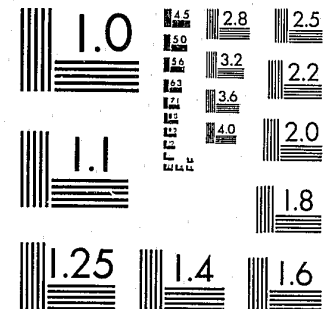


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CHILDREN AND THEIR NEIGHBORS IN

CHESTERFIELD COUNTY

PROBLEMS AND IDEALS IN A GROWING COMMUNITY



Children and Their Neighbors Project, Virginia Juvenile Justice  
and Delinquency Prevention Advisory Council

October, 1980

My students learn that tax dollars will not solve their problems, that we together must do that.

Marva Collins

I was a youth with some problems...nothing to do led me to more destructive entertainment such as theft, staying out all night, etc. The biggest problem I encountered was drinking and pot. There needs to be more community action. It seems parents don't really give a damn. I believe the most beneficial project would be a Spanish Castle type place where kids between the ages of 13-18 could talk with other people (chaperones), play ping pong, watch TV, play pool...get into discussion groups, produce plays, movies, read books, have bake sales, yard sales, parties, fund drives, play music and have a good time free of preconceptions of religion, alcohol and drugs. The reason the Spanish Castle house was torn down was because of lack of concern of parents and kids. I think it's time for a new Spanish Castle to be initiated by anyone able to donate the building and enthusiastic leadership as a chaperone. I can't describe how much good it did for me.

Chesterfield County resident

SEP 2 1980

ACQUISITIONS

## Foreword

In working in Chesterfield County, we were greeted with more interest, enthusiasm, and cooperation than we had dared to hope for. Service providers, parents, and youths gave freely of their time, and answered many questions whose purposes must have seemed obscure. Youths talked to their friends for us, and service providers guided us to others we might have missed. In fact, we only regret that we could not reach all those who were recommended to us in the limited time we had.

Above all, the Office on Youth devoted time, manpower, and much thought to the project; Ron Bessent interviewed, scouted out interview subjects, and promoted the effort across the county. The Youth Services Commission also gave support and encouragement to the effort.

We hope that the results of this report will be of use to all who helped us. Clearly, there are many in Chesterfield County who take great interest in the welfare of the County's younger citizens.

The Children and Their Neighbors Project

## Introduction

In April, 1980, the Chesterfield County Office on Youth, with the assistance of the Children and Their Neighbors Project, (Virginia Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Advisory Committee, DJCP), embarked on a needs assessment of county children as a necessary step to systematic youth services planning. The first product of that effort was the report, Facts and Figures on Chesterfield County and its Youth (July, 1980). While this document gave us an official picture of what was happening in the county, and gave us some numbers, it still left more to be said about youth needs in Chesterfield. Numbers are cold and abstract; the residents of Chesterfield County are very much alive. We wanted to tap the meaning that these people could give the figures contained in the first report.

We have therefore augmented the first report with information gathered from those who live and work in the county. In the last months, we have looked into the services that are available in the county, what service providers do, and what services people think should be available. We have tried to discover what parents want for their children, what they are doing with them now, and what they think should be done. We have also asked children about their needs and wants and about their families and schools. This report is the result of our conversations with people throughout the county. It reflects their concerns and their hopes, and shows how these can affect what service providers can and cannot accomplish.

In early planning for this needs assessment, we decided to focus on county neighborhoods, and chose five neighborhoods representative of neighborhoods in Chesterfield generally as the areas for our field work. We anticipated that the neighborhood emphasis would keep us from over-generalizing about county youth, and allow us to take differences within the county into account.

In the course of our work, however, we found that neighborhood problems could as easily be described as county problems, at least as far as youth were concerned. Youth problems had less to do with income, housing type, and available services than with human relationships and the attitudes of youths and parents alike. While these were affected by income and other factors, they were by no means dependent on them. Rich and poor children alike suffer the consequences of loneliness, distance, competition and the like, as we shall see. Thus the study now is a discussion of all Chesterfield youth, rather than of youths in particular neighborhoods.

Chapter One, "Understanding Youth Problems," is a discussion of the ways in which the very notion of "problems" can limit what we learn about youths in Chesterfield, and what we can do about their concerns. It addresses three topics: what people mean by problems; the frequent demand for "quick fixes" for problems; and the effects of our consumer orientation on problem solving.

Chapter Two, "Problems and Ideals," describes the needs of children as they were told to us by residents and service providers in the county. It is important to note that these comments do not refer to all parents and children in the county, but to those who have problems. This report stresses what children and their families need, and the problems certain of them have. It does not talk about the good things these same families undoubtedly have; that is not its purpose. The reader might keep this in mind when reading the report and finding little happy or good in it. The first part of the chapter is devoted to what people told us, and not to our interpretation of this material. It is not a discussion of the statistically - verifiable extent of problems in the county. It is a discussion of what those who are concerned about children in the County, and who spoke with us, felt were problems.

The chapter then takes the problems and needs listed and stands them on their heads, as it were. It looks at problems and needs as an evaluation of the way things are against people's feelings about the way they should be. It lists the ideals and expectations of county residents as their discussion of problems showed them to be. In these ideals, we found a number of contradictions and conflicts in people's understanding of children, of parent and child relations, and of problems. These, in fact, formed the real problems underlying those about which people talked.

Chapter Three, "Living Up to the Ideals," moves to a discussion of where these contradictions and conflicts come from, and why they create problems that seem insurmountable. We note that problems in many cases are the results of residents' attempts to cope with conflicts between what they expect and what they and their families can deliver in today's working world.

Chapter Four, "Consequences for Service Providers", addresses the question that precipitated this needs assessment: what can the County do about the needs of its younger residents? It suggests that a youth policy, which recognizes the limitations government faces in dealing with youth needs, and which looks to an organized and reasoned approach to youth needs, be developed. It describes several program ideas in general terms; some of these were suggested by service providers. The chapter is meant to generate discussion among service providers, parents, and youths, and to encourage more thinking along these lines; it is not meant to be a laundry list of programs. It is meant to show how programs now in existence, or new ones, can be oriented to take not only the needs, but the attitudes, beliefs, and limitations of citizens into account in ever-greater measure.

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## Chapter One: Understanding "Youth Problems"

In the course of the Chesterfield youth needs assessment, we interviewed a wide range of county residents and service workers: parents and children, school principals, mental health and recreation staff, social service caseworkers, public health nurses, day care center directors, county planners, librarians, ministers, judges, and police. We administered a questionnaire to store managers in Cloverleaf and Chesterfield malls, and attended county meetings.

Almost everyone we talked to mentioned problems and suggested possible solutions. We heard ideas and perceptions repeated again and again as we moved from group to group and to different areas of the county. Most comments included families, parents, the suburban way of life, peers, and county services as part of the problems of youth. Although they did not always agree on which problems were the most important, those we spoke with felt that something was wrong or at least not as it should be in the county.

Those we spoke with consistently addressed three problem areas. These were most often described as the roots of many of the others. They were:

- (1) the breakdown of the family;
- (2) the individual child (or parent) who has difficulty coping with his or her environment;
- (3) relationships between parents and children and children and their peers which do not provide proper guidance and nurturance.

The third of these is a refined social science version of the first two, because it says that families are systems of relationships between people (mother and father, parent and children, etc.), and that individuals are created and maintained by their relationships with other people.

Thus, sometimes people said, for example, that parents and children live separate lives and that divorces are destroying county families (breakdown of the family). They said that youths' insecurities prompt them to try drugs, sex, and other means to give themselves an identity (individuals have difficulty coping). Or they said, for example, that the absence of caring, open and supportive relationships between parents and their daughters leads some to succumb to peer pressure to lose their virginity (faulty relationships).

This way of looking at the problems people described to us seems to make sense, at first. It says that we should focus service efforts not on the symptomatic problems of youth -- teenage pregnancy, drug use, and the like -- but on the root causes of these: on shoring up the family, helping individuals cope, and improving relationships between people.

