

# SSWAG

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION OF GEORGIA

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## *Historical Moments*

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### **2026-27**

- 2026-27 SSWAG President- Erin Woodcock, Effingham County (District 1).

### **2025-26**

- 2025-26 SSWAG President- Corey Lowe, Walker County (District 7)
- 2025-26 SSW of the Year- Angela Denise Gay, Clarke County (District 9)
- 2026 Spring Conference- March 23 - 25 at Chateau Elan in Braselton, GA.  
Theme: *Rooted in Resilience: Reclaiming Wellness for Ourselves and our Schools*. This is the first time we used an app for all things spring conference, including the program. There were, however, hardcopy booklets for the *conference awards banquet* and the *membership milestones recognitions*. Pins were presented for new, 5-yr, 10-yr, 20-yr, 25-yr, and 30-yr memberships
- Mar 25, 2026- First class of Social Work Legends were introduced to the SSWAG body during spring conference. Two will be selected each year and this year's recipients were given a bouquet of flowers. President Lowe will present them with awards at their school districts for this recognition.
  - Kristen Braid, Cartersville City Schools
  - Alicia McClung, Fulton County Schools
- Dec 3, 2025- The US Department of Education made public its intention to define advanced nursing, social work, allied medical degrees, among others as being "non-professional" education. NASW sponsored a petition for Social Work to continue to be recognized as a Professional Degree
- 2025- SSWAG seized the opportunity to advocate for an additional \$5 Million in the FY2026 budget under the Dept. of Education. Tyler "TJ" Kaplan, a public affairs strategist, lobbyist for Inseparable, and managing director at the J.L. Morgan Company, was instrumental in securing the FY 2026 CCR for HB68 funding, which expands SSW services in small and rural districts. To date, \$7.5M in funding has been secured, including \$2.5M in the FY2025 legislative cycle and the \$5M in the FY2026 legislative cycle. These funds have directly supported 22 school districts that previously did not have access to SSWs, thus helping to close critical service gaps for students and families. Mr. Kaplan has continued his work in collaboration with our new lobbyist, Andy Lord, and is currently hard at work to secure funding for FY2027
- 2025- Virtual Fall Institute- November 14. Theme: *What's on Your Radar?*

- Nov 2025- Established a new lobbying relationship with Georgia Capitol Solutions, Inc with Andy Lord
- Sept 15, 2025- Dissolved SSWAG's lobbying relationship with Nelson Mullins

### **2024-25**

- 2024-25 SSWAG President- Crystal Wright, Bibb County (District 6)
- 2025-26 SSW of the Year- Laura Etheridge, Barrow County (District 9)
- 2025 Spring Conference- March 5 – 7 at Great Wolfe Lodge in LaGrange, GA.  
Theme: *Bloom in Any Room*
- SSWAG Awards Catalog was created to disseminate information to members about all award categories and the nominating processes
- Dec 8 - 9, 2024- SSWAG members represented the organization at the Biennial Institute with Nelson and Mullins in Athens, GA
- Dec 4, 2024- SSWAG members represented the organization at the GADOE Attendance Summit in Atlanta, GA
- 2024- Virtual Fall Institute- December 1. Theme: *Tech Savvy Practitioners: Changing the Future of School Social Workers*
- Oct 18, 2024- SSWAG members represented the organization at the NASW/ASWB Forum in Atlanta, GA
- Sept 6, 2024- SSWAG coordinated state-wide SSW crisis response and grief support to the Barrow County community

### **2023-24**

- 2023-24 SSWAG President- Dr. Jacqueline Brown-Pinkney, Effingham County (District 1)
- 2024-25 SSW of the Year- Petrina Fowler, Cobb County (District 5)
- 2024 Spring Conference- March 26- 29 at Atlanta Evergreen Lakeside Resort, Stone Mountain, GA. Theme: *Rise Up and Thrive with Resilience and Professional Efficacy*
- Mar 28, 2024- The Public Relations Committee added the subcommittee, Tech Titans, which will use audiovisual media to chronicle SSWAG events.
- Jan 16, 2024- The E-Board sanctioned a video showcasing the diverse and unique work of SSWs was presented at this E-Board meeting. The video was produced by Lansing Productions
- 2024- SSWAG Committee launched a new evaluation tool tailored to the unique work of School Social Workers. President Brown-Pinkney invited SSWs from Bulloch, Clarke, Dalton, Effingham, Glynn, Gwinnett, Henry, and Rockdale to participate in a pilot program to be the first to use it.

- 2023- Virtual Fall Conference was November 10. Theme: Leadership Through the Social Work Lens



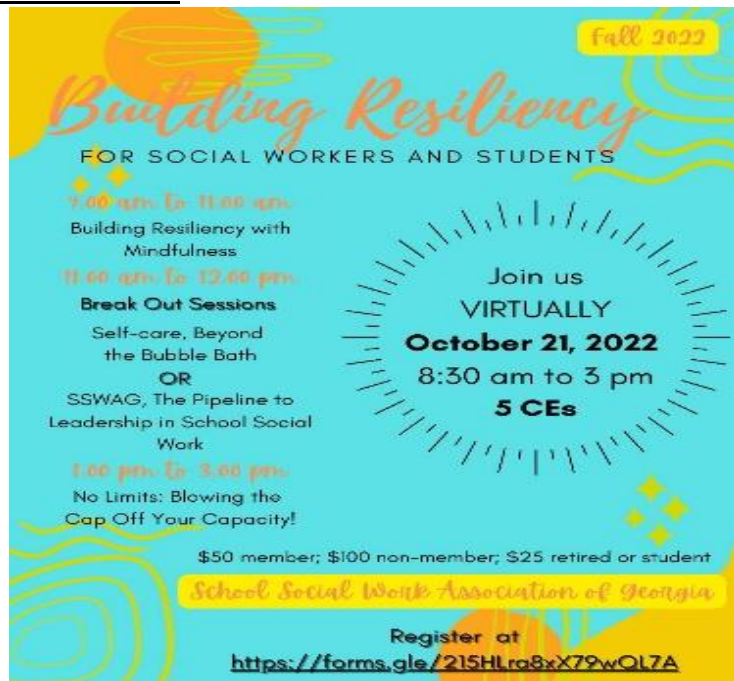
- Nov 30, 2023- Announcement: SSWAG member, Sandra Wilcher, was appointed Superintendent of Schools for Lowndes County Schools. She is believed to be the 1st SSW appointed to such a position in Georgia's history. Sandra was a dedicated SSWAG member. She was awarded SSWOTY in her district and made valuable contributions to SSWAG while serving on the Executive Board  
<https://www.facebook.com/100064781406737/posts/pfbid06E6uEEN8Gz9Cp2NgFswRkkk8zrzEsu6jSSP8Z5mXzS1EwvSADJNP1H4YCH2bUz7JI/?mibextid=16gGtw>
- Sept 2023- Kennesaw State University invited 6 SSWs (2 rural, 2 urban, 2 suburban) to assist/advise with the development of a SSW course that prepares KSU students in innovative ways. Additionally, they are seeking a SSWAG member to teach the course
- May 2, 2023- Announcement: Dr. Denise Scott, a former SSW was appointed Assistant Superintendent of Student Services in the Bryan County School District
- Sept 2023- PAGE Legislative Survey seeking SSWs input that serves to shape PAGE Advocacy

### 2022-23

- 2022-23 SSWAG President- Dr. Jacqueline Brown-Pinkney, Effingham County (District 1)
- 2022-23 SSW of the Year- Kashera Guy Robinson, Clayton County (District 4)
- 2023 Spring Conference- March 29- 31 at The Westin, Jekyll Island, GA. Theme: Realigning Social Work Skills and Values with the Needs of Our Students and School Communities.  
 This is the first year SSWAG used an app, created by Daniel Rivera, to deliver all conference data, including the official agenda.



- Jan 2023- The SSW Lead Program was launched to empower and support SSWs in their journey towards becoming influential leaders in the field. It is open to Georgia SSWs
- 2022- 2023- The 1st *SSWAG You Make a Difference* Scholarship recipient is Ottoria Foreman
- 2022- SSWAG returned to in-person spring conferences after the Covid pandemic. Conference held on Jekyll Island, GA in collaboration with PAGE (Professional Association of Georgia Educators). This collaboration marked a significant reconnection between the two organizations, as PAGE had not been actively involved with SSWAG for quite some time
- 2022- Board achievements included: a facelift of the SSWAG website; update of the Procedural Guidelines and Strategic Plan; Press conference at the State Capitol; the *SSWAG You Make a Difference* Scholarship was chartered; membership reached 315; and GA SSW Dr. TerriylN Rivers-Cannon (District 4) was elected SSWAA President
- 2022- Virtual Fall Conference was October 10. Theme: *Building Resiliency for Social Workers and Students*



### 2021-22 (and previous years)

- 2021-22 SSWAG President- Dr. Katina Cooper, Effingham County (District 1)
- 2021-22 SSW of the Year- Dr. Jacqueline Brown-Pinkney, Effingham County (District 1)
- 2022 Spring Conference- March 15- 18 at The Westin, Jekyll Island, GA. Theme: *75 Years of SSW: Now What? From Healing to Thriving*
- 2021- GaDOE hired SSW Specialist, Dr. Lindsey Oliver and SSW moves to the Office of Whole Child Supports
- 2021- The Impact of Trauma on Students in Foster Care (HB 855) passes
- 2021- New website host <https://www.sswaga.org/>
- 2020- With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, GA SSWs had to pivot and reimagine SSW in the virtual world. Conferences went virtual
- 2019- National SSWOTY awarded to Atlanta Public Schools SSW Dr. TerriylN Rivers-Cannon
- 2018- Governor Nathan Deal appoints SSW Dr. Jackie Brown-Pinkney to the GA Composite Board of Professional Counselors, Social Workers and Marriage and Family Therapists
- 2017- SSWAG logo change under the Presidency of Dr. TerriylN Rivers- Cannon

- 2015- SSWAG Mentor Program chartered under the Presidency of Dr. Chiquetta Thompson and Dr. Jackie Brown-Pinkney was appointed chair
- 2014- 2015- For the spring conference, Dr. Renee Glass-Dixon collaborated with GADOE to fund the first collaborative SSWAG and School Counselors conference
- 2007 Spring Conference, 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary 1947- 2007- March 21- 23 in Savannah, GA.  
*Theme: School Social Workers: Solid as a Rock*
- 2006- 250 SSWAG members
- 2005- SSWAG redistricting: The combined 3 & 6 District opted to separate and District 8 divided into two separate districts
- Updated the practice manual issued to members
- 2005- SSWAG redistricting: The combined 4 & 5 District opted to separate. The action resulted in two different SSWAG Districts
- 2003 Spring Conference- April 30 - May 2 at Jekyll Inn Oceanfront Resort, Jekyll Island, GA.  
*Theme: School Social Workers: Speak Out for the Children and the Profession*
- 2000- Governor Roy Barnes lowered the SSW to student ratio from 1: 3300 to 1: 2475 as part of HB 1187. Gov. Barnes also signed the SSW week proclamation. SSWAG created its first organizational website. President William Clinton renamed Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act to McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Act to honor both major supporters of the act
- 1999- SB101 proposed by Senator Madden to increase the number of SSWs for remedial education- it was passed by the Senate and House, but removed from the budget
- 1998- Sandro Blalock (Tift Co. SSW) was appointed by Gov. Zell Miller to be a member of the Children's Trust Fund commission. Membership pins distributed for the first time. GAE proposed to lower the SSW to student ratio in their legislative agenda
- 1995- SSWAG adopts a new organization symbol. The new SSWAG logo was voted on by the membership. SSWAG Executive Board votes to hire an Executive Secretary. American actor, producer and social activist Danny Glover defended SSWs in a rebuke to a speech made by a representative of GA's Department of Education
- 1994- SSWAG, Inc. receives tax exempt status. Don Lyons receives the Elsie Nesbit Friendship Award. 1994-Georgia SSW delegates sent to Illinois to discuss formation of School Social Workers Association of America (SSWAA)
- 1993- SSWAG is officially incorporated and becomes SSWAG, Inc. thanks to the volunteer efforts of Judge Johnny Warren of Dublin, GA
- 1992- School Social Workers had a major regulatory victory when the Federal Register published the Department of Education's revised regulations to Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and NASW was successful in persuading the DOE to withdraw the proposed deletion and maintain the title, *social work services in schools*
- 1991- There were 222 certified SSW and 142 Attendance workers employed by the state of Georgia. Gov. Zell Miller signs the 1st GA proclamation recognizing March 18 - 22 as School Social Work week
- 1990- HB677 gains approval from the GA House and Senate with support from Dewayne Hamilton
- 1989 (spring)- Dr. Gail Kurtz provides leadership training to the SSWAG Executive Board and a mission statement is born. *"The School Social Workers Association of Georgia exists to*

