

## REPORT ON THE HACIENDA DE LOS MUCHACHOS

Gladstone, Colfax County

3-12-76

Staff: Father Ed - Director and Founder  
 Tony Garcia - Assistant Director  
 Efinita V. Garcia - Cook  
 Sister Mary Carmel - Learning Center  
 Teacher

The Hacienda de los Muchachos has been open for about nine years as an Institution for Delinquent and Dependent Children. It currently holds license No. 28823 and provides services to boys only. This home has had a Social Services Agency social worker since January of 1973. The social worker has made regular visits to Hacienda, visiting and counselling the boys, arranging for some medical services, and available for consultation with the staff on any problems concerning the boys or the home. During this time certain problems were noticed and complaints were received. They seemed to be of an isolated nature and the staff always explained adequately what had happened. There seemed to be no problems of a serious nature or cause for concern about the care the boys were receiving. However, in January of 1976 an investigation was initiated by our agency because of an increase in problems and incidents at the Hacienda. The emerging philosophy and recurrent problems with and of the boys led to the need to examine current programs and activities of the Hacienda.

During the investigation much information about occurrences of the past few years, previously unknown to us, were brought to our attention. Although individually many of these happenings are not grounds for undue concern, taken together and looking at the overall picture, it is the consensus of the Colfax County SSA staff that alternative placements for the eight boys currently at Hacienda be found and that no more children be placed there.

Complaints and findings can be placed in three main categories: environment, philosophy, and discipline.

*Philosophy and Policies:* Father Ed's stated philosophy is good; it is in the carrying out of this philosophy where problems occur. Father Ed wants what he considers best for the boys, yet in carrying out what is well intended, some policies have emerged which are not conducive to healthy growth. Father Ed's policy of the boys "joining the Hacienda Family" and almost completely severing all familial relationships, is diametrically opposed to agency policy and is detrimental to the boys placed there. Father Ed feels that if parents cannot provide financial support, the parents have no rights to the child. Sometimes the boys appear to be punished for their parents' lack of support. Father Ed returned many Christmas presents from the boys' families during the 1975

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Christmas season with notes explaining if they (parents, relatives) could not support the boys, they could not afford gifts. This policy was apparently established after gifts were received at the Hacienda. The boys' parents are not important to Father Ed and he does not realize that regardless of how he and the parents may feel, the boys have a real need to maintain contact with their family.

Father Ed has not been open about some of the things that have happened. Several members of his staff have left in the past year and Father Ed explains their absence with "Their commitment was up" or "They are on extended leave". Pierre Nicoles, who was with him a number of years as art and nature instructor, has left; Gil Litchfield cooked at the Hacienda for a couple of years, and left after several disagreements with Father Ed; Brother Earl and Sister Barbara (both from a Catholic order) left the Hacienda; and the Gary Frye family, after some disagreement, left. Father Ed has not been honest with our agency about why these people left and had not re-examined the policies which his ex-staff thought were unfair and with which they disagreed.

Father Ed considers education unimportant and a privilege to be earned. A child must prove himself at the Hacienda before being allowed to attend public school. Unfortunately, the Springer schools reinforce this attitude and boys are taken out of school for infractions, real or otherwise. Boys have been removed for disruptive behavior on the school bus, for "doing nothing" in class, for running away, for smoking cigarettes, and numerous other infractions. The boys then have to earn the privilege of returning to school.

The ways to earn the privilege are dependent on Father Ed. There is not any clear cut means, and failure is built in. For example -- a boy can ask for a responsibility like taking care of the animal project. He is then given the entire project without clearly defined limits or close supervision, so if the project fails, it is solely the boy's responsibility. Father Ed says the boys are free to ask for help rather than offering supervision when he sees it is needed. To ask for assistance with a project makes the boy feel as if he has failed.

Father Ed has had an excessive number of runaways, up to 4 or 5 incidences in one week, and it appears in at least one instance that Father Ed actually encouraged the boy to run away. Several boys, in the course of a football game, beat up one boy. The boy that was beaten went to Father Ed and told him what happened. Father Ed told the boy that his brother had been picked on by the other boys and this boy had done nothing to help his brother, implying there was no reason for Father Ed to help this boy. The boy interpreted this to mean that Father Ed did not care, and immediately ran away. Father Ed does not understand this boy's problems and appears not to understand children's needs in general. Father Ed did not notify us of runaways until recently, and now only if it is a child we are paying for. If a chi<sup>12</sup>

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not always reported to the police immediately. If the boy asks a rancher for help and Father Ed is called, Father Ed does not go and try to pick the boy up. Father Ed says if he goes to pick the boy up, the boy will run, so, if the boy wants to return, the boy can. When boys are picked up by people who have found them, Father Ed has expressed no concern for the child and has on occasion been rude to the people returning the child.

