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Date 6/30/78

THE ATTENTION HOME AND DROPOUTS IN HELENA, MONTANA

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if the young people who were residents of a group home, known as the Attention Home, felt that their experience at the Attention Home had helped them decide to remain in or return to school.

This was accomplished by having eighty youngsters, who had lived at the Attention Home in 1977, and who comprised eighty-nine percent of the total Attention Home population for that year, complete a questionnaire which produced the following information: 1. The grade level and sex of each participant; 2. The number of those who had dropped out or were planning to drop out of school prior to their residence at the Attention Home; 3. The number of those who were attending school after their stay at the Attention Home; 4. The influence the Attention Home had on their decisions to remain in or return to school; 5. Their general attitudes towards school; 6. The reasons why they had dropped out or were planning to drop out of school; 7. The reasons why they felt the Attention Home had or had not influenced their decisions regarding school attendance; 8. The reasons why they felt as they did about going to school.

Percentages, means, medians, and modes were used to analyze the material obtained from the questionnaire. These statisics were presented in tables, which were followed by an explanation and a paraphrased summary of similar narrative responses.

The most important results of this study were: 1. Seventy percent of those studied had dropped out or were planning to drop out of school prior to their residence at the Attention Home; 2. Over ninety percent were attending school after their residence at the Attention Home; 3. Seventy percent agreed that their stay at the Attention Home had helped them decide to remain in or return to school; 4. Eighty percent felt that school is important because an education is necessary in order to get a good job.

After analyzing the statistics and the narrative responses to the instrument, the researcher concluded that the services provided by the Attention Home do help reduce the dropout rate. This is so, because the Attention Home is supportive of youth and the Attention Home staff is very effective at pointing out the relationship between education and employment.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The youth of America are this nation's greatest resource, and many of them are experiencing problems that adversely affect school attendance. Many programs have been initiated to help keep young people in school, but most of these programs are concerned with school related problems such as boring curricula, lack of career preparation, poor attendance policies, and poor discipline policies.

The subject of this study, however, was to determine the effectiveness of a group home in preventing dropouts. Its effectiveness was evaluated by analyzing the perceptions of those juveniles who had been residents of the group home during a specific period.

The group home used in this study was the Attention Home located in Helena, Montana, a city of approximately thirty thousand people. The Attention Home itself was a large, detached house in a residential section of the city.

Troubled youth were given shelter in a positive, home-like atmosphere until they returned to their homes, alternate placement was found, or the court placed them in a detention facility.

Sixty-eight percent of the Attention Home residents were placed there by the court for a variety of reasons (17). The remainder sought residence in the Attention Home voluntarily.

While residents of the Attention Home, the youngsters were expected to help maintain the house by doing various chores such as washing dishes, dusting, and cleaning rooms. These youngsters received positive reinforcement for their smallest successes and reasonable punishment for their offenses. They were not ridiculed, rather, they received support at every turn. They also received counseling from a variety of sources. This kind of help ranged from family help clinics to drug abuse programs.

Consequently, because the Attention Home acted as a youth advocate trying to help young people solve or cope with their problems, it may have also been serving as a dropout prevention program.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem of this study was to determine if the young people who were residents of the Attention Home during 1977 felt that their experience at the Attention Home had helped them decide to remain in or return to school.

NEED OF STUDY

This study of the Attention Home and its relationship to the dropout problem in Helena is needed to assess the role of the Attention

Home in the educational system.

The Attention Home has been evaluated several times in its function as a runaway house and as a place in which to house youngsters awaiting placement by the courts or social service agencies; however, there has never been any evaluation of this program as it relates to the dropout problem.

James S. Gordon has shown that group homes which provide youth advocacy programs, similar to those provided by the Attention Home, have been very successful in dealing with young people who had run away from home or who had been threatened with some form of institutionalization (6,7,8). It was felt by this researcher, and by those whom he consulted, that it would be valuable to know if the youth advocacy programs offered by the Attention Home had any effect on the dropout rate as well.

QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

The questions to be answered by this study were:

1. What were the grade level and sex of the Attention Home clients to be studied?

2. How many Attention Home clients during 1977 had dropped out of school or were planning to drop out of school and the reasons for their plans or decisions?

3. How many Attention Home clients during 1977 returned to or remained in school and the reasons for their decisions?

4. How many Attention Home clients during 1977 had not remained in or returned to school and the reasons for their decisions?