*improve the quality of services to the students so as to enhance their individual and educational potential.*" (fall)-18 representatives from 6 states (GA, KY, NC, SC, TN, VA) met at the Knoxville airport Ramada Inn in Alcoa, TN to form the "Southern School Social Work Council." The purpose of this new organization was "to promote professional excellence among those who practice School Social Work in order to enhance the quality and delivery of School Social Work services in educational systems"

- 1988 (spring/fall)- SSWAG voted to increase membership dues from \$20 to \$30; there were 131 SSWAG members. The Georgia Department of Education projects included: creation of a video tape on School Social Workers in Georgia; the development of a SSW referral/reporting form; and finalization of a SSW job description. SSWAG voted to employ a lobbyist. There was a presentation of the School Social Worker Evaluation Instrument (SSWEI) by Robert Newton at the SSWAG Spring Conference
- 1987- Membership count of 156 and President Ronald Reagan signed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act into law to address the growing homeless population of women and children
- 1986- SSWAG voted to increase membership dues from \$15 to \$20. Position statements were written on homeschool, dropouts, and teen pregnancy. There were 187 paid SSWAG members
- 1985- A Memorandum of Agreement was signed between Georgia Association of Educators and SSWAG
- 1984 (summer)- Implementation of School Social Worker of the Year Award
- 1983- SSWAG President Randall Smith signs a resolution requesting that Georgia legislators revise the 1945 Compulsory School Attendance Law to make it congruent with existing laws and educational needs of the state
- 1978- The Georgia Visiting Teacher Association renames itself the School Social Workers Association of Georgia (SSWAG). This change reflected a new emphasis on Social Work in the school setting
- 1971- The African-American and Caucasian VT/SSW associations merged into the Georgia Visiting Teacher Association. This was prompted by the merger of their affiliates, the Georgia Educators Association and Georgia Teacher and Educator Association, into the Georgia Association of Education (GAE)
- 1964- African-American and Caucasian VTs/SSWs began to interact when UGA permitted both races to join forces for training and certification
- 1956- Mary Calhoun, an Albany VT, was chosen Dougherty County's "Woman of the Year"
- 1955- There were a total of 144 paid members in the GAVT. The Visiting Teacher.... In GA, the first publication to specifically assist VTs in GA was published by the State Board of Education Co-Authored by Elsie Nesbit, Visiting Teacher Lee County Schools, Leesburg, GA, and Florrie B. Still, Coordinator GA Visiting Teacher Service State Department of Education Atlanta, GA
- 1954 (fall)- Florrie Still, Hall County VT, was appointed to the staff of the GaDOE as Coordinator of Visiting Teacher Services
- 1953- local systems were given the freedom to choose for the first time whether or not to continue the VT program. The program was continued with 150 county school systems and 25 independent school systems

- 1950- Paul West, Superintendent of Fulton County Schools stated that, “the VT is, in reality, an indispensable liaison between the school and the community and is in a unique position to help both. As such, she is one of the most important people on the school staff.” In August, a committee comprised of Dorothy Lester, Katherine Walker, and Elsie Nesbit met with Dr. Collins (GaDOE Superintendent) to express the need for a state DOE consultant for the Visiting Teacher Program
- 1949- Dr. Collins, State Superintendent in speaking to the Economic Committee, of the tax revision committee, on behalf of GaDOE stated “we believe it is good judgment to spend a few thousand dollars in prevention rather than missions in penal custody, rehabilitation and public assistance” in response to the value of VTs
- 1948- The second annual conference of Visiting Teachers was held in Atlanta with 125 (VTs) in attendance. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) compiled the VT’s data from across the state and found that 5399 referrals were made monthly as well as 1303 students enrolling in school for the first time
- 1947- The first Statewide Visiting Teacher conference was held in Atlanta. The Georgia Association of Visiting Teachers (GAVT) was formed, but membership was limited to Caucasians. GAVT was organized as an affiliate of the Georgia Education Association (now known as the Georgia Association of Educators). The same year the Visiting Teachers Association of Georgia, an affiliate of the Georgia Teacher and Educators Association was organized for African-American Visiting Teachers
- 1946 (fall)- 40 Visiting Teachers (VTs) assembled at the University of Georgia and organized themselves into districts
- 1937- A State Board of Education, to be composed of laypersons rather than professional educators, was established to oversee and coordinate the delivery of education
- 1916- Georgia’s first major statewide education initiative where the General Assembly enacted legislation making school attendance compulsory for all children between the ages of eight and fourteen

**Appendix A**

**The Visiting Teacher...in Georgia**

**THE VISITING TEACHER  
... IN GEORGIA**

*Works With The Child,  
School Personnel, Parents,  
And Community, To  
Help The Child . . .*

**Published by  
The State Department of Education  
Atlanta, Georgia**



.... an important visitor for Georgia's children: the Visiting Teacher

THE VISITING TEACHER  
... IN GEORGIA

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## **The Visiting Teacher and Georgia's Children**

The child—whoever he is, wherever he is— is the focus of all our efforts in the Georgia school program.

The Visiting Teacher has done a remarkable job in helping the Georgia child. Our Legislature in 1945 wisely passed the new Compulsory Attendance Law. The Visiting Teacher program was started to make this law effective. Her job was not just to check absentees, but to find the cause, and help solve the problem back of it all.

Everybody in the school program in Georgia has the same purpose: to help the child be his best and do his best.

No group makes a finer contribution toward this than our Visiting Teachers.

They work with the child, his family, and his community to relieve the pressures, lessen the emotional tensions, and suggest solutions for specific stresses that might handicap him. Their way is to help the child help himself. They reach out to steady him, to strengthen him, and to help him find self-reliance.

Their work is not well known to the public. This is largely because it has to be confidential if it is to be of real value. These wise and well-trained people work quietly. Their competence and concern reassures the child and his family; their efforts strengthen the school program and give it more value to the community.

Their work has been recognized as one of the effective helps in preventing juvenile delinquency. It has strengthened the holding power of the schools. It has changed many a frustrated child and parents into happier, better adjusted persons. The service promotes mental health. It has promoted better family relationships and more efficient classroom work.

We have sound reasons to be genuinely proud of the achievements of Georgia's Visiting Teachers. We need more of them. IN there is one in your community, you can help by giving her your warmhearted, appreciative support. If there is — not one, consider with your neighbors and school leader the good you could do your community's children by providing them with the understanding counsel of a visiting teacher.

I hope you will read this bulletin. I am confident that in its pages you will find a better understanding of what the Visiting Teacher Service means to the school program in Georgia.



M. D. Collins, State  
Superintendent of Schools

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## A Better Understanding of This Service

### Why This Bulletin Was Written

State-wide visiting teacher service was established in Georgia in 1945. Since then much work has been done in local, district, and state groups to clarify the function of the service as an integral part of the total school program. However, very little has been written, and most interpretation has been given by word of mouth. So, like any other such communication, it has been understood differently by different people. One would assume, then, that the local meaning of the service has been largely dependent upon its interpretation and use in the local school system.

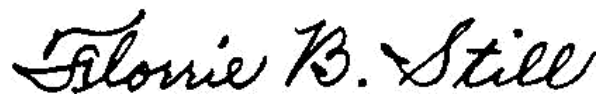
The State Board of Education in the beginning set forth over-all policies to regulate and give direction to the development of this program. These policies in general have remained unchanged. It is now deemed good that a more specific description of the service be made available on a state-wide basis to all who are concerned with the use of this service. Such a description can be of value to school administrators as they plan for a more effective visiting teacher program in their system. It can enable parents to become better acquainted with one of the services the school offers.

Classroom teachers will find it helpful in planning the best use of a school resource for the benefit of the children in their care. This material should enable community agencies and other non-school personnel to understand better the purpose and plan for work in which the visiting teacher operates within the school. A better understanding of the service may inspire suitable young people to enter a program which renders a specific service of far-reaching implications to individual children.

The philosophy of the service as given in this material is not limited to Georgia, but is found in any good visiting teacher program. In all states which have such a program leaders are working toward the common goal of providing a better and more uniform service. In this bulletin we have tried to bring together the general philosophy, purpose and plan agreed upon not only in Georgia, but throughout the nation.

I wish to thank Miss Nesbit for her fine contribution to our state program through the time and effort given to this publication. Her work makes this publication possible.

The pictures were made by the Audio-Visual Service of the State Department of Education. Helpful teachers and Department staff members posed for them. For this cooperation we are appreciative.



Florrie B. Still, Coordinator  
Georgia Visiting Teacher Service

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## CHAPTER I

"Our *and* our,  
*goections*"

### What IS The Visiting Teacher Program?

Over and over the questions are asked: What is a visiting teacher? What does she do? This description is an attempt to answer these questions by looking first at the service as a whole and then at some of its specific features. One theme is predominant—the service is not an appendage to but an integral part of the school.

The visiting teacher works on an individual basis with children, their teachers, and their parents. The focus of the work is always on the child. The work is with children who find it difficult to come to school or to participate in a satisfactory way when they do come.

The service does not cover all school problems, nor all problem of children. Scores of problems are handled daily in the classroom with no need for other help, and community resources are used to help with problems for which the school is not responsible. The service does not duplicate or relieve other school personnel of their own duties. It is not for discipline nor for academic teaching but for helping children solve their problems.

Compulsory school attendance laws make the school responsible for teaching all children who are educable. This challenges the school to fit the curriculum to the needs of all children rather than to attempt to fit the children to the curriculum or to allow them to drop out as misfits. Yet, there are many children who are unable, for various reasons, to take advantage of what is offered them even in the most adequate curriculum. These are the children with whom the visiting teacher works. She offers one of the services which assist classroom teachers in their duties of teaching all children.

Along with all other school personnel, the visiting teacher represents the positive and constructive aspects of the school to the child. They believe in the rightness of school for children and in helping to make the school a happy place for them. In spite of cartoonists who still liken the opening of school to a cactus bed into which the child falls helplessly, school people believe that the child who is happy, who can manage his own problems with minimum adult assistance, will find satisfaction in school. The visiting teacher is one of the people who can help the child learn how to manage himself if he finds it difficult to do so alone or with the help which his teacher and his parents give him.

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*'Organization makes  
the difference"*

### **How is The Program Organized?**

The many facets of the visiting teacher program can be compared to a jigsaw puzzle. Unassembled, the pieces seem to bear little relation to each other; assembled, each fits into the pattern. Organization makes the difference.