Yet are these things government service providers can really do? Can the County expect to reach each and every family or person in need of help, or to build up every relationship in the County?

Moreover, our research shows that, despite people's convictions that the root causes of problems in the County are as we listed them, there is more to the problems than this. We could shore up the family, help individuals, and improve relationships at great cost, and still not affect citizens' sense that something is wrong, that there are youth problems in the County. Let us see why this is so.

#### What are "Problems"?

When Chesterfield citizens and service providers were telling us about youth problems, about the root problems of the family, individuals and relationships, they were describing what these same things should be. When they talked about problems, they were also saying that something specific needed to be made better; problems need solutions. Lastly, they were saying that problems they saw could be solved by those who had an objective understanding of the problems and what could fix them, and the resources to do the fixing. In short, they were describing what they saw as unwanted, but isolable, understandable states of affairs that could be solved with the right tools, and a little know-how.

Thus, those who talked about "problems" in Chesterfield County were doing two things: First, they were judging themselves and others against ideal standards and finding "problems" where they or others did not meet the standards; and second, they were looking for mechanical or quick and objective solutions to the problems they saw. The difficulties of this approach were two. First, people did not exactly say what their ideal standards were in any consistent and coherent manner. In fact, they were contradictory in what they expected of themselves and their children and they expected things that did not fit the way we must live today. They were looking for solutions to things that were not "problems" in the normal sense of the word, but were the unpleasant consequences of "life in the fast lane", and not amenable to clear definition or pat solutions.

#### The Effects of "Problems" on Service Deliverers

We can imagine the effects this notion of problems and the search for elusive solutions could have on services. Service providers are looked to as and consider themselves to be the experts who can or should solve problems, even when this definition of things that are wrong is not appropriate. When the "problems" people discuss do not respond to proposed solutions (because they are not "problems" as people define these), it is easy to despair of improving things at all and to say that what would be good solutions just can't be put into practice.

Related to the difficulties the "problem" orientation poses for service providers is what one service provider called the "quick fix" mentality of citizens and service providers who want the problems they see solved here and now. Health care service providers attributed much of the drug-use of children to the prescription drug use children are exposed to for other ailments. Children who are given pills to get well, to slow down, to feel better, and who see their parents doing the same thing, conclude that ingesting something and expecting a result fairly quickly is a legitimate way to deal with a problem. As one youth said, "day in, day out, school is the same, even though some teachers try to make it interesting. It's just boring, and people do things to

have some excitement." Drugs are a quick way out of the problem of boredom. This "quick fix" idea pervades people's attitudes about all that ails them. When they cannot take something like a pill to solve a problem they have, they may "take" another kind of medicine - a lecture by an expert, a series of visits with a counselor, or a course in "how to be a better \_\_\_\_\_." In doing so, they look to something from outside themselves to take their problems away quickly, with limited effort on their part.

When the problems do not go away, they complain that the medicine was bad, or sigh that they have done all they can. One instance of this "quick fix" idea was the drop-off in attendance at a series of meetings in a County neighborhood to discuss what to do about teenage drug use and misbehavior. After the first meeting, many people expected results, or at least felt they had done what they could. By the third meeting, attendance was less than half what it had been at the first. What this means for service providers is a constant pressure to do "one night stands" for civic groups, or to develop programs without extensive planning for the future. To the "quick fixers", short term actions, rather than carefully planned long-range ones, are more appealing. People want to see something done, and the fact that something done without foresight cost much and accomplished little will be forgotten in the long run.

Related also to the "problem" and "quick fix" ideas, and raising other difficulties for service providers, is the "consumer" approach to services that we all have learned, and that service providers expect. We assume that we can purchase solutions to problems. We purchase clothes to cheer us up, gifts to show we care, and services to alleviate our personal problems. We expect that what we buy will work (soon), and that we can take it back if it does not. We heard citizens say "tell us what to do and we will support it", which sounded encouraging until we recognized that service providers were being put in the unenviable position of having to provide purchasable solutions to people's ill-defined "problems". The consumer orientation is in the end one way of pushing problems away, by reducing one's involvement with them to a short term purchasing transaction. Money, not feeling, and action, not time, are seen as the ways out of "problems."

All of these things affect service providers' efforts to do what they have been hired to do - "solve problems." They quite likely apply to all "problem" areas, although we saw them as they played out in the social services area. But we also found that more than this affected what Chesterfield County residents thought was wrong, and what could be done about it.

The "problem - quick-fix - consumer orientation" that service providers encounter is complicated further in the case of children's and youth services by ambivalent attitudes about children themselves.

The ideals of family life that parents attempt to live up to conflict with one another, and with the parents' and children's experiences in the real world. These conflicts create much ambiguity about children, which is expressed for service providers in requests that service providers either leave children and parents alone, or that they address children as another "problem" group, like welfare recipients or the mentally ill. Parents either want to be in full control of their children and free from government "interference", or they ask that more things be provided their children: recreation opportunities,

more counseling, better schools, instruction in new areas, job-seeking assistance, and the like. Parents in Chesterfield, like many parents elsewhere, are caught up in the so-called "demise of the family", which as we will see, is not that so much as the realization in bits and conflicting pieces that the ideal of the family with which they grew up is now less attainable. They are responding to the family pressures they feel in the only ways they know how - by giving to their children or requiring that service deliverers do so, by saying they have problems that others must solve, or by closing in upon themselves. Each of these responses sets parents and children apart from one another as givers and recipients and as problems, and can place service providers between them. "Family" problems have become government problems, and ones it cannot solve quickly, even with more of the taxpayers' money.

This is the situation in which Chesterfield County service providers find themselves - a set of youth "problems", and an orientation that demands the problems be solved by experts (quickly), coupled with general social confusion about what children and families can and should be. This means that what service providers should do remains unclear, that any action is risky, and that no action is also dangerous.

What can be done to provide more effective youth services in this environment? First, we must examine what people feel about "problems", and understand what they see these to be. Then we must also check into what they feel about how youths and children should be, the ideal standards by which they are judging children, parents, and families. This will allow us to better understand what can and cannot be done in the county about the "problems" described. We will better know what people expect and how this matches with the possible. From this point, we can address possibilities for services that will be appropriate to the needs, and yet anticipate the expectations of county citizens. In the following chapter, we will first describe the problems Chesterfield residents and service providers discussed with us. Then we will look at the ideals these represent, and what this could mean for service providers.

## Chapter Two: Problems and Ideals

### Children's Problems

#### Responsibility and the Value of Things

- o Service providers said that many children do not learn to take responsibility for their actions or their possessions.
  - They think others will pick up after their careless actions, said one principal citing several examples. He thought they learned this "someone else will do it" at home.
  - Some must be disciplined constantly, and do not care about getting in trouble. For some youths, this "troublemaker" status is the only identity they have, noted one youth.
- o Some mall merchants noted that young employees present difficulties because of their high turnover rate, visiting of friends, and other unprofessional or irresponsible behavior.
- o Children have no regard for the value of things, said service providers who see children every day.
  - Principals noted that children who were given a great deal at home were not very concerned about losing or lending things. It was easier to go and buy a new coat than to look for the old one that was lost.
  - A student remarked that some of those who wrecked fancy cars could count on getting a new one soon, and so had no idea what it meant to work for a car or anything else of value.

#### Growing Up and Knowing it All

- o Principals, youths, and other service providers remarked that children are growing up too fast.
  - One mother worried that pressures to grow up are starting earlier and earlier. By their twenties, a caseworker said, there is nothing now left for young people to discover or do. They begin to date in their early teens, and spend time alone or are responsible for themselves at elementary school ages.
  - Youths are forced to make early decisions about drugs, family relationships, involvement in sex, their futures, and their values in an uncertain world where even guidance from their parents is limited.
  - Many children take responsibility for their own medical care at an early age.
- o Teenagers remarked that drug education programs at home or at school (recommended by parents) are unnecessary because teenagers already know

what they need to know and do not need to listen to adults.

