



The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 3
Issue 6 July

Article 6

July 1976

Educating Social Workers for Evolving Roles in Corrections

Florence Kaslow
Hahnemann Medical College

Stewart Werner
Council on State Government - Lexington, Kentucky

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>

 Part of the [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kaslow, Florence and Werner, Stewart (1976) "Educating Social Workers for Evolving Roles in Corrections," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 6 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol3/iss6/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



EDUCATING SOCIAL WORKERS
FOR EVOLVING ROLES IN CORRECTIONS*

Florence Kaslow, Ph.D.*
Associate Professor
Hahnemann Medical College

Stewart Werner, M.S.W.
Policy Analyst, Council
on State Government
Lexington, Kentucky

Operating Philosophy

The sought after concept of "socialized justice" toward which we aspire will hopefully emerge a reality in the Twentieth Century. The pendulum swings from the public's indignation and outrage toward the violent and heinous crimes of our times to the advance of modern correctional methods and techniques stimulated by changing social forces and federally funded programs; the humanization of our prisons, facilities and field services is the result. Gains are being made which are beginning to be felt, in which prescribed treatment programs tailored to meet the needs of the individual are beginning to pay dividends. This advance speaks to two basic premises inherent in the socialized justice concept: that persons caught up in the criminal justice system (1) possess dignity as individuals; and (2) are capable of change. Implicit in this is the idea that what happens during the person's period of incarceration should be determined by his assessed needs rather than by the category of crime he committed.

Probably the most critical factor in determining the outcome for or against socialized justice will be the ability and sufficiency of professional manpower to administer and deliver the varied therapeutic programs now available to the field of

* When this paper was written, Mr. Werner was Commissioner of the Bureau of Correction in Penna. and Dr. Kaslow was serving as a Staffing Training Specialist for the Bureau in conjunction with her teaching assignment at Hahnemann.

corrections. For the first time in the history of corrections, it is now possible, with access to funds, to secure competent and skilled workers, and to win public support for qualified and highly motivated professionals to make a definitive assault on what has been an unbelievably antiquated, punitive, politically oriented, apathetic, inept and ineffective correctional system.

There has been an estrangement of corrections and social work since the days of Mary Richmond in the first two decades of this century. Often social work turned its back upon the delinquent and criminal, once he was prosecuted and cast into the correctional system. Similarly, corrections failed to come forward with any outcry for support from the social work profession. The fact is that today, corrections emerges as a just cause for social concern within the context of civil rights and humanistic psychology. Add to this money in its coffers and it becomes clear why corrections is appealing to social work to the point where it could assume its rightful position in this area of human service. Practitioners are being increasingly attracted to the field and its dimensions of institutional services, treatment, supervision, management, training, research and administration. Recent advances in the criminal justice field by social work can be attributed to individuals who have made the breakthrough and carried in the discipline, rather than to a concerted effort on the part of the profession to concern itself with this area of human crisis and suffering.

Legal Versus Behavioral Constructs

One of the real dilemmas in pursuing the problem of crime and corrections has been the fact that we have never really focused, in any sustained way, our attention upon the offender - the perpetrator of crime, and his behavior. We have instead been preoccupied with the legal process of dealing with him in police stations, courts and correctional institutions. What

attempts we have made to change him have been within the legal constructs of the sentencing structure, rather than within a behavioral framework of understanding the psychosocial aspects of his malfunctioning. It will be necessary for corrections personnel to comprehend this and make a commitment to change this before any real inroads can be made upon the causes of the crime problem; that is, the offender himself and the conditions which serve as a breeding ground for him!¹ Society has found it all too easy to attempt to regulate or control crime by changing the sentencing structure; by following the delusional path that longer sentences will serve as a deterrent; by rationalizing that if just a little bit harsher punishment were inflicted the problem behavior would somehow be "corrected."

