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RESEARCH AND EVALUATION
ON
THE BRONX COURT RELATED UNIT

AN INTERIM REPORT

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The purpose of this document is to bring all concerned parties up to date on the continuing research on the Bronx Court Related Unit being conducted by members of the Special Projects Research Unit. This research project has been continuously collecting data on the Bronx CRU since it accepted it's first youth for treatment in 1976. The results of the first year's work have been detailed in our report, "The Bronx Court Related Unit: Evaluation and Recommendations." A second summary report scheduled for June, 1978 will review the functioning of the unit over the entire two year time period.

This second summary report will be in the format of a compilation of individual papers on specific topics prefaced by an overall evaluation of the CRU and an examination of the unit's level of improvement over the past year. In order to allow those concerned to be aware of the direction of our work and to review preliminary findings where available, we have written a brief summary of the major papers to be included in the second years final report. These summaries are attached and each, in addition to listing the working title, describes the paper and currently available findings.

The extent to which the collection and the analysis of the data are complete for each of these papers varies widely. In some cases, such as the paper on staff attitudes, the collection and the preliminary analysis are already finished. In other instances, such as the paper dealing with the effectiveness of the program in treating the youths, data collection will continue through March so that a full two years worth of information can be examined. In still other cases, such as the paper dealing with similar programs throughout the U.S., the collection of data, which in this instance will be obtained by actually visiting other states, is not scheduled to occur for several months. It is planned that each of these papers will be circulated as they are completed over the next several months. These papers will then be compiled and integrated to form the basis of the June, 1978 final report.

The attached summaries should provide some sense of the directions of our research and of the status of the CRU. After reviewing what has occurred since our last formal report, our attitude toward the unit remains positive. While problems still remain, the CRU has improved in several areas. The IPDU continues to function effectively in performing stabilization and diagnostic functions, and the LTTU after a period of change has settled down and appears to be making significant progress particularly in its development of community support services and an aftercare system. Furthermore, major areas of concern such as inter-unit communication and the availability of alternative DMH facilities for placement seem to be moving toward successful resolution. Thus, although our formal evaluation of the unit will be offered only after the completion of the papers described on the attached sheets and the final report, our current perception is that the unit continues to serve an important function within New York State and that the unit is showing that it is possible to provide effective treatment to violent, mentally disordered youth.

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PATHWAYS INTO AND THROUGH THE BRONX COURT RELATED UNIT

Description: This report will focus on youths referred to and processed through the Bronx Court Related Unit. It will specifically address: the number and source of referrals to the program, the CRU's admission decisions, the movement of the youths through the program, and the placement of youths subsequent to their stay in the CRU. Data have been collected by obtaining records on all youths referred, reports from clinical staff on admission and transfer decisions, and formal CRU reports on all youths discharged.

Findings: As of January 31, 1978, a total of 104 youths have been referred to the CRU. During the second year of the project, family courts have continued to be a major source of referrals while referrals from DFY facilities have dramatically decreased.

Of the 104 youths referred, 12 were withdrawn before any action was officially taken, and five other cases are still pending. Of the 87 youths who have had their referrals acted upon by the CRU, 55 have been rejected. Most of these youths were defined by the CRU as either not mentally ill (34%), insufficiently violent (20%), or both (18%).

Of the 32 youths admitted into the CRU, nearly 70% have been adjudicated for an extremely violent offense (i.e., murder, rape, armed robbery), with the remaining youths having displayed a pattern of violence against persons in addition to an adjudication for a lesser offense.

Of the youths admitted to the CRU, 26 have been transferred out of the IPDU. Of these, 21 were placed into the LTTU, one was placed in another DFY facility and four were placed in another DMH facility for

long term hospitalization. Three of the youths placed within the LTTU were returned to the IPDU with two of them subsequently being placed within other DMH facilities. Due to difficulties finding appropriate facilities, the six youths, who were placed in DMH facilities, have spent an average of seven months on the IPDU rather than the regular and desired three months. In addition to the three youths returned to the IPDU, six other youths have been released by the LTTU. One youth was sent to another DFY facility and five have been released to the community.