In the process of planning, duties are defined which serve as guideposts not only for the visiting teacher but also for others who use the service.

**A Place to Call Her Own.** The visiting teacher works in the entire school system or in certain assigned schools but should have a "home base" where she can be contacted or where messages can be left. It should be sufficiently private to allow for conferences and undisturbed work. Many records are of a confidential nature and should be kept locked.

In addition to a central office, interviewing space should be available in each school. A place to work in the school gives status to the visiting teacher and enables teachers and children to know where to find her. In crowded buildings this may be quite difficult, but the principal and visiting teacher should plan together to do the best they can. The corner of a hall, a book room, or a cleared-out storage space have been used when there was nothing better. In planning new buildings this need should be considered.

Circumstances in each local system will determine the amount of clerical help which can be provided. The more the visiting teacher can be relieved of routine duties, the more time she can have to work with children. Assistance in compiling statistical reports and typing records are two services which would help to make the program more effective. A dictaphone or other kind of recorder saves time and provides more adequate records if such equipment is available.

**A Plan to Use Her Time.** Though emergencies do arise, an orderly way of working is important. A schedule helps direct the visiting teacher's thinking and avoids the temptation to be guided by her inclinations day by day. To be sure, the varied nature of her work requires a schedule that is flexible. The same is true of the teacher. Because there is a class schedule, the teacher does not abruptly call a halt to all other activity at exactly nine fifty-two every day in order to begin arithmetic. The schedule in high school is of necessity less flexible than in elementary school but not as rigid as it might appear on first thought. It provides the time limits essential when a number of people must work together. The visiting teacher works with a number of different people daily, and a schedule provides a

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constructive use of limits for herself.

Planning her time enables the visiting teacher to do more and better work. If schools know when to expect her, referrals can be ready. A schedule is necessary in planning regular contacts with children and in making appointments for home or office visits.

**A Bird's Eye View.** In addition to her major duty of working with the children who are referred, there are other ways in which the visiting teacher functions as a part of the staff of the school. She may participate in faculty study groups. As one of the people who know the total school system, she is in a position to be of help in system-wide planning. She is definitely a part of the local teachers' organization and should take an active part. As a link between school, community, and home, she can be a valuable aid in promoting understanding in all these directions.

### **The School and Attendance**

Attendance problems are of major concern for the whole school. Truancy and non-attendance are no longer considered crimes but are known to be symptoms of trouble. Therefore, these problems are treated as other school problems are treated by—discovering the cause and helping the child find a more satisfactory way of handling it.

Attendance is the responsibility of the entire school and community. An attractive and meaningful school program, understanding teachers, positive attitudes on the part of parents and community in general toward school and school attendance, and economic security can do more to promote good attendance than mere enforcement of the law. These preventive measures are more effective than relying on the law; yet there is definite need for the law. Delegating responsibility to specific persons for carrying out the purpose of the law is needed to complete a well-rounded attendance program.

Attendance is a prerequisite to education. The child cannot be taught if he is not there, but his physical presence does not ensure successful learning. He can be mentally as well as physically truant. When difficulties become too great, the easiest solution sometimes is to leave. When parents do not understand or care, they need help in becoming more understanding. Handling these situations requires the same kind of skills the visiting teacher uses in handling any other school-connected problems of children.

Along with the importance of attendance is the importance of knowing all the children who should be in school. It is the responsibility of the entire school to keep the school census up to date, with the visiting teacher assisting in planning and coordination. Attendance measures are not as effective as they should be unless there are workable means of accounting for all children who should attend.

Treating truancy and non-attendance as symptoms of difficulty and considering attendance the responsibility of the whole community is a positive approach, while punishment is negative. School is a good place for children to be, and they will learn more happily and successfully when this is the prevailing community attitude. Yet, most schools and communities fall somewhat below this ideal. Not all children find school a good place to be nor do all communities cooperate so well. Children must learn to live with authority instead of in conflict with it. When parents do not themselves give to their children their right to an education, the State must do it for them. Visiting teachers or attendance officers are obligated by law to carry out this purpose. Their responsibility in enforcing the law will be discussed in a later chapter.

School attendance is a part of the accepted standards of society and those who ignore or defy this standard are paying a high price for their non-conformity. This suggests that the underlying causes must be of such intensity that the disapproval of society is risked. Having to be in school when everything seems to go wrong for him may make the child reel trapped and unable to escape. There may be fear of failure; but running away is not failure; it is escape. Hence, he may become truant. The child from an insecure home may feel that he is being rejected when he has to go to school while his younger brothers and sisters can stay at home. The demands of school may be too great for some children. There may be worry over events at home. Forgetting the child's rights, a mother might retreat into illness to keep her child at home. A father may feel that it is the duty of his children to work for him. These are examples of the need for careful study of the causes behind poor attendance. Truancy and drop-outs, as well as other school problems, may be prevented by detecting earlier and less serious symptoms of difficulty or maladjustment in school.

## CHAPTER II

*“An important word: referral”*

### **Which Children NEED Her Help?**

What is meant by a referral? It is simply the means by which the visiting teacher is notified of the children who need her help. She does not begin working with children on her own initiative without the knowledge of the teacher and principal. The referral implies a request for a definite service. If the visiting teacher knows of a child who seems to be having difficulty in school, she should discuss the matter with the proper person at school. Together they decide how the problem should be handled. The referral process is a vital part of the visiting teacher service. There is no ritual about it. The most convenient way of getting the child to the visiting teacher is usually the most satisfactory.

**Methods of Making Referrals.** What is the procedure for referral? Parents sometimes write a note or come to the school. Community agencies call the visiting teacher for a conference. Principals and teachers talk to the visiting teacher about a child or a family. Someone stops her on the street or in the grocery store to make a referral or to ask for information. All of these are natural means of communication. The fact of referral is more important than the method, but planning can make it more effective. Within the school, written referrals are more satisfactory. They do not take the place of conferences, but stating the problem in writing brings into focus the specific problem on which work should begin. Having written referrals placed on the principal's desk is a simple means of keeping him informed as to the children who are referred.

Plans can be worked out for mutual referrals with community agencies. From whatever source the referral comes, the visiting teacher should talk with the appropriate person at school before any plans are made to see the child.

### **Who Are These Children?**

Visiting teachers are not the only ones who help children with their school problems. Teachers and all other school personnel are doing it constantly. Some problems are resolved more satisfactorily in the group than individually. Others need individual help in addition to and different from that which the teacher gives. Those who are showing symptoms of social, emotional, or scholastic maladjustment come within the scope of the visiting teacher's responsibility to help. Deviation from normal behavior or behavior or performance as to the usual syzygoptoza.



... for the child In a big, bad world, a reassuring friend

The service should be available to all children when they need it just as health or other services should be available to all. Estimates of the possible number who may need such service from two percent to ten percent or more of the school population. The number who can actually receive such help depends on the number of schools and the enrollment served by one visiting teacher. The type of service, however, should not vary from large to small systems. It is better to limit the number served than to give a superficial service to many.

Troubled children have. What kinds of behaviors are signs of difficulty? It is not the ordinary mischief or temporary ill-temper which cause concern, but the chronic, unusual, or "different" emotion on the part of the child which cause trouble for himself or for the group. The timid, withdrawn child who sits

ignoring the group and ignored by it, may have a more serious

problem than the overly aggressive person whose behavior will not be tolerated by the group. The aggressive boy or girl is at least doing something to relieve the tensions, while the timid one may be retaining tensions within himself. Both need help to find acceptable ways of handling their problems.

Children who steal, lie, tell fantastic tales, quarrel constantly, daydream excessively, show off, carry a chip on the shoulder, sulks, have temper tantrums, pick on others, or are always at odds with the group are saying clearly that something is wrong and they need help. Laziness, indifference, shirking of responsibility, lack of cooperation, lack of dependability, impudence, and many other non-conforming attitudes are symptoms rather than diseases. They are the child's way of saying that everything is not right for him. He may not think there is anything wrong with himself but that the trouble is outside of himself in the school, at home, bad luck, or just the way the world is anyway. On the other hand, he may think that it is all because he himself is bad. In either case, he does know something is wrong whether he admits it or not. These are some of the children with whom the visiting teacher may help.

Others who need the service are those who are failing in schoolwork or making poor grades though they have the ability to do the work. All schools know of students of superior ability whose achievement is very poor. Something is interfering with the use of this ability. At the other end of the scale are children who become confused and discouraged because of the pressures of school to achieve more than they are able to do. And, in between the two extremes are many children who do not make the best use of their capacity for learning. The visiting teacher may help them make better use of their abilities.

There are various other reasons for referral to the visiting teacher. Many problems of children begin in the home but are reflected in the school. Parental neglect, indifference or hostility to school, economic strain or discord in the home affect the child's ability to use the school successfully. Truancy is a sign of a problem of long standing. It is running away, taking the easy way out of an intolerable situation. Not the truancy alone but what makes school intolerable is the concern of the visiting teacher. Delinquent behavior comes in the same category. Children who have lost faith in themselves or in adults need help desperately. Children who have been helped by the visiting teacher often tell others or ask if their friends can talk with her, too. Occasionally two or three students will ask to talk with the visiting teacher together about a common problem.

**These Things the Visiting Teacher Does Not Do.** Not all emotional problems are handled by the visiting teacher. Very

deeply disturbed children or cases in which the parent rather than the child needs casework service should be referred to a child guidance clinic, a family service agency, or a psychiatrist. The absence of a child guidance or mental hygiene clinic will influence to some degree the extent of working with emotionally disturbed children who can remain in school with some help. Decisions must be made on the merits of the individual case, considering all contributing factors. One visiting teacher, who was working intensively with a very seriously disturbed child because there was no other agency referral, asked for help from a psychiatrist in planning treatment. He agreed that the child was being helped slowly but felt that, even with long-term treatment, the outcome was doubtful. A wise suggestion was that it would be better for the visiting teacher to use her time working with those who had less serious problems and where much of her effort would be preventive. Spending long hours with one child who might never be able to use school effectively would leave many other children neglected, and with their problems becoming progressively worse. That did not lessen the need of the seriously disturbed child for help or the wish of his family for it, but it did help the visiting teacher face the reality of offering her service to the largest number of children possible.

Neither are all social problems handled by the visiting teacher. The relief of financial stress, poor or crowded housing conditions, lack of recreational facilities, the placement of children in foster homes, and many others are community problems to which she has a definite relationship but not primary responsibility. The visiting teacher refers such problems to appropriate agencies, if there are such, and, if there are not, recognizes the limits of her own job as helping children with their problems in school.

#### When Does She Refer to Community Agencies?

Frequently other community resources are needed in working out children's problems. Duplication and confusion for the child and his family should be avoided. Many times, more than one agency may be working with a family at the same time. In such instances, all those concerned with helping in the situation should formulate a plan of continued working together, agreeing upon areas of responsibility each will assume. For instance, if the child is referred to a child guidance clinic. The visiting teacher would help the family get there and begin using the service but would not thereafter continue working with the child on the same problem for which he was referred. She might keep in touch with him in the area of his school progress.

Large communities maintain a Social Service Exchange in order to avoid duplication of services. There should be a similar plan in smaller communities for the exchange of information and coordination of efforts. It is not good for families to have several agencies helping with the same or related problems nor for them to be able to make the same requests from several agencies.



THE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT—one of many community agencies that help the Visiting Teacher help the child to become a whole and wholesome personality

Each agency in the community has its own function and cooperative planning among all will mean better service for the people. When the visiting teacher knows the functions of all the agencies, she will know how to use the resources of her community to the best advantage. She will know where and how to refer families who need help. Likewise, when agencies know the function of the visiting teacher and the kinds of problems with which she can work, they can make appropriate referrals to her.

