

starting out in detached work

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Starting work as a detached worker can be an isolating experience; although there may be co-workers and managers willing to offer support and a community to relate to, workers are essentially on their own. Alan Rogers explores the experience in this classic booklet dating from 1981.

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This classic booklet, written by Alan Rogers, offered help for new workers in two ways; first by describing and explaining some of the causes of isolation it showed that these feelings are



created by the nature of the work, rather than simply the person doing it. Secondly, it offered guidelines for action and recording during these early months which provided a means of identifying problems and overcoming them.

While the booklet was designed primarily for workers themselves, its style and structure meant that it could be used as a work book or guide that new workers and managers of projects could use together. It became the standard introduction to detached youth work.

The booklet was written as part of the work of NAYC's Project in Support of Alternative Work, with the help, advice and experience of a group of field workers (credited in the Foreword).

Alan Rogers [pictured above right circa 1982] was Co-ordinator of the Project in Support of Alternative Work - a DES funded project, based at NAYC (1978-82). The Project examined the support needs of detached and project-based youth workers. He went on to coordinate Youth Clubs in the 80s Project and since the late 1980s has worked as a freelance consultant, writer and editor in the field of youth and community work. He also edits [the Source](#) - UK Youth's online magazine.

NB: [page numbers] refer to the original edition of the booklet.

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Foreword

A worker with little or no previous experience has few reference points when starting out in detached work. There is little formal training that specializes in detached work and few accounts of recent practice. This booklet attempts to provide some guidelines to the initial months in post for workers new to detached work.

Once it was decided to write the booklet, I co-ordinated several meetings of a small group of workers who had been through the process of starting out. We talked and reminisced about our experiences and tape-recorded our conversation. This booklet is an

attempt to organize our discussion; the sub-titles (written in italic) in the text are quotes from our meetings.

The booklet is directed essentially at workers and managers of new projects. We believe, however, that the process we outline will be similar for workers joining established projects; the job will tend to be more defined, but many of the activities and feelings of confusion will be the same. Indeed there may well be something to be gained by having a more open-ended brief, similar to the worker in a new project - as described in the booklet.

My thanks to go to those people who gave their time and ideas in order to make this booklet more realistic; Ann Atkins, Tim Caley, Adrian King and Martin Varley.

Alan Rogers

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Introduction

There's no way to make the beginnings easy.

The detached work method itself tends to create feelings of isolation and uncertainty for workers. In the early months of employment particularly, detached workers tend to feel pressures upon them to justify the existence of the post - to managers, co-workers and themselves. Detached work is often slow to develop, so there is no way to guarantee instant success; what we hope to do is, by pointing out some common problems to share a load, while at the same time offer some guidelines that may be of practical use.

Detached workers work with young people on their 'homeground' - on streets, waste ground, in cafes, clubs, bars and discos. This means having to become part of the scene by gaining their acceptance; once a level of trust is established, the possibilities for fruitful and exciting work are endless - but gaining that acceptance can be hard. When you are paid to establish relationships on the streets even more pressures are felt.

Don't let the first group of kids you meet become your clients for the next three years.

During what we are calling the reconnaissance period, the major responsibility a worker has is to research their patch in order to collect information which will be used to plan the long-term objectives of the project. At the same time, however, there is a need to establish a [page 5] credibility through personal and professional relationships with young people, adults and agencies in the area. These two needs will sometimes be in conflict - as the later parts of the booklet will show. Employers - and others - will have ideas about what could be done. The post may be funded to work within specific geographical boundaries or with a particular 'target group'; there should be a job specification for the post which will also define boundaries for the work. Whatever planning and research has been carried out, however, it's almost certain to look different once someone is out there.

It is important for workers to be allowed enough time to carry out their reconnaissance of the locality. It's tempting to become involved in 'doing' things too early, only to find out that expectations have been set up that in the long-term are not appropriate. This process is going to take six-to-nine months; the reconnaissance period begins with the first day in post and should end with the presentation of a final reconnaissance report which is given full discussion at a meeting with the manager(s) of the project.

You may identify ten different possibilities for action in ten different places - you can't cope with all of them. In these six to nine months it is important to keep your options open and not to get caught up in programmes of activity that will close off other future possibilities. These decisions should be left until the end of this research process, when there will be more information available on what is going on in the area. Workers will need time to get settled in without pressure to achieve anything other than the gathering of credibility.

There is pressure on workers to 'achieve' or 'produce' something early on to prove that the project is giving 'value for money'. Some of this pressure will come from managers and others and anxious to know what has been established. But very real pressures are ones

that come from within workers themselves, and these are to do with the need to establish an identity

After about three months, I said to my management group - "I think we could start a small information service now, people are asking for it" - they said "Hang on, we said we'd take nine months to look around, let's wait and see; keep doing what you're doing" -I think that was the most supportive meeting in those first months.

