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74261

CREST: Training for Judges on Probation Tallahassee, Florida

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National Institute of Justice

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Project CREST: Counseling for Juveniles on Probation an exemplary project

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PROJECT CREST

Kids get into trouble for many different reasons. For Tommy, it was more or less a matter of growing into trouble. Tommy's father disappeared years ago. Because his mother worked at two jobs, she wasn't around when Tommy needed supervision. Very early he began tagging along with older kids in the neighborhood—skipping school, hanging out, occasionally participating in some vandalism. Known to the police by the time he was 12, Tommy had never been caught at anything more serious than breaking street lights. Until now.

This time it was serious. Tommy and a couple of older boys had been caught breaking into a house. He was now officially a delinquent. The other two youths, who were repeat offenders, were committed to a state institution. Since Tommy was only 14 and this was his first serious offense, the court placed him on probation with the Florida Youth Services Program (YSP).

The probation officer assigned to the case felt that Tommy lacked structure and clear limits in his life. Equally important, he needed caring and a belief that someone would help him work through his problems. In the probation officer's judgment, Tommy was a prime candidate for Project CREST.

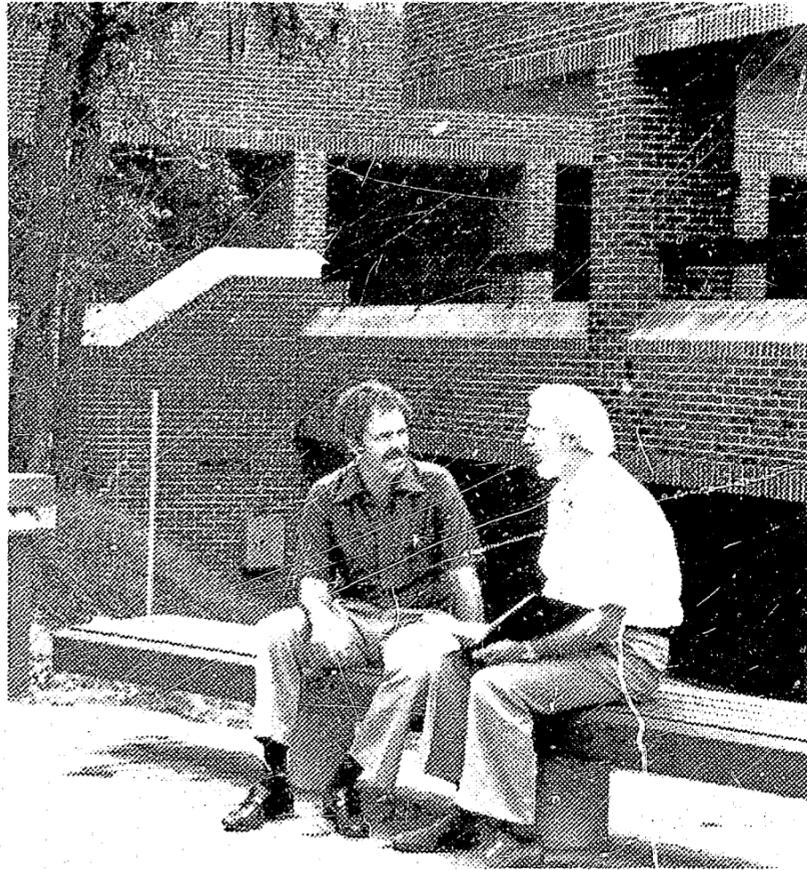
Project CREST (Clinical Regional Support Teams) uses volunteer, graduate-level university students to counsel delinquent youth in north-central Florida. Complementing the more authoritative role of probation officers, CREST counselors give youngsters an opportunity to discuss their problems openly without fear of being judged or adversely affected. CREST tries to help clients develop more positive attitudes about themselves and society, and thus to reduce delinquent behavior.



A client and his counselor get together informally at CREST headquarters.

