

Foreword



The post-World War II era has witnessed a truly extraordinary increase in the number and diversity of human service agencies in the public and voluntary sectors. Accompanying this increase has been a growing literature on the nature and effectiveness of these agencies. The bulk of this literature must be characterized as spotty in terms of quality, comprehensiveness, and even relevance. It would not be unfair to describe it as largely anecdotal, leaving readers uncertain about how well goals have been achieved. Few descriptions or evaluations provide a rosy picture. Indeed, it is hard to escape the impression that, generally speaking, these new agencies, despite the best of intentions and heroic efforts, are far from meeting their intended purposes. Why this is so is usually unclear. Is it underfunding? inadequately selected and trained personnel? turfdom and bureaucratic entanglements? politics (local, state, and national)? misguided initial conceptualizations of the problems to be attacked? From the standpoint of these questions, the existing literature is not at all helpful. We do not know what we have or should have learned. It is also the case that this literature has had virtually no impact on policies, on legislation, or even on the continued existence of these human services agencies.

I have had countless opportunities to observe and consult with these agencies, and I have come away with several firm conclusions. The first conclusion is that, more often than not, the staff

of such agencies are young, hardworking, idealistic people. What they may lack in background or formal training is partially compensated for by motivation and creative maneuvering. The second conclusion is that these young people know that the policy rhetoric that justified the creation of the new agencies has slowly (and sometimes rapidly) transformed the agencies in ways antithetical to that rhetoric, with the result that staff morale has been weakened. The third conclusion is related to the second: the staff of these agencies understand that the implications of that policy rhetoric were never really thought through; since it was a rhetoric of virtue whose practical consequences were never systematically understood and confronted, when the rhetoric came face-to-face with social, political, and institutional realities, its emptiness became obvious. A fourth conclusion, one most relevant to the present volume, is that the leaders and staff of these agencies are very sophisticated about why the agencies are so deficient in meeting goals and being effective but are unable, unwilling, or too constrained to write about what they know and have experienced. They represent a kind of clinician-activist, not schooled to write up their experience for what it can tell us about the relationship between goals and practice in the real world, and yet what they can tell us is of vital theoretical and practical importance.

These conclusions explain my enthusiasm when I learned that David G. Blumenkrantz, long a warrior in the human services arena, had begun to outline a book on a new species of human service agency: the Youth Service Bureau, of which hundreds have been created in recent decades in communities around the country. Blumenkrantz, as a longtime director of such an agency in a city of modest size, was in a position to examine these bureaus in his own community and in others in his state and around the country. What is so refreshing is his awareness that the problems he confronted are common to these new community agencies. He has sought to understand why and how these agencies are not meeting their intended purposes. For example, they were created to devise and implement preventive programs, not to come up with "quick fixes" for problems that are already overwhelming and difficult, if not insoluble. They were intended as catalysts for proactive community efforts, as vehicles for involving the community and helping it use its re-

sources to prevent problems. But things did not work out that way, and David Blumenkrantz tells us why.

He does more than that, however. Several chapters of this book describe the Rite of Passage Experience (ROPE), a program explicitly preventive in orientation and requiring the participation of parents, schoolchildren, and school personnel. Blumenkrantz does not describe ROPE as a panacea; indeed, he tells about the obstacles that the program's implementation encounters in diverse communities and about the conditions that must exist if the program is to have the desired effects. ROPE is an example of what could and should be done to give a Youth Service Bureau a truly community-oriented, preventive character.

One of the distinctive features of this book is that it is written in the first person, which allows us more than a glimpse of a bureau chief struggling with pressures, crises, and community politics as he tries to be true to his vision and values and see beyond today in a particular community while exposing his own frailties, anxieties, and passions. If we had more such accounts from people on the firing line in our human services agencies, we would stand a better chance of making practice more consistent with policy rhetoric. Academics have written much about policy and values, and many have written up their evaluations of these agencies. But precisely because they are not on the firing line, they cannot know or use the phenomenological substance and context of those whose lives center on practice, and without that substance and context, their evaluations ignore crucial data that should inform change.

This is far more than a book about Youth Service Bureaus. It is a book relevant to the policy arena, to community resources and involvement, to issues of primary and secondary prevention, to public schools, and to the ubiquitous problem of individual behavior in bureaucratic settings.

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