The worker is moving from their adult world into the world of young people, very much caught in the middle - neither one of Them', nor one [page 6] of 'Us'. It is not surprising if early on workers seek to establish a role - as 'troubleshooter', 'counsellor', 'information-giver' or whatever. Any or all of these roles may be appropriate in the long-term. At this stage, however, it is not clear which groups of young people will be seen as the main target groups, where the project will be working, or if the project will choose to concentrate on specific issues, such as unemployment, truancy and so on.

This makes the reconnaissance period sound a bit frightening -there must be a positive side?!

Perhaps the most important and exciting facet of starting out in a detached work project is the sense of freedom - there are so many possibilities; there's a real liberating effect in being able to take the time to explore where you can use your energies in the long-term. It's a chance to be able to assess and choose objectives compatible with your own strengths and skills - or honestly to recognize that the job requires strengths and skills which you don't have. (Doing this will identify training needs, or the need to look for a method of work more appropriate to you.) Whatever happens, there is a far greater chance of effective use being made of a project's most valuable resource - its staff. One attraction of detached work itself is that it has been - and is - an innovatory force in the youth service; there is much happening now that detached workers helped pioneer. [page 7]

Using this booklet

The body of the booklet is five sections covering the major areas of concern in the first six-to-nine months, up to the presentation and discussion of a reconnaissance report. Although nothing fits into tight

compartments, the sequence is a suggested chronological order. Areas will certainly overlap, but to go out of sequence would tend to lose any coherent development in this period.

Each section ends with a Summary and Checklist for Action and Recording which is designed to help the writing-up and communication of these months. Primarily this book is for workers, but it is also a tool that can be used together with managers as a 'work-book', a check on progress and a means of identifying areas of concern. *[page 8]*

Section I: Preparation

Although it is dangerous to hold off too long from making contacts and being seen around, it's even more dangerous to be pointed in the direction of 'your' city centre or estate and be left and told to get on with it. Some preparation will be necessary.

When I started I didn't really know much about detached work myself.....

Because it is outside the mainstream of youth work, workers haven't necessarily had any specific training in detached work, so it is valuable to have opportunities to talk and read about the subject. Co-workers on the project are the first and most valuable source for this type of support. The importance of the support of co-workers or team members underlines the value of a team-based approach to detached work; the single-post project creates additional stress and isolation for the worker. If there are other workers in the locality, their experience and ideas are another obvious source of information. If this support is not available locally, it is worth looking further afield.

Although it is in many ways a 'second best', there is material worth reading and sources worth contacting. (A suggested 'reading list' and contact list is included in this booklet as an Appendix.) A detached work project will need very little equipment at this stage, but there are some basic physical resources required *[page 9]*

Although I was supposed to be using this centre as my base, the telephone was a call-box, the office was two corridors from the telephone, the toilet was two floors down

Although detached work projects make only a small demand on capital and premises, it is vital that these demands are met. At the very least this means an office with a desk, chairs, telephone, filing cabinet and stationery. The worker will be writing reports and will need access to some secretarial help. It is a management responsibility to locate these resources and they should already exist on appointment. If they don't exist it is important for managers to make the provision of these basics a major priority.

One financial matter that will need to be cleared at this stage is the issue of professional expenses. Workers will incur necessary expenses in the course of their work, which they would not normally have. These will include buying drinks and refreshments for themselves and sometimes for others, as well as travelling. Some form of payment and guidelines on what is a justifiable professional expense will be needed at this time.

Why is it that they think a detached youth worker is the answer to any of the problems that they are concerned to do anything about?

The project is a response to something; the original aims of the project will be the reference point for discussion on the long-term future. It is crucial to be aware of the stated aims of the project and the concerns that brought the project into being. This will involve reading reports of previous research in the area, the project description and job specification as well as talking to managers - members of the management committee and/or people within the agency where the project is based.

The reconnaissance period will be testing out the evidence for and feasibility of the aims that have been set for the work. It is important for all to be aware that the proposed aims may not be realistic or practical - and that some modification may be necessary. If changes are proposed, solid information will be needed to justify them, which highlights the importance of recording.

Some kind of background information on local resources

Members of the management committee and people within the agency should have an overview of what is happening in the area -in youth work and other related services. They will know groups and agencies working in the area and should be able to point you in the direction of people worth contacting, both in agencies and in community groups. It may not [page 10] be appropriate to visit all of these people at this point - in this booklet 'Contact with Formal Groups and Agencies' is placed towards the end of this process. At this stage it would be useful to know, for example, that there are three projects working specifically for and with the homeless or two youth clubs in an area. As the reconnaissance progresses you may be able to find out if these resources are reaching their target groups, while looking for possible gaps in provision. In some cases it will be useful to ring, write or possibly call in on some of these agencies to see if they have available any written material which describes their work. It is not important at this stage to enter into any in-depth relationship with agencies; managers too can be involved in this basic information-gathering. The follow-up to this sounding-out exercise is covered in Section IV.

