their support to stay open.

Allan wasn't sure exactly how he could use me, only that he wanted me to help. "There are other consultants," he said, "but we can use a psychiatrist—maybe for individual therapy or for court evaluations." Allan began to tell me about some of his problems. He wanted, he said, to "respect the personhood" of each of the young people, but there was so much confusion, such a great need to "keep up appearances—at least until we're more secure in the neighborhood. I can't have the kids acting like they did at the mission—staying up all night, smoking marijuana. Here they can't even make noise or swear so anyone can hear them. Some of our neighbors are looking for anything they can to close us. Later the young people can have more freedom; but right now we need some order."

I liked the house: there was something industrious and comforting about the chaos—a group of people working at something together. But I also felt a little uneasy. I guessed that the neighborhood's disapproval would weigh constantly on the house, and I feared that this social pressure might serve as justification—even when it was not compelling—for oppressive policies in the house. Perhaps it was Allan who made me feel that. He seemed at once unsure and self-righteous, too eager for professional help just because it was professional.

I suggested that I spend time around the house, talking with the young people and counselors. I also said that I would like to come to house meetings if they had any. Allan agreed and then asked in passing if I would talk with Bobby, one of the young people in the house. He seemed very "strange," quiet and frightened. He laughed aloud to himself, and some of the counselors thought that he might be hearing voices.

Within three weeks I was going to the weekly house meetings that Allan and the counselors found necessary.

At Markham, as at Frye, I attended as a consultant and facilitator, an outside observer who could help unravel the tangled communications and clarify the obscurities of a meeting, someone committed to helping the participants put immediate issues and arguments in the larger context of a group of people—neglected and homeless young people and their counselors—struggling to live and work together in a decent way.

Deviance in Both Houses

Deviance is relative to particular social groups. Decisions about who or what is deviant, and exclusion of people whose behavior or attitudes are so labeled, help to provide groups with a means of defining and organizing themselves.[17] From the perspective of the larger society, all of the young people and many of the counselors in both group foster homes were deviant. Within each of the houses there were also people whose behavior and attitudes caused them to be regarded by their fellow residents as deviant. The differing ways of dealing with this perceived deviance were crucial in shaping the development of the two houses.

At Frye House, Tom's "craziness" was allowed and encouraged to emerge in weekly house meetings.[18] With my help the counselors and other young people came to see his behavior and understand his language as, among other things, indirect and disguised protests against house rules and communal attitudes which seemed contradictory, destructive, and insensitive. By refraining from labeling as delusory his beliefs that they did not care about him and were "destroying him," the counselors could begin to look at the ways in which they were being destructive, at the contradictions between their stated feelings of warmth and sympathy and the content of certain house rules which they enforced. If Tom did not want to go to school or work and they tried to force him to do so, then perhaps they were indeed caring less for him than for their rules. If they said he was free to choose what to do with himself, and simultaneously had a rule that only young people who worked or went to school could stay in the house, that denied his right to choose. If they then denied the contradiction between words and rules, then indeed they were helping—by double-binding him—to "drive him crazy."

The willingness of the counselors to view Tom's behavior as a critique of the social situation rather than simply as deviance from its norms relieved some of the pressure on him. It also provided a precedent for understanding and dealing with all of the young people. The purpose of the house was to include people who had been excluded and isolated, to respect the rights of each one who came there. To judge, regulate, and discipline young people according to the counselors' preconceptions or norms was to reproduce the kind of oppressive social situation which had excluded them in the first place.

In Markham House the tendency to isolate and label the deviant was not modified. Bobby's silent withdrawal was all but ignored in the clamor of group meetings. Both he and Joanne, a 16-year-old who had spent time in reform school and several other group homes, were insistently referred for treatment to the house psychologists. Joanne's anger at what she termed "two-faced lies and insults"—which seemed based on the apparent inequity with which privileges were doled out to the young people by one of the

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[17] See Erikson, especially pp. 1-29 ("On the Sociology of Deviance").

