

BRIDGING THE CENTURIES: LASALLIAN “TOUCHING HEARTS” IN LIGHT OF THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL CASEWORK RELATIONSHIP.”

*Br. Philip Rofrano, FSC, LCSW-R
Martin de Porres Group Homes, Queens, New York, NY*

ABSTRACT

“Touching Hearts” and other aspects of the educational relationship as described in the *Conduct of the Schools*, the *Meditations*, and other Lasallian literature has been utilized in Lasallian Educational Centers for over three hundred years. Intuitively and intuitionally this educational relationship feels right, and seems to have positive results. However, in modern times an educational approach needs to have a firm theoretical basis, and if used as the basis for a model of intervention in the lives of at-risk youth, it also requires empirical proof through achieved outcomes if it is to be deemed credible. The initial phase of this study is to demonstrate that values and characteristics of the modern Social Casework relationship, which is based on social work and psychological theory, are latent in the Lasallian educational relationship. This study will establish the theoretical underpinnings that are present in the Lasallian educational relationship that is, “touching hearts”. Phase 2 of this project will operationalize aspects of the Lasallian educational relationship for the twofold purpose of developing a training tool for direct care workers who interact daily with at-risk youth in residential and preventive service programs, and to be able to collect data on the quality of these relationships. Phase 3 will create a model of intervention, the outcomes of which can be measured so as to establish the success of the model in improving the lives of the young people whose hearts are touched in these residential and preventive programs.

Key-words: social casework, Lasallian educational relationship, at-risk youth, individualization, controlled emotional response, feelings, acceptance, the non-judgmental attitude, self-determination, confidentiality.

INTRODUCTION

Much of the research on our Lasallian roots center on the classroom or traditional school setting. Throughout the Lasallian world there are centers and programs focusing on at-risk youth, who in former times, may have been described as children “far from salvation.” This paper will examine the similarities and underlying values and principles in the modern social casework relationship, also referred to as the helping relationship, and the pedagogical relationship of St. John Baptist de la Salle and his followers.

For the purposes of this discussion, at-risk youth are defined as:

- 1) Youth who are in danger of placement outside of the home, such as in detention, group homes, psychiatric hospitals, and related institutions.
- 2) Youth who have had negative contact with social agencies, which include school, law enforcement, church, etc.
- 3) Youth who have been impacted and traumatized by the consequences of social ills present in society such as substance, abuse, sexual promiscuity, physical and sexual abuse, aggression, violence and poverty.

The Research Department at Fr. Flanagan's Boys Home, Boys Town, Nebraska, has identified nine behaviors associated with at risk youth. These behaviors are:

- violence and aggression;
- sexual acting out;
- substance abuse;
- suicidal thoughts, actions, and statements;
- lying;
- cheating;
- stealing;
- runaway behavior;
- chronic truancy (Everson, 1993).

The social casework or professional relationship is taught to casework and direct care staff in our residential and preventive service programs. Father Felix Biestek, SJ (1957) describes this relationship as the dynamic interaction of attitudes and emotions between the worker and youth with the purpose of helping the youth achieve a better relationship between himself and his environment. This relationship helps a youngster to meet a problem, fill a need, or receive a service. It focuses on the mobilization of dormant capacities of the individual, the mobilization of community resources, or both. In order to understand the individual, it is necessary to know as much as possible about the common characteristics of human nature. The knowledge of how human personality grows, changes, and reacts to life's stresses, normally and abnormally, serve as a framework in which the individual youth is better understood (Biestek, 1957).

The casework relationship has also been described as an art in which the knowledge of the science of human relations and skill in building relationship are used to mobilize capacities in the individual and resources in the community (Bowers, 1949). The Encyclopedia of Social Work (1987) defines social casework in the words of Mary Richmond: "Social casework consists of those processes which develop personality through adjustments consciously effected, individual by individual, between men and their social environment" (p. 741).

The Lasallian pedagogical or educational relationship is the moving force behind the centering of the school on the student, and this relationship is characterized by lucidity, trust, cordiality and affection. This Lasallian relationship has been described as responding to the spiritual, social and affective needs of students. This attitude is a means of liberating, humanizing and evangelizing. This three-fold aim can only be realized through the experience of true human love (Lauraire, 2004).

The social casework relationship and the Lasallian pedagogical relationship refer to a professional relationship, and although there is an affective or emotional component present, the advancement and well-being of the young people served is paramount. The equality within a relationship varies

with the type of relationship. Both parties in the casework and pedagogical relationship are not equal in that the teacher-worker serves and the student-youth is the recipient of that service.

