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A STUDY OF POLICE SERVICES TO CHILDREN IN A RURAL WISCONSIN COUNTY

KENNETH L. SHIMOTA

Kenneth L. Shimota is a law enforcement consultant, Community Services, Division for Children and Youth, Wisconsin State Department of Welfare. Mr. Shimota holds master degrees in both sociology and social work and prior to his appointment in June, 1963 to his present position had served as a parole agent for ten years in Minnesota and Wisconsin.—EDITOR.

Every community that assumes its responsibility to provide its children with the opportunity to develop into well adjusted mature adults, delegates a part of this responsibility to local law enforcement. This responsibility is juvenile control which involves the protection and regulation of behavior and the control of environments detrimental to youth.

In recognition of the premise that juvenile control is a local law enforcement responsibility, Sheriff Merle Spencer and Juvenile Court Judge Harland Hill of Sauk County, Wisconsin, requested the Wisconsin Department of Public Welfare's Division for Children and Youth to conduct a study of the scope of delinquency and the available law enforcement services for children in Sauk County.¹ The purpose of this study was to determine how to strengthen police services in the county and to evaluate the need for an officer in the Sheriff's Department to work with children. This study was requested with the approval of the chiefs of police of the county and the county welfare department's director, Wesley Rohrer, whose agency is responsible for providing juvenile court services.

Since there were no precedents for studying police services to children, this study was conducted as a pilot project. Preliminary procedures

¹ Sauk County is located in southern Wisconsin consisting of an area of 840 square miles of rolling hills, lakes, and rivers. Approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of the land is covered with forest growth. Agriculture is the primary business. It is one of the state's leading recreation areas.

Sauk County has a population of approximately 37,370. Baraboo is the county seat and largest city in the county, population 7,760.

Law enforcement services are provided by 64 full time personnel of which 51 are administrative or officer staff. The County Sheriff Department has a staff of 26 which includes clerical, dispatching, and jail personnel. The communities with more than one officer are as follows: Baraboo (12), Reedsburg (10), Sauk City-Prairie Du Sac (4), Spring Green (2), and Lake Delton (2).

involved the development of a study team, the collection and perusal of all available pertinent data from state agencies and the Sauk County Sheriff's Department. In addition, consultive services were provided by staff from the Division's Administrative Review Team and the State Department of Public Welfare's Bureau of Research and the Administrative Analysis Unit.

The study team consisted of the following Division for Children and Youth staff:

Kenneth L. Shimota, Law Enforcement Consultant

Alvin T. Nygaard, Assistant Law Enforcement Consultant

Sarah Campbell, Assistant Community Services Consultant

Ferdinand Hirzy, County Services Supervisor

The team's perusal of preliminary data and consultation with other state staff provided the basis for the decision to develop separate questionnaires to be used by the team in interviewing the following:

1. The administrator of all police departments located in the county.

2. The administrator, or his delegate, of all junior and senior high schools in the county.

3. The caseworkers in the county welfare department providing services to the juvenile court.

The police administrators were interviewed on departmental police procedures in working with children. In addition, all records pertaining to children in each department were studied and data was tabulated regarding type of offense and police dispositions. This involved the study of thirteen law enforcement departments, in addition to the county sheriff's department.

Miss Campbell interviewed the administrators of eight junior and senior public high schools and the one parochial high school in the county. This

questionnaire covered police and school procedures involving mutual areas of concern.

Mr. Hirzy interviewed the three social workers providing services to the juvenile court about police investigations, report content and records.

This study indicated the following major problem areas:

1. Lack of police protective services to children.
2. Inadequate police investigations, questionable dispositions and records involving allegedly delinquent children in some departments.
3. Lack of communication and established procedures between police departments, schools, the welfare department and the juvenile court for working with children.
4. The need for in-service training for law enforcement personnel in the areas of child protection and delinquency prevention and control.

In reviewing protective services to children, recommendations were made regarding police procedures in dealing with allegedly abused and neglected children, youth employment, and the control of environments detrimental to youth. These recommendations, discussed in detail in the report, were:

1. Complaints involving child neglect and abuse should be adequately investigated to substantiate possible prosecution and referred to the county welfare department for its determination whether services should be provided to strengthen the family and for its recommendation to the court whether the child should remain in the home.

2. Local police departments must assume responsibility for knowledge of and enforcement of child labor statutes.

3. In order to provide an adequate "preventive patrol program" law enforcement personnel must be increased and more training provided, including in-service training.

Recognizing that adequate juvenile control by law enforcement necessitates complete and factual investigations, proper police dispositions, and the operation of a good record system, the study team emphasized its investigation of these areas.

Police investigations were reviewed for accuracy and content. Inadequate investigation not only jeopardizes the police disposition process but

impedes the processing of cases referred to other agencies or the court. A need for in-service training in police report writing was indicated. Also, social workers were attempting to complete inaccurate or inadequate police investigations rather than returning reports to the police department for re-investigation.

In Wisconsin, police use considerable discretion in making dispositions of a child allegedly committing an act of juvenile delinquency. Typical dispositions are "dismiss—not involved", "warned and released" (to parents), "refer to probation or parole agent", "release to other jurisdiction", "voluntary police supervision", "referral to social agency", and "referral to court". Recognizing that such quasi-judicial functioning affects the rehabilitation of the alleged offender, it was recommended and approved by all police administrators that all officers be provided special training in working with children, including the development of criteria and procedures for proper referral. This training is offered by the Division as part of its workshop program.

Records in individual departments varied from non-existent for several one-man units to adequate operational record systems in larger departments. In addition, the Sheriff's Department has the nucleus of a county juvenile central recording system. The study team's suggestions for improving records were:

1. Use a juvenile master index card which will contain information on the individual and on police and court dispositions of referred offenders.

2. Use a summary reporting system in place of the state's current recommended procedure for reporting police apprehensions and dispositions to the state.

3. Increase training of all police in the use of the already developed and utilized Juvenile Field Interrogation Report.

Police and school personnel and social workers providing court services all indicated a need for increased understanding of each other's professional roles. Increased communication, coordination, and the necessity for developing and utilizing standard working procedures were recommended.

The study indicated justification for the position of a juvenile officer in the Sheriff's Department. This recommendation met with the unanimous approval of all police administrators interviewed. This position could perform the

following functions:

1. Investigate cases involving juveniles for the sheriff's department;
2. Assist individual police departments, on request, in investigation of cases involving children;
3. Supervise, promote, and improve the sheriff's department's central recording system;
4. Act as a liaison officer between law enforcement, schools, social workers, and the court;
5. Conduct or arrange in-service training programs on police work with children for all officers in the county;
6. Serve in an educational capacity to provide children and their parents with a better understanding of police and the law.

With the alleged increase in juvenile delinquency, public concern seems to increase at a

disproportionate rate. In response to this concern, there is a tendency to rationalize the causes and advocate "cures". Currently developing in popularity is a "get tough" philosophy of reducing delinquency by publishing the names of juvenile offenders, prosecuting parents, reducing juvenile court jurisdiction, etc. These efforts to achieve the degree of juvenile control requested by the community through legislative change often result from failure to evaluate the problem locally. In many cases the strengthening and coordinating of local services within the current legal structure may be sufficient.

Rather than rationalize and seek external "cures", the police, school administrators and social workers in Sauk County were able and willing to appraise objectively both police work with children and police relationships with the other involved agencies.