CREST began in 1972 when a professor at the University of Florida in Gainesville helped Columbia County obtain an LEA A grant for a counseling program involving graduate students in the University's Department of Counselor Education. With the support and encouragement of Youth Service Program probation officers, the project quickly became

a respected partner in the area's juvenile justice system. Since 1976, all financing for Project CREST has been provided by the State. The founder has served as project director throughout the life of the program and has built a strong and active constituency, including juvenile authorities and advocates, the University and the public schools. His continuing ties to the University's Counselor Education Department, where he is an adjunct professor, help to ensure the quality and commitment of the students involved in the program.



CREST's project director maintains close ties with university faculty members and administration.

HOW IS CREST ORGANIZED?

CREST brings together three organizations with mutual interest in helping juveniles—Project CREST itself, the University of Florida and the Florida Youth Services Program (YSP). Each benefits from the relationship: YSP has access to a valuable resource; the University counseling program is strengthened, and its students receive training, experience and academic credit; and CREST gets its volunteers. But the most important beneficiaries of this network are youth like Tommy who get the help they need.

Outreach is key to CREST's operations. Counselors do not wait for clients to come to them. Rather, CREST goes into the communities, into the homes, and into the schools to serve the youngsters referred to the program. Three counseling teams, one for each of the three counties served by CREST, work out of a small central office in Gainesville. Each team consists of 4 to 6 volunteer counselors and tutors supervised by a doctoral student who functions

as the team leader. The office staff includes the project director, a part-time associate director, and a part-time secretary.

Advisory boards made up of interested and prominent citizens in each of the three counties review the work of the project, offer recommendations for improvement and suggest new CREST activities. Board members provide a vital link to the communities CREST serves and help to develop resources that can enhance the project's work within

their communities. One of CREST's advisory boards, for example, developed a spin-off program that pairs CREST clients with advanced high school students who act as friends and role models. This "Big Buddy" Program, which is funded by the United Way, provides another support system for youth in trouble.



Recreational activities are an important part of the relationship between counselor and client.

WHO VOLUNTEERS FOR CREST?

Karen wanted to work with troubled youngsters. A camp counselor, a recreation leader and a tutor while she was in college, Karen was enrolled in a graduate program leading toward a doctoral degree in counseling. After completing basic coursework, she was ready for her first field work experience. Students who had worked with CREST had told her how difficult it was to get through to some of the kids, but how rewarding it was to see a youngster begin to feel better about himself. Karen decided to sign up with CREST.

CREST volunteers come from the University of Florida's Department of Counselor Education, which requires graduate students to complete three to five practica (10-week work experiences in their field of specialization). CREST is one of several programs students may choose to fulfill that requirement. During each practicum, students receive academic credit for working 20 hours a week in their chosen agency while continuing to take classes at the University. Students enrolled in the two-year graduate specialist program must also complete a one quarter internship during which they work

full time in the agency of their choice. Doctoral students are required to complete a full year of internship.

A smaller number of CREST workers, known as counselor aides, come from Santa Fe Community College, also in Gainesville. These are undergraduate students who, unlike the University's graduate students, are not required to complete courses in counseling before beginning their work experience. Counselor aides begin as tutors or "big brothers or

sisters," and move into counseling only after some experience and training at CREST.

Finally, there are a few volunteers from the community, usually people with previous experience working with youngsters in trouble, who serve as tutors.

HOW ARE VOLUNTEERS SUPERVISED?

Structured supervision and ongoing training and support are vital to the success of CREST. All new volunteers receive an intensive 12-hour orientation and training workshop before they are paired with clients. Staff and volunteers meet together every week for at least an hour to review cases, discuss problems and exchange ideas for treatment. In addition to the full staff meeting, which is mandatory for all personnel, volunteers meet each week with their team leaders, all of whom began as CREST counselors. Team

leaders know all of the clients assigned to their team members and are able to provide first-hand knowledge and much-needed encouragement for counselors. They are also able to smooth the transition for the longer term client from one volunteer counselor to another.