[18] For a more detailed account of Tom's "craziness" and of deviance in Frye House, see Gordon, 1973, 1974.

counselors—was simply dismissed. In house meetings the counselors said that there were reasons for this, but Joanne just didn't seem to understand. When she persisted, they told her that her constant anger was the reason she had fewer privileges—that, in effect, her protests against the rules justified their use against her.

Comments by me on this process of exclusion and mystification were not particularly helpful. Allan conceded, in private, that I might be right "in theory, but the time's not right." Admitting the justice of the young peoples' criticisms in a meeting would be opening the house to an "anarchy" it could not afford.

At Frye the openness to deviance was instrumental in keeping the house an organically evolving entity, in allowing it to change to accommodate the variety of young people who stayed there. This flexibility, in turn, made it possible for a high percentage of the young people to stay for long periods of time, for almost all of them to leave when *they* were ready. In contrast, the counselors and residents at Markham regularly extruded young people—with appropriate psychiatric diagnoses, moral or criminal charges—who were considered "too disruptive."

As far as I was able to tell, there were no appreciable differences among the "kinds" of young people staying at the two houses; sometimes, in fact, the same young person was simultaneously being considered for admission to both houses. At Frye the age range was 14 to 18; at Markham, 14 to 17. The vast majority of them were white and lower-middle class. Virtually all of the young people had run away from their homes and had spent a period of time in detention centers. About one-third of the residents in each house had been sent to reform schools, and another third had spent time in mental hospitals. Close to 90 percent of the young people in both houses had previously been placed in other foster homes; more than half of them had been placed more than once. One person from Frye and one from Markham left the group foster home to return to his or her parents. In each house approximately 15 to 20 percent of the young people were black.

With these similarities in mind the differences in length of stay are particularly striking: Over an 18-month period, nine people stayed at Frye for an average of 10.5 months each; during the same time 18 lived at Markham for an average of 5.0 months each. Many of those who left Markham were asked to do so. Five were sent from Markham directly to institutions.

Power and Rules

At Frye House the distribution of power and the rules which reflected it gradually changed to conform to the spirit of respect and participatory democracy which had originally animated the house's formation.

In the weekly meetings at Frye the young people's challenges to house rules were accepted, not deflected. Social norms which had been adopted unquestioningly—all young people should go to school or work, should wake up

and return home at certain hours, etc.—were critically considered and revised to fit the felt needs of the young people.

In the house meetings personal frankness slowly replaced defensiveness. Teenage residents who were not afraid that some privilege would be taken away grew comfortable in criticizing counselors freely and directly, and were able to reveal personal difficulties without fears of arbitrary reprisal. Similarly, the counselors, no longer burdened with moralistic postures, could drop their defensive condescension and be more straightforward about their own annoyances, anxieties, and concerns.

The increased respect of the counselors for the young people provided the basis for new processes of decision-making. Instead of being reserved to the counselors and their consultants, all decisions—regarding household budgets, hiring of new counselors, rules, admission of new people to the house, and overnight guests—began to be made in common. The way the house dealt with drug use is illustrative.

There had always been a counselor-imposed—and collective-wide—rule against drug use in the house: Anyone caught with drugs would be kicked out. In fact, one person had been caught and allowed to stay. Generally the young people had lied about drugs, claiming that there were none in the house while hiding them from the counselors. Inevitably this drove a wedge between the young people and the counselors. The young people were resentful and guilty, and the counselors were suspicious and self-righteously angry at the betrayal which they knew the young people were perpetrating. In addition, none of the young people felt free to talk about drug-related problems: fears of addiction, the possibility of hepatitis, a bad trip that they had or were having.

Only when group discussions were finally held about drugs in the house, about the real dangers of police arrest and the possible closing down of the house, and only *after* the young people had power over and a stake in the house, did they honestly agree not to have drugs there. It was no longer a "counselors' rule," but a matter of common interest and of group survival.

At Markham House the split between counselors and young people widened. Fears of disorder and an inability to hear young people's criticisms, spoken directly, or indirectly displayed in angry behavior, led to an increasing concentration of power in the counselors, a proliferation of rules and sanctions. Instead of granting freedom and responsibility together, the counselors insisted that a demonstrated responsibility precede freedom and that they would be the ones who would determine who was responsible.