## The Visiting Teacher and Her Colleagues

Wherever people work together the "together" part of the relationship is as important as the "work" part. The school staff is a team and each member establishes his own relationships with all other members. Much could be said about the great importance of all these relationships. This discussion is limited to ways in which the visiting teacher "works together with" each member of the team. Ways in which her working relationships extend into the community have been noted in the previous chapter.



... the Visiting Teacher brings her faculty colleagues new understandings from the community

The visiting teacher needs to know and to be known by all other school personnel and to establish ways of working with them. She needs to know the limitations of their duties and they need to know hers. She needs to know the principles of working with other people and continually to examine her practice of

these principles. This is basic to all professional relationships. In addition, she must work out her relationships with other staff members in terms of their own particular functions and hers. '1'ho.:e are the working relationships which insure an effective program.

### **What's the Visiting Teacher Like as a Person?**

An examination of personal attitudes and motives is essential in working with others. It is not a personal service, but the visiting teacher does necessarily function as a person. Being professional does not mean being aloof and impersonal. It does mean that personal feelings, desires, and prejudices are not allowed to interfere with working relationships. The visiting teacher must demonstrate her right to acceptance and respect by giving service of high quality and by being the kind of person with whom others can work. She must be aware of the weaknesses of the school, but she must not lose sight of the fact that she herself is also a part of the school. For maximum effectiveness the visiting teacher must possess not only an understanding of the purpose and scope of the program of which she is a part but also have a genuine love for children and a full awareness of the value of this service to them.

The visiting teacher does not assume the role of any other person on the school staff. It is true that her role will be determined to a certain degree by other kinds of services available, but hour program cannot be expected to compensate for the lack of other facilities. For example, she cannot take the place of a school health nurse or a mental hygiene clinic. On the one hand, there must be reasonable limits to what she is expected to do regardless of other resources, and, on the other hand, there should be enough flexibility to allow for the best possible service to children in the local school system.

In allowing for flexibility in the visiting teacher's duties there is danger that the school may find itself with an errand girl instead of a professional worker. This can result not only from the many and varied requests of school personnel but also from the insecurity or the visiting teacher in the fear that she may not be able to establish a place for herself. Limitations will not prevent her acting on her own natural impulses of goodwill or giving freely of her time in an emergency as all conscientious workers do when occasion demands. The visiting teacher who has time to work for everybody else is saying that her own job is not so important. The one who cooperates generously as it fits into her schedule and does not take away from the total service to children is serving as a good member of the team.

All school personnel should share a mutual and not a competitive interest in children. The school exists for the child and not for the staff. Not the attitude, "This is my territory; you stay out!" but "How can we work together' to make the school a good place for children?" should be a professional motto. In such an atmosphere, which she has responsibility to help create, the visiting teacher can set up a good working plan.

#### **How She Works with the System Superintendent and Board of Education**

The administration sets the policies for the entire system, and the visiting teacher is responsible for carrying out those set for her own program. She is also responsible for making reports of her work to the local superintendent or board as well as to the state. When the types of duties are specified in detail, the responsibility is clear. When she is left to her own initiative except for very general policies, she still has definite responsibilities. She will need to make at least occasional reports of her activities, both statistical and narrative. She will participate in reports of the school system to the community, thus contributing to better understanding and good public relations. As there is need, she may want to ask the local superintendent or board of education for specific policies to guide her in certain kinds of situations. For instance, before she refers a case to court, she should know the attitude of the superintendent and board of education. Conferences with the superintendent or his delegated representative on matters of policy and general development of the program are important.

#### **How She Works with the Principal**

The principal is the head of the school and responsible for what happens there. All contacts with his school should be made through him or with his knowledge. The visiting teacher works in cooperation with him and as a member of his faculty when she is working in his school. He should be consulted about policies and procedures in his school and should be kept informed of progress in the areas in which the visiting teacher is working. He helps interpret the function of the visiting teacher to teachers and to the community and helps the visiting teacher know of referrals that should be made in his school.

Methods of referral should be agreed upon whether all should come through the principal or directly from the teachers. In either case, the principal should know which children are referred and why. He should know as to of continued work with these children because all plans for working with a child in trouble should be coordinated. With shared planning the principal, classroom teacher, and visiting teacher can work more effectively toward a common goal.

It is important for the principal and visiting teacher to work out together the best way to help all children in the school become acquainted with the visiting teacher in such a manner that she will be accepted as a natural part of the school and children will not feel embarrassed or reluctant to see her individually. This is a continuing process. Children should know that the visiting teacher is a part of the regular staff.

Any new plan or significant change in regular routine in a school which the visiting teacher wishes to make should be discussed first with the principal. He may have valuable suggestions to make or know of reasons the change should not be made. He may invite the visiting teacher to a faculty meeting where plans and policies can be discussed.



. . her friend, the classroom teacher,  
brings her fa another friend

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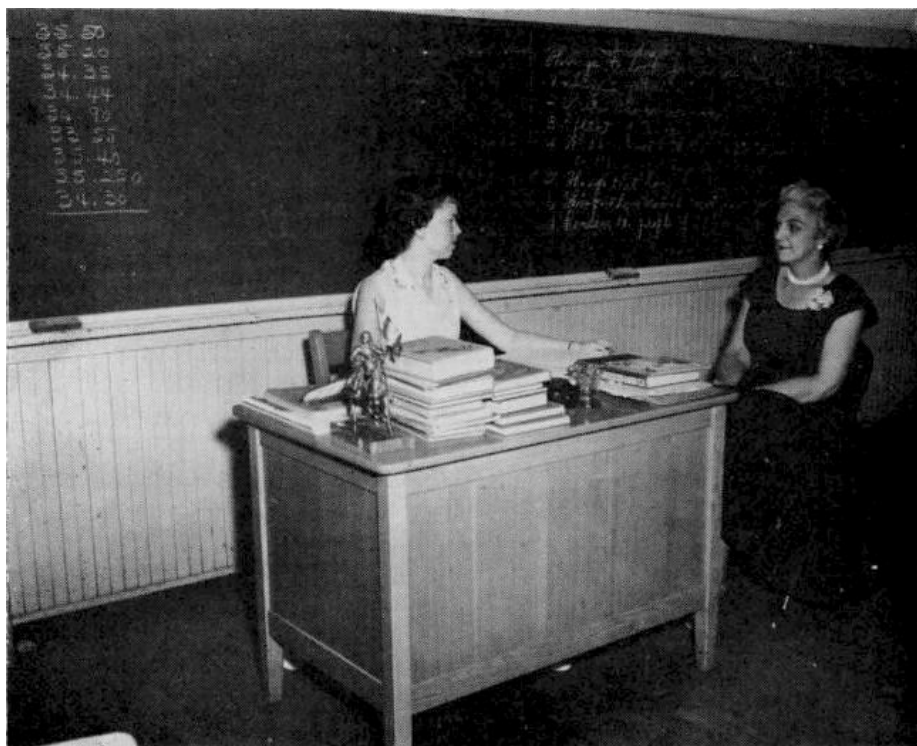
## How She Works with the Classroom Teacher

The principal is the key person in the school with whom the visiting teacher plans first for the whole school, and the classroom teacher is the key person to the children in her class. It is of the utmost importance that the visiting teacher work closely with the classroom teacher. This means that teachers must know referral policies and other plans for the visiting teacher's work in their school. All teachers need to know the service so that referrals can be made whenever necessary.

The teacher is the most important person in the child's school adjustment. The visiting teacher does not take the child away from the teacher nor does the teacher hand him over to the visiting teacher to solve his problem. While the visiting teacher must establish a warm relationship with the child in order to gain his confidence and help him, she also tries in every way she can to strengthen his relationship with his teacher. Her relationship is temporary and lasts only as long as the child needs her help, while the teacher lives with him day in and day out. When both teacher and visiting teacher have equal concern and an equal share in helping, the child derives the most benefit from the service.

**Conferences.** Since frequent conferences with the teacher are important as the visiting teacher works with the child, definite plans should be made for them. Interruptions of classes should be avoided as much as possible. Standing outside the classroom door is not the most satisfactory place for discussing a child or talking with a child. Face to face contacts mean more than written reports, though it may be necessary at times to report to the teacher in writing. Conferences are necessary to share information and plans.

**Sharing.** The sharing of information is an important matter. When all concerned with helping the child pool their knowledge, the best results are accomplished. If the teacher withholds pertinent information about the child, the visiting teacher will not be able to proceed as well or as quickly. When the teacher has shared information fully, she has the right to expect the same professional consideration she has given. She should be given pertinent information regarding a home visit or interview with a child as soon as possible. A referral is a request from the teacher for help in her own planning for further steps with the child as well as a request for additional personalized help for the child. The blending of the two purposes will result in the most benefit to the child.



.. the classroom teacher and Visiting Teacher share and plan in their joint responsibility — for a child

If the question arises as to the kind of information that should be shared. Should the visiting teacher report to the teacher confidential information a child's parent has asked her not to tell. It is obvious that one should not violate confidence: yet many times it is information that would be helpful to the teacher to know when the visiting teacher should talk with the child or parent about what the teacher needs to know in order to help the child. She should gain the child's or parent's consent. or if objections are raised, work with them about the importance of sharing information with someone else. If there is certain information which the teacher must know immediately, permission of the child is not asked, but the reason should be explained to him. It is better to proceed slowly than to destroy a child's faith in the person who is trying to help him. It is important for the child to know that his teacher, his parents, and the visiting teacher are working together to help him and that they must share information in order to help.

Sometimes the parent tells feelings to the visiting teacher which are not pertinent to the present problem, in which case it is necessary to mention them again, just as the teacher discusses

factors which need not be repeated to the parents. Sharing information does not mean telling everything that happens. Two rules can be of great help in deciding what to tell—reach agreement with the persons giving the information as to the part that would help in solving the problem, and use it in a positive way. Instead of saying, "The house is so dirty you could not expect the child to be clean," report that it is easy to understand the child's difficulty after seeing the house.

Basic to any policy of sharing information is that each party is the kind of person who can be trusted professionally. It is easy to understand why the teacher who asked for help in checking a malicious rumor about a high school girl decided never again to refer a case when the visiting teacher began to repeat it in the community. Also, a visiting teacher will carefully avoid giving any confidential information to a teacher who remarks, "If a mother won't do any better for her child than that, she need not expect me to try to help him!"

Deciding on Referrals. The teacher has a very important role to play in preparing the child to see the Visiting teacher. He should be told why he is asked to go, and the visiting teacher should be introduced to him as someone who is a friend and can help him. Discussing the problem with the child or saying to him that she thinks the visiting teacher might help find the cause of his problem in school will take him a long way toward its solution. The visiting teacher should never be used as a threat or a punishment. Ideally, the teacher and child decide together to ask the visiting teacher to help.

There is no reason for the teacher to feel that she has failed or that she is inadequate if she refers a child to the visiting teacher. It has been noticed repeatedly that the best teachers make the best referrals when they understand the function of the visiting teacher. Sensitivity to a child's needs and choosing the ones who need special help make of the referral process a professional skill. When a boy or girl shows special talent in music or art, the teacher tries to provide opportunity for growth in these fields. If a pupil seems to need glasses, she may refer him to the school nurse. When he is unable to make or keep friends, she may ask the visiting teacher to help him. Neither the teacher nor the visiting teacher can guarantee success. They do not do things to a child or for a child but help him work out things for himself. The child himself is the most important factor. One eighth grade teacher referred a boy because he was a perpetual annoyance and would not work. The best efforts of teacher and visiting teacher did not help him to change. Several weeks later his behavior and schoolwork suddenly became better; he had become interested in a classmate who encouraged him to conform to the standards of the group.

