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ECHO GLEN CHILDREN'S CENTER
SEX OFFENDER PROGRAM

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ACQUISITIONS

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I. THE PROGRAM

One of the most significant conclusions reached during a 1975 examination of juvenile offenders in Washington State indicated that diagnostic centers, treatment centers, and parole departments were unable to agree on the identity of sex offenders in custody. It was generally felt within the correctional system that use of the term "sex offender" would be detrimental to the child and have a permanent negative effect on his or her future endeavors. Because of this, the child's diagnostic record would often show an inability to relate to peers, low self-esteem, or emotional withdrawal. Consequently, treatment which targeted sexual offenses was frequently neglected. As a result, programs designed specifically for this kind of behavior were limited and rehabilitation remained incomplete.

Counselors in juvenile rehabilitation programs have traditionally dealt with sex offenders in the same manner as youths committed for other crimes. Very little effort has been made to directly face the problem and attempt to develop a viable program for the sex offender. In an effort to mitigate effects of this lack of treatment, Echo Glen Children's Center, located 25 miles east of Seattle, Washington, has developed a program that involves individual counseling and group therapy for the sex offender. The setting at Echo Glen is particularly conducive to a treatment program of this nature. It is a state institution for adjudicated delinquent children ranging in age from eleven to seventeen years. At the present time, eight living units, or cottages, are open; five of these are used exclusively for boys, three are co-educational, and each includes sixteen single person bedrooms.

Residents have access to numerous educational, recreational, and counseling resources, and full-time schooling is provided for every child within the institution. The recreation department provides numerous opportunities for the children, including team sports, swimming, skiing, camping, and mountain climbing. Trips away from the institution to Seattle and other areas for sports and cultural events are also available. Resident counseling is provided individually, in groups, and with families; individual goals and objectives are established for each child and targeted for the individual's particular problems. Group counseling in the areas of sex education, assertive behavior, basic survival skills, drug and alcohol abuse, and problem-solving is provided.

The sex offender program at Echo Glen involves individual counseling, group therapy, and in some cases, family counseling. Approximately 10% of the in-resident boys have been committed for sex offenses. Selected staff at the institution have been trained in counseling adolescent sex offenders by experts from the Sex Offender Program at the University of Washington, as well as by a private psychologist. These community based individuals are sometimes involved in diagnostic evaluations prior to the child's sentencing. Recommendations from these sources are given consideration in any commitment decisions by the courts.

When a candidate for sex offender group enters Echo Glen, a pregroup interview is held with the group leaders. The child's degree of denial, willingness to accept responsibility, understanding of why the offense was wrong, and willingness to participate in a group are all discussed. If group therapy seems appropriate for the offender, the assigned social worker, group leader, and offender are all required to sign a contract emphasizing confidentiality of information shared during the group therapy. Group treatment is twenty hours in duration, utilizes a guided group interaction format, and focuses on responsibility for one's behavior, empathy for the victim, recognition of situations which are high risk for each offender, and includes some values clarification and social skills exercises. Rational Emotive Therapy and Reality Therapy basic treatment modalities are emphasized throughout the sessions.

The Jesness Inventory, originally developed for use in classification and treatment of disturbed youth, is used as a pre and post group measure of attitude change. Results of group sessions are communicated to cottage staff, as are recommendations for individual counseling sessions.

II. RESULTS TO DATE

At this time, two groups of youth have received group treatment as one part of their total program. The first group consisted of nine boys: five were incarcerated for indecent liberties, one for statutory rape and incest, one convicted of communicating with a minor for immoral purposes, one for statutory rape and indecent liberties, and one for rape in the first degree. The second group consisted of seven offenders: four were convicted of one count of indecent liberties; one for two counts of indecent liberties; one youth for three counts of statutory rape; and one for indecent liberties, simple assault, and attempted rape in the second degree. Only three of the sixteen offenders indicated that their conviction was the result of the first sex offense in which they were involved. The ages of victims range from three to adult.

Both groups of sex offenders showed significant decreases in overall scores on three Jesness scales: immaturity, alienation, and the asocial index. These results may indicate the groups made gains in age appropriate attitudes and perceptions of self and others, trust in interpersonal relationships, and acceptance of social norms. Other changes occurred on various scales, but were not consistent between the two groups. The second group appeared to be more disturbed during pretesting and showed very marked changes, some of which were not in the expected direction. It was evident that offenders felt emotional discomfort and may have been involved in some depressively toned introspection following intensive focus on their offenses. Continued counseling is necessary to move through feelings of personal inadequacy and self dissatisfaction.

Results of overall group scores must be interpreted carefully. Pretest scores for each group on various scales and individual changes have not been closely analyzed. Because the group members are involved in several kinds of treatment at Echo Glen, any changes that occur over the ten weeks in group therapy must be considered in this context and not attributed to group therapy per se.

There is a continuing problem because some sex offenders have short sentences. Under Washington's determinant sentencing laws, a youth receives a minimum and maximum length of stay based on prior offenses, age, and severity of offense. Youth charged with indecent liberties, often as a result of plea bargaining from an original charge of rape, may receive sentences of three to four months. These short sentences do not allow adequate time for needed therapy. It is felt by institutional staff that a combination of group and individual counseling effectively decreases the risk of adolescent boys re-offending sexually. The need for more time in therapy while in the institution and counseling once a resident returns to a community is also evident. A plan to meet these needs is presently being formulated.

III. SUMMARY AND FUTURE PLANS

The Echo Glen Children's Center Sex Offender Program is an attempt to develop problem treatment for specific adolescent male sex offenders committed to a state institution. Treatment may include individual counseling with institution staff or psychologists in private practice and group therapy. At Echo Glen two groups of adolescent boys have completed twenty hours of group therapy to date. The Jesness Inventory used as a pre and post group measure suggests there were positive attitudinal changes but results were inconclusive. Evaluations by group co-leaders based on

members' group behavior and pre and post group interviews have indicated that there is a lower risk of future sexual offenses by those who have been involved in the program.

Echo Glen is one of twelve residential facilities within the Washington State Division of Juvenile Rehabilitation. The residents are usually the younger offenders in need of a secure environment. In the past few months facilities other than Echo Glen have begun staff training programs for counseling sex offenders.

The next step to further services for adolescent sex offenders will be follow up community counseling for those residents on parole. It is felt that counseling should not be terminated when a child has completed his sentence commitment. Back in the community, an offender often faces anxiety laden and aggression producing situations, similar to those in which he first sexually victimized. Access to on going counseling should provide assistance in handling these high risk situations.