The social casework relationship or helping relationship is characterized by seven principles that flow from seven human needs. These needs are:

- 1) The need to be treated as an individual rather than as a case, a type or a category.
- 2) The need to be able to express feeling, both positive and negative. These can be feelings of fear, insecurity, injustice, or their opposites.
- 3) The need to be accepted as a person of worth, with innate dignity, as a child of God.
- 4) The need for a response to feelings expressed, and an understanding of those feelings.
- 5) The need to be neither judged nor condemned.
- 6) The need to make one's own choices and decisions, albeit with the advice and input from others.
- 7) The need for privacy and confidentiality, and to preserve one's reputation (Biestek, 1957, p.14).

The seven principles that flow from these needs are Individualization, Purposeful Expression of Feelings, Controlled Emotional Involvement, Acceptance, a Non-judgmental Attitude, Self-determination, and Confidentiality. Various aspects of these principles are present in the foundational writings and subsequent writings regarding the Lasallian educational relationship.

INDIVIDUALIZATION

Individualization may be defined as a recognition and understanding of each youth's unique qualities and the differential use of principles and methods base on the right of human beings to be individuals. A person is a unique individual by heredity, environment, innate intellectual capacity, and the individual's cooperation with the grace of God (Biestek, 1957). Secular society tends to devalue the worth of the individual. Historically, for example, Elizabethan poor laws were developed to address "pauperism" in society rather than the needs of the individual who was poor. Christian saints, however, saw the value of the individual as a unique child of God, as demonstrated by the work of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Vincent de Paul, Frederic Ozanam and St. John Baptist de la Salle. The attitudes, values and beliefs of the professional working with at-risk youth are of key importance in developing a positive, helping relationship. "Recognize Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children whom you have to instruct; adore him in them... May faith lead you to do this with affection and zeal because these children are members of Jesus Christ" (*Meditation* 96.3).

William Lufquist (1989) describes a Spectrum of Attitudes model for reviewing and relating to young people. In the first scenario, young people are viewed as object. The adult is in control with no intention of inviting youth involvement in the helping process. The intended objective may be the personal development of young people, but the unfortunate byproduct is conformity and stagnation. The second scenario views young people as recipients in the helping relationship. Here the adult is still in control, but permits youth involvement. The intended objective continues to be the personal development of young people, and in this scenario, the byproduct is increased

organizational effectiveness in helping at-risk youth. Lufquist's third scenario views young people as resources. There is a youth-adult partnership or shared control. The byproducts of this scenario are personal development of both young people and adults. Dr. Kenneth Hardy, a lecturer and practitioner who works with at-risk youth, describes the adult's role in each of these scenarios as that of "jailer," "helper," and "healer" (LAYFS Presentation, 2011). If the adult is to have the role of healer in the helping relationship he must see the young person as an individual endowed by the Creator with "unalienable rights".

In *Meditation 33*, St. LaSalle tells his followers that they are to model themselves after the Good Shepherd. He refers to Jesus instructing those who have the "care of souls" that they must know each one of their sheep individually and react to them as individuals. They must show "mildness" toward some, and "firmness" toward others, depending on the individual personalities and needs of the youth entrusted to their care. The Founder goes on to say that some of the youth require patience, others require stimulation and encouragement, and still others require constant vigilance lest they go astray. The shepherd must know his sheep, and the sheep must know their shepherd. This is certainly true in the helping relationship where the professional must assess the individual needs and learning styles of each member of his flock, and the young people must know and be able to relate to and trust the teacher-worker, their shepherd. The shepherd must love his sheep and the sheep must love their shepherd if growth and positive development is to take place. Without this love and trust, what should be a culture of care can quickly devolve into a toxic environment for both youth and worker.

In *Meditation 33.3*, de La Salle states, "Because they must understand what you say, you must give them instructions that are adapted to their capacity; otherwise what you say will be of little use". Br. Leon Lauraire develops this theme and tells us that there is no true educational impact which is not based on personal knowledge: "Personal knowledge calls for an effort to get below the surface, for empathy, for real dialogue" (Lauraire, 2004, p. 19). This is equally true for therapeutic impact, where one size also cannot be expected to fit all. Children and youth develop at their own pace in areas which include the physical, sexual, social, intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual. An awareness of where the individual youth is located in reference to these areas of development is crucial to be able to have an impact on that individual (Everson, 1993).

St. John Baptist de la Salle and the senior Brothers who developed the *Conduct of the Christian Schools* in early 18th century were well aware of the individual differences in the children entrusted to their care, particularly in regard to correction. Children are divided into specific types and correction was to be administered depending on where the individual fell in this typology. The "ill-bred, self-willed, or delinquent children" are disobedient and have little regard for their parents' authority. These youngsters must be frequently admonished. If they are bold or haughty, they should be given responsibility in the classroom. They should receive some positive reward in their academic in order to positively dispose them toward school. Stubborn students must always receive correction especially when they resist and are not willing to accept correction. When these youngsters are especially resistant, the teacher is advised to wait until the negative attitude passes before making the correction. Gentle children, newcomers, and special cases can have their spirit broken and correction must be sufficiently gentle to avoid this from happening. Newcomers must be assessed and the teacher must realize where they fall in the typology described in the *Conduct* before administering correction.

