

the

VERA

report

November, 1970

The Organization

Vera is in the business of change - not a sweeping overhaul of society's institutions but small, meaningful changes that operate to the benefit of the individual. No one would deny that significant change is necessary in present institutions, and countless individuals and organizations have beaten their heads against the stone walls of the system. Vera, by zeroing in on specific problems and by putting the welfare of the individual first in its priorities, can look back on a record of meaningful change in the New York City criminal justice system.

One cannot, however, attribute these changes completely to the setting of practical goals. Vera's staff strives to work unobtrusively and inoffensively with executive and judicial officers to gain their confidence both in the Vera staff itself and in the changes.

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Ford Renews Vera 5-Year Grant

The Ford Foundation recently announced a second five-year grant to Vera in the sum of \$1.5 million beginning July 1, 1971.

Ford has contributed financial support to Vera almost since the beginning, indirectly at first through the Institute for Judicial Administration specifically for the Bail and Summons projects, and since 1966 with a \$1.1 million grant for the general administration of Vera and the planning of new projects.



"Relax, Vera — it's an encounter group."

Neighborhood Youth Diversion Project

Soon after the first of the year, the first participants will be accepted in a major new Vera project - this time aimed at the juvenile in trouble with the law.

This new project, a joint effort of Vera, Fordham University's Institute for Social Research and the East Tremont Community, will offer its services to qualified young people who are recent offenders or those in danger of becoming involved with the law (primarily those from 12 to 15). The Project will seek to take advantage of the resources within the community to deal these youths through a number of activities:

1. By training a group of young adults from the community to serve as Advocate Aides under the direction of a professional staff. The Advocate Aides will be trained to assist a troubled youth with his problems by serving as counselors, mediators, and advocates. They will go into the

home, and the street, and will work with schools and agencies to get the needed services for the juvenile. They will not simply refer a young person to an agency or an institution, but rather will follow up to assure the assistance is received.

2. By applying a method for the assessment of delinquent behavior, developed by Fordham, which seeks as complete a knowledge as possible about the full range of variables which may have been involved in the behavior of the youth - cultural, social and personal. It provides a range of information not generally available in juvenile cases as they are now processed, and it attempts to make possible a more accurate assessment of the behavior in which a youth was involved and the reasons for his involvement.
3. By developing a Forum staffed by people from the community where minor offenses can be heard informally in a neighborhood setting, and where resolution of problems surrounding these offenses can be worked out and appropriate support offered.
4. By developing services not presently available in that community such as drug care, schooling and foster care.
5. By helping juveniles deal with existing agencies and by working with the community to develop other services which might be effective for local children. The Project will assume continuing responsibility for cases referred to other agencies to avoid a youngster being shunted from agency to agency which so often occurs in conventional cases.
6. By establishing a procedure for the early identification of youths who need help.

The Project expects to find juveniles in need of assistance from several sources - the Police Department, the Office of Probation, the Family Court, the schools, the community and other City agencies - but at first cases will be received only from

the Police Department and the Office of Probation. A case will be assigned to the Project only with the assurance of cooperation from the juvenile and his family.

The Project will take the form of a charitable corporation whose Board of Directors will include representatives of Vera, Fordham, the CJCC, the East Tremont Community, and possibly the professions which have experience working with delinquents.

The Project will be assisted by a Community Advisory Board consisting of 5 students, 6 adult community members, and 4 members representing organizations concerned with juveniles.

Between now and February 1, the target date for accepting the first referrals, efforts are being concentrated on hiring and training staff and locating and setting up suitable headquarters in the East Tremont section of the Bronx. John Whelan will project director, his assistant for community development will be Sandra Oliver. Jeri Thompson will be the Project's office manager and financial coordinator.

Teacher Corps Project

A 3 1/2 month planning grant has been approved by Teacher corps for the development of a proposal aimed at training teachers to work with delinquent, pre-delinquent and drug-involved youths. The objectives of the project, which is being developed jointly by the Board of Education, Vera and Fordham University, would be

1. to develop a new method of training teachers to work in correctional programs,
2. to expand the roles of teachers in public schools who deal with troubled youths, and
3. to demonstrate the feasibility of alternate systems of education within a community-based project.