Currently there are seven youths on the IPDU and 12 youths in the LTTU.

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PROFILE OF YOUTHS ADMITTED TO THE BRONX COURT RELATED UNIT

Description: The main purpose of this report is to provide an overall description of the youths admitted to the Bronx CRU during its first two years. The data are drawn primarily from the application forms completed by the youths family in conjunction with unit staff. These forms provide information on demographic and social characteristics of the youths, on their criminal behavior and mental disorders, and on their family background.

Findings: The average age of the 31 youths admitted to the program over the two year period is 15. Forty-five percent of them were black; 29%, white; and 26% Hispanic. Less than a fourth came from families in which both natural parents were present.

The majority of youths had been involved in violent crimes such as murder, rape and robbery just prior to admission. In addition, most had a history of arrests for various types of crimes and over half of them had experienced a prior placement in a DFY facility. Also, almost half of the youths had previously been in a mental health facility.

The one finding from this study regarding the families of these youths which most stands out is the high percentage of the families who themselves had been involved in the criminal justice or mental health systems. In 69% of the cases, the youths came from homes in which members of their immediate family had been arrested, and in 36% of the cases, a member of the immediate family had been treated or hospitalized for mental illness.

PSYCHIATRIC PROBLEMS AND SYMPTOMS
OF YOUTHS ADMITTED TO THE BRONX COURT RELATED UNIT

Description: The major question to be addressed by this report is the extent to which the youths admitted to the CRU are similar in their presenting psychiatric symptomatology to other youths admitted to DMH facilities. In order to explore this issue, data were collected on the CRU youths and on a matched comparison group of 315 youths admitted into DMH facilities during the same period. The source of data for both groups were forms (MS-5) completed for all patients at time of admission. These checklist forms contain information on diagnosis, developmental problems, symptoms, and an overall evaluation of the individual's condition.

Findings: Analysis of these data indicate that the CRU youths in contrast to the comparison group are: 1) less likely to be diagnosed as Schizophrenic (20% as compared to 48%), and more likely to be diagnosed as Personality or Behavior Disorder (65% as compared to 35%); 2) almost twice as likely to be evaluated as experiencing a severe illness; and 3) significantly more likely to have problems getting along with others and in their school performance.

An examination of the checklist of symptoms revealed that with regard to most items there was no difference between the two groups. For instance, the CRU youths were neither more nor less likely to be evaluated as experiencing delusions, hallucinations, hyperactivity, or grandiosity than the comparison group. The four areas in which differences were significant include: anti-social attitudes,

assaultive acts, depression, and sexual problems. In each of these areas, the youths admitted to the CRU were more likely to be evaluated as experiencing these symptoms.

TREATMENT EFFECTIVENESS: LEVEL OF IMPROVEMENT EXPERIENCED BY

YOUTHS WHILE ON THE BRONX COURT RELATED UNIT

Description: Probably the most important question to be addressed by the research is whether or not the treatment provided by the CRU actually succeeded in having a positive impact on the youths admitted to the unit. In this paper, the extent to which the youths improve while still on the unit will be examined. The primary source of data for this study is the Behavior Rating Forms. These forms, completed weekly for each youth, have been employed for over a year on the IPDU and on the LTTU for the past four months. The data from these forms will be supplemented by other indicators including measures of the level of anti-social behaviors displayed by the youths on the units and the perceptions of the youths themselves as to the CRU's effectiveness.

