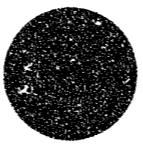GROUP HOMES IN THE 1980's

J. Robert Weber

NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF
ALTERNATIVES TO JUVENILE JUSTICE PROCESSING

The School of Social Service Administration
The University of Chicago
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Acknowledgements

## INTRODUCTION

Whether reading child welfare, correctional, or mental health literature, the term "group home" has come to refer to a relatively specific form of residential care for adolescents. The last fifteen years' rapid development in the number of such homes and of references to them in the literature parallels and is an inextricable part of the children's services reform movement focussing on due process, decriminalization and deinstitutionalization. Coupled with such reforms has come emphasis upon utilizing the "least restrictive available alternative" whenever out-of-home placement seems necessary. A related trend has been toward "normalization", often interpreted as retaining the opportunity for youth in need of care to reside in situations maintaining to maximum feasible degree the opportunity for the sorts of educational and vocational opportunities and general contact with community life normal to their age group. Thus group homes are frequently viewed as the major alternative to the congregate correctional institution, the state hospital, or the child-rearing institution.

Although a given group home might have either the flexibility and informality of a foster home or the rigidity and appearance of a mini-institution, they are, in general, somewhere in between. They have more structure than the typical foster home and more community involvement on a daily basis than the typical institution. Thus community-based programs requiring a residential component have often adopted the group home as the preferred choice for adolescents.

Some writers include group homes under the broad generic term of "foster care." (e.g. Costin, 1979). Others include them under institutions and differentiate the child-caring institution from foster care (Kadushin, 1980). Narrower definitions often include description of the type of person served within the network of services of a particular agency. However, for the purpose of this review, a group home is defined as a physical facility undifferentiated from the other buildings in the neighborhood, caring in a home-like setting for 5-12 unrelated youngsters ages 10-18, with specific behavioral problems. The emphasis is on those young people who are categorized as delinquent, status offenders, or emotionally disturbed. Homes focussing on the mentally retarded, physically handicapped, or autistic child are excluded from this review.

While we do employ such labels as "delinquent", "status offender" or "emotionally disturbed", we recognize that these terms are not descriptive of the personalities and behaviors of young people. They may very often reflect, instead, the actions and decisions of persons in settings responsible for the placement, funding, protection of legal rights of problem youth, and for meeting whatever accountability criteria that may prevail. In broad program or legal terms the labels may have some merit or consequences, but in providing services from one human being to another, they are largely meaningless. In fact, group home patients are not generally alert to official labels of residents. They are "Bill," "Joe," "Betty," "Mary," and "Muffy," all in various stages of trying "to get their heads together."

While such terms as "delinquent" and "status offender" may in many states have specific statutory definitions, "emotionally disturbed" is a particularly vague notion. Everyone is upset at some time or another, and teenagers have intensely-experienced feelings.

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Mental health agencies are reluctant to intervene in the lives of adolescents beyond an office counseling relationship. Hospital settings are most generally considered to be deleterious to normal maturation and to the quest for self identity so common to the young. The youngster with a history of aggressive acts toward others is acutely troublesome to mental health agencies. Such agencies are reluctant to engage in coercive control or to provide security facility arrangement. In most states, long-term tensions have existed among mental health, juvenile corrections, and the juvenile court. Group homes are sometimes viewed as a tool for the resolution of such tensions. They may provide a means to greater coordination between agencies and a reduction of territorial conflicts. With child welfare agencies increasingly involved with the court-defined status offenders, another actor re-enters the stage. Since the label "emotionally disturbed" cuts across all jurisdictions, it tends to become the rationale for group home placement.

Accurate data on the numbers of group homes and youths are difficult to secure. In many states a comprehensive list of licensed group homes does not exist. Each agency keeps a list of those facilities they use or might use. Group homes are not generally required to report upon population intake or egress to a state agency. Thus, basic census information about them and their residents must be collected on an ad hoc survey basis. A further complication is the lack of stability over time of the private group home. They come and go; open and shut down. The agency may exist on paper as a legal entity without a program. Group homes operating last year may be in different locations this year or may be dormant, awaiting a zoning board approval to reopen. The fluidity of the phenomenon mitigates against the aggregation of accurate data for descriptive purposes. It is known, however, that during the past decade group homes have proliferated. In the 30 months ending December 31, 1977, the Census Bureau reported an increase of 25% in the number of privately-operated residential child welfare facilities and a 7% increase in the number of youth residing in them: 1600 facilities serving 29,070 juveniles in 1977 compared to the 1975 figures of 1277 facilities and 27,290 juveniles (LEAA, 1979). About 26% of the juveniles were status offenders, 42% were non-offenders (neglected, abused, or emotionally disturbed); and 32% delinquent. There were 1.3 juveniles per every staff member, and per capita operating costs averaged $12,270.

## HISTORY OF GROUP HOMES

The development of group homes has been inextricably tied to the historical development of residential services to children. Because of the rapid expansion of their numbers in the 1960's and 70's, many observers perceive the group homes concept as one of recent development. In fact, group homes were firmly rooted in foster family care and institutional satellite programs for decades, but their existence was neither as frequent nor as visible as at present. The availability of federal dollars coupled with frequent exposes of child-caring institutions were the two forces that combined in the nineteen sixties to proliferate group homes as an alternative to and supplement to institutions.