If you are appointing someone to do a job, then you need to give them information on which to base their work.

Further background information can be gathered from things like maps, surveys and statistics. They may not all be to hand, but it is valuable to know at least what is available, and where it can be found. Depending on the nature of the project, it may be useful to know such things as population, age, distribution, size of schools, number of unemployed and so on.

The responsibility for knowing where this information is held rests essentially with the management as this information is a tool for the worker(s). Realistically, workers will be the actual gatherers of much of the information. It may be necessary, however, for managers to contact the appropriate local authority or other officials to tell them that a worker will be visiting, in order to gain 'clearance', thus saving workers' time and (possibly) frustration.

I felt very strongly the need for something very early on - some sort of human support.

One of the most vital needs in these early months - and one which continues - is the need to be able to discuss and reflect on the experience of being involved in detached work. One major support which should be available is a personal supervisor or consultant. This is above and beyond any supervision by management.

You need to be able to say "I think I've made a big mistake here" - and know that it isn't going to put your job at risk.

The purpose of managerial supervision is, in broad terms, to direct and *[page 11]* inspect the work; the purpose of non-managerial consultancy is to provide a learning and supportive process through personal and professional support on an informal, non-directive basis. Because the consultant has no directive function it is vital that this person is someone who is outside the management structure. Use of an external consultant offers the opportunity to take 'time out' from the field work in order to reflect more objectively on problems and progress. The special value of personal consultants at this stage is that workers can feel able to share their worries and concerns about their own capabilities without the fear of losing the confidence of their managers. In an ideal world it would be possible to share these worries with employers. A major item on the agenda in discussion with the consultant could be how and whether to share these issues with managers - since in the long run, many of these problems would need to be sorted out with them.

And the question is whether there is anybody available - and if there is - how the hell do you find them?

It is not necessary for the consultant to have in-depth knowledge or skills in detached work. More important is an interest and commitment to the person doing the work and skill as a 'reflector' and questioner. A common choice is a tutor or lecturer on a Youth and Community Work Course, but people with knowledge of Sociology, Psychology or Management could be equally appropriate. Experienced workers in the Youth Service or related fields are another potential source of consultants.

It is important that whoever is chosen has time to do the job since, although the discussion may be informal, a formal commitment to the task is needed. Sessions with a consultant might be expected to be, say two hours a month - time which should be given to the worker, with no fear of Interruptions. As the commitment of consultants is important, it is appropriate that they should be paid for their services. Consultancy fees, therefore, are a legitimate expense for managers to consider. If managers are expected to pay for the consultant it is reasonable to expect that they will wish formally to agree the worker's choice. Not all workers find the use of a consultant necessary or appropriate but it is a process that many have found invaluable and this option should be actively considered by workers and management as one vital means of helping workers care for themselves. *[page 12]*

A chance to share ideas and experiences with other workers.....

The concept of a 'support group' has become fairly well established in the detached work field. There are both benefits and disadvantages in the various types of support groups. Perhaps the most valuable support group is one where the workers share a specific 'brief or commitment which gives them some important common concerns. Women workers, workers with multi-ethnic groups or with the unemployed are obvious examples of people who will find special value in discussing their particular needs and experiences with others whose outlook is similar.

Coming into a job and not having regular hours.....

The difference between detached work and most other jobs, even in youth work, is typified by the very hours that are worked. Rather than 'opening and closing' at set times, workers, particularly in the early days, will be expected to work varying and unsocial hours. It is likely that, at this initial stage, no regular pattern will be set up. For this reason it is valuable for the worker to use a diary or timetable to keep a check on their hours. Experience has shown that the danger is likely to be that of working too many rather than too few hours. The main point of doing this is, again, to help the worker care for her/himself rather than to check that s/he is doing 'a fair day's work' for the employer-though, of course, this should be a concern.

Yesterday, I was out from midnight until three.

In planning your work load it is absolutely essential to see recording the work as part of the job NOT as something extra, so time within work hours must be allowed for this. Managers, too must be clear on the time implications of effectively recording work. The summaries at the end of the sections give suggestions on what to record; the benefits will be seen in a very practical way when it comes to the preparation of the report on the reconnaissance period. It is important to achieve a balance between 'field-work' and 'recording-work'. It will be unhelpful to take on so many tasks that to record them becomes an unrealistic pressure.

You need to know where you fit in the project as a whole.