CREST counselors also meet weekly with each client's probation officer to discuss problems and progress. In addition, at the end of every month, counselors submit detailed reports of their work to the project director, and before the end of each

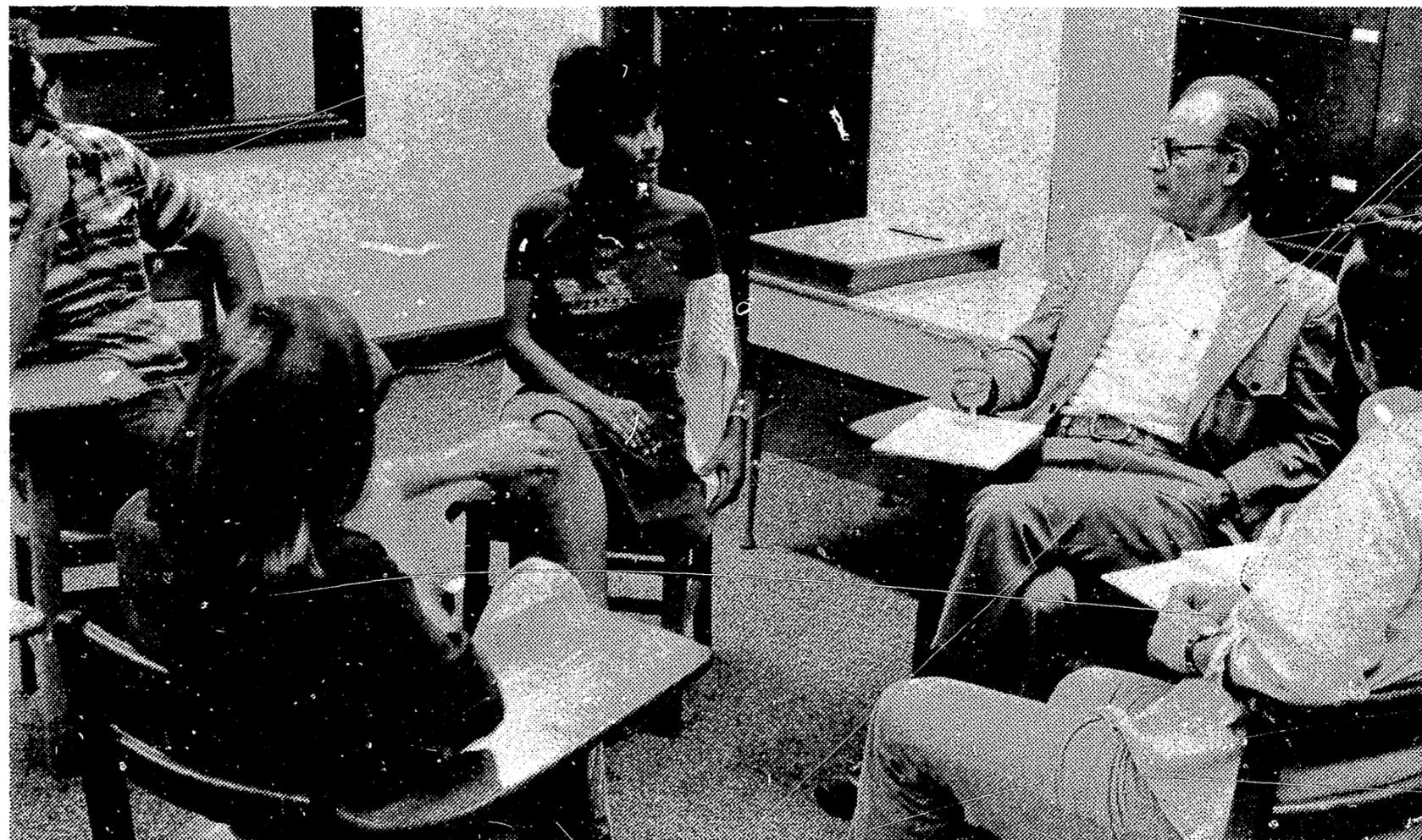


CREST staff members meet frequently with the project director.

practicum, they prepare a written report on each client for submission to the Youth Services Program.

Finally, the University of Florida requires practicum students to meet with professors each week, individually and in groups. Each student is required to submit seven recordings of counseling sessions to individual and group criticism. The group sessions sometimes include students working in agencies other than CREST, giving volunteers an opportunity to learn from the experiences of their peers in other settings.

