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# THE NON-DIRECTIVE APPROACH

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## Foreword

THIS is a much needed reprint of the first six chapters of *The Non-Directive Approach in Group and Community Work*. T. R. Batten concluded the preface to the first edition with this paragraph:

"During the last eighteen years we have been working with all the many experienced administrators, trainers, and field workers from 'developing' and 'developed' countries who have attended our courses either in England or overseas to get the *positive* roles and functions of non-directive workers and trainers specific and clear. In this book we present the conclusions which we and they have reached, in the hope that these will stimulate further thought and be of some practical help to all the many workers and trainers now experimenting in the field."

The conclusions do indeed 'stimulate further thought' and they are of 'practical help'. When the book was published in 1967 George Lovell was one of their students and Catherine Widdicombe was a member of a later course that used the book. All our subsequent work has been built upon the foundations so well laid in this book. We return to it over and over again. We continuously refer others to it. Twenty one years later there is nothing to replace the lucid and critical exposition in the first six chapters of the nature, scope and limitations of the directive and non-directive approaches. These chapters are still needed to do for others what they have done for us. We decided not to reprint the other parts of the original book (a comparable study of directive and non-directive training and training the trainers) because far fewer people need them and in order to make the first part more readily and generally available at a modest price.

We are deeply grateful to Dr T. R. and Mrs M. Batten for allowing us to reprint this part of their book. When *The Non-Directive Approach in Group and Community Work* went out of print stocks quickly disappeared and we were without a key text so much

## THE NON-DIRECTIVE APPROACH

needed by members of our courses and those with whom we work. Dr and Mrs Batten readily agreed to our publishing in this format. As always, their only concern was to contribute to the betterment of people through the approaches they have pioneered.

For us the publication of some of Dr and Mrs Battens' work under the imprint of Avec is a source of much joy because it symbolises things of inestimable value and importance to us. First, Dr Batten has been a consultancy partner in our work and researches for over twenty years and, thank God, he continues to be so. He has made invaluable contributions to the work of Avec through practising in our relationship what he has written about the non-directive approach and through helping us to find ways of practising it and researching it. Second, they have both helped us to open up the field of *church and* community development, to work out the implications of their work for that of ministers, priests, religious and laity engaged in church and community work. Third, their efforts and ours combined span fifty years and more of sustained systematic work on things critical to human welfare and development.

The Battens' work is highly significant for the work of the Churches in the last decade of this century and well into the next. Their work is fundamental and seminal. The further we go, the more experience we have, the more research that we do, the more we understand of that significance—significance we first discerned intuitively in the sixties.

In thanking Dr and Mrs Batten for permission to reprint we salute them for what they have contributed to our ministries, that of countless others, and what they will contribute to yet more people through this reprint.

AVEC: A Service Agency for  
Church and Community Work

GEORGE LOVELL  
CATHERINE WIDDICOMBE

July 7th 1988

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PART ONE  
APPROACHES

## Introduction

COMMUNITY workers work for the betterment of people. But 'betterment' is a very vague and general term which every person will interpret for himself according to his own ideas of what is good. Thus what the worker regards as betterment for the people with whom he works they may not regard as betterment for themselves. If this should happen, what then should the worker do? Should he try to direct, lead, guide, or persuade people to accept his judgement of what is good? If he does, how can he be sure that he is right? Or should he try to help them think out for themselves what they themselves want? If so, and if the people decide on something that conflicts with his own ideas of what is good, what then becomes of his purpose of promoting betterment for them?

How a community worker answers these questions will govern his choice of basic approach. He will choose a *directive* approach if he feels that he must be the ultimate judge for people of what is good for them; or a *non-directive* approach if he feels that he ought to help them judge this for themselves.

A clear distinction also needs to be made between an 'approach' and a 'method'. It is particularly important to get this clear since so many people tend to equate the lecture method with a directive approach and the discussion method with a non-directive approach. In fact, both methods can be used, and are used, by workers adopting either approach. Thus a worker can use a lecture either directly as a means of persuading people to accept his conclusions as good for themselves; or non-directively in order to stimulate people to think out their own conclusions for themselves. Similarly, a worker may value discussion either as a valuable means of 'implanting' in people his own pre-fixed ideas for them, or as a means of stimulating people to think, express their own ideas, and make their own decisions for themselves.

## The Directive Approach

IN this book we are using the term *community work* in the very broadest sense to include almost anything that anyone may do to influence people's values, ideas, attitudes, relationships, or behaviour for the better; the term *community worker* to denote anyone who does this kind of work, whole-time or part-time, paid or unpaid, for a social, educational, or religious agency, or as an individual working on his own; and the term *community agency* to include all those who decide on policy or supervise and support the activities of its workers in the field.

### *The basic problem of determining and achieving 'betterment'*

Community work, as we have defined it, includes both social work and informal education; work with young people, with the aged, and with delinquents; and work with people in various kinds of special need. The common element in all these different kinds of community work is that they involve working with people for the betterment of the people, and this is why all community workers have certain problems in common. Thus in order to promote betterment they need first to define it, and then achieve it: but this is by no means easy in view of all the many complex factors inherent in some of the situations in which they work. Different people have different ideas about what constitutes betterment, and the mere fact that the worker wants to influence people for the better, as he sees it, suggests that his ideas about what is good are different from theirs. How then can he be sure that his ideas are better than theirs, not only for him but for them also? And if he is sure, how can he most effectively get people to accept his ideas if they already have their own quite different ideas about what is good for them? These are real problems, and if the judgement of the agency or

its workers in dealing with them is anywhere at fault, not only may they fail to do good, they may actually do harm. This has obvious implications for those of us who presume to try to influence others in relation to what we see as good. Good intentions are not enough. We can only really justify our presumption, to ourselves and to others, by continually reviewing our purposes and the assumptions on which they are based, and by continually evaluating the efficacy of the approaches and methods we employ.

Although our definition of community work includes a very wide variety of purposes and programmes, they are all implemented through only two basic approaches: the one, which is directive in character; and the other which, for want of a better name, is usually called non-directive. Of these two approaches the directive approach is by far the more common. The non-directive approach is relatively new. It is still not very well understood and applied by most community workers, many of whom doubt its value.

### *The directive approach: planning and providing for people*

The directive approach, as its name implies, means that the agency which adopts it itself decides, more or less specifically, whatever it thinks people need or ought to value or ought to do for their own good, and sometimes even how they ought to behave. These decisions become the agency's betterment goals *for people*. The agency will then provide whatever staff, equipment, premises, and programme it thinks are needed to meet the needs or interests of the people it wishes to help, in the hope that they will avail themselves of the services or activities it provides. This will bring them into contact with the agency's workers, who will then try to influence people in relation to the agency's ideas of betterment for them. It is the essence of this approach that the agency and its workers think, decide, plan, organize, administer, and provide *for people*. Always the main initiative, and the final say, remains with them.

This is the essence of the directive approach, but it is not always obvious as such to the superficial observer. This is

because an agency, as a prior condition to achieving its betterment goals, must be able to attract people to its programme and, having attracted them, keep them attracted for long enough to have a chance of exerting its influence over them. Thus however directive in intention an agency may be, it may still ask people what they want and then provide it, unless it is something of which it disapproves. Similarly, an agency worker may allow, or even encourage people to decide some things for themselves, but he will still be using a directive approach if he attempts to persuade them to decide according to what he thinks is good for them; or if he retains the power, however seldom he uses it, to veto any decision with which he fundamentally disagrees; or if he imposes any conditions, such as compulsory participation in some 'worthwhile' activity, as the price of participation in other more popular activities.

Those who respond to this approach, and very many do, do so in order to satisfy some need or interest of their own. They will join an Evening Institute, for instance, to pursue a hobby or interest under the guidance of a qualified instructor and to meet other people with a similar interest; or because they are lonely and want to extend their circle of friends; or because they live in a cold cheerless room and feel that joining a class is as good a way as any of spending an evening in comparative warmth and comfort. Young people join youth clubs for much the same reasons. Many of them like the directive approach because it frees them from all real responsibility; and even those who do not like it will accept it and conform to it as long as the advantages it offers outweigh for them the disadvantages of having to conform. The fact that they conform, however, does not necessarily mean that they have accepted or will accept the agency's ideas of what is betterment for them. All that can certainly be said is that while they stay with the agency's programme, the worker has continuing opportunities of influencing them in situations of his own contriving.