5. What were the attitudes of the Attention Home clients during 1977 toward school and the reasons why they felt this way?

GENERAL PROCEDURES

The problem of this study was solved by hand delivering the instument, a questionnaire, to each participant in the study and then returning a week later to retrieve the completed instrument. This method was used to assure an adequate return of the instrument only after it had been determined that this method would not adversely affect the validity of the study.

Statistics obtained from the instrument were computed and presented in tables containing percentages, mean, median and mode. Each table was followed by an explanation of the table itself, and by a paraphrased explanation of similar narrative responses.

LIMITATIONS

This study is limited in several ways. First, only clients of

the Attention Home during 1977 who were not placed in a detention facility following their residence at the Attention Home were part of the study. Second, only the perceptions of Attention Home clients were part of the study. Third, this reseacher was prevented from obtaining the specific reasons why each youngster was a resident of the Attention Home, due to confidentiality constraints.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms were employed as an aid to more unified communication:

Attention Home. The Attention Home refers to a large, detached house located in a residential section of Helena, Montana. It is operated by Attention, Inc., Lewis and Clark County, Helena, Montana through the First Judicial District Probation Office. Attention, Inc. is a locally formed, private, non-profit organization which employs qualified houseparents who are aided by a part-time director (17).

The Attention Home provides troubled youth with:

1. An alternative residence for those who would otherwise be placed in jail while awaiting adjudication and disposition of their cases;

2. A stable, supportive, home-like environment for those who have experienced severe family disruptions or inappropriate institu-

tional placements;

3. A stable, supportive, home-like environment while social workers evaluate their situations and seek appropriate placement (17).

The Attention Home provides attention rather than detention for periods of generally twenty to thirty days. This short-term crisis care combines the efforts of private citizens with those of traditional private and governmental youth-serving agencies to help youngsters cope with their problems (17).

Status Offenders. This term refers to juveniles who commit such crimes as truancy, curfew violations, ungovernability and running away from home. None of these offenses results in detention for an adult, only for juveniles.

Attention Home Clients. This term refers to juveniles who were residents of the Attention Home.

Youth Advocacy Programs. This term refers to programs that offer juveniles a wide range of support and services in attempt to help them solve their problems.

SUMMARY

Helena, Montana, like the rest of the nation, has a problem of premature withdrawal from school. The Attention Home, though not specifically designed to prevent dropouts, may actually reduce the

number of dropouts as a result of its advocacy activities on behalf of Helena's youth.

Consequently, this study was begun to determine if the clients of the Attention Home, themselves, felt that their experience at the Attention Home influenced their decisions to remain in or return to school.

The data for this study were obtained from a questionnaire which was completed by eighty-nine percent of the clients of the Attention Home during 1977. The information was then compiled and presented in tables containing percentages, mean, median and mode. Each table was then explained and similar narrative responses were grouped together so the researcher could write one statement that was synonomous with each group of similar responses.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In reviewing the literature concerning group homes and the dropout problem, the researcher was unable to locate any information that directly related the two. Consequently, the researcher used sources that illustrated the role of group homes in areas closely related to the dropout issue.

In order to present the information in an orderly fashion, the review of literature has been divided into a discussion of the following topics:

1. Characteristics and causes of premature school withdrawal;
2. Dropout prevention programs;
3. Juveniles and the law;
4. Runaways and group homes;
5. History, development and need for group homes.

CHARACTERISTICS AND CAUSES OF PREMATURE SCHOOL WITHDRAWAL

The dropout problem in the United States is extremely serious. Howard and Hill have estimated that in 1975 approximately twenty-five percent of this nation's students were not graduating from high school (11, 12).

This is deplorable and potentially dangerous in a society which provides free education to enrich the lives of its citizens to help make them productive individuals able to intelligently participate in the democratic process of government.

Many people have attempted to isolate the cause of dropping out of school, but most researchers agree that it is difficult to pinpoint, with any great validity, any specific characteristic that applies to the majority of dropouts. Martins stated in 1972 that "dropping out of school is seldom an isolated act; it is generally the final act of deviant behavior" (15: p. 11).

However, in 1966, Greene analyzed dropout studies conducted between 1900 and 1965. He concluded that most dropouts are males between fourteen and eighteen years old who have poor academic records (9). Although Greene was able to categorize dropouts, he was unable to identify any single most important cause for dropping out of school, and he agreed with Martins that dropping out of school is not an isolated act (9).

