

Mount St. Ann

Five-Year History

In April 1970 Mount St. Ann began a new era in the service to children. The new facility of 5 cottages replaced the older buildings that had served so many children for over 75 years.

The cottage set-up is an emphasis on family group living with 8 children of relatively the same age. The groups were divided approximately 5-8 years, 9-13 years and 13-15 years. The program was designed to provide residential group care to children who were in need of service, many times because of multi-problemmed families.

To implement this program the staff was composed of the following: 1 administrator; 1 assistant administrator; 5 full-time child care workers; 1 full-time social worker; 2 part-time social workers and 1 consultant psychiatrist.

With the advent of the new set up of separate cottages, it allowed our program to be more expansive and flexible. We had and still have an intake procedure which usually will take 7 to 10 days to implement. However, due to the type of need and the immediacy requested, sometime that process is completed in its initial stages within an hour. The remaining steps would be accomplished once placement occurs. We have served, on an average, approximately 80 children and families each year since 1970.

Mention is made of this flexibility to accept referrals very quickly to emphasize the fact that relatively few agencies accept placements on that basis. One reason for this is that the staff must be open, generous and flexible to a great degree. Ours is such, and they extend themselves admirably.

In 1970, Mount St. Ann along with all other residential group care facilities came under the authority of the Rate Setting Commission of the Commonwealth. It was and is their task to set fair and reasonable rates for services. In 1970 our rate was \$11.00 per day per child; it has increased to the present \$21.71 per day. The rates usually are lower than actual cost to run our program.

In 1971 we were able to hire a second social worker to help with the tremendous task of helping the families and the children put their lives back together. This entire process is a team effort and requires constant communication and effort amongst the whole staff.

In 1972 we introduced Dr. Al Jurgela to our program as our in-service trainer in Behavior Modification. He has continued as a monthly consultant to our staff concentrating on the staff's own personal development.

In 1973 we were called to formalize our emergency care program with city and state agencies. A pilot type program was initiated in April and lasted for six months. The agencies involved were: Catholic Charities, Division of Family & Children's Service, Office for Children and the Worcester Police. The purpose of the plan was to provide emergency care

services to children in need with the emphasis being on retaining the child in their own homes. If this was impossible, then back up plan would be operative - using foster homes or Mount St. Ann - whichever was appropriate. The program ran from April 1, 1973 to Sept. 30, 1973. During that period we received a total of 60 calls requesting immediate service for children. These 60 calls involved 126 children. After a screening process, it was only necessary to place 42 of those 126 for a total of 175 days of care. The others were referred to appropriate agencies for help; relatives were sought out for alternative planning and homemakers were used. As a point of note for prevention -- of the 42 placed, 88% returned home, the average age of the children placed was 6 years, the average length of stay during the emergency period was 4 days. After the 6 month period due to funding we revised our emergency plan to calls from the Police Department and/or the Division of Family & Children's Service.

The more involved one becomes in people's lives, it becomes clear that you cannot treat people any differently once the child leaves. For a long time follow-up was done on a hit and miss basis until we decided to formalize it in 1974. It is the function of the social workers, but really open to the entire staff to make concerted efforts to keep ourselves open to contacts from the children. We now have initiated a phone call, letter and personal contact basis for follow-ups. This is an important component since it gives the family more continuity of service - we are there for support, and also if need be, a back-up for a return here in crisis to something the child knows and with which he feels secure.

In conjunction with this we have had two holiday parties and invited the children back. This gives the children a chance to return and make contact with important persons in their lives and also give the children still in care an opportunity to see that the children who left are happy and functioning in their homes or substitute homes.

This entire follow-up process is becoming increasingly more and more a vital aspect of our program to serve children and their families.

Updating staffing patterns took precedence also in 1974. We extended the working hours of the counselors who have been with us for several years. They are now full child care workers working with the chief child care worker in each cottage to provide optimum level care. Training child care staff takes a year at least - if not more. This has distributed the work more evenly and allowed for better use of staff.

In March of this year we underwent our licensing procedure under the Office for Children -- the newly designated state agency mandated to license group care facilities. Previously this had been done by the Department of Public Welfare. Our program was scrutinized and evaluated by their licensing representative and we received excellent reviews and were granted our license for another two year period. It may be noted for emphasis, but several other facilities have had much difficulty with their evaluations.

In these five years, our commitment has grown to setting up plans that are as permanent as possible. This is to ensure further security and prevent children from bouncing around once they leave. To aid this we have set up a conjoint effort with Families for Foster Children and the Division of Family & Children's Service to get foster homes ahead of time and then work with them specifically with one of our children over a period of time before actual placement occurs. Previously, we have placed successfully 2 children in adoption and several permanent plans for children who would not have had that security available to them had they not come to Mount St. Ann.

In conjunction with this we have explored the possibility of setting up and running our own foster homes. This is one possible goal for the future. This would further insure consistency of care for children from Mount St. Ann.

Although our primary service agreement is with the Division of Family & Children's Service, Department of Public Welfare, we have had several agreements with Dept. of Youth Service and other agencies. In the summer of 1974 we were approached by Worcester Children's Friend Society - a private child welfare agency - to use our facility for a few placements to evaluate and recommend future plans for some of their children. That agency had decided to close the group care part of their Merrefield program. This contact came about as a result of their using us several times before on an emergency basis and were very much satisfied with our service.

We have also been part of a city Fire plan and agreed to a commitment to care for families and children in case of a city fire. As recently as this week, we received a call about four "fire victims." They stayed for a few days until they were able to find alternate housing.

In the past five years the Advisory Board of Mount St. Ann has become more active in helping to make our program continually effective and open to community needs. Several committees have given valuable time, effort and direction to our goals.

The future is a complex of contingencies of federal and state government planning and funding. The needs are there -- children and families in need of consistent and caring service. Our hopes are that Mount St. Ann will continue to be a center for child care in Worcester.

April 18, 1975