“He May Get Worse.” One important factor to remember, especially in serious problems, is that the child may get worse before he gets better. Talking about a difficulty makes it more acute but, at the same time, is the best way to face and overcome it. Understanding this will help teacher and visiting teacher to accept the regression and to continue to work with the child. For instance, the little girl who is stealing pencils may feel so guilty that she steals more often until she can understand herself and why she has adopted that kind of behavior.

In attempting to help a child the teacher and visiting teacher must consider the child's capacity to grow, to become more mature. Not every problem has to be solved with their help. As he learns to manage the one for which he was referred, he may gain understanding and experience to handle others alone. Some- times the healing power of time is all that he needs. Several months after active work has ceased, or after a summer vacation, the teacher may discover that he is like a different child.

While relationships with all members of the school team are important, the one most significant factor in helping a child is the working relationship between his teacher and the visiting teacher. Of equal importance to the child is the relationship established between the visiting teacher and his parents.

### **How She Works with Other School Personnel**

The basic principles of working with other school personnel are the same as working with principals and teachers. The supervisor, counselor, school nurse, psychologist, or any other member of the staff has his own area of work, limitations, and responsibilities. In working together to understand each other's duties, each talking his own part of the responsibility and clarifying matters that overlap, all will become a team. Bus drivers, lunchroom workers, building custodians, all who are a part of the school should be included.

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## Let's Get Down To Cases

### What IS Casework?

Casework is a specialized skill used to help individuals solve their own problems, a way of understanding and working with people in a one-to-one relationship. It is not merely gathering facts about someone in order to understand him better or giving information in order to help him. It is not going to the home to get information that will help the school or taking messages from the school to the home. It is the process of helping in which many techniques are used.

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### Ways of Working with Children

There are no sets of tools, no magic tricks, which may be called "techniques of casework." There are ways of working with people which have been found to be helpful. These methods are described in an effort to answer some of the questions and perhaps clear up some of the misconceptions about casework.

**The Interview.** Interviewing as a part of the casework process is a learned skill which is improved through study and practice. It is not "just talking" nor is it giving advice. Talking is the major means of communication used, but the talking has a purpose which both the visiting teacher and the child understand. There are many other means to communication which both use in the interviewing situation. The visiting teacher observes the child's mannerisms, facial expressions, posture, and general attitude. What he omits is as important as what he tells.

Whether he is habitually late or early for appointments is significant. With a child, the use of play materials helps in the expression of his feelings. He may act out what he is unable to verbalize, or he may be more at ease when his hands are busy. Noting what makes him appear anxious, change the subject, or stop talking is a useful technique. The more alert the interviewer is to all that is happening, spoken and unspoken, the better able she is to carry out her own part of the interview.

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**The Relationship.** Help and change take place through the skilled, sensitive use of the relationship between the two persons involved. The first steps in interviewing are planned to build relationship of mutual trust and confidence, of understanding and the freedom to express deepest feelings without fear of condemnation. The relationship is meaningful and very real to both. In this atmosphere the child is free to work on his problem and the visiting teacher is free to help him. It is something both use consciously and unconsciously.

The visiting teacher must be aware not only of her own use of the relationship but also of the child's use of it. As work progresses and the child faces his problem more and more deeply, varied reactions are likely to occur, such as dependence on the visiting teacher, hostility, rejection, guilt feelings, or others. Description and explanation will not give the full meaning of the relationship. It must be experienced to be known fully.

**Acceptance.** Acceptance is of major importance in the case work process. The visiting teacher accepts the child as he is, begins working with him where he is, and proceeds at his own pace. She does not judge him by her own standards but allows him to be himself. Acceptance must be real and sincere; there must be genuine liking for the other person. It is entirely possible to like a person whose standards are not accepted and whose behavior is not approved. With a child, especially, it is of the utmost importance to let him know he is liked whether his behavior is accepted or not. The child will know it if the visiting teacher does not like him. Friendliness and a non-judgmental attitude are essential in helping.

**Other Techniques.** There are other important techniques in casework service. Listening while the other person tells his story in his own way is valuable. Knowing when and how to ask questions is one of the most important. The interview is not a quiz. If certain information is needed, the child should know what it is and why, also how it will be used. Gathering information which is useless is a waste of time and may be harmful to the child. The visiting teacher does not probe into the child's own private affairs or his feelings by asking questions which are irrelevant to the situation or which he is not yet ready to answer. If he is pushed too fast, he may break off the relationship and leave his source of help. There must be a sincere desire to understand and help him, a feeling which will be communicated to him in all that the visiting teacher says and does.

The helping person is as much a part of the casework process as the person seeking help. It is what happens between the two and how the child uses it to change that is the heart of the entire

helping situation. The visiting teacher must know how to involve herself as a person, how to be warm, friendly, sincere and interested, without allowing the interview to become a personal conversation. The visiting teacher's own personal affairs and feelings are not discussed; otherwise, there would be two clients and no helping person.

The visiting teacher does inevitably have feelings about what is going on, but she must know how to handle them so that they do not get her involved personally in the child's problem. She does not merely listen while the child relieves himself by talking or playing. Her responses, attitudes, questions, sincere interest and attention are a vital part of the interview. She must be keenly sensitive to the child's feelings and help him understand what is happening to him. She does not take the problem away from him but helps him handle it, respecting his decisions. She also respects herself and trusts herself to become a vital part of the relationship. She invests a great deal of herself in it with an awareness of what she is doing.

Understanding human behavior is another tool which enables the caseworker and the teacher to be more helpful. Knowing the general characteristics of children at different age levels is useful in determining whether certain behavior patterns are normal or abnormal for the child concerned. To recognize that all behavior, good or bad, has a cause is to understand that the unusual reactions of the child or adult are symptoms and not the disease. The bully may be covering up his own cowardice; the angry person may actually be fearful. Behavior is not understood in the abstract, however. Certain conditions do not cause specific kinds of behavior as the typhoid germ will always cause typhoid fever instead of malaria or some other disease. Instead of one cause for certain behavior there is usually a combination of many causes which are different for each individual.

### **How Is the Visiting Teacher Trained?**

Study in a school of social work is considered the most valuable specialized training for the visiting teacher. There she learns casework methods through class study and actual practice under competent supervision. There are courses in understanding normal and abnormal behavior, human emotions, and the developmental stages of growth. The visiting teacher learns to understand herself better, some of the reasons she behaves as she does, and how to handle her own feelings in a better manner. In brief, this kind of training enables the visiting teacher to work with people in a more helpful way.

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Yet, social work training does not guarantee the most competent service nor does the lack of it prove that the program is superficial. Much of the success or failure of the work lies in the visiting teacher herself and in the administrative set up. The visiting teacher feels her own need for more understanding and skills that come from more specialized training, but she uses what she has already learned from her previous training, experience, and actual living and continues to learn more as she serves people in the helping process. In-service training is being used to help increase the knowledge and use of casework methods and to help the visiting teacher feel more secure in working with people to help solve their problems.

If the visiting teacher' has not had the opportunity for specialized training, the school need not feel that she is unable to help people, The skillful service that numbers of people have rendered who began work with no special training is proof that it can be done and is being done. The professional person, with or without casework training, should attempt more in the area of human relations than she feels capable of handling. Trust in herself and a sensitivity to the feelings and needs of others, together with an objective attitude, will enable the visiting teacher to carry out a capable, professional job. Availing herself of every opportunity to learn as she works will enable her to be of more and more service to the school.

## CHAPTER V

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### **The Child Himself**

The focus of all visiting teacher work is on the child. The work begins with him but may reach out to all the significant people and things in his environment. Beginning with the child makes him a real part of the plan to help him and serves as a stimulus to him to begin work on his problem himself. Most adults grossly underestimate the ability of children to understand themselves and the causes of their behavior, also their strength to do something about it. Whether due to lack of understanding or to the need to keep children dependent on them, this attitude on the part of adults interferes with the child's growth toward maturity and independence. Children are not trained as animals are trained. They are not "conditioned" to good behavior and



... **The Visiting Teacher supports his strengths as he works on his problem**

the right social skills. They are thinking, responsive personalities actively participating in their own growing up. More “working with” and less “working for” the child on the part of all the team will lead to fewer school problems.

#### Face fa Face

**Getting the Child in Focus.** It is not possible to over emphasize the importance of working with the child, including him in the planning and the activities related to the need to change his behavior. It may seem simpler and less time-consuming to make plans for him, to work around him, or to punish him for his bad behavior, But these do not solve the problem. It is treating symptoms and not causes. Punishment may deter the impudent youngster from “talking back,” but it will not give him the respect and trust of adults that he needs; he will have to find another symptom to express his feelings. Why did the girl who appeared shy and lonely not seem glad when told that all arrangements had been made for her to go to camp? She had not been included in the planning and camp may not have been what she needed. Ignoring the problem, false reassurances, helping the child to forget, and “making it up to him” by overindulgence are not steps toward maturity. Facing problems with him as he is able to face them without blame or censure is mature action toward him and the way to help him grow in his own best way.

It is through the casework relationship that the child is helped. Regular, planned interviews are the most effective means of accomplishing this end. Whether there is one interview or many, there needs to be a plan, a time, and a place. The reason should be explained to the child at the time of referral, not simply that the visiting teacher wants to see him in her office. If a schedule can be arranged so that the child can remember his own time and keep his own appointment, it is even more helpful.

**Standing on His Own Feet.** While working with the child is the focus of the service, the ultimate purpose is to enable him to get along without special help. He and the visiting teacher, together with his teacher, decide when that time has come. The visiting teacher works toward strengthening his relationship with the teacher and with the group. The teacher is the parent figure at school and children tend to act and feel toward her as toward their parents. The high school girl who talked at length about how one teacher always mistreated her finally said, with obvious surprise to herself, “She acts just like my stepmother!” When she understood her own tangled feelings, she no longer was antagonistic toward the teacher. The little girl who said to the visiting teacher, “My teacher likes me now,” was rejecting her own changed feelings.

Often the relationship with the teacher is good, but the difficulty lies in getting along with his own group. It is essential for children to feel accepted by their peers. A ten-year-old boy was referred to the visiting teacher because he had a fight every day in school. Within two months he was captain of his ball team. He had realized his anger at an older brother for being the favorite at home, and at the same time, his mother had been helped to give him more attention. Helping the child understand his own feelings is basic to changing attitudes.

**Choices.** Most often the child does not come to the visiting teacher of his own accord but is referred by someone else, usually the teacher. Here the school setting is definitely an advantage. He is accustomed to the authority of school, and, since the visiting teacher is part of the school, accepts the service as he does other school services. This does not mean that he will always like being sent to the visiting teacher. Preparation for referral may help him to accept the visiting teacher in a more positive way, but he will still decide for himself what he thinks of the experience and how he will use it. Though he may not have had a choice in coming, in a very real sense he decides whether he will use the service. This is a part of the casework process talking with him about his feelings in coming and letting him know that he does have some choices.