Although no single cause for dropping out of school was isolated, all the studies examined by this researcher concluded that most dropouts are members of families that do not provide love, affection, understanding and support which are essential to normal development. They all concurred that when this happens, security becomes much more important than reading, writing and arithmetic

Friedenberg, Hill and Ward insisted that more resources must be directed toward improving the stability of the family if the dropout problem is going to be solved (4, 11, 19). Promoting family stability through counseling and youth advocacy is one of the principal functions of the Attention Home, and as a result may reduce the dropout rate.

Another frequently mentioned cause for dropping out of school was boring and irrelevant curricula. Howard went so far as to suggest that it would be cheaper to overhaul the traditional structure of schools than to absorb the loss of earning potential of the dropout (12).

This may be so, but all those studied, including Howard, felt that it would be foolish to isolate one aspect of the problem for attention when the problem seems composed of so many parts (12: p. 23).

Certainly, the schools should do all they can to provide a quality education in a healthy atmosphere, but as Greene pointed out, the dropout problem is also a community, home and government problem. these sections of society have a responsibility to aid the schools in their quest for a solution (9).

It is through and with these elements of society that the Attention Home worked. The Attention Home arranged for individual and family counseling for its clients, and aided in alternative placement if family problems could not be resolved. The community was used as a

source of volunteers and funds for the Attention Home, while various government agencies provided funds and services.

Consequently, the Attention Home, though not organized as a dropout prevention program, was viewed as possibly reducing the number of dropouts as a result of its operation as a youth advocacy program, which utilized the support of individuals, the community and the government.

DROPOUT PREVENTION

There have been many programs developed to keep youngsters in school. Most of these programs have been directed toward making school more appealing to the students (16). These attempts have resulted in greater course selection, alternative schools, schools within schools, revamped attendance and discipline policies and other similar programs. These efforts have all met with varying degrees of success, but the purpose of this paper did not involve the restructuring of school. Consequently, the dropout prevention programs mentioned here relate specifically to the operation of the Attention Home.

Decisions to dropout of school have caused the greatest public and private concern, because there is generally greater crime, drug use, unemployment and general alienation from society among dropouts (11).

This concern has been translated into a variety of programs. Hill reported in 1975 that one such program involved a new approach to career education, which encouraged students to remain in school to increase their ability to cope in the world of work (11). Howard pointed out that eighty-nine percent of the students he studied were interested in school primarily because education was related to employment (12: p. 5). The Clayman and Richardson study and the Breglio study stated that this employment related interest in school should be translated into programs that increase the awareness of the value of education in securing worthwhile employment (1, 3).

One of the primary goals of the Attention Home was to help its clients cope with their various problems, which, in part, meant pointing out the value and relationship of education to employment (17). In doing this, the Attention Home might have reduced the dropout rate.

A dropout prevention program located in Chicago, Illinois studied by Buckner was strikingly similar to the Attention Home program.

The Chicago program "emanated from concern expressed by educators and civic leaders over the need for rechanneling the energies of the potential and the identified dropout and delinquent into positive endeavors beneficial to the person and society" (2: p. 2). This concern was echoed by E. Wayne Phillips, Director of the Attention Home, who said that the Attention Home was generally formed for the same purpose (17).

Those who participated in both programs were also very similar. They were students who exhibited disruptive behavior, were chronically truant, poor achievers in school, and students who had run away from home or who had run afoul of the law (2, 17).

The objectives of the Chicago program also paralleled those of the Attention Home and they were:

1. The reduction of truancy;
2. The reduction of delinquency;
3. The reduction of hostility;
4. The improvement of school achievement;
5. The development of a more positive attitude toward school;
6. The development of a closer relationship between child and parents;
7. The development of a closer relationship between the school and the home (2, 17).

Buckner stated that, "These centers are not concerned only with therapy and rehabilitation, but also with the change and correction of the social situation contributing to the creation of the problem" (2: p. 5). Once again, this feeling was shared by Phillips (17).

To accomplish these objectives, in the Chicago program and in the Attention Home program, the community organization approach was used to strengthen supportive services from the following institutions:

1. The home;

2. The school;

3. Social service agencies;

4. Law enforcement agencies;

5. Community and private organizations (2, 17).

This approach brought the talents and energies of many different individuals and organizations to bear against the problem, which, according to Gillespie, is the only way the dropout problem can be solved (5: p. 17).