### *Leading or guiding people*

So far we have mainly described the directive approach in terms of agency planning and provision, but it is also applied in the relationship that the worker establishes with people, especially with young people and with adults in certain categories of special need. The worker's initial aim is to get himself accepted as a friendly, trustworthy, and competent person whose advice is worth having and opinions worth listening to. Once he has achieved this he will have many opportunities of guiding the thinking and the attitudes and behaviour of the people with whom he works, both as a leader of groups and as the counsellor of those who approach him individually with their problems.

### *The directive approach evaluated*

Although the directive approach is very widely used, some people dislike it and criticize it. They query the agencies' assumption that they know better than the people what is good for them, and they dislike the worker-client, superior-inferior relationship that this implies. They also believe that many of the agencies' potential clients dislike it too, and that this reduces the effectiveness of these agencies' work.

This may well be true, at least to some considerable extent, but is it not also true that those who control the agencies' policies, and the workers who implement their programmes, are, for the most part, more strongly motivated by feelings of social responsibility and more competent through education, training, and experience than the generality of the people they try to serve? And does this not justify them, if they feel they have something worthwhile to give and want to give it, in deciding for themselves what they will give and in what way they will give it?

### *Its achievements*

In fact, few if any of the critics of the directive approach would deny that the agencies which use it have achieved and are still achieving a tremendous amount of good. No one can

seriously argue, for instance, that they have not enriched the cultural, recreational, and social life of millions of people, quite apart from the massive help and support they have given to many categories of people in special need.

#### *Its limitations*

However, it is also true that agencies find the directive approach less effective for some purposes than others, and in some situations than in others. Although it has proved very effective as a way of providing people with whatever kinds of help and services they already want, it is by no means as effective a way of getting them to change or modify any of their strongly established ideas, attitudes, or patterns of behaviour. Thus the Reverend Henry Solly who saw the need for workingmen's clubs and was the founder of their Club and Institute Union was, in the words of the Union's official history, 'both the propeller and the brake of the movement; he got it going, but his objects were typically those of a Victorian parson'. He not only aimed to make the clubs centres of adult education but was also intent on keeping them teetotal and that 'was probably why they failed, for the emphasis in those early years was not upon giving the members what they wanted, but upon deciding what was good for them . . . even smoking was heartily discouraged'.<sup>1</sup>

It was not until after the Union's members assumed control that the restriction on beer-drinking was relaxed and that the movement really began to flourish. Today it has more than 2,500,000 members. Indeed, people are quick to sense, and to resent and resist, any direct attempt to influence them, and all too often its only effect is the reverse of what the agencies intend. This difficulty is least with those people whose ideas are already close to the agencies' idea of what is good for them—and who presumably are therefore least in need of 'direction'; and greatest with those who, in the agencies' opinion, most need to be influenced for the 'better'. Most young people in youth clubs are already reasonably well behaved. One major problem of

<sup>1</sup> George Tremlett, *The First Hundred Years*, London, 1962, pp. 11-12.

the Youth Service and one which many youth workers regard as *the* major problem, is how to reach and influence the more delinquent types who will not come in or who, if they do, will not conform.

Faced with this kind of problem an agency has a difficult choice to make. On the one hand, it can decide to persist with its directive approach which implies that it will fail to influence those who need its influence most. On the other, it can decide to abandon its attempts at 'direction', accept people as they are, and try to help them in some other (i.e. non-directive) way.

While the directive approach is therefore relatively ineffective as a means of influencing all the very many people who for one reason or another dislike it and resist it, it does at any rate bring the worker into personal contact with all those who are attracted to his programme. Many of these may not only not resent, but even welcome, direct advice and guidance from someone they have learned to like, respect, and accept as their 'leader'. It is with this kind of person that the worker can do his most effective work.

But effective for what? Most effective, one might think, in meeting people's short-term needs, and least effective for the long-term goal of helping them to realize their full potentialities as persons. This is because the more effectively the worker succeeds in leading, guiding, and persuading them to accept the *results of his thinking* for them, and the more he provides for them, the less they need to think, decide, and provide for themselves. Thus he deprives them of many potentially valuable learning experiences and tends to make them more dependent on himself. This is a major weakness of the directive approach for agencies that aim to increase people's capacity for responsible and effective self-directed action.

Community work in its modern sense in Britain was begun in the nineteenth century by upper- and middle-class idealists and reformers who sought to ameliorate the often appalling conditions under which working-class people lived in the new industrial towns. Such people's material needs at that time were



obvious and specific, and many of them were too poor, too ignorant, and too disorganized to do very much to help themselves. In this context the newly-formed social agencies necessarily took the initiative in planning and providing *for* people, and this directive approach was undoubtedly the most effective way of providing help.

Conditions today, however, are very different. Fewer people are really poor, and the main emphasis in community work has shifted from providing for people's material needs to helping them in relation to what, broadly speaking, one might call their psychological needs. Such needs may be stated in a variety of different ways: to find a real purpose in life; to control their emotional impulses; to think more objectively; to establish more rewarding relationships with others and thus acquire status with others; to make some more satisfying use of their increasing hours of leisure; or to learn how to choose from an ever-widening and often worrying range of choices those most likely to produce the greatest satisfaction to themselves. Experience has shown that the traditional directive type of approach has limitations as a means of helping people in relation to such needs, for reasons that have already been explained: and this is why many agencies are now experimenting with the non-directive approach. This is the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

# The Non-Directive Approach

DURING the last twenty years or so many agencies have experimented with one form or another of non-directive approach, but many of their workers still do not understand it very well and some actively mistrust it. This is unfortunate but not altogether surprising. The idea of 'non-direction' is not in itself very appealing. It is far too negative to satisfy the really conscientious and committed worker who has a strong sense of purpose, and of direction derived from that purpose. Such people are willing to work hard but they also aim to get results. They want to do more than merely 'non-direct'! Thus before they will commit themselves to using this approach they need to be quite clear about what the change will mean for them—just how it can help them better to achieve their purposes, and just what it implies in terms of what they *positively* need to do in order to achieve them.

### *The non-directive approach*

The worker who uses the non-directive approach does not attempt to decide for people, or to lead, guide, or persuade them to accept any of his own specific conclusions about what is good for them. He tries to get them to decide for themselves what their needs are: what, if anything, they are willing to do to meet them; and how they can best organize, plan, and act to carry their project through. Thus he aims at stimulating a process of self-determination and self-help, and he values it for all the potential learning experiences which participation in this process provides. He aims to encourage people to develop themselves, and it is by thinking and acting for themselves, he believes, that they are most likely to do so. Moreover, the outcome will usually be a project designed to produce some change

for the better in the people's lives. Thus two kinds of betterment result, and change in people and change in their environment go hand in hand.

At least, that is the theory, but stated thus briefly it leaves a mass of relevant questions unanswered. For instance, even if the worker succeeds in getting people to consider meeting some of their needs themselves, how can he be sure that they will agree on what these are? or if they do agree, that they will decide on what is really best for them? or even on what is practicable for them? And if, for whatever reason, their project fails, as it well may do since the worker is in no sense in control, how then does betterment of any kind result?

#### *Conditions necessary for self-directed action*

To answer these questions we need to look much more closely at the worker's role. First, let us note that people do quite often agree on a need, decide on a project to meet it, and carry it through successfully without any outsider's help. They may establish their own recreational or cultural or interest group, and decide on a programme quite independently for themselves; they may form a protest group to demand a playground or a safe road crossing for their children; or they may form a service group to help other people in need.

While this is true it is also true that many such groups have failed to meet the needs of their members. In fact, autonomous action by small groups of people will not occur, or if it does occur will not succeed, unless certain conditions are present. These are:

1. that a number of people are dissatisfied with things as they are, and are agreed on something which they all feel as a specific want;
2. that they realize that this want is likely to remain unmet unless they do something about it themselves;
3. that they have, or have access to, sufficient resources to be able to achieve what they want to achieve. This implies that they have (or can get):

- (a) enough knowledge to enable them to make a wise decision about what to do and how best to do it;
- (b) enough resources of knowledge, skill, and equipment actually to do it; and
- (c) a sufficiently strong incentive to keep them together while they carry the project through.

If the want is strong enough, and the other conditions are all present, then people will act without outside help. Unfortunately, more often than not they are not all present. This is why many potentially valuable need-meeting autonomous groups either do not form, or if they do form, quickly die: and this is why community workers, if they wish, can find ample scope for using the non-directive approach.

