

League for Emotionally Disturbed Children

First draft for attention of Education Committee only

AN Experimental Program for the Education of Seriously Disturbed Children

Introduction

There is in the community a group of children whose needs are not met by existing educational facilities. These children, for want of a better term, have been described as "seriously disturbed". This term applies to no specific clinical entity; rather, it is descriptive of the child who for a variety of unknown reasons has not been able to function adequately. Although severely handicapped to the extent that they cannot function in the ordinary school setting, hospitalization for such children is not indicated nor therapeutically desirable. These children are basically frightened and anxious, the symptomatic evidence being their terror, extreme fears, disabling inhibitions, pre-occupation with inner impulses and an extreme lack of interest in the world around them, aggression and bizarre behavior.

The children included in the description of seriously disturbed are helped - often reluctantly - through a variety of services such as child guidance clinics, case work services of children's agencies, psychiatric hospitals as well as through private child psychiatrists. It is recognized by the clinicians working with these children that in many instances the lack of an appropriate educational and group experience has prevented such children from benefitting from the services which are available to them.

The right to an education, like many of the rights we enjoy as free citizens - we usually take for granted. Yet, the seriously disturbed child is excluded from our public education system entirely, or, in a number of instances, is provided with but a few hours of home instruction which at best is pitifully inadequate for his needs.

In recent years the advances in our knowledge and treatment of seriously disturbed children have indicated the advisability of keeping such children in the community and in the home if we are to help them. It has been found that the trauma of removing such a child from his community and home is very difficult to overcome in

therapy. Keeping the child at home, however, has been an almost impossible recommendation, to effect. From the therapeutic point of view the child needs and must have a positive educational and group experience lest he become further isolated and withdrawn from the world around him. Such group experiences are also vital if he is to learn to recognize and interpret more adequately the behavior of other children. From the parent's point of view they need the relief that attendance in a school affords as well as the feeling that something is being done for their child. Only in this way can they bear the almost unbearable burden and replenish their energies so that they can continue to handle their child in a way conducive to his improvement. From the point of view of the community, these are children who are admittedly in high jeopardy and unless they are given the support of a day-to-day living and learning experience, as well as other services, they will swell the ever-increasing army of mental patients in our bursting state hospitals.

With no possibility for educational and other services becoming available for their children, the parents organized the League for Emotionally Disturbed Children to help seriously disturbed children everywhere regardless of race, color, creed or financial situation. The League is now a national organization and has 3 chapters in the metropolitan area as well as other chapters throughout the country. From its foundation, the League has received the whole-hearted support of the professional community in New York City as well as nationally. It is recognized as providing a very much needed service with due regards to high professional standards.

History of Development of the Educational Program for Seriously Disturbed Children

Recognizing the need to demonstrate the feasibility and practicability of providing a suitable educational experience for seriously disturbed children, the League sponsored an experimental private day school which opened its doors during February of 1953. The League School was set up as a non-residential educational facility for seriously disturbed children age 6 to 12, who are too withdrawn from the realities of living to be able to make an adjustment in a regular school setting. With the successful experience of the League School and other experimental programs which have demonstrated

the feasibility and practicability of an educational program for seriously disturbed children, the New York City Board of Education can now participate in the setting up of the experimental educational program we propose on a much firmer basis of knowledge and experience than heretofore.

We propose that an experimental class be set up under the sponsorship of the League for Emotionally Disturbed Children and the New York City Board of Education that could serve as a pilot project to determine the kinds of personnel and educational methods required to help seriously disturbed children to achieve the maximum degree of social adaptability and intellectual development. We recognize that due to the definition of function, the Board of Education may be able to meet the cost of only part of the program and other aspects will have to be met thru private funds. The League is therefore prepared to meet the cost of services not provided by the Board of Education. The blending of public and private funds working towards a common goal is most appropriate in a program of this type that can render a unique and most needed service to the New York City community. This pilot operation can also have a profound effect on the education of seriously disturbed children everywhere.

The Child in the Program

We anticipate selecting 10 children who live within reasonable travelling distance from the school building chosen, preferably in Manhattan. The referrals of the children would come from schools, hospitals, social agencies, clinics, psychiatrists, nurses and others. The children selected are to be from 7 years thru 9 years of age who are seriously disturbed. The age range is to be narrow, but flexible. Children accepted in the program are those for whom no educational facilities are now available in the community. It is not intended, nor would the program be used for, any children who can benefit from a regular or special classes now in existence in the school system. The diagnosis will be a functional one. Organically impaired or mentally retarded children are to be excluded. Each of the children will receive a thorough examination with all findings - psychological, medical, psychiatric, neurological and social being incor-

porated in the total study on which the decision to admit the child in the program will be based.

