A CORNER GIRL DISCUSSES HER FEELINGS
ABOUT HER CORNER GROUP SOCIAL WORKER

Prepared by
Special Youth Program
Research Staff
January 1957
A CORNER GIRL DISCUSSES HER FEELINGS
ABOUT HER CORNER GROUP SOCIAL WORKER

The following dialogue was taken from a tape recording of a discussion between a Special Youth Program worker and a seventeen year old girl—here called "Marge". Marge was a former member of a group of street corner girls worked with by the worker—a group that had been seen by the community as "bad", and who had been engaged in habitual truancy and other kinds of troublesome behavior.

At the beginning of the discussion Marge tells the social worker that she has recently come in contact with a new group of girls who have been getting in trouble like her group used to. Marge feels these girls could be helped if they were approached in the right way. In the course of further discussion Marge tells the social worker how her group felt about their social worker. Marge sees the corner group worker as one who does not spread confidential information, and feels that it is trust primarily that makes possible a productive relationship.

SW: What do these girls think of the social workers, people who have tried to help them out?

MARGE: They wouldn't go to a social worker!

SW: Why not, Marge?

MARGE: The social workers always end up by putting them away! They don't help them out (by putting them in foster homes and correctional institutions). What they should do is something like (you people) do here (in Roxbury). See these girls and speak to them, like you do now, and see what the community can do. But if the community don't send you out, these girls aren't going to come to any social worker.

SW: Why do you think that is?

MARGE: Well, you tell me all the time—"This is confidential between us." Well, they've got to be sure of that. They don't want to be sent back to (correctional institutions).

SW: How do you think these girls would feel about a social worker coming to them and trying to help them?

MARGE: The wouldn't like it (at first). You'd have to get to know these girls, get to know them so you could talk to them, and gradually
talk to them about how social workers are. And tell them it's really confidential, that no one is going to go right away and say, "We have your daughter here...". They want it confidential; they don't want it to get right back to their families--they don't want to get sent away to some (correctional institution).

SW: What do you think could be done to help some of these (girls) who are around your age and who are thinking about marriage in a year or so?

MARGE: Well, like if (they had) someone like you they could...talk to about things like that, things that are confidential, you know, and like you advised me to go to the Guidance Center. If (the girls) look at their family, see how their families are run, and then go to someone like you, and say they have a problem about that--like my father, he was drinking a lot, and he and my mother had a separation--well, I wouldn't want a thing like that to happen to my own family when I get married.

So what (those girls) should do is to try and get to know a social worker--like you--and see what she would advise them to do. Say, like you sent me to the Guidance Center.

SW: Well, Marge, you said they should hunt out a social worker or find someone like myself. Do you think this is liable to happen?

MARGE: No. It's girls like that that aren't going to go up to a social worker and say, "Oh, I got a problem!" The social worker has to be very interested in this kind of subject--like you came to us. If they put social workers out on the town, social workers that are young and would go around and be able to talk to those girls--if they could make it so that...how old would you say the youngest social worker would be?

SW: Around 22 or 23.
MARGE: If you got social workers in the twenties—say, from 20 to 25, and you put them out on the town so that the girls could see them all the time—I mean, say you came in town and I walked up to you and they saw me talking to you—when I’d go back to them they’d ask me what I was talking about and I’d say, “Well, that’s a social worker and I always talk to her...”.

So then you’d come over and I’d introduce you to them, and you get to know them, and you come around every once in a while, and we have coffee together maybe, and talk and talk; gradually you’ll notice that those girls will start talking to you, you know? What I think you have to do is have contact with the girls, by someone young who would understand them and have fun with them, that would do the things they did. I think that would be the best way to get in contact with them.

If you could start a group with them like you did with us, while they’re still that young, they wouldn’t get in as much trouble. You know, like you brought us on picnics and things like that, and we didn’t have time to get in too much trouble.

SW: How did you kids feel about it when I first came down (to the neighborhood)?

MARGE: Well, the first night you came down we thought you were a cop. You see, when you first came down I never knew any social workers, really. When you came around you gradually got our confidence—you know, started talking with us, and we finally came up and told you things.

SW: How do you think I did that, Marge?

MARGE: You got me. (Laughs) Well, by letting us know we could trust you, and that you’d be able to understand the things we were doing, and letting us know that you were really helping us. You know, like taking us out all the time, like we used to get in your car all the time, like
we used to go on picnics all the time. I mean, you showed us that you were interested in those things, and that you wanted to help us, and that we could trust you!

SW: Do you think, Marge, that you did some things to try me out, to test me out, in the beginning?

MARGE: I don't doubt it--I don't really remember, but I don't doubt it. I mean, we probably did a lot of things unconsciously, most of them, to try you out. Like the time we told you things we thought might get back to our mothers, and when they didn't--there's the trust right there, see?