#### *The worker's role in groups*

This kind of work is now being called *community development*, and workers who undertake it are often called *community development workers*. Such workers specialize in using the non-directive approach in the work they do with autonomous groups. The essence of their work is to create sufficiently favourable conditions for successful group action without in any way infringing group autonomy either by making decisions for the group or by doing for its members anything that they could reasonably be expected to do, or learn to do, for themselves. This means in practice that the worker will:

1. *try to strengthen incentives for people to act—when these are weak—by stimulating them to discuss their needs in the hope that they will come to see them more specifically as wants.* (For example, a need which people might initially state only in such vague terms as, 'If only our children had somewhere to play', might in this way develop into a quite specific statement such as, 'We want, and intend somehow to get, a suitable play space for our children'. A restatement of their need in this positive form will greatly increase the chances that they will organize for some kind of group action.)
2. *help by providing information—if people need it—about how similar groups have organized for action;*

3. *help people systematically to think through and analyse the nature and causes of any problem they may encounter in the course of their project, and to explore the pros and cons of each and every suggestion for solving it; and*

4. *help by suggesting sources from which the group may be able to obtain any material help or technical advice in addition to what they can provide for themselves.*

The worker performs these functions partly by contributing any relevant factual information which the members lack, but appear to need, and partly by asking questions to draw their attention to relevant factors they would otherwise overlook. But he will not load his questions to suggest any specific answer, and he will not in any other way try to limit or direct their thinking by suggesting what he thinks they ought to do. In all he does, he concentrates on helping *them* to think.

The worker has one other important role in groups. This is to help resolve any inter-personal difficulties that may arise between the members. However strong the incentive that has brought them together may be, and even perhaps just because it is so strong, every member will be personally affected by the outcome—good or bad—of any decisions the group may take. Yet some of them may hold very different views about what these decisions should be. Such disagreements may easily lead to friction between the members, and unless they are resolved may even break up the group. Should such a disagreement happen, the worker is often in a much better position than anyone else to help resolve it. He is present in the group but he alone is not a member of it, and he does not commit himself to support anyone's viewpoint. On the contrary, by asking questions he tries to encourage the members of the group objectively to consider the pros and cons of *every* viewpoint in order that they should decide what best to do in the interest of them all.

#### *The worker's role with individuals*

What has been written above applies to non-directive work with a group, or with a committee representative of several groups. But a worker may also work with individuals in much

the same way, for the underlying principle of enabling people to assume responsibility for implementing their own decisions for themselves is the same.

#### *The potential advantages of the non-directive approach*

Workers who use the non-directive approach do so because they believe that they can achieve their purposes better in this way. Its advantages, as they see them, are as follows:

1. *it enables them to accomplish more with their limited resources*

(No social or educational agency ever has enough material resources to do all the work it wants to do. By encouraging people to organize to meet more of their own needs for themselves, the non-directive approach enables an agency to spread its own limited resources more widely, since the agency provides less and the people more. There is also the additional advantage that people will generally look after what they provide for themselves more carefully than what an agency provides for them.)

2. *it helps to 'develop' people*

(Many agencies have as their primary aim the development of people in the sense that they want to help them, both individually and in groups, to develop the will and the competence to manage their own affairs. They value this, not only because it enables people to meet more of their own needs for themselves, but also because in the process of doing so they can increase their status and feeling of self-respect.)

3. *it helps the emergence of 'we-feeling'*

(People who work together in a group on a project they have all chosen in order to meet some need they all share tend to get to know and like and respect one another, and to think and talk of themselves more and more as 'we' rather than as 'I' and 'they'; and thus, if it was previously lacking, the germ of a feeling of caring for the welfare of other members is born which may later extend to people outside the group. It is this change of attitude towards others, which *may* result from a project, which constitutes the core of all true community development.)

4. *it provides many opportunities of educating and influencing people*

(Although a worker using a non-directive approach does not try to lead or guide people to accept any preformed conclusion of his own, he does hope to educate them, and also to influence their attitudes and behaviour. He aims to educate them partly by asking questions intended to help them to think more systematically and relevantly than they otherwise would, and partly by providing any relevant information they need and would otherwise lack. He can also hope to influence their attitudes and behaviour indirectly, as we have just seen in (3) above through what he contributes to the emergence of 'we-feeling'.)

*Its limitations*

Whether the worker actually reaps these potential advantages of the non-directive approach or not will depend on the degree of skill with which he uses it: but however great his skill may be, he must always be ready to recognize that this approach has limitations.

Thus it is implicit in the use of this approach that the worker is never in control, and he has no guarantee whatsoever that, as the result of the thinking he has helped people to do, they will arrive at the conclusion he would prefer. All he can do is to trust to his skill in the hope that with his (non-directive) help, they will arrive at decisions which really are good for them. If they fail in this, e.g. if they choose goals they lack the skill or resources to achieve, they will lose confidence both in the worker and themselves, and the worker's efforts will have resulted in harm rather than good. A very great deal, therefore, depends upon his skill in helping them to think objectively and systematically about where their own true interest lies.

Another limitation is that people may sometimes dislike and reject the worker's non-directive approach because they do not want the trouble and responsibility of thinking and deciding for themselves. This may frequently happen when an agency changes from the directive to the non-directive approach, for one effect of the directive approach, as we have seen, is to make people dependent, irresponsible, and unpractised in thinking

for themselves. Yet if the worker then tries to *impose* responsibility on them, however unwilling they may be, what then becomes of his 'non-directive' approach? This problem will be referred to again in the next chapter and in Chapter Seven.

## Factors Affecting Choice

As we saw in the two previous chapters, a worker may either work *directively* by trying to get people to act on his conclusions about what is good for them, or *non-directively* by encouraging them to think out their own conclusions for themselves. The two approaches are therefore very different, but both are useful and neither is invariably 'better' than the other. Each has some advantages over the other and some disadvantages which the other avoids. Each is more suitable for some purposes than for others and for use in some situations than in others. On the whole, therefore, the worker who understands and values them both is more often likely to succeed than the worker who from force of habit or for any other reason restricts himself to using only one.

If both are useful, why then do so many workers use only one, and that in most cases, though not in all, the directive approach? There are many reasons for this which are quite unrelated to any normal criteria of efficiency. One is that the directive approach is the traditional approach to community work, and that like all established traditions it tends to perpetuate itself. Another is that the directive approach helps the worker to feel that he really is in control—however illusory in practice this feeling may sometimes turn out to be—and this is far more tolerable, even for people who are not authoritarian in outlook, than the feeling of strain and uncertainty that the worker so often has to endure when he is working non-directively. When working non-directively the worker can never feel entirely in control.

There are other reasons too. Even if a worker wants to adopt a non-directive approach he may not be free to do so. This is because many workers are not free agents. Their status in the

community, or even with the agency which employs them, may depend on their ability to produce some quick and visible results which they cannot ensure, or ensure quickly enough, by working non-directively. Thus a youth leader, for instance, may feel that he has to work directly in order to satisfy his Management Committee or the parents of the young people that he is running 'a really worthwhile club'. Again, he is not really free to choose a non-directive approach unless he has acquired the skill he needs to use it. And he may have few opportunities of acquiring it for training of this kind is still, for most workers, hard to come by even if they want it.

But if a worker has skill in using both, how then does he decide which to use and when to use it? A great deal will depend on what he sees as the people's major needs and on what he thinks of the people who have these needs. If he thinks that they are either so ignorant and inexperienced or so young that they are unfit to decide for themselves where their own true interest lies; or so apathetic or irresponsible or lazy or dependent in attitude that they will not attempt to do anything to try to help themselves; or so hostile towards one another that they will refuse to work together; or so disorganized that they are incapable of working together: then he is likely to decide that the only way he can achieve anything is to decide, plan, and provide for them himself.

He will also be influenced by how he sees himself. Thus the more expert in diagnosing and meeting people's needs he feels himself to be, and the less he trusts the people he is working with to diagnose their own needs for themselves, the more likely he is to choose the directive approach. This is why so many health and agricultural extension workers tend to think for people rather than help them to think independently for themselves. By training and experience such extension workers may have become very expert within their own specialized field: and they may feel, often quite rightly, that they know much better than the people what they ought to do. The same is also true of many youth leaders who see their job mainly as one of leading and guiding young people who, because they are young and

therefore immature, seem so much less well fitted to reach 'un-guided' good decisions for themselves.

It is more than doubtful, however, whether even a skilled and experienced worker is always safe in deciding for people just how their needs can best be met, or even just what these needs may be. As a worker his standpoint and his purposes are necessarily somewhat different from theirs, and therefore just because he is a worker he can never hope to become completely 'one of them'. Thus when he makes a decision for them he can only do so in the light of *his* purposes and of the relevant factors which *he* sees. Since he is not and cannot be one of them, however, he may quite easily overlook some factors which are relevant for them: and in that case his decision will not be truly right for them. And the greater the difference between him and the people with whom he works—whether in age, education, training, or experience of living as they do—the harder it will be for him to see their needs as they see them, or to judge how acceptable to them his ways of meeting these needs will be. Many agency-sponsored and worker-sponsored projects in communities have failed for no other reason than this. A worker using the directive approach needs to be able to identify himself with his clients very fully if he is to avoid making decisions which may involve him in difficulties of this kind.