Findings: The tentative conclusion offered in the first year report was that the youths appeared to be improving over their stay in the CRU. The main task this year will be to examine the validity of this initial finding. While a complete analysis will not be conducted for several months in order to collect as much data as possible, the impression one gets from frequent visits to the program and interviews with the youths is that the program is having a positive impact on the youths. This appears to be the case on both the IPDU and the LTTU. The amount of violent and anti-social behavior seems to have decreased on both units and the majority of responses given by youths have been positive. For example, most of the youths interviewed during their stay on the IPDU feel that they have been helped by being there. Similarly, youths who

have been interviewed just prior to their release to the community from the LTTU have expressed the feeling that they had been helped a lot by the CRU. A pattern which seems to come through in these interviews is the perception by the youths that the CRU is different from other programs, that it is different in that the staff are concerned and helpful, and that as a result they, the youths, claim to get into less trouble and have less need to fight. These impressions and the overall question of the extent to which the youths have changed as a result of their treatment in the CRU will be systematically examined in this paper.

AGGRESSION AND DEPRESSION IN VIOLENT, MENTALLY

DISORDERED YOUTHS

Description: One of the more interesting findings of the research on the Bronx CRU has been the pattern of symptoms displayed by the youths admitted to the program. Not unexpectedly anti-social behavior, assaultiveness, abusiveness and other similar aggressive behaviors have been noted often as serious problems for these youths. Less expected was the extent to which depression would be a major concern, rivaling aggression as the single major clinical symptom presented by the youths. In this report the problems of aggression and depression among this population, the relationship between the two and the potential implications of the findings will be discussed. Data for this report are drawn from admission forms (MS-5) and from Behavior Rating Forms which are filled out weekly for each youth by several staff members.

Findings: It is clear from both the admission forms and the weekly rating forms that there are two major clusters of symptoms experienced by these youths--aggression and depression. These problems were present at admission at a level significantly greater than other youths admitted to DMH facilities and continue as the two most frequently noted symptoms during the youths stay in the CRU. More complete analysis of these data will document this finding and explore the correlation between them over the youths stay in the unit.

COMMUNITY FOLLOW-UP OF YOUTHS RELEASED

FROM THE BRONX COURT RELATED UNIT

Description: A major goal of all residential treatment programs is to help the resident learn how to adjust to and live in the outside society. The purpose of this report is to evaluate how effective the CRU has been in meeting this long range goal. This task involves two steps. First, the experiences of all youths released from the CRU are being monitored. This includes obtaining information on: subsequent placements, future arrests and institutionalizations, and the youths adjustment to the outside society. However, information on just these youths is not satisfactory by itself. One needs to know the extent to which any observed improvements would have occurred even if the youngster were not placed into the CRU. Thus, the second step will be to collect similar data on a comparative group of youths. The group of youths who appear to present problems and symptomology closest to CRU youths are those youths referred to the CRU but rejected as inappropriate. While they clearly do not constitute an ideal control group, they probably represent the best possible comparison group in that they were defined by the referral sources as appropriate for the CRU and, thus, should be more similar to the CRU youths than any other potential group.

Findings: Currently, four youths have been released by the LTTU after having successfully completed the program. As of January 31, 1978, none of these youths have been rearrested or rehospitalized. Three other youths have been returned to the community, one as a result of a court order,

a second from a DJJ facility to which he was transferred, and the third, from a DMH psychiatric center.

Although the trend for those youths who have successfully completed the program appears positive, it is clear that until more youths are released and more time has passed, the success of the unit in actually altering the community behavior of the youths cannot be adequately assessed.

STAFF ATTITUDES: CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF
BRONX COURT RELATED UNIT YOUTHS AND PROGRAM

Description: Data were collected to examine the changes over a year and a half period in staff attitudes toward the CRU youths and toward the program itself. Of primary interest was the impact that actually working with such youths might have on the staff's conception of the youths and of their ability to provide effective treatment for the youths.

In January, 1976, prior to the admission of any youths to the CRU, staff were asked to fill out a questionnaire. The primary purpose of the instrument was to obtain their attitudes toward the youths they would be treating and toward the program. Eighteen months later, in June of 1977, the same questionnaire with only slight changes was again completed by staff, seventy percent of whom had also responded to the first instrument.