Over a two-year period, Teacher Corps interns would rotate between the Board of Education's Special Schools for the Socially

Maladjusted and Vera projects (e.g., the new Neighborhood Youth Diversion Project). Fordham University would be responsible for the training component of the program which would permit interns to gain a Masters Degree in Education.

A proposal will be submitted to Teacher Corps by the end of November, 1970. If the project is funded, training would begin in the summer of 1971 and actual operation in the fall.

THE ORGANIZATION...(continued from page 1)

The Vera projects now in operation - Bail, Summons, Court Employment, Bowery, Bronx Sentencing, Appearance Control - have established themselves as important additions to the criminal justice system.

The Bail project, started by Vera in 1961, proved to the satisfaction of the courts that if judges are given verified information about a defendant's reliability and roots in the community, the courts will grant release on recognizance and that 99% of those defendants will return to court when called. The Bail project is now run by the Department of Probation.

The Manhattan Summons Project (1964) grew out of the success of the Bail Project. If verified information establishing a defendant's roots in the community could insure their appearance in court, why not release them earlier - at the stationhouse, instead of the court? This procedure was initiated for crimes involving simple assault and petty larceny in a precinct in Manhattan in 1964. In December, 1966 the Police Department assumed complete control of the project, and in July, 1967 it was extended throughout the City.

The Manhattan Court Employment Project (1968) is based on the premise that through counseling and job opportunities, an individual may be diverted from the criminal justice system. The Manhattan Court Employment staff intervenes on behalf of those defendants they find appropriate for the Project just after arrest and, if several months of successful participation in the Project fol-

low, MCEP may recommend that charges be dismissed. MCEP is now in the process of becoming separately incorporated and being funded by the City's Human Resources Administration.

The Manhattan Bowery Corporation seeks to help the homeless alcoholic by removing the responsibility for him from the police and courts and responding to the problem as a medical and social one. By providing medical care, counseling, and referral, the Bowery Project has reduced arrests of area derelicts by 80%.

Vera moved into the area of reform in police and court procedures with such projects as the Traffic Court Alert, the Appearance Control Project, and the Pre-Arrestment Processing Facility. The ACP, through the use of available communicative techniques, has been able to save the courts and the police considerable waste of time and money. The most recent development - a telephone alert procedure - has resulted in the avoidance of 2000 unnecessary police appearances and 500 civilian witness appearances.

Since drugs are a major problem in the criminal justice system, Vera developed a comprehensive experimental project designed to test the effectiveness of methadone in combination with social services called Addiction Research and Treatment Corporation.

While Vera develops and expands current projects, new ideas and directions are being sought and considered. Several new projects are just getting on their feet - Neighborhood Youth Diversion Project and Project Renewal - and new ideas are being researched - supportive work programs, drug programs, health technology. There have been and will be many setbacks, but the combination of a thorough knowledge of specific problems, the setting of practical goals, and a cooperative attitude have led to workable change and confidence in Vera as an idea and as an institution.

New City Plan for Youthful Offenders

The New York Law Journal reported in its October 5, 1970, issue that a new plan has been inaugurated for handling juvenile cases in the Family Court in Brooklyn. It

stated that "All juvenile matters before the Family Court in Kings County will be screened starting today by the Family Court section of the city's corporation counsel office in a new city-wide program intended to provide more effective Family Court operations.

"The specific program has been in active development for almost a year and this week begins county-by-county introduction into the Family Courts..."

"Under the program city attorneys assigned to the various Family Courts will fully prepare all juvenile cases for the court. They will perform investigations, interview witnesses and organize pertinent facts and the presentation of direct evidence...."

Under the old system, no one agency was responsible for preparing the prosecution of cases in the Family Court, as the district attorney does for adult offenders. Except in cases where the petitioner (the complainant) was a police officer or a teacher, there was often no attorney to present the facts. As a result, the Family Court judge was often forced to assume the dual role of questioning witnesses and adjudicating the case.

One of the major goals of the Family Court has been to assure the most constructive program for a youthful offender rather than to punish the guilty. The new procedure will continue this emphasis. Corporation Counsel J. Lee Rankin stated in the article that "...although cases will be diligently prepared and vigorously presented, the non-criminal, rehabilitative nature of the Family Court will be preserved and encouraged."

