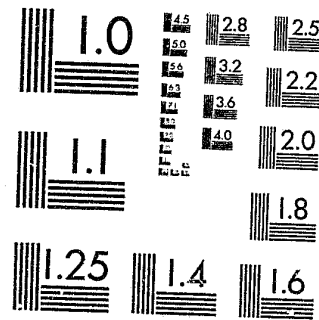


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International Summaries

A Series of Selected Translations in Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice

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Development and Implementation of Project Bridge, Cologne

Bridge projects in West Germany provide alternative sentencing of juveniles to community service in an effort to offer educational and rehabilitative experience for juvenile offenders.

By Erich Marks

Introduction

Inspired by offender community service programs in England, Project Bridge associations have sprung up in various parts of West Germany. As private, nonprofit service providers, the Bridge associations implement such community-based forms of juvenile correctional programming as community service work, social living skills instruction, counseling, and social rehabilitation assistance.

The Bridge Cologne, established in 1979, is the second project of this type in the Federal Republic of Germany. The first Bridge was founded in 1978 in Munich. Both projects deal with community service orders, an educational judicial sanction that sentences juvenile offenders to performing some public or human service work in the community. Bridge projects currently are being formed in other urban centers such as Bielefeld, Ebersberg, Starnberg, Kiel, and Siegen. The focus of activity varies from place to place; in Kiel the thrust will be on implementing juvenile and youthful offender restitution programs in repayment of damages to victims, while the Siegen project will practice juvenile counseling and group social work.

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Project Rationale and Origins

The need for Project Bridge services arises from the conviction that justice sanctions for juveniles should be educative rather than repressive. It holds that juvenile deviance is frequently a transitional, developmental phase that can be overcome through personalized guidance and learning opportunities. Institutionalization of juveniles in particular should be avoided because of its negative stigmatizing effects upon young lives and its failure to reverse criminal tendencies. Instead, community-based correctional programming should involve juveniles in personal growth experiences that reveal alternatives to the delinquent life style.

West German juvenile justice codes acknowledge this rehabilitation philosophy and provide for two categories of sentencing—correctional and educational. The latter admits a wide range of alternative juvenile sentences that can be served in the community. Despite the existence of a legal framework for educational juvenile sanctions, however, the implementation of counseling, training, and community service work programs has been stymied by organizational, staffing, and funding constraints. In practical terms, the dominant sentencing alternatives available to juvenile judges have been the correctional ones—fines, and the various forms of confinement or constraint of liberty (i.e., short- or long-term institutionalization, leisure-time detention, probation).

In Cologne, for example, until the establishment of Project Bridge, the juvenile probation and court assis-

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tance services were the principal providers of supervision and counseling to juvenile delinquents. The Cologne juvenile court handles approximately 6,000 cases yearly, overburdening court assistance workers with caseloads of some 600 clients per officer. The probation service, based on a one-to-one relationship between clients and officers, was unable to expand and diversify its programming to encompass training courses, group counseling, and community work assignments.

The association Bridge Cologne was formed specifically to promote the expansion and maximum utilization of the legal provisions for community-based, education-oriented, nonpunitive correctional alternatives for juveniles. Program planning was done in consultation with juvenile judges and administrators in the juvenile justice and correctional system. Program implementation remains closely coordinated with these authorities and is concentrated in the following areas:

- Administration and monitoring of juvenile offenders under judicial community service orders, including maintaining liaison among juvenile courts, court assistance services, and community service organizations, and providing individualized assistance to clients.
- Provision of short-term (6 months) intensive counseling and life-skills training to juvenile repeat offenders sentenced with judicial orders to undergo sociopedagogical programming because their personal circumstances and juvenile justice backgrounds indicate likelihood of continued criminal involvement and the threat of more serious correctional penalties in the future.
- Promotion of pretrial diversion for minor offenses at the prosecutorial level—usually in conjunction with community service orders.