Supervision is thus structured so that every CREST counselor has some formal contact every week with each of the three organizations in the network. Because volunteers get this kind of support and guidance, their level of commitment and enthusiasm remains high despite the frustration or occasional setbacks that often accompany this type of work.

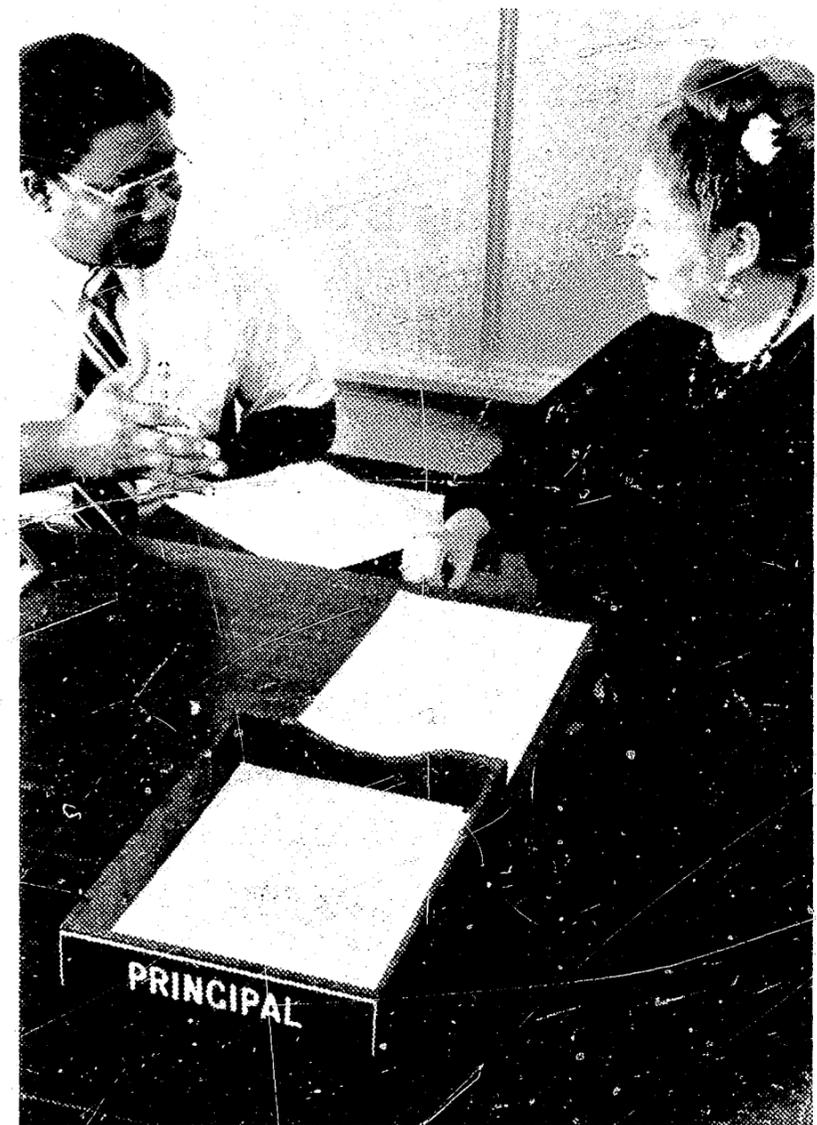


Practicum students meet with faculty supervisors weekly.

WHO ARE CREST'S CLIENTS?

Probation officers decide which youngsters to refer to CREST. Because they see CREST services as a valuable resource not to be wasted, they tend to refer neither the hardest nor the easiest cases to the program. They are more likely to send difficult youngsters who want help or who might be responsive to counseling—youngsters like Tommy who might be diverted from the legal system with some extra help. Youth who come to CREST often have psychological and family problems, and many have trouble dealing with authority.

When the probation officer decided to refer Tommy to CREST, he contacted the team leader responsible for his area. After discussing Tommy's problems with the probation officer, the leader decided that Karen would be a good person to work with Tommy. Karen and Tommy had their first meeting over a hamburger at a nearby restaurant. Tommy had very little to say at first. He saw Karen as just another authority figure. But slowly Karen drew him out. She talked about his interests. She found out he liked baseball and impressed him by rattling off the batting averages of his favorite players. At the end of that first meeting a trusting relationship had been started, and Karen and Tommy arranged to meet regularly. She also set up meetings with his mother and with his teachers and principal.