The behavioral approach takes into account the whole man; the legalistic takes into account only his offending act. To become operative, socialized justice must provide the flexibility to allow for work with the individual's behavior.²

Roles for Social Workers in this Changing Scene

The Therapeutic Community

For any kind of rehabilitative efforts to be effective with prison populations, interventions must be potent enough to cut into the characteristic patterns of thinking and acting of the offender; new options can be introduced, considered and utilized; and better, more pro-social behaviors adopted. Since many residents fall into the diagnostic category variously called "sociopathic", "psychopathic", "character disorder" or more recently "personality disorder", we know that they have been severely deprived from early infancy, that they exhibit much impulse ridden behavior, that they frequently feel empty and inadequate, and that the feigned bravado masks a depressive

nucleus in the personality structure.³ Another sizable, though to a much smaller extent, group of inmates are clearly "psychotic"-- their sense of reality is distorted and their bizarre behavior is often exacerbated by the conditions of confinement. Since both groups share the tendency to project the blame for their current imprisoned status on (1) their family background; (2) the community; (3) their accusers; (4) the police and/or court; and since almost all prisoners seem to delude themselves into a belief in their own innocence; few prisoners in these categories express the desire for or seek out treatment--a relationship and process which implicitly places responsibility for one's actions, growth and change clearly on the self. They manifest problems of relating to anyone in authority, no matter how rational and warranted the use of authority may be.

Human behavior can be profoundly influenced by the court sentence and it is in the context of this authority that a good correctional therapist works. He uses the authority inherent in the sentence to help bring about change in his client...⁴

When an atmosphere conducive to treatment, broadly conceived, is established and when it becomes normative and exceptional, the literature reveals that great strides have been made by individual offenders and that recidivism rates have ultimately been sharply reduced.⁵ The therapeutic alliance, once it is established, provides a sustained relationship with a dependable, trustworthy adult and this in and of itself introduces a much needed element into the offender's contemporaneous life-space.

In Maxwell Jones' seminal work on the Therapeutic Community,⁶ he articulates the rationale and process for turning a mental hospital into a total therapeutic milieu. In such a setting all

staff members serve as part of the treatment team; all transactions should be corrective, considerable and honest; patients become involved in taking responsibility for sharing in creating the environment in which they live and in formulating the program in which they participate; and the sanctions against unacceptable behavior run high. The authors urge that these concepts be adopted and modified by direct service staffs of correctional facilities so that within these residential settings, a therapeutic community can be created for those prisoners interested in participating. Involvement in this and other rehabilitation should be voluntary for the residents, keeping in mind prisoners' rights - particularly the right to treatment and the right to refuse treatment. In a therapeutic community, all staff members can work cooperatively and collaboratively, rather than at cross purposes, to bring about the two major goals of the corrections system--the protection of society from its dangerous members and to correct--to modify behavior so that no further anti-social acts are committed.

To evolve such therapeutic communities would necessitate a major shift in philosophy and a broad overhaul of practice in most institutions, but the validity of such an approach is borne out in the literature on such programs as those detailed by Stürup in Treating the Untreatable on his work with hardcore offenders at Herstedvester in Denmark⁷ and by Groder on a recent pilot project at the federal penitentiary at Marion, Illinois, described in "Asklepieion: An Effective Treatment Method for Incarcerated Character Disorders,"⁸ Despite the tremendous difficulties that would undoubtedly be encountered in restructuring prison society, the patented gains justify the effort.

A similar therapeutic conceptualization and orientation is recommended at all stages of the corrections process - from the point of apprehension, through adjudication and in all

correctional facilities.* Every interaction and transaction between staff members and their charges should facilitate change in a positive direction.

Direct Service Delivery - Therapeutic Roles

In Pennsylvania we speak of the support team in the state prisons. This is composed of the correctional officer, the counselor and caseworker, and anyone involved with the prisoner in work, educational and vocational training programs, psychologists and other therapists treating the particular inmate. Social work roles in this context, as in institutions for juveniles and in community treatment centers, would include: counselor, caseworker, group worker, and group therapist. Hopefully, programs will be expanded to include marriage counseling with the prisoner and his or her spouse during the six-month period prior to release to raise the level of likelihood that transition back into the marriage (and family) can be successfully accomplished. Where this is feasible, qualified social workers can serve as marriage counselors. Each support and treatment team has a team leader and this is a function which skilled clinical social workers can perform interchangeably with professionals from other mental health disciplines. As team leader, the social worker helps convey the importance of matching the treatment modality and goals to the needs and objectives of the offender, not to the crime.