Not all choices can be left to the child, of course. There are certain limits within which both he and the visiting teacher must operate—the rules of school, attendance laws, and the demands of society. It should be made clear to him what the choices are in the situation. He makes his decisions within these limits. No amount of “help” can get him to learn to read unless he participates in the process. No plan will work unless he helps make it work. One fifteen-year-old boy, who had been truant since the first grade and had resisted all efforts of the school to help him change, finally was able to say to the visiting teacher after prolonged work together that this was the only way he would hit back at his parents for hurting him (neglecting him). Then he retreated behind his wall of defense again, saying that it was too late now to change; it would mean that his parents would win. He would prefer to endure school until he was sixteen years old and could quit rather than to give them the victory. He had made his choice and no amount of effort on the part of the visiting teacher could reach him to help him see what he was doing to himself. If he had been referred in the first grade, the story might have been different.

Actually giving freedom of choice to the child when it is possible makes it more likely that he will make good decisions. Instead of telling him he is expected to go to school, which he

knows already, ask him what he is ready to do about it or what things get in his way of liking school. Instead of setting a deadline arbitrarily, let him decide when he thinks he can get himself back to school. Too often the pressures of the school for a good attendance record or her own desire to get results cause the visiting teacher to pass that pressure on to the child and his family, while proceeding more slowly and allowing the child a chance to change himself could possibly be the means of a better attendance record in the end. The same principle works in other areas, too. If the child is angry when he comes to his interview, he can choose whether he wants to stay and talk or wait until another time. If he is angry about coming, there might be disadvantages in his staying. If he is angry at someone else, he may welcome the chance to stay and get rid of his feelings.

**Testing the Relationship.** Whether the child is willing to come or not, he will find ways of testing the strength of the relationship and the sincerity of the visiting teacher before he will risk revealing his deeper feelings. He must know he is accepted. The aggressive child may break a toy to learn the visiting teacher's reaction. The fearful one may hide behind the desk. This is the beginning of the casework relationship which the visiting teacher must handle consciously and with care. One nine-year-old who was skeptical of all adults would not respond to the visiting teacher's friendliness but suddenly seized her purse and gleefully emptied all its contents on the floor. When she did not scold or punish, saying she did not like people to do that to her purse, but she still liked him, he stood close by her and asked to stay a long time.

Frequently a child will ask for something that belongs to the visiting teacher, even a piece of paper, to test her liking for him. Most children will ask who the other children are who come and what they talk about. This is not to find out what the others do but how the visiting teacher feels about children who come to see her, an attempt to find out how much she likes them. Some children will be absent on the day the interview is scheduled; others will have to pass the door many times during the day to be sure the visiting teacher will not forget them. Many will declare that they had not even thought about the interview since last week, had forgotten it, in fact. Some will want to prolong the interview, others to leave early. Some will tell fantastic tales about their bad behavior, others deny that they have a problem. Every child will have his own special way of testing the relationship.

**The Child's Own Strength.** Much has been said about helping the child develop and use his own strength to solve his own

problem. How is this done in the relationship with him? Allowing him to make choices within reasonable limits is one way. Helping him to face the reality of the situation is another. Allowing him the freedom to make mistakes yet to be accepted, as well as to realize an adult believes in him, adds to his self-respect. A very important means of developing and using his strength is to work on a small part of the problem at the time. The child sets the pace and gives direction to the interview by revealing his readiness to tackle the problem. These are some of the methods which help him to understand himself.

*“Margaret was unhappy”*

Examples will illustrate better than a description. Margaret was having trouble “taking things.” the first step was to help her see that she took things only when she was unhappy, but it did not make her feel better; it really made her feel worse. The next step was to explore the many events in her life that made her unhappy. Finally came the day when the visiting teacher asked if they could make a plan about what she could do the next time she felt like taking something. After deep thought Margaret decided she could tell herself to go away from it and leave it alone. The visiting teacher remarked that this would really be her decision because nobody else would be there with her. She was sure she could do it. And, for the first time, she did go away and leave things alone. The next step was to help her plan ways she could feel happier at school. She decided that if she did more schoolwork she would not have so much time to feel bad and could feel glad about better work. This was the process by which she overcame the stealing entirely. Each decision was her own idea worked out with the support and understanding of the visiting teacher.

*Sammy had a lie stomachache*

Another example is Sammy. A highly intelligent sixth grader, he began to have a stomachache every day during arithmetic class, asking to go to the sick room. When he began begging to stay at home, his mother took him to the doctor only to find that nothing was physically wrong. Sammy readily admitted to the visiting teacher that he knew it was nothing he ate, but his stomach did really hurt. She agreed that worrying about something could make people feel sick whether they really were sick or not. She suggested that since he knew that much, maybe he could begin to find out what really made him feel sick. Finally, he was able to say that arithmetic was not actually too hard, he

just did not like it. Then what could he do about that? He could work harder, but he guessed there was something else about arithmetic that made him feel bad. After intensive work on the idea, he revealed that he and his father had conflict every evening when he was doing his arithmetic homework. Next he connected this with the fact that his father wanted him to be an engineer while he himself wanted to be a doctor. Gradually he came up with the idea that he had several years to decide what he would be, but his stomachache was a way of running away from his problem. He could talk to his father about his wish to be a doctor. When he was strong enough to face his problem, he no longer needed the symptom of a stomachache.

IO QS6fN P0f,£0  
*strengthen courage*

**Growing Up Is a Big Job.** In working with children it is important to remember that many of their problems are in the area of growing up. Many times school failures can be traced to this fear. Learning is a sign of growing up; so to fail to learn may in some way postpone that fate or relieve the child of its responsibilities. A boy said he would have to marry if he grew up. Another, with a severe speech defect, was afraid of going to the army. A speech defect would keep him out and keep him from making progress in school. Another child had a relative in jail and feared the same fate for himself. A mother was making her daughter feel guilty about wanting to be independent and was using illness to tie the girl to herself in a morbid way. A little girl was crying every day at school because she wanted to be at home with the baby, the favorite of the family. The complexities of growing up constitute one area in which the visiting teacher can help children to gain strength. If they can see the obstacles in the way, the things that make them afraid to grow up, they can learn to handle those feelings in a more mature way.

*\k'hen ihe yoi'ng gels  
rough, a rri"end*

The Heart of the Service. Working with the child is a specialized area of casework. It requires special skill in understanding growth and development, in respecting the child as an individual, and in developing an understanding way of forming a warm relationship in which to work. The child is not a case but an individual. He has the right to understanding and help from the adults in his life in the business of growing up. He needs the teacher all the time at school and the visiting teacher when the going gets too rough and he and his teacher wish to ask her to help.

## CHAPTER VI

*mhecruet the child goes, his problems go*

### **The Child's Family**

Some of the most effective work of the visiting teacher in helping the child is done with his family. The child does not have one personality for school and another for home and other places. He takes all his problems with him wherever he goes. At school he may be worrying about a quarrel at home; at home he may be worrying about arithmetic or what the teacher said. Most parents have a more vital interest in their children than anyone else has, and all parents can be found to have some concern. It is of the utmost importance that parents be included as a real part of the working situation when dealing with the problems of their children.

*“not hiding things”*

#### **When and Why the Family Is Important**

Though work is begun with the child, it is almost always necessary to contact the home either by a visit or by inviting the parent to come to school. In certain instances when adolescents are struggling to become independent and the problem seems to be in themselves rather than in the faintly, it may be better to work with them individually. In other instances when there is only one contact with the child or the problem is of a very minor nature, a visit to the home might create a problem rather than solve one. There are other situations when the home should be contacted before the child is seen. If trouble seems to stem from a misunderstanding between parent and school, or if it is known that it is the situation itself which is causing trouble for the child, or if the problem involves all of the children in the family who are in school, the first step would naturally be to contact the home. The nature of the problem will always determine the procedure. It is not a matter of hiding something from parent or child or developing routine methods of meeting situations; it is deciding the best steps to take to help the individual child.

Frequently the only contact parents have with the school is through the visiting teacher. As a representative of the school she has an obligation to interpret the policies of the school to parents and to help them find answers to their questions about specific situations concerning their children. The parents can be

of help also to the school by helping the visiting teacher to know their children better.

The purpose of home contacts is not merely to gain information about or understanding of the child, though this is one of the important results. The real purpose is to work with parents concerning the child and his problem and their own problems as parents as these affect the school child who is having difficulty. In other words, a casework service is offered to parents in relation to the work with their children. There is the same acceptance and understanding of the parent as of the child. The visiting teacher does not identify with the child against the parent or teacher nor does she identify with either against the child. She works with all in finding and removing the causes of the child's problem. She works with parents because they are parents and have the natural right to be consulted.



... parents and Visiting Teacher find reasons for tears and tangles that bother the child

The visiting teacher and the parents work together on problems associated with the child's difficulty. If there is another kind of service needed, she assists them in reaching the proper source of help.

## How The Family Helps

Just as the visiting teacher does not take the child away from the teacher, neither does she take him away from the parents not permit them to turn him over to her. She does not make decisions which belong to the parents or offer advice. There is a mutual working together until a common decision is reached. If advice is given and either fails or is not followed, there is the tendency for each to blame the other.

Unless there is a specific reason for taking another person along and unless the parent knows in advance that another person will be present, the visiting teacher should go to the home alone. When two people go together to discuss a problem, it may seem



.... in field or a+Bee, the Visiting Teacher and the parent considat fhe child who concerns them both

to the family that an unfair advantage is being taken. The same principle holds true if neighbors are present during a visit. If the neighbors insist on staying, it is better to make another appointment than to discuss private matters in their presence.

*“...noi to judge, noi  
fo reform, hur lo help”*

### **The School's Part in Helping the Child**

The school should not use the visiting teacher service as a means of telling the family what they should do. Parents appreciate no more than the school being told what they must or must not do. While teachers and visiting teachers may feel that certain parents are not taking enough responsibility or interest in school matters, the only way to change the situation is to try to find the cause, to know what the parents think about it. They may feel that the school is not sufficiently concerned about their children. The visiting teacher may be of real help in establishing home- school cooperation when this has been difficult. It is important to remember that the children in school come from a wide variety of homes with many different standards of living but representing a more or less satisfactory way of life for the family itself. The purpose of a home visit is not to judge or to reform but to help.

When parents know this is a service they can request, they can feel free to come to the school or to ask the visiting teacher to come to the home. Many parents prefer seeing the visiting teacher at school; it involves more active participation on their part. After all, they are vitally interested in what happens to their children and are naturally concerned.

Parents may wish to talk with the teacher about the referral. Teachers can help parents understand the service as a part of the school. Even though they may have known about it, there is always a different feeling when it is related to them personally. All people have some anxiety about a new experience, and parents have a right to know the approach the school makes to the problems of their children. Teachers and visiting teachers have a joint responsibility to explain this to the parents who will be using the service.

## Preventive Aspects of the Program

The school seeks to create a healthy emotional atmosphere for children. Fewer educational casualties result in a setting where the child rather than the textbook is of primary importance, one of the major responsibilities of the school is to work with children in such a way that they will not run into difficulties either academic, social, or emotional. The visiting teacher carries part of this responsibility for prevention. It is in this area that some of her most effective and far-reaching work can be done.

Preventive measures are as important in mental health as in physical health. Everyone shudders at the thought of exposing children to whooping cough or polio or even the common cold. Yet it is as damaging to the personality to be exposed to nagging, harsh treatment, jealousy, anger, gloominess, irritability, or hatred as it is to the body to be exposed to a crippling disease. If companions are critical, gossipy, untruthful, pessimistic, or quarrelsome, a person may soon find the same traits in himself. On the other hand, cheerfulness, fair play, friendliness and a happy disposition are equally as contagious. The school which creates such an atmosphere as part of its curriculum has a good preventive program in mental health.

### Early Symptoms

The secret of a good preventive program is the recognition and intelligent handling of early symptoms of trouble. The school is the one institution in modern society which comes into contact with all children. This fact becomes even more significant when it is realized that the contact is maintained during all the formative years of the child's life beyond early childhood. Because this is true, there is no better place than the school in which to discover and make plans for overcoming the first signs of difficulty. The school is the setting in which all children may be reached most easily and naturally.