CREST works not only with clients but with their families and schools.

WHAT KIND OF TREATMENT DOES CREST PROVIDE?

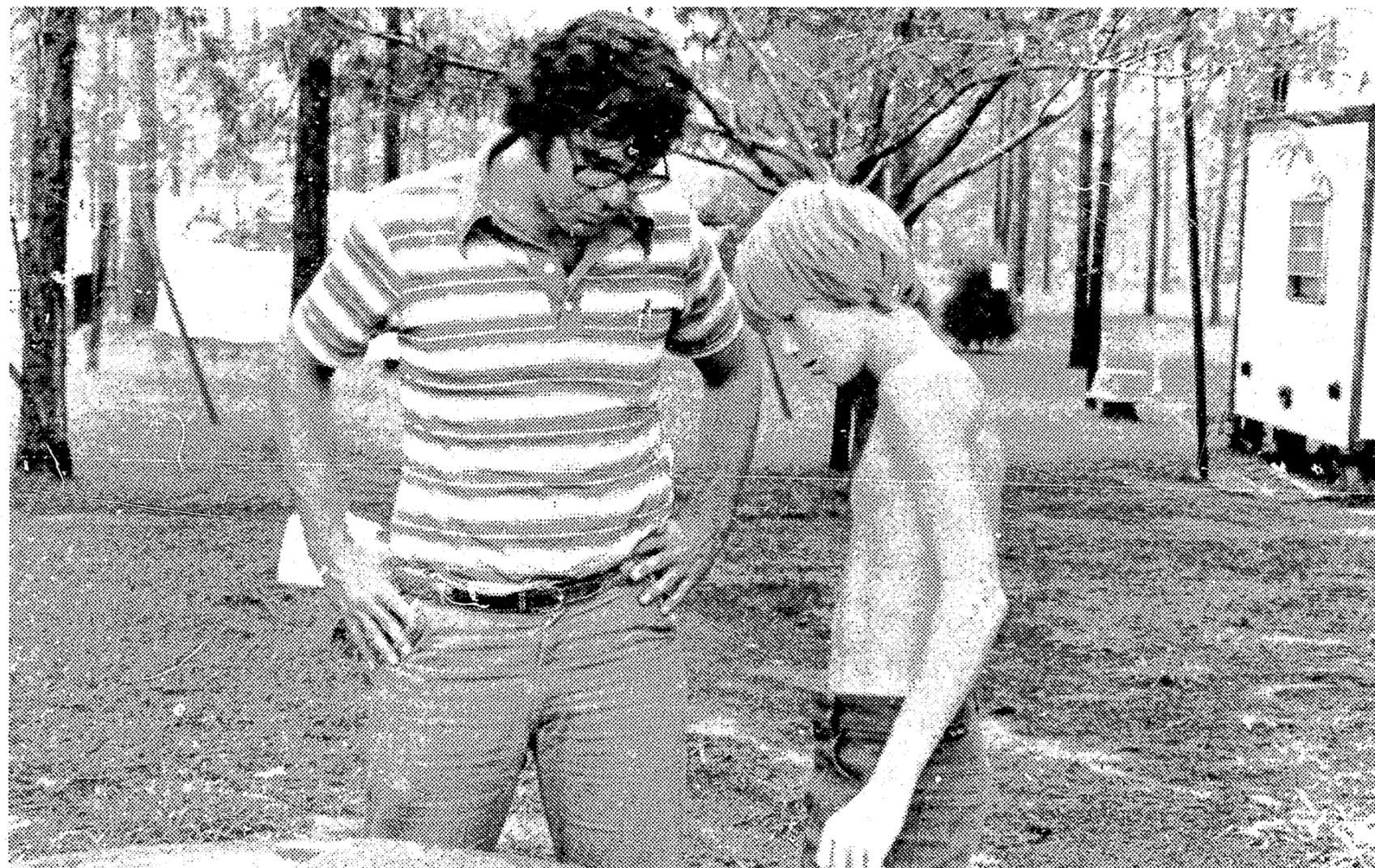
CREST counseling is designed to build trust and increase the client's sense of self worth and self awareness, so that youngsters not only understand better why they do the things they do, but can better plan and control their actions.