State training schools, the superintendents of which too often had responsibility for dependent, neglected, and delinquent children, as well as for aftercare programs, for many years developed foster homes and small group community programs for children who had no other place to go. While this was more often true of small rural states (Utah, Vermont) than in large industrialized states, Wisconsin and Michigan also had such a tradition.

Child Welfare agencies typically had one or two large foster homes which they kept full and in which they often placed children beyond licensed capacity. The author recalls

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one such home licensed for five foster children, but through the late thirties and forties usually caring for six to eight. Most child welfare agencies during this time could report similar experiences. "Foster family group home" became the term for this style of "Ma" and "Pa" group home, and the model was used extensively in Minnesota, Florida and Wisconsin during the sixties and seventies.

There were dedicated individuals with religious vocations, but lacking social work training, who by dint of their own energies started small group care programs in the community, but these programs seldom survived beyond the transfer of the founding personality, and many never achieved state licenses as child care facilities (Keller, 1970).

The halfway house movement, building a bridge from the prison to the community for released offenders, and the community mental health movement calling for the treatment of the mentally ill in the community, were closely related to the burgeoning of group homes for youth (McCartt & Mangogna, 1976).

By the 1950's, the child caring congregate institution was in disfavor in professional schools preparing students interested in children's services. Terms such as "total institutions," "mass-congregate institutions," and "institutionalized child," were bandied about by students pejoratively (Deutsch, 1950; Bowlby, 1951). The "medical model" for designing intervention strategies were being questioned. The code words of the seventies were beginning to emerge conceptually--"deinstitutionalization," "least restrictive alternatives," "family-focused service," "CHINS or MINS" (new statutory categories for non-delinquent behavior-problem children), "diversion," "community-based alternatives," etc. These were the ideas that fueled the rapid development of group homes in the next two decades.

The societal context of the sixties included the Indochinese war, the civil rights movement, and a youth culture in opposition to the dominant adult culture. Democratic and utopian notions about war, racism and materialism prevailed. Peace Corps workers, civil rights workers, "hippies," and "radicals" evolved new ways of helping one another with human problems. They also evolved new styles of dress and music, politics and art. Not infrequently, runaway shelters, "crash pads", or other programs started by the counter-culture became reasonably stable operations and were eventually subsidized by Federal or other relatively conventional funding resources. Thus the legacy of the "counter culture" impacted heavily on group homes for troubled adolescents. Some young adults emerged from the sixties as group home parents, and the values and egalitarianism of groups designed to help and support each member, with all decisions shared by the group, at first contrasted with but later frequently influenced traditional residential programs staffed by trained human service professionals (Gordon, 1978).

The seventies saw new dollars available for support of group homes. The President's Crime Commission (1967) urged a new priority for the community setting as the locus for programs. The congressional response was the establishment of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA). Although the bulk of LEAA funds went in the early years to police and equipment, some dollars trickled down to support juvenile programs. A greater share was so awarded in later years.

LEAA funds often supported group homes through discretionary grants, and state plans frequently included group home support for the use of block grant funds. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP, 1974) disbursed dollars that in many states went to the support of group homes. The enactment of Title XX of The Social Security Act brought increased support for group homes available to mental health and

social service departments. In some states, the juvenile corrections agency received Title XX funds. States also made appropriations for increased purchase of service contracts for group home programs in the private sector available to child welfare, mental health and juvenile corrections. Frequently, federal financial support for such endeavors became available through Title IV-A of the Social Security Act, providing for support of child welfare services. State subsidy programs--particularly those in California, Minnesota, and Ohio--provided grants to county governments supporting group homes. By 1979, however, many of these sources seemed on the verge of disappearing. Group homes in both the private and the public sector were seeking sources of future support. Title XX dollars were fewer and LEAA was winding down. Inflation had increased costs. Inevitably state programs witnessed budget cutbacks. Despite a 1979 study indicating that state and local jurisdictions were absorbing costs of group homes begun by LEAA "seed" dollars, (Smith, Warner 1979), by the early 1980's group home managers were pessimistic.

In the planning days of the legislation establishing the Office of Law Enforcement Assistance and the subsequent Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, the policy of on-going federal support of law enforcement was paramount. The concept of "comprehensive planning" at the state level was a cornerstone of a subsidy program. By the time Congress finished with the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1967, the subsidy concept had been left in the dust of the priority for urban riot control. The program was seen and administered as a "seed" dollar program that funded innovation and demonstration projects. As federal dollars decreased, it was intended that state and local sources should increase their percentage of the match. But it increasingly appears that when 100% support of costs is expected from state or local government, programs' futures becomes very clouded.

### COMMUNITY FIT OF THE GROUP HOME

Anyone desiring to establish a group home program must anticipate community resistance. Such resistance can be covert, emotional, misinformed and difficult to confront. It can take the form of petitions, open hearings, zoning ordinances, planning board meetings, picketing, and court suits (Feragne & Strauss, 1974). There is no magic recipe for coping with such threats. The process is at best one of trial and error, although it can be observed that when a respected and esteemed member of the community can act as the "front" or advance person for the establishment, of a group home, this is of inestimable value. Beyond this, three strategies are common:

1. Moving in "under cover of darkness and exist when the sun rises."
2. Classic community organization technique with careful preparation of key community persons, organizations and neighbors to the end of support of a program they consider "theirs", or at least of tolerance of the program (Weber, 1978).
3. Keep a low profile, work with a select few key community leaders, isolate opposition (prevent coalition by potential opponents), develop plan for cooptation of any resistance, implement plans, review process and reassess (Stickney, Capaivolo, 1976; Rachin, 1972).