The support of the rest of the working team, should you have one, and of managers is particularly important at this time-and it's important too, to know that this support isn't just expressed through an occasional pat on the back. If workers are accountable to a team leader, then there must be regular meetings to check on progress, sort out problems and exchange *[page 13]* information. Similarly co-workers will need to meet regularly to exchange views, plans and experiences.

Managers will need to work out with workers a general work plan for the reconnaissance period. Meetings and reports should be built in at appropriate stages of the process. This planning and continued discussion with all the other people involved in the process is a necessary means of making the most of the support that is available.
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Summary - Check List for Action and Recording

Reading and talking-round the subject: co-workers/other local workers; for reading see Appendix.

Check on basic necessities: office, desk, telephone, etc. (management responsibility to locate and provide); clarify guidelines for professional expenses.

Aims of project: locate/collate documentation on aims e.g. project application/description, job specification etc; be clear on any limitations in target groups e.g. age, sex, geographical.

Previous research: check on any work done to establish the need for the project; note any special areas of concern and/or agencies worth contacting for further information.

Discuss with management: note the particular concerns of people who initiated the project.

Any statistical information available: surveys, maps, reports from other agencies; identify sources, possibly gain 'clearance'.

Other agencies: ring, write, call for basic information/literature - management involved?

Supervision: possible sources in text; payment needed?

Support: when are team meetings held? Any other opportunities for discussion of issues/problems? - any specialist support networks in the area?

Reconnaissance plan: discuss and agree with management general work-plan including reports and meetings.

NB The guidelines as to aims that you record here are not necessarily the ones that your later research will affirm as being appropriate. They are, however, the context within which your 'case' will have to be argued at the end of the reconnaissance period.

Section II: Walking the Streets

This is a bit of a bore, what am I doing tramping round in the freezing cold?

One way of establishing yourself that has the twin value of easing yourself in the local youth scene and of gathering useful information is-literally - to walk the streets of your patch. Spending some time doing this, without any pressure to make contact with young people will help you get a feel of the neighbourhood and its geography. You may, on this tour, see and note places or potential places where young people gather (and can be contacted in the future). You will begin to get ideas about what happens in the area and, in some cases, why.

You get to know the short-cuts, what it feels like - if it's a dark alleyway, why girls obviously don't go down there - little things like that build up a picture.

This sort of information can't be gathered from maps and statistics - or even by touring round in a car. At this point you are also getting a chance to see what goes on in various cafes or pubs, where the practicalities of finding warmth and refreshment can be combined with the 'duties' of observation and/or informal chat with the proprietor. This process will continue - probably throughout the project life, but certainly into the 'making contact' stage. At this point, however, it's important not to feel pressurized into making contact - it may happen in a cafe or whatever, but that is merely a bonus. The time spent walking about can be used to develop skills and powers of observation. *[page 16]*

If you notice a hall or building that has potential - make a note to find out who owns it.

Besides trying to get a picture of the neighbourhood, this time can also be used to identify possible resources-buildings or ha Us that groups you contact in the future may be able to use, or local groups/agencies that might be worth a visit later.

When I actually did meet the kids and they talked about a particular bit of parkland or an alley they cut through, I knew exactly where they meant.

The very practical spin-off from doing this type of survey is that it can make contact-making easier. Over a period of time you learn the

local names for places, to navigate by pubs and chip shops, when the bingo sessions are, where the buses run and so on - all the vital community information that can only be uncovered by actually spending time in the locality.

At this stage it's important to remain open and not make assumptions about the areas you visit; to put great emphasis on your observation skills - looking for the little details that in the long term will help establish you as a valuable resource for young people and your agency. 'Walking the Streets' will probably overlap with 'Making Contact' since you will continually be digging deeper and deeper for information and resources. There is value, however, in specifically setting aside time to ensure that you cover the whole patch once at least, before concentrating on developing contacts. [page 17]

Summary - Check List for Action and Recording

Resources: maps/notepad/pen; if necessary, divide the area into smaller 'zones', defined by roads or other significant boundaries and survey each of these in turn.

Notes from observations could include:

Housing

Recreational facilities

Schools, church halls, other possible venues

Any agencies

Meeting places

Commercial use

Transport/accessibility

Special features

Any groupings observed

Possible follow-up

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Section III Making Contact

In retrospect, the way I went about it was too direct.....

In all contacts with people there is a thread of potential conflict; that conflict is between the need to find out information, while at the same time establishing a credibility by showing respect for the sensitivity of the people you meet.

Actually finding the opening to talk to young people becomes a psychological watershed. One point to make early on is that the process of contact-making is likely to be a gradual process. It may begin with observation, which develops into eye contact, then to a nod which after a number of greetings becomes a conversation. All that happens up until that conversation is just as important as the conversation itself. The reason for taking time in this way is that the approach becomes more relaxed and friendly rather than an 'interrogation'. This low-key approach can often mean that it is a young person who makes the approach rather than the worker.