The policy on runaways is the boy packs and takes what he wants. The things a boy leaves behind (clothing and possessions) are boxed and placed in the hall as Father Ed assumes a boy has taken everything he wants with him. The other boys take what they want. This policy encourages the disrespect of personal property. The boys are not allowed much personal property. The responsibility is placed on the boy as the boy is aware of what happens to his clothing if he runs away. The punishments for running away are not consistent; some boys are taken out of school or lose a privilege; others are not punished.

We were told allowance is a complicated system and the boys end up never receiving allowances. His policies on allowance sound good but have contingencies where the allowance is never realized. An example of this is -- the boys earn money which is (at least theoretically) placed in a savings account for the boy when he leaves the ranch. The condition is -- if a boy leaves "dishonorably" the boy is not entitled to the money he earned. Dishonorably means any leaving (including court ordered) without Father Ed's blessing. Father Ed charges any damages done by the boy (such as windows broken) to the boy's account. Money the boys have earned also goes into their accounts. Several have worked at the school cafeteria; others have taken advantage of Father Ed's offer of money for killing stray cats and dogs.

The policy concerning the dorms is that each boy must earn the privilege of the more "trusted" dorms. This results in older boys, who are new arrivals, being placed in the dorms of the younger boys. This results in the older boy with the most problems being in with the younger boys where their undesirable influence has the most effect. The dorms really are not the boys'. They do not have free access to their rooms but are allowed to use them only for sleeping.

Father Ed takes away all medication a boy is taking when he arrives at the ranch. Generally, the medication is given only when a boy asks for it, placing the responsibility on the child. The medications withheld include those prescribed for kidney problems, foot fungus and epilepsy. Father Ed does have annual physicals for all the boys and their immunizations are kept up to date.

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*Discipline:* Discipline involves the revoking of privileges (like attending recreational functions and school). Some boys never have any privileges and Father Ed says that some of the boys, in a lifetime, could not work off all the infractions. Twice a year there is a day each boy can ask for a clean slate, but it is the boy's responsibility to ask. If a boy does not ask, privileges are still withheld. The problem appears to be that all privileges have to be earned and then the privileges can be revoked for misbehavior. It appears the boys are set up to fail as the boys are given total responsibility without the necessary guidance. The whole system of discipline is arbitrary and some boys are punished for the same infraction for which other boys are not punished. Some of the policies were established because of one incident, and are now rigid policies.

Several ex-staff members have stated that much psychological punishment is used which the boys do not understand. They feel the boys often do not understand why they are being punished and that the punishment is often in excess of the infraction.

*Environment:* The Hacienda is an old school building and it is a very institutional setting. Everything is rigidly scheduled. The boys have complained they feel like prisoners; their mail is read and censored; they have no privacy; they are allowed very few personal belongings, and they cannot go to their rooms except for allotted times.

The bathrooms are open; there is no door to the hallway; the showers are pipes out of the wall; there are no booths for the commodes, and there is a total lack of privacy.

The boys rooms have no privacy, either, and the boys are not allowed free access to their rooms. The whole building set-up allows no privacy and the rules further restrict any privacy that could exist.

The boys have very few personal belongings and respect for personal property is not encouraged. Books are not allowed in the dorms, as dorms are only for sleeping.

The Hacienda provides an austere atmosphere -- more like a monastery than a normal home. There is very little, or no fun, and far too many punishments and rigid rules. There appears to be far too much responsibility placed on the boys with little supervision, which puts a boy in the position of constantly facing failure. Since discipline is inconsistent, and pleasurable things are taken away for punishment, the boys experience little or no security. The boys seem to have little to depend on or look forward to.

In conclusion, we feel this group home is not conducive to the positive growth and development of a child. The emphasis seems to be on conforming to certain

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*set rules and regulations instead of providing a warm, secure atmosphere in which to grow.*

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