At-risk youth who are placed in our residential centers frequently display resistant, defiant and oppositional behavior. Some have an underlying sense of hopelessness, despair, or depression which is frequently masked by the outward defiant and angry behavior. If change is to take place, correction must take place but it must be adjusted to the individual youth's needs in terms of

frequency, firmness or gentleness, taking into account not only the individual's qualities and personality, but the circumstances surrounding the opposition or defiance. Br. Othmar Würth discusses the role of maladjustment as an educational, and therefore a developmental, handicap (Würth, 1988). Environmental factors, dysfunctional intra-familial relationships, lack of positive role models and a clear value system, poor moral fiber, and low intelligence are all factors that must be assessed inasmuch as they can interfere with the education and healthy development of a child. The healer understands the contributions of these stressors, and can distinguish their contribution to the problems in each individual youth. Programming for each individual youth must be tailored to address these stressors to allow learning and positive development to take place.

CONTROLLED EMOTIONAL RESPONSE AND PURPOSEFUL EXPRESSION OF FEELINGS

Emotions are an integral part of human nature and their healthy development is necessary for the development of the total personality (Biestek, 1957). As discussed earlier, at-risk youth have experienced trauma, inconsistent nurturance, and violence. They tend to react to uncertain challenges with violence or fear. Their "fight or flight" emotional responses result in avoidance of helpers, or fighting helpers. Disturbance in emotional development or growth can occur at a very young age. Children learn their first lessons about the world from their early interaction with the environment, specifically their parents or caregivers. If the environment is positively responsive to the young child's needs, the child learns to trust the outside world. If, on the other hand, the environment is unresponsive, or even toxic, the young child learns that the world is an unreliable and even dangerous place (NCYS, 2005).

Basic psychological needs have been identified as:

- The need for affection
- The need for security
- The need for status
- The need for self-expression
- The need for achievement
- The need for independence
- And possibly the need for novelty (Biestek, 1957).

The Helper must recognize the youth's need to express himself. The denial of an opportunity to express feelings, fears, hopes, and even hostility is the denial of dealing with the total person. By allowing the youth to express feelings, the Helper allows the youth to:

- Relieve stress
- Develop insight into problems
- Receive psychological support
- Deepen the relationship with the Helper (Biestek, 1957).

Feelings are facts. How a person feels about himself, about his interpersonal relationships, and about his problems should be seen as objective facts. Expression of feelings allows them to be discussed.

Every communication is a two-way process and the content of the communication indicates the kind of response expected. Generally speaking, the content of communication can be classified into three categories, namely, ideas only, feelings only, or a combination of ideas and feelings. Controlled emotional response on the part of the Helper depends on the problem at hand, the function of the

organization that the Helper represents, the needs of the individual youth, and the purpose of the relationship. Biestek (1957) defines controlled emotional involvement as the Helper's sensitivity to the youth's feelings and an understanding of their meaning, and a purposeful, appropriate response to those feelings.

The Helper needs the skill to communicate on both the thought and feeling level. As an agent of an organization, the Helper must respond within the context of the organization's policies and procedures. When the youth's response is on an emotional level, which can be aggressive and accompanied by many expletives, the Helper needs to respond in a controlled and appropriate manner. This is one of the most difficult skills in maintaining the helping relationship. The Helper must possess sensitivity, empathy, and understanding in or to respond appropriately to a youth, especially in times of crisis.

The Helper must remember that the professional relationship is different from a personal relationship and the boundaries of the professional relationship must be maintained. Power is more or less equal between parties in the personal relationship, but power is unequal in the professional relationship with the Helper having more power. In the personal relationship, satisfying needs is reciprocal, whereas this is not true in the professional relationship where the meeting the youth's needs come first. And finally, in the healthy personal relationship, parties have a say when the relationship begins, how long it continues, and when it ends. The parties involved in the professional relationship may not have input into the duration of the relationship (NCYS, 2005).