I was scared stiff when I went out to make contact.

Most people find this first contact difficult, it's rarely 'easy' even for the most experienced worker. The 'right' approach will be different for every personality. Approaches will range from the gradual to the very direct. There are ways of gaining introductions which have advantages -though there is a school of thought which says that the use of 'props' such as questionnaires acts as a block to relationship building. One approach is to call in on youth clubs; in youth clubs people are not so surprised at being approached by an interested adult. Making a first *[page 19]* contact here can help you gain introductions in pubs or cafes where that approach would be out of the ordinary-'they don't expect odd interested adults to be around on the streets!' Once your face gets known it becomes easier to gain acceptance into new or related groups on the streets.

Co-workers are an important source of support at this point, both as a possible means of introduction and as people to talk to who share similar problems.

It's getting in there and doing the actual speaking - that's the problem; after that you get quite confident about it!

Over a period you find different ways of initiating conversation and find the ways that fit your own situation and personality. The whole problem of making contact is exactly the sort of issue that workers can use their consultant to help clarify. If it is becoming a block to progress, the only way to seek resolution of the problem is to talk it over. Co-workers or managers can be helpful but, if you don't feel happy about doing this, an 'outsider' of some sort is vital. The special advantage of consultants over other outsiders is that you know they are there and you have a right to make demands of them.

A specific problem facing women workers is that they often have to operate in environments hostile to them as women (e.g. pubs, discos). This particular issue requires the sensitive concern of management and points to the likely need for support from other women.

Finding out how they see things - some insight into their perspective on the world - that's the starting point.....

From 'Walking the Streets' you gained an initial picture from your own viewpoint - from 'Making Contact' you are looking to see the area/community from the view points of the young people you meet. As mentioned earlier, there's a delicate balance to be sought as you are trying to find out information at this stage, but at the same time wish to establish a relationship (not at present a close one, however), that respects the young person. It mustn't become like an interrogation-that will set up all kinds of suspicions - police? 'pervert'? prostitute?

You need information about the patterns of what people do in an area - that's what your reconnaissance is all about.

Some vision of general patterns in the activities of the various people you meet will help the search for further contacts and unmet needs. What young people do in their spare time, (assuming they are

employed or at school) where they meet, where they go for 'entertainment' and so on. [page 20] Again there is a problem of balancing your need for information with the need to relate respectfully with your contacts.

It would be a useful idea to actually make a list of the sort of things you feel are important to know at this stage and have them in your mind when you are out on the streets. This doesn't mean you have to have a mental list of questions and become a talking questionnaire, but it may help conversation. Being too direct can be threatening - it's not usually wise to ask people 'what is your address?' - you will tend to pick things up which indicate whether they live in the locality, on a particular estate or whatever. As a practical guide, 'closed' questions - ones that invite only a 'yes' or 'no' answer - will tend to give the impression of interrogation; 'open' questions, which seek subjective replies are more likely to stimulate a conversation. All 'open' questions use one of the words What, When, Where, Who, Why or How.

Recording's crucial at this point - jotting down the little points or comments people make - you can come back to them later, when you're writing up the report.

A list of the points on which you are seeking information will give a guide to what you need to record. While things are fresh in the mind it is also useful to note down little quotes from conversations you've had. Often little phrases communicate more vividly than the conclusions you may draw from those phrases, they will act as a reminder to you and at the reporting stage will also communicate quickly to managers.

How far do you go in this reconnaissance period?- well, you don't go as far as starting regular contact or developing it beyond a superficial or even non-verbal one in many cases.

Again we return to the point that at this stage you don't want to make final decisions on your future target groups - 'don't let the first group of kids you meet become your clients for the next three years'. If the project is designed for a specific target group you will still make other contacts which at least give useful background information and may even suggest other possibilities. If you do start thinking about changing priorities, however, it will still be necessary to gather as

much information as possible on the proposed target group, since alternative proposals will need to offer evidence as to why that group is not chosen as well as why another group is recommended. The general message, still, is to keep options open and not to set up expectations which the project will not wish to fulfil in the long-term.

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Bring out the youth!

Making contact presupposes that you are actually going to find young people. This probably won't be a problem unless there is a specific target group - say 'the unemployed' or 'homeless young people'. They may not be easy to find and don't stand out in a crowd. It is very important to get a picture of the area at different times of day. The cafe or street corner that's empty during the day may be 'the' place to be at night - or vice versa. Another problem that will continue to affect contact-making is that the 'scene' shifts.....

So I didn't bother going down Queens Close but now, 6-7 weeks on, Queens Close is where they all are.....