All three strategies have been used successfully and all three have resulted in failure. There is no clear evidence indicating the superiority of one over the others as measured by results. Most group home managers choose the third strategy first, believing it to offer the highest probability of success, but experience shows the first strategy is just as often effective.

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Once a group home is established, the need to react to critical incidents in the neighborhood and community in an effective manner is important to continued existence of the program. Wilgus and Epstein (1978) describe the lack of support by the professional community as a key variable in the demise of one home. Neighborhood groups can organize in such a manner as to block the operation of a group home even though it is a legal entity (Ohio Youth Commission, 1976).

"Community fit" is emphasized in available curriculum materials designed to assist in the training of group home staff. Attention is given to interactions with neighbors, grocers, pharmacists, bank tellers, service station attendants, etc., in a manner facilitating acceptance of the home and interpreting it as a "normal" thing (Rosenthal, et al, 1979). The appropriateness and limitation of a community Open House are discussed, and it is noted that the important key is knowledge as to when visibility is desirable and when it is not.

Training of staff often emphasizes informed use of available mental health and medical resources. Eligibility criteria for social services are stressed and recreation programs potentially available to residents are discussed. Staff learn to develop a roster of community resources with contact names and telephone numbers. This training assists staff in avoiding errors in community relations.

The relationship of the group home to the school generally receives priority in this training of group home staff. The nature of Public Law 94-142 is taught and the content, procedures, and appeal of an Individual Education Plan are learned. Cooperative working relations with schools are encouraged, but the legal rights and child advocacy role of the group home are not ignored. (Rosenthal, Hanison, Harrington, 1979, unpublished modules of the Residential Training Program, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; and Olin, 1978).

Some neighborhoods have been saturated with residences for mentally ill, drug abusers and ex-offenders as a result of the deinstitutionalization movement in mental health, corrections and retardation. Scarce community support services become spread even thinner. Responses to this problem have been varied. California passed SB 1012, permitting zoning authorities in three counties to deny a license for a proposed residential care facility if the facility is planned within 300 feet of an existing facility which also houses wards of the juvenile court. The law was to exist for two years only and a study was required of the problem of location, "saturation," extent and need for community facilities. It was the intent of the legislation to provide relief for three counties with complaints of "saturation" of group homes and to prevent the problem in other counties.

The first finding, and recommendation of the study commission, was an absence anywhere in state government of a list of all licensed community facilities. California is not unique; state after state cannot provide a comprehensive list of group homes.

The California study committee's first recommendation was:

"That the legislature ensure that the State Department of Social Services take responsibility for providing information to local agencies and the public about the number, type, and location of Community Care facilities." p.5

General lack of community planning for group home populations was exacerbated by the facts that nearly one half of residents of such homes were placed outside the county of their

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residence, that there was inadequate training for staff and facility operators, and that regulation of "clustering" or "saturation" of a neighborhood with group homes too often failed to take into consideration proximity to other types of community care facilities which may house handicapped individuals, ex-offenders, substance abusers, psychiatric outpatients, or any other type of client group. An overlay chart of Orange County locations of group homes is provided. The first overlay of group homes for pre-delinquent and delinquent children reveals 27 facilities well distributed throughout the county. The second overlay--substance abuse facilities--adds a few more, mostly in the city of Santa Ana. The third overlay--group homes for the mentally disturbed--adds over fifty facilities with clear patterns of "clustering" in given neighborhoods. The fourth overlay--group homes for the developmentally disabled-- reveals a saturation of group homes in the more populous cities of Santa Ana, Garden Grove, Anaheim, and, to a lesser extent, Fullerton (California Department of Youth Authority, 1979). This and similar studies make clear that unless thoughtful long-range solutions are sought the seeds of destruction of community residential programs are already sowed in many neighborhoods and communities. While resultant attacks by the community on a group home can sometimes strenghten a program by pulling the residents together in defense, in general a strong program is dependent upon a comfortable community fit.

### MANAGEMENT CONCERNS

Once beyond the problems of locating and opening a group home, a new array of problems confronts the administrator. A helpful guide has been produced which covers organization, personnel, finances, programs, and community relations (Little, 1979). This is a "how-to" manual and nicely complements existing standards for group homes.

### STANDARDS

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) issued standards for group homes in 1978. While the language of the standards is such that they are philosophic and goal-oriented rather than subject to empirical assessment, they cover child care, staffing, organization and administration, physical plant, community planning and organization and social services (CWLA, 1978).

The Commission on Accreditation for Corrections (CAC) issued standards for group homes in the same year as CWLA. The CAC standards differ from those of the CWLA in that they are measurable, covering such matters as administration, fiscal management, personnel, facility admission, program, food service, medical care, special procedures, citizen and volunteer involvement, records, communication and coordination, and evaluation (CAC, 1978). However, in spite of their different approaches the central thrusts of the two volumes of standards are much the same.

Some agencies operating group homes obtain accreditation from the Joint Commission for Accreditation of Hospitals (JCAH). This renders them eligible to receive Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS) dollars for children of military personnel. Approximately 250 such children are in a residential treatment for non-physical disability on any given day. Both patient and facility must be approved by CHAMPUS for reimbursement of costs. Some of these children eligible to CHAMPUS benefits are status offenders and delinquents.