ACCEPTANCE, THE NON-JUDGMENTAL ATTITUDE, SELF-DETERMINATION

These three principles of the helping relationship are intrinsically entwined, with the non-judgmental attitude and self-determination flowing from acceptance. Acceptance has a number of nuances depending on its context. It can mean the acceptance of a gift, the acceptance of an idea, or as used in the context of the helping relationship, the acceptance of another human being for whom he or she is. Biestek (1957) characterizes the central dynamic of acceptance as giving help and strength, as being a special kind of love, consisting of warm concern, and having a therapeutic (healing) interest. Three steps in developing acceptance include perception, that is, the Helper must see and be aware of that which is to be accepted. He must be aware of the uniqueness of the youth who is before him and of his intrinsic worth as a child of God, and therefore worthy of the Helper's acceptance and love. The second step is to have a therapeutic understanding of why this youth is before him. What are the causes and developmental challenges that have resulted in the youth's need of this helping relationship? The third step is the acknowledgement of the youth as a pertinent reality, in need of and deserving of help. Accepting the youth as he is does not mean accepting the deviant, immoral, or illegal behaviors and attitudes that the youth may present. Acceptance means accepting the person behind these behaviors and attitudes, respecting that individual, and instilling in the youth the hope to change and grow. The youth's heredity or environment does not nullify his intrinsic value and right to God-given dignity. Biestek (1957) defines acceptance as a principle of action, whereby the Helper perceives and deals with the youth as he really is, including his strengths and weaknesses, his congenial and uncongenial qualities, his positive and negative feeling, his constructive and destructive behavior, maintain all the while a sense of the youth's innate dignity and personal worth.

Some obstructions to developing this acceptance may include the values and beliefs of the Helper, who must see beyond the behavior and attitude displayed by the youth. Sometimes the youth's resistance seems so strong that growth and development seem elusive. On the other hand, acceptance can result in crossing the boundaries of the helping relationship and over-identification

with the youth, especially if there are aspects of the youth's background that are similar to the Helper's. The Helper needs to have a degree of self-awareness to prevent these pitfalls in the development of a healthy helping relationship. The worker needs to be very aware of the difference between acceptance of the youth for whom he is, as opposed to approval of the anti-social behavior and attitude displayed by the youth.

The Non-judgmental attitude principle flows from Acceptance. The Helper has his own value system which is frequently contrary to the attitudes and behaviors exhibited by at-risk youth. The Non-judgmental attitude is a quality of the helping relationship; it is based on a conviction that the helping relationship and process excludes assigning guilt or innocence, or degree of client responsibility for the causation of problems and need, but does include making evaluative judgments about the attitudes, standards or actions of the youth; the attitude which involves both thought or feeling elements, is transmitted to the youth (Biestek, 1957). In an earlier period, the individual's "worthiness" or "unworthiness" was a consideration in giving or withholding help. Today, the helping professions accept the Christian concept that it is possible to love the sinner without loving the sin. Need rather than "worthiness" has come to be the accepted criterion for service.

St. John Baptist de La Salle established the Christian School so that the children of the poor and artisans could be successfully inserted into society. "They shall manifest equal affection for all the pupils, more even for the poor than for the rich, because they are entrusted by the Institute much more with the former than with the latter" (*Rule and Foundational Documents*, 2002, 7,14). De La Salle viewed the children of the poor and artisans as basically abandoned by their parents, whose ignorance and time absorbing occupations prevented them from providing the care and guidance required. He believed that without the Christian schools, these children would become accustomed to an idle life over many years, and would have great difficulty when the time came for them to go to work and fit into the greater society. They would associate with bad companions, get into the habit of committing many sins, and they would develop deeply rooted bad habits (Alpago, 2000). It is clear that de La Salle accepted the children of the poor and artisans as children of God, without accepting their negative or sinful behavior:

Recognize Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children when you have to instruct; adore him in them... May faith lead you to do this with affection and zeal because these children are members of Jesus Christ. In this way the Divine Savior will be pleased with you and you will find him because he always loved the poor and poverty (*Meditation 96.3*).

You are by your state obliged to instruct poor children. Do you love them? Do you honor Jesus Christ in their person? With this in mind, do you prefer them to those who have a certain amount of material wealth? Do you have more concern for the former rather than the latter? (*Meditation 133.3*).

The principle of self-determination is the practical recognition of the right and need of at-risk youth to freedom in making their own choices and decisions in the helping process. Helpers have a corresponding duty to respect that right, recognize that need, stimulate and help to activate that potential for self-direction, helping the youth to see and use the available and appropriate resources of the community and his own personality (Biestek, 1957). As discussed earlier, at-risk youth have grown up in a world that is seen, at the least, as not responsive to their needs, and in the extreme, as a hostile, dangerous, and emotionally toxic environment. The youth can develop a sense of control of self and the environment through self-determination. Certainly the youth should be a party to his own assessment and service planning in the helping process if he is to attain the goals outlined in his service plan. Self-determination results in empowerment. The Helper must share power with the youth. Power and control are not the same, inasmuch as power is given, while control is taken

(NCYS 2005). Freedom for a youth in the helping relationship is a fundamental right flowing from his dignity as a human being. The Helper can apply the principle of self-determination by:

- 1) Helping the youth to see his problem or need clearly and with perspective.
- 2) Acquainting the youth with pertinent services in the community.
- 3) Introducing stimuli that will activate the youth's own dormant resources.
- 4) Creating a relationship environment in which the youth can grow and work out his own problems (Biestek 1957).