The Chicago program, according to Buckner, (2) has achieved very encouraging results, and though there were differences, the Attention Home program was the same in its approach, clientele, and objectives. Consequently, this indicated the possibility of similar results.

JUVENILES AND THE LAW

"Approximately three percent of the youth population exhibit behavior that lead to their appearance in juvenile court" (14: p. 395). This fact translates to mean that more than one million juveniles appear in court every year.

Until recently, children were not given legal safeguards by the courts; they were jailed, and many times they were denied adult legal rights (10, 14).

Fortunatley, the courts have evolved as social service agencies

in an attempt to help rather than punish the juvenile offender, and as such, the disposition of each case is extremely important. For example, in the case of a runaway from home, the court will often times refer a juvenile to a group within the community where..."individual and family counseling, tutoring, and job finding assistance is provided" (14: p. 397). In the case of the juvenile who is truant from or incorrigible in school, the court will generally respond by placing him on probation or by referring him to community agencies for help. In both cases, services are normally provided to alter the conditions that brought about the unacceptable behavior. In instances where the home is found to be a major part of the problem, the court will often times refer a juvenile to a group home, where he is allowed to stay until a suitable solution has been developed (14).

As Kirk pointed out, the courts, in many areas of the nation, have changed their position regarding juvenile offenders, but this is not the case in all parts of the country (14). Some courts do not have access to group home services and there is no alternative to incarceration. In these areas, the more traditional remedies are applied to juvenile offenders, namely probation and jail.

Although many courts act as social service agencies on behalf of the juvenile, the laws in most states, when applied to juveniles, are still so broad that almost any child could be charged with delinquency. Many times these youthful status offenders may by ... "charged with

delinquency for acts which are not crimes for adults, for example, incorrigibility and growing up in idleness" (10: p. 41). Certainly, these situations should be dealt with, but as Kirk has noted and as the courts have directed, incarceration is not the answer except... "in the interest of public safety" (14:p. 398).

Kirk cited Pennsylvania Act Number 333 as a step in the right direction. This act was designed to... "preserve the basic unity of the family whenever possible and to provide for the care, protection, and wholesome mental and physical development of children" (14: p. 398). This would be accomplished through programs of supervision, care and rehabilitation rather than punishment.

The Congress of the United States, as stated by Kirk, also noted the problem of young legal offenders when, in its introductory remarks to the Juvenile Justice Act of 1964, it stated that many youngsters may become deliquent because government failed to provide effective services (14).

Presently, the government is doing something to provide services for juveniles; government is beginning to provide attention rather than detention.

RUNAWAYS AND GROUP HOMES

This section of the review of literature discusses the growing

problem of runaways and some of the successful methods used to deal with this problem. The information contained in this section comes from the work of James S. Gordon, who is a research psychiatrist for the Center for Studies of Child and Family Health of the National Institute of Mental Health.

Each year approximately one million young people run away from home. Gordon found that many were accepted by runaway homes where they were able to live in a non-threatening, supportive atmosphere (8).

Gordon also found in his research of runaways, that ninety percent of those who sought refuge in runaway houses cited family disorders as their principal complaint. He also noted that with proper individual and family counseling, most were able to return to their homes (8: p. 4).

Those who could not or would not return home were allowed to remain, and Gordon found that continued support by the staff proved to be economically valuable, because it eliminated the need for more serious institutionalization.

After completing his study of thirty-one runaway homes, Gordon suggested the following recommendations:

1. Encouraging runaway houses and other alternative services to expand the services they provide to young people, particularly in the areas of crisis intervention, family counseling, long term residential care, foster placement, community networking, and job training and placement;
2. Investigation of the ability of alternative services to work with seriously disturbed young people, to provide the kind of non-medical asylums which have been pioneered by the Philadelphia and Arbours Association;
3. Active encouragement of working relationships between

alternative services and other community organizations—police and fire departments, schools, Y's, social clubs, community mental health centers, welfare departments, etc.

4. Promotion of cross general alliances, i.e., working relationships between alternative services and the young people they serve and groups which meet the needs of young children and citizens.
5. Encouraging the use of alternative services models--small, flexible projects that meet people's felt needs on their terms --in other delivery systems.
6. Advocacy for decriminalizing offenses such as running away from home.
7. Inclusion of young people on Department of Health, Education and Welfare committees and task forces which are designed to investigate and design programs for youth and insistence on their participation on boards of federally funded youth programs.
8. Promulgation of Federal regulations which will permit runaway houses and other alternative services to retain the organizational flexibility which enables them to change to meet the changing needs of their clients (8: pp. 14, 15).