State licensing has imposed increasingly onerous tasks on group home managers. The states have revised their licensing requirements in recent years, and a specific category of grou

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homes with its own regulations separate from foster family or child-caring institutions has emerged. The private agency must be a legal entity. The public group home is in most states exempt from state licensing requirements but subject to local regulation by building codes, fire inspection, health department, and zoning boards. For private agency homes the physical facility standards in some states are very rigid as to square footage, closet space, illumination, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, emergency exists, and sanitation. The rehabilitation of large old homes to meet state licensing requirements can be expensive. Curiously, state licensing requirements omit program practices. Thus, record keeping, medical services, counseling services, personnel policies, fiscal policies, etc. are rarely mentioned.

### AUSPICES OF GROUP HOMES

Florida, Wisconsin and Minnesota are among the states with extensive experience with foster family group homes. These are generally expanded or large foster homes. The parents own or lease the house, are licensed as foster parents, have control over the premises, control which children are placed or asked to leave, and can stop being foster parents any time. The advantage is the greater flexibility in the establishment of placement resources. Community resistance will be practically nil. In practice these foster parents--or at least the foster mothers--have generally been receptive to training opportunities. The disadvantages include the facts that the placement authority has no control over the removal of a youngster, and has no authority other than persuasive influence. Cross-racial placements are difficult and problematic, and there is seldom any in-home program other than family living.

Agency administered group homes are distinguished between the private sector and the public sector. The private sector can be further divided between the not-for-profit, tax exempt agency and the proprietary agency or for-profit corporation, although many for-profit agencies are more profit motivated rather than profit-making. There is little difference in programs between non-profit and proprietary agency on such matters as program outcomes, costs, and efficiency of operations. The non-profit agency has a governing board of volunteers, but few of these boards are representative of the community. The proprietary agency has a governing board of directors comprised of the major stockholders. Many, however, also will have an advisory board representative of the community in which the group home is located. Some professionals resent proprietory agencies "attempting to profit from dealing with human misery." Yet, staff of proprietory agencies generally are professionally well qualified and have no value conflicts in delivering their services in a profit-motivated agency. There is no ready solution of these divergent value perspectives, but, in general young people are served similarly regardless of agency auspices.

Administrators of state programs usually favor purchase of service contracts for group homes from the private sector over state operation. Private operation provides greater flexibility in the development and utilization of resources, few constraints on management such as those imposed by state merit systems and union contracts, and the ability of the private agency to serve as a buffer between the public agency and the community (Bisco, 1972). On the other hand, it sometimes does occur that the private sector will not accept or keep a youngster. If the public agency does not operate a group home, the youngster cannot be served, while a public group home can be required to work with a youngster. Thus in the retardation field, for example, although preference is shown for purchase of service contracts with the private sector, each geographic area in many states will operate a state-run group home to provide for the more difficult retardate rejected by the private group homes. This practice is not common, however, in child

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welfare, mental health or corrections.

## STAFFING PATTERNS

In the private sector, the group home parents are staff members of the agency, which owns or leases the facility. Staff have little, if any, control over which youth is placed or where and when they leave. The staff can live in the group home and be exempt from federal wage and hour laws. In the public sector, it is much more difficult to employ live-in staff, as merit systems and union contracts specifying overtime, fringe benefits, and employment conditions, apply. Thus, publically-operated group homes tend to operate on a shift basis, with supervising staff working five eight-hour shifts a week. In the private sector, it is more typical to employ a live-in couple with designated time off during the month. This ranges from weekends to one weekend a month for some group homes. (Shostack, 1977).

The issue as to which is the preferred staffing pattern is debatable. Terpstra (1979) and Shostack (1977) both represent shift staff as more successful but present no evidence on the point. The author, as well as a number of colleagues experienced in group home management, prefer the live-in arrangement as the best means of assuring home-like climate. Staff on shifts drift into routine functioning and become insensitive to the development of a counter culture in which residents oppose the dominant culture of staff and administration (McEwen, 1977). It must be granted that live-in staff "burn-out" and turnover is high, but turnover of staff on shifts is also high.

Some programs shut down on weekends and the residents return home. Thus, staff are free of responsibility until late Sunday afternoon. Most programs, however, operate seven days a week. When this is true, relief of live-in house parents can be troublesome. If the house parents do not have their own home or apartment, their "relief" is spent in their living quarters within the group home. This has proved a very unsatisfying arrangement. A few group home managers have paid for two nights a month in a motel as a relief program for house parents. But relief remains a headache which must sometimes be solved in innovative ways. In North California for example, a survey showed many relief staff were burnt-out ex-group home parents. Their experience was invaluable in covering a home for a weekend or two a month.

### "BURN OUT"

The high rate in the turnover of group home patients is the largest problem of group home managers, as reflected by the percentage of the literature devoted to the topic. A careful reading of such literature reveals an implicit desire on the part of administrators, rarely made explicit, to attract and retain career group home parents. Cottage parents in the child care institutions of yesterday were frequently long-term employees. Group home managers often have had some background in institutional settings. Thus there is often an expectation that the stolid, easygoing middle-aged or older cottage parents of the orphanages should provide a role model for group home parents. The insulated, controlled institutional environment made possible the meeting of staff needs-- sometimes at the expense of meeting the needs of residents--but the unpredictable, chaotic world of the neighborhood and community does not have the same luxury. Thus, the literature reflects a persistent lament over high turnover rates and their drain on agency resources and training capacity.

