

ROSEMOUNT – AN ALTERNATIVE DAY PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT

Rosemount is a centre which conducts a voluntary day attendance programme for unemployed 14½ – 17 year old adolescents.

The programme includes small group work, workshops and counselling. The special feature of Rosemount as an agency is its three-tiered approach to working with adolescents: the individual, the family and the peer group.

Tash Dakos, Peter Harkin and Margaret Cody are Youthworkers in the agency. Erika Cornwell is Co-ordinator and Family Worker. Sister Noeline White is a detached Youthworker in Kings Cross, and a member of the Rosemount Board. Noeline was formerly Co-ordinator at Rosemont.

ROSEMOUNT

History

The Good Shepherd Sister's work with adolescent girls and women began in Sydney in 1913, providing institutional care with an emphasis on protection and shelter. During 1981 it was decided to replace the hostel programme with a non-residential day-attendance programme. The closure of the Ashfield hostel concluded 68 years of residential care in Sydney by the Good Shepherd Sisters and their staff. The concept of the Day Attendance Programme developed after wide consultation with officers from the Department of Youth and Community Services, solicitors involved in the Children's Court, Legal Aid Scheme and magistrates. Now known as the Rosemount Survival Skills Programme, it is an attempt to provide an innovative form of intervention for the increasing number of young people at risk. These young people may be homeless, experiencing family difficulties, abused, truanting, or involved in minor offences. Many are emotionally and behaviourally disturbed; some are developmentally disabled.

Philosophy

Rosemount today seeks to help unemployed and troubled adolescents find new directions. Rosemounts philosophy respects the fundamental worth of the individual, whatever their circumstances or actions. The family and social networks of these adolescents are considered in exploring problems and potential solutions. Any interventions to help these people cope with their difficulties is based on thorough assessment and evaluation.

Referral and Intake

Young people are usually referred by school counsellors, the Department of Youth and Community Services, Young Offenders Support Team, families and guardians, the adolescents themselves and their friends.

Criteria for consideration include:

- to be aged between 14 years 6 months and 17 years.
- to have left school.
- unemployed.
- no severe drug problem.
- no severe development disability.
- to have personal or social difficulties.

The referral process involves two interviews (see Appendix). The first interview includes the young person, family or guardian and referring agency and a personal interview. This allows understanding of the dynamics operating in the referrer/family/adolescent context.

The aims and nature of Rosemount are explained in detail, stressing that attendance is voluntary and by contract. Personal history is gathered at this stage. At the second interview between the adolescent and one of the youthworkers, they are asked to look at personal motivation, areas of difficulty on which they wish to work, and goals for the future. The young person is then invited to make a decision and telephone the agency by a given date. Thus, in a the beginning of their contract with Rosemount, autonomy and decision-making are fostered. Approximately 90% of young people phone back.

At a team meeting, the referrals are considered and a group chosen according to the urgency of their need, other options for them, motivation, and stability or accommodation.

Programme

Group work and individual time are the means by which Rosemount's programme is presented. Groups are usually of two types: those dealing with a particular topic such as nutrition, and those which explicitly deal with the interpersonal concerns of the participants. For clarity's sake we shall refer to the former as "task-centred" and the latter as "maintenance-centred". It must be stressed at this point that this distinction is purely a conceptual one and more an indication of the *stated* objectives of a group. Group maintenance issues are those which need to be addressed so that the group can progress along its course more effectively. A task-centred group is one whose stated agenda involves the working through of a task like giving contraceptive advice, for example. In reality, maintenance issues of a group are constantly monitored and

handled whether there is a task to perform or not. In cases where the interpersonal issues are so acute in a task-oriented group it would be short-sighted not to abandon the task at hand and focus in on these other issues.

A number of issues are dealt with in the task-centred groups and the mode of delivery changes with each topic and with each group of participants. There are issues which suit some groups and not others. At present, the programme is planned before the staff have had first hand knowledge of the participants and their level of maturity; it is thus important that each workshop remains flexible in presentation and emphasis to suit the needs of the particular group. An accommodation workshop for example, might not be suited to a group made up of younger participants still living at home. In such an instance the emphasis will be placed not on the logistics of renting a flat, but instead on the budgeting and relationship issues. Here, the adolescents can speculate on the difficulties and advantages of sharing and co-operating. The participants, by looking at the people in the workshop as the people they would live with, are encouraged to interact with one another in resolving possible conflict which might arise. The key ingredient in this workshop and in all others is effective communication between group members, as well as enjoyment, stimulation and gaining mastery. Other topics for groups in the Rosemount programme are: job skills, legal issues, drug and alcohol use, nutrition, sexuality and value exploration.