A system of levels of privilege was instituted. Several weeks of obedience at one level of freedom (a 10 o'clock curfew, one phone call a night) preceded the granting of greater privileges (a midnight curfew and two phone calls a night). The young people, who resented the levels, disobeyed the rules covertly and conned susceptible counselors into exempting them from sanctions. The counselors (with a circularity of reasoning which took many months for them to understand) justified the need for levels by pointing to

the lack of responsibility and honesty that the young people demonstrated in dealing with them.

The counselors always reserved final decision-making power to themselves. Many of them regarded house meetings as simply "a time for the kids to complain, to blow off steam." The real decisions about levels and punishment were to be made by the counselors, away from the meetings. Attempts to make the house more democratic, to share power, turned out actually to be covert systems of manipulation and mystification: Separate orbits of power were designated, one that the young people could control, and a larger, encompassing one that gave the counselors control over the first. These dual orbits were initially welcomed by the young people. When they discovered that they couldn't make substantive changes—hours of curfew, time of clean-up, patterns of phone use—they became more cynical and the split between them and the counselors widened.

Induction

Freud has written of powerful forces in all of us which tend to cause us to repeat past patterns of behavior (repetition compulsion) and to act with new people and in novel situations as we have with significant historical, and especially parental, figures and in formative situations (transference). More recently Laing (1973) has described "induction," a transpersonal process by which we induce others to behave toward us as significant historical others once did. In the group foster homes all of these forces and, in particular, induction were continuous, powerful, and pervasive.

Virtually all of the young people in both houses had been, in a variety of ways, rejected, discounted, and nullified by their parents long before they left home. Whatever efforts they made to grow close to the counselors, to make new and better homes for themselves, were inevitably shot through with suspicions and resentments that they transferred from previous settings, attitudes, and actions which tended to induce the counselors to act as their parents and previous caretakers had. Only counselors who were both sensitive to this process and willing to forego the often destructive parental roles for which their own histories prepared them were able to resist induction. Only in a setting in which induction was not easily fulfilled could this take place.

The democratization of Frye House provided a firm basis for resisting a variety of inductions. When they felt victimized, young people could be reminded, truthfully, that they had real power in and over their living situation. Counselors who actively sought the interpersonal meaning of disruptive behavior were predisposed to understand certain of the young people's actions as invitations to rejection, to interpret rather than answer them. Still, the struggle was continuous and not always successful.

The counselors were surprisingly capable of dealing with most of the young people. For example, 15-year-old Ellen's aggressiveness and self-

destructive behavior (stealing, multiple drug use, street fights, temper tantrums) continually invited reprisals, sanctions, and restrictions. The counselors refused either to confine her—as her parents, a succession of foster parents, and reform schools had done—or, when attempts at control proved insufficient, to reject her as they had. For the most part they simply treated her with the respect due someone who was capable of making up her own mind. They confronted her with their responses to her disruptive behavior, and tried to stop it when it infringed on them; when she asked for advice, verbally or nonverbally, they tried to dissuade her from actions they thought unwise, to help her think about and find alternative courses. At the same time, they tried to listen to the whys and whens of her actions, to be available to her when depression and loneliness succeeded vengefulness and violence.

The counselors had more difficulty with young people whose early lives seemed to have been characterized by massive indifference and neglect. Two of these young people seemed constantly to drift away from house activities and interactions. They seemed both disdainful and frightened of the participatory possibilities which the openness of the house permitted them. If they took offense, they often refused to admit it; sometimes they seemed to cherish their hurt in secret. Their need for affection well hidden, as well as their anger, they continually slipped further away from engagement with counselors. They were able to find in the counselors' respect for their freedom, its parody, the kind of indifference to which they were accustomed. And in time, the counselors, frustrated and discouraged, did become indifferent to them. Within six months these young men (who had both previously lived on their own) left the house, vaguely disappointed, to "bum around."