Most of the literature addresses the problem in terms of what can be done to reduce staff turnover. Thompson (1978) reports that turnover is "very costly in terms of the need for

continual recruitment and training of new houseparents, and in terms of the turmoil which results in most group homes, no matter how well the termination is handled." Remedies usually involve exhortation to more careful screening and selection of group home parents, more pre-service orientation, more on-the-job training, and more agency support service to the group home. The more recent trend, however, is for administration to conserve scarce resources and not waste them on an unattainable objective. Even if the couple were adequately prepared by training and experience to serve as parents, there is no reason to believe the turnover rate would decline. Neither is there any evidence that workshops, consultants, and personally-enriching experiences made available to group home parents by the agency extends the time served on the job.

Many prospective group home parents intend to work only a year. They do not envision long-range commitments. And, even when there is an uncertainty about what the future holds, the lack of privacy, the long hours, the role conflicts, the lack of feedback as to what happens to youths in whom personal investment may have been great, the emotional depletion of giving of oneself and rarely being given back to, causes group home parents to move on in order to survive.

A major role conflict revolves around being called houseparents, being perceived by residents as substitute parents, and being agency employees. Hirschbach (1976) contends that:

> "There is no contradiction between the statement that a group
> home is not a substitute for a family and the emphasis on the
> role of the child care worker as a substitute parent. The
> critical point is that child care workers must be ready to play
> the role of substitute parents only when and as far as the children
> need and want this relationship. Child care workers also have to
> clarify to the child that they cannot become his parents, that they
> are agency staff members who someday may leave the employment of the
> agency."

There are multiple other roles that the group home parent plays. They are homemakers-- creating a homelike climate--and home managers--keeping records, accounting for expendi- tures, buying groceries, clothing, etc. They are sometimes counselors, role models, teachers, or behavior managers. They are nurturers, friends, comforters, advocates, problem solvers and leaders. In some homes, they are expected to deal with schools and with health and social agencies.

Adler (1976) states that:

> "'Life with children' encompasses the child care worker's tasks.
> Therapeutic care is his function; rearing children of stress is
> his preoccupation. He is not a parent, but exercises parental
> functions; he may not be a recreation worker, but he plays with
> children and organizes leisure time activities; he is not a
> housekeeper, but has responsibility for orderly functioning of
> the children's living environment. In all his tasks, the child
> care worker has opportunities to contribute to healthy development
> of children."

Thompson (1978) found that among those house parents he interviewed, most "felt that there was too much job variety. The house parent role frequently includes administrative, clinical, social work, secretarial, maintenance, and other functions." And throughout

the performance of these various functions, house parents are expected to "remain 'therapeutic' at all times in the group home."

One role of house parents is that of "relationship builder." Treishman, Whittaker, and Brendtro (1969) stress that the relationship "is central to therapeutic work with disturbed and delinquent children" and that "a prime goal 'establishing a relationship' is to facilitate the child in learning new ways of behaving." Shostack (1978) found that house parents who were with residents on an around-the-clock basis were better able to "develop more intensive relations with the children than a daily succession of shift workers."

Another role conflict for house parents is cited by Thompson (1978) and involves the relationship with both the youths and the group home agency. The house parent is a member of a "family" and is also a member of an organization:

> "The house parent serves as an advocate and communicator. Part of
> the success of these facilities might be explained in terms of the
> house parent's ability to 'buy into' the world-view of the adolescent
> clients to some extent. This, however, may at times conflict profoundly
> with the world-view of the organization (a part of the 'adult' world).
> This puts the house parent in a very stressful 'double agent' role."

Costigan (1980) interviewed ex-group home parents, securing responses such as the following:

> "Working in a group home is like working at McDonald's and sleeping with
> the hamburgers and french fries."

> "We felt our privacy was very much invaded."

> "I think it's hard to say that the kids were not a success because you
> don't ever know what sort of an effect the time there has had on them."

> "They grew a lot, but they're still screwed up. It's very frustrating. . .
> Whether we helped these kids in the long run. . .well, I doubt it."

> "It's so all encompassing. . .it just changes your entire life style
> for the time that you're there in the job."

> "I would have like to have been more warm and compassionate with the
> kids, but I couldn't have that luxury because in order to keep myself
> sane and together I had to keep my distance and be more closed to the
> residents."

> "As soon as they get on their feet and start to control their own lives,
> to be happy instead of miserable, it's time for them to move on and they
> go out of your life. It hurts."

In light of these experiences, many group home managers have resigned themselves to an acceptance of group home parents as short-term employees. They are stating to candidates that they would like a year's commitment to the job, but realize this will not always happen. The advantage to the agency is the conservation of scarce resources previously spent on structured pre-service and in-service training designed to develop professional house parents. Training becomes more practical, more responsive to the immediate need,

and more ad hoc. The paradox is that in reviewing conference programs of state, regional and national organizations during the past year, papers and workshops are found which, from their descriptions, indicate that some group home managers still are preoccupied with strategies for developing career house parents.