- Librarians and public health officials noted that kids feel a great deal of pressure to be knowledgeable about everything, both in front of their peers and with adults.

#### Authority

- o A high school principal remarked that many students in his school do not respect authority and actually control, rather than obey, their parents.
- Principals remarked that some children treat their parents like servants. Another noted that some abuse them.
- o Many teenagers feel that their parents have few or no means to punish them for violating family rules.
- One mother said there was nothing she could do to make her son behave. She said discipline dwindles as children grow older.

#### Love and Intimacy

- o Sex is a central element of everyone's life and youths are no exception. It is a focus of intimacy, of competition, and of identity.
- o Health officials noted that young girls became involved with sex to meet the demands of peers more than from a true sense of readiness for and interest in sex.
- Some were concerned that girls raised in this "have to do it" atmosphere would grow to dislike sex, to associate it with force and pressure.
- o They also noted that central as it is, sex is not discussed by parents with their children. Parents impart by their silence the notion that sex is dirty and hidden, while children get strong messages from elsewhere that they should "do it."
- Caught in this confusion, girls (and boys) find themselves in sexually-related emotional and physical trouble. Abortions and illegitimate births among young girls are on the rise.

#### Parents' and Families' Problems

- Time and again, people referred to parents and the families they create as the roots of children's problems. Parents give children too much material wealth (even when they are poor) and too little spiritual wealth. They talk to them too much or too little; they control them too tightly, or give them too much freedom.

#### Broken Homes

- o Divorce rates are high in Chesterfield County and so are re-marriages.

- A middle school principal remarked that books on divorce and separating families are regularly withdrawn from the school's library by students. It was obvious to that principal and to others that many students must deal with their parents divorcing and need help in coping with separation, as well as with new families.
- Describing the American family to pre-schoolers has grown more and more difficult, according to one day care center director, because the "typical" mother, father, brother, and sister plus dog family is not so typical anymore. Children whose families are different from the typical must not feel that something is wrong with their families.

#### Communication

- o Parents were said to not communicate their values and concerns to children. Children were said to not want to confide in their parents.
- County health personnel remarked that girls they see have little understanding of sex and sexuality, except a vague notion that it is dirty, and that their parents would "kill them" if they knew the girls were having sexual relations. They talk to service providers only if they are sure they will not tell parents.
- Other service providers remarked that many parents do not read and do not encourage their children to read. They have few spiritual ideals or supports, and give their children few. They watch television and rely on it for their information, said a principal, and so teach their children to do the same. Children then watch television rather than converse or read, and play out the violence they see there.
- Rather than being teachers to children, parents may try to friends to them, said health personnel, principals, and youths. Children have friends; they need guidance, support, information, and firmness from their parents. Children learn a great deal from their parents, much of it not consciously taught. The fears and hopes parents hold can become their children's, and their actions toward their children may have causes and consequences they never dreamed of. Parents' insecurity and loneliness make them befriend their children for fear of losing them. This reflects a problem that parents have, and that is passed on to their children, who feel insecure and look for support from peers.

#### Parents and Children Go Separate Ways

- o There were many indications from parents and service providers that homes were filled with tension as parents and children pulled separate ways, as they participated in their own activities.
- One service provider remarked that parents she sees feel so alone at work that they cannot stop feeling lonely when they get home. They compete with other family members, and push their children away.

- One boy remarked that the parents of many people in his school had their priorities confused, and put too much store in clothes, cars, and other purchasable things for their children. Parents earn for their children but do not devote enough time to playing with and instructing them.

#### Parental Neglect

- o Some parents were said by principals and day care personnel to expect schools and day care centers to care for their children while the parents were at work or play, regardless of what happened. Parents cannot be reached when their children are sick or will not come to the school to deal with discipline problems. Some principals recognized that this was in part because working parents cannot get off work.

#### Parents' Lack of Knowledge

- o Some service providers felt that problems can arise when parents, particularly young ones, are not fully aware of their children's developmental stages. They can expect too much or too little of their children at different stages of growth.
- They give them too much money, independence, and responsibility at eight and ten years, and then demand childlike innocence and behavior from near adults.
- Thus, they let teenagers work and drive cars (adult things), but not engage in sex or use of drugs (other adult things).
- Other service providers felt that children could do well with instruction in adults' life stages to help them understand their parents and their concerns a bit better.

#### Children and Parents in Conflict

##### The Peer Culture

- o We heard that the peer culture dominates children's (particularly older ones') values and activities. This culture is described by adults in more negative than positive terms.
- Many times parents and service providers remarked that all kids want to do is party, and that that is all they talk about.
- Peer culture activities include unsupervised parties, drinking, drugs, and sex at worst, and unfruitful juvenile socializing at best.
- "Peer culture" is understood to include the many small groups that youths form, and in which membership is assumed to be important.

##### The Need for Peers: The Search for Identity

- o Nearly all service providers, and parents as well, noted that young children to some extent and middle school and high school students to a

greater extent have only their peers to turn to for support and guidance. These are often ignorant or unhelpful about what to do. Children need guidance and support -- the feeling that they are valuable and important -- from their parents.

- Parents are not home when children return from school, and often are busy at night and on weekends as well.
- Children are out and about in their own groups with money to spend; so are their parents.
- Children participate in sports and school activities often without their parents' support or participation.

#### The Role of Peer Groups: Giving an Identity

- o Students and service providers noted that youths use group membership, sex, and drugs as ways to "be somebody," to have an identity acceptable to some set of people. Groups whose members use drugs to establish their identity as the school "heads" are doing the same thing as groups whose members use sports to set them aside as the school "jocks".
- More than one student remarked that those who use illicit means of group identification, such as drugs, violence, and sex do so because all more traditional means have been cut off for them. A small circle of rotating elites has absorbed all of the school or sports-related achievement-oriented identities, and those of rebellion are all that is left.

#### Competition Within Groups

- o Despite the importance in both parents' and youths' eyes of the peer group as a support group and a source of identity, youths remarked that they really have little of substance to talk about with their peers, and that competition within the group always sets the individual members apart. Each group member must try to live up to the group's image to a greater degree than anyone else, to set the group standard, as it were. In this respect, groups are small bands of youths who compete with one another for the rewards of the group.
- Thus service providers and teenagers remarked that kids feel insecure, inadequate, and anxious. They worry about failing in school or in their groups and compete to stay ahead. In this they are little different from their parents, and in fact they learn such behavior from their parents.

#### Parents' Fears About Peer Groups

- o Parents fear that their children will fall under the influence of "bad" groups, and be pressured to conform to their standards, which may include sex and drugs.
- Peers are said to pressure individual children to conform to group standards.

- A three year old cried outside a day care center because he was afraid the other children would laugh at his clothes.
- Girls reaching puberty are pressured to have sexual relations before their bodies and emotions are ready for sex. While they may engage in sex or pretend to have done so for the sake of their standing in one group, they may eliminate themselves from other groups (who will call them "sluts"). They may also encourage others to take their path, by their example.
- Girls of 14 and 15 years date men of 21 and 22 years in search of identity and security. They are likely to find heartbreak and inconstancy.

#### Positive Peer Influence

- o Yet peers and principals noted that most youths will not listen to "good" people, or even to "bad" ones, in any kind of admonitory role. Efforts to head them off certain paths by example or education were said to be fruitless by some, and capable of reaching only a few, by others.
- Parents and service providers look for ways to boost the visibility and the positive effects of youthful "good" groups. Yet these groups too are seen by adults as ultimately juvenile and in need of adult guidance and nurturance.

#### The Failings of the Peer Culture

- o This is the main failing of the peer culture; it does not allow adult participation or dominance; in fact, it leaves the adults outside, feeling much older than they are, and isolated from their own children. It leaves children and youths on their own, and to their own devices, while they grow up to face adult problems.

#### Peer Groups Conflict with Families

- o Parents were concerned that children, particularly those in high school, did not want to do what their parents arranged for them or the family.
- No one came to a dance organized by neighborhood parents.
- After 16, children with cars would prefer to ride around and go to their own hangouts than stay at home or attend planned activities.
- Parents noted that kids wanted to spend their time with one another rather than with them.