At Markham House the counselors' insistence on concentrating decision-making power in themselves, and their willingness to make rules "for the young people's good" made them particularly vulnerable to inductions. Almost any aspect of behavior could signal the need for an "appropriate" and "effective" response. With bizarre faithfulness counselors managed to act out an array of contradictory parts in which the young people cast them. At the same time their need to maintain authority made it difficult for them to see this process. Confronted with it, they became defensive and self-righteous, readily willing to blame "the kids."

For example, Allan's relationship with Leslie rapidly became a facsimile of the one she had had with her father: Her good looks, coquettishness, and sweetness immediately attracted him to her, encouraged him to seek her out as a confidante. When she later evaded house rules to be with her boyfriend, Allan seemed to experience it as insult and desertion. He accused her, without any sense of irony, of selfishness, and of not caring, and became bitter, suspicious, and vindictive toward her. A final invasion of her privacy—a public harangue while she was at her job—paralleled exactly her father's jealous intrusiveness on her relations with other young people.

Another counselor (who in talks with me admitted his bewilderment) simultaneously acted cool and condescending to one girl, authoritarian and punitive to one boy, and forgiving to another resident. All the while he spoke in meetings of the need for "consistency in treatment" and of his attempt to be "firm, but fair."

The Group Foster Home and the World

Group foster homes are peculiarly vulnerable to outside influences. Simply to exist, the houses must adhere to strict zoning regulations and obey a variety of sanitary and fire codes that entail substantial expenditures and exact careful compliance. The knowledge that boys and girls live together with young counselors—and the noise that inevitably comes from a place where there are half a dozen adolescents—makes each house a focus of attention for worried and suspicious neighbors. Each of the young people who is placed in the house is subject to the authority of court-appointed officers; an individual or a house's offenses against a particular probation officer's or social worker's prejudices—as well as actual offenses—may precipitate the removal of a young person. To insure its survival, the group foster home must be cleaner and quieter than its neighbors. The young people who live there must be better behaved than their peers next door, and more careful about what they are seen doing.

There are also more subtle influences of the community on the houses. The economic status of a particular neighborhood, the kind of dwellings, the color of the people who live there, the composition of households, their ages, the community's political climate, the attitude of the police, the quality of the schools, the extent to which there is a self-conscious and supportive network of counterculture services. All of these factors have powerful effects on the group foster home.

As one of a number of social service projects in a large, nonhierarchical, collectively run organization, Frye House and the people who lived in it were both responsible to and supported by other counselors and young people. The collective structure of the larger organization provided a model for changes within Frye. Including young people in decision-making was an extension of the franchise, a reaffirmation and deepening of principle by counselors and young people rather than a departure from it. As a result of these changes in Frye, young people in all the projects were included in collective-wide policy decisions, and given a voice in selecting their own counselors.

The structure of the collective and the proximity of a network of alternative services—free clinics, job cooperative, free school, community newspaper, antiprofit businesses—provided a larger world which sustained the democratic and participatory values of the group foster home.

Still, there were aspects of living in a city that were alien and threatening to teenagers who came from suburban schools and neighborhoods. The

heavy urban street scene—drugs, prostitution, violence—that existed side by side with the counterculture exerted a powerful and sometimes destructive pull on some of the young people, tugged at the fabric of counter-cultural values. Some young people, though happy in the house, continually hungered for more familiar parental figures, a more settled and conventional life.

In my first months at Frye House the counselors often seemed caught between the young people and the probation officers and case workers who supervised their placement. They were defensive with these officials, angry at their intrusions, protectively vague in their responses to questions. Sometimes they transmitted the anxieties they felt to the young people, insisting too loud and long that they "shape up" to protect the house's reputation with the case workers. Sometimes the young people complained about the counselors to the case workers, and sometimes in frustration the counselors sided with case workers against the young people.

With the redistribution of power and the changes in rules counselors and young people began to present a united front to the supervisory forces. At first this was largely protective, with each "covering" for the other's derelictions from court policy. But, as the house grew more confident about its policies, it was able, in a relatively unintimidated and undefensive manner, to advance its own beliefs about the young people's right to make their own decisions. There was evidence in Frye's favor: Young people who were labeled incorrigible, who had never been able to stay anywhere else, were able to live at Frye House; some of those whom counselors had refused to force to work or go to school had later, on their own, chosen to do so; young people considered irresponsible, delinquent, and psychotic, were taking part in running a functioning household.