## CASH FLOW

Group homes in the private sector are characteristically reimbursed for services rendered. The time involved in preparing a voucher, processing the paper, and receiving a check can involve two to four months between the spending of money and reimbursement. Without adequate start-up costs, this cash-flow problem can be devastating. Vendors are irate, staff morale is affected, and the credibility of the group home in the community is questioned (Coates, 1978). A number of program evaluations of group homes recommend steps to alleviate the cash-flow problem (Hunt, 1979). Some states have been able to advance dollars, but most states are prevented by law from doing so. A few of these states have advocated changes in state law affecting the purchase of service, so as to simplify the flow of paper and speed up reimbursement. Some private agencies have been successful in soliciting contributions from industry, business, and philanthropic organizations to provide a "cushion" fund. Even in these circumstances, the temptation for managers to invest these dollars for high-interest yields rather than using them to pay current bills pending reimbursement is hard to resist.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Multiplicity of funding sources and referral agencies creates further major concerns for group home managers. Funds appropriated by the state for purchase of services are handled differentially by mental health social services and juvenile justice departments. Federal dollars are handled differently among Title XX, LEAA, OJJDP, and Title IV-A. Although essentially the same information is provided to all agencies, the information must be supplied in different forms and formats. This increases the administrative costs of the group home program. Regulation of the home also becomes multiple. In addition to meeting state licensing requirements, additional standards may have to be met for eligibility to Title XX funds, mental health purchase of service, CHAMPUS dollars, JCAH accreditation, CAC creditation, etc. With this complexity, it is not surprising that many group homes choose to serve a single referring agency in order to keep their reporting practices consistent. With the growing financial crunch on available purchase of services, however, group homes are often forced to diversify referral sources in order to keep their programs alive.

## PROGRAM SIZE

Group homes may be licensed for 8, 10, or 12 beds, with variation in licensing requirements among states. Live-in house parents consistently report that five to six youngsters is the ideal size. Larger numbers mean more routinization of daily life and less flexibility to meet individual needs. Small populations, on the other hand, cause the program to lose to some degree the efficacy of the group for control and decision-making. Group homes with staff on shifts generally have larger populations, with some advantages of economy of scale but with the disadvantage of a less home-like atmosphere.

## COSTS OF GROUP HOMES VS. OTHER ALTERNATIVES

The popular wisdom is that group homes cost more than providing support services to youth in their own homes but less than institutional care. The literature is particularly

weak on this question. Collecting cost figures that are suitable for comparison purposes is rarely accomplished. In computing per diem cost, are the administrative costs of central office prorated? If training is provided by a separate administrative unit, are these costs pro-rated? If services to group home residents are being provided by other community agencies, are these costs considered? Does one compute per bed costs or per person/day served?

A recent in-house management study of a state institution for the retarded showed that the community component was more expensive per person than was the institution. As an administrator in one state several years ago, the author knew, in general, that the group homes cost less per person served than the security institutions for boys and girls, but were more costly than the non-secure forestry camps and wilderness stress time-limited programs. Murray and Cox computed institutional and a community-based alternative costs as being almost equal, and developed a model for such computations in future evaluation studies (Murray and Cox, 1979). At best, it must be acknowledged that even if costs are difficult to compare and hidden costs difficult to compute, group homes are not inexpensive.

## PROGRAM MODALITIES

The underlying philosophic assumptions of a group home program may be expected to go far toward shaping program goals, the type of residents to be served, the length of stay, and the desired discharge placement. No program, however, is "pure" in its operation. Thus, for example, a program in which the goal is the return of residents to their own families will have from time to time a resident who will leave for the military or independent living. The variability of human personality and the volatility of adolescence will from time to time cause a program to reject or adapt to a resident whose needs do not quite meet the program's design.

Length of stay appears to vary more within a given program than between programs with different objectives. Some programs advertise that they anticipate about a 10-12 month stay for each resident. Others refer to a 4-6 month average. However, the number of youngsters that leave after a few days or weeks reduces the between-program variation in average length of stay. The variation within a given group population appears to be consistently greater than is that between programs.

In sum, there is no one preferred treatment philosophy or technology for group homes. Many of them combine modalities in unique ways. Nevertheless, some frequently-recurring program modalities can be identified. Examples of these follow.

## CONTIGENCY MANAGEMENT

Learning theory developed from positivist psychology has been adopted in group home management to systems of rewards, withholding of reinforcers, or in some instances negative reinforcers. "Token economy" is a term often used to describe this program style. In group homes, a point system is frequently devised to guide the resident from one level of program participation to the next. Four levels are generally designated, with the lowest level applicable to the new resident and the highest level to the resident nearing successful completion of the program. Each level is characterized by increased privileges. The resident can as a result of his behavior be awarded points or demerits. The net number of points earned over a given time period (one week - two weeks) determines at what level he is to be assigned. The theory is that the

resident will thus learn a socially appropriate repertoire of behavioral responses. The major criticism of such a theoretical perspective derives from the fact that the system of rewards and punishment operating in normal homes or "on the streets" to which residents return may well be incongruent with those taught in the group home program.

Other techniques are often combined in a behavior modification style program. Among them are contracts with a resident, specific and individualized means of earning extra points, role-modeling by staff, and the teaching of cognitive skills (Rosen, et al, 1980). Over-all, however, the advantage of the token economy most frequently seems to lie in its daily operation of the program. It is often an effective management tool for staff.

## TEACHING-FAMILY MODEL

The literature on Achievement Place describes the prototype of the teaching-parent model of group homes programs (Wolf, et al, 1976). Although the teaching-parent model integrates some behavioral modification concepts, it exhibits a different flavor, or climate, to the casual observer. The model highlights self-government by residents, life-space immediate counseling by teaching parents, skill acquisition, a point-based motivational system, and an individualized goal-oriented plan for each resident.