If we stand these problem statements on their heads, as it were, we can construct a fairly comprehensive, if contradictory, picture of what Chesterfield County residents and service providers feel should be with respect to children, parents and families. First and foremost, there is the strong sense that the family should be an extremely important institution for children and parents, though it is threatened now with dissolution. Problems with children were most often traced to family problems, and then to public services which did not accept responsibility for or help children as families did (or

should). There are many more "shoulds" of this kind; these are listed on the following pages.

These messages about what "should be" have their origins in residents' and service providers' experiences, schooling, parental examples, work, peers, and in public sources such as churches and the media. As these things are similar among most Chesterfield County residents, so their expectations are similar. Even those who are poor and unemployed have seen the television families and experienced the social services that stress the same sorts of family ideals that others who have steady jobs and successful histories express. Poor and rich kids get in trouble, we were told, and wealthier parents have no monopoly on concern for their children.

#### Ideals for Children

- o Children should be responsible and act in accord with what adults and parents expect of them.
- o Youths and children should appreciate what their parents do for them or what they have, and should recognize the value of things, from clothes to education.
- o Childhood is an age of innocence. Children should be protected from the unpleasant, the mature, and the confusing. They should be carefree.
- o Childhood is a time when experimentation, mistakes, and changes in attitude are legitimate, because it is a time of few responsibilities, when parents provide a safe environment for growth.
- o Children should respect authority and obey their parents, even fear them, for adults know what children do not and support and train children for their own adulthood.
- o Childhood is a time to learn. Not only should children learn how to read, count, and write; it is a time to learn about how to get along. They should learn from adults' example or teachings about competition, responsibility, manners, authority, the rewards of hard work, the dangers of drugs, the importance of doing well, and the consequences of failure.
- o Children cannot be entrusted with the secret pleasures of sex and drugs because they do not know how to use them, and because these would despoil their innocence.

#### Parents and Family Ideals

- o Families should be made up of father, mother, and children.
- o Families are happy places where each member feels accepted and free to be what he or she cannot be at work, at school, or with friends.
- o Families are the last stronghold of people caring for people.
- o Families should be the place where children learn many things, and where children are cared for in material and emotional ways.

- o Children should be close to their parents and share their questions and problems with them. They should confide in them.
- o Children and their parents should give one another a sense of belonging. They should share with one another, rather than compete.
- o It is most important to give children the raw materials for growing up: a good home, pleasant surroundings, good schools, and enough clothes and toys to put them on a par with others.
- o It is most important to spend time with children, to be an example for them, to play with them, to instruct them, regardless of the time and energy it takes. Jobs are not as important as a healthy and happy home life.
- o Parents play a tremendous role in their children's lives. They must remain interested in their welfare at all times.
- o Children grow up in stages, and need different things at each stage. Yet they always need something from their parents. Their parents must both let them go, and remain responsible for them.

#### Conflicting Ideals of Children and Families

- o Adolescent peer groups and peer culture are less desirable than the peer culture of adults. Partying, socializing, and other such behaviors are not desirable.
- o Adolescent peer groups and peer culture are more desirable than the peer culture of adults. The activities listed above are desirable.
- o Children should not have to rely on friends but should be able to count on their parents. They should maintain strong family activities (choosing family over friends), even as they grow up.
- o Children should not have to compete, or feel insecure and inadequate, in groups or at home.
- o Children should be able to have an identity from a positive source. This includes families and legitimate adult supervised activities, rather than peer groups.
- o Peer groups of different types better fit the individual's needs and understand the individual, than do other, more "legitimate" groups. They also are available, while other groups may not be.
- o Children and youths should have and respect adult guidance, rather than succumb to peer pressure. Peer pressure should be limited or turned to "positive" ends. This is especially true in the areas of sex and drugs.
- o Children and youths can figure out their own problems, with the help of other youths. The problems of peer pressure and the dangers of sex and drugs are not as severe as adults make them out to be. Each individual can handle himself.

### Chapter Three: Living Up to the Ideals

#### The Consequences of Ideals

The ideals listed in the last chapter should look familiar, like school chums at a reunion. We haven't thought of them for a while, but now that we see them, we recognize them.

It should also be clear that in many cases these ideals are contradictory. We cannot expect children to learn and be innocent at the same time. They cannot grow up and remain children. Moreover, parents and children can have conflicting ideals, which they both hold to tenaciously. Why? As we mentioned earlier, we are all victims of our experiences and learning. Many of these ideals about youth and childhood, and the conflicts they hold, are the remnants of historical change in the last century. Our learning has been in bits and pieces from the past, hence the conflicts in what we know. Moreover, our learning about childhood has not been untouched by our experiences in the world of work and everyday life. We not only find conflicts among our ideals, but between what we think should be in this area, and what can be, given the constraints of modern daily life in the county. As we took more closely at these ideals and at how we must live, we see that the lives parents and children live simply do not allow them the time or the common ground to fulfill these ideals, or to challenge their conflicts or truthfulness.

Let us look at these two things in a bit more detail: the historical origins of the ideals "problems" reflect as these affect our attitudes today; and how everyday life makes these ideals unattainable, thus leading to "problems."

#### Historical Origins

Before the 18th century, children were seen as little adults, who only needed to grow bigger to become like their parents. Social interest was in what children would become, not in what they were. In the 19th century, people came to speak of childhood as a discrete time of life with its own problems and possibilities. Children were seen as different from adults in what they could understand, what was important to them, and what they enjoyed or were capable of doing (Watson, 1965:5). This meant that they had to be treated differently from adults - educated, removed from the workplace, and given their own past-times and enjoyments. At the same time that attitudes towards children were changing in this way, and parents were finding a new class of people under their roofs, the extended family that worked and played together was becoming the more mobile "nuclear family" of parents and children. This arrangement left parents with little informal or family information about these new children for whom they were responsible. The interest in science in the period and a new faith in experts provided a new source of information about how to raise children - the manual and "how-to" book. Children became delicate things to be done for, rather than contributing members of a working concern (though we also sometimes see them in this way as well), and only experts knew how children could be safely raised (though we may come to feel that we at least

know how to handle our own children). As experts came and went and as times and pressures on parents changed (as with the rebirth of the two-income family), ideas about children grew myriad and conflicting.

Many of the problems people discussed in Chesterfield County reflect the heritage of these ideas. Parents are faced with responsibility for a set of people who must be treated according to a set of contradicting standards. They are in many ways more demanding than a job, but have many job-like qualities. Parents come to feel they can fail as parents just as they can fail on a job, and evidently feel they can quit being parents as they quit a job.

From the child's side, the power of objective and conflicting standards also contributes to "problems." The notion that parents are to give and children to receive makes children go the way of all recipients - they feel antagonistic towards and exploitive of the givers. Their innocence is compromised at every turn by their experiences in school, with television and with family life itself. As they grow up and cease to be children, they feel the conflicts that growing out of what they are and yet not really being adults entail. While being a child is said to be special, and while we identify them as children, children and youths know that ours is an adult culture where freedom, power, and rewards are concentrated in the hands of adults. It is little wonder that they strive so hard to be adults and yet so often appear childish in our eyes.

This look at history should tell us that parents and children alike would do well to recognize the historical origins of their ideals, and that perhaps they expect too much of one another. Their concern for these ideals actually draws them apart, and takes from the sheer joy of being with other human beings. Parents and children can learn to accomodate to one another in a human setting, not a quasi-scientific or employment one where children are jobs that require certain behaviors of parents, and vice versa. Parents and children are in the same boat of confusion and change, and the artificial separation of the two groups does not help either to row very far.

In addition to the problems history has given us, the exigencies of everyday life make it difficult to fulfill these ideals, as well.