CREST counselors attempt to develop a helping relationship with clients using a variety of counseling techniques and therapy models

taught in the University's Department of Counselor Education. Individual counselors are encouraged to choose the techniques that they feel are most appropriate for each client. They may use reality therapy to help some youngsters confront the problems of the present rather than living in the past or in a fantasy world. In other cases, it may be necessary to separate irrational associations in the client's mind ("I did something bad; therefore, I am bad."). Or perhaps a client centered approach which focuses on the youngster's needs and perspectives is the basis upon which counseling proceeds. But whatever method a counselor

chooses to use with a particular youngster, the basic approach of all CREST workers is non-authoritarian and oriented toward the feelings and attitudes of the clients.

In addition to individual and family counseling, CREST workers often organize small group sessions to help clients learn that their problems are not unique and to encourage them to help each other. Counselors often spend extra time with their clients, attending cultural or sports events or participating in recreational activities.



CREST counselors meet with clients wherever the youngsters feel comfortable.

Karen worked hard to get to know Tommy, who his friends were, how he spent his leisure time. When Tommy didn't show up for his appointment with her, Karen went looking for him. She made clear that she intended to go more than halfway to build a relationship and that she expected him to do the same. She met with Tommy in his home, in her car, on the street, wherever he was comfortable. Gradually he expressed his loneliness, his anger, his need to be part of a crowd and, at last, his concern that he had messed things up for himself and his mother.

HOW DOES CREST WORK WITH PROBATION OFFICERS?

CREST workers are taught to be part of a treatment *team* and to work closely with the responsible juvenile authorities. CREST's dual treatment concept underlies the relationship between CREST and the Youth Services Program. Probation officers provide structure and limits and can invoke sanctions. CREST counselors provide guidance and support in a non-threatening, helping environment.

In fact, YSP staff see CREST as an important supplement to probation. Before CREST came along, they

had to be both probation officers and counselors, and many of them found those roles conflicting.

CREST's assumption of some responsibility for counseling has reduced this tension. And CREST has also dramatically increased the amount of counseling time provided to clients. While CREST workers have no fixed schedule for counseling, they usually see their clients once or twice a week, the family once a week, and the school once every other week. Often probation officers, who may have more than fifty clients in their caseloads, are only able to see each client once a month for an hour or so.

Sometimes clients tell counselors about offenses they have committed that the probation officer doesn't know about. CREST's stated policy is to give priority to the trust between counselor and client, except where a danger to life is involved. Probation officers understand and respect this position.

The ultimate goals of CREST and probation officers are similar, although they have different parts to play in achieving those goals. One probation official said, "CREST has never turned down a kid. It's not a numbers game with CREST. They don't say 'you've got to guarantee us 15 kids this month or we won't

come back.' If I only have 2 youngsters who need counseling, they take 2 and if I have 15, they take those too." CREST's philosophy is that any child is worth the effort. Even clients seem to understand and appreciate the dual treatment approach. One youth put it this way: "The probation officer stayed on my case and talked to my parents. CREST put new things in my life and talked to me."



A CREST team leader visits the home of a client.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF CREST ON ITS CLIENTS?

With few exceptions, CREST has met or exceeded its service delivery goals every year since it began. In 1977-78, for example, CREST:

- provided weekly individual counseling for 90 delinquent youth for an average of five months per child;
- counseled more than 50 families of delinquent youth;

- provided extended group counseling and therapy for 84 youngsters;
- counseled 40 delinquency-prone youngsters referred by the high school and another 24 such youth referred jointly by YSP and the high school;
- gave consulting assistance to schools for 81 CREST clients.

Officials of the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, YSP's parent agency, say they consider CREST's performance over the years to be excellent.