Findings: The data clearly indicate that staff attitudes did change as a result of their experience in providing treatment to the CRU youths. Most importantly, their conception of the youths were significantly modified. After a year and a half of actually working with them, the staff were less inclined to perceive the youths as being violent, or the youths' violent behavior as interfering with their ability to provide treatment. The staff were also more likely to see the youths as more predictable and understandable. In general, the staff's view of the youths was much more positive than it had been. With regard to the staff's attitudes toward their job and the effectiveness of the unit, the following were found. Consistent with their

changing attitude toward the youths, the data revealed that the youths were no longer seen by staff as presenting the greatest difficulty in their job. At the time of the second questionnaire, staff saw other staff and issues such as adequate supervision, staff conflict, and role clarification as being the greatest problems. Concerning effectiveness, fewer of the staff felt that the program was very effective, but none of the staff thought that the program was ineffective and more staff felt that they deserved more credit for helping these youths overcome their problems and return to the community.

THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL GROUPS
ON THE BRONX COURT RELATED UNIT

Description: The major issue addressed by this report is the extent to which the structure, functioning and effectiveness of the Bronx Court Related Unit has been influenced by external agencies, organizations and interest groups. External groups considered include: administrators of DMH and DFY not directly subsumed within this program, other DMH and DFY facilities, DCJS - the chief funding source of the CRU, the New York City Legal Aid Society and Mental Health Information Services, various law enforcement groups (i.e., family court judges), community action groups, researchers and evaluators, and local and state politicians. This report will focus specifically on three areas of concern: the project's admission criteria and intake processing system, its treatment program, and the discharge and placement of CRU youths. Data have been collected through participant observation, examination of all relevant documents, and structured and unstructured interviews with all administrative and professional staff of the CRU and representatives from external organizations and agencies.

Findings: Based on observations, numerous specific cases of external influence upon the CRU have been recorded and will be discussed in the report. Structured interviews with CRU staff have been consistent with such observations. All CRU staff interviewed felt that external groups have had an overall influence on the CRU, and almost all members felt

that each of the three specific areas singled out were influenced by external groups. This external influence was perceived by CRU staff as negative force upon its overall operations, treatment program and the discharge and placement of its youths. Only admission criteria and intake processing was seen as being aided by such external groups. On the other hand, representatives of the external organizations and agencies perceived their influence as helpful to the CRU's overall operations and for all three of the specified areas.

A SURVEY AND COMPARISON OF PROGRAMS FOR THE
TREATMENT OF VIOLENT AND MENTALLY ILL YOUTHS

Description: The CRU is the only program in New York State designed specifically for the care, treatment and control of violent and mentally disordered juveniles. It is difficult to analyze this program's structure, effectiveness, and cost without comparing it to similar programs or other systems for delivering care to these youths. Given this difficulty and the fact that other states are also experiencing problems in providing treatment to similar problematic youths, we are engaging in research into how other states define and handle this problem. To accomplish this objective we are obtaining information from three sources. First, we are in the process of sending out questionnaires to the directors of children and youth in each state's mental health agency to find out: the number of youths in their state presenting the dual problems of violence and mental illness, the problems they have experienced treating such youths, and the services and facilities available in their state for the treatment of these youths. Secondly, we have asked each director to fill out forms describing in detail any available programs specifically designed for such youth. Finally, we will visit several of these special programs throughout the country.

Findings: Although we have not yet collected the data for this report, our discussion with mental health professionals outside of New York State and our examination of the available literature leads us to anticipate certain patterns. First of all, there appears to be widespread agreement

that such youths, those who are both violent and mentally ill, present serious problems to the community and to agencies charged with the responsibility of their care. Second, there is great variability from state to state in what programs are available for their care. For example, in Michigan no programs at all exist for dealing with these types of youths while in Massachusetts a number of new projects such as Centerpoint in the northeastern part of the state have recently been developed. Thirdly, while few states have programs developed specifically for such a population, many are currently in the process of establishing pilot programs. Information obtained from the survey and examination of such programs will provide an additional basis with which to view and evaluate the CRU.

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