#### Everyday Life and Attaining Ideals

##### There Just Isn't Time

A study completed on London families found that:

except on weekends and on holiday, the family is not the governing institution but the governed. The child has to be at school between certain hours and have holidays at certain times, the wife similarly at her work, the husband at his. The amount of time they can overlap together at home is settled for them rather than by them. The shift-workers are only the most extreme illustration of a general rule. If people had more choice not only about what they did outside the home but when, the family would be less fragmented and cross-pressured. (Young and Wilmott 1975:234)

What was true in London is true in Chesterfield County as well. While people idealize the family and relationships within it as the last bulwark against the complete isolation of each of us, at least as far as our emotional, expressive sides go, they still must live a life that gives them precious little time with that family. Without time to be together and stay acquainted, Chesterfield County families can find themselves drifting apart, and not being what they feel they should be, close. They feel the loss of something vital; they cannot give to or get from the families what they feel they should. And not only do family members not have the opportunity to be together; they also assume that they therefore lead different lives.

##### Children and Parents Lead Different Lives

The vast majority of Chesterfield County parents work. They have good jobs and earn decent incomes. They are able to provide for their children. Chesterfield County children on the other hand, spend their days in school, and with friends. Both parents and children have what on the surface appear to be very different experiences for the majority of their active hours each day. They are far away from one another, and seemingly do very different things, for very different purposes.

On the surface, parents at work earn money, do things of importance, produce, and are not always being taught - they practice what they have learned. Children, on the other hand, earn grades, not money in school, do things of little consequence, do not produce anything of use, work short hours and have long holidays, and must always be taught. So parents imagine that their children are very different from them, that the "real world" is tough and hard, not like the easy school world. Youths, too, look upon each parent's working world as a realm different from their own.

The fact that in many ways school is structured as children's work, and that parents and children do much in common is not appreciated by parents and children. Both parents and children are held to schedules not of their own making. They must bow to superiors. They must perform and be judged. They must try to advance, or at least keep on an even keel. They must accomodate to peer pressure. Their lack of experience in each other's environment, however, and their surface impression of these cause parents and children to have incorrect views of one another.

The notion that children and parents live in different worlds limits opportunities for fulfilling important ideals. It is hard for families to be close when their members assume they have little in common. This lack of opportunity to meet ideals leads to some of the "problems" we heard discussed.

Parents and children who feel they lead different lives assume that neither can understand the joys and the tribulations of the other. Each side, therefore, finds difficulty in accepting, and sometimes in giving the other information, guidance and advice. Thus youths do not need parents' ideas and information about drugs and sex, and parents do not need youths' ideas about how to solve "youth problems".

People tend to assume that those groups they do not belong to or know first hand are probably dangerous because their behavior can't be predicted. People surround themselves with those like themselves, and draw away from those who appear different. Those who exist apart from them are eventually assumed to be different and unpredictable. Thus parents grow afraid that other youths, or "peer groups", are corrupting their children. Their solution to the problem is to exercise more control, to attempt to increase the predictability of their children's behavior. Youths on the other hand see their parents' world as stodgy or uninteresting, and withdraw into their own social circles. They assume their parents would "kill them" if they knew what they think or do.

Lastly, it is difficult to exercise authority when rules can be broken without parents' knowledge, when those who feel rules are made by those who "don't understand" see rule-breaking as legitimate ("taxation without representation is tyranny"), and when rule-makers and rule-obeyers are mutually suspicious. Thus, youths are said to flaunt authority and need discipline, and parents are seen as ultimately powerless over their children.

To sum up, parents and children, convinced that they have little in common, find themselves nevertheless under the same roof. There is built-in conflict in this situation, and the fulfillment of the ideals of loving family togetherness, sharing of advice, and legitimate exercise of authority is not easy.

#### If It Works At Work, It Will Work At Home

Being apart and feeling different are not the only difficulties families face, or that lead to "problems". As we noted in the ideals section above, home and family are idealized as the center of love, emotion, and individual expression. We have seen that circumstances may make this ideal somewhat elusive. Conflict and unhappiness are likely to arise at home.

When they do, something quite interesting comes into play. This is the influence of work and the ideas it (and its junior brother, school) imparts to employees. As we noted earlier, the vast majority of Chesterfield County parents work. Many of them have important managerial positions. A number of studies have shown that what one does all day largely determines how one thinks - how one organizes his thoughts and perceives of problems. Thus men out of work for long periods in the 1930's lost track of time, and became unable to plan for the future or even get up in the morning, or to do other things they did automatically when working. (Jahoda, et al, 1972).

Without our really knowing it, work gives us ways to think about everything from social relationships to problems to the way of the world, because it operates on a fairly consistent set of assumptions about all of these things to which we are constantly exposed. One of these assumptions is that what happens can be changed, that we can make a difference. Hence, businesses produce products, and governments attempt to address "problems". Work assures that problems can be solved, and describes the world in "problem" terms. We spoke of the "problem" orientation earlier; the work place is its origin. Work also teaches us that rules can make things run smoothly, that e-motions are expressions of irrationality and weakness, that sex is not productive, that socializing is a waste of time, and that not accomplishing

something is wasting money and time. It teaches us that there are bosses and the bossed, and that while some of the bossed may become bosses, it will not be without hard work, dedication, and obedience.

Does this sound like home? Can we see the "problems" we discussed lurking behind these assumptions that help us get through the day at work? Indeed, just as these assumptions help us get through the day at work (and we could think of many more), we decide, when things are rough at home, that they should work at home as well. Thus youths find themselves with more rules when parents grow concerned about them, because after all, rules make things go more smoothly at work. We find that leisure time can't really be relaxing time, because that is unproductive. Leisure time must be spent in self-improvement, competition, or other worthwhile activities. Moreover, leisure is something that, like everything else, should be earned. Adults get to drink (and perhaps even have intimate relations) because they have earned the right to do so ("this Bud's for you" are not empty words). Children who do not work somehow do not really deserve leisure time, or at least not the highest rewards of leisure time, such as drinking and relaxation. Socializing, just hanging around, again is a waste of time, so what can be said about kids who think it is enjoyable? Competition at work becomes competition at home - in the athletic association, or between family members. Families, which are potentially very emotional places, become restrained ones in many cases, again reflecting the rationality and order of the workplace.

Perhaps the most interesting of the effects of work on home life is the "education effect." Family members out of touch with one another and unable to cross the barriers of communication born of distance, look to experts to educate them in what is happening and what can be done. Like a professional out of touch with his field and in need of a refresher course, a parent looks to parenting, or, looking for the lost comfort of being young and being told what to do and what to know, he looks to an expert or a teacher to help him out.

The problem with the work response to difficulties or to generally getting along at home is that it is not adequate. Work and home have different functions. Work is production-oriented; home is not (though it once was). Home ideally is a place where social relationships cover a wide range of feelings and activities, and not the limited ones of work. As one mother remarked in regard to children in particular, children may need guidance and even rules, but they need understanding of what each child's desires, worries, and knowledge are, and how they can best learn from the rules imposed on them as well. As she also noted, they need to know what their parents are thinking, to be a members of a unit that is not just the residual unit of peoples lives, where they go when they have nothing else to do, but a central element of their lives.

#### Those Who Do Not Work

We have been talking about ideas and assumptions that people gain from work. What about those residents of Chesterfield who do not work? Those who do not work may indeed not have the same approach to the family as those who do - they have no way to learn the approach. These people emphasize not the abstract, "problem" world of employees, but the concrete world of people and things. They lead lives full of another kind of anxiety than what we have dealt with here, that of not having sufficient cash, and suffering the helplessness

of failure in the working world as well as home. Here the future becomes a fantasy, and day-to-day life a grim reality that admits of little understanding. This kind of world is described in our report on Bainbridge and Blackwell, two poor neighborhoods in southside Richmond.

Oddly enough, however, children whose school work is not considered real work begin to take on many of the characteristics of the unemployed or the underemployed. This makes them even more incomprehensible to their employed parents.