Worse than the 'scene' shifting is no 'scene' at all. Whilst the people who initiated the project can present figures that so many people are unemployed or homeless, making contact with them may be difficult, even impossible. So even making this initial contact may be preceded by a long search

Six of us were out looking all night for homeless people - we went back to the management committees and said 'Sorry, but we couldn't find anybody!'

The seasons of the year affect the reconnaissance in very fundamental ways. It is realistic to assume that many of the street-corner groupings will not exist in the middle of winter. They may move to other accessible spots - clubs or cafes - but they may disappear into private homes, so the picture is seasonally distorted. It is worth noting - by workers and managers - that a reconnaissance will be affected, possibly delayed, if it begins in the winter period. Once contact has been established it is easier to maintain over the winter.

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Summary - Check List for Action and Recording

Level of contact: a means of charting the development of relationship-building that could be used as a recording tool.

e.g. Observation only, Routine acknowledgement, Neutral conversation, Personal conversation, Constructive conversation, Personal crisis situation

NB The latter headings are not likely to be reached in many cases at this stage.

Contact information: specific headings will depend on your individual circumstance; you may well find it helpful to work out your own list; some possibilities are:

name (or other means of identification)

time/place/date of contact

area where resident

leisure activities (and views on them)

meeting places

any groupings?

comments or quotes that illustrate attitudes to environment
(personal/social)

NB As stressed in the text, these headings are intended as guides, not as a list of questions - they are intended to help your recording. If used inflexibly they are likely to actually prevent you from developing a trusting relationship with the people you meet. Don't expect to gain all you would like from one meeting.

Problems in contact making: discuss any problems with co-workers/managers/consultant/support group?

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Section IV: Meeting with Other Agencies and Groups

The new detached worker on a whirlwind tour!

Meetings and discussions with other agencies and community groups will help build up a picture of the resources available, resources that may be useful to you and/or the young people you meet. Early on, workers are usually encouraged to do a tour of all the agencies - a tour which tends to become a blur of half-remembered names, facts and figures. In general, there is a lot to be said for delaying these visits until workers have a clearer picture of the area for themselves.

I went not really knowing what the agency was doing, but feeling I had to visit them, so I didn't know what to ask when I got there.

Delaying the visit gives an opportunity for two things to happen that will make it easier to know what questions are worth asking. First, you may be able to ring or just 'drop-in' to see if there is any literature available which would help find out what work the agency is involved in and how it is structured (as suggested in Section I - Preparation). Secondly, you will have time to look around the area, and that experience in itself is likely to generate questions. As well as having more questions, you may also be clearer on some answers.....

They always ask 'what is your work all about?'

The answer to this question is, hopefully, becoming clearer now and easier to supply as time goes by. It's important to be able to describe to others as clearly as possible the purpose of the reconnaissance.

[page 24] Effective presentation of yourself and the work will encourage a positive response from others.

I always go the fifth one down.....

The problem still remains of who is/are the right person/people to talk to. Catching the wrong person on the wrong day can mean you get 'shut out' or ignore that agency for a long time because that first contact was unproductive. Generally there are two major reasons for

a visit: (i) you are seeking an overview of what the agency does, or (ii) you are looking to explore the feasibility of a working relationship with someone from that agency with common concerns. In the long term it is the latter that will probably make up the major part of your relationship with that agency. At this point it is only important that you know why you are going - that should determine who you talk to.

If you are able to be as clear as possible on what you want when you arrange the visit, your enquiries are more likely to be directed to the right place. To take a simple example: if you want to find out about local trends in crime amongst young people, you would need to meet someone in the Police Juvenile Liaison Bureau; if, however, you want to know the police view of their relationship to young people on a particular estate, you're more likely to get what you want if you meet with the person on the local 'beat'.

Again, if this contact (other than requests for basic information) is delayed, the decision as to who you could most usefully meet with should become easier.

'Are you from the press?'

The problem of gaining information without arousing suspicion is the same with (some) agencies as it is with young people. The Summary gives a guide to the sort of information that maybe worth recording but, as with young people, simply going through a check-list will prevent the establishment of any personal relationship. Preparation is important here, as is a willingness to take time, to allow for a number of visits (where appropriate) and for informal chats outside the office environment.

I started writing down a list of all the agencies and groups I visited - I was amazed at how long it was.

The list is long, but the level of these meetings will vary from popping in to a number of in-depth discussions. Although the list seems enormous, when spread out over six-to-nine months it is not quite so daunting. It will be useful to build up a list of agencies and community groups. From *[page 25]* early discussions within your agency through to your first visits with other agencies, you will be

picking up new names and addresses for possible contact. Actually writing a list will help to sort out which ones are worth visiting and priorities amongst these; this is preferable to simply reacting and rushing off to the next port of call, still unsure about what to ask when you arrive.