**Strategic Position of Teachers.** Teachers are in a better position than anyone else outside the home to observe the daily behavior of children and to recognize when they are meeting difficulties which interfere with their normal development. Here, more than in any other area, can close cooperation between teacher and visiting teacher be most effective and results most immediate and permanent. In planning the use of the visiting teacher services the urgent and deep-rooted problems should not

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be allowed to crowd out the less urgent. Many preventive cases can be handled in the same time required by one difficult and involved situation, although neither should be neglected.

All children experience problems as a part of growing up. There is neither wisdom nor kindness in trying to protect them from all difficult or unpleasant situations. Only as they can become able to manage frustrations in small doses with wise and loving guidance will they be prepared for the reality of living. Children are equipped with strength to cope with a great deal of frustration. Just as the human body tends toward physical health rather than illness, so does the personality tend toward mental and emotional health.

It is important to distinguish between normal behavior and signs of trouble. Not every child who misbehaves or fails to conform to the group is emotionally disturbed. The first-grade child who does not play may not be anti-social but may be lacking in the experience of playing with others. A timid child may live in an isolated community deprived of associations outside of his family. The uninhibited troublemaker may have had too few restraints or too many indulgences. His behavior sometimes may be resistance to adult standards and rules which are too exacting, or perhaps a test to see what adults will do. Most children have heard their parents or other adults boast about how they disobeyed the rules in school. Yet, even with the best intentions, all children will make mistakes occasionally. They lack the wisdom and maturity to make the right choices always.

**How to Know?** How then can adults know what is normal behavior and what is an early symptom of trouble? There is no sure way, but one of the best guides is to know the child's general pattern of behavior. Does he usually have a sunny disposition but suddenly becomes irritable? Is his usual participation replaced by withdrawal from the group or daydreaming? Is he more inclined toward exaggeration and "tall tales" than he should be at his stage of development? Is he unable to assume proper responsibility for himself? Is he beginning to dislike school? Is he becoming overly independent or dependent for his age? The child who steals may have a deep-seated problem or he may never have had anything of his own; everything may have been shared at home, including the family drinking cup. Close observation of the children in her room enables the teacher to know when a child seems to be adopting a kind of behavior which is different from his usual pattern and might be the first sign that he needs help.

Circumstances in the child's living situation may give clues to his feelings. Wearing a ragged dress, a "dress-tip" suit, or a different style of clothing causes children to look different, feel

different, and then act different. Being over-age or under-age, too large or too small, awkward or clumsy may cause children to feel out of place or too different. Non-cooperative or overly solicitous parents may interfere with the child's adjustment to the group. Reactions to such circumstances may be signs that the child needs help to adjust to the situation before he develops more serious symptoms.

No attempt has been made here to compile an exhaustive list of conditions which may be early signs of trouble for children. These are only suggestions of possible danger. Every child is different and will react to circumstances in his own way. In general, however, any significant change in a child's usual pattern of behavior in a negative way is a signal that trouble may be developing.

### **What To Do?**

The teacher is able to alleviate many difficult situations for children as she plans for individual differences in her class. Through closer observation in regular activities she may be able to discover the cause of the unusual behavior. Helping the unruly youngster to find satisfaction in cooperation rather than in disobedience may be the treatment needed. It is important to remember that it is the cause and not the symptom which should be treated. Not all lying stems from the same cause. As often happens, a situation may work itself out and the child return to his normal adjustment without the cause having been discovered. Then it may be assumed that the child overcame it through his own strength and the usual guidance of the adults in his life. In other instances, the child is not able to work out satisfactory solutions to his problems for himself nor can the teacher reach the cause in the classroom situation. These are the ones who need the joint cooperation of the teacher, the visiting teacher, and the home.

While the child must be a part of every plan made for him, the circumstances of each case will determine whether it is the teacher or the visiting teacher who works out the plan with him.

He is not "Bad." One of the most important factors in prevention is that the child is not made to feel that he is bad because he has a problem. It is tragic to label him as bad and more disastrous for him to believe it. He can use that belief to justify his behavior and his feelings of hostility—if he is bad, it will not matter how he acts anyway. And once he believes it, he must prove it to himself and to others.

Sometimes children feel that they must be good to be loved. Then, when something happens to make them feel rejected, they

may feel it is all because they're afraid. Therefore, it is very important that children know they are loved whether their behavior is approved or not. That their behavior may be bad but they themselves are not bad. It is especially for them to know that, while they are accepted, their bad behavior will not be tolerated. In fact, protection from liability on bad behavior with just measures

of punishment may be a tangible sign of the love of parents which children can readily understand and accept.



He knows where to find his friend, the Visiting Teacher

The way children feel about themselves, their home, their school, and their community is the most important factor in determining

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whether they get into trouble or not. There is no better preventive measure than helping them to feel that they are loved and accepted, that they are important to the group and belong. Teachers and visiting teachers play an important role in this process.

**Adolescence.** The earlier a problem is discovered the more likely is the treatment to be successful. Concentration of efforts in the primary grades can prevent many difficulties later in school. Not all problems begin in the early years, however. Symptoms sometimes do appear first at adolescence, or a sudden extreme event may reactivate a situation within a child that he could handle under ordinary circumstances at an earlier stage of his



... "a bulwarL against juvenile delinquency—the Visiting Teacher program," seid e Georgia legislative committee report

development when conflicts about himself were not complicated by social, emotional, and physical changes which occur at adolescence. The school should be alert to the problems children are not able to handle alone at any age so that they may not become more serious.

**Self-Referrals.** In a school system where all the children know of the service and are free to ask for it themselves there is excellent opportunity for prevention. Self-referrals are more likely to come from those who know the cause of the difficulty, or who have experienced help before, than from those whose problems are very deep-seated and involved.

It is good administrative policy to encourage self-referrals throughout the school. Invariably this raises the question as to whether some students will not use this as a means of getting out of class or for an excuse to talk about unimportant matters. Undoubtedly a few students will, but it need not prevent the use of the policy. The mere fact that it does occur is an indication of a difficulty which the visiting teacher can recognize and help the student to face. The wish to get out of class on a flimsy excuse is a sign that he needs help. There will be those too who come from curiosity or the sincere desire to know and use all the school has to offer them. This affords a good opportunity for interpretation without making the child feel that he has done something wrong. The policy of self-referrals can be used successfully only when students, teachers, and visiting teacher feel comfortable about it.

**The Child Knows It.** When a child is referred as a matter of prevention, the question often arises as to whether he should be told that he has a problem. He does not have to be told; he knows it. He may not be able to verbalize it, but he knows that something is not right for him. He should be told the truth—that the situation may get him into trouble if it continues and that the school wishes to help him avoid that unhappiness. Ignoring a difficulty or trying to help the child to forget it only makes it worse, never solves it. The child deserves the respect and support of having someone face the problem with him as he is able to face it.

### **The Matter of Juvenile Delinquency**

All that has been said about prevention in a general way may be said about prevention of juvenile delinquency. On the other hand, any child is potentially delinquent. A child in trouble is an unhappy child, one whose needs have not been met and whose delinquent behavior is his effort to adjust to his environment. The other extreme effort for a more comfortable adjustment is complete withdrawal, giving up the struggle either as a recluse or as a mentally ill person.

Even though the same offense is repeated after every effort has been made to help the child, it does not prove that he is a "born criminal." It does prove that the cause of the behavior has not been found, or was not found early enough. Someone has failed the child.

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**Before It Is Too Late.** The pre-delinquents and many of the delinquents are in school now, and they can be discovered—not to turn them over to the courts but to help them overcome their antisocial tendencies. No one specific act should label a child as a delinquent. The school can take steps to help him if he begins to show a trend toward belligerent, evasive, or other non-conforming behavior.

It is not enough to say that parents should teach their children at home how to behave. It is not possible for parents to do all of it alone. It has always been agreed that there are some teachings parents can give which the school is unable to do, but the opposite is equally true. Because of the very nature of group interaction the school is able to teach some aspects of group living which the child cannot learn at home. In fact, the school must help the child learn how to live away from home. Inevitably problems arise at school which children are unable to handle satisfactorily and the teaching role of the school makes it responsible for helping to solve them. They are not home problems but are implicit in the school situation. The close interaction between home and school make cooperation essential. Each has its own responsibility in teaching children how to live together and to respect each other's rights.

**Children Already In Trouble.** The school has a special responsibility to its students who have already had difficulty with the law or the courts. The purpose of the juvenile court is not to punish but to help children start again in the right direction. The school can help prevent the stigma sometimes attached to a court experience, and, more important, help these children find more acceptable ways of behaving. Whatever the offense, their crime is not as grave as that of the people in their lives who should have prevented it. It is right that children who have been arrested should be helped to overcome their difficulties in their own environment if at all possible. It is more natural, less expensive, and much less painful to them and to their families than placement in an institution.

All school people, including the visiting teacher, have a definite responsibility to help prevent trouble for children whether the trouble results in delinquency or in other situations which make them unhappy and unable to get along with people.

## CHAPTER VIII

### The Constructive Use of Authority

There is a mistaken idea on the part of a few people that the visiting teacher is a person without authority and is, therefore, in a better position to help. It implies that authority is not good and that the visiting teacher relationship is better than that of the teacher. Neither is true. It is true that the visiting teacher does not have, and should never try to assume, the authority of the principal, the teacher, or the parent, but she is not without authority in the casework relationship. She carries a different kind of authority *from* that of other school personnel or of parents. There is a natural authority in this adult-child relationship—the influence of greater knowledge and more experience, the responsibility of maturity toward immaturity, the responsibility of using the casework relationship to help a child when he is referred. There is also the authority of the school, which the visiting teacher represents.

The term “authority” may imply many concepts: guidance, influence, restraint, control, or coercion. Here it is used to mean that element in the relationship with other people which is positive and constructive, which carries the responsibility of participation in decisions but not the arbitrary enforcement of rules or laws. It is the part of living which creates order instead of chaos, which enables people to live together peaceably.

There are two kinds of authority, inherent and delegated. Inherent authority is that which is an integral part of the situation itself; delegated authority is assigned as part of the job. There is inherent authority in the parent-child relationship, but the power of arrest is delegated to the policeman. Both kinds of authority are found in the school—the inherent authority of teacher-pupil relationships and the delegated authority to establish and maintain a workable organization.

#### Feelings About Authority

In addition to the realities of the situation, there are feelings about authority which profoundly influence its acceptance and use. It is more constructive to think in terms of its positive use than in terms of submission. Children and adults are more often in conflict with authority in the realm of thinking and feeling than in reality.

Helping the child live comfortably with the rules of school and society is a part of the visiting teacher's job, a part of the

job of all adults who work with children. Yet, adults themselves have many feelings about authority, both positive and negative. The place to start, then, is with their own attitudes and reactions. Unless they can feel at ease within the framework of an authoritative setting, they will not be able to assume responsibility in the situation; unless they can live comfortably under rules and regulations, they cannot help others to do so.

The responses of adults to authority are the results of all their living experiences. Parent figures, teachers, policemen, school, laws, courts, all are symbols of power for good or bad, for acceptance or rejection, for working with or working against. An honest appraisal of personal feelings can begin to bring freedom from negative reactions and conflicts. A few situations for consideration are reactions to traffic laws, speed limits, serving on the jury, income tax, the umpire, and so on. Each person's own individual conflicts and prejudices are the most fruitful areas of exploration.

