

Schools can help cut delinquency

School personnel, particularly school psychologists, can play a critical role in reducing juvenile delinquency.

Prof. Rosemary C. Sarri of the University of Michigan described five major issues related to the interaction between schools and juvenile justice.

"Schools give disproportionate attention to negative rather than positive aspects of youth behavior," she said. "Specific strategies are designed to extinguish problematic behavior, but relatively little effort is directed toward the explicit enhancement of education for all youth."

"A second problem is the assumptions made about children: some are quickly identified as bright, creative and responsible, while others are described as culturally deprived, troublesome and apathetic."

"Improperly assessed as to their ability and potential, these children can be expected to become frustrated and to express that frustration in delinquent behavior."

Third, Ms. Sarri cited a "major but unrecognized scandal, the exclusion of millions of children from school each year." Of the cases documented by the Children's Defense Fund, 75 per cent were from the 7- to 13-year-old group, and represented about three per cent of the total school age population for that age group, she said.

"NON-ENROLLED children were disproportionately from poor, minority and inner city families. The barriers to attendance included physical handicaps, mental retardation, poor language skills, misbehavior, and pregnancy."

Community conditions were the fourth factor cited. "The responsiveness of community agencies and institutions determines whether youth in trouble will be isolated within the justice system or will be helped toward a satisfying and conventional social life."

"Minors accused of engaging in deviant but not illegal behavior—particularly status offenders—could not be processed into the justice system without the consent, writing or otherwise, of professionals (for example, school psychologists) whom the public regards as experts in these matters."

"These persons know well why such youths have not and will not be adequately served through conventional agencies, including the schools," Ms. Sarri said. "They also should know, though many may not, what is and is not and cannot remedy the problems assigned to it, they are authenticating both its rationale and its operations."

Fifth, she said "decriminalization," "diversion" and "deinstitutionalization" are being discussed almost simultaneously with "deterrence."

Estate planning seminar nears

A course on estate planning will be offered starting Sept. 29 at The Community House in Birmingham, the Farmington Community Center and St. Joseph's Hospital in Pontiac.

"The Exciting Challenge of Estate Planning" will be open to the public at The Community House and the Farmington Community Center. Only members of the Oakland County Medical Society may attend the seminar in Pontiac.

"It's appalling to discover how many successful people die without wills," said Amy von M. Morse, originator and coordinator of the seminars. "If you don't have a will, or if it is not current, the results could be shockingly surprising."

"punishment" and "retribution."

"Almost no attention is given to the fundamental contradiction between these two paths," she said.

"COMMUNITY frustration at increasing crime may result in the waiver of more youth to adult courts for processing into adult correctional programs. In contrast to trends in most European countries, the United States appears to be blurring its distinctions between adults and juveniles."

Ms. Sarri is co-director of the National Assessment of Juvenile Corrections at the U-M, which "conservatively" estimates that the United States processes in excess of two million delinquency cases each year. On the average, 50 per cent are status offenders, detained for such acts as incorrigibility, truancy and running away from home.

"The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 mandates the removal of status offenders from correctional facilities within two years," she said. "Now there is real opportunity for school personnel to propose alternative mechanisms for serving such youth."

"TWO INTERRELATED elements should be included in a more effective

community response to youth needs and problems: the youth should have an increased role in decision making that affects them, and expanded choices in programs that deal with them, including educational programs."

"It seems a small price to pay given the nature of the present crisis."

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