The Cologne project focused on the development of community service as the alternative with the most potential for avoiding stigmatization and providing significant learning experiences. The area of service can be selected to fit individual talents and interests, and work performance requires active involvement of the juvenile in a constructive working environment. This is far preferable to the passivity of "sitting out" a confinement term or "buying one's freedom" by paying a fine. Furthermore, participation in the human service setting offers opportunities for social learning and personal growth through assistance to others. Finally, the community service alternative gives judges an instrument for meting out individual sentences commensurate with the nature and severity of the offense (i.e., in the number of service hours assigned).

Program Administration and Client Processing

The project is staffed by one educator as project director, four social workers/counselors, one social work student, one volunteer resident trainee, one administrative secretary, and two civil service providers. The initial phase of the Cologne project (March 1980 to March 1982) is being funded primarily by a juvenile foundation (Stiftung Deutscher Jugendmarke, e.V.), with supplementary allocations from state and municipal resources.

Upon issuing a community service order, the court provides the juvenile with a program description and instructions to report at the Bridge office within 1 week. About 90 percent of the clients appear voluntarily. Should a client fail to report, a written reminder is sent. A Bridge staff member may also visit the home and attempt to motivate voluntary participation. Intake involves a lengthy interview concerning:

- The committed offense and its consequences;
- Nature and purpose of community service as a juvenile justice sanction;
- Selection of a community service that corresponds to the clients' interests and capabilities;
- Details of the assignment regarding punctuality, work attitude and performance, length of service, and scheduling;
- Personal problems for which additional assistance might be required.

Both the client and the community service agency receive written statements from the Bridge detailing the individual service arrangements (e.g., number of work hours, liaison with the Bridge, and timeframe for assignment completion). The service agency makes a written report to the Bridge upon fulfillment of a service order; this document is further transmitted to the court, following an exit conference with the juvenile.

The average number of community service hours to which clients were sentenced was 24.6 in 1980 and 29.0 in 1981; sentences ranged from 5 to 200 work hours. Judges rarely assigned more than 80 hours because juveniles are hard to motivate over long periods. At the outset, the Bridge had contacts with 34 local service organizations accepting its clients. Currently, the liaison extends to 159 service organizations, including agencies for the elderly and the handicapped, hospitals, child care centers, juvenile recreation programs, religious congregations, municipal offices, and community action groups. Each organization designates a contact person who over-

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sees individual client performance, reports to the Bridge, and attends the association's liaison meetings at 6-month intervals. Project staff pay special attention to maintaining good relations with service organization representatives and encourage their support of clients.

The Bridge also arranges "work groups" for problem clients unable to fulfill their service orders alone. Such clients include youths with aggressive behaviors, foreigners with language difficulty, persons unable to discipline themselves, and those whose histories indicate risk of dropping out. Work groups comprise up to eight clients, are supervised and counseled by a Bridge staff member, and work together on a common large-scale project (a recreation center renovation, a day care facility construction, etc.) for an entire week or over a series of weekdays. Each working session concludes with a common discussion, which is conducive to good relations between youths and their counselors because it is held outside formal project offices.

Community services orders may also be performed on a one-to-one basis in shared activities between the juvenile and an elderly or handicapped individual. In such cases, social workers specially prepare both parties for the mutual helping relationship. Juveniles commonly perform shopping and household chores and provide companionship on excursions or outdoor walks. This form of human service is usually satisfying to everyone involved, from staff to the assistance recipient as well as the juveniles, because it realigns the client-service provider constellation, allowing the youths to experience a new role of responsibility.

Most clients complete their service orders without further prompting from the Bridge; only 13 cases (2.5 percent) failed the program in 1980 and were confined for the remainder of their sentences. Approximately one-fourth of the clients require additional assistance from Bridge staff in dealing with personal problems such as living arrangements, family relationships, and vocational or educational handicaps (e.g., illiteracy).