Don't forget the pub landlords/ladies and cafe owners.....

Agencies with useful experience and information will not only include official ones. People such as coffee-bar owners will have plenty of information on the activities of young people in the area. They will be able to identify various groups and probably know a lot about their interests and their use of leisure time.

It's like contact with young people - the first ones are the worst.

Because, at the moment, you have no definite work plan beyond these six-to-nine months, it can feel that you are going in to visit people unable to offer anything and unclear about what you are doing. Indeed you are unclear about what you will be doing after the reconnaissance period; this makes it all the more important that you are (i) clear about why you are visiting that agency and (ii) able to describe clearly the information-gathering process you are going through.

This feeling of uncertainty is another reason for not rushing into this contact. Delaying these visits also means that having learnt something about the locality, you will have something to contribute to the discussions with people from other agencies. Often it is easier to listen to others more closely when you are able to contribute to the discussion as opposed to being only a listener.

I got roped into all sorts of inappropriate things.....

In these early months a detached worker is a new resource in the area -and one that other agencies and groups may find attractive. It is often easy for people to find work for a newcomer - helping out at this event, ferrying people to another, organizing something new and so on. Sometimes it maybe useful to help in this way, but these extra jobs may get in the way of the main tasks.

Any offer to help should be given on the clear understanding that it will be temporary (since it may not be appropriate in the long-term) - and given where it is likely to have some spin-off for the detached work reconnaissance (such as meeting new contacts). The assertive ability to say 'no' may well be needed at this time-and probably for a long time to come. [page 26]

Summary - Check List for Action and Recording

Agencies to visit: draw up a list from previous work; possibly rank them in importance - some suggestions are:

Local Authority Departments (Housing, Planning, Recreation, Education, etc.) Social Services, Youth Clubs, Adult Education, Sports Halls, Careers, Job Centres, Schools, Community Relations Council, Hostels, Tenants/Residents Associations, Ethnic Groups/Associations, Cafes, Police, Magistrates, Local Library, CAB

Before visit: note the purpose, background and preparation for the meeting (some points are made In the text).

Recorded Information could include:

Name, address, telephone number of agency/group

Name of contact(s)/position in agency structure

Short description of visit

Activities of agency a) general b) relating to young people/target group(s)

Resources and potential resources for project

Possible influence of contact/agency

Information gained re target group(s)

Attitudes; subjective notes on attitudes of contact regarding young people/target group(s)/the project

Any further action or possibilities for long-term action.

NB This could be adapted for use with informal agencies such as pubs/cafes. As stressed in the text - and in the previous Section - these headings are guides for possible recording, not a list of questions to go through one after the other. In some cases several meetings, including informal ones, may be needed.

[page 27]

Section V: The Reconnaissance Report

..... structuring what has gone before and a starting point for future work,

There are two major purposes for a report on the reconnaissance period: the first is to pass on information on what has been seen, done, read and heard in the past; the second, based on that information, is to put forward options for the future. In preparing the information for managers, it is essential that it is structured in a way that helps them advise and decide in a rational way. Three major elements should be included in the report:

1. A factual account of what has happened. This could be organized by using the structure of this booklet, through a simple account of what has been done under the four headings of the previous sections: Preparation, Walking the Streets, Contact with Young People, and Meeting with Agencies and Groups. If previous reports have been written, this may not involve too much work at this stage, simply a pulling together of previous material.
2. Some indication of patterns (where this is possible/appropriate). This is an invitation to generalize, which can be dangerous, but it is a useful exercise for workers, as well as being helpful to managers, to try to look for general patterns. This might be drawing a pen picture of two or three relatively distinct groups, their activities and

interests. One way of doing this effectively would be to use examples and extracts of conversations and other notes from your recordings [page 28] made over this period. It is helpful for managers, literally, to know what young people are saying and doing at a very basic level. This will give a more vivid picture of what workers have been doing, give insight into attitudes, and help decision-making.

3. Conclusions and recommendations/options - the report should put forward some pointers to avenues for future work. This will give a starting point to the discussion and should take into account the original aims of the project. Managers may be able to come up with alternatives because of their different perspectives, so the list of possibilities should not be considered closed.

It's not just any old report.

At the end of this period you will be attempting to set a pattern for the future. For this reason, discussion of this report should not be just another item on a long agenda at an ordinary meeting. It should be at the centre of attention at a special meeting which should be long enough to do justice to the report and the matter at hand. It is crucial for managers to acknowledge the importance of this process to the worker and demonstrates their commitment and support through attending the meeting.

It must have taken me two or three weeks to write.