As Gordon has shown, runaway houses are performing a much needed function in society. They are successfully dealing with young people and their problems in a manner that is both healthy and economical, because they aid youngsters achieve emotional stability and they prevent institutionalization while providing a place to live.

HISTORY, DEVELOPMENT AND NEED FOR GROUP HOMES

Toward the end of the Nineteenth Century, three changes in the legal structure radically altered the position of the teenager in America. These changes included..."the passage of laws prohibiting child labor, enforcing compulsory education, and creating a juvenile

justice system" (7: p.40).

Prior to these changes, a young person was accorded the privileges of an adult, because he was usually working as an adult. If dissatisfied with conditions at home, a youngster was often able to receive comfort from an older member of the extended family or from some older member of the community.

This situation was changed, however, when the student lost his job, was compelled to attend school, and could be in jail for running away and incorrigibility (7).

"These difficulties were compounded by rapid social and economic change" (7: p. 41). Young people were forced to achieve greater degrees of specialization and devote more years to prepare for a life that was becoming more and more foreign to their home and school experience (6,7).

At the same time, increased mobility began to destroy the extended family as people began to move more frequently in search of new opportunities. This separated the young from the background and tradition that had provided their parents with their beliefs. "Cut off from the past, isolated from their parent's lives as adults, adolescents found comfort and support from one another" (7: p.41).

As this was happening to the adolescents, their parents became increasingly alarmed at the change in their children's behavior and

attitudes. They began consulting professionals to explain this change, and this was regarded by adolescents as pointing the finger of guilt in their direction, and this increased their feelings of alienation (7).

If this were not bad enough, other people began to share the power structure of their parents. The police, school administrators, counselors, and teachers now possessed parental type power, and for many youngsters advocacy at home and at school was beginning to disappear (7).

Finally in the 1960's many young people in America had become disaffected and homeless as they reacted to America's foreign policy, the seeming indifference of the government to human domestic problems, and the attraction of living an independent life (6: p. 18).

From this tumultuous activity came local groups that were very responsive and respectful of the new youth counter-culture. Organizations were developed to provide food, housing, and medical and psychological services (6,7).

As the war in Viet Nam came to a close, so did much of the counter-culture, but alternative services thrived because their value to youth had been demonstrated. Communities and government at all levels began organizing to provide supportive services to adolescents and their families (6,7).

These child advocacy programs were built on a tradition that goes back to the Progressive Era, but the difference now is that there is a

new attempt to integrate these programs with other existing institutions such as schools, mental health clinics, and churches to provide the best possible service to American children (13).

Kahn, Kamerman, and McGowan stated that child advocacy is concerned..."with intervention into secondary institutions such as schools, juvenile courts, health programs and the like," and "because children are frequently shortchanged by American society, broad social action and policy intervention on their behalf are desperately needed and are of the highest priority" (13: p. 18). This impression is reinforced by Spencer, who quoted the finding of the Joint Commission on Mental Health of Children in 1970 that..."the nation as a whole has not accepted its responsibility for making the necessary supports and resources available to families who need them" (19: p.39).

As the research indicates, there is a growing awareness of the need for advocacy programs of all types, but especially of the group home variety.

SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the literature concerning the relationship of dropouts to group homes, but because no information could be found directly relating group homes to dropout research, the chapter was divided to relate group homes with topics closely related to the

dropout problem.

The research pointed out that approximately twenty-five percent of this nation's students did not graduate from high school in 1975. The research also showed that there is no single cause of this problem.

The importance of family stability was illustrated as was the need to involve the community and the government in the effort to reduce the dropout rate.

Several studies of dropout prevention ideas and programs were examined and it was learned that vocational awareness has been successfully used in dropout programs.

A successful dropout program in Chicago was also examined, and the researcher found many striking similarities between this program and the Attention Home program.

The role of group homes in dealing with juvenile legal offenders and runaways was also examined showing the importance of group homes to youth who encountered these problems.

Finally, the history, development and need of group homes was analyzed, and it indicated the need for more group homes to help deal with this nation's troubled youth.

After reviewing the literature this researcher concluded that group homes, such as the Attention Home, might help reduce the number of dropouts through their advocacy programs on behalf of America's youth.

