

FAAC counsellor avoids placing blame

By SUSAN AVERILL

The view of parents as the sole contributing cause to an adolescent's psychological problems is wrong, Gregg Young said. Which is why, during family counselling, he avoids blame-placing and fault-finding.

Young is program director of the Farmington Area Advisory Council. He counsels individuals and families while fulfilling administrative duties at the facility on Middle Belt Road in Farmington Hills.

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"I don't view parents as the sole contributing cause. It really doesn't matter if it's more important to get the situation changed," he said.

"BLAME-PLACING is a waste of time. I'd rather be doing reconstruction than fault-finding or blame-placing."

The purpose of family counselling is to fashion a "support system" for the person trying to overcome a problem. Often that person seeking help is an adolescent still living at home which makes a parent's role in therapy all the more important, he said.

Most of his counselling cases involve adolescents or young adults who are too young or financially dependent to move away from home.

Seeing them alone for 30 minutes once a week is often not enough to help a recovery, he said. There must be other forces working for recovery. Those other forces are people who will have more frequent contact with his client and can provide continual support.

"In order to make strides in therapy, you should try to incorporate all aspects of that person's life, including schools, peers, parents and neighborhood environment."

"An individual walks in, sees me for 30 minutes, walks out and nothing has changed. He will still meet the same external environment. I don't feel it is enough to fortify an individual to continue attempts to change," he said.

Behaviors parents exhibit can add to the problem without their realizing it.

"They can act as a support system,

but often they don't know how. Their child might have a substance abuse problem and they won't know how to handle it."

FAMILY COUNSELING should give the parents insights into their child's behavior.

"Part of the purpose is to increase communication in the home and to decrease any home problems. If a child can talk to his parents, he doesn't have to wait those six days and 23 minutes before he can talk about a problem, talk about a feeling."

In some cases, other family members will be used. "I have

"SOMETIMES I'll get two pages, written on both front and back, of things that are wrong. Next time I see them, I assign them to spend as much time doing a list of positive things. I tell them not to dare come in here without a list the same size."

Sometimes clients will claim there's nothing good to write.

"When they sit down and look at the good side, they can usually find it," he said.

Young said that sometimes, despite his best efforts, parents refuse to come in. Part of the reason, he said, is an outdated prejudice against therapy.

"Several years ago, people thought that if you needed a social worker, psychologist or psychiatrist that there must be something terribly wrong. It was an insult to their ability and an embarrassment to the family. Some still have a hard time accepting the fact that therapy could be used in their family."

Sometimes it isn't the social stigma, but the personal aggravation parents

may try to avoid by rejecting family counselling.

"Many are afraid that the therapist is doing to get down on them. It's rubbish to think that parents are always the cause of a problem. Most aren't that terrible."

"For adolescents, there is a lot of peer, school and environmental pressure which could be responsible. But a lot of parents think they're going to be attacked."

TO AVOID ALL presumption of accusation, Young makes contact casually with the parents, explaining the importance of their supporting role in their child's recovery.

"No matter what the problem is, most of the time the parents can be of some help. Even if it is just to allow their child to verbalize."

Even so, some parents will refuse to help and Young must resort to alternative ways to aid his client.

"Then I just have to help clients deal with their parents' rigidity as well as with their own problems," he said.

If he can muster help from other sources, he will.

"Sometimes it is necessary to use people other than parents. If I have a young client who is estranged from his parents and living with two other individuals, I might ask them to come in," he said.

Parents' participation in therapy does not take responsibility for change out of the client's hands.

"They must first admit to a need for change and then work for it. They must be aware that the responsibility to change is on them."

An individual who thinks the prob-

lem is external has the least chance of success, he said.

"Sometimes he'll say, 'Everyone else is wrong; I'm right. Change the government, my parents and the social system and I'll be all right.' If he is unable to see another's idea, he won't succeed."

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Schools assist Boys Republic

Continued from Page 1A

originally placed the student will be billed for excess costs."

If it was a voluntary commitment—the parents placed their child—then Boys Republic will be responsible for obtaining money from the parents.

Lewis said that he doesn't know how much of the \$200,000 program will be reimbursed by the state.

"We never know exactly how much the state will send because it depends on the money available for special education. The county makes up the difference."

Billing, he said, will include allowances for administrative costs incurred by the district.

"The local taxpayer would not be in any way financially responsible."

Public Act 198, the mandatory special education act, was passed in the State Legislature in 1971. According to the law, "education will be provided to all handicapped students, regardless of where they reside."

CONTROVERSY OVER residency rules snagged the law's implementation. Financial responsibility was relegated to districts where the handicapped lived.

But if a court from another school district sends a student into a neighboring district, then the sending district is responsible. If it is a voluntary placement, then Boys Republic is responsible for the costs, which they may collect either from the parents or from its supportive agency, the United Fund.

Farmington has not lagged behind other districts by waiting until the 1973-74 school year before picking up its responsibility.

"Most others have waited this long because of the confusion over rules and regulations. It gets down to dollars and cents. It wasn't so much reluctance to provide for the education of the children, but to decide finances so people wouldn't be penalized for having such an institution in their district."

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