In this chapter, we have moved from the discussion of problems and their reflected ideals in Chapter Two, to an analysis of "problems" as the consequences of unfulfilled ideals. We have seen that ideals of children have historical roots and internal contradictions, and that the very nature of daily life makes fulfilling ideals very difficult. The facts that children and adults spend little time together, that they assume they lead different lives, and that they rely on work-based assumptions to run their home lives create "problems" for youths and their families.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Consequences for Service Providers

What then, can we say about youth needs in the county, given the new sorts of problems we have identified there? We have seen that family members have difficulty meeting ideals they have set for themselves because of the constraints of their daily lives. Because these constraints have to be accepted as given in the short run, we must recognize that there is little human service agencies can do to alter the causes of the stresses families feel; these are the results of patterns of work, of living far from the work place, and of segregating youths and adults for educational and productive purposes. Changes in the institutions of work, in the zoning of business and residential property and in the well established methods of education in the long run are the only things that can lead to closer family relationships and the fulfillment of traditional family ideals.

Yet speaking of doing such things may well be an attempt to bring back a now romanticized past; at least, it is not something human service providers can do alone. Rather, human service providers' role is to help citizens cope with what is, in this case, to counter certain of the negative effects of the way they live their lives by helping them to recognize their unrealistic demands on themselves, and by providing alternatives to family closeness. They can also encourage other county agencies--those that affect zoning, attract new industries, set school policy, and so on--to take an active role in recognizing the social effects of zoning and other business decisions (beyond those of population increase, income and other demographic issues). They can work to encourage local industries, businesses and schools to work to place adults and children in more contact than at present, and to play a greater role in the social life of the community. At the same time, they can produce an image of the county as supportive of its citizens, and a helper, though not the county's "problem solver".

### Approach to Youth Problems

In fulfilling this role, service providers can set out a strategy for meeting youth needs that addresses the topics covered in this report. A comprehensive youth policy that recognizes the stresses placed on Chesterfield families, and their general responses to those stresses, can be laid out, and action based on that policy. Many things now being done could easily fit within such a policy--other things could be developed in accord with it. Overall this policy could first recognize the constraints to youth services to be found in the county. As we have seen, so-called youth problems in the county can be traced to conflicting ideals of family life, a lack of time together, the feeling that children and parents lead different lives, and the emphasis on work-related values. These pose their own constraints on what will work and what will not, because they entail a separation between parents and children and structural limitations to family-based programs or to youth programs run by adults. This report shows that there are four such constraints.

o First, the county, like other urbanizing areas, is facing a service demand explosion, as people who have no community ties turn to professional government services for support. Strangers cannot turn to neighbors or parents or other informal support networks - they must turn to official helping professionals. Thus demand for services will continue to grow.

o Second, it is clear that county residents will demand individual assistance (as in mental health), and assistance to entire groups with problems, such as county youth. In both of these areas, requests for help will take the form of defining problems, recommending that experts solve them, and arguing over funding for the solutions recommended. That is, "problems" will be placed away from those who should provide solutions. Togetherness and community or family life will have an uphill battle. Involvement will come from some quarters, but it is likely to be short-lived.

- This is not because citizens in Chesterfield County are bad or lazy, but because they are suffering what can be called "structural" limitations to true involvement in or understanding of the "problems" they see. The demands of work and school make it nearly impossible for service providers to compete for people's time. These have too much to do in their off-hours, and too much to do apart from one another, to take a great deal of interest in family improvement activities after hours. Moreover, the separation of family members and the work-fostered emphasis on self-improvement or relaxation after work means that people spend time not as a family, but as individuals. Programs to arrange things for families, unless they were to be along fantasy lines that could help families to superficially fulfill the family ideal while limiting real contact (as television does) would for these reasons be a fruitless effort in the long run.

o Another quality of Chesterfield County citizens will limit the long range effectiveness of efforts that try for family or groups participation, and will encourage the "experts do it" type of solution. This is the fundamental isolation and non-community orientation of Americans in general, Chesterfield County residents included. While efforts are always being made to establish "community centers" and community feeling, the fact is that most citizens do not want to take the time and make the effort that community involvement demands.

- In short, citizens will continue to demand the problem - quick-fix - consumer approach to things that are wrong and will not respond to what may seem to be a good solution to many problems activities that bring parents and children together or call for community involvement.

o Lastly, service providers will be limited in their successes because we are a culture that thrives on problems. They tell us what to do, and they allow us to criticize ourselves, to feel we could be better. Whatever is done, there will probably be more "problems" just over the horizon. People's "needs" are infinite, and the problem orientation is one way of looking at the world that capitalizes on this fact. If the world were a bed of roses, there would be those who would worry about the thorns.

After recognizing and accepting the constraints within which County services must operate, the County policy could list three approaches to easing the difficulties of families and youth in Chesterfield. These are: helping citizens to recognize what they are up against; providing alternatives or catalysts to family closeness; and working to encourage other agencies, public and private, and non-human service, to take a more active role in youth matters.

### Helping Citizens

#### Helping Citizens Through Public Information

Most of those in Chesterfield County have had some schooling and most have at least a high school education. They are accustomed to being educated through the popular press, commercials, and most recently, continuing education programs. They are used to paying for their education, and listen more to what they pay for than to what they get for free, unless what they get for free is particularly entertaining or satisfying in some other way (TV, for example, provides relaxation). They are used to reading light materials such as newspapers and magazines, and to paying for them. They are willing, in short, to learn things, provided, however, that these things do not offend or threaten the way they see things.

The County could use this interest to keep the County, and its efforts to help the citizenry understand what it is like to be parents and children in the County, in the forefront. It could establish the County as a resource for information and a vehicle for professional advice, although not as a problem solver in and of itself. The County could be seen as an interested partner in Chesterfield County life, not as a "big brother" prying into people's family lives or a large institution for those who cannot make it.

Thus the County could help parents and children by publishing relevant pamphlets and articles, and making them available for a small fee. The operation could in time be self-supporting to avoid the "use of the taxpayers' dollars" stigma. Television and newspaper reporters are interested in doing series on life in the County, and clearly jump at the chance to do stories on things of importance to Chesterfield readers and viewers. They could be provided with material on the government's understanding of the pressures and constraints that County residents face, and how they can cope with these. Libraries could include such material in their collections, and schools could have children's versions. Grocery stores, convenience stores, malls, and other locations could also be used as dissemination points for such literature. With some expenditure, the County could produce a magazine or newsletter on life in the County, which could include articles on family life to self-help as well as entertainment in the County and places to go. One problem with most public relations efforts is their one-time nature. Another is their limited circulation, and another their uninteresting subject matter or obtuse writing. These problems could be circumvented by a periodical like the State Library's Virginia Cavalcade or the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Virginia Wildlife, or by a popular newsletter.

Topics covered in such a magazine or newsletter or in pamphlets and articles disseminated in other ways could include popularized versions of the

material in this report, recent figures on child-related topics in the County, tips on things to do with the family in the County, and to do individually. Prominent County or private psychologists, sociologists, health specialists and others could be requested to write for these materials, and citizens could have their own dialogue with the County through letters or a "my turn" column in the periodical. The Office on Youth could be the editor of such a periodical.

The benefits of written educational materials are many. They can surmount a number of the structural difficulties we have discussed. First, they can be placed where people will find them when they are doing what they normally do: their habits need not be changed to get the information into their hands. If they are required to pay for the material they are more likely to read it, and to consider that it has value. They can peruse the material on their own time, and in the comfort of their own homes. They need not deal with others in doing so. They need not come together as a family to do so. The tremendous popularity of self-improvement guides is testimony to the workability of this method of educating Chesterfield citizens about why it is difficult to be a parent or a child today, and how things can be done to make it easier.

#### Helping Through Better Information About Youth

An improved youth information system would contribute greatly to the County's understanding of the extent of youth concerns and population shifts in the County, and would also aid any publication efforts. Little information is collected on a traffic zone or neighborhood basis at present, and little youth information is collected at all. The Office on Youth could take responsibility for collecting data about youth and related topics in the County, and for providing that information to the public and other agencies. This report's companion volume, Facts and Figures, located the major County information sources. All that remains to be done is to determine what other data elements could be valuable to different agencies and the public, and how they can be regularly collected, collated, and published.