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Audio-visual resources and role-playing and guest speakers are extensively used. For example, in a job skills workshop the interviews are simulated, and then video-taped so that the group can evaluate their performance. A more creative and active participation by the adolescents leads to a more effective and enjoyable learning process. In these task-centred groups, when guest speakers are used, the staff focus on the maintenance of the group. So, for example, if Richard is once again hurling abuse at Tracey because that is the only way he can gain attention or sense of identity, then the group is brought to focus on this issue.

Although discipline is not a "dirty word" at Rosemount, team members are very cautious about reproducing established patterns of response to authority figures by the group members. A lot of the participants come into the programme with very negative reactions to traditional forms of authority and discipline. It is important that the approach in the group assist in cultivating alternative coping skills and ways of communication. The agency is organised so that the youngsters have structure and clear benchmarks to test themselves against.

The adolescents' feelings towards the staff are explicitly dealt with in the "maintenance-centred" groups. These groups which are run 4-6 times per programme include all the participants and the three staff members directly involved with the group. Here the group members are encouraged to communicate directly with one another and staff. The issues dealt with include how the members feel, perceive and respond to one another and to the staff. Incidents between members that have occurred prior to group meetings are brought into the group arena and the members are encouraged to talk to one another instead of *about* one another. Adolescents, more so than adults, experience great difficulties in owning their feelings about themselves and other people. The ability to say, "I feel lonely, nervous, sad", or, "I really like the way you . . ." is lacking in most of the adolescents that come through Rosemount.

The members in the groups are answerable not only to the group leader but to the rest of the group. If, for example, Rodney has been unfair in his treatment to Glenda, the rest of the group is mobilised to exert pressure on Rodney to evaluate his behaviour. Peer pressure must be acknowledged to be just as significant as any influence the staff might exert on the adolescents. The respect and commitment to one another makes for a unique type of relation between them, as well as being part of Rosemount philosophy. In exploring their position in the group, (the pecking order), those they feel close to, those others they have trouble relating to, dealing with the authority position of the staff, the group is gradually working towards group unity.

If this aim is achieved then the group provides a supportive environment, where

the group shares responsibility, makes decisions and takes constructive steps towards the emotional welfare of all members in the group. This ethos may then be transferred into other spheres of existence outside Rosemount.

Another aspect of the Rosemount programme is Individual Time, which takes place once a week for each participant. The three direct workers at Rosemount have skills in either/or teaching, counselling and psychology. They are known to the adolescents as "youth-workers", as opposed to "teachers", "psychologist" and so on because young people find this less threatening. Considering the nature of the work, it is important that the workers appear "human". Much importance is attached to the provision of alternative role models as well as providing structure and clear limits.

In the initial sessions with each adolescent, a contract for individual time is negotiated. Both youthworker and young person sign it. The rationale for the formality of such a practice lies simply in the fact that young people treat documents that they sign with more seriousness and respect. In negotiating a contract the participants are encouraged to show motivation, control and choice over the things they want to work on. It may be that one person wants to concentrate exclusively on a problem and receive counselling. Another might want to do some computing, craft, job skills, discuss the future after Rosemount. Issues identified by the worker and resulting from the group work are also discussed. This is where individual time differs from group work. The former concentrates on interpersonal issues, and the latter on interpersonal concerns. An adolescent's performance in a group the day before is discussed in individual time, but the subject matter of individual time is left outside the group arena due to the professional ethos of confidentiality.

An important tool used during individual time is the Goal Achievement Scale (GAS). Here the adolescents are encouraged to identify areas in themselves that they would like to improve. This might include: stopping smoking, control of temper, build up of confidence and so on. The scale allows for self-monitoring by the young person since there are numerical gradations of improvement. What must be stressed is that the young person individually assesses the perceived level of improvement. This hands over responsibility to the young person and fosters a sense of empowerment.

The element that links individual time, group work and all other activities at Rosemount is the attempt to encourage the young people to accept responsibility and control over their decisions and behaviour. Rosemount aims to provide a supportive environment where communication, co-operation, clear guidelines, removing sources of difficulty, and learning are key ingredients in these adolescents' search for identity, future planning and alternative coping skills.

