

NUMBER: 25-1990
STATUS: APPROVED
PLACE: ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND
DATE: MAY 15, 1990
TEXT:

parents to sign up to use the computers at Washington Square. She reported that HOC had been participating in a leadership training conference involving 50 students which was now in its third year. They had also gotten students involved in visiting black colleges through the Suggs Memorial Black College Tour. Many of these students had never seen a college campus, and HOC was now trying to help these students to obtain financial assistance for post-secondary education. Mr. Fred Carter, resident services, stated that they had the loan of a computer program to assist students in obtaining information about grants for colleges.

Ms. Myrtle Brown, resident services, explained that the major portion of their time was spent in assisting parents to help their children get into the right program to meet their needs. Many of their residents were intimidated by bureaucratic processes. Dr. Shoenberg asked about the degree to which they were able to work with families to provide a full complex of services. For example, did residents have access to services or were services brought to places convenient for them?

Ms. Scissors replied that they had a staff of counselors working in the field, and their job was to know the families, identify their needs, and link them up with existing resources. Their ratio of staff to households ranged from 1 to 120 to 1 to 150, and at any given time 20 to 25 percent of these families were having serious problems. They ran day care centers in four developments as well as before- and after-school enrichment programs. HOC staff worked with MCPS principals and counselors when students were having difficulties. They also worked with the Health Department and Social Services to get services for their clients. She pointed out that a lot of the human services agencies operated out of their offices. HOC staff was in the community and encouraged other agencies to bring their services to the people.

Mr. Bernard Tetreault, executive director of HOC, stated that their second initiative was to provide transition housing to deal with the problems of the homeless. He participated with Dr. Vance on a coordinating council at the county level which dealt with drug abuse problems. For example, when crack arrived in the county, they were able to do something in a hurry to provide security, fencing, and lighting at their projects. He thought that the county now had a lid on this drug situation. Dr. Shoenberg asked about evicting people from their housing when there was drug involvement. Mr. Tetreault replied that they were bound by state laws when they had to evict a family; however, they had tightened up on their Section 8 screening to weed out these families. Mr. George Dines, HOC commissioner, added that they were not talking about a high rate of evictions because of

drug involvement.

Mr. Bell remarked that they lived in a society where people were innocent until proven guilty. Therefore, they had to be careful about disenfranchising someone from their residence. Mr. Tetreault commented that they did cooperate with Addiction, Victim and Mental Health on treatment services for their clients.

Ms. Scissors stated that in the case of children, they tried to keep them too busy to become involved with drugs.

Ms. Brown reported that in the last few years they had gone after grants and other sources to provide funds for housing the homeless. They had programs to get at the root cause of homelessness so that people would not lose their homes again. These individuals usually spent about 18 months to two years in transitional housing, and they had contracts with the families to ensure their participation in various programs. She asked about school system efforts with the homeless.

Dr. Hiawatha Fountain, associate superintendent, stated that they tried to provide transportation to keep the child in the same school. They had child find screening clinics out in the community and in the HOC office to provide ease of access to services. The pupil personnel workers and the counselors were working with HOC staff on the problems of the homeless. He personally served on a resource sharing network to help expedite services. Head Start and Chapter I were also participating in these efforts. His church operated a helping hand shelter which worked closely with HOC.

Ms. Scissors reported that she had been serving on a group set up by the county executive, but the group did not have a representative from MCPS. She hoped that the group would ask for participation by MCPS staff because their goal was to coordinate services, identify programs, and work for new initiatives. Dr. Fountain agreed to check into school system membership on the group. Ms. Brown commented that one problem facing them was the physical size of Montgomery County. They dealt with people who had lived in Gaithersburg and relocated to Silver Spring. There were children who did not attend school on a regular basis or who had never been enrolled in school. Mr. Bell remarked that once they were able to house a family the situation stabilized for a period of time.

Mrs. Praisner asked about the waiting list for transitional housing. Ms. Brown replied that they were working on obtaining a new grant for 10 more slots, but they had 100 people assessed and waiting for housing. However, some families in the homeless category moved directly to permanent housing without using the transitional slots. Ms. Joyce Siegel, community relations

officer, added that they had 7,300 households on the waiting list for HOC housing and 1,000 of those were probably in a crisis situation. Mr. Tetreault explained that it was their goal to provide 500 new units per year. Mr. James Brodsky, commissioner, noted that federal funds were no longer available, and all funds were provided locally.