The counselors saw no reason for case workers to impose conventional but arbitrary standards of conduct and morals on the young people who lived in the house. Impressed by the counselors' assurances, respecting the house's success, knowing there was no other place for many of their most difficult young people, many case workers relented; some even seemed converted.

The isolation of Markham in its community contributed greatly to its increasing obedience to the norms of the surrounding suburban community and to their institutionalization in rules and relationships between staff and residents.

Many property holders and politicians opposed Markham as an unwholesome and dangerous addition to the community. In public meetings Allan and his staff again and again had to overcome their objections. These neighbors spurred police to make raids for runaways and complained to them of minor annoyances; to politicians they spoke of drug use, sexual activity, delinquent behavior and noise. As allies the director had a few neighbors and probation officers, people who were for the most part no more committed to the house's survival than they were to traditional and somewhat condescending ideas of child care.

Allan transmitted the constant pressure on him to counselors and young people directly, through strict and detailed rules designed to appease the community and "keep things cool," and indirectly, by self-righteous accusations in the genre of "Look at all I'm doing for you. Why don't you act more grateful?" Some of the counselors shared Allan's approach and his angers; others, painfully sensitive to the young people's reactions but not able to oppose Allan, tended to apologize for him.

The young people banded together with the counselors for special efforts: cleaning the house and the yard before a county council site visit; practicing speeches for a zoning commission meeting. But afterwards they were resentful. The arbitrariness of the rules and their lack of flexibility made the young people feel that they were more the instrument for than the purpose of the house's survival. The director's "guilt tripping" was often a hurtful reminder of attitudes prevalent in their own homes.

Under outside pressure, without the mediation of an extended "alternative" community, hierarchical, male-dominated structures tended to perpetuate themselves. A male director—the only fund raiser and administrator—appointed a male head counselor. Both supervised the work of female counselors. Among the young people in the house, stronger males pushed weaker ones around; and both were ascendant over females. Girls tended to be assigned to cooking and cleaning, boys to garage and yard work. The basic hierarchy between rule-making counselors and rule-obeying (or disobeying) kids was further subdivided in terms of levels of more or less privileged young people.

The counselors tended to go for their emotional, intellectual, and political support to a relatively small group of people in the surrounding community. This helped make the house more a part of the community, a place where neighbors, probation officers, and consultants felt comfortable dropping in. But it also had a conservatizing and confining effect. All house members were under constant if informal and well-intentioned scrutiny. The director felt compelled to accede to the wishes of the probation officers who supported his program. At virtually any hour he would accept "referrals" from them regardless of the objections of the young people in the house.

The young people feared the closeness of the counselors and probation officers for other reasons. Perhaps secrets told to counselors would be revealed to the probation officers, who could return them to detention centers and reform schools. More generally, the expectations and standards of educated middle-class white counselors and probation officers, and of their neighbors and advisors, were inappropriate for or intimidating of poor and/or black young people.

Leaving

Leaving is a constant issue in group foster homes for adolescents. Only the youngest of teenagers does not feel the pressure or the pull of the "some

day" when he or she will be "on my own." In my experience, only the newest of counselors or the most settled of couples does not wonder "what's next for me?"

For the most part young people left Frye when they were ready or elt ready. The right to leave was as important and as respected by counselors as any other right. Generally, their purpose was to understand and facilitate the young person's choice, not oppose or influence it. When they disagreed with a decision they tried simply to say so and explain why. For young people who wanted to leave before they were 18, the counselors simultaneously worked both for legal emancipation and a kind of trial separation: They wanted the young person to be free to go, but for at least a month they tried to keep a place open in the house in case he or she decided to return.

The same philosophy of respect for the young person's rights and wishes made it reasonable for the counselors to fight to keep young people who felt they needed to stay beyond their 18th birthday. Sympathetic case workers and probation officers facilitated continued financial support in some instances; where this was not forthcoming, the counselors and the young person tried together to raise the necessary funds.