Prosecutorial Diversion

In minor offenses, community service can be used as a form of prosecutorial diversion for juveniles. This procedure has the potential of reducing juvenile adjudication by one third of the current caseload. It can also reduce the waiting time between indictment and trial, which in some cases lasts as long as 6 or 9 months because of bureaucratic lags in caseload processing. The offense and trial thereby become too far removed from each other in time and lose the impact of their immediate association. Diversion to community services also helps first offenders whose initial apprehension may have been

deterrent and punishment enough to preclude need for further justice system processing, as well as those for whom fines may pose financial stress. Above all, prosecutorial diversion of minor offenders frees the courts for consideration of more serious crimes.

Juveniles diverted to community service receive written notice from the prosecutor's office. If the client willingly accepts this alternative, Bridge program intake proceeds in a manner similar to that of juveniles with court orders to community service. Should a client refuse the opportunity for pretrial diversion through community service, the case is reopened for prosecution. From June 1981 to January 1982, Bridge programming successfully diverted 105 minor offenses at the pretrial stage.

Client Characteristics

A total of 1,541 community services orders, both judicial and prosecutorial, were administered by the Bridge in 1981. Clients averaged 17.1 years of age, ranging between 14 and 20; 87.3 percent were male; 10.6 percent were foreigners. The most frequent offense was shoplifting or simple theft (26.1 percent), followed by riding public transportation without paying the fare (17.2 percent), serious theft (17.2 percent), various traffic offenses (8.7 percent), injurious assault (6.5 percent), drug possession/use (5.3 percent), fraud or embezzlement (4.1 percent), and property damage (3.6 percent).

A preliminary assessment of the effects of Bridge programming compared juvenile court sentencing data for 1971 (pre-Bridge) and 1981 (1 full year of Bridge implementation). Judges' use of confinement sentences in 1981 was one-third less frequent than in 1971, while community service orders tripled.

Educational Counseling

Educational counseling orders are a sentencing option of the court for juvenile offenders whose social circumstances and prior juvenile justice system involvement indicate special risk of renewed offenses and likelihood of heavier sentences in the future. This is an intensive intervention measure designed to prevent the development of criminal careers. Bridge programming implements this sentencing option through a 6-month individualized counseling, supervision, and instruction service coupled with community work orders and various forms of social assistance, depending on the client's personal needs. Clients are juvenile repeat offenders, status offenders in the transitional state of attempting to fend for themselves, dropouts from community service assignments, and other youths for whom this program represents

a final chance to overcome a criminal life style. The intensive counseling order can be issued only to offenders whose overall social situations evidence need and distress (unemployment, deprivational living arrangements, disrupted family relationships, educational handicaps) and whose incarceration upon their next offense appears imminent. Counseling and instruction focus on problems related to school, vocational training, and employment; shelter and financial security; and parental and peer relationships.

These Bridge counseling arrangements are more flexible and less punitive than formal probation. Most important, they retain a voluntary character by establishing a client/counselor relationship for only 6 months instead of the 3-year supervision period imposed by probation. Client intake is carefully prepared. It requires several personal interviews between the assigned counselor and the client, during which they jointly reach agreement regarding the individualized course of instruction, and community service work. Client participation in peer group sessions is encouraged, but individualized counseling can predominate. The client's willing involvement in

program formulation and fulfillment is a prerequisite. Should the client initially evidence an uncooperative attitude, the Bridge requests the court to revoke its intensive counseling order and resentence the offender to other sanctions, which may no longer be community-based.

Since Autumn 1980, 41 orders for intensive counseling have been handed down by Cologne juvenile courts and completed under Bridge programming. Clients' average age was 17.4, and most were repeat offenders who previously had been adjudicated. Among the individualized needs the Bridge was able to meet were literacy instruction; voluntary, expanded rap sessions with a client and his neighborhood peer group; and family counseling for juveniles with drug problems and poor intrafamily communication.

The Bridge experiences are based on the assumption that juvenile deviance is, in many cases, a transitional phase that need not lead to a criminal career. To test this assumption and the success of the Bridge, evaluative research is planned involving postprogram followups on Bridge clients and their subsequent adjustment to life.

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