To the extent that a worker realizes that such difficulties are likely to occur and wants to avoid them, to that extent he may be inclined to favour the non-directive approach. This has the advantage that it does not involve him in making any specific decisions for people, for it is then his job to encourage them to make these decisions for themselves. If he does this, however, he incurs the disadvantage, inherent in the use of the non-directive approach, of never being sure that the people will choose what he would like them to choose or act in the way that he thinks best. Thus to avoid the one disadvantage he will have to accept another: and only he is really in a position to decide in the light of the circumstances facing him at the time which advantage, together with its accompanying disadvantage, he will choose.

If this were all he had to worry about it would be bad enough,

but in fact he is likely to have to face yet another dilemma. On the one hand the surer he is that he knows what is right, and the surer he is in his own mind that the people are not to be trusted to decide, plan, organize, and act quickly and efficiently for themselves, the more inclined he will be to choose the directive approach. On the other hand, if he then decides, plans, and provides for people, how does this help to meet their basic underlying need of learning how to think, plan, and act responsibly and efficiently for themselves? In fact, it is likely to have just the opposite effect, for the more the worker decides, plans, and provides for people, the more dependent and irresponsible they are likely to become. Thus once again the worker has a difficult choice to make.

It would be presumptuous for anyone to say what a worker should do when he faces a problem of this kind. All that can certainly be said is that he should desirably recognize that the dilemma exists and needs to be resolved. This means that he must carefully assess his purposes for people in the light of both their present and their long-term needs. In crisis situations, e.g. when people are homeless or hungry or diseased, their material needs are dominant and they may be in no position to help themselves. In such situations, the case for the directive approach becomes overwhelmingly strong. When, however, the people's needs are chronic rather than acute, and their attitude so irresponsible that they show no real willingness to try to help themselves, then the directive approach seems far less applicable: and the case for stimulating people to think and act for themselves, and thereby develop themselves, i.e. the case for the non-directive approach, becomes correspondingly strong.

There is one final complication. Whichever approach a worker may decide on, he cannot use it to really good effect unless it proves acceptable to the people he is working with. Thus if people would rather decide things for themselves, they may resent a worker's attempt to decide for them, and withhold the co-operation he needs for success. Similarly, if a would-be non-directive worker seeks to impose on people the responsibility of deciding for themselves things they would rather have

decided for them, then they too may feel resentful and refuse to co-operate. Somehow, whichever approach he chooses, the worker must make it acceptable to the people, and effective for his purposes with the people. For the worker the only sound criterion for assessing the value of either approach will be its effectiveness in helping him to achieve his purposes with people.

Hence although we believe very strongly in the value of the non-directive approach as a means of promoting development and growth in people, we also believe that workers should be careful to avoid imposing on dependent groups of young, or immature, or inexperienced people responsibilities for autonomous decision-making in excess of what they really are willing and able to bear. What the worker has to do with such people is to delegate initially only those areas of freedom and responsibility which he believes they will value and can learn to exercise with benefit and satisfaction to themselves. Then, as their confidence grows and as their competence increases, he will enlarge their area of freedom and responsibility accordingly.

Thus in some situations the worker may at one and the same time function *directively* in so far as he retains the power or intention to direct, lead, guide, persuade, or in any other way get people to conform to what he thinks they ought to do; and *non-directively* in so far as he defines and communicates to the people certain areas of freedom and responsibility within which he will leave them entirely free to act for themselves. Within these areas he will not express his own opinions and will not impose, or try to impose, any kind of veto, but concentrate solely on the non-directive functions of helping people to think, discuss, decide, plan, organize, and act responsibly and autonomously for themselves. And the more clearly he sees the development of people as his purpose, and the non-directive approach as the means of achieving it, the more he will want to use it with as many people and in as many situations as possible in relation to whatever wants and purposes they have or may develop.

There can be no question, therefore, of condemning one approach and supporting only the other. Neither can be

judged good or bad except in terms of the worker's purpose, the relevance of this purpose to the needs and circumstances of the people, and the appropriateness of his choice of approach to the achievement of that purpose. However, when this has been said it may also be said that very many workers do habitually use the directive approach without ever seriously considering whether the non-directive approach might not sometimes, or often, help them to achieve their purposes better. Why this is so has been briefly explained earlier in this chapter, but the fact that it is so is unfortunate. One reason for writing this book is to explain both the uses and the disadvantages and limitations of the non-directive approach and thus provide some help to workers as to when to choose it; another, to explore what it implies in terms of role and function for workers who may then want to use it.

PART TWO  
THE NON-DIRECTIVE  
APPROACH



## Introduction

WHAT we have said in the first part of this book about approaches to community work applies equally to work with individuals or to work with groups. In this second part we shall now examine in greater detail the scope for non-directive work with groups, and what this implies in terms of role and function for community agencies and their workers.

An agency may choose the non-directive approach for either or both of two reasons. Thus one reason may be that the agency diagnoses that the people have many more needs than it could possibly hope to meet out of its own unaided resources. It may then value the non-directive approach as a means of stimulating people to meet at least some of these needs for themselves. A second and even stronger reason may be that it feels the people's greatest need is to acquire more confidence and competence in thinking, deciding, and implementing their own decisions for themselves, and that a directive approach would tend to have just the opposite effect.

These two reasons for using the non-directive approach are both strong in those under-developed areas where the people's needs for local amenities are often very great; where neither the statutory nor voluntary agencies have anything like enough resources to be able to provide them; and where the people either cannot or will not help themselves until some form of outside stimulus or help is given. In such areas the non-directive approach has often been used in both rural communities and urban neighbourhoods with outstandingly good results. Thus in the villages the people have provided themselves with roads, or schools, or clean water supplies, or any of a host of other amenities according to what kind of need they have seen. Similarly, in towns people have cleared drains, cleaned or filled in wells, made playgrounds for their children, or constructed shelters under which they have met in order to learn

to read and write. These are typical of the kind of material results achieved, but at the same time, so we are told, the people have changed in themselves by becoming more confident, self-reliant, and competent *as persons*.

In developed countries the scope for material projects of this kind is obviously more restricted: partly because most needs for the simpler material amenities are already provided for by the central or local governments, and partly because of the unavoidable but restrictive effects of government planning. Nevertheless, there is still much scope for agencies to encourage and help people to undertake self-directed group and community action. People in many villages still need village halls, playing fields, bus shelters, and similar amenities, and just because of planning restrictions they may need an experienced worker's help. Again, people newly resettled in a block of flats or on a new housing estate may badly want a play space for their toddlers, a playground for their school-age children, a room or hall where their young people, or their old people, or they themselves can meet. They may want to do something about obtaining these things but lack the knowledge or skill to provide them successfully for themselves. Here too they could do with an experienced non-directive worker's help.

But the play space, the playground, and the meeting-room or hall are no more than places where needs can be met. They do not meet the needs themselves. Whether needs are met or not depends on how the places are used. Does a nursery group develop? and a youth club? and a mothers' club? and a social group? and an old people's club? If so, how do they get started and how are they run? Do community workers run these groups for the people? But what if no community workers are interested or if the people want to start and run their clubs themselves? Is there not potentially as much scope in developed countries for community workers to encourage such self-help groups as there is in under-developed countries to encourage material projects? In fact, every club or group people might think of starting may be just as much a need-meeting project as the road, or school, or well in an under-developed country: and the people may be

just as much in need of some outside stimulus or help either to get started or to keep going. Yet so far, in most developed countries, the scope for such non-directive work in helping self-help community groups to form has only recently begun to be explored.

Community workers in developed countries, however, do feel that many adults and certainly most young people need help in acquiring more competence, and hence more confidence, in dealing with some of the many problems and frustrations that so often arise in the complex and rapidly changing situations in which they live. This has opened up two fields of non-directive work: the one, with individuals in some kind of special need—and much of the work now done with problem children, problem families, delinquents, alcoholics, and mental health patients is now seen to come within this field; and the other, with normal people who attend groups or classes in pursuit of their educational or social needs. Many agencies which sponsor groups or classes of this kind hope that the people who will join them will somehow more fully develop their potentialities as persons through the contacts they make with the worker and with each other. Youth Service agencies in particular have this aim in mind. They recognize that the young people with whom they work are still in the process of 'growing up into persons', and their prime object in all they do is to facilitate this growth or, to put it another way, to help them to mature.

