Residential Treatment Services:  
A Review of Some Current Trends

Craig Winston LeCroy  
Arizona State University  
Tempe, Arizona

ABSTRACT: Residential treatment continues to be a major vehicle for delivering services to troubled youth and their families. A review of some current trends is presented to examine research supporting current practice and to highlight professional issues and concerns in residential treatment. In particular, incentive systems, child-care staffing, parent involvement, and programming activities are examined.

Residential treatment continues to be of major importance in delivering services to disturbed and troubled youth. Although long-term institutional care has decreased over the years, the use of more community-based treatment alternatives such as group homes continues to be necessary in meeting the needs of many youths.

Recent articles have made various recommendations regarding staffing (Martin, 1977; Millman & Schaefer, 1975), treatment alternatives (Astrachan, 1975; Barchi, 1977; Dimock, 1977; Jacobs & Schweitzer, 1979), and specific programming content (Fisher, 1980; Rosen, Peterson & Walsh, 1980; Roth, 1977). Whittaker (1978) has discussed the changing character of residential child care, emphasizing some of these recent directions. Similarly, Weintrob (1978) discusses variations in the adolescent residential treatment population. In 1973, Maluccio and Marlow reviewed the literature on residential treatment of emotionally disturbed children focusing on historical development, general characteristics, criteria for admission, and treatment outcome.

This paper provides an update on the earlier review, but is also more narrow in focus, emphasizing the use of group incentive systems or token economies, issues with child-care staffing, the recent focus on parent involvement, and the therapeutic use of programming activities. While other areas could be included (e.g., group treatment approaches, educational programming, etc.), the selected topics appear to be of major importance to all residential treatment programs, for emotionally disturbed or delinquent youth, and of current interest to professionals involved in residential treatment. The purpose of this

Requests for reprints should be addressed to Craig Winston LeCroy, School of Social Work, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287.

Child Care Quarterly, 13(2), Summer 1984  
©1984 by Human Sciences Press
review is to present current trends and research, to discuss professional concerns and issues, and to suggest needed research in light of this information.

**Token Economies**

Phillips (1968) pioneered a major advancement in the use of token economies in group home treatment with delinquents. Achievement Place is a small, family-style group home founded on the premise that delinquent behavior is best treated within a social-learning model. Its structured setting focuses on increasing such behaviors as room cleaning, saving money, academic skills, and self-care skills and on decreasing such behaviors as aggressive acts, tardiness, arguments, and so forth (see Kazdin, 1977, for a review). The Achievement Place program contains four main elements: "a comprehensive skills training curriculum, a motivation system (token economy), a self-government system, and the development of a reciprocally reinforcing relationship between the youths and the teaching parents . . ." (Wolf et al., 1976, p. 95).

The Achievement Place token economy (Phillips et al., 1971) is set up so the residents can earn points for demonstrating desirable behaviors, which are then exchanged for a variety of reinforcers such as snacks, allowance, or privileges such as telephone use, use of tools, and so forth. The residents graduate through a series of point systems (beginning with a daily point system, then weekly, etc.) to a merit system in which all privileges are available and desirable behavior is maintained through approval and staff praise. The last phase involves a homeward-bound system, which allows the resident to spend increasing amounts of time at home.

Achievement Place has been a model program for other residential programs developing a token economy. Additional research has examined the reliability of self-reporting (Fixsen et al., 1972), the use of self-government (Fixsen et al., 1973), use of a daily report-card system (Bailey et al., 1970), and vocational training (Braukmann et al., 1974). Evaluation of Achievement Place (Fixsen et al., 1976) in a two-year follow-up with comparison groups from a state institution and boys placed on probation found less recidivism, fewer contacts with police and courts, and slightly higher grades for the Achievement Place youth. Research by Eitzen (1975) examined the effects of Achievement Place on the attitudes of the youth. Participation in Achievement Place was found to result in improved achievement orientation, personal feelings of mastery, and self-concept.