In-Service Training for Child Care Workers

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ABSTRACT: The multiple functions and weighty responsibilities of child care workers require specialized knowledge, skills, objectivity, and self-awareness. However, educational and in-service training resources to meet the child care worker's professional needs continue to be limited. This paper describes a child care workers training program at the Jewish Child Care Association of New York. It is based on a conviction that the child care worker is a therapeutic agent, not a custodial person. Its seminars and workshops are designed for child care workers at different levels of experience and for interdisciplinary groups, and are also adapted to a variety of group care settings and a diversity of the client population.

The child care worker's role in residential treatment of handicapped and emotionally disturbed children is highly significant. His job responsibilities place him at the center of the children's daily activities. The nature of his relationships with individual children influences their growth and development; his leadership capability affects the children in his care.

His tasks are diverse and complex. He is responsible for the orderly functioning of the children's living arrangements; is involved in their physical nature, personal hygiene, education, work and leisure-time activities; assures them protection from physical and emotional abuse and is attentive to their total well-being. He helps children cope with their anxieties by attentive listening and actively intervenes in crisis situations; is supportive when they are troubled or discouraged, and facilitates clinical treatment by communicating his observations to clinical personnel. He also serves as a model and guide for developing positive values, attitudes, and behavior. As a member of the residential treatment team, he participates in planning and evaluating treatment goals. He also relates to the children's families during

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their visits. These weighty responsibilities require specialized knowledge, skills, objectivity, and self-awareness. The fact that they are delegated to relatively untrained personnel is a major contradiction in residential care. Administrative and clinical expectations of the child care worker are rarely matched by the resources made available to him to increase his competence and therapeutic effectiveness.

Formal child care education in the United States is still very limited. Although modest advances have been made in developing programs in community colleges and undergraduate departments of universities, these reach a relatively small number of potential and practicing child care workers. Individual supervision, supplemented by occasional in-service training seminars, continue to be the prevalent staff development method for orientation and continuing education of child care personnel. The supervisory process is most important because it provides the self-awareness and emotional support the child care worker requires to work with disturbed and handicapped children.

This paper will describe a training program for child care workers in the Jewish Child Care Association of New York, an integral part of the agency’s comprehensive staff development program (Adler, 1973). The Jewish Child Care Association is a voluntary child welfare agency which provides placement and treatment services for dependent, neglected, emotionally disturbed, and multiple-handicapped children who are unable to live with their families, due to family breakdown, tensions, or unmanageable conflicts between child and family. To provide appropriate placement and treatment services, the agency maintains specialized residential treatment centers, group residences, group homes, foster homes, and day care programs.

The training program is based on a conviction that the child care worker is a therapeutic agent and not a custodial person and that there are specialized areas of knowledge and skills and techniques which he will have to master in order to develop his therapeutic competency. It takes into consideration the varied levels of experience of the workers as well as the characteristics of the client population. Diversity of offerings and adaptability to changing conditions are essential. Since there is substantial turnover of child care workers, there is need for ongoing orientation of new staff. The customary orientation to cottage living through a brief period of participant observation, and individual supervision is supplemented in each of the residential programs by an introductory seminar. Its content consists of concepts of residential