

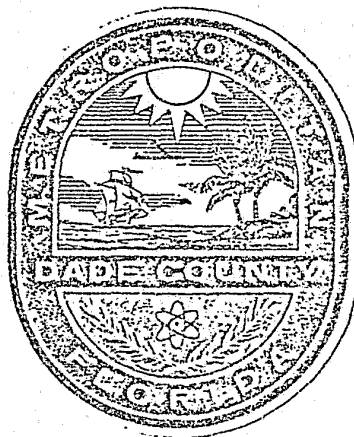
File Juvenile Justice

DADE COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE
PLANNING UNIT

NCJRS
SEP 5 1979
ACQUISITIONS

EVALUATION

ALPHA HOUSE



December, 1976

This document was prepared by the
Planning and Evaluation section of
the Dade County Criminal Justice
Planning Unit and was supported by
L.E.A.A. Grant no: 76-A1-15-AA-01

61406

PROJECT SUMMARY

The intensive evaluation of the LEAA funded Alpha House Boys' Unit was undertaken as part of the In-depth Evaluation and Research Project, grant 76-A1-15-AA-01.

Alpha House offers a specialized residential treatment program for juveniles who manifest emotional problems which, if not treated, could lead to serious delinquent behavior. The treatment of these children toward the goals of personal and familial stability helps to reduce deviant behavior and divert the child and the family from further involvement in the juvenile justice system. These children are referred to the project by the State Office of Youth Services Intake Department, State Office of Social and Economic Services, Dade County Department of Youth Services, as well as from the community itself. Referrals are also accepted from recognized social agencies in the community, especially public schools and special crisis intervention programs.

The goal of the project is to shape attitudes, traits, and behaviors to better conform to the expectations that youngsters meet in their homes and schools. Such traits are honesty, foresight, respect for others' rights and responsibility.

This program uses a method which is presently in effect at Alpha House called Corrective Expectancy Scheduling (CES). CES is a scientific behavior manipulation technique in which a child's

behavior is reviewed daily by a committee of Alpha House staff with the child present. The child earns points in each of seven behavior categories which are converted into purchasing power for clearly specified privileges.

The program also utilized traditional family, group and individual counseling methods while the youth is in Alpha House, and after his release. Treatment of the family is seen as an essential step in stabilizing the child's situation. Additional program components are milieu therapy, a therapeutic program encompassing, remedial education and physical fitness.

A new system called the Achievement Point System was added to the program in 1974. Each child in Alpha House is expected to make measurable achievements in each of five crucial area:

- 1- Cottage social behavior--measured by CES.
- 2- Home and family life--measured by the Alpha House Parents' and Residents' Rating Scales.
- 3- School progress--measured by standards achievement tests.
- 4- Moral development--measured by L. Kohlberg's empirically derived moral development scale.
- 5- Physical fitness--measured by the 32 stages of the Canadian Air Force and the President's fitness programs.

Privileges and progress toward release are contingent upon achievement in the above areas.