Historically, probation and parole have provided important alternatives to incarceration. The roles of probation and parole officers are crucial ones in the life of a person who is trying to "pull himself together" and "stay out of trouble." Social workers seem well suited to this role be-

* In this paper, the phrases "correctional facilities and correction programs" subsume and include youth study centers, residential treatment centers for delinquents, other diagnostic facilities, forestry camps and reformatories, prisons, community treatment centers, and probation and parole.

cause they are trained in utilizing rational authority constructively, in serving as role models, in helping clients learn alternative and better ways of behaving and coping with external reality situations and internal pressures, in providing ego supportive treatment, and in familiarizing the client with and facilitating his use of community resources and services.

The concept of career ladders has permeated most departments of corrections. One component of good staff morale is seeing oneself as being able to achieve desired upward career mobility. In systems where upgrading from within the ranks is valued, in-service training is a handmaiden of the promotional process. Two aspects of in-service training which can logically devolve upon masters degree social workers are clinical supervision of B.S.W.'s and para-professionals and staff training specialists to inaugurate and teach classes in content and skills areas in which trainees or incumbent staff are weak.

Administrative Roles

The social worker's blend of clinical understanding and skills, his knowledge of the interrelationship of the individual and society, and his acumen about the workings of social systems and bureaucracies, should equip him to serve in such administrative capacities as: superintendent or director of a correctional facility (and--of course--deputy and assistant director); chief of such departments of a state Bureau of Corrections as Training and Treatment Services; and when he also possess tremendous energy, commitment and political know-how, as Commissioner of Correction. In each of these positions, the social worker must serve as a change agent dedicated to improving and humanizing the system and educating the community at large to the issues inherent in criminal justice.

Community Organization and Development

The dire need for education of the larger society to prisoners' rights, causes of crime, problems faced by victims, special dilemmas of the prisoner's family, and how to help ex-offenders become reintegrated as law-abiding members of the community is one that must be met. The roles of information officer and interpretation specialist appear suitable for social workers gifted in the art of public relations. Once the groundwork has been laid, the social worker - community organizer can help citizens mobilize to serve as volunteers, to be sponsors for prisoners, to get a neighborhood ready to house a community treatment center, and to persuade local employers to hire ex-offenders.

A new operational concept and approach, generally called "community corrections" emerged in the post World War II era. It became increasingly evident that given a fairly effective prison system, there is a point in time during imprisonment when the offender has derived the maximum benefit that he can from his confinement and that there will be diminishing returns if he has to remain incarcerated.⁹ We have been attempting to develop the skills and sensitive measuring techniques to identify this "peaking out", a kind of therapeutic readiness when the inmate has gained all he can from incarceration and is ready to enter a different type of program and facility, quite possibly a community treatment center.

An element contributing to the emergence of community corrections was the realization of astute practitioners that just to put the person "back together" was not enough. The individual also was in need of a receptive environment that would understand and be willing to assist and support him before he could experience full rehabilitation. This radical new endeavor carries as its therapeutic goal the "reintegration" of the offender back into the community. It places upon the

field a challenge to develop reception neighborhoods and necessitates that the community worker become a new member of the corrections team. This role calls upon the best skills of community organizers and developers as they move to assist the heretofore alienated offender.

In this organized community effort the citizen is called upon to help the professionals find jobs, locate adequate housing, and find other needed resources for the ex-inmate. He is called upon to break down social, religious and cultural barriers which in the past have blocked the offender's chances of succeeding in the community or at least have crippled him from giving full expression to his abilities and desire to readjust "on the street."