In the chapters which follow we first define maturity and discuss how people do in fact mature. We then go on to consider what this implies for those agencies and workers who aim to assist adults or young people to mature. In doing so we particularly have in mind the problems that face youth workers: partly because the development of maturity in young people is their especial aim; and partly because the very degree of immaturity of some of the young people with whom they work makes this aim especially difficult for youth workers to achieve.

## Developing Maturity

BETTERMENT implies change, and most agencies aim to promote changes of two main kinds: changes for the better in the environment in which people live; and change for the better in the people themselves.

Changing people's environment for the better may mean anything from improving people's houses, or providing a playing field, a community centre, or a safe crossing-place on a busy road, to establishing a citizens' advice bureau, or a club for old people, or for young people, or for lonely people, or for physically handicapped people. Such changes are relatively easy to introduce. Agency workers know what to do, and when they have done it they see visible proof of what they have done.

Change for the better in people, however, is much more difficult to define and more difficult still to achieve. Just how can we precisely define 'better' for instance, when people are anyway already so different from us and from each other in so many different ways? Should the community worker define it in the sense that people who differ from him would be better if they became more like him by accepting *his* values, *his* standards of conduct and behaviour, and *his* ideas of what is and what is not 'worthwhile'? If so, this would suggest the use of the directive approach, but how can he be sure he is right in using it? This is a question that worries many community workers. If they answer it affirmatively they can hardly avoid implying that they are, or think themselves to be, in some way superior to and better than all those who differ from themselves, and this many of them are genuinely unwilling to imply. On the other hand, if they answer it negatively, what sure foundation are they left with on which to build their work?

Workers who adopt the non-directive approach find this

question much easier to answer. As we have seen, a worker working in this way does not try to guide or persuade people to accept his values or ideas, but concentrates on helping people to find their own values for themselves. He does this by helping them to learn to think more systematically and objectively about their purposes for themselves and for others. And, as we shall see, it is through just this process that people do, in fact, develop themselves by becoming more mature.

### *Maturity defined*

But what is maturity? The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines it as a state of 'fullness or perfection of development or growth'. This does not help us very much, and perhaps we can get a better working idea of it by considering the nature of the changes in attitude and behaviour that this concept of human growth or development implies. Thus babies and very young children are by nature essentially immature, and hence their behaviour is also immature. If we study this (immature) type of behaviour, we notice that it differs from that of maturing or matured adults in certain important respects. Thus the behaviour of a baby is essentially self-centred and it is also greatly influenced by impulse and emotion. However, as he grows up so he will normally develop a more rational and socially responsible type of behaviour. He gradually becomes less dominated by impulse and emotion, and therefore takes more time to think before he acts. He also tends to become more objective in his thinking; more able to think further ahead; more able to deal with complicated activities; more willing to understand and take into consideration the viewpoints and interests of others; and more skilful in interacting with others in pursuit of his purposes. He thus becomes both more able to make realistic decisions about what best to do in any situation, and more skilful in putting such decisions into effect.

It is important to note, however, that all young people do not mature in this way as they grow older. In fact some, such as problem children and delinquents, may hardly mature at all; but apart from these and the problems they cause, many of our

current political, economic, and social problems, one might think, would have been avoided, or would be solved more easily, if only more people were more mature.

It therefore seems relevant to inquire just what, if anything, community workers can effectively do to assist more people to attain a higher level of maturity, and especially what teachers and youth leaders can do to help the children and young people now in the schools and youth clubs to grow up into mature adults. Can young people, in fact, be given a better chance than their parents have had? and if so, just how can this be done? To the extent that we accept the development of maturity as a legitimate and desirable goal, as it certainly already is in the Youth Service, these are important questions that deserve clear and specific answers.

#### *How people mature*

Can we first consider how people do, in fact, progress from relatively immature to relatively more mature behaviour? Everyone starts by being immature, and maturity in the sense in which we have defined it is the product of a learning process which may, or may not, take place as a result of a person's attempts to achieve his purposes in interaction with others. In the case of very young children, most of such interaction will take place within the family, or in play groups, or in a nursery school. Then as children get older they interact with others in schools and in youth clubs; and then as adults at their places of work and as members of many kinds of formal and informal groups. Each of these situations is a potential learning situation.

In any situation and in relation to his interest or purpose at the time, a person will select the kind of behaviour which he thinks appropriate. If this brings a result which satisfies him, he will tend to behave in the same way in future similar situations. If, however, he finds the result of his behaviour unsatisfying, he will then either try to understand in what respect his own behaviour was at fault so that he can do better next time, or he will blame others for his failure, feel angry with them

for frustrating him, and seek to pay them back in their own coin. If he does the former he is likely to learn from his experience and thus become more mature. If he does the latter, his reaction to his experience will have been a negative one, for he will have regressed into a more egocentric and emotionally dominated type of behaviour than before, and one that is likely to involve him in still more frustrating experiences in the future. Thus may begin a kind of chain regression which may end in one of two kinds of extreme immature behaviour: either, on the one hand, the openly aggressive behaviour of the criminal or delinquent; or, on the other, the progressive withdrawal from normal friendly social interaction which characterizes the social isolate. Both types of behaviour are equally symptomatic of a person's failure to mature.

Thus whether a person successfully matures will depend partly on the kind of opportunities he has had of interaction with others; partly on how satisfied or frustrated he has been in each case with the result of the way he has chosen to behave; and partly on the way, positively or negatively, he has reacted to his frustrations and his failures.

#### *What the community worker can do to help*

Having got this clear, we can now consider what community workers can do in relation to their goal of helping people, according to their need, to develop a more mature type of behaviour. They can usefully aim to do two things: the one, to ensure that the people with whom they work have adequate opportunities of interacting with others in relation to purposes which are important, and therefore meaningful, to them; and the other, to provide whatever help they may need to enable them to react positively rather than negatively to difficulties and frustrations if and when they should occur.

Each and every person is, of course, continually interacting with others, but a good deal of this interaction is relatively insignificant as an aid to learning. For instance, a casual meeting between two strangers at a bus-stop is unlikely to produce a significant learning experience for either, since neither is likely

to have a purpose he hopes to achieve with the other, and once having met and parted, they are unlikely to meet each other again. Interaction, however, becomes much more meaningful and significant when it is between two or more people who meet each other over a considerable period of time, and who need each other's help and co-operation in relation to purposes that really matter to them.

*The case for encouraging autonomy in groups*

This is why groups are of such potential importance. If a group really matters to its members, that is, if each member values it as a means of meeting some need or purpose of his own, and if the members are free to decide what they as a group will do, then there will be many occasions when they will need to interact significantly with one another, and from these many learning opportunities may result. Of course, significant interaction will also take place in many situations outside groups—in people's homes for instance, or at their place of work. Group situations, however, are usually much more easily accessible to the community worker than other situations and, in fact, most community workers do already do much of their work with youth clubs or in women's organizations, community associations, denominational groups, and groups of many other kinds.

Workers need to remember, however, that all groups are not organized in the same way. There are autonomous groups and dependent or sponsored groups, and the advantage we have claimed for autonomous groups is by no means as true of groups over which the worker exerts control, at any rate as far as all major issues are concerned. Such groups are really *proprietary* groups whose proprietor—whether statutory authority or voluntary agency—employs an agent such as a warden or a youth leader who, by taking all really important decisions for the members, deprives them of the learning opportunities they would have had had they needed to make such decisions themselves.

Proprietary, dependent, or sponsored groups, therefore, have

much less potential for promoting maturity than autonomous groups in which members are entirely free to make their own decisions for themselves. Indeed, to the extent that members of proprietary groups are already immature, the overall effect of such groups may be to confirm them in their immature habits and inhibit further growth.

Unfortunately, all too few community workers realize this, and therefore all too few allow the groups with which they work much real autonomy. Thus even in the Youth Service, which specifically aims at helping young people to mature, most clubs are proprietary clubs which are owned by a statutory or voluntary agency, managed by an adult committee, and 'run' by a youth leader. Between them they customarily decide all major issues affecting the members and sometimes even, as a condition of membership, insist that all members shall participate in specified 'worthwhile' activities on certain nights of the week.

Most informal as well as formal adult education classes provided by Local Education Authorities are also of the proprietary kind, for it is the Adult Education Principal acting as their agent who normally decides what classes there shall be, when and where they shall meet, and who shall be their instructor. We say 'normally', because an article published in *Adult Education* in January 1965<sup>1</sup> tells how the Local Education Authority in Oxfordshire handed over a major share of responsibility for the planning and provision of adult education in rural communities to the people themselves. The result, we are told, was that enrolments trebled, many new groups and societies formed and, surprising as it may seem, standards of work became higher than before. Such action, however, is still exceptional.