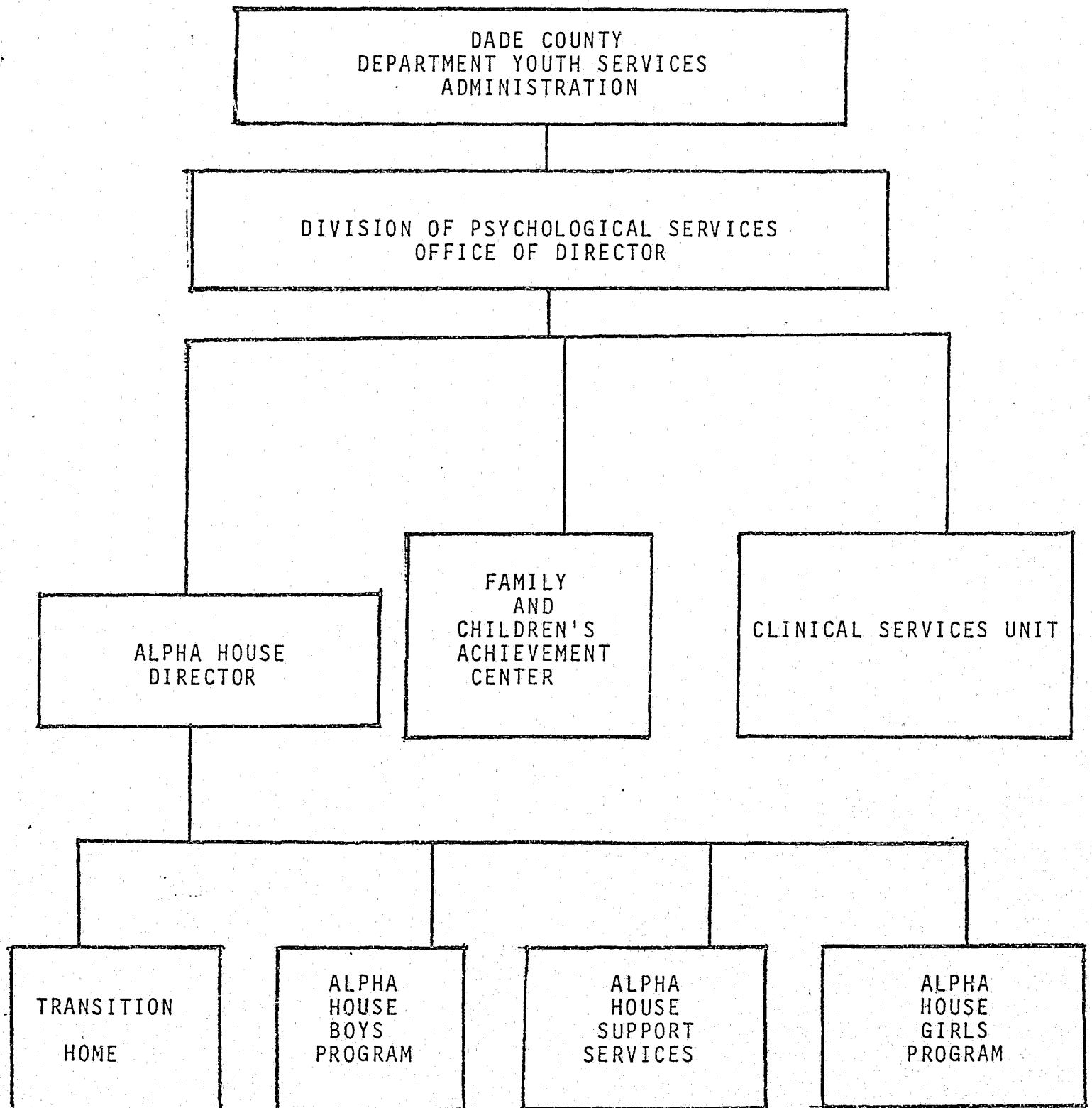
PROJECT ADMINISTRATION

One of the major weaknesses found in the Alpha House Boys' program was in the area of project administration. This weakness manifested itself in several ways. First, communication to professional and non-professional staff by the Project Director regarding the objectives and requirements of the grant was poor. During interviews with both the professional and non-professional staff, it became apparent that few of them knew about the objectives of the grant and were, at times, even surprised to hear of certain of these objectives. This made it more difficult for staff to deal with changes that may have been necessary in the program and in relationship to the grant.

Secondly, quarterly reports were consistently submitted months after they were due in spite of repeated reminders via letter and phone calls from the Dade County Criminal Justice Planning Unit. Twice, it became necessary to suspend review of grant applications (1975 and 1976 grant applications) because of the extreme tardiness of these reports.

Thirdly, there were several levels of administration for the Boys' Unit. (A Table of Organization follows.) In view of the fact that there were three psychologists holding Ph.,D.'s directly related to the Alpha House Boys' Program, it is questionable whether that much administration was necessary for the efficient operation of the program. It seems quite possible

DIVISION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES



that there were times when conflict arose regarding treatment decisions. However, there have been recent changes in the total Alpha House Program and one of the Psychologists, and Project Director, has been transferred to another program. There are no plans to replace him and the present director of the Boys' Unit will become project director for the grant.

Fourthly, in the process of doing this evaluation, it became evident that several of the measurable objectives of the grant were not being met. It should be noted that the measurable objectives of this grant were written solely by the staff of Alpha House. At the time that the Dade County Criminal Justice Planning Unit reviewed the grant application these areas seemed reasonable and so, were accepted by both the Bureau of Criminal Justice Planning and Assistance in Tallahassee as well as the Dade County Criminal Justice Planning Unit. Discussions with professional and non-professional staff as well as professional knowledge of this writer brought to bear that at least some of these objectives were unnecessary, and in fact, not the most efficient use of staff time and of questionable benefit to the program. Administratively, these areas (see section on Attainment of Measurable Objectives) should have been discussed with the Criminal Justice Planning Unit as problems and changes should have been implemented at an earlier date.