One of the real detractors from correcting people in a large mass prison is the fact that they become lost in "the faceless crowd" in a too often sterile and desensitizing closed community. Community corrections provides the situation for normalizing, to the maximum extent possible, the regimen of the offender's life and affords the opportunity to utilize the more natural and meaningful resources which exist in his community. Thus, instead of establishing isolated special services within the confines of the facility, we make increasing use of those services already existing in the community. Instead of developing separate vocational training and school programs, we utilize the local vocational-technical school or community college. Instead of in-house chaplaincy and educational services, we encourage the offender to participate in local church and school programs and thereby generate non-offender associations.

The following are some axioms which support the rationale for community corrections:

1. Restraint, whether in the form of physical custody or some other control, should be used only to the degree necessary to protect the public, deter the offender, or contribute to his treatment. Punishment for its own sake only reinforces the pattern of criminal behavior.
2. Long-term incarceration should be reserved only for those dangerous and violent offenders who cannot be handled safely in the free community or in community-based facilities.
3. Placing the offender closer to the social, cultural, and emotional roots of his life enhances the treatment process, making it more relevant to the offender's normal life situation.
4. Decentralization of correctional services permits specialized services and meaningful programs to be individually fitted to the needs of each offender.
5. The "convict" stigma, which psychologically thwarts attempts at rehabilitation and which is inherent in the large, prison-type institution, is less pronounced in community-based corrections.
6. Even though the cost of clinical services is high, community-based programs are less expensive than the operation and maintenance of large correctional institutions.¹⁰

Within community corrections, there is a pressing need for workers possessing community organization and development skills. One may serve as a generalist or as a specialist depending upon the size of the correctional organization and

the community, and perform in roles which vary from that of a "change agent" influencing public attitudes to providing services for the client in the community. Serving in the vanguard of community corrections, the worker finds himself as a professional on the cutting edge of change at the same time that he is responsible for the delivery of his professional services.

Social Action

Corrections is at a crossroads. It is moving from one era to another, both politically and socially. In its transition it is passing through a crucial stage, not unlike the space capsule which when re-entering the earth's atmosphere goes through critical atmospheric changes, as well as through a communication vacuum. Like any other social system such as the military, the university, the church and the police, it is taking its turn in coming under the "white light" of public scrutiny. Corrections is under attack by the "law and order" public - the "lock them up and throw the key away" segment; the "flaming" liberals who advocate "tear down the walls"; the legislature; the judiciary; the unions; and, most vital, has won the curiosity and interest of "John Q. Public" himself. All of this calls for strong, tough professional leadership committed to maintaining that elusive balance between treatment and control. Corrections experts are expected to help reduce crime. In this, we have a mandate to protect the community and a responsibility to help salvage human beings. Control, protection, and treatment are mandates not in conflict nor exclusive of each other. They are instead, compatible and mutually reinforcing.

The professional worker needs to be involved in social action, understanding the public barometer and assisting the public to comprehend and be receptive to the new corrections.

At this critical juncture, it is a win all or lose all proposition. Much will depend on the ability of corrections' staff to exploit the situation for good. Public officials must be convinced that it is sound politics to get behind modern, humane correctional practice. It is up to the professional to articulate this practice using a valid ethical rationale. This rationale may be a fiscal one, one for human betterment or one to control crime.

Professional Leadership

As already indicated, it will take innovative, high quality professional leadership to turn the tide for social justice in the Twentieth Century. This leadership must be responsible for generating the goals and objectives upon which progressive policy is based and must be able to articulate the methods and techniques required to carry out these policies.

This cadre of leadership must also possess an unshakable commitment to the socialized justice concept and to educating the opinion and decision makers, such as legislators, the judiciary, government officials and citizen leaders in order to gain sufficient support to ensure program integrity. Those in the vanguard should provide sufficient research, staff training and program development to insure the success of this endeavor. This leadership must be prepared to defend the new approach against reactionary forces that will appear in the vestige of legislative investigations, bipartisan political assaults, and others of the old guard who prefer to have things remain the way they have traditionally been rather than upset the status quo.

It becomes obvious that there are numerous challenging and varied roles that social workers can, should and are assuming in corrections during the 1970's. Let us now look at

what a model graduate school curriculum might contain to prepare social workers to enter such positions as those elucidated above.