Self-determination is not the same as license. Rights of one individual are circumscribed by the rights of others. Also the degree of self-determination depends on the capacity of the youth, including his maturity, intellectual ability, and mental health. There may also be limitations arising from civil law, especially in juvenile justice settings.

The *Conduct of the Christian Schools* discusses correction as one of the most important things done in schools. It also addresses indirectly the concepts of power and control. The teachers are told, "If, for example, absolute authority and an overbearing attitude are assumed in dealing with children, it is likely that a teacher will find it difficult to keep this way of acting from becoming harsh and unbearable... At the same time, if too much consideration is had for human weakness, and if, under the pretext of showing compassion, children are allowed to do as they will, the result will be wayward, idle, and unruly students" (*Conduct*, p. 135). The *Conduct* also provides for the appointment of students as officers in the school. "There will be several officers in the school. These officers will be charged with several different functions which teachers cannot or ought not to do for themselves" (*Conduct*, p. 170).

CONFIDENTIALITY

The principle of Confidentiality in the helping relationship flows from the underlying value that makes one worthy of receiving help, namely the innate dignity of the individual. Confidentiality is the preservation of secret information concerning the youth which is disclosed in the helping relationship. Confidentiality is based on a basic right of the youth; it is an ethical obligation of the helper and is necessary for an effective helping intervention. Moreover, the youth's right, however, is not absolute. The youth's secret is often shared with other professional persons within the agency, or upon consent, in other agencies. The obligation then binds all equally (Biestek, 1957). The Helper must remain aware that he is an agent of an organization that has the primary responsibility of providing help for the youth. It is the responsibility of the Helper to provide this information to the youth, as well as the limits of confidentiality, which includes taking action if the youth himself or others may be in danger if the information is not shared. Biestek describes natural law as the "will of the Creator as manifested in nature" (p.122). Natural law therefore spells out the individual's duties to himself and others. The means for the fulfillment of these duties are rights, and humans have two classes of natural rights, namely, the right to life and the right to growth and development. The latter class includes the right to procure the good of the body, the right to the good of fortune, and right to the good of the soul (Biestek, 1957). A secret or one's personal business is one's "property" and for another to give away that "property" constitutes theft.

Although de La Salle and the foundational writings do not specifically address confidentiality, the seeds of the principle are latent in the practices of the time. The *Conduct of the Christian Schools*

required that the teachers keep “registers” regarding the pupils. The “Register of the Good and Bad Qualities of Pupils” was a summary of the teacher’s observations of his pupils during the school year. This register included the teacher’s assessment of the students’ character, behavior, piety, defects, their relationship with parents, punctuality, qualities, offices held during the year, and how he carried them out (Lauraire 2006). These Registers were kept with the Director for safe-keeping.

When a student was first enrolled, detailed information was obtained regarding the child. This information included such personal matters as the home background of the child, first impressions of the child’s character, information regarding previous school experiences, involvement in the Christian life of the Church, and any plans for the future the child or parent may have (Lauraire 2006). With the emphasis on Christian charity and silence in the operation of the schools, it is likely that this information was kept confidential. During recreation, according to the *1705 Rule*, the Brothers “...[will not] speak about what has occurred in the world, the schools, or what they have learned there, but will converse on edifying topics that can lead them to love God and practice virtue” (*Rule and Foundational Documents*, p. 30). It is clear that the Brothers were not to discuss information obtained about their students during recreation, thus helping to maintain the confidential nature of this information.

THE LASALLIAN SCHOOL, THE LASALLIAN AGENCY

Lasallian Studies #17, *That Your School Runs Well* is a combination of writings by contemporary writings on various characteristics of the Lasallian School. Br. Leon Lauraire writes, “Warm relationships are characteristic of the atmosphere in a true Lasallian School, and they promote good performance and effectiveness of teaching and learning activities”. Brother goes on to write:

By mature and deliberate choice, the Lasallian educational relationship is warm and brotherly, trusting and stimulating, and it affects the method of working without claiming exclusive possession of it, Lasallians are convinced that this type of relationship is indispensable for the harmonious and integrated growth of individuals (p. 77).

In that same publication, Br. Pedro Maria Gil writes:

Lasallian Pedagogy will be all the more insignificant if it is reduced to procedures, techniques, or specific resources. Conversely, the more it is considered as a spirit capable of animating and producing concrete actions, so much the more will it be alive and able to apply new human dimensions in the field of pedagogy (p. 244).