It was clearly stated and documented on-site by the monitoring staff of the Planning Unit, that if there were problem areas, these needed to be discussed with staff so that appropriate changes could be made. In only one instance did this occur and that was in relationship to the Holtzman Ink-Blot Tests. Verbally and via letter of June 22, 1976, changes by the Planning Unit were requested for an alternate testing procedure at the discretion of Alpha House personnel. However, this request was never followed through by the project director. This type of problem in dealing with the administrative staff of Alpha House was a severe hinderance to the effective operation of this grant.

ATTAINMENT OF MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES

Each of the measurable objectives of the grant will be discussed separately below:

1. "To continue to provide direct residential treatment services to an increased number of 26 delinquent and pre-delinquent boys per day (approximately 75 boys annually). A pre-delinquent youth is defined as one who commits delinquent acts such that if continued, would almost surely lead to actual adjudication."

The number 26 actually seems to be in error. LEAA funds were not intended to cover the entire boys program. Twenty boys are actually in residence at Alpha House while 6 boys reside in the transitional group home. This totals 26. However, the target number of 26 youth for the total boys program has been consistently met. Since there is a small waiting list, there are not usually empty beds. But, since the average length to stay is approximately 6-7 months, a more accurate total for the year would seem to fall in the range of 50-60 boys served. Therefore, the Planning Unit should consider changing the measurable objective to reflect a smaller annual number.

There has been some concern expressed by the Planning Unit regarding the low number of referrals accepted from the State Office of Youth Services, especially the Intake Unit. Since the Alpha House Grant is seen mainly as a diversion source for the juvenile justice system, State Youth Services should be seen as an important referral source. After exploring this area with

both Alpha House personnel as well as personnel at Youth Services Intake, it became apparent that there were problems on both sides that precluded more acceptance of referrals for admission. Some of these can easily be remedied and others are situations about which little can be done. One of the main problems was a lack of communication and/or understanding about the program. Since State Youth Services Intake has many youth needing some type of residential placement, and since Alpha House is a fairly small program with low turnover rates, it appears that counselors at Intake became frustrated because very few of their referrals were accepted. Over a period of time, fewer and fewer referrals were being made by Intake. It is recommended that a periodic (perhaps every 9 months to 1 year) meeting be held by the Alpha House staff in order to communicate program goals and limitations to Intake. For instance, if counselors were to realize the limited turnover there would obviously be more understanding about the rejection of, or placement of, a child on a waiting list. In addition, it is recommended that a list of criteria be circulated to Youth Services Intake clarifying the type of child most likely to be accepted by Alpha House. This should be circulated both to Intake as well as the Juvenile Court Mental Health Clinic.

We would also hope that at times, appropriate referrals to Alpha House from Intake be given some priority consideration. This is again in keeping with the fact that the LEAA funded program is primarily a diversion program.

Although there should be more referrals accepted from Intake, there is no doubt in this writer's mind that the type of children placed in the Boys Unit is appropriate for the LEAA grant. In the course of this evaluation, case records were reviewed of most of the boys over the preceeding 2 years. Most of these children exhibited acting out behavior that if not treated would probably lead to an adjudication. Of those children who had no prior court contacts, their behavior was such (incorrigibility, truancy, etc.) that they may well have had court contact except that they had not yet been apprehended.

2. "To provide the following services for each of the 26 boys in residence:

a. 20 periods per week of remedial special education under a master's level certified Special Education teacher (maximum of 7 boys per classroom). Group Home boys will attend regular public schools."

The boys all attend the special education classes on the campus.

b. " One hour per week of individual psychotherapy with a Ph. D., psychologist or an M.S. W. social worker or both."

This objective is not being met and has not been met in the past. During discussions with the professional staff, most felt that this was not

necessary because the boys were receiving group and family counseling as well as crisis intervention when necessary. In fact, this additional therapy may be counter-productive. This objective should be deleted.

- c. "Three hours per week of group psychotherapy and moral development dialogues. One hour is in the form of professionally supervised "rap session" between staff and children."

This objective is being met.

- d. "One hour per week of therapy with both the child and his family."

