

CHIMO YOUTH RETREAT CENTRE
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PHILOSOPHY

By recognizing the needs of young people today, Chimo offers an alternative to the institutions by providing a warm and positive home atmosphere while at the same time not isolating the young person from the community at large. Chimo often becomes a "last resort" agency flexible enough to handle a wide variety of problems related to youth.

The organizational purpose of the Chimo Youth Retreat Centre is to help young people to come to a life commitment, to find meaning in their lives, and to experience a community of friends with God as the "centre".

In order to fulfill this organizational purpose the Articles of Incorporation of the Agency state that it is the policy of the Board of Directors to: 1) Provide a residence for youths who cannot or will not return to their homes. 2) Provide counselling, therapy, etc. in order to assist youths to return to their homes, schools, and/or jobs. 3) Provide counselling, therapy, etc. to assist youths in understanding their home environments, and in adjusting their life styles to self selected goals.

HISTORY

The Chimo Centre concept arose in response to an expressed need by teenagers, parents, and persons working with both for more facilities to help young people to maturity and to help resolve family breakdowns.

Chimo began operation in the Fall of 1970. The emphasis of Chimo's activity changed from groups to individuals. But late in the same year it changed again from individuals to families. This extension was a result of experience demonstrating the need for active therapy involving the whole family, and the fact that the problems being dealt with by the Chimo Staff were increasingly being defined in terms of family relationships and the disintegration of these relationships. At this point energies were being directed toward "communication breakdowns", which were designated as the main underlying cause of the problems being dealt with.

Until the Spring of 1971 the Chimo Staff had been engaged in counselling and offering programs. It was soon discovered that in many instances of "family Breakdown" it was desirable for a teenager to temporarily leave the setting. (It has been observed that in several instances this course of action had positive results.) The Chimo Centre then began providing room and board facilities with live-in Staff Members who provide day to day supervision and operation of the Centre. Presently the Chimo Centre functions in this capacity, with the major concern being the reintegration of the young person back into the family through the use of counselling techniques. Chimo has also seen that there is a need to provide a "home base" for those young people who, otherwise, would not have one.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

At the present time Chimo has three houses. Chimo I serves as the intake and assessment house where the individual receives his or her orientation. Here the individual's expectations and responsibilities are clearly defined and large amounts of the individuals leisure time are structured. After a short time in Chimo I, (2 to 3 weeks), the individual may be moved to one of the other houses. At Chimo II and III help is offered in areas of fulfilling goals, responsibilities and communications as well as the individuals personal concerns.

All three houses are located in Edmonton, Alberta.

TARGET POPULATION

The Centre is a social service agency which provides residence for teenagers between the ages of fourteen and eighteen who are unable to live at home or on their own.

CLIENT POPULATION

Over the years Chimo's clientele has changed from groups to individuals to families. Today Chimo is concerned with all three.

Two years ago Chimo's clientele were mostly self-referrals - young people coming off the street seeking help and shelter. At this time the major problem was a breakdown in communication between the young person and the parents. Today, even though there are still some self-referrals, by far the greatest referrals are from other Agencies, the major ones being The Department of Health and Social Development, City Social Services, Hospitals (psychiatric wards), Probation Departments and parents. The result is

that Chimo is dealing with far more damaged youth and damaged homes. Many of the youth have had years of Foster Care, Psychiatric Care, Institutional Care, and in some cases, NO Care at all.

Taking a random sample of the youth who come to Chimo we find that some are mature and know how to take care of themselves. Leaving home is the only reasonable alternative to their problems. Others have problems that must be dealt with but are not ready to care for themselves for they have neither the knowledge nor the skills to do so. The majority of these youth need and want to return to a family setting - eventually. Still, other youth are severely disturbed after leaving a physically or psychologically brutal home, guided only by the instinct for survival.

Like a lot of young people many of the youth that come to Chimo are "young/old." Behind the mask of self-sufficiency there is a child who is growing up and still needs love, a home and limits set around him. They are struggling to find their own identities - trying on roles and different ways of relating to people.