St. John Baptist de La Salle, in his fifth and sixth *Meditations in Time of Retreat*, strongly encourages the Brothers to be guardian angels to the children entrusted to their care. He describes the need of the children for “visible angels” who will encourage the youth through instruction and good example. The guardian angels, provided by God, are to prevent “anything whatsoever harmful to their salvation from capturing their hearts but also *to guide* the children through all the dangers they meet in the world”. He speaks of coaching the youth, in modern terms, when he tells the Brothers it is their duty to “*admonish the unruly* and to do this in such a way *that they give up their former way of life*; you must rouse up those who lack courage, support the weak, and be patient toward all” (*Meditations* 197, 198). How appropriate are these words for Helpers of today working with at-risk youth!

The Lasallian School has as its purpose “the procurement of the salvation of souls, where salvation embraces the goal of making the students employable and in the growing maturity of their lives of faith” (Van Grieken 1999, p. 91). The Lasallian agency, through the helping relationship, has as its

purpose also the procurement of the salvation of souls, to prepare the youth in care for interaction with society, to be able to lead productive and healthy lives as citizens, parents, and as individuals who are capable of attaining the physical, emotional, and spiritual goods the world has to offer. The Lasallian agency is a clean, caring, orderly, structured environment where learning, healing, and supportive interactions can take place. The Lasallian agency must be a welcoming place, one where the residents, their family members, and external overseers can feel welcome and engaged. The Lasallian agency is a safe environment, where a youth can be himself and be able to relate positively with peers, counselors, and caretakers. The Lasallian agency must engage in competent, evidence based practice, which requires a well-trained and experienced staff who understands the needs of the youth and families in care, and how to provide for those needs. The Healing agents must understand the psychological and neurological effects of trauma in the lives of the youth entrusted to their care, and how to touch their hearts, transform their lives, and instill hope in their minds.

DISCUSSION: THE LASALLIAN CULTURE OF CARE

In January, 2012, legislation was passed in the State of New York to transfer care and custody of adjudicated delinquents in non-secure and limited-secure from the State Office of Children and Family Services to New York City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS), the largest public child-welfare and juvenile justice agency in the United States of America.

ACS issued a request for proposals for not-for-profit provider agencies to provide the required services to these youth in community-based group homes. The program was dubbed Close to Home, because youth who were incarcerated in Upstate New York settings would be transferred to these community-based group homes and be near to family and community. This would allow family members to be involved in therapeutic interventions with their child, and would also permit the development of ties to local, community based organizations that could continue to provide services following the child being reunited with the family. ACS required that the provider agencies propose an evidenced based model of intervention, or at the very least, a promising practices model.

Martin de Porres Group Homes, a ministry of the District of Eastern North America, provided services to this population of youth since 1974, and proposed the Lasallian Culture of Care as its promising practices model. The model is based on Lasallian pedagogy as developed by St. La Salle and his Brothers and their colleagues for over three hundred years, guided by theories of casework practice and relationship, and principles of child and youth development. Martin de Porres received an award in the procurement process to provide up to twenty beds in three houses located in New York City. ACS and the State Office of Children Services requested that Martin de Porres further develop the Lasallian Culture of Care and presentations were made to those public agencies on the history and components of the burgeoning model. All Martin de Porres staff are thoroughly trained in the model, supplemented by attendance at regional, national, or international Lasallian formation programs.

The three pillars of the model are: touching hearts, transforming lives, and instilling hope. The following description of the model is from the *Martin de Porres Group Homes Close to Home* (MDPGH). *Manual of Policies and Procedures* - (2012). The model is based on the tenets of the Helping or casework relationship and the principles of Lasallian pedagogy:

Martin de Porres has provided and seeks to maintain a warm, safe, and nurturing environment for the children entrusted to their care. To achieve this goal the initial and

ongoing training of staff is vital in establishing and maintaining the desired “Lasallian Culture of Care.” We have developed a competency-based approach model of treatment over the years that incorporate techniques that we have found to be successful, with the *Residential Child and Youth Care Professional Curriculum* of the University of Oklahoma. In this model the staff are given the basic five premises that are discussed and developed so that staff has a clear understanding of who the population is that we work with and why it is vitally important that all staff agree with the five premises and are all on the same page. The five premises are as follows:

1. Children and youth in residential care must receive services that do more than focus on problems or deficits. They need a wide range of appropriately challenging and supportive opportunities to explore, learn and grow as individuals.
2. Children and youth in residential care and their families must be engaged and actively involved in all aspects of the services they receive. This includes assessment, goal setting, case planning, activities, program design, and evaluation.
3. Children and youth in residential care must have opportunities to establish caring relationships in their lives. Their growth and progress occurs within the context of their relationships with staff, peers, family members, and other caring adults.
4. Children and youth in residential care must be served in programs that take into account environmental influences on growth and progress. Environments include physical, cultural, philosophical, and social dimensions.
5. Children and youth in residential care must be served in programs that collaborate and form partnerships with a number of resources. Those include the youth, their families, staff, other service providers and the community.