There is a strong emphasis in the Alpha House program on family treatment. Parents are required to participate in family treatment whenever possible.

- e. "Pre- and post treatment evaluation. "

This will be discussed under Objective #5.

- f. "Academic and psychological testing and evaluation."

This will be discussed under Objective#5.

- g. "Involvement in a total behavior modification program."

The word behavior modification should have been deleted from the grant application.

LEAA has stated that it will not fund actual behavior modification programs. Although this is not a true behavior modification program behavioral techniques are used. This objective is being met as far as the utilization of behavioral techniques.

- h. "Involvement in a total milieu therapeutic program with trained staff."

The Alpha House program is a milieu therapy program. This will be discussed further in the Recommendations Section.

- i. "Involvement in an organized physical fitness program(2 1/2hours per wk) in addition to recreational sports."

This objective is being met.

- j. "Professional counseling on demand."

All boys needing crisis intervention services are seen by either the psychologist or social workers.

- 3. "To maintain and train staff sufficient to implement the above program.

- a. One clinical psychologist II (1/3 of time)
- b. One clinical psychologist I
- c. Two child care workers II (supervisors)
- d. One clerk typist II (1/2 time)
- e. Three special education teachers.
- f. One recreational therapist (1/2 time)
- g. One Administrative officer II (1/4 time)

h. 13 child care workers 1 each given initial 8 week intensive training.

This objective is being met. In addition, one MSW social worker and one bachelor degree social worker work full-time on the boys' unit.

4. "To provide follow-up services to each boy on extended trial home visit prior to final release. Such follow-up services include crisis intervention, family therapy at home, liaison with the school and Juvenile Court and liaison with special educational and vocational programs."

This objective could not be adequately studied. However, at the present time, it appears that at least some of these services are not being provided.

5. "To assess the results of the total program by the following means:
- a. Comparison of pre-treatment with post-treatment Juvenile Court records.
 - b. Comparison of initial to final academic achievement scores.
 - c. Comparison of pre- to post-treatment school records.
 - d. Comparison of pre- to post-treatment psychological test scores (standardized Holtzman Ink-Blot Test.)
 - e. Comparison of initial to final scores on child and family evaluation inventories.
 - f. Initial compared to final Achievement Point System cottage behavior scores.
 - g. Initial compared to final Kohlberg standardized moral development level.

h. Initial compared to final standardized physical fitness levels."

Essentially, the above measurable objective relates to evaluation of the effectiveness of the grant. As stated previously, in the section on Grant Administration, administration was poor. This is reflected in the above procedures required for evaluating the effectiveness of the Alpha House program. Much of this data was not routinely collected in the past. As stated in prior correspondence to the project director by the Bureau of Criminal Justice Planning and Assistance and the Dade County Criminal Justice Planning Unit, suggestions were made as to easy retrieval of the required information as well as procedures necessary for retrieval. For the most part, these recommendations were not followed. In addition, there was no format or timetable utilized by the program for periodic examination of data. Therefore, in quarterly reports, random information was submitted and it became difficult to assess the program by any statistical means.

It is recommended that two parts of objective #5 be deleted. The first is the Holtzman Ink-Blot Test. After discussions with the staff and the Bureau of Criminal Justice Planning and Assistance, it appears that this particular test is not a good measuring device for a program such as Alpha House since it measures intra-psychic changes. It would be more valuable to see actual behavioral changes as indicators of success or failure. These behavior changes can be more adequately assessed via other evaluation criteria such as school records, family evaluation inventories, etc.

The second area which might need to be considered for deletion would be the physical fitness testing. Although continuation of an active physical fitness and recreational therapy program is vital, it is of questionable value to this writer whether changes that occur as evidence in this type of testing warrant the staff time necessary. This may be interesting data in and of itself but it is not felt that this data is vital to the evaluation of the total program. This decision, however, should be left up to the program itself.

STAFF TRAINING AND MORALE

Since the demise of the training unit at the Department of Youth Services, on-going training has been a problem. Recently, the Child Care Workers have been receiving no on-going training. Steps should be taken to provide some type of training and project staff, even if this is only minimal. Morale among Child Care Workers seems to be generally low, although most are enthusiastic about working with the children. Some of the morale problem may be due to the loss of some staff within the entire department because of lay-offs and budgetary problems.