A brief mention of the backgrounds of the individuals who come to Chimo will give an idea of the variety of home situations we are dealing with. Individuals come from economic statuses ranging from welfare to wealthy families. They come from homes that are either broken or stable; single parent families to step-parents to divorced parents; from homes where there is full employment or unemployment, or homes where one parent is absent for extended periods of time due to employment out of town; from homes of no religious influence to ones of fanatical religious pressure, or from homes where there is emotional disturbance due to alcoholism, drug abuse, mental illness and physical disabilities.

Due to the range in background of the individuals we, consequently, are faced with many different types of difficulties. Some of these are delinquency, truancy from school, lack of motivation, inability to handle leisure time - constructively, drug abuse, emotional and/or mental disturbance, difficulty in finding and keeping employment and lack of problem-solving skills.

PROGRAMS

Primarily, the Chimo Centre tries to become a positive influence in the lives of those who come for help. This orientation accomplishes two things: a) it provides an atmosphere that contrasts the negativity with which its residents were received elsewhere; b) it facilitates the development of faith and trust in the Staff - a necessary prerequisite to the implementation of successful counselling and therapy situations.

An attempt is made to restore the family relationship, whenever possible. Growth or change in both the teenager and the parent(s) is required if a reconciliation or mutually satisfactory agreement is to be reached. The Chimo Staff encourages both sides to change and grow through family discussions and encounters.

At Chimo a particular atmosphere, or environment, is created in which the resident can more comfortably and readily deal with his or her own problem. A primary aim of the Chimo Staff, in this respect, is the development of self-awareness in the resident and increased awareness of the parents. The Staff makes itself available to talk and listen to the problems of the individuals, and to some extent, serve as models for the residents. Much of the counselling that is done at the Centre is conducted informally, and often spontaneously.

Before a person enters Chimo (s)he is first interviewed by the Director and/or Staff. If it is felt that the Chimo Program can help the individual, and if there is room, he is then accepted as a resident. It is expected that each person go to the Mental Health Services Clinic for assessment to help the Chimo Staff become more quickly aware as to what the needs of the individual are.

Upon entering Chimo it is expected that each individual become involved in something. If the young person decides to continue or start school the Chimo Staff gets into gear and not only encourages the young person to carry through his decision but contacts all those concerned to help them understand the changes and inconsistencies that are going on in the life of the individual. If the person should decide to work help is offered to find work, and perhaps even job training. All residents are encouraged to develop and explore new interests so that they do not have so much idle time and fall into the trap of their old life style which caused them so much trouble and heartache.

The more structured activities of the Chimo Program include weekly "house meetings" where the operation and maintenance of the house is discussed, plus, under the supervision of a Staff Member, interpersonal conflicts are aired in a constructive manner. Another weekly group activity is the individual house sessions conducted by Psychologists from the Mental Health Services of Alberta. The theme and scope is a cooperative effort between the Staff and the Psychologists to meet the group needs of the respective houses. In addition to meeting the needs, a consulting Psychiatrist is available to provide assistance to the Staff and the residents on any difficulties that may occur.

Another phase of Chimo's services is the recreational program. This program consists of weekend retreats available to small groups, bi-monthly camping trips for the entire Chimo community, drama workshops, weekly sessions of arts and crafts, creative dancing and gymnastics. In addition informal sports are organized, which include baseball, football, floor hockey, volleyball and so forth.

An additional feature of Chimo's services is the "follow-up program". This program involves both informal counselling and referral. The informal counselling provides an on-going emotional support continuing the trust developed at Chimo and aiding the individual in coping with his present situation. Besides emotional support the referral system offers the young person help in discovering concrete solutions to practical problems. This entails help in finding jobs, in locating places to stay and providing information regarding schools and training programs. A side function of this same program is a follow-up survey which will be used in evaluating the effectiveness and need of Chimo services.