The new plan follows many of the recommendations in a January, 1968, Vera proposal for a Family Court Law Officer, prepared at the request of the Youth Services Committee of the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council.

Updated

APPEARANCE CONTROL PROJECT - Disposition of cases in Part 1B1 through October 23, 1970.

	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>
Cases returned to 1B1 for subsequent Appearance	42.2%	31.6%
Cases disposed of by plea or dismissal	13.5	21.3

The project has saved 4,090 witnesses from appearing, 907 civilians and 3,183 police.

The Project recently received a 4-month grant for \$35,000 from the New York State Crime Control Planning Board.

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BRONX SENTENCING PROJECT - Summary of statistics as of September 18, 1970:

Cases sentenced or adjourned for supervised release in which there was a Vera Report present 1,719

Non-prison dispositions:
Cases which carried a recommendation for a non-prison sentence or an adjournment for the purpose of supervised release 899

Cases in which the court followed such a recommendation 820

Percentage of agreement between Vera and the Court on non-prison dispositions
-1st 8 months of project 83.3%
-total project to date 91.2%

Prison Dispositions:
Cases which did not qualify for a non-prison recommendation or for an adjournment for supervised release 636

Cases in which the court followed such a "recommendation" 557

Percentage of agreement between Vera and the court on the prison disposition
-first eight months 87.3%
-total project to date 87.6%

A report has been prepared of the results of

the recent research into the effectiveness of the first eight months of the project. A copy of the summary of that report is available on request.

A second research effort is being undertaken to refine the sentencing recommendation guidelines in light of the recidivism data collected in the recently completed research. The new research will also evaluate new procedures for pre-sentence adjournments in the custody of Vera and referrals to supervisory agencies such as VOI. Tony Croce will again head the research effort, assisted by Ricky Abad, who also participated in the previous effort, and Nancy Hannon.

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COURT EMPLOYMENT PROJECT - Plans are well underway to separately incorporate the Project which will be fully funded by the City's Human Resources Administration. The new corporation will double the present intake capacity of the Project in Manhattan to 20 participants a week and will also expand operations to the Brooklyn Criminal Court. In addition, the Court Employment Project began to accept a limited number of female participants on an experimental basis, offering them the same range of services that are presently available to male clients.

Intensive efforts are being made to recruit staff for the expanded activities so they will be fully trained by the anticipated expansion date in early December. New staff members are:

Gene Alberico, Career Developer
Howard Bailey, Rep
Glenn Bell, Custodian
Madeleine Crohn, Administrative Assistant
Patricia Decker, Secretary
Ludwig Elstak, Rep
Anne Hayes, Assistant to Supervisor
Nancy Hechinger, Research Associate
Paul Herzich, Trainer
Eloise Hirsh, Assistant Director
Lynette Jackson, Assistant to Supervisor
Timothy Knowles, Screener
Gary Kornblith, Screener
Ronald Lewis, Rep
Lydia Martinez, Screener
Lillian Mateo, Rep

Celeste Miller, Administrative Secretary
Nancy Mosher, Screener
Daniel Noona
Priscilla Orr, Screener
Stephen O'Rourke, Screener
Skaidrite Picciotto, Screener
Mary Rothschild, Screener
Roy Schwartz, Rep
Clair Spector, Screener
Jake Tanksley, Rep
Santiago Torres, Rep
William Whigham, Screener
Marilyn Wilson, Assistant to Supervisor

The director of the new Brooklyn project will be Al Gellar, his assistant director will be Leonard Melford. Madeleine Crohn will serve as administrative assistant. Dan Freedman will be in charge of the Manhattan operation.

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MANHATTAN BOWERY PROJECT - As of the beginning of October, MBP had accepted 8,134 admissions, representing the treatment of 2,950 men. New MBP staff members are:

Florence Grende, Caseworker
Richard Ermish, Medical Aide
Jack Boverland, Medical Aide
Ann Zedel, Nurse
Joseph Way, Medical Aide

New Staff

Maggie Hopp - will assist in the development of a supported work project.

Kenneth Joseph - An Urban Fellow who will work with a number of Vera projects.

Marcie Setlow - will develop a possible Manhattan Bowery facility for Manhattan's West side.