What does that record mean for the clients? Several studies have attempted to measure the project's impact upon its clients. In one study, evaluators looked at episodes of misconduct among two groups of youngsters, 30 CREST clients and 34 youth who had committed similar offenses but had not received treatment. While the groups differed somewhat in terms of age and sex, the CREST youngsters did show a dramatic reduction in official acts

of misconduct during treatment as compared to the other group. The total number of such acts committed by the CREST clients declined from 39 to 8, while those of the comparison group remained essentially the same—26 and 25.

A follow-up study almost 2 years later found that youngsters who had received CREST counseling were charged with offenses less often than the comparison group. Thirty-one

individuals in the comparison group were charged with 65 offenses, while in the same post-project period, 30 former CREST clients were charged with only 23 offenses. Felony charges dropped from 54 to 7 for the CREST group and from 56 to 30 for the comparison group.

Youngsters receiving CREST treatment have also shown significant improvement in school attendance when compared to similar youth who were not involved with CREST. The grades of CREST clients improved and they had fewer suspensions from the school than the comparison group.

As for Tommy, his attitude about himself slowly began to change. He recognized that he was responsible for his behavior and started to make some decisions about what he wanted to do. He realized he needed to go to school if he was ever to make it on his own. He started making some good grades, which he reported to Karen with great pride. He got involved in some organized recreational activities and started spending less and less time with his old pals on the streets.

Karen's practicum ended before Tommy finished probation. She explained at the beginning that she would only be with him until the end of that 10-week period, so that he would not feel rejected. He still needed some support, which he received from the team leader at CREST. Karen still stays in touch with Tommy. They get together every now and then and he tells her what he's doing and what his plans are.

WHAT DOES CREST COST?

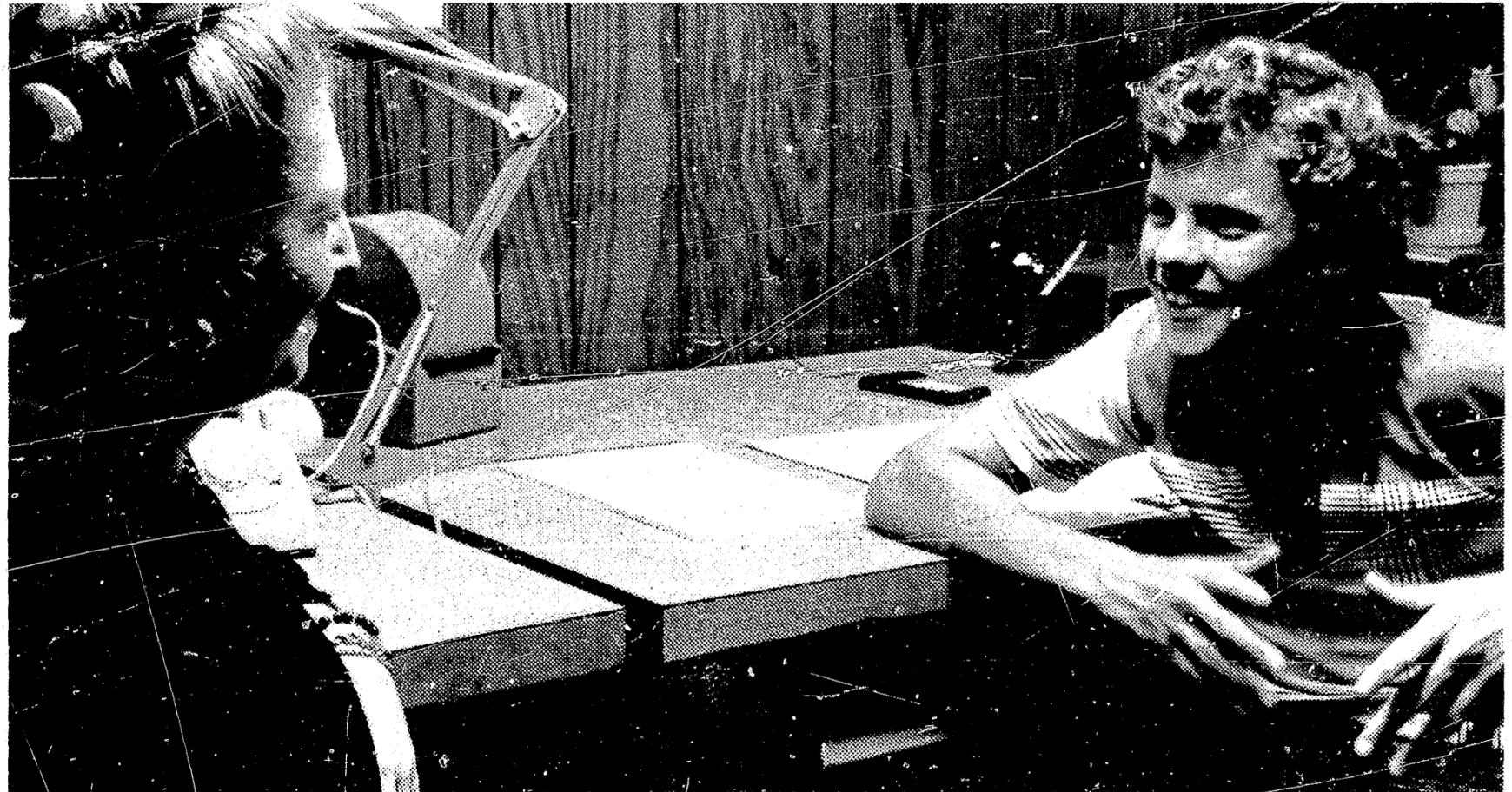
Because CREST uses highly committed, trained volunteers and keeps its paid staff to a minimum, its costs are remarkably low. The program operates on a total budget of about \$55,000 a year, which enables CREST to provide approximately 102 hours of counseling per week. The Youth Services Program can provide only about 40 hours for the same amount of money. CREST's average cost per client in 1977-78 was \$295.