#### Helping Citizens: The Proper Image

The image county government presents to residents encourages them to use its assistance and to participate in its efforts to help and inform them. Whether people are rich or poor, they derive their images of services and "helpers" from the world around them. They see banks and supermarkets on the one hand which cater to them with much fanfare, and attempt to make their facilities instill comfort or respect. The bank is probably the most respected institution with which individuals have regular dealings. Banks always maintain an air of quiet respectability or aloofness, and yet they treat their clients with respect as well. Banks give and command respect. We would not see linoleum floors and folding chairs in a bank, because such a bank would not encourage people to leave their money with it. In the same vein, when people want personal help they quite often go to people who command and offer respect - health professionals, clergy. We were told this was the case in the county.

What this means for service providers is that those who have "problems", or who are looking to the County for guidance, expect formal and professional relationships rather than quasi-formal relationships. One service provider remarked that she tried to be personal or "down home" with groups of citizens,

and that the method backfired. It did so because she was telling citizens things about their problems and what they should do as a professional, but talking and acting like one of them. She therefore became a competitor instead of an expert, and lost their attention. This maintenance of formalism and respect should extend to the County's facilities as well. Many service providers noted that County citizens will not use County services because they are public, which carries with it the stigma of "shabby." Yet Public Health nurses reported that they were well-received in the community and by youths, because they have a respected professional status, and are considered to be above people's run-of-the-mill affairs.

All of this means that citizens, rich, poor, or otherwise, respond to services that express respect for them and their problems, through formal and well-appointed, confidence-inducing surroundings. Governments many times project poor images to show they are not wasting taxpayers' money. But they leave taxpayers with an image of themselves as bumbling incompetents who work in bad conditions because they know no better, or because they cannot get work elsewhere.

Like other services we have discussed here, however, the County cannot lose sight of the need for contact with citizens. The "personal touch", and the real feeling that the County cares about its citizens, must be conveyed in every way possible. Some of these ways are discussed shortly.

It may seem that here we are talking about building up an image that the County really should not have, that of "expert." The more expert the County looks, will not citizens be the more tempted to hand problems over to them? Perhaps, but the County can only begin to build a partnership that places responsibility for "problems" on citizens as well as on government when it has status in citizens' eyes, and the citizens' respect. Then it can say that things must be done by the citizenry as well, and that there are things government cannot do, in the manner that a respected surgeon can say "now it is up to you" to his patient. Without that strong professional image, service providers will appear to be shirking responsibility and to be taking advantage of the taxpayers' money while doing little for the taxpayers.

Our experience in Chesterfield County showed that there is great professionalism and respect on the part of the human services staffs for the citizenry. This particular approach seems to be understood, but it needs to be reinforced in these days of decreased spending. Moreover, it needs to be stressed that even the poor will respond with more responsibility to services that have formal and professional rather than poor-looking offices and staff.

#### Providing Alternatives to Family Closeness - A Sense of Belonging

Time and again service providers in the County talked about parents' and children's isolation - from one another, from their peers, and incidentally, from their government. They suggested that what most children who were "problem" cases needed was an adult to listen to their ideas and problems. The adult did not need to have professional credentials, some said, others said he did. Behind the idea was the notion that not only might parents be busy, but the conflicting ideals with which parents and children must cope, and the

intensity of the relationship, make intimate relationships that recognize that the child is becoming an adult difficult. Kids told us about teachers and coaches who played this role for them, and in some cases indeed, one parent did, while the other took the role of rule-giver.

But not only do children need someone to talk to, perhaps outside the family circle, parents may as well. We received a warm reception everywhere we went to talk to parents about their children. They wanted to talk, and they were pleased that the County was taking an interest in them. The Home Start program in the County sends paraprofessionals into the homes of poor citizens to work with the families and teach their pre-school age children. The program provides supportive, personal contact for adults as well as children and serves as an advocate for families in need of help from other service agencies.

These things show that the isolation, problem emphasis, and distance between County and citizens can be countered by a more personalistic approach on the part of the County. When people feel things are wrong they seek either formal, professional help, or the help of close friends or family. The County can provide help in both domains, using its existing program structure and new program ideas.

School and playground personnel could be encouraged to take a greater role in informally counseling children, and provided with training and incentives to do so. Older students, or college or graduate students who are known to be informal helpers, could be encouraged, and given the opportunity to learn what services they might recommend to friends in trouble.

Youths find it difficult to classify their problems and then call a proper service provider, and they may hesitate to share their problems. But in an environment of a variety of available "listeners" and with the use of information about formal help that is provided in a personal and informal fashion, these barriers can perhaps be broken down.

A method of improving contact between family members and the County might be a set of County roving ombudsmen. These people would be assigned permanently to a neighborhood as the County representative in that neighborhood. They would contact families periodically to provide new information and to see what the County could do to help the family. They would serve as advocates for those in need of Chesterfield services, following them through the system. They would take ideas to the County administrator from their neighborhood. Thus they would provide support for citizens, but not while demanding that the citizens travel, associate with others, or otherwise disturb their routines.

Volunteer programs to provide adult companionship for children already exist. Parents pay to have services take care of their children. These should be encouraged, as the major way to provide children with an antidote to isolation. Parents could be asked to participate by taking an interest in others' children - those of neighbors, for example, in a neighborhood effort to give children good adult role models. Moreover, there is a vast and untapped number of single men and women who are lonely--perhaps new to the area and without friends. They could be brought into a "big brother big sister" style

program, and with proper training, help both youths and themselves. The most difficult aspect of these programs is attracting and maintaining (remember the quick fix) interested people. Sponsored popular activities, such as hiking, camping, skiing, plays, and unusual sports for those ages 15-25 would be one possible way to overcome these constraints. Many young adults have skills that can be taught after hours in community centers, willing restaurants, and other natural youth "hangouts." It is important that such groups be arranged by the younger people, to obviate complaints that they are "adult," and that they take place in natural youth hangouts--pools in the summer, schools, and malls. They should, moreover, be neighborhood based, to ease transportation problems. Yet we should not expect these ideas to work in all cases. More thinking still needs to be done on getting adults out of the house and into working with children. It is quite possible that volunteer efforts such as this will not overcome the problems of limited time, and the distance between parents and children, but they are a possible alternative, and an important one. Time and again service providers noted that what youths needed were interested, concerned people, and we need to find ways to make that happen.

#### Encouraging Others to Take a Role

The richest areas of possibilities lie here. If the County's youth policy recognizes that all have a role in helping Chesterfield County youth to grow up, then the opportunities for helping youths within the context of family ideals, the separation of youths and adults and other difficulties we discussed become many. Service providers suggested some of the opportunities listed below. We have tried to show how they can counter some of the difficulties with which services are faced. There are undoubtedly many more, which can be designed to take the findings of this report into account in systematic fashion. We suggest that we devote some effort to thinking of these, in the context of what we know about youth problems. We must at all costs avoid the trap of thinking of "solutions" without giving due consideration to the topic and "problems" we are facing.\* From that point we can discuss the who's, when's, and how much's of the efforts that seem desirable.

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\*The way in which Americans approach social problems has been recognized as patterned or habitual. James Bossard has described the steps or stages through which society normally solves its problems as follows:

- (1) There will slowly develop a recognition that a problem exists which will be characterized by spreading discontent expressed by the statement, "Something ought to be done."
- (2) There will be discussions among various individuals and groups about the seriousness of the problem.
- (3) "Reforms," usually intuitively arrived at, often ill-advised, promoted by a "well, let's do something" attitude will be attempted by the individuals and groups in disorganized fashion.
- (4) This will lead to failure which will be followed by requests for careful studies and more information.

We would suggest that any effort undertaken be done first in a pilot program on a very small scale, in a particular neighborhood, perhaps selected from a list of solicited volunteers. From a successful pilot program, word can spread.