Chapter 3

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the general procedures used to solve the problem of the study, and will include the following topics:

1. The population of the study;
2. The categories of the study;
3. The method of collecting data;
4. The method of recording data;
5. The questions to be answered by this study;
6. The analysis of the data;
7. The precautions taken to insure the accuracy of the data.

POPULATION

The population of this study consisted of eighty juveniles who resided at the Attention Home at some time during the year 1977, and who were not placed in a detention facility following their residence at the Attention Home. These youth accounted for eighty-nine percent of all the Attention Home clients of 1977.

CATEGORIES OF INVESTIGATION

The major category of this study was the perceptions of Attention Home clients regarding the relationship of their stay at the Attention Home to their decisions to remain in or return to school, and how many had or had not actually returned to or remained in school.

An examination of their general attitudes toward school was also determined, as were the numbers of those who had dropped out of school or who were planning to drop out of school.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The data for this study was obtained from a questionnaire which utilized a five point Likert response mode, yes and no responses and questions designed to provide information as to the age and sex of the respondent. The Likert response mode was given a numerical value ranging from five for those who strongly agreed with the statement to one for those who strongly disagreed with the statement.

The questionnaire also asked for narrative responses which enabled the researcher to determine why the questions were answered as they were.

The reliability of this instrument was determined by using the test-retest method. Thirty former Attention Home clients completed the questionnaire twice with a three week interval between the completion of each questionnaire. This produced a reliability

coefficient of .97.

The validity of the instrument was determined by having it analyzed by the researcher's Graduate Committee Chairman and by five other professional educators.

METHOD OF RECORDING DATA

The data obtained from the questionnaire were computed to obtain percentages, means, medians, and modes. Percentages were used to analyze two groups of responses.

These statistics were presented in tables followed by an explanation of the table. Narrative responses were then grouped together according to similar meanings and were presented as a paraphrased statement written by the researcher to explain why the questions were answered as they were.

QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

The questions to be answered by this study were:

1. What were the grade level and the sex of each subject in the study?

2. How many individuals surveyed had dropped out of school and why did they act or feel as they did?

3. What were the general attitudes of each individual surveyed toward school and why did they feel this way?

4. How many Attention Home clients attended school after residence in the Attention Home?

5. How many individuals surveyed returned to school or remained in school as a result of the care they received at the Attention Home?

ANALYSIS OF DATA

As it was explained in the Method of Recording Data section of this chapter, the information obtained from the questionnaire was computed to provide descriptive statistics which were presented in tables followed by an explanation of the tables. The narrative responses were grouped together according to similar interpretations to better explain the tables.

PRECAUTIONS TAKEN FOR ACCURACY

All statistical work in this study was reviewed and checked by three persons, other than the researcher, to insure accurate statistics. All the narrative responses were reviewed by three persons, other than the researcher, to insure a uniform interpretation of these responses.

SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the procedures used by this researcher to determine the relationship between the Attention Home and the dropout problem as perceived by the Attention Home clients themselves.

The nature of the study was investigative, therefore, descriptive statistics were computed from the instrument and were then presented in tables followed by explanations of the tables.

The test-retest method was used to insure reliability while validity was insured by having the instrument reviewed by six professional educators.

Statistical accuracy was insured by having all calculations and narrative responses reviewed by three persons, other than the researcher.

Chapter 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA

For the purposes of this study, relating the perceptions of Attention Home clients to the dropout problem in Helena, Montana, eighty Attention Home clients completed a questionnaire designed to answer the questions previously listed in this paper. The respondents accounted for eighty-nine percent of the total number of Attention Home clients who lived there during the study. The remaining eleven percent were placed in a detention facility following their residence at the Attention Home.

The information is presented in the following manner:

First, with the exception of grade level and sex information, the statement is written as it appeared on the questionnaire (see appendix).

Second, a table containing the appropriate statistics is provided.

Third, an explanation of the table is given.

Fourth, when applicable, similar narrative responses to the questionnaire are grouped together and the researcher wrote a single explanation for each group. The frequency of similar narrative responses is provided in the parentheses at the end of each statement. These explanations are presented in order to better explain each table by illustrating why the subjects of this study answered the questions

as they did.

GRADE LEVEL AND SEX

Sex/Grade	Number	Percentage
Male	48	60
Female	32	40
5-6	3	3.75
7-8	22	27.50
9-10	48	60
11-12	7	8.75

The subjects of this study ranged from the fifth through the twlfth grade, with sixty percent being in either the ninth or the tenth grade.