To complement the concern of managers, the workers, too, must prepare well for the meeting and allow plenty of time for the writing of the report. Time should be allowed for managers to read it before the meeting – at least a week will be necessary. The actual writing process may begin therefore, nearly a month before the meeting.

As a general guide to the writing of reports, a sound approach is to begin by working on the structure or chapter headings of the whole report and to plan that before beginning the actual text.

Know your audience.

The level of detail necessary within the report will depend on the level of knowledge of your managers. If they don't know the area

well, maps and photographs could be useful inclusions - they can quickly convey a lot of information. It is crucial to remember that this report is for their sake as well as your own; the style and content should be decided by what they will need to be able to come to grips with the work. It is only too easy to make assumptions that because managers know the locality well they will be in touch with how young people see it; this isn't necessarily the case. *[page 29]*

The recommendations could also include things that could be done by others.

Almost certainly more possibilities for action will be identified than the resources of the project will allow. The report offers an opportunity to pass on to management ideas that they can take further with other agencies. This is a valuable way in which detached workers can use their special position and knowledge of the experience of young people.

There are limits to what you can do.

Through the report and discussion of it, the project will have to decide on priorities and identify target groups. It is realistic here to be aware that, as well as the original aims of the project, the strengths and interests of the worker(s) will need to be taken into account. The effects of revealing these at this point are either that certain approaches will be chosen in the light of strengths and interests, or that training needs will be identified.

My job has changed almost totally over the last year.

On employment the worker should have been given a job specification, outlining the key tasks involved in the post. After the discussion of the report and planning for the future, it will be necessary to change the job specification given to the worker on appointment into a job description. This should take into account both the (almost inevitable) changes in the nature of the work and qualities of the person who holds the post. *[page 30]*

Summary - Check List for Action and Recording

Allow time for writing the report: it will depend on how much there is to say and how easy/difficult it is for you to write.

Possible outline of report: will photographs, maps, diagrams or statistics be useful, perhaps as appendices?

a. Factual account, using previous recordings (earlier reports will help) i) Preparation ii) Walking the Streets iii) Making Contact iv) Contact with Other Agencies

b. Interpretation; highlighting major issues or describing groupings; quotes from contact period will help illuminate your description

c. Conclusion and recommendations; outline options, including what other agencies could do.

Distribute the report (at least one week) before the meeting

Allow special time for the meeting: plan the structure of the day with the people involved.

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Resources

Borderlines - Alistair and Gabrielle Cox, NYB (1977)

No Man's Landmarks - Nigel Collins and Liz Hoggarth, NYB

Two books that give a feel of what detached work is like.

Adolescent Girls at Risk - Harold Marchant and Helen M Smith, Pergamon Press (1977)

A drier description of field work, but includes a good discussion of the methods and special value of detached work.

Making Contact... a stage in the detached work process - Michael R Farrant and Harold J Marchant

Choosing Objectives ... a stage in the detached work process - Michael R Farrant and Harold J Marchant - both available from Youth AID, Hearsay Centre, 17 Brownhill Road, London, SE6. Useful background discussion of issues facing new workers.

The Management of Detached Work: How and Why - Arnold, Askins, Davies, Evans, Rogers and Taylor NAYC (1981).

A basic resource book for managers and workers: contains a definition of detached work and a great deal of practical ideas and information -including a step-by-step guide to setting up a project.

Detached Work Statement

A statement on detached work written by a group of workers; available from Detached Work Forum, c/o NYB. [page 32]

Guidelines to Finding Your Own Support - Warren Redman NAYC (1981)

Self explanatory title - the emphasis is on things you can do for yourself.

Developing Support Groups - Howard Kirschenbaum and Barbara Glaser, University Associates. Available from People at Work Limited, 158 Chesterfield Road North, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, NG19 7JD. Expensive, but interesting ideas - the 'pitfalls' will ring bells for many.

National Youth Bureau (NYB) - 17-23 Albion Street, Leicester, LE1 6GD: one of the bureau's central functions is to collate information on a II aspects of youth work, so if you need information or ideas they are often a good starting point. NYB operates a loan-service for documents, including projects' reports from all over the country.

National Association of Youth Clubs (NAYC), 70 St Nicholas Circle, Leicester, LE1 5NY: you may find it useful to join your Local

Association, their address can be obtained from NAYC who may also be able to help and advise on other queries. NAYC has a Girls Work Officer, Val Carpenter, with the specific role of supporting workers, particularly women, interested or involved in work with girls and young women.

Keele University Adult Education, Keele, Staffordshire, STB 5BG: twice a year Keele organizes, in conjunction with the Hanley Youth Project (Stoke), the Detached Work Seminars which comprise eight small workshop options on issues relevant to detached workers. The seminars offer a chance to meet and talk with other workers as well as a unique training opportunity.

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