The professional counseling staff operates most enthusiastically. They sense a real learning environment and seem to be concerned with their own professional growth. Different learning experiences are provided to them by the Boys' Unit Head.

The educational personnel, however, are concerned with what they feel are inadequate teaching devices, texts, etc. as well as lack of opportunities for exposure outside of the institution to new concepts. They feel it is especially important to be in contact with learning disability classrooms and the diagnostics utilized in these classrooms, since many of the boys experience learning disabilities. It would be recommended that more up-to-date teaching devices and learning materials be obtained. As far as training, if there are no monies available for actual seminars, etc., then, the possibility of arranging for observation in the Dade County Public Schools should be explored. This would involve minimal cost. The Planning Unit could help arrange for this, if necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to recommendations already stated in the body of this evaluation, several suggestions still remain. It should be noted that several meetings were held with Dept. of Youth Services personnel regarding problem areas of the Alpha House grant. Dr. Douglas Heister, head of the Division of Psychological Services, Mr. James Mooney, head of Professional Services, Mr Nathan Johnson, assistant director of the Dept. of Youth Services, and Dr. David Weisfeld, head of the Boy's Unit and soon to be appointed project director were all extremely cooperative in addressing the problem areas as well as recommendations made by the CJPU staff. Unfortunately, these areas should have been resolved long ago. There is no question in this writer's mind that the services of a program such as Alpha House are sorely needed in this community. Too many emotionally disturbed children end up going through the court system and are eventually, committed to State Youth Service where there are few if any appropriate treatment facilities for emotionally disturbed children. Early intervention with children exhibiting acting out behavior is necessary. In fact, this community needs treatment services even before the time when it becomes necessary to institutionalize a child. A greater continuum of services starting in the prevention area and continuing through programs such as Alpha House are necessary. Unfortunately, funds always become the major issue.

In meetings with the Department of Youth Services personnel, the problem areas identified in the body of this evaluation were discussed at great length.

Certain changes recommended by the evaluation, have already been implemented. Others will be implemented in the near future. These include the following:

1. To establish and maintain a closer working relationship with the Office of Youth Service Intake (now Health and Rehabilitative Services Single Intake). This includes developing written criteria for counselors as well as periodic meetings in order to clarify the operation of the program and to give feedback to Intake about their referrals.
2. Deletion of certain of the measurable objectives. These include:
 - a. "One hour per week of individual psychotherapy with a Ph.D. psychologist or an MSW social worker or both."
 - b. The term "Behavior Modification" should be deleted from the application and all correspondence.
 - c. "Comparison of pre-to post-treatment psychological test scores (standarized Holtzman Ink-Blot Test).
 - d. Comparison of initial versus final Kohlberg standarized moral development level.
3. A more systematized way of collecting data for the evaluation so that each quarterly report will include data on only those children who were discharged from Alpha House either 6 or 12 months prior to the quarter.
4. A more well-defined system of follow-up once a child is released by the program needs to be developed. Once the 6 and 12 month statistical data is gathered by the

project staff, it can then be used to alert the staff about those children who may be experiencing problems and who may need some additional services. These services should be provided by the Department of Youth Services itself or through referral to appropriate community agencies. Hopefully, this follow-up system would provide a mechanism for early re-intervention and prevent the need for institutionalization once more.

The possibility of more extensive research in terms of "successful terminations" from the program should be considered. This could possibly lead to acknowledgement of the need for areas of the program or in follow-up which may need special emphasis.

5. The educational program needs to be upgraded as discussed in the section on Staff Training and Morale.
6. Some type of in-service training needs to be carried out for child care workers.
7. The last recommendation relates to more emphasis on the "team concept" that is seen as an integral part of a milieu therapy program. Greater emphasis could be given to involvement of all the disciplines in the milieu treatment of the child. Specifically, this would call for greater input about each child's

progress as it relates to the total program as well as discussions relating to the everyday interaction by all staff members with each child. This is especially important with the child-care workers who spend a majority of their time with the children.

This might be considered as an area to be included in the weekly staff meetings. At present, some problem children are discussed but each child is not considered. These kinds of discussions might also serve the purpose of providing additional staff training and may sensitize child care workers more and may provide for a greater stability of treatment throughout the entire program.

In spite of the problems outlined in this evaluation, many of them due to administrative problems, the Alpha House program meets a real need in this community. With some changes in the program, it has the potential to be a fine residential program.

END