We are not arguing here that proprietary groups are bad, or that only autonomous groups are good. This is certainly not true. People's wants, purposes, and interests vary, and a person will only value his membership of any group, proprietary or autonomous, to the extent that he feels it helps to meet them.

<sup>1</sup> E. T. Dyke, 'Partnership in Oxfordshire', *Adult Education*, xxxvii, 5, Jan. 1965.

Many people, however, do want, and also need, more say in the affairs of the groups to which they belong, and incidentally therefore—though none of them would see it in this way—more opportunities of a kind that are likely to help them to mature. All we are saying here, therefore, is that wherever this want or need exists, the case for enabling more people to share in decision-making in groups is very strong; that for the community worker this implies encouraging autonomy in groups; and that the more he decides and plans for people instead of helping them to decide and implement their own decisions for themselves, the less likely he is to succeed in helping them to mature.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## Helping Autonomous Groups

IN the previous chapter we suggested that how far a person matures depends partly on what kind of opportunities he has had of interacting significantly with other people, and partly on how positively or negatively he has reacted to his difficulties in trying to achieve his purposes with others. In this chapter we shall consider what community agencies can do to provide people with more opportunities of significantly interacting with each other in this way, and in the next chapter what they can do to help people learn from these experiences of interaction so that they do actually mature.

We have already noted that groups are important as centres of interaction, and that the interaction that occurs between the members of a group is usually much more significant in an autonomous group than in a dependent or sponsored group. Thus agencies which really want to help people to mature—and which value autonomous groups for that reason—will be interested both in enlarging the autonomy of any existing dependent groups and in helping and encouraging more autonomous groups to form. And in every case, in order to safeguard the autonomy of groups, the agencies will need to adopt a purely non-directive approach.

### *Attitudes towards helping groups to form*

At present, very few community agencies see their task in this light. Most of them still tend to limit the autonomy of the groups they sponsor and with which they work, and few are really interested in helping people to form autonomous groups to meet their own needs for themselves. Nor do they often seem very practically concerned about all the many people, including most of those whom community workers

would judge as being in greatest need of learning to mature, who either do not belong to any group, or who do not stay long with the group they join.

Indeed, an agency may be so occupied with the groups it already has that it may even do nothing to meet the need for more groups of the same kind. For instance, we once visited a large rural community which had no women's groups, except devotional groups; and when we asked some of the women why they had not formed a women's group they said that they would have liked to form one, but that none of them had felt sure enough about how to proceed. Once we had asked the question, however, and they were given the information they had lacked, they acted on it and a flourishing women's group was quickly formed.

Another community had several women's groups, including one very large group which had had to restrict its membership to the maximum number its meeting-hall could take. This group had a waiting-list of forty, and the group's members were proud of the fact since it testified to the popularity of their group. Some of them, however, were worried about the women who could not join. Most of these were new arrivals and therefore especially in need of the companionship the group could offer. But neither the members of the group nor the women on the waiting-list were free to start an additional group, since their national organization had laid down that there could be only one such group in any one community. Not until this regulation had been altered, which was subsequently done, could a second flourishing group be formed.

#### *Attitudes towards helping autonomous groups to form*

While agencies can sometimes leave needs unmet, even for groups of their own kinds, they are even less likely to feel concern about people's needs for groups of other kinds. It is true that Community Associations and Councils of Social Service both do something in this field: but the wardens of community centres tend to concentrate more on organizing activities within

their centres than on going out into the community to help people meet their needs on their own ground; while until quite recently Councils of Social Service were predominantly, as some still are, welfare organizations which think and plan and provide for people rather than helping them to think, plan, and provide more effectively for themselves.

Here again, relevant illustrations from two communities come to mind. Each of these communities has an old people's club, but the clubs are very different from each other. In one community the club was started by a small group of middle-class people as a welfare project for the old folk, and for years the old people themselves have never had anything to do with the running of the club. In the other community, when the need for an old people's club was seen, it was tackled as a community project. A committee was formed of representatives of every existing group to organize a community fête to raise funds, and the money raised was used to start a club. Soon after it was started, however, it was handed over to the old people, and since then they have run it as their own club for themselves. They are independent and enjoy being independent. They are proud of their club and proud of meeting their own needs for themselves.

Although there is now a trend towards appointing community or neighbourhood workers to encourage and help people to set up their own autonomous groups for themselves, this trend has still not gone very far and the functions of such workers are not yet always clearly understood and defined. Indeed, in many communities there is still no worker whose primary aim is to help people to organize to meet their own needs as they see them themselves.

This is not so much intended to imply criticism of the work that existing agencies are doing as to draw attention to work that is not being done, or not being done enough: and work, moreover, that has a particular importance for those agencies and their workers who aim to help people to mature. As it is, there are many people with needs and purposes that could be met by groups who do not join existing groups—

either because none of them really fits their need, or because they are not congenial enough, or because they are too far away. The only choice such people have is either to leave their need unmet, or to establish a new group for themselves. But the people most in need of such a group are often those who are least able to start one, or to keep it going once they have started it, without some help from people more experienced than themselves.

*Promoting and servicing autonomous groups*

How can this need be met, and met in such a way that it will assist more people to mature? The primary need, surely, is for workers skilled in working non-directively with people to stimulate them to discuss and define their needs and form their own groups to meet them. There are many such workers already in the under-developed areas of the world, including the under-developed areas of such developed countries as the United States and Canada, but until quite recently very little work of this kind was done in the 'developed' areas of these countries or in other developed countries. There are, however, some outstanding exceptions even as far back as the very early nineteen-fifties. One such early example in Britain was the work done under the aegis of the National Council of Social Service in starting and servicing autonomous clubs for women in new housing estates in industrial areas. There was no prescribed constitution for these clubs and their members were free to run their meetings how they liked and to choose any programme of activities they liked. They therefore attracted women to whom the more highly structured meetings of the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds and the National Federation of Women's Institutes did not appeal, but who nevertheless valued the help that the experienced but undemanding worker can provide. In many of these clubs the members undertake voluntary work to help sick, elderly, or handicapped people in addition to the programmes they provide themselves.

Another early British example is the pioneer work begun well over twenty years ago by the very small community deve-

lopment staff of the London Council of Social Service. These workers applied the basic principles underlying the non-directive approach in the very successful work they did to help the autonomous groups which were formed, often spontaneously, by the people who had been resettled in London's new housing estates or blocks of high-rise council flats. One of the most important outcomes of their work was that in due course these groups formed their own Association of London Housing Estates through which the member groups have since been able to provide themselves with many of the services they need.

Such workers, of course, aim to do more than merely encourage people to form their own groups. They want to help them to achieve the purposes for which the people formed the groups. Therefore much of their work consists of helping the members of such groups to get whatever information or advice they may need in order to achieve their purposes for their groups; or with training in committee procedures, or in keeping accounts, or in any other skill the members of the group may need. In fact, such workers undertake for autonomous groups almost all the services that most voluntary agencies will normally provide for their affiliated groups, but without imposing conditions to which the groups are expected to conform.

The need for work of this kind is well illustrated by what has often happened on new housing estates and in blocks of council flats. When a new block of flats is opened, the people who come to live in it usually become conscious of various social needs, and among them the need for something for their children and young people to do in the evening. But the established youth clubs are often too far away, and anyway both the residents and their young people prefer to have their own club for themselves. The residents may then form a committee, find adults willing to help, and start a club. They have the goodwill and they have the helpers, but they lack skill and experience. They need help, but where can they get it? Not from the established youth work agencies: they are already busy with their existing clubs, and anyway the people often do not want an agency to run their club for them. What they want is to run their own club



for their own young people by themselves. They need help, and the help they need is with the problems they meet when trying to run a club. Any worker who gives this help works with adults, not with young people. Thus he does not work as a youth leader. His first job is to become known as a friendly undemanding person who in no way threatens the autonomy of the adults he works with, but who is a useful person to turn to when troubles threaten or problems arise. He has no specific programme except to help the adults sort out what to do in order to help their young people, and how they can best do it. One of his major functions, once he is really accepted, is to help people get informal training of a practical kind in relation to what they want to do.<sup>1</sup>

Another function of such workers, or of the agencies to which they belong, is to represent the interests of autonomous groups with government administrators and planners at both national and local levels. We have mentioned earlier (p. 28) that the need for the detailed planning of land-use in developed countries unavoidably restricts people's freedom to undertake group or community projects which involve the use of land. Planning permission is always needed for such projects, and this may be difficult if not impossible to get. But planning can also greatly restrict, or even prevent, groups being formed at all if, when plans for rehousing people are drawn up, no provision is made for places where groups can meet; or if the provision made is of the wrong kind—a large hall, for example, when small rooms for separate groups are also needed—or in the wrong place, such as the centre of a town, if the main needs are in the outlying residential areas.