The teaching parents are closely supported by an agency staff. A major emphasis is placed on training. There is an executive pre-service training workshop (at least one week), a formalized monthly in-service training session, scheduled on-site visits by agency staff, and agency staff availability by telephone several days a week around the clock.

Emphasis is placed on the community. Each group home has a community board either advisory or policy-making. Other agencies involved with residents are actively supported by the teaching parents and communication is stressed. Courts, schools, mental health, social services, and natural parents are actively involved toward the end of mutually supportive relationships (Maloney, et al, 1977).

## EXISTENTIAL MODE

One constellation of group homes derive from the tradition of the "counter-institution" movements of the sixties--civil rights, women's liberation, and the youth counter-culture. Professionally trained staff are retained as consultants but are seldom on staff. Staff work for low wages, are closely aligned to the concerns of residents (or residents are immediately responsive to the concern and values of staff), and a major emphasis is on egalitarian relationships between staff and residents. A far larger number of residents in this style home plan for independent living situations than in other styles where most youngsters plan to return to their own homes.

"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." (p. 101, Gordon, 1978).

The existential group home eschews all labels and diagnostic categories. It seeks an abiding respect for the right and ability of each young person to define his own problem and work out his own destiny. All decisions are in accordance with principles of participatory democracy. Staff are older, and have survived more life experiences than the younger residents, but they are not experts in any manner superior in a hierarchal sense within the decision-making process. Staff have deep affection and concern for the welfare of residents. The residents, however, are not protected from having to shoulder the consequences of their own choices. Their choices are their future (Gordon, 1978; Janzen, Love, 1977; Shinn, 1978).

## GROUP MEETINGS

All group homes have meetings of staff and residents. The frequency and intent of group meetings, however, vary. The most common focus of group meetings if the daily routine, task assignments, and house rules. Reality Therapy and Transactional Analysis are sometimes adapted to group therapy in group homes (Weathers, Bullock, 1978; Roth, 1977). The more popular group process with adolescents, however, appears to be the sociological theory-based Guided Group Interaction which uses peer pressure to define the direction of behavioral change and as the means to assume individual conformity to peer-validated attitudes, values, and behavior. The residents each assume a helper role with one another. (McKorkle, 1978; Keller and Alper, 1970; Harstad, et al, 1976; Harlow, et al, 1971; Empey, 1971, 1967).

Among criticisms of Guided Group Interaction are those based on civil libertarian and/or treatment theory concerns. Civil libertarian critics fault intervention on grounds of due process, "brain washing," and privacy rights (Gordon, 1962). Some treatment theorists operating from a dynamic, ego/psychology framework find Guided Group Interaction to be insensitive to personality development and motivational issues. In this, as in other fields of human service endeavor, major theoretical conflicts have yet to be resolved.

## FAMILY COUNSELING

The trend in many group homes is toward insistance from the point of intake and throughout the program upon participation of parents and siblings in counseling programs with the residents (Astraham, 1975; Weisfeld, Poser, 1976; Ellis, 1972; Richter, 1977). Many of these programs involve the resident spending weekends with the parents. Other variations include a specified number of family counseling sessions, with home visits earned by the resident. The usual goal is the return of the resident to the home setting, although some large and diversified programs such as Vision-Quest combine youth for whom the plan is to return to the family, and youth for whom the goal is independent living. (Behavioral Research Associates, 1978).

## PROGRAM EVALUATION

Many group homes were started with the aid of federal funds. A usual federal requirement was an evaluation component. However most such evaluations, were designed to meet objectives other than knowledge development. To often, evaluations met bureaucratic needs with designs incorporating methodological errors so gross as to render a contribution to knowledge impossible. At other times, designs have been so simplistic as to produce results ignoring the complexity of human behavior in a complex society. The most commonly-

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cited conclusion of group home evaluations is that to the effect that such homes are both cheaper and a viable alternative to institutions. However, costs vary so widely by type of program that generalization is unwarranted. Some group home programs rival the per diem costs of the most expensive institution programs, and some "Ma and Pa" foster family homes are operated very economically. Generally, the findings suggest that group homes do no worse than institutions as measured by former residents' success in staying out of jails, correctional institutions and state hospitals, but how much better they do is unclear (Coates, et al, 1978). Too often, evaluation statements resemble "party line" endorsements, rather than empirically-derived knowledge. Fortunately, there are some exceptions. Thus a somewhat different criteria is used by Murray and Cox (1979), with somewhat different conclusions. They interpret their data as showing that institutions have a greater "suppression" rate on subsequent arrests than do group homes. A thoughtful consideration of value issues, however, may well lead one to say "So what?" Nazi concentration camps surely would have had a greater "suppression" rate than if Jews, gypsies, and other "dangerous populations" had been housed in group homes. This author's experience would suggest that group homes are much less stifling of spirit, individuality, sparkling eyes, and positive humor than in institutional care.