Young people who were neither forced out nor bound to the group foster home had both the time and the freedom to work through some of the conflicts that beset separation. Ellen, for instance, was able to "decide to leave" half a dozen times. She rejected the counselors in word—"The only reason you want me to stay is because of the money"—and deed, taking off several times for a night or a week, and discovered that she was not rejected. In house meetings she expressed harsh rigidity in her own ideas about separation ("People who leave," she said, "shouldn't be allowed to just drop over to eat") and heard them mitigated by others—counselors and young people—who wished to provide continuing emotional support to former residents.

In the daily attention the house and the larger collective paid to former residents—allowing them to come to eat, to attend group meetings, or to stay overnight, asking them to act as volunteers or paid workers in the runaway house or job cooperative—Ellen was able to see that the rejection she advocated (and perhaps feared) would not be visited on her. When she did leave at 17½, after three years, Ellen *knew* she could depend on Frye House's support.

This continued feeling of a connection which supersedes and evolves beyond separation was also present among counselors and consultants. My own experience is perhaps illustrative. During the time I was there I was intensely involved with the house as a whole and the people in it. I was at once facilitator of group meetings, and a friend and advisor to individuals. After group meetings I ate dinner at the house, sometimes went for a walk or to a movie with individual members. Sometimes on weekends, house members would come to visit me. When I asked two friends of mine to take my place as consultant, I had the feeling I was "inviting them into the family" as much as I was asking them to do a piece of work.

For a while after I left, I kept in touch with individual house members but stayed away from the house itself. I felt a little strange, unsettled in my relationship to it. I was accustomed to a certain dependency in the house's relationship to me, and, I realized, a position of authority. How, I wondered, could I fit in without being so central? After a few months I began to relax into a new role, as an avuncular member of an extended family, someone who is "there" for the house, a part of its growth and, if needed, a present support—a reminder of its history, and a promise of continuity.

Markham House's tendency to extrude deviants who wanted to stay was cruelly caricatured in its difficulty in letting go of those who wanted to leave. The fitful behavior that preceded or accompanied a decision to leave was often met with renewed attempts to control the young person. Unless he or she was especially careful or shrewd or patient, the young person fell victim to a kind of "Catch 22": The more the young person asserted independence, the more likely he or she was to lose privileges and be restricted. Finally, when the young person—furious and disillusioned—rebelled against the whole system of authority and control and committed "a very serious violation," he or she was kicked out.

Lacking the proper emancipation papers, labeled as "irresponsible," some of the young people were remanded to still more confining situations. The counselors, meanwhile, were depressed, bewildered, and resentful. What could they have done differently? Why did the young person act that way? They had lost the control they thought so necessary to helpfulness and were left only with the bitterness of blame.

For some this final disappointment colored the whole experience of having been at Markham. Even if the young person had concluded that much of the time spent there was helpful, the resentment—sometimes embarrassment—that characterized his or her departure made it virtually impossible to use the home as a support in the months of uncertainty that followed leaving. Some came to depend on individual counselors or professionals (including me) whom they'd met while in the home. Many more, among them some of the most troubled and despairing, withdrew in disillusionment from contact with any "helping" people.

Conclusion

Alternative group foster homes are both heir to a tradition of child placement and a challenge to it. They are providing places for young people who have not been able to live with their parents or foster parents, who would otherwise be—and often have been—institutionalized in mental hospitals and reform schools. Instead of helping them to adjust to a social structure which had already defined them as deviant, counselors in these homes are trying to discover, and to create with the young people, a new microsocial structure.

My experience at Frye and Markham has helped me to understand the variety of factors which facilitate or retard this process: the political and

moral climate of the surrounding community; the support of other workers engaged in a similar enterprise; the organizational structure of the group home itself: the real commitment of counselors to the rights of young people; and the integrity and courage with which they persist, against the odds of overwork, abuse, anxiety, and convention, in respecting each of them.

If they are able to resist the false promises and restricting bonds of parent-child or therapist-client relationships, counselors in these homes can provide the emotional support of respectful mutuality. Understanding that they cannot have "the answers," they may be able to live and work with—and learn from—young people in a way which helps all of them to value and make sense of their common experience.

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