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POLICE SCIENCE

POLICE METHODS FOR HANDLING DELINQUENT YOUTH

JACOB CHWAST

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Undoubtedly, one of the most vexing problems confronting society today is that of youthful delinquency. Delinquency, as we have often seen, is a social condition which cuts across all strata of society. No individual, no agency, no institution is untouched by delinquency. We are, all of us, individually and jointly involved in the problem. All of us have in some way contributed to its development, and likewise all of us in some way are inevitably required to participate in working toward its solution. Fundamentally, the techniques of handling delinquent youth do not consist in spelling out particular tricks or magical formulas which will do the job. We must realize fully and soberly that techniques per se isolated from the main stream of social living become mere empty gestures. Eventually, the futility of such often times disjointed, self-deceptive maneuvers leaves us feeling disappointed and distressed. For the individual worker in this vast sea of social disorganization, his only sense of satisfaction sometimes comes when one of the many troubled persons he has helped "straightens out and flies right."

Youthful trouble makers have been known to us since time immemorial. The point at which they became an inconvenience to their societies has been invariably determined by existent social, legal, and moral codes. We know, for instance, that up until the middle of the last century, the young offender was accorded not merely harsh but actually brutal and inhuman treatment for his misdeeds. The child was whipped, branded, mutilated, and even executed upon occasion. Unbelievable as it may seem, jail imprisonment for the child was a humane innovation in the era of its introduction.¹ It would be nice to say that such an alarming display of inhumanity no longer exists; however, this is hardly the case. Even with our vaunted twentieth century enlightenment we find in some communities of our highly advanced country vestiges of such barbarism. New York City happily by virtue of its cosmopolitan, flexible, and humane attitudes has been in the forefront of those seeking out more effective ways for rooting out the twin problems of delinquency and crime. The coming of the new methods of handling youngsters has been a slow process. It has been accomplished step by step. None of these gains has been won without a hard fought battle, and none can we afford to relinquish.

¹ PAUL TAPPAN, *JUVENILE DELINQUENCY*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1949, Chap. XV. Harry Elmer Barnes and NEGLEY K. TEETERS, *NEW HORIZONS IN CRIMINOLOGY*, Prentice-Hall Inc., New York, 1951, p. 381.

What is it that has been significant in our onward march toward solving the enigma of delinquency? Unquestionably the impact of psychiatry, psychology, and social work merging over the course of the years with visionary police work has been prepotent. During the past 50 years or so, we have witnessed an astounding proliferation of social agencies aimed at relieving the manifold human maladjustments generated within a highly mobile, machine-gearred society. We would be blessed indeed if these agencies and their operations were as well synchronized as they focused upon social problems as the machines are in their output. This should not be misconstrued as being critical of social facilities endeavoring to cope with social problems. As a matter of fact, they must be whole-heartedly supported in increasing the scope and variety of their activities.

A great deal must be done in addition. Time and again social agencies have worked hard to no avail with particular delinquents and their families. Also, probation and parole bureaus striving mightily have often fought a losing battle in supervising their charges. This has at times made us pause and wonder. Does our ineffectiveness reflect an insufficiency of social agencies or must not traditional social work techniques be somewhat modified in the approach to the delinquent?

The Juvenile Aid Bureau of the New York City Police Department is most directly and intimately concerned with the problem of delinquency. It very well knows how complicated is work with the delinquent. The Bureau hopes however that social facilities could orient themselves more open-mindedly and positively toward it and its capacities, present and potential, in this area. A tendency has developed which is deplorable in that it attempts to minimize the very dynamic and constructive role which can be played by the Juvenile Aid Bureau toward this end. Many of the things done by the Bureau for many years, for instance, without fuss or fanfare have been recently 'discovered' by other agencies. "Aggressive casework", so called, has been in a sense the backbone of the Bureau's program since it started.

To turn from the Juvenile Aid Bureau for a while let us see how the police department has been retooling itself in order to meet the special needs of the delinquent, wayward minor, and neglected child: the human being of tender years. In almost every phase of police work, the endeavor is made to handle the youngster with especial care. He is treated differently.

The legal concept of juvenile delinquency contemplates the child from a developmental point of view and fittingly emphasizes that the purpose of the judicial process is not to exact punishment from the child but rather to rehabilitate him. In line with this concept the police department's procedures have been modified so as to be consistent as they affect the child. Because of the fact that arrests which are followed by court appearances have been demonstrated time and again to adversely affect the young offender,² the attempt is made insofar as possible, but definitely not beyond that point, to utilize a less stringent procedure in handling him. This has taken the form of a report known as the Behavior Referral Card which is forwarded by the police officer on the scene of the incident for extensive, skillful, and discreet investigation by other officers who specialize in working with children. This type of report has the additional advantage of making it possible for the Bureau worker to reach any troubled child for reconstructive purposes even though the offense itself

² O. W. WILSON, *POLICE ADMINISTRATION*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1950, p. 203.

might not be suitable for court action. With the fairly normal youngster, this service is a kindly but firm and pointed reminder that his misbehavior has been noted and should be discontinued.

