

Letters to the Editor

Bancroft Home reassessed

To The Editor,
The Bancroft Drive Boys' Home situation, though probably old news, is certainly not out of the minds of concerned individuals. It would have been easier and much more emotional for me to vent inner feelings right after the news coverage which announced the demise of the Home's services. I preferred to stifle my anger and to take the time to compose both myself and

this letter.
Before one can understand the whys and wherefores of the Boys' Home situation, one has to make heads or tails out of the trends which come and go in psychology and social work fields. These professions determine strongly the success or failure of treatment and/or prevention facilities.

One must also realize the dichotomy between the "consistency" ap-

proach, which is generally preached, and the inconsistent practices evident in the everyday functioning of children's services.

The Bancroft Drive Boys' Home failed for many reasons (including lack of communication and funds). Many reasons for the failure of such services will not openly be discussed with the public because this will mean open debate on the fact that our "tools of the

trade and present practices" are often not adequate to handle such problem areas.

Research, documented in various papers, often points out that professional services aren't as successful as the public would think, or as the professionals are wont to admit. Some studies even declare that we do more harm than good.

I am aware that it is not enough to complain
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...our kids need a permanent home and parent

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(even though this is a trend of the 70's). I also know that "change", new ideas of a concrete nature and radicalism frighten many who would rather keep things as they are, even though this may mean accomplishing little. Yet, the public must always maintain its right to speak out, to voice opinions and ideas, regardless of opposition. The following suggestion is

therefore submitted for the use of the empty Bancroft Drive Boys' Home:

Many children in the care of the Children's Aid Societies come to believe that their lot in life is to be shifted from home to home. At eight, nine and ten, many children have already come to the conclusion that they have no right to warmth, love and the knowledge that they are good.

Many permanent wards of the Children's Aid Societies feel doomed to be shunted back and forth from one foster home to the next until the desperate day they turn eighteen.

Many of these children, because of this created feeling of rejection, insecurity and worthlessness, become discouraged and some, even desperate.

They sadly succumb to

lethargy, delinquency, emotional problems and anguish due to this "consistency" approach... we preach but don't practice.

Adoption isn't even a hope for many children who, being hurt so many times by so many, know that they just aren't "acceptable" anymore. Why did they have to become this way?

Foster homes, for the most part, are good homes; but their very philosophy negates permanency, consistency. Group homes are "interesting and in" in a professional way, but, run by shift professionals, they will never be homes. Social workers are caring people for the most part, yet the very foundation of this philosophy and its practice negates the possibility of consistency (due to job demands, case loads, moves to other agencies

and cities, etc.)

Our whole concept of "family" and "home" is awry.

A family is not necessarily a group of biologically tied individuals, natural parents and a spattering of kids. A family is a warm and secure unit; be it a gang, a group of friends, a club, a school band, a classroom. It can also be a big house filled with 40 kids and a permanent adult figure[s]. A home means the "same" address, the "same" people for whom you care and by whom you are cared for. A home is also a place where your "day-mother" doesn't leave at 4 pm, because her "shift" is over. A family also means buying and making presents for the "same" pseudo-parents throughout your childhood, rather than a series of pseudo-parents you never really have

enough time to learn to trust or to love.

It just may be time to realize that we can't provide total service to all children, even though it would be best if we could. Camus once said: "It is impossible to totally eradicate that which makes children suffer, but much can be done to alleviate suffering in children."

Just maybe, here in Sudbury, where innovation is the key to our growth, we can provide a **permanent home** for 40 children. It could be a place where a group of children could finally get a taste of a real home. This group of children of varied ages could discover the happiness in participation and co-operation, not in an expensive "therapeutic program" but in a more normal type of living situation (except, bigger in size).

Children need much less of behaviour modified functioning and more of normalizing environments where they can appreciate the OK aspects of laughing and crying and eating and sleeping and playing and fighting and loving - without the hovering over-protection of a society which treats them as castoffs, pitiful urchins or available guinea pigs.

I know, I know, I know! The Bancroft Drive Boys' Home is such a HUGE building! How can this be a family environment! It feels like an institution (that ghastly word)! An orphanage! How horrible, how degrading!

The physical appearance, richness, poverty, and cleanliness of a home have little to do with the feelings, warmth and security it provides. If a home is run on basic rules and modes of conduct, participation and co-operation, its size has no significance.

Ask any permanent ward of the Children's Aid Society who has no hope of being adopted or being returned to his natural home environment, if he had the choice, would he prefer being shunted back and forth between a series of foster homes until the age of 18 or would he prefer for the rest of his childhood to be given a permanent home, with the security and warmth of the same person to care for him?

I doubt we need debate the answer...

Fear of institutions is our fear, not the child's. Institutional regulations, activities, programs and therapeutic milieus are of our making and choice, not the child's. A building does not an institution make.

Another argument which has been thrown at me from time to time is the following: Who, in

his/her right mind would undertake such a heavy and ridiculous vocation? Surprisingly, enough, this very vocation is being undertaken in many countries (not North America - where such a vocational choice is viewed as neurotic, to say the least). The concept is that of the S.O.S. Children's Villages where a child no longer fears a life of constant rejection since he is given a permanent home.

The idea that a child without a home should be given a permanent substitute home has made little if any headway in this country. We seem to be too involved with the excitement created by the intricacies of problematic situations in the soap opera world of our charges than in their temporal and emotional wellbeing as individual human beings.

Naturally, this suggestion may not be the sought after "suitable" answer to the question: "What do we do with that big grey elephant?"

Yet, in this, the latter part of the Year of the Child, I am saddened to think that there are still children in this rich country who can say with despair that they have no home and that, though they may be well clothed and spoiled with material things, they cannot say, with certainty or security, that they have a home which will cherish them and help them grow to adulthood.

Can you imagine a Xmas dinner (of several turkeys) with 40 mouths smiling, talking, laughing, eating, singing; knowing that they will not be suddenly moved off to another place, knowing that they are just as good as anybody, knowing that there just has to be a Santa Claus.

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