Craft and Leisure

Another aspect of the Rosemount programme is craft. It has long been recognised that making things and acquiring new skills is of therapeutic value. There is a fundamental discipline involved which requires the participant to bring the creative task to some kind of conclusion. But it is not a discipline which is just externally imposed; it is rather a discipline evolving from the demands of the craft itself. At whatever level of skill the project is finished, it is often felt to be "O.K." by the persons involved, and can also lead on to a determination to continue to further develop these skills.

Whatever is produced, whether it be an elementary still life, a smudged Tee shirt or an unfocussed black and white print, provides satisfaction and the opportunity for learning: e.g. "you have achieved this ... for your next piece of work, you might like to try this . . ." The young people themselves can feel happy about criticizing their work or expressing dissatisfaction and the desire to try again. For example, "I've made a mess of this; I'm going to do another one" or "I don't like the design . . . I'll have to change it". Artistic merit is not the main concern. What is important is that participants are learning and getting satisfaction.

That is all fairly obvious, but it is important to consider the opportunities for interaction. There is a particular kind of conversation which flows from shared activities which is not likely to occur in a more formal setting – a classroom or a workshop for example. It arises from the activity itself and from the relaxed atmosphere. Confidences and news are exchanged, opinions, questions, comments in a free-flowing way that puts very few limits. An important aspect of this is the reinforcement and affirmation they give one another, and the often surprisingly constructive criticism: "I like that – how do you do that with the pencil to make shadows?" . . . "That's O.K. but it's too small to paint – the drawing of the figures needs to be bigger for a cartoon".

Learning to laugh together is something that can be taken for granted: many of our young people take a while to be able not just to laugh at situations or other people, but at themselves and their behaviour, to handle jokes and make jokes about their own foibles. And caught in the spontaneity of the moment and in a sense of play, this can happen during craft.

Another important area in which play can be found, limits explored and companionship enjoyed is leisure day. Rosemount's aim is to provide the young people with opportunities for sport and physical activity that they might not have the opportunity to discover by themselves. It is not imposed like school sport or physical education. They and the youthworkers democratically choose the weekly leisure day outing (approx. 3 hours), with the provisos that it appeal to most of the group, be appropriate to the prevailing weather conditions and the budget, and provide as much variety of experience as possible.

A few of these young people are so fearful of new experiences that they have to be encouraged to go as far as they choose, and for some this may amount to putting on a pair of ice skates and standing on the ice; for another mounting a horse and then dismounting or watching. It still represents some level of personal exploration.

Leisure days are intended to be enjoyable and reasonably taxing in terms of energy required, with the emphasis on the active rather than the passive. In team sport such as indoor cricket a sense of fair play can be fostered, generous concessions are often made to team mates for the sake of the game and personal enjoyment for everyone. Otherwise abusive and aggressive young people sink their energies into the game or leisure activity and become constructively engaged in a common pursuit. Thus they experience the pleasures of working and playing together co-operatively. It is an active learning process about interaction and teamwork more effectively taught by doing than by telling. It is also child-centred, and competitive for the sake of amusement rather than scores, in keeping with modern educational theory.

Camp

Camp serves as another significant part of the Rosemount programme. It is usually conducted in the first few weeks of programme so as to achieve two basic aims; the bonding of individual participants into a cohesive group and the establishing of effective working relationships between staff and young people.

The camp does not try to "push" the participants to their physical or emotional limits of endurance, but rather allows staff to create an environment that fosters development through positive reinforcement. The positive reinforcement of one young person who takes part in an activity such as abseiling is just as significant as the positive reinforcement of someone who takes part in a simple meal preparation. In this respect, although the programme is based upon effective group dynamics, it tries not to lose sight of the individuals or their needs.

The camp also provides a three day intensive experience of living together. Consequently the young people are forced to deal with interpersonal issues and resolve conflict which arises, with the knowledge that if they do not, they will have to live with the residual tension. They are therefore encouraged again to be active rather than passive.

Some young people are capable of more physical or stressful conditions on camp and it is important that they be given the opportunity to test their abilities.

The other benefit of the camp is that it clearly accentuates the issues emerging from the group which will receive attention during the rest of their time at Rosemounts.