Where an arrest must be effected, the youngster is protected as completely as can be from any ill effects whatsoever. He is not booked at the police station. In fact he is not even brought to a police station. Instead he is brought directly to the appropriate court if in session or otherwise to a temporary children's shelter. To the degree that is feasible, transportation is provided in vehicles which cannot be identified as belonging to the police. Even in the effecting of an arrest, wherein a juvenile has been involved, the police officer refrains from giving the appearance in any way that the youngster is in his custody. He avoids the use of handcuffs, nippers, or any other device to fasten the prisoner to himself. Where a girl has been arrested, arrangements are made for escorting her by a policewoman.

As has been previously indicated, the department's policy over the years has become increasingly oriented toward the child. It has given very pronounced and concrete expression to this trend in the creation of a branch already referred to which specializes in working with the child, i.e. the Juvenile Aid Bureau. This bureau has been drawing heavily upon the fields of social work, psychology, sociology, education, and anthropology in forging instruments suitable to its task.

The stated purpose of the Juvenile Aid Bureau is two-fold:³

1. Planning and putting into operation programs designed for the prevention of juvenile delinquency and waywardness of minors.
2. Securing adequate social treatment and putting into effect measures for the rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents, neglected children, and wayward minors.

To carry out this job, the bureau has established twelve field units throughout the city with carefully selected, skilled, and trained personnel who perform several vital functions. Necessary suppressive police action is routinely administered by the supervision of all locations in the community which foster crime. Not only are bars, poolrooms, bowling alleys, and dance halls carefully inspected, but in addition, regular patrols are maintained in delinquency-prone areas: Times Square, Navy Yard, Coney Island, etc.

About 80% of the work of the Juvenile Aid Bureau consists of a follow up to the reports, on the Behavior Referral Cards, about the anti-social acts, committed by the individual child. Since the Bureau's focus at this point is upon the child and his totality rather than merely upon the offense, the officer is confronted with a very demanding job. He is required to investigate as fully as he can the total background of the child. This is often a rather intensive procedure which must be pursued in a very large proportion of cases brought to its attention. Where the offense is of a trivial nature, the need for a thorough investigation is obviated.

Very simply expressed the field worker's job, as the Bureau sees it is as follows:

- a. To understand the nature of the child's difficulties
- b. To devise a plan to meet these difficulties
- c. To put this plan into operation

As can be readily perceived this covers what has been elsewhere referred to as its

³ Police Department, City of New York, *MANUAL OF PROCEDURE*, Article 17, Section 1, 1949. New York City Charter, Section 435.

locating, diagnosing, and screening functions.⁴ The primary objective of the Juvenile Aid Bureau, and this must be stressed, is that of making referrals based upon the foregoing analysis of the needs of each situation. The staff of the Juvenile Aid Bureau processes around 20,000 cases each year. A large number of them can be channeled to appropriate community resources such as the court, the private agency, and the public agency as is indicated and if at all possible. Where, however, the case is of a non-referrable nature, the bureau does not abandon the youngster but continues to work with him until he has stabilized sufficiently to give some assurance that he will not revert to anti-social behavior. Even in these latter cases, the persistent attempt is made to interest other social agencies and professional people to work with the child. To carry out this job, the Juvenile Aid Bureau has found that it must move out toward the delinquent and his family rather than place sole reliance on the latter's willingness to meet with it. To anyone acquainted with the psychology of the delinquent's make-up the importance of following up contacts with him is very obvious. The worker will meet his client at the office, at home, or in the street if need be. The Bureau has found that the determining factor in how effective the worker can be with the youngster does not lie in any preconceived stereotyped ideas he may have about him. It depends substantially upon the type of relationship which the worker is able to establish. This, namely relationship, is presently the Bureau's primary area of concentration.

A simple study carried out in conjunction with the Fordham School of Social Service is rather interesting as an attempt to judge the Juvenile Aid Bureau's effectiveness.⁵ This consisted of a follow-up to the later careers of 320 delinquents selected at random who had been reported to the Bureau for offenses they had committed. Ten years afterward 76% of them had neither been reported to us again nor had they been arrested for any other offense. Only 14% were later reported once and 6%, twice. It is obvious that inasmuch as several crucial variables remained uncontrolled in this study, the results reported must therefore be critically evaluated. Nevertheless the figures themselves, even permitting a good margin of scientific error, appear rather impressive.

⁴ PAUL TAPPAN, *JUVENILE DELINQUENCY*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1949, pp. 529-530.

⁵ ALBERT TRICOMI, *PREDELINQUENT TEN YEARS LATER*, 1950 (unpublished Master's Dissertation) Fordham University School of Social Service, 1953.