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from our findings is that more than a handful of human service agencies must be concerned about youth growing up in the County. They can only do so much, can only reach so many. Beyond this, these agencies must work to bring other organizations into the picture. This is especially true in the days of tightening economic belts. Youth are not a government problem, they are a county concern. Part of the government's youth policy could be to enlist the cooperation and involvement of county restaurateurs, leisure activity centers, businesses, and merchants in the development of a variety of efforts to counter the loneliness, boredom, and anxiety of youth. These efforts could include the following:

- o A drive to enlist volunteers in helping citizens in need could be launched. It need not be labeled a "teen effort" though recruitment efforts could include schools and after-school hangouts. Such efforts could include exposing youths to the living conditions of many in their own community, requesting their help, making them feel needed, and giving them some paraprofessional status. This would meet their needs to feel members of some groups, would answer parents' objections that youths are not productive, and might reawaken the concern for others that so many of us have lost through isolation and ignorance of the world around us.
- o A neighborhood exchange could do much for youth and county solidarity. Different neighborhoods in the county are doing different things. Where they have ideas or need them, they could call a central county number, perhaps that of the Office on Youth, to see what others might be doing, or to suggest a new idea. This could tie the scattered neighborhoods of the county together in a network of ideas and interest in children.
- o There is an old story about a man and woman who switched jobs for a day. After that, each appreciated the others' work a great deal more, and complained quite a bit less. Danville has established a program of in-school talks and tours by businesses, factories, stores, and other establishments in the Danville area, to acquaint children with the working world, and with job possibilities. Such a program could be established in Chesterfield, with the Office on Youth establishing a list of interested establishments. The tables could also be reversed and parents sent to school, not at night, and not as observers, but for a day of being a student. Youths would also go to work for a day at their parents' or a neighbor's place of work, of course with school permission.
- o We have said little about parents thus far. A recruitment effort, involving not only radio spots but personal appearances at civic meetings, churches, and other adult groups could produce adults interested in inviting youth into their homes, teaching them their skills, and so on, perhaps on a neighborhood basis. Neighborhood cooks could be encouraged to sponsor a one-night cooking course for adults and teenagers, or just for teenagers. Or parents who already do a great deal for neighbors' children could be offered training in helping youth. Block parents could be available for children whose parents are not at home, for

emergency assistance. This responsibility could rotate. This sort of parental involvement can place parents in an adult role, making them comfortable, but have them teaching or doing things that are non-threatening and interesting. It helps them do what they may already do, and it allows them to be helpful and obtain some benefit from it. There is also no reason why youths could not teach adults some of their skills as well. Such efforts might reduce isolation, the separation between the age groups, and youths' and parents' ideas that neither can teach the other anything. It would help to meet the ideals of caring and sharing in a relaxed atmosphere that demands little in the way of time or effort.

- o Students and service providers mentioned that there were not enough activities for all students, particularly in the large high schools. There are any number of possible activities for students, and maybe more of these should be offered, after or during school. One youth suggested that the last weeks of drivers' education, now devoted to a review of health materials, could include job hunting skills. He also suggested that the Tech center be open in the summer. Other after school activities could include courses in roller skating, home repair, child-rearing, marriage and the family (perhaps one in which youths act out many elements of marriage, such as finding an apartment, looking for a job, and planning budgets), trips to downtown Richmond to see people with different ways of life, and whatever else youths are interested in. Not only would such things encourage more student participation in legitimate activities, but the activities if developed with youths' participation, could be relevant and useful to them in the long run. As this would take manpower and some investment in transportation on occasion, it might best be started as a pilot project, where a questionnaire in one school can produce suggested ideas, and a student-trainee team can be established to drum up interest in and develop activities for one of the most popular suggestions. Continuing education is popular with adults: it can be offered to youths as well. The course could have a small charge, to avoid the "giving" trap.
- o Youths who had been "in trouble" suggested that some of their age might listen to these tell why not to do what they did. Others said that youths would not listen, even to their own peers who had been there --they felt in control. But a program of speakers who can "tell it like it is" to high school or elementary school classes might make a difference to some, or might open an avenue of personal communications for some. As the famous Toma demonstrates, it is not lectures that youth respond to, but the sense that someone cares; this, not objective analysis of the pro's and con's is what makes the difference. If speakers who had such a caring attitude could be made available to health or other classes, or simply "be around" centers, we might again succeed in penetrating the loneliness of being young.
- o There was much talk in the county of "teen centers," where teens could go and have "good clean fun." It was also said by teens that they wouldn't go. There are a number of restaurants, entertainment centers, and so on at present, however, that attract a number of students. If the proprietors of these establishments could be encouraged to take an interest in youths, these places could provide much of the positive

entertainment we have discussed. In another Virginia city, a restaurateur has devoted part of his space to pool tables, and holds pool tournaments for youths and adults. While there, the youths are well-behaved, do not drink, and have a good time, but they are in a restaurant, not a facility supervised by a director. This sort of effort on the part of other restaurateurs would make youths part of the regular scene rather than shunting them into special programs, allow for adult-youth interaction in an adult atmosphere, and give youths a place to go that did not require extensive additional funding or personnel. These are the things that most frequently stand in the way of teen centers.

- o Librarians mentioned that there are many books available now on young adult problems. These books can be found in the public libraries, which young adults tend not to frequent. As these books can work as a kind of therapy, there should be efforts made to get the books into the hands of middle school and high school students. One strategy could be to encourage local bookstores to stock and prominently display such books. Another would be to begin booktalks in the high schools. Another would be to begin a circle of critics at each school who would read and publish small newsletters about new books of interest. This could be expanded into a general youth newsletter, containing information about student rights, new movies or books and new legislation affecting youths on their families. Funding here would include the cost of printing the newsletter. Perhaps these efforts could stimulate interest in reading, help those who need it but are afraid to ask, and provide another activity for students who cannot participate in others. It of course should be youth run, giving youths adult responsibilities and opportunities.
- o A youth services coordinating office made up of youths, and paid a salary could be required to fulfill responsibilities in any number of areas, from recruiting volunteers and running a program like that mentioned above, to preparing service information for friends to use with their friends as discussed, to their own projects. Mainly, they would be made responsible for what they wanted to do, without constraints other than those normally placed on government agencies. This would acquaint youths with the world of work, would make them responsible, and educate them in how things work, while producing positive things for the County.
- o Assistance to youths who want to set up their own legitimate businesses, from selling produce to hotdogs to roller skates could be provided. A most ambitious effort of this type is a teen run restaurant frequented by adults. Just as adults need business information, so do youths, and there are several in the County who no doubt can provide it. Even small loans could perhaps be arranged. This would truly give youths an opportunity to try something to take on adult responsibilities, though with some cushion or support. A lesser version of this effort was suggested by a youth, who wanted the county to offer more job training and more job information. This shows that youths' ideas are not solely on fun and school; they very much want to take on adult roles. We must give them the opportunity to do so, rather than giving them so much that they become recipient-minded.

- o Many service providers talked of the need for various places to go for youths and adults in trouble. The county offers little in the way of housing for those who have been forced out of their residences, for battered spouses, and for runaway or other needy youths. Perhaps one center could meet a number of these needs, and different groups provide support for one another.

### Conclusions

This report has covered a wide range of subjects, from the notion of "problems" to what to do about circumstances with which people are not satisfied.

We have seen that talking about "problems" can lead to requests that experts find quick-fix solutions to problems, solutions which cost little more than money and give results. We have seen that what people frequently describe as "problems" mask a more serious state of affairs. What people think should be, and what they want, simply cannot be in a world that pulls families apart, pits them against one another, and gives them false ideas about how their unhappiness, and their "problems", can be remedied.

All this points to the need for a sophisticated approach to youth needs in Chesterfield County, one that begins with a deep understanding of what children and their families are up against in the county. It points to the need for services that make the citizenry part of the solution, not just the citizen who feels he has a problem. County government cannot go it alone, and it need not. With proper appreciation of citizens' expectations, and the recognition of their situation and limitations, the County can join with its citizens to overcome the barriers they face, to make growing up in the county a fulfilling experience for children and adults alike.

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