The Parent in the Program

It is anticipated that parents or persons assuming parental responsibility will be involved from the beginning and be given to understand that their participation is desirable and necessary. They will be given a picture of the child in the school and be encouraged to discuss the daily life incidents of the child in the home so that they can be helped in better handling some of the home situations. It is also anticipated that the parents will need to become involved in individual and/or group therapy. Within the limitations of the available social work time under the supervision of the consultant psychiatrist, such services will be provided to the parents. Any additional therapeutic services will have to be obtained outside the school situation. Where outside treatment is obtained, the social worker will be responsible for the integration of treatment of the parents and work with the children. On the basis of our own work with the parents as well as on the experiences of others, such programs for parents have been found to be highly beneficial both for them and their children.

The School Program

Based on the clinical experience of workers in the field, effective changes in social functioning can be achieved with seriously disturbed children without face to face psycho-therapy. We therefore do not contemplate providing individual psych-therapy for these children within the program.

The general aim of the school program is to help the seriously disturbed child attain behavior appropriate for his age. The setting would be one to arouse and tap the interests of young children. There would need to be the gamut of materials from those which are simple and unstructured to those which can be endowed with content: the range here might be from blocks to typewriters. An attempt will be made to structure the environment for the children in such a way that stimulation will be carefully dosed.

The essential feature of the program would be an individual and individualized relationship between the teacher and the child, since the seriously disturbed child is able to make adjustments to learning situations only on the basis of a relationship with some one individual. The school program will start with the child where he is, and the teacher will work with whatever ego-strengths the child has, build upon them, and as the child is ready, introduce new skills, new routines and new demands.

The program is therapeutic in that the teaching is predicated upon an interpersonal relationship between teacher and child, upon the basis of which skills will be taught and routines established at a pace at which the child can absorb them. It is educational in the sense that this will proceed not through rational interpretation but through a mixture of emotional experience. The program will teach the usual academic subjects, but they will be introduced at a faster or slower rate depending on the particular level of readiness of the child. Very considerable unevenness in this readiness and in the tolerance of each child for specific kinds of academic subjects is anticipated. For most of these children, the approach will need to be through a program of very carefully thought through use of materials to teach academic subjects.

To achieve the aims outlined small groups will be necessary, thus enabling the teacher to give the close individual attention each child needs. Because of this individual nature of the work that has to be done with the seriously disturbed child, 4 teachers will be needed for the 10 children contemplated in the program. Each child is thus provided with a central figure who is with him constantly from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. except for necessary interruptions. The teachers will also guide the parents in their handling of the children at home and will interpret the school program to them.

Training

The field of education of seriously disturbed children is relatively new and training facilities available in the community for teachers who can work with such children are wholly inadequate. Accordingly, the training of teachers and other professional workers with seriously disturbed children lags behind.

Since the project will provide an outstanding opportunity for the training

of teachers and others in the mental health professions, it is anticipated that there will be a close relationship established with training institutions and the project. In this way it is hoped that we will be able to add somewhat to the smaller number of trained teachers who are so desperately needed for work with seriously disturbed children.

Study

We are contemplating planning the project in such a way that it will fulfill both the functions of service and of study. The service function is clear from the foregoing. The study function needs to be ~~underscored~~ ^{underscored} since it is paramount in increasing the value of the efforts invested in the total project. It is anticipated that publication of the findings will follow so that others may learn from this experiment. Obviously, the project can only help a small number of children but it is hoped that out of this effort we may gain more knowledge about methods and techniques that will aid us in the education and treatment of severely disturbed children everywhere.

Administration

The project will include children from all groups in the community regardless of race, color, creed or financial situation. It is anticipated that it will continue for a period of three years. Sponsored by the League for Emotionally Disturbed Children and the Board of Education, the project will have an outstanding child psychiatrist who will be professionally responsible for the program. The senior teacher will be responsible for the educational aspects of the program and the supervision of the teachers. The social worker, in addition to direct work with the parents, will also be responsible for the integration of the work of the project with the contributions of participating agencies in the community. Psychological and screening services will be provided through the participation of a community agency or hospital especially interested in this particular problem. In addition to the personnel specified in the attached budget, the program will be under the general supervision of a consultative board which will be composed of psychiatrists, psychologists, educators, researchers and social workers.

Annual Budget

It is anticipated that the Board of Education will provide the following:

Personnel:

2 Teachers -	full time
Clerical assistance	part time

Space and Equipment:

Office equipment and supplies such as typewriters, desks, chairs, etc.

2 classrooms with educational equipment and supplies.

* The following is an annual estimate of the items and costs to be provided through private funds:

Psychiatrist	4 hours per week	\$2,400.00
Social Worker	half time	2,400.00
Senior Teacher	full time	5,000.00
Teacher	full time	3,800.00
Research consultant	4 hours per week	900.00
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		\$ 14,500.00

* Psychological testing and screening services to be contributed by community agency or hospital participating in the program.