Work Experience

Work experience is available for those young people who are interested in entering the workforce after Rosemount. Workshops leading up to work experience

deal with work related issues, such as where to look for work, how to apply for a job and basic work habits. Role playing forms a significant part in this process, involving interviews conducted in conjunction with other agencies such as C.E.C. or the Department of Industrial Relations Youth Counselling Service. The participants are given as much autonomy as possible in the choice of work experience. They are encouraged to choose their own area of interest (within reason). For example, non-certificated, non-experienced youngsters wanting work as veterinarians might be directed into work as veterinary assistants. They are encouraged to approach business houses and individuals themselves, with their youthworker acting as a support. The young people may find work experience a positive or negative experience; however, all develop a clearer idea of their own needs and abilities and hence it is seen as a learning experience.

Family and Interagency Work

When a young person is accepted into the Rosemount programme, it is understood that we will work with the young person, within the context of an understanding of their family and other networks. This is regardless of whether we have counselling sessions or meetings with the family or other networks.

At the beginning of the programme a case plan is formulated for the adolescent and their family/network. We begin by thinking broadly about the adolescent within their context and work inwards to the individual, thinking about how we will impact on the individual. An example to illustrate this might be the case of an incest victim where secrecy and boundary confusion has been a common pattern in the family and between family and agencies. We will work to be extremely clear and to constantly clarify who belongs where, who is doing what, when and so on.

The case plan is continually evaluated during weekly team meetings, where information from individual, group and family sessions is compared and discussed, and through supervision and consultation.

We may well work with a family where the presenting problem is an adolescent's difficult, defiant behaviour at home which parents cannot deal with.

There may be a programme participant living in a de-facto relationship. There may be issues that need to be addressed in relation to the sub-system of family origin and young person and with the de-facto couple. In other situations Rosemount deals with a young person in a medium-term accommodation unit. There may be certain issues that fall in this sphere as well as with the parental/young person sub-system.

Most of these young people and their families do have many welfare workers surrounding them. It is important to imagine what these families feel like; virtually every movement they make is



monitored; they may feel unable to move and at times totally stifled. It is not unusual for our young people and their families to have four or five agencies involved with them. Rosemount plays a role in helping clarify the tasks of agencies through meetings and case conferences.

Where an adolescent and family is referred, Rosemount may take a course of non-intervention with the family. This may occur because there are either too many people already seeing the family or that seeing the family or part of the family may make the situation worse. Workers often "do for a family" when instead they should be encouraging the family to fall back on their own resources. Rosemount may work with a family indirectly through another agency which is already working with that family. Ideas, suggestions may be introduced to the agency presently working with the family.

Rosemount considers that it is very important to seek consultation with difficult families. When necessary, a consultant meets with all members of the team at the agency to clarify the general direction in working with the whole agency/family/young person system.

The approach used with families varies. Milan Style Systemic Therapy has been used with families who have developed rigid and long-standing patterns of behaviour and where there are many other workers from other agencies involved.

In other families where problems are not as long-standing and entrenched, a Structural/Strategic Approach is used. Work is generally brief and may not extend beyond the fourteen weeks during which the adolescent takes part in the programme. There will always be exceptions to this.

In the overall case plan we keep in mind how other systems interacting with the family may help perpetuate the difficulties. For example, one of the tasks which may be proposed to a family and adolescent who has left home is that the adolescent needs to find their own alternative accommodation. There are many agencies who for one reason or another will rescue the adolescent by taking it out of their hands, thereby defeating the purpose of the original plan.

Conclusion

For troubled adolescents, the uniqueness of Rosemount lies in its integration of three spheres of work: the life of the individual, interaction with the peer group, and interaction with the family. Working in these three areas simultaneously helps avoid a compartmentalised attitude to life in working with adolescents. Rosemount provides time and space in which people can experiment structure and yet also be with others in an informal and relaxed environment. This more relaxed atmosphere between young people and staff breaks down the "them and us" authority barriers experienced sometimes in school and family systems.

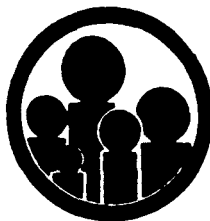
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Appendix

Rosemount Procedure

Referral Enquiry

Referral to other agency (where appropriate)

1st interview with parent(s)
or guardian and young
person Programme
Co-ordinator

Referral to other agency (where appropriate)

2nd interview young person
and youthworker

Referral to other agency (where appropriate)

Team meeting

waiting list for next programme

Place not offered

Referral to other agency
(where appropriate)

Place offered in programme

Programme

Look at future direction
for each adolescent

Follow-up