How the child feels about authority is important, also. Does he think of it as a helpful or harmful force or as punishment? What methods have adults used with him to gain compliance with their wishes? If they have been harsh or punitive, how can a positive relationship be established? His feelings will deeply affect his behavior at school.

### **Inherent Authority**

Children need and want limits set for them. They are happier when they know what they can and cannot do and, in general, what is expected of them. It is a part of the dependency needs of growing up. This does not mean that every activity must be prescribed. They need someone outside themselves to help them to direct their impulses until they can learn the self-discipline to control themselves. They do not learn self-control by being allowed to do as they please. Having neither the wisdom nor the experience to make all their decisions, they need help and loving guidance. The wisdom of parents and teachers to know when to "untie apron strings" and how to allow more freedom as it can be managed by the child allows for the development of the positive use of authority.

Helping the child to live within limits is far different from the attitude that he must obey because the parent or teacher says so. The latter does not allow for growth. It may gain submission but not cooperation. It may leave smoldering feelings of hate and fear which may go with him all his life or which may lead to delinquent behavior.

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**Staying With The Child.** There need not be an apologetic approach to the use of the authority of the school or of that inherent in the visiting teacher relationship. As was discussed in a previous chapter, the child does decide whether he will use casework help or not, but should he not have responsible guidance in making that decision? He could, be left entirely to his own devices, decide not to work on his problem and might continue his anti-social behavior until he breaks the law and is arrested. Should there not be a reaching out to him, someone to stay with him until he can make positive use of the help that is available? And where is there better use of the authority of the school or of the casework relationship? When he is arrested, he is not asked whether he will use help or not.

**He Does Decide.** This does not violate the casework principle that the client must want help and must be given the freedom to refuse it. It requires an unusual amount of self-discipline on the part of the visiting teacher, an investment of self which risks failure, rebuff, and hostility. It is part of the child's need to have limits set for him, to have adult participation in the making of some of his decisions. If the decision of working on his problem is left entirely to him, without the support of the visiting teacher, he may well think that she does not care. He may need more proof that she does care.

The visiting teacher must recognize how difficult it is for the child to face his weakness and share it with her. It is here that she may use her own strength to support him until he can grasp the problem himself. This requires all the skill at her command. She can make an immediate and positive response to the person who asks for and is ready for help. It fulfills some of her own needs, strengthens her own ego. Unless she is keenly aware of herself, she may feel that the child who does not want help is rejecting, not the help, but herself personally. Then, it becomes easy to rationalize and say that she is unable to help him because he does not want her help or that he is unable to use it. Living through the difficulties of allowing him to reject without being rejected is a legitimate part of the casework process for **teacher** and visiting teacher. Allowing the child to run away from his problem may be rejection.

An illustration will describe this more clearly. Nine-year-old Carol had built up a resistance to learning which had defied all efforts of teachers and visiting teachers to break through and in which, apparently, she was quite contented. After several weeks the visiting teacher had advanced exactly nowhere with her, though Carol outwardly was quite affectionate and talkative. Any reference to her school problem seemed not to make the least impression. Gradually the visiting teacher brought it more and

more into the conversation until finally Carol deliberately tried to make her angry by rudely interrupting everything she said. This was the first real show of feeling she had exhibited and the visiting teacher made use of it by admitting that Carol had succeeded in her efforts and by exploring with her the need to make her angry. Then Carol could say that she had not wanted to come to see the visiting teacher, did not want to think about her problem, and wanted to be left alone. The visiting teacher accepted all these feelings but said with sincere warmth and love that she felt she could not let Carol go because it would not be fair to her. It would not be giving her a chance to find out why she was not learning though both she and her teacher knew she could learn. By this time Carol was more attentive than she had ever been and volunteered the expression that she had been determined not to like or to be liked by the visiting teacher so that she would be left alone. She did not care whether she could read or not, and, therefore, nobody else should care. The visiting teacher responded that she herself did care whether children learned to read and she cared about Carol, too. She still wanted to give her a chance and would expect her to continue the appointments. Carol did continue, evidently much more comfortably, and soon was able to say to the visiting teacher, "I did not want to like you, but now I do. I did not want to think about school, but now I want to tell you about it, and I don't know why." The reason was that the visiting teacher believed in her until she could begin to believe in herself. Within a year Carol had learned to read well.

It is helpful to let the child know that there are limits within which both he and the visiting teacher must live, but that there is freedom within those limits for decisions and self-direction.

### **Delegated Authority**

Visiting teachers or attendance officers are made responsible by law for carrying out the provisions of compulsory school attendance laws. Also, children who have been in court sometimes need the special attention and help of the visiting teacher.

As in all feelings about authority, the visiting teacher must examine her attitudes toward the law and the courts, how she feels about people who have to be taken to court and about delinquent behavior. It has been said that the court should be used in attendance cases only as a last resort, but perhaps there is a more constructive approach to the problem. It is true that no one wishes to have a parent or child go through a court experience if it can be avoided. All skill and understanding should be exercised in helping the child to attend school on his own accord, but when this is not enough and court action is indicated, the same skill and understanding should be used to go with him and his parents through this experience, too. School attendance laws are

not for the punishment of parents but for the protection of the rights of children. It is in this way that the courts should be used.

The visiting teacher should clarify her feelings about herself as a person who carries this kind of authority. The attitude of the school should be clear, too. Is it a chance to control others or is she the representative of a society which says that children have a right to an education and that school is the place where they learn to live in that society? How can this authority be used so that positive relationships can be maintained with the family? The attitudes shown by the school and the visiting teacher will determine in large measure what the experience means to the family.

**Constructive and Not Destructive.** How can a court experience be made constructive for a parent or a child? First of all, it can be made clear that both the visiting teacher and the family are subject to the law and each has his own responsibility. If parents and children are unable to take their part of the responsibility, they must have help to do so. To many people, the language of authority is the only language they can understand. What they are unable or unwilling to do on their own initiative, they can assume when the authority of the court has acted for them. It can also be made clear to the family that court action is not used as punishment but as a means of protecting the rights of the child. The visiting teacher should show the same friendliness, the same willingness to help that she has shown before. Continued acceptance is essential. Many times, there is need to help neighbors and schoolmates to understand and accept.

The visiting teacher should become familiar with the operation of the court and know the officials. If there is a juvenile court in her county, she should know the judge and the probation officers. Where there is no juvenile court, she should learn the provisions for handling juvenile offenders. Solicitors, judges, lawyers, the sheriff, and other officials can help the visiting teacher in gaining this kind of understanding and in learning how cases should be referred to court.

**In Close Touch.** Whether the parent or the child is taken to court, the visiting teacher must work closely with the entire family. If it is the neglect or indifference of the parent which keeps the child from school, then the parent is held responsible. If it seems that the parents are doing all they can but the child refuses to attend, it is he who is referred. In such an experience, parents need help in keeping their self-respect and in becoming better able to assume their own responsibility. Children need help not to lose faith in their parents or in themselves. The experience should be used to help both the child and his parents to discover a better relationship to each other and to the school.

One big argument of uneducated parents who feel insecure in their position in society is that they can see no value in an education. They are getting along all right and so will their children. This may be due to actual ignorance or to a deeper underlying cause. They may be afraid to let their children learn more than they know, fear loss of prestige or control of their children and, therefore, unconsciously make them fail in school. One father told the visiting teacher that he could never learn anything in school and his son was just like him. They had already been taken to court in another county, but it did no good because the boy would never learn until he was grown, as this had been his own experience. The cowed boy admitted that he must be just like his father because at fifteen he still could not read. Many children have not so completely absorbed parental attitudes and the court experience prevents their following in the educational footsteps of their parents. In such cases, parents need a great deal of support in allowing their children to succeed.

**Indications for Referral.** Most cases of unlawful attendance yield to the usual casework methods. The help of the court is needed with those who do not respond. The court is another aid in offering help to families. A number of attitudes may indicate the need for the use of the authority of the court—when promises are made but never kept; when the parents avoid the visiting teacher; when they are hostile or belligerent or purposely indifferent. These are strong barriers of defense on the part of a weak or frightened person: "This is the way I am going to behave; what can you do about it?" It is a way of fighting the school and the visiting teacher which may create the desire in her to fight back, yet her different skills and methods of approach are the key to change. Fighting is the negative approach; whereas, facing the reality of the situation and using the law as protection are positive. Most often the client is greatly relieved when this has been done in such a way that he has not "lost face" with the visiting teacher. He has not been punished but helped to use authority for himself.

Authority and self-control go hand in hand. The school is a natural setting in which to acquire respect for authority and for the individual to develop his maximum self-control.

## CHAPTER IX

*“ . . . for different patterns”*

### What of the Future?

Should schools become unduly concerned if their local visiting teacher program does not measure up to the standards described in these chapters? There is no program which is perfect. The service as described represents goals as well as standards. Children are not all made by the same pattern and neither are communities. Nothing which is good or effective in a local program should be discarded in favor of another suggestion. Standards are useful in the evaluation of present practices and future plans but should be studied in the light of local needs.

Obstacles block the attainment of desired goals in every school activity. Lack of space, crowded classrooms, and inadequate facilities are common problems. Some obstacles in the way of an adequate visiting teacher service are: too much area and too large a school population to be served, the lack of interviewing space, assignment of too many unrelated duties, the lack of qualified personnel to fill vacancies, the lack of a consistent plan for interpretation and development of the program, and the need for more appropriate training.

Just as a local system can have a good school without all the facilities needed, so can it have an effective visiting teacher program or other school service in spite of handicaps. Progressive local leaders make the best use of present facilities while planning more adequate provisions for the future. Children will not wait to grow up, and they deserve the best instruction available. School personnel can do much among themselves to improve a situation. The kind of persons the principal, teacher, and visiting teacher are mean more to children than the kind of desks or rooms they sit in. All members of the team give something of themselves to children. Working together, the contribution of each one complements that of all the others.

The visiting teacher service is a continually developing and ongoing part of a growing and increasingly effective school program. It is the privilege, as well as the responsibility, of all who work with children to help the visiting teacher service play its role in the education of children.

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## Appendix B

### Notes from SSWAG Spring Conference 2007

#### Notes for SSWAG Spring Conference 2007

By Wesley O. Boyd

Perhaps most of us would agree that the most constant thing in life is change, itself. Of course, school social workers are no strangers to the idea of change. They have embraced the concept of "change agent" as their role since the inception of school social work practice. Change is what was occurring in Georgia in the decade of the '70's. Many local school systems in Georgia were working toward providing unitary public education.

Black and white students and faculties were merging across the state to provide desegregated public education. Along with those efforts, the two Georgia professional education organizations, namely: the Georgia Education Association (GEA, the predominantly white organization) and the Georgia Teachers and Education Association (GT and EA, the black organization) agreed to become one organization known as the Georgia Association of Educators (GAE). The two organizations drafted a new constitution and by-laws and drew up a merger agreement, which provided guidelines on how the officers of the new organization would be elected. Both organizations formerly had provided membership to sub-organizations of special groups known as affiliates. So it followed that the newly formed GAE organization would require the affiliates to adopt merger guidelines as well. There would be no more dual organizations representing the same profession. Therefore, all subgroups that would become affiliates of the new GAE, like the parent organization, would have to merge into one organization, following the guidelines set by the parent organization.

Georgia school social workers (then known as visiting teachers) had been in existence since 1947, and the professional organization for the predominantly white visiting teachers was an affiliate of GEA and known as the **Georgia Association of Visiting Teachers (GAVT)**; the organization for black visiting teachers was the **Visiting Teachers Association of Georgia (VTAG)**, and an affiliate of GT and EA. Having been



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