Developing a Culture of Care: is a process that all staff members are introduced to in training. The staff is made aware that there are a variety of factors that determine the structure and feel of the program. These factors include policies, procedures, written and “unwritten” rules, and of course the physical facilities. All of these factors contribute to the culture of care which can be a positive or negative one. We at Martin de Porres strive for a positive culture of care where the strengths of the individual child is recognized and built upon. It is our belief that the child is a resource in the treatment plan and could be looked upon to provide input into the process. The staff’s role in the process is also defined so that at the end of training the staff knows what their role is, how they fit in, and what additional skills they may need to develop in order to help in the process.

Building Relationships: and its importance is also emphasized in the training. The staff is made aware that the relationship they have with the children is instrumental in being able to provide services to the children. It is the positive relationship that staff will build and maintain with the child that will ultimately determine whether or not the child has a smooth transition out of care. The staff is trained to understand that there are sometimes cultural differences that they should be aware of and respectful of. The staff is also taught that communication is important in the building of relationships. The staff at the end of the training knows the difference between verbal and non verbal cues from the children and how to be effective listeners.

Understanding Child Development: is another topic that is covered extensively in the training. The staff is made aware of the various stages of development and what happens when that stage is either interrupted or undue negative factors unduly retard development. The life skills continuum is also explored and the staff is made aware that a child must master a variety of skills in order to make a smooth transition into adulthood. Spiritual development which involves the moral growth, values, and the sense that we are connected to something larger than ourselves is also discussed so that the staff can help the children in this area.

Discipline: is one of the most important segments of the training. The staff is made aware that there is a distinct difference between Discipline and Punishment. We at Martin de Porres do not punish but effectively discipline by teaching. We strive to show the children alternative ways to act in a positive manner and achieve the same results. Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs is introduced in this segment. The staff is made aware that in most cases the children are acting out because there is an unmet need. Staff is trained to identify this need and re-direct the child to appropriate behavior.

To aid in this endeavor Martin de Porres uses a "Token Behavior Management" system. The children get positive re-enforcement by receiving points for following the guidelines and rules and regulations of the program. These points can be earned by keeping their rooms clean, going to school and not receiving calls from the school, and doing their chores. Points are also rewarded for satisfactory performance in programming such as Preparing Youth for Adulthood and tutoring. The total number of points earned during the week determines which one of 4 groups that the child belongs in. The groups starting with 1 determines what additional privileges the child will receive for the week. These privileges could be extra phone, computer or video game time. The points that are earned are converted into dollars and the money is received along with their allowance for the week. The Behavior Management system was one that was devised by staff as well as the children and the direct care staff advises that it is a useful tool in getting the desired behavior.

All newly hired staff since 2010 has received this 4 week (100 hours) training before they are committed to working with the children. In addition they receive a minimum of 30 hours during the course of the year on a variety of other topics. It has been the observation of the administration that the number of incidents has decreased since the inception of the training.

Mentoring: We at MDPGH believe that every child is entitled to a quality education and warm and nurturing environment that will foster growth and development, so that the child may reach their full potential. In pursuit of that goal MDPGH has established a Mentoring Program for the children entrusted to their care.

We serve young men between the ages of 13-21 who have been placed with MDPGH and who come to us with a variety of "life" issues that our staffs are trained and qualified to address. It is our goal to provide a road map for our youth as they try to navigate through that difficult rite of passage namely adolescent.

We will provide the young men access to technology, advocacy, and a voice of reason when they are in times of crisis. It is our goal to improve academic achievement and ambition. It is also our goal to improve self-esteem, social competence, and avoidance of high risk behavior upon their discharge.

Studies have shown that the intervention of a quality mentoring program at some point in a youth's life has had nothing but positive results. It is the relationships that are formed with the mentee that forms the bonds of trust and motivates the youth to do better. It is the aim of MDPGH to provide that intervention so that our youth can have the lifelong benefit of our mentoring program.

Group Meetings: In order to sustain the Lasallian Culture of Care at Martin De Porres Group Homes, as well as enhance the various programs that we engage the youth in, each of our Close to Home facilities conducts bi-weekly Group Meetings that includes both staff and residents. These meetings allow all and any issues to be discussed, as well as give an opportunity for all the positives and accomplishments that occurred in between meetings to be announced. It is important to celebrate their accomplishments, both big and small, and there is no better setting to do so than with your family.