Partly as a result of the kind of pioneer work described above, and partly also as a result of the growing tendency of ordinary people to protest and demonstrate in order to make their grievances known, many statutory and some voluntary organi-

zations are now appointing community workers specifically to encourage people, and more especially disadvantaged people, to form their own neighbourhood and community groups in which they can identify their local needs and discuss what to do about them. Such groups provide the community worker with many opportunities for non-directive work. Just what such work consists of in terms of positive role and functions is discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>1</sup> This topic is more fully discussed in a short paper, 'Youth Organizations and the Changing Needs of Youth', written in 1960 and published in *Social Service Quarterly*, xxxvi, 1, in that year. Two years later two workers were attached to the Community Development Department of the London Council of Social Service to work in just this way.

## Working Non-Directively in Groups

FOR experiences in groups to help people to mature in the sense in which we defined maturity in Chapter Four, it is not enough that they should have the experiences: they also need to learn from them. To help them do this is one of the major functions, or rather *the* major function, of the non-directive community worker.

In autonomous groups the members themselves decide on their purposes for their group and on how they hope to achieve them. If the members are mature and experienced people, they will be able to decide realistically both what they want and how they can best achieve it. If they are less mature and less experienced, it will be harder for them to think realistically and they are therefore more likely to reach impracticable decisions, or decisions which may have some unforeseen adverse effect on the welfare of the group. The non-directive worker, however, if he is present at their meetings, can do a great deal to help. He will not tell the members of the group what he thinks they ought to do because this would deprive them of the opportunity of learning to think realistically for themselves: but he will try to structure, systematize, and enlarge the scope of their thinking, and in this way help them to reach a good decision for themselves. He will also hope that the thinking they do will help them further to develop their potentialities as persons.

But how can a non-directive worker structure, systematize, and enlarge the scope of people's thinking without reverting to a directive approach? It will help to clarify this if we consider how a group of people may move from feeling vaguely dissatisfied with things as they are to taking some action to change things in some way for the better.

Such an action results from a thinking process, and the dissatisfaction from which it begins may initially be very vague indeed. Once people begin to think about *why* they are feeling dissatisfied, however, they may become more specifically aware of certain needs, and these in turn may crystallize eventually as definite and specific wants. Only when they reach this stage may people begin seriously to consider taking some action to meet one or more of these wants themselves. If they do decide to act, they then have to decide on what action to take, how to organize themselves to take it, and when, where, and how to take it. Whether the people actually achieve a result satisfactory to themselves or not will depend partly on whether they have persisted through all the stages of this thinking and planning process, and then act as they have planned; and partly on whether at each of its stages they have thought effectively enough to reach really appropriate decisions.

Left to themselves without any external stimulus or help, many people, and more often than not those in greatest need, may never get beyond the initial stage of vague dissatisfaction. The non-directive worker, however, aims to supply both *stimulus*, in so far as it is needed, to get people thinking and to go on with their thinking until they reach some definite conclusions; and *structure* to ensure as far as possible that the conclusions people reach as a result of their thinking are practical and relevant to their need.

A non-directive worker can provide this stimulus and help in any of a wide variety of formal and informal situations. In a youth club, for instance, the 'worker' will be the youth leader or one of his helpers, and the 'group' either a formal group such as a members' committee, or an interest group, or an *ad hoc* informal group which consists of only a few members talking things over in the coffee bar. Similarly, in a church the 'worker' may be the vicar or one of his assistants, and the 'group' any of their parishioners they have discussions with in the course of their work. Whoever the worker may be and whatever the group, in so far as he aims to help them to do their own thinking for themselves, he will attempt to stimulate and structure the

thinking process by asking questions. He will ask these questions initially to encourage people to think about their purposes for their group or club or church as the case may be, and assess to what extent they feel they are achieving them. If any dissatisfactions or criticisms are then expressed, he will ask further questions to test whether these are shared by the other members of the group.

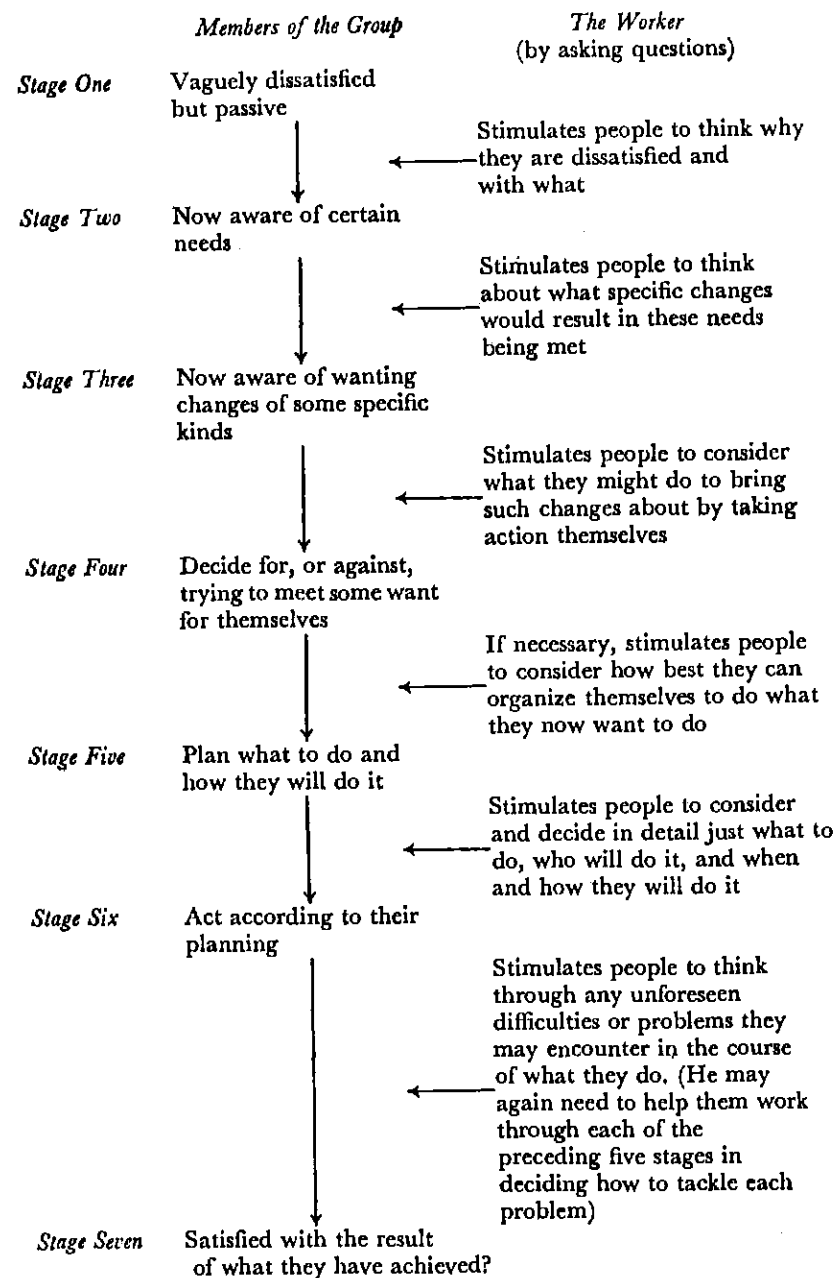
In relation to any specific dissatisfaction, he may then promote further thinking by asking questions about its causes and about what changes the members think might help to put things right; then about what members think they could do to bring these changes about; and go on thus stimulating the thinking process with questions until the members have decided whether they will attempt to do anything themselves or not; and if they do decide to do something, what they will do and just what this implies in terms of who, and what, and with whom.

To take people right through to the end of this process, of course, may take a good deal of time, and it may continue intermittently through a whole series of meetings, informal or formal, with the same group or with several groups according to need and the way people's thinking develops.

The stages through which the members of a group may move from a passive state of feeling vaguely dissatisfied to some positive action designed to meet a specific want are summarized on p. 47, together with brief notes about what the non-directive worker does to move them on from any one stage to the next.