In addition to the project director, the assistant director (soon to be replaced with a part-time administrative assistant) and the secretary, other paid staff include the three team leaders, who receive a salary roughly comparable to that of a graduate assistant at the University. Volunteers receive no stipends and sometimes use their own funds to buy meals or tickets to cultural or sports events for their clients.

In 1977-78, CREST funds were allocated as follows:

Salaries	\$48,232.00
Travel	2,855.41
Operating Expenses (Rent*, telephone, supplies, reproduction)	2,965.42
Administrative expense	1,233.91
TOTAL	\$55,286.74

*Rent on the building in Gainesville which houses the central office is only \$150 a month, thanks to the owner's willingness to make the space available to CREST at substantially below market value.



Counselors encourage clients to talk about their interests and feelings.

HOW CAN CREST WORK IN OTHER COMMUNITIES?

Troubled youth in many other communities could benefit from a program such as CREST, but there are several criteria that must be met for a similar project to be successful.

What separates CREST from numerous other volunteer programs is the level of training of its volunteers. A university offering a graduate counseling program must be within easy driving distance of the community to be served. Untrained volunteers, however well meaning and dedicated,

cannot provide the kinds of services CREST offers its clients. Volunteers must understand counseling techniques and be held accountable for their performance. CREST counselors have already made a commitment to counseling as a profession, they have taken graduate level courses in counseling, and they receive academic credit for their work in the program. This ensures high quality and dedicated volunteers.

Structured supervision and training are also important. The team approach, used so successfully by CREST, assures that volunteers receive regular support and guidance from more advanced students who have previously served as counselors. The accessibility of the project director and weekly sessions with faculty members in the Department of Counselor Education help to maintain professional standards and accountability.

A successful program must have the support of the community's juvenile authorities. There must be mutual

trust and belief in the concept of dual treatment. Treatment that complements the probation officer's role and includes families and schools is an essential component.

Effective communication and involvement of citizens in the communities to be served is vital to the success of the CREST project.

Active and concerned people living in the community help the program focus on the real needs of that community and generate good will for the program.

The most important factor in building a professional, high quality volunteer counseling program is, of course, the people. Strong leadership is needed to get the program started, to obtain funding and to attract dedicated volunteers. Staff and volunteers must be willing to reach out to troubled youth and their families, to go where they are, to work with them in all kinds of settings, and to keep going back again and again as long as a child needs help.

For further information concerning the policies and procedures of Project CREST, contact:

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