

Editorial note

The pastoral care of delinquents or of children at risk has a long history in the Institute since those first young gentlemen whom the Founder accepted in Saint Yon. It is not surprising that a man concerned about children left to themselves from morning until night because of the occupations of their parents, should have been deeply concerned about other children and young people who were seen to be "far from salvation". This, too, has been the concern of generations of Brothers down to the present day. It is true that, in a number of recent instances, the Brothers have had to give up some such works because of the extreme demands of government agencies, or because of greater financial responsibility assumed by the state. There are, however, a number of instances where the very governments which dismantled a whole network of such institutions run by voluntary bodies have now turned again to the Brothers to ask them if they would resume such work.

The Boys Town described in the following article is the second establishment with this name which the Brothers of the Australian District have founded. While the first now continues under another name and under different direction, Boys Town Beaudesert has become nationally known. The subject of two different television documentaries in the past decade, it has attracted much generous support from a wide range of charitable bodies and individuals. It is a Brothers foundation in a deep sense, for the priest co-founder, Monsignor Owen Steele O.B.E., was himself one of the first pupils of the Brothers in their very first Australian school. For him, Boys Town was the realisation of a dream which he felt could only come true if there were Brothers to direct the work. Many generations of Brothers have spent their summer holidays, or large sections of them, "helping out" in Boys Town. The work remains one of the priority tasks of the Australian District in its service of the poor.

We are grateful to the present Director of Boys Town for the following impressionistic account of the work accomplished there.

THE ALL-ABSORBING WORK OF BOYS TOWN

It isn't easy to write about the boys of Boys Town. I much prefer to try and forget about our problems — the boys' problems. For all that, our work with delinquents is all-absorbing, intriguing, rewarding. In spite of all that goes wrong, perhaps because of all that goes wrong, I and all my staff are powerfully drawn towards these problem boys.

I spent part of today at the Brisbane Children's Court where these baby-faced "crims" go on trial. It is a modern building where so many do so much for the disturbed souls of these sad-faced youngsters.

A girl, 13, peers through the thick corrugated glass door in a stainless steel partition. She is in a cell in an airy and well lighted basement. She seems to symbolise the clouded perspective in which these kids see life. For them the worthwhile things in life are the dangerous thrills, the fun of the streets, drugs, the unwholesome friends, the bent way of life.

In adjacent cells other juveniles sit and wait. Some are isolated. Others are in groups. In a control room an attendant presses a button and one of the cell doors is electrically opened. A boy emerges and is led upstairs along carpeted corridors and ushered into a large well ventilated room. The magistrate salutes the duty solicitor and invites the boy to sit down. Another session of the Children's Court has begun.

The session is a procession of breaking and entering, damage to property, prostitution and all that goes with it. These are only the external symptoms of the greater evils that lurk beneath — the lack of love, the neglect, the loneliness.

Billy is bent as his father was bent, as some generations before them were bent. Billy has never known God or Faith. All through his short life - childhood, teens, his Dad's been nicking things and Billy knows it. Every minute of his life his Mum or step mum has been close to the bottle.

Because of his father, or mother, Billy knows others of this breed. They are his father's friends, and the children of his father's friends are his friends. This is his only world. Everything, everyone he comes in contact with is bent - without Faith, without hope. At marriageable age who is going to marry Billy other than one of his own class? It's a self perpetuating cycle and who knows that better than Billy. He will continue to live in his own tight community and he likes it that way.

His offspring will be of his own kind. They will be taught, and they will believe, that criminality is both normal and desirable.

Of course there are exceptions. A small number of our boys are from good families. Decent people who seem to have done a fair thing by all their children. They love their children and stand by them but they cannot like some of the things their children do.

In another level of society the double standards of adults are to blame for the plight of young people who suffer from homelessness, lack of love, drug addiction, pornography and sexual abuse. What do youngsters say of the hypocrisy of the older generation who heavily indulge in the "old drugs" while we young people are not supposed to touch the "new drugs".

There are no locks or bars here at Boys Town. A lot is done for them here and we hope they will stay. Sometimes they don't. But we usually know where to find them — rap dancing or just idling in the Mall. Maybe in the Valley where redlight areas abound. There are greater dangers there. When we have found them, they don't deny that they are doing harm to themselves. They come back home with us — but they find it hard to turn their backs on what they see as the fun of the streets.

The methods we use at Boys Town are not new. We aim to do a kind of "break and enter" — break into the cycle of quasi criminal activity and implant within the seed of Faith, Hope and Charity for what is it that makes a man good or evil but what he believes?

By presenting normality we aim to put the boys in conflict with the situation in which he was brought up. Tasks within the range of their ability are presented to the boys as opportunities to succeed and so build up confidence.

The boys live in cottages in which cottage-parents, supported at all times by the Brothers, simulate good family life. The boys are taught to share, to respect the rights and property of others. In the cottage they experience love, security — and good home cooking.

We have our own registered secondary school. Study is encouraged. A little work around the cottage is mandatory. It is a contribution to their "town" community. Just a little public worship and, we hope, a deep knowledge of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

We persist in doing these things. We forgive to seventy times seven times.

Not a little satisfaction comes to us from many of our "old boys" who constantly express their confidence and gratitude by making the trip out to Beaudesert or otherwise keeping in touch, telling us of their successes and sometimes of their failures.

I take this opportunity to salute the many institutions similar to ours in all parts of the world. We salute their staffs who use methods very similar to ours in devoting themselves to "remedial work" for boys and girls who seem born to be victims.

Last week it was one such boy who, at a picnic, found a wallet containing \$ 250. Michael handed it in because "the owner will need it".

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