Residents are empowered at these meetings because all changes in the in-house rules and group activities are discussed, dissected, explained and agreed on at these meetings prior to being implemented. The youth make suggestions about any reasonable changes they would like to see in the program and are afforded the opportunity to present their arguments about those changes in which staff are there to respond appropriately. This environment allows the youth to feel a level of respect they never felt before. Youth are more inclined to follow rules and policies they helped create than the rules and policies that are just imposed on them.

Part of the meeting also focuses on the mentoring program that has become a staple within our agency. Each mentor and mentee shares their experiences with the group and talk about the various interactions and/or activities that they embarked on. The mentors and mentees plan group outings and are able to share best practices.

The bi-weekly Group Meetings have become very important to the success of Martin De Porres Group Homes because it creates an open line of communication for two entities of our program (the staff & the residents). These meeting bring the two groups together to keep all lines of communication clear and transparent so that all parties remain on the same page. The residents tend to look forward to the meetings because they look at it as an opportunity to be a voice, which is usually a rare experience for the youth that we serve.

CONCLUSION

The values of the Helping or Casework Relationship and the key components of the Lasallian Pedagogical Model are evident in this selection from the *Manual* outlining the Lasallian Culture of Care. All staff, both experienced and new, working with youth at Martin de Porres receive initial orientation and ongoing training in this model and in methods to implement it. Agency representatives have provided workshops in this Model for oversight public agencies in New York City and State. Martin de Porres administrators and supervisors will present the Lasallian Culture of Care at breakout sessions at the 2013 Huether Educational conference in New Orleans, La.

Outcomes being measured are recidivism rate, school success, unauthorized absences, and incidents of violence between youth or directed against staff. These outcomes at Martin de Porres will be compared to the outcomes realized by other programs that are not using the Lasallian Culture of Care as their model of intervention in order to provide evidence of the model's success.

Just as John Baptist de La Salle in the 17th Century saw the educator as a Minister of Jesus Christ, we today can see the educator, in poetic analogy, as the potter mentioned in Jeremiah (Jr. 18, 1-6). As the potter gives shape to the clay, the Lasallian educator helps to give shape to human beings. This shaping goes beyond technical and scientific knowledge by unifying values, life experience, and a witness to the fact that life has meaning if it is shared and lived, as fraternity, encounter and welcoming (Lasallian Studies #17, 2013, p. 262).

REFERENCES

- ALPAGO, Bruno FSC (2000). *The Institute in the Educational Service of the Poor*, Lasallian Studies #7. Trans. Allen Geppert, FSC. Rome, It: Brothers of the Christian Schools.
- BIESTEK, Felix, SJ. (1957). *The Casework Relationship*. Chicago, Il: Loyola University Press
- BOWERS, Swithun OMI (1949). "The Nature and Definition of Social Casework" *Journal of Social Casework* 30:417: December 1949
- DE LA SALLE, Jean-Baptiste:
- *Meditations*. (1994) Transl. Richard Arnandez, FSC and Augustine Loes, FSC. Ed. Augustine Loes, FSC and Francis Huether, FSC.
 - *Rule and Foundational Documents*. (2002). Trans. Augustine Loes, FSC and Ronald Isetti.
 - *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* (1996). Transl. F. de la Fonaineri and Richard Arnandez, FSC. Ed. William Mann, FSC.
- EVERSON, Thomas J. (1993). *Pathways: Spiritual Growth Among At-Risk Youth* Boys Town, Ne: Boys Town Press.
- GIL, Pedro Ma. and MUÑOZ, Diego, FSC (ed.) (2013) *That Your School Runs Well: Approach to Lasallian Educational Model*. Rome, It. Lasallian Studies #17.
- LAURAIRE, Leon, FSC. (2004). MEL Bulletin #12. Rome, It: Brothers of the Christian Schools.
- LAURAIRE, Leon, FSC.(2006) *The Conduct of the Schools: Pedagogical Approach*. Rome, It: Cahiers Lasalliens #62, Transl. Allen Geppert, FSC.
- LOFQUIST, William (1989) *Technology of Prevention Workbook*. Tucson, Az. Associates for Youth development, Inc.
- MARTIN DE PORRES GROUP HOMES CLOSE TO HOME (2012). Manual, unpublished.
- NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS (1987). *Encyclopedia of Social Work, 18th ed*. Silver Spring, Md: Richmond, Mary
- NATIONAL CENTER FOR YOUTH SERVICES (2005) *Residential Child and Youth Care Professional Curriculum*. University of Oklahoma.
- VAN GRIEKEN, George, FSC. (1999) *Touching the Hears of Students: Characteristics of Lasallian Schools*. Christian Brothers Publications.
- WÜRTH, Othmar, FSC. (1988) *John Baptist de La Salle and Special Education: A Study of St. Yon*. Romeoville, Il: Lasallian Publications.