Mr. Goldensohn asked whether the educational centers were in the community or in the schools. Ms. Scissors replied that they did have one in Gaithersburg Intermediate School, but normally the centers were in the projects. Mr. Goldensohn inquired about expanding their educational efforts. Ms. Scissors reported that the problem was space and supplies because they had volunteers interested in supporting these programs. Dr. Cronin asked whether they had to rent school space through the ICB, and Mr. Carter replied that they did. Dr. Cronin asked about waivers of rental fees, and Dr. Pitt replied that this was a big issue with the ICB. However, they did have a joint program with the ICB to focus on latch key children.

Mr. Ewing asked if HOC staff had any suggestions for MCPS staff.

Ms. Scissors replied that one problem area was that MCPS staff put children having behavior problems on home instruction. Sometimes these children were home alone because their parents were working. They also had children living in families where there was little discipline, and this problem was two-fold when there was drug use involved. There was a gap in knowing who was to provide assistance and services. Protective Services got involved only when child abuse was involved. No one agency seemed to be helping children who were neglected. Mr. Bell asked whether HOC was notified when MCPS put children on home instruction, and Ms. Brown replied that the on-site staff would be aware of the situation. However, Ms. Scissors pointed out that they had a lot of units that were scattered and did not have on-site staff. Dr. Cronin thought there might be a legal problem of protecting the confidentiality of the students and informing HOC.

Mrs. Praisner commented that school system staff was also concerned about the threshold level of Protective Services. The situation had to be very severe before staff of Protective Services entered the picture.

Dr. Shoenberg remarked that this kept coming back to the issue of parental involvement. Where possible, MCPS tried to assign students to in-school suspensions. Removing the child from school for a period of time might be releasing the child to his or her own supervision because parents were not at home. MCPS staff had talked about the neglected child and did have parent service specialists in each area, but this again related to the

issue of parental involvement. Ms. Scissors thought it might be appropriate to sit down with the parent service specialists and try to focus on this issue. Mr. Carter agreed that parental involvement was crucial in addressing issues, and Dr. Lancaster's staff had been helpful to them in terms of providing workshops. For example, the program in Washington Square would never have gotten off the ground but for the assistance of Linda Warren and Bill Bowen of the school system staff. They had provided a lot of help to HOC staff, and parents felt comfortable in calling upon them. From Mr. Carter's perspective, that type of involvement from the school system was invaluable and enabled him to do his job. He agreed that parental involvement was necessary in keeping these youngsters in school. Dr. Vance suggested that spring would be an excellent time to get the two staffs together.

It seemed to Mr. Ewing that it might be worthwhile to set up a seminar or half-day program for the staffs of all county agencies dealing with youth in trouble. The people working with children could identify gaps in services, and parents could be invited to participate in the sessions. This could develop some bridging and support among agencies. Dr. Cronin suggested that this could be brought up at the next meeting of the heads of county agencies.

Dr. Pitt reported that Prince George's and Baltimore City had started programs to coordinate case management, and this effort was being supported by the Casey Foundation. Dr. Shoenberg thought they needed to make an effort here and suggested that the on-site staff of HOC would be an entre to case management. Mrs. Praisner recalled that a few years ago they had talked about the need for counselors and principals to visit their community rather than having parents always coming to the school. Dr. Pitt reported that several schools had principals going out into the community. Mrs. Praisner suggested that this should be one of the first outreach efforts by new principals.

Mr. Tetreault described HOC future housing plans. He recalled that HOC had started as a public housing agency, went to small developments, and then in the 1970's moved to scattered sites. They were now concentrating on economically mixed housing. For example, at Timberlawn in Rockville some of the tenants paid the full cost of the housing and others were low-income and paid reduced rates. They now had a property one block from the Silver Spring Metro where they planned to develop 311 units. Most of these would be one bedroom units and would provide needed housing for employees in the down-county area. At present they owned or managed 6,000 units, and 1,000 of these were for the elderly. Mr. Bell added that they also had a program to assist low-income families in purchasing homes.

Dr. Shoenberg asked about next steps as a result of this meeting.

Mr. Tetreault said he was interested in having the HOC staff meet with the parent/community specialists. Ms. Scissors hoped everyone had gained a better understanding of the extent of problems of low-income families in Montgomery County. Mr. Tetreault also liked the idea of the interagency workshop on homeless and neglected children. He said that he would like to talk more about the idea of case management with the county government and school system. He thought they could look to Chuck Short to pull the workshop together with the support of HOC and MCPS. He would like to explore getting some assistance in the form of supplies and space for their tutorial program. He thought they might talk about some joint acquisitions of property.

Dr. Shoenberg thanked commission members and HOC staff for their presentation and discussions.

Re: ADJOURNMENT

The president adjourned the meeting at 9:20 p.m.

PRESIDENT

SECRETARY

HP:mlw