Curriculum Content¹¹

I. Practice Area

- A. Generic or multi methods course
- B. Specific courses in clinical practice
 1. Casework - to include psychoanalytically oriented practice, ego supportive treatment, behavior therapy, etc.
 2. Group work
 3. Group Therapies - to include psychoanalytic group therapy, sensitivity and encounter groups, transactional analysis, etc.
 4. Marital counseling and family therapy
 5. Community organization - to include community education and development, citizen involvement and planning

II. Human Growth and Development

- A. Psychology
 1. Normal growth and development
 2. Psychopathology - character disorders, neurosis and psychosis
 3. Sexual deviance
 4. Theories of personality - spanning from psychoanalytic theory to existential and humanistic approaches
- B. Sociology of Corrections
 1. Theories of causation of delinquent and criminal behavior
 2. Social systems - and other relevant aspects of social theory
 3. The corrections process
- C. Racism

III. Administration

- A. Supervision and Staff Development
- B. Organizational development - using management science and industrial psychology literature
- C. Theory and practice of administration
- D. Serving as a change agent
- E. The political process as it affects corrections
- F. Public relations

In all of these substantive areas, development of self awareness, conscious use of the professional self, and professional ethics and values should be fostered and highlighted. Since working with extremely disturbed and dysfunctional individuals is quite anxiety producing and the real dangers inherent in dealing with impulse ridden, acting out clients are omnipresent, it might be well to recommend that students undergo personal therapy in order to augment their own insight and integration and to supplement the didactic learnings with intensive therapeutic experiential learnings.

Strategies for Change

For Twentieth Century social justice to become a reality, we will need to continue developing viable strategies for change. We must come to understand the phenomena of change itself, and the mechanisms and ramifications of changes within the correctional structure itself as well as how this will impact on the larger society. Such strategies must be clearly enunciated to insure sufficient commitment to change and internal competence so that the "pilings" of the new correctional platform will not be washed away by the tides and undercurrents of social and political change.

Conclusion

Corrections as an agent of social justice is at the threshold of the realization of its mandated purpose. In the midst of conflicting attitudes and ideologies lies fertile ground for strong, sound professional leadership to implant social work standards and promulgate its methods, techniques and ethics. Likewise, the practitioner now has the opportunity to demonstrate his helping methods and techniques through new, expanding as well as traditional service delivery programs.

The struggle for socialized justice demands attention. A clear and immediate response to this challenge on the part of social work will necessitate much dedication and ingenuity. And corrections will respond. The quid pro quo will be the infusion social work will receive from corrections in the form of increased vigor and virility. This could be the reward for social work's timely investment.

Footnotes

1. Kaslow, Florence W. "The Evolution of Theory and Policy on Inner City Delinquency", Growth and Change, Fall 1973, Vol. 4, No. 4.
2. Werner, Stewart. "Maximizing the Minimum", Pa. Prison Journal, Spring-Summer 1972, Vol. II, pp. 50-55.
3. Reiner, Beatrice & Kauffman, Irving. Character Disorders in Parents of Delinquents, (N. Y.: Family Service Association of America), 1959.

4. Werner, op cit., p. 53
5. Stürup, George. Treating the Untreatable (Maryland: John Hopkins U. Press), 1969.
6. Jones, Maxwell. Therapeutic Community (N.Y.: Basic Books), 1953
7. Stürup, op cit.
8. Groder, Martin. Asklepieion: An Effective Treatment Method for Incarcerated Character Disorders (Federal Center for Correctional Research, Butner, North Carolina 27509), 1973.
9. Werner, op cit., p. 53
10. Penna. Crime Commission Task Force Report, Corrections in Pennsylvania, July 1969, p. 30
11. This is partially based on the author's experience in teaching in a School of Social Work, in setting up and teaching seminars in Correctional Psychology at Hahnemann Medical College (1973-1975); in serving as Staff Training Specialist for the Pennsylvania Bureau of Correction and discussing the matter with social work practitioners in corrections.