Chimo's flexibility allows it to develop and implement programs according to the changing needs of youth. In keeping with this concept Chimo is instituting a "Life Skills" course. Life Skills is a problem solving behavior - appropriately and responsibly used in the management of personal affairs (self, family, community, leisure and work). The idea originated from the discovery that upon leaving Chimo the youth had developed a certain amount of emotional maturity and stability. However, we found they lacked an ability to manage their personal affairs. Life Skills will help the youth acquire those skills needed to deal with their lives - more effectively.

STAFFING PATTERNS

Chimo looks for Staff who are able to relate well and understand the many problems the young people are faced with. Chimo relies mainly on residential counselling Staff to implement its residential programs. At each of the three residences there are two full-time Staff, one relief worker covering two of the houses. There is one person involved in family and follow-up work, two Life Skills coaches, a secretary and Executive Director. The Board of Directors handles long range planning and development of the Chimo Program.

Most of the Staff have some University training in the Social Sciences, several having the B.A. Degrees. Staff who do not have University training are hired on the basis of former experience in managing group homes and/or knowledge and experience of the "youth scene". The Life Skills coaches have completed the Life Skills training course offered by the Canadian Mental Health Association, which qualifies them as Life Skills Coaches. All personnel, while at Chimo, receive weekly "in service training" to equip them for their task. This will include counselling

techniques in individual and family therapy, crisis intervention as offered by the Staff Psychiatrists at the Alberta Mental Health Services Clinic.

PLANNING

Because of the many problems the individuals at Chimo are attempting to work out there is much "experimentation" in how we help the residents approach their difficulties. We are always investigating new ideas and new approaches. There is continual experimentation and change in both the residential and program planning.

INTEGRATION

Chimo does not propose to have a program of isolation, but wishes to work with all types of Agencies and Groups in the community. The Board of Directors consists of people from all walks of life and Agencies within the community. In order to discover and meet the needs of the young people we will use as many resources as possible - such as clinics, schools, hospitals, social service agencies, parents, Churches, institutions, counselling services, etc.

APPENDIX I

1. What is the "Life Skills Program"?

Life Skills training provides adults with the knowledge and skills to demonstrate competence in human relations and in areas of life responsibilities. Precisely defined Life Skills means: "problem solving behaviors responsibly and appropriately used in the management of personal affairs". A sequence of planned experiences help adult students to implement a program of personal development in the area of

- developing oneself and relating to others
- coping with home and family responsibilities
- using leisure time purposefully
- exercising rights and responsibilities in the community
- making responsible decisions for work future.

2. The Program

Four months in duration with a minimum of three hours per day - Monday thru Friday - the students are taken through some 60 structured lessons from which 91 specific Skills are developed. The Skills of the coach allow for some variation - dependant upon the needs of the students.

While specific skills are taught its content and methodology gives students a more realistic insight into their abilities and some of the skills to handle themselves in new situations. In other words it provides the students with the basic skills that equip them to cope more effectively with a wide range of situations that will affect them.

3. Who is Life Skills for?

Life Skills is a "mental health" program using an educational model. It makes no attempt to affect the pathology of illness. Individuals, demonstrating acute signs of mental illness with thought disorders of interfering psychotic behaviors, are not suitable candidates. The ability to concentrate for periods of time is important.

With the above exception Life Skills offers personal growth and development to people who demonstrate difficulties with

- communicating effectively with others - at home on the job or socially.
- poor motivation - appears to have greater potential than they have the confidence to reach for.
- self-perception - appears to under or over estimate their competence.
- confronting and dealing with problems - avoids action and lets other people determine their destiny or handles some problems repeatedly in an ineffective manner.

Candidates should:

- a) Accept the fact that they contribute, in some ways, to their difficulties, and have the desire to improve the way in which they deal with situations that lead to their discomfort.
- b) As anxious as they may be, they are prepared to commit themselves to the first three weeks of the program, after which they can back out if they feel it is not for them.
- c) Attend regularly. Active participation in time will come. If they don't attend regularly nothing can happen.
- d) Ability to tolerate a "group setting".

MS-90

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