Stimulating people in this way, however, is only a part of the worker's job. He also needs to ensure as far as he can that the people think realistically enough at each stage to reach sound and practicable decisions. This is very necessary, for if through inexperience people are unaware of all the factors they may need to take into account, or if through immaturity they tend to disregard relevant but awkward facts, they may well decide to do something which is at best impracticable and at worst downright harmful to themselves.

## STAGES IN THE THINKING PROCESS LEADING TO ACTION BY A GROUP



If the worker thus needs not only to stimulate thinking but also to ensure sound thinking, what then can he do? Perhaps the best way to begin answering this question is to ask another, for if we ask ourselves what conditions in a group favour sound thinking, then to the extent that these conditions are not present in any group it becomes the worker's job to try to promote them. But what are these conditions? Perhaps we may agree that they can be listed as follows:

1. that the members have a very clearly defined and agreed purpose which they genuinely want to achieve together;
2. that they want to utilize to the full whatever knowledge and experience each and every member of the group may have which may in any way be relevant to the achievement of the purpose of the group;
3. that they have between them enough knowledge and experience, once it has been pooled and thoroughly considered, on which to reach sound decisions in relation to the purpose of the group; or, alternatively,
4. that they have enough knowledge and experience to know that they have not got enough, and therefore find ways of getting more by seeking it outside the group;
5. that they are sufficiently mature to subordinate their individual or factional interests to their common purpose for the group, and hence to put forward and consider every idea and suggestion objectively on its merits in relation to this common purpose, rather than each subjectively supporting his own idea because he made it;
6. that they are sufficiently skilled to think together, with or without a chairman, in a logical and orderly way in relation to their purpose.

To the extent that all or any of these basic conditions are lacking, so the members of any group will be hampered in their thinking and therefore also hampered in their purpose of reaching wise decisions for themselves. Thus if they fail to define their purpose clearly enough, or if some members do not whole-heartedly accept it, they will lack a clear enough focus for their thinking and are quite likely to find themselves argu-

ing at cross-purposes. If they lack some of the facts they need to know, they are then likely to reach a decision which is faulty because they have ignored some of the facts. If they allow their individual or factional interests to predominate over their common group interest, any majority decision they reach—if indeed they are able to reach one at all—is likely to alienate the remaining members of the group. If they lack the skill to think and discuss in an orderly, logical, and therefore *structured* way, some of the points will be discussed too briefly; others, perhaps, will not be discussed at all; and none will be seen in proper relationship to the group's purpose as a whole.

Unlike the directive type of worker who tries to avoid these difficulties by 'guiding' the members of a group to the conclusions he thinks best for them, the non-directive worker concentrates on reducing their potentially bad effects by structuring, enlarging, and systematizing the thinking process of the group. He does this mainly by asking questions, but he avoids asking 'leading questions' which might restrict the thinking of the group. His sole purpose is to help and encourage the members of the group to structure their thinking more systematically and thoroughly for themselves.

The worker may decide to intervene with a question at any stage in a group's thinking according to the needs he sees, and only in relation to such needs. That is to say, he will not share in the members' discussion of what they should do or how they should do it: he will restrict himself solely to his function of facilitating effective group thinking and discussion.

The need for him to intervene will vary from group to group according to the maturity and experience of the members, but he may want to intervene for any of the following reasons:

1. *to make sure that the members of the group really are agreed about what they are aiming to discuss*

(Members of a group may sometimes agree on a common purpose only because it is stated so generally that each is able to interpret it according to his own idea of what it is intended to be. If these interpretations differ, the members may find themselves at cross-purposes in discussion and this may lead to

confusion. If a worker thinks that such differences exist, he will try to bring them into the open by asking for some clarification of the purpose, or by stating it in more specific terms and asking if this is what the members mean. As they answer this question the members will incidentally define their purpose more specifically for themselves.)

*2. to ensure that they consider several possibilities instead of only one*

(By pushing his own idea a dominant member may inhibit other members from putting forward some different ideas of their own with the result that only the one idea is discussed. The worker may try to prevent this happening by asking, when one idea has been put forward, whether there are any others which might also be discussed. This creates an opportunity for the less pushful members to suggest alternative ideas so that every idea is noted. The merits and demerits of each idea can then be discussed in turn. The worker may ask his question not only at the beginning of a discussion but at any subsequent stage when there may be alternatives to consider.)

*3. to keep discussion focussed on one item at a time*

(Even when the members of a group have listed the possible alternatives, and are discussing one of them, they may stray from it without realizing that they have. The worker may then intervene to draw attention to the fact. He will not try to influence the members to return to their original point. They may decide to continue with one and abandon the other; or continue with one and return to the other later.)

*4. to ensure that the members of the group base their thinking on facts rather than on their assumptions about facts*

(Members of a group may decide an issue in ignorance of certain facts, or on the basis of their own (untested) assumptions about facts. This is particularly likely to happen when the members of a group are planning a project intended to meet the needs of people other than themselves. They may then assume they know what people want without ever checking the truth of their assumption with the people they are planning for. Thus when members of a group make statements about what other people want, or are prepared to do, the worker may

ask a question designed to encourage members to consider whether these are merely assumptions or whether they are based on ascertained facts: and if the former, how they can best ascertain the facts.)

*5. to ensure that the members of the group are aware of factors they need to take into account*

(If members of a group are either inexperienced or immature, it is very likely that they may fail to take some long-term considerations into account. For instance, they may plan to provide themselves or others with some amenity without really considering just how, when they have got it, they will use it and maintain it. The worker can be of great value to the members of a group if, by asking questions of the kind, 'Have you thought about how . . . ?' he draws their attention to points they need to discuss but would not have thought of themselves.)

*6. from time to time to help members assess what progress they have made and what still remains for them to do*

(Many non-directive workers work with small groups which have no chairman and which do not follow formal committee procedures. In such groups the members may sometimes ramble on in discussion without any clear idea of what progress they have so far made or of what still remains for them to do. When this happens, the worker can often help by asking if he is right in thinking that such and such points have now been cleared and such and such decisions taken, but that members are still not agreed on this point and that, and are these points they now need to discuss? Whether the members then agree with his summary or modify it, the worker will have succeeded in his purpose of helping to focus discussion more definitely on the areas of disagreement that remain.)

Apart from helping to structure and enlarge the scope of discussion in the ways outlined above, the worker can also help to improve communication and understanding between members in a more general way. Thus he can:

*1. help to clarify, when necessary, an unclear statement made by any member of the group*

(When people say something in a group, they do not always

manage to convey to the other members exactly what they mean. This can lead to the members talking at cross-purposes even about something on which they are really agreed. If the worker senses that this may happen, he can often help by restating more precisely the purport of what he thinks the member meant, and asking if this is what he meant to convey, e.g. 'I'm sorry, but I'm not quite sure I've got your point clear. Is it . . .?' The member who made the contribution originally will then either agree that this is what he meant, or say again more clearly and specifically just what he had meant. Either way, the risk of misunderstanding will have been greatly reduced.)

2. *help to reduce unproductive argument between members*

(Members of a group may get so involved in arguing against each other—each for his own point of view—that they are liable to forget their overall purpose of reaching the best decision as a group. The worker can sometimes help them to realize this by suggesting that they may best serve their purpose for the group if they concentrate on listing and assessing the merits and demerits of *both* viewpoints instead of arguing for one viewpoint and against the other.)

Although it may appear at first sight that the worker's structuring and facilitating role is very similar to that of a chairman in a group, it is important to note that it differs in several important respects. Unlike a chairman, the worker is not a member of the group, exercises no authority over it, makes no decisions for it, and is not directly responsible for implementing any decisions the members of the group may make. Thus he is much less involved than a chairman in the actual content of a discussion, and correspondingly freer to concentrate as a neutral on his role of facilitating more thorough, systematic, and objective thinking and discussion by the members of the group. Even if they try to involve him further, as they may well do by asking him for his opinion when they differ among themselves, he will try to avoid giving it. Instead, he will return their question by restating for their further consideration all the points that have already been made for and against each

of the alternatives they are considering, together with any further points which he thinks they might usefully consider. As far as he can he will also try to keep himself uninvolved by addressing any remarks he makes to the whole group rather than to a single member.

Because the non-directive worker neither has nor seeks power, he can only work in a way acceptable to the group. This is an additional reason, if one were needed, why he does not give his opinions, for by supporting one view he is likely to please some members of the group and alienate others, whereas he aims to work acceptably with them all. So he limits himself to asking questions which help people to think objectively in the light of all the ascertainable facts. Even these questions he has to choose and time with care, for if he intervenes too often this may also cause offence. In the end, therefore, much depends on his sensitivity to the atmosphere and feelings in the group, as well as on his skill in framing and asking questions in a wholly acceptable way.