## SYSTEM FIT

When one examines the "fit" of group homes in the network of services to adolescents, one must consider questions about placement practices and about the characteristics of youth sent to institutions as compared to those of youth sent to group homes. The two populations may be not at all comparable. In 1965, the author visited programs in 35 states, 12 of which included group homes in their array of juvenile programs. The fit of the group homes within the network of services frequently emerged as a problem area. The problem did not become evident until residents were interviewed. It became apparent that staff and administrators were too often inclined to ignore perceptions of the youngsters of issues related to intake and egress procedures (Weber, 1966). In situations in which the group home was being used as an aftercare service, or re-entry to the community, the youth perceived placement as unfair. Time spent in the training school had not been reduced, and some peers, committed under similar circumstances, were allowed to go home rather than to group homes. All too often the group home placement was perceived as additional "time" to be served.

While in the aftercare use of group homes, aggressive behavior was often rewarded by removal from the group home to parole or aftercare status, in the probation use of the group homes the aggressive, hostile youngster was carefully screened out at intake and refused admission (Minnesota Department of Correction, 1977). In the private sector, a review of referrals revealed a similar "creaming" effect. The irony was that the officially stated purposes of the group home and of the type of youngster the program was designed to serve, was largely descriptive of the referrals rejected.

The "emotionally-disturbed," "acting out" youngster is the typical type the literature describes as "falling in the cracks" between agencies. The conflict between mental health and juvenile justice agencies as to who should provide services is very old and will probably not be resolved in the forseeable future (McKenzie, Roos, 1979). In particular, group homes serving either justice or mental health agencies screen out the aggressive youngster--possibly as a result of the sensitivity of the community to the presence of a group home (Mayer, Richman, Balcerzak, 1977).

Systematic study of the system fit of group home is lacking though there have been some beginnings. North Carolina is currently doing a study of the placement history of a small

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population of youngsters identified as mentally-ill, aggressive and delinquent. Undoubtedly, group homes will crop up in the placement backgrounds of some of these youngsters, but a systematic study of group homes themselves as to intake and egress practices and policies within a network of youth services is lacking. The strong suspicion is that group homes exist in addition to, rather than as an alternative to institutions. (Minnesota Department of Correction, 1977; Bush, M., 1980; Greenberg, 1975; Coates, Miller, Ohlin, 1978).

## THE FUTURE OF GROUP HOMES

The future is always dimly perceived and subject to the totally unexpected. There are, however, certain trends that may well continue into the future. Use of group homes appears to be declining. Sometime in 1978 or 1979, the number of group home beds peaked and leveled off. The data is not yet available, but the impression is that both the number of group homes and the number of beds within them are declining and will continue to decline in the eighties. The reasons, this author believes, include increasing costs, changing practices regarding the placement of status offenders and aggressive adolescents, and more realistic expectations of what group homes might accomplish.

Reimbursement rates are not keeping pace with costs. Where group home agencies are unable to keep rates and costs in balance, the placement agency has to seek cheaper alternatives. The possibility of further cutbacks of public dollars available to pay for services is very real. Private-sector group home administrators must study alternative service patterns in order to survive. The luxury of studying community problems and developing plans to meet identified needs is no longer available. The human consequences of racism, poverty, inflation and unemployment are givens within the context of objective priority determination--too rarely objectives for amelioration in themselves. In periods of retrenchment group homes as human services will suffer together with all welfare services.

In the past five years, state after state has restricted and prohibited the use of training schools for status offenders. Group homes were frequently the alternative placement of choice. For the anxious, frightened, passive young person, group homes often have been a genuine source of help. For the impulsive, "nothing makes any difference." "I don't care" youngster, such homes become a problematic setting. These types of status offenders frequently prove to be as much of a community nuisance in group home settings as within their own families. Thus placement agencies are much slower to select group homes as a placement choice for status offenders today. Experienced correctional program managers often observe that they would prefer working with sophisticated delinquents rather than the unpredictable "airheads" labeled status offenders. Group home managers and placement workers might not go that far, but they are much aware of the problems of teaching self-responsibility to minors who just don't care.

Mental health agencies, traditionally reluctant to use hospital settings for treatment of the aggressive emotionally disturbed, have often used group homes in the past five years. Their experience has been similar to that accruing from work with status offenders. Community acceptance of group home programs has been threatened, kids did not materially change their behavior, and group home parents lacked adequate controls. Thus, placement agencies are currently demonstrating much more caution in recommending a group home placement. As indicated earlier, group homes have been very good at screening out referrals of youngsters with histories of aggressive behavior. In light of the inability of mental health agencies to effectively use group homes with this type of youngster, careful screening was probably wise.

It would seem that the group home's greatest value is in its service to the older adole-

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scent who can use the home as a stepping stone to independent living. The group home certainly no longer is seen as a panacea for residential placement needs of adolescents. For these reasons, the author forsees a declining use of group homes in the near future. However, such homes will remain an important placement resource in a continuum of residential programs for children and youth.

As regards future trends in the homes' program emphases, there will always be fads. But one factor will be of paramount and continuing importance. Youth need to be given a greater sense of control over their destiny. Increased opportunities for youngsters participation in decisions affecting their futures is the means to provide them with the sense of creating the future. The need is for a trend toward much less of the workers saying, "We think that this placement is what is best for you," and more for his asking, "What do you want and how can we help you get it?" There is a need for less paternalism, less prolongation of dependency, and more delineation of options, with exploration of probable consequences. Admittedly, it is hard to develop a technology in which the youngster is free to choose. Painfully, kids don't always make the right choices. Workers' desires to protect the youngster from failure may often result, in part, from desire to protect the worker from hurting. But it is in the nature of kids that they do hurt others. The process of growing up is often complicated and painful. Group homes should be a part of accelerating the process, not prolonging it.

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