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COUNSELLING SERVICES FOR ADULTS

Perhaps the provision of adequate counselling services for adults is the most important (and most neglected) of all the aspects of education in Canada at the present time.

The idea that learning is a continuous process throughout life has been talked about at length in our country. Now we are beginning to see action toward making this dream a reality.

At the present time there is virtually no significant general counselling service for adults in Canada. That is the simple fact. Some few school boards, some private and public agencies, one or two universities have been struggling against long odds to improve this situation. The Manpower Department (Federal) has plans and a program getting under way, but since it remains committed to job placement and upgrading and such, it cannot be expected to do the really significant job for the adult population.

I do not in any way mean to slight the efforts of the many concerned individuals who have laboured long and hard to make good counselling services available. What I am saying is that quite a new and vital approach must now be taken.

At the present time such services as are available in some of our major communities are so fragmented and so unknown to the individual that they are of little use to him. There needs to be a consolidation of these functions in any urban area so that counselling help about health, welfare, educational opportunity, job opportunity, family life, financial problems, and so on, may be obtainable from one source. At least the initial approach may be made to one source with a fair chance of success.

This means much more coordination of agencies that are now disparate and frequently poorly supported. A multiplicity of agencies with specialized functions is undoubtedly necessary. But agencies tend to become empires and empires tend not to communicate well with one another. In the guarding of their imperial prerogatives they sometimes tend to fail in their responsibilities to the individual who needs a variety of types of counselling help.

SERVICES DE CONSEILS POUR ADULTES

Aucun service général de conseils à la disposition des adultes.

Besoin d'un service central d'aide pour la santé, l'assistance l'éducation, le travail, la vie familiale, les problèmes financiers.

Mais personne
n'est prêt à
soutenir un tel
service

Service téléphonique
d'essai pour
les renseignements
sur l'éducation
inondé.

Personnel?
Grand mystère!

Les généralistes
aussi.

It seems to me that the function of information about counselling services is perhaps the most urgently in need of attention. I do not know of a major community in Canada where one information service can provide the individual with anything like a comprehensive look at the various facilities available to him. No organization or agency appears ready to support and staff such a service. The need is very evident.

In the area of educational opportunity alone we found in Ottawa that a tiny kiosk on a main street with no general advertising whatsoever handled over 600 requests for educational information in one month. A later extension of this information service employed three full-time and five part-time staff and handled over 3,000 calls in a six-week period. No accurate count of calls could be made because the three phones rang constantly from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. This is merely an indicator of the immensity of the problems of providing information about opportunities to learn.

The provision of adult counselling and information services raises problems. The problem of co-ordination has been mentioned. The adequacy of information is an acknowledged hazard. The class war between psychiatrists, psychologists, and ordinary mortals is a third problem of some significance. What or who is a counsellor? The lack of clarity around this term may be good or bad, depending on your point of view. Since there appears to be no standard definition of the counsellor, the staffing of an adult counselling centre is a process full of mystery.

My own view is that a variety of staff, operating sometimes independently and sometimes as a team, probably provides the best answer. There is little indication that advanced degrees in *any* field improve one's ability to counsel adults in *every* field. The counselling of adults needs the generalist as well as the specialist. More than that it needs them working together in mutual respect for each other's talents. One of the tragic aspects of the field is the lack of recognition available to the large number of people who have great skill at listening to others and good talent in helping them to see their way through problems, but have no piece of paper which would give them recognition and status.

Further, and perhaps most significant, any provision of counselling service for adults needs to fully recognize that *learning is rapidly becoming the fact of life in Canada*. This has profound implications for

those who would be called counsellors. They must become very up-to-date in their knowledge of the learning process. They must operate on the best available facts about learning. This is in direct confrontation with the current practice which tends to "test the hell out of the client" and then assume that his future course of action must be based upon what he is now rather than what he can become. Now that we realize that, inside the broadest parameters, what we have commonly called intelligence is essentially a learned attribute, not an innate gift, the possibility of achievement for all can be seen in quite a different perspective. This is a very difficult concept. Most of us feel we are successful because we are "intelligent," whereas there are more and more good indicators that we are "intelligent" because we are successful. The acceptance of this idea will be slow because so many have vested interest in this particular status quo. Counsellors could move mountains if they could bring themselves to abandon the common prejudice about "intelligence" and bring a heightened awareness of human potential into the forefront of their activities.

Finally, I must add my concern for what I seem to see happening in counselling throughout the land. I seem to see counselling reflecting the change in educational tempo and direction. This is understandable but unfortunate. At the very time when technological change may well give the best opportunity for individual development that the world has ever seen, we seem bent as a society on counselling and training for improved work skills beyond all else. This is a trend which must be reversed or lead to something less than a better life for all. Counselling services could be in the forefront of a change in this national attitude. Each time a counsellor or a counselling agency gives the gross national product priority over the individual being counselled, there is an opportunity missed. Another opportunity is missed each time an individual is placed in a job because the job is there, rather than because that is the best way ahead for him.

Until we can centre our attention on adult counselling as a normal expectation of everyone in the society, we will have a patchwork effort. I hope your organization will work toward a full-scale counselling service for the total adult community—with the kind of access that every citizen has to a municipal bus service.

On test le client à outrance.

Concentrer sur ce qu'il pourrait devenir.

Sommes-nous intelligents, donc un succès?

Non—Un succès, donc intelligents.

Conseiller dans le but de développer l'individu, pas ses habiletés.

Les conseillers aussi accessibles que les autobus du service local.