THE ORTHOGONIC SCHOOL NEWS

Summer 2002

THERAPY SERVICES

Milieu Therapy
For almost seventy years, the Orthogenic School has defined one of its primary missions as the carefully-planned provision of intensive milieu therapy for students with special emotional needs, who are in residential care at the school. During many of those years, the school aimed to provide a psychodynamically-oriented model of living and learning environment to facilitate the emotional, interpersonal and educational growth of its students. The beginnings of that long-standing tradition can be traced from the early collaborative work done the 1940's by Bruno Bettelheim at the Orthogenic School and Fritz Redl in Detroit, both of whom were indebted to the pioneering group work with young people done by Anna Freud in London and Vienna, and somewhat earlier by August Aichhorn in Austria.

In more recent years, the school has adapted its milieu to incorporate techniques that recognize the value of using of positive reinforcements to help promote student achievement and growth in areas such as emotional life and affect regulation, positive behaviors, self-esteem, sense of personal responsibility and educational performance. With these changes, however, the school still aims to provide a structured, predictable milieu environment for its students, while at the same time attempting to balance this aspect of structure with a recognition of and respect for the unique, particular needs of its individual students.

FROM THE DIRECTOR’S DESK

It is hard to believe that 6 months has past since I have assumed the role as Director of the School. A lot has happened in this short period of time. It has been mostly fun and exciting with some stresses and disappointments. But, overall, I think that our students are doing better and our programs have improved dramatically.

For me, this has been a time of hard work and a very steep learning curve. The life of a school director has some very interesting twists that are quite different from my roles as a Professor and Department Chairman at The University of Chicago. Similarities include being available 24/7. But the challenge of meeting and remembering the names and faces of students, staff and families is at the top of my list.

Program development and staff recruitment has been high priorities in the past six months. And, we have seen a lot of activity in this area. New program managers (Cindy Orozco & Tonya Bibbs), a new assistant director for residential programs (Pete Myers) and a new CFO (Abby Simon) as well as many new counselors have added strength and wisdom to our programs.

New programs include a stronger vocational program – many of our students are now working. And, of course, the Transition Program is well under way. First elements have included the development of transition plans for many of the students. Additionally, the Transitional Living Center is being created with a schedule for opening in early September.

I am especially proud of our Parents’ Association that has done a wonderful job of providing services to parents, to me and to the School. The excellent parent meetings and the terrific web page were superb products for the first year of activity that was capped off by the wonderful Fathers’ Day barbeque.

And, the grand finale of our season was the Spring Prom. Our beautiful and handsome students had a wonderful time along with the staff and many family members. Everyone looked so lovely in tuxedos and evening gowns. And, the dancing was fun, also. Despite the heat, it was a superb way to end a long year of transition.

Finally, I want to thank students, staff, parents and our board for helping to make this transition year for me possible and bearable. With many changes ahead, it was comforting to have the support and guidance of so many trusted friends and colleagues. I look forward to a successful 2002-2003 academic year.

--- Bennett Leventhal, M.D.
Psychopharmacology Services
In addition to the modifications in the school’s overall milieu structure, over the years there have been striking advances in the field of psychopharmacological management and treatment of emotional disturbances. Accordingly, the school provides detailed psychopharmacological assessment and treatment for those students who can benefit from this type of medical intervention. These services are provided by a team of Medical Fellows associated with the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Chicago Hospitals, under the direction and supervision of the school’s Medical Director.

Therapeutic Classroom and Dormitory Services
In addition to the attention paid to the school’s overall milieu and to the provision of psychopharmacological services, students’ educational needs are addressed in small-classroom settings staffed by fully certified special education teachers, who work closely with a number of teaching assistant personnel to facilitate even greater individualized attention. Educational services are provided in both self-contained classroom arrangements and in small-group subject area classes.

Students’ dormitory living experiences are enriched by groups of counselors assigned to work full-time in each student’s dormitory; these counselors receive ongoing clinical supervision with respect to their work with students at the school. In addition, during both school and dormitory times, there is a wide variety of specialized therapeutic group activity experiences available to the school’s students. These therapeutic activities include planned programming in areas including the creative arts, literature, music, drama, horticulture, student-run business opportunities (Junior Achievement), and self-government.

Individual Psychotherapy Services
In addition to the provision of milieu therapy, psychopharmacological treatment, special education services, dormitory counseling, and specialized therapeutic group activities, the school also offers formal individual psychotherapy, provided either by licensed clinicians (psychiatric residents, psychologists, and social workers) or by other therapists receiving ongoing supervision by licensed clinicians. This service is provided to all students who are assessed as being able to benefit from that more intensive one-to-one clinical experience. Individual psychotherapy is scheduled for twice-weekly sessions; however, the frequency and length of session times can be adapted according to a particular student’s therapeutic needs. At the present time, the major modes of individual psychotherapy provided at the school are psychodynamic (ranging from introspective to relational models) and cognitive-behavioral therapy. Attempts are made to reach a determination of the particular mode of treatment most suitable for a particular student based upon attention to the particular student’s target issues, as well as upon a consideration of the student’s psychological resources and suitability for a particular model of therapy.

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Group Psychotherapy
Recognizing that formal group therapy experiences can have a major constructive effect upon young people, the school is in the process of implementing a range of formal, twice-weekly therapy groups for all of our students. These therapy groups include longer-term process groups for those students capable achieving an awareness of group process, and of benefiting from realizing the relationship implications in therapeutic group interpersonal interactions. interpersonal learning. In addition to process groups, the school provides more time-delimited therapeutic groups that have problem-specific emphases. These more structured, solution-focused therapy groups are aimed at a variety of more particular issues, such as developing ways to cope with feelings of depression or anxiety, the acquisition of anger management skills, the development of basic to more complex social skills, and the enhancement of adaptive life skills/transitional living capacities.