There was no significant difference in the responses according to grade level or sex, except that six of the seven who were not attending school were males in the eleventh or twelfth grade.

STATEMENT ONE

Before living in the Attention Home, I had dropped out of school or I was planning to drop out of school.

Yes	No
70% (56)	30% (24)

Seventy percent of the Attention Home clients surveyed said they were not attending school or were planning to drop out of school. Eleven had been kicked out of school, thirty-two had dropped out of school voluntarily, while thirteen said they had planned to drop out of school.

Eight of the eleven who had been kicked out of school cited poor attendance as the reason, while three had been kicked out for violating school rules.

The researcher is uncertain if the non-attendance at school was temporary as in a suspension or permanent as in an expulsion, but since expulsion requires action by the school board, he feels that most were probably suspended temporarily.

The thirty-two students who had dropped out of school gave a variety of reasons for their actions. Twelve said they found school boring and no fun. Thirteen responded that they were failing most of their courses so they quit going to school. Three of these students added that they quit school because they hoped to enroll in a new alternative school recently opened by the school district. Finally, seven left school to seek employment.

Seven of the remaining thirteen who planned to drop out of school cited boring classes and poor grades as their reasons for wanting to quit. Six said that no one cared if they attended school, so they did not feel compelled to go.

Those who were attending school and had no plans to leave also had a variety of reasons for their responses.

Seven of the thirteen said their friends went to school so they were not going to quit. Five felt that school was worth attending because it was hard to get a good job without an education. One responded that he enjoyed school and hoped to become a teacher.

STATEMENT TWO

I am now attending school.

Yes	No
91.2% (73)	8.8% (7)

Over ninety-one percent responded that they were attending school. This represented a twenty-one percent increase over those who had dropped out of school or who were planning to drop out of school.

The relation of the Attention Home to this statistic is provided by the response to Statement Three.

STATEMENT THREE

My stay at the Attention Home helped me decide to remain in school or return to school.

Response (Scale 1-5)	Number	Percent
5 (Strongly Agree)	32	40
4 (Agree)	24	30
3 (Undecided)	8	10
2 (Disagree)	16	20
1 (Strongly disagree)	0	0

Mean	Median	Mode
3.9	4.18	5.0

Seventy percent either strongly agreed or agreed that their residence at the Attention Home did help them decide to remain in or return to school. In fact, the most frequent response was to strongly agree with the statement, given the value five on the Likert Scale.

Central tendancy, as expressed by the mean and the median, reinforced the conclusion that the Attention Home did aid its clients' decisions to remain in or return to school.

Those who strongly agreed with Statement Three listed the following reasons:

1. My stay at the Attention Home showed me the value of an education in obtaining a good job (eighteen).

2. My stay at the Attention Home helped me solve my problems (eighteen).

3. The houseparents helped me get back into school (four).

4. The Attention Home helped to reunite me with my family (two).

Those who agreed with Statement Three gave the following reasons:

1. My stay at the Attention Home showed me the value of an education in obtaining a good job (thirteen).

2. The houseparents helped me get back into school (four).

3. The houseparents helped me with my school work, and they got my teachers to help me (four).

4. My stay at the Attention Home helped me to solve my problems (two).

Those who were undecided about Statement Three gave the following reason:

1. I do not know if it helped (eight).

Those who disagreed with Statement Three gave the following reasons:

1. I returned to school to see my friends (eight).

2. I did not go back to school (eight).

3. My sister talked me into returning to school (one).

STATEMENT FOUR

I think going to school will help me lead a more productive, happier life.

Response (Scale 1-5)	Number	Percent
5 (Strongly Agree)	48	60
4 (Agree)	28	35
3 (Undecided)	0	0
2 (Disagree)	4	5
1 (Strongly Disagree)	0	0

Mean	Median	Mode
4.25	4.79	5.00

The responses to this statement showed that ninety-five percent of the subjects of this study felt that school was important in improving the quality of one's life. Again the most frequent response was strongly agree.

Only four subjects disagreed with the statement and none of them were attending school at the time.

Those who strongly agreed with Statement Four relating school to a happier, more productive life listed the following reasons:

1. An education will help a person get a good job (forty-two).

2. School teaches a person many different things that will help him later (four).

3. You meet many people in school and develop new friendships (two).

Those who agreed with Statement Four listed the following reasons:

1. School will help a person get a good job (twenty-two).
2. You meet many people in school (two).
3. You meet many people in school and you make new friends (two).
4. School is fun (two).

