A ROXBURY MOTHER DESCRIBES THE IMPACT
OF THE SPECIAL YOUTH PROGRAM
IN HER COMMUNITY

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In assessing a youth service program, it is important to know how the
program appears in the eyes of many different groups - the young people
themselves, social agency workers, clergyman, police, school personnel and
numerous others. Perhaps one of the most important of such groups is the adults
of the local community - those who have worked with young people or have children
of their own. The following observation was made by a mother who is a lifelong
resident of a neighborhood worked in by Program workers. In addition, she has
had wide experience with teenagers in the general community. This mother has
served on the Special Youth Program Board and has closely followed the opera-
tion of the Program.

The remarks presented here were taken from her extemporaneous remarks
made at a meeting of the Special Youth Program Board, June 6, 1956.

I am a woman who lives in the community where these children are being
served. It has been my pleasure... during the many years I have lived in the
community as an adult to work with its young people in leisure time activity.

I think those who have been active in the youth serving agencies that work
with the "good" children have become alarmingly aware of the need for the kind
of service which the Special Youth Program has offered to the community during
the past two years. There has been a rapid population turn-over in the
community, and it would have been tragic had there not been such a program in
operation.

Because of this high mobility in the community, one of the real complaints
by parents of stable families in the area whose children have good educational
opportunities and can be protected at home, is that there is a constant pull
on their teenagers to go out in the early evenings with others who do congregate
on the corners. "Everybody else does it. Why can't I?" - is constantly heard.
Unless the parents are strong and resist these pleas, studies begin to suffer.
This pull is particularly strong, I feel, in that part of the community where
Project Worker Miss M. has been working with the girls, and had she not been
successful in encouraging many of the girls in her group to continue in high
school, many other girls who had previously been stable would have followed
in their trail.
At the time Miss M. began to work with the group there was a very
definite question in the minds of some school personnel as to the possible
efficacy of the work of a program like this; just what could workers meeting
children on the street corners do that would be effective in influencing the
total personality and behavior pattern of a girl? I was consulted by some
of the school personnel on the possible value of at least giving this new
thing a try. I am pleased to report that after having had a very cautious
attitude toward the Program for some time, they now recognize its value and
consider the community fortunate to have had such a program.

I am thoroughly familiar with the members of the youth group with which
Program Worker Mr. B. has worked. A great many of them come from homes where
both parents are working - good parents, doing the best they can to provide
their children with a good home atmosphere. There has been a definite and
growing tendency for these children to want to be out in the evening, and I
believe that some of the parents may have been overly permissive in letting
their children go out. At the time Mr. B. began his work in this area there
were several possible explosion spots where some or all of these children,
who for the most part were good children, might have become involved.

Some of the boys in this group are natural leaders; I have in mind the
boys who called a public official's attention to the need of improvements to
a neighborhood playfield. One of these boys came from a very large family
with no mother in the home. From the point of view of native endowment, this
boy is brilliant, but became a school drop-out, which was a tragedy. Although
he could have been successful in any line of endeavor had he completed his
education, he definitely went far off the beaten path. This boy is now a
young man and seems to be approaching some stability, and I think this is
largely due to the personal influence of Mr. B. on his group. Here is a boy
who naturally has become filled with a great deal of bitterness because of the
many things he wanted and couldn't have. Until he became a member of Mr. B's
group, there was no adult who was able to get close enough to him to be of any real influence in his life. I haven't said this to Mr. B. before, but it's something that I know has happened.

I know of another mother whose family includes two sons; one has never been a problem, but the other was different. He was an excellent student in elementary school, but upon entering high school began having difficulty; he didn't make it his first year because he wouldn't study. He was no longer interested in continuing in school although his former teachers and other adults tried to get him to continue. Through Mr. B's influence, however, he decided to continue and presently is making consistently passing grades.

He is a child with a very high I.Q., and is a natural leader, but he is very immature. It is my feeling that his mother had reached the end of her ingenuity in handling him - she admitted as much. As any mother would have been, this mother was quite concerned when this new club formed and had a meeting place in a vacated store. When I talked with her, I did my best to calm her fears; I know she is deeply grateful for the opportunity her son has had. There is a boy, I'm sure, who really needed some group where he could air his feelings and talk to a detached social worker as he probably would talk to no one else, and who otherwise might have been completely lost at the age of fourteen. Now, I think he'll make the jump.

I know of two other boys in the group whose mother is a fine mother, but whose father is away from home frequently because of the nature of his work; she is especially grateful to the opportunity that her boys have had to be a part of Mr. B's club group. I could go on to other individual instances, but I think those I have mentioned will give you the general picture.

I am grateful, too, that the Special Youth Program has been able to create an atmosphere among this disturbed group of boys which has removed the feeling of fear in the community about what they were going to do. Talking with those who live in the area has assured me that this has been accomplished. I would
say that there is definitely much less concern about what young people are
going to do on these corners than there was at the beginning of last summer.
Many of the residents dreaded last summer, and because of the polio siege
doctors told those who had not left the city by July not to leave or take
their children. I am one of those.

I have four children of my own. They may have been somewhat more
fortunate than others in the opportunities they have had, but I, too, have
had to be very conscious of the community in which they are growing up and of
the contacts that I hope they will make for their own happy futures.

One summer I had the opportunity to participate in a community summer
recreational program started by the Special Youth Program. We made available
the facilities of a public schoolyard to community teenagers several nights
a week, with relaxed personnel in the yard and a program which offered them a
diversity of activity. We often had hundreds of teenagers in the yard during
an evening and we did not have one really untoward incident. Nothing happened
in the yard that wasn't handled quickly, and the young people developed a strong
loyalty to enjoying the facilities of the yard.

I think it is most unfortunate that the existing agencies in the community
are not supported sufficiently well to make possible an adequate program for
our young people. Those who head the agencies are well aware of this fact.
I think it is very important that as part of an overall plan for the future
that a very realistic study be made of the programming that is being done and
will be done in the existing agencies, and that enough money be appropriated
to make it possible for these programs to meet the real needs of the community.
If adequate sums are made available, money will not have to be spent in large
quantities to rehabilitate these youngsters after they have had to go to
correctional institutions. It will be much more expensive to do that than to
offer them active programs in the communities where they are growing up.

I don't think our boys and girls are nearly as wicked as they have been
tagged. I think they needed a few friends; and I think that if this program as such is going to terminate in another year, it is most important that the recommendations that have been made for a continuing plan to set up some central agency where the existing agencies may turn for counsel and help be adopted.