Family Therapy Services
In some cases, students may be admitted to the school who are already involved with in treatment with a family therapist outside of the school. In such instances, continuation of that ongoing family therapy is encouraged by the school. For those families who are not receiving family therapy services, family members are encouraged to contact the school to arrange for periodic family meetings at the school with staff members directly involved in the treatment and education of their son or daughter. In addition, there is a formal family group that holds regularly scheduled meetings at the school, and all interested families are encouraged to participate in this group. Finally, although school staff members do not currently provide formal family therapy, the school is exploring an arrangement that would make this service available to our families as an adjunctive service.

D. Patrick Zimmerman, Psy. D.
Assistant Director Admissions and Psychotherapy Services
A New Assistant Director is Appointed!

Dr. Peter Myers joined the “O” School as the new Assistant Director on July 8, 2002. This is Dr. Myers’ second tenure at the school, as he first joined the staff in 1988 as a Counselor.

Peter Myers has been a member of the Juvenile Protective Association’s (JPA) clinical staff for the past 3 and half years. At JPA Dr. Myers provides psychotherapy to a caseload of severely at-risk families and their children. He also supervises the agency’s program evaluation and quality assurance efforts. Of particular interest to Dr. Myers are the development and implementation of clinically sensitive and programmatically useful outcome measures. His article on outcome evaluation for children in residential treatment was published in the November 2001 issue of Residential Treatment for Children and Youth.

In addition to working at JPA, for the past 3 years, Dr. Myers has served as a Visiting Lecturer in the Psychology Department at Northeastern Illinois University. Teaching a wide variety of courses, he brings his clinical experiences into the classrooms of future mental health professionals through courses in abnormal psychology; child, adolescent, and adult development; personality theories; theories of development; and techniques of group psychotherapy.

Dr. Myers received his doctorate from the Illinois School of Professional Psychology-Chicago Campus. He completed his internship at the Manhattan Psychiatric Center, a 3000-bed facility for New York City most disturbed and disadvantaged citizens. He also was awarded a Master’s of Arts degree from the University of Chicago in the Social Sciences Department.

Prior to working at JPA Dr. Myers had eleven years of experience working with severely emotionally disturbed individuals across all ages in both inpatient and outpatient facilities. Working first with emotionally disturbed children and adolescents at the Orthogenic School, Dr. Myers first worked as a counselor in the boys’ dormitory and ultimately was the Coordinator of Residential Services for the school. While completing his doctorate, Dr. Myers worked as a psychiatric crisis worker in a community based emergency room. He also served as a psychometician for a group private practice in Chicago that specialized in serving youth receiving SSI or who were wards of the state.

Please join us in welcoming Dr. Myers back!

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Staff Highlights

► In May, Tonya Bibbs joined the Orthogenic School as the Program Manager for the Starz and Adventurers. She comes to the school from Uhlich Children’s Home where she was a Psychotherapist. Tonya has a B.A. in Literature, Science and the Arts from the University of Iowa, and a M.S.W. from the Jane Addams School of Social Work at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She also has a post-graduate certificate in Couples and Family Therapy from the Center for Family Health at the University of Chicago. She joined the “O” School because she wants to utilize her family therapy skills and particularly likes the academic environment. She excited about being a part of the current evolution of the School. While not working, Tonya enjoys listening to and creating music and writing.

► Candy Orozco joined the School in January as the Program Manager for the Dolphins and Minstrels. She comes to the School from the Neurology Department at Children’s Memorial Hospital. While in the Neurology Department, she was also active in their Child Protective Team, where she assessed children for abuse and neglect. Her past experience includes working at the Community Counseling Centers of Chicago for three years as a SASS worker and spending the past four years at the Ravenswood Hospital Emergency Room as a Crisis Worker, where she continues to work.

Candy has a B.A. in Applied Psychology from the University of Illinois at Chicago and a Master’s Degree in Clinical Social Work from the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago. She choose the O School because of its great reputation and knowledge of its current staff. Additionally, as an alumnus of the University, she felt that working on campus would feel like home. Outside of work, Candy enjoys traveling, music, dancing and reading.

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Visit Schedule

September
6-7    Rosh Hashana*
13-15  All Dormitories
15     Yom Kippur Begins*
27-29  All Dormitories

October
11-14  Columbus Day – All Dormitories
24-27  School NIA Day – All Dormitories

November
8-11   All Dormitories
27-12/1 Thanksgiving Holiday – All Dormitories

December
20-1/03 Holiday Break – All Dormitories

* for those families for whom it is appropriate, visits can be arranged for the Jewish Holidays, as well.

Parents’ Corner

The mission of the Parents Group is to "Provide support for parents, the children residing at the O school and their siblings." This is accomplished by sharing information of common concerns, providing a supportive atmosphere for parents and their families and to work on projects to promote the emotional and social growth of our children. Since our inception last October, the Parents Group with the support and encouragement of Dr. Leventhal and the entire staff of the O school has opened the doors of communication by introducing monthly parents meeting, a monthly parents' newsletter, bi-monthly multi-family therapy support sessions, meet n greet between dorm staff and parents and a parents’ day picnic.

As advocates for our children, it is up to us to find the means and opportunities to help our children meet their potential and to be connected with them. We are looking for ways to get parents more involved in the group, provide fund raising activities, parental education and resources. The meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month at the O School from 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm.

- Deborah Marshall

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ORTHOGENIC SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

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