Those who disagreed with Statement Four listed the following reasons:

1. School does not teach you anything you need to know (two).
2. School is a waste of time when I could be out working (two).

SUMMARY

This study of the perceptions of Attention Home clients relating their residence at the Attention Home to their decisions to remain in or return to school proved that the Attention Home did indeed influence the dropout rate in Helena, Montana. Seventy percent of the study group said that prior to their residence at the Attention Home they had dropped out of school or they were planning to drop out of school. Over ninety-one percent, however, were attending school following their stay at the Attention Home, and seventy percent indicated that their stay at the Attention Home had helped them decide to remain in or

return to school. Over half of those who strongly agreed or who agreed with the statement relating Attention Home residence to their school attendance decisions said that their experience showed them the importance of an education to obtaining employment. Others cited the help and support of the houseparents as the principal reason they remained in or returned to school.

The overwhelming majority, ninety-five percent, also responded that school is important to the quality of life, and eighty percent said they felt this way because an education is needed to get a good job. The others indicated that friendships and variety of knowledge were the principal reasons why going to school is important.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to determine if living in a group home, known as the Attention Home, had any effect on the dropout rate in Helena, Montana. This question was answered by having eighty-nine percent of the Attention Home clients during 1977 complete a questionnaire, from which percentages, mean, median and mode were calculated. These statistics were presented in tables followed by an explanation of each table and a paraphrased statement of similar narrative responses.

In reviewing the literature, the researcher found that approximately twenty-five percent of the nation's students do not graduate from high school, and this problem is very difficult to solve because it is so complex (11, 12).

The researcher also learned that to solve the dropout problem individual, community, and governmental involvement is needed to support the stability of the family and to provide support for troubled youth.

The research also pointed out that group homes, similar to the Attention Home, have been very successful in dealing with young people

who had runaway from home, who had run afoul of the law, or who had been threatened with some form of institutionalization. Consequently, it was felt by the researcher and those who urged him to write this paper, that the Attention Home might help reduce the dropout rate as a result of its function as a youth advocacy program.

CONCLUSIONS

The problem of this study was to determine if the young people who were residents of the Attention Home in 1977 felt that this experience had helped them decide to remain in or return to school; and it is agreed that the services provided by the Attention Home do help reduce the dropout rate.

Seventy percent of those surveyed had either dropped out of school or were planning to drop out prior to their residence at the Attention Home, but over ninety-one percent were attending school after their stay at the Attention Home, while seventy percent said their experience at the Attention Home had helped them decide to remain in or return to school.

Most of the respondents said that relating the importance of an education to employment was the greatest help provided by the Attention Home, while others cited the comfort and support of the houseparents as the reason for their remaining in or returning to school.

The researcher also found that ninety-five percent of those studied felt that school is important to a person's happiness and productivity. Once again, the overwhelming reason for this was the importance of an education in obtaining employment. Also mentioned were the facts that education provides a person with useful skills that will be used throughout life, and that going to school afforded the opportunity to meet people and develop new friendships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of this study the researcher suggests the following recommendations:

1. That more financial aid be given to the Attention Home;

2. That programs be initiated to inform the general public and the educational system in Helena, Montana, about the function of the Attention Home and its role in the community;

3. That a liaison officer between the Attention Home and the Helena schools be appointed to accomplish two goals: (a) to identify troubled youth and refer them to the Attention Home, and (b) to assist those youth who want to remain in or return to school;

4. That the services and facilities of the Attention Home be expanded in order to serve more youth;

5. That the services provided by the Attention Home be closely monitored to maintain the effectiveness of their programs.

APPENDIX

INSTRUMENT

Please circle the appropriate response.

Current grade level - 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Male Female

I am now attending school. Yes No

Please circle the letter or the word which, in your opinion, best answers the statement. Then, in the space provided, please explain why you feel this way. Use the other side of this page if more space is needed.

1. Before living at the Attention Home, I had dropped out of school, or I was planning to drop out of school. Yes No

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

   SA - Strongly Agree
   A - Agree
   U - Undecided
   D - Disagree
   SD - Strongly Disagree

2. My stay at the Attention Home helped me decide to remain in school or to return to school. SA A U D SD

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. I think going to school will help me lead a happier, more productive life. SA A U D SD

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

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