

## PROBLEMS IN CHILD PLACING

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The placement of dependent children, whether delinquent or not, constitutes a fundamental and integral part in any social program. Apart from presenting an immediately urgent need as it so often does, Child Placing affords the greatest challenge in the scheme of modern social rehabilitation. No other problem has more lasting results in time or broader scope in the outcome.

It is the inalienable right of every child to be provided with such conditions and circumstances as will foster the attainment of *his* highest development. His health, his education, his training, and happiness are all involved. Within him lies the vital force of his future citizenship and it will grow as the direct outcome of these factors acting and reacting upon him as an individual. If at maturity, society exacts the price of conformity to its traditions and laws, it must provide adequate protection for its children. It is their defender. Since society imposes responsibilities upon its citizens, these same, as children, must be taught and trained accordingly for their coming citizenship.

Today child placing agencies are cognizant of much that had grown out of the former hit-and-miss methods of somehow tucking children away in this available home or that, without much concern or appreciation of the importance that a particular home be a "good home," not just in general, but be especially adapted to the particular child to be placed therein. Such subtle factors as the family's attitudes, family unity and personality types are considered, as they need to be, with as much care as is the provision of the purely physical necessities. The child's background, his present attitude, his mental, physical, emotional and social development and their probable inter-reaction within the new home are carefully studied in order, first of all, that adjustment may be possible and that it may be permanently maintained. To grow up happily a child must feel a sense of security, must be conscious of being recognized as an integral part of the group and accepted by the other older and more powerful members. The birth of altruism, of loyalty, of social and industrial cooperation emerges from the sense of an abundance of unchallenged security. This is as true of the child who remains

beneath his parental roof as it is of the child who is placed elsewhere. Throughout this discussion child placing is taken to mean the decision which terminates in choosing a particular home for a particular child. It may be the parental home, more often it is not.

As illustrative of the problems involved in the placing of children and of their possible solution, the cases of Sam and his brother Mart are here presented. They are the sons of rather young Russian Jewish parents; their home situation was decidedly poor, the children neglected. The father had been sentenced to jail for bootlegging and the mother had returned to her old environment in the tenderloin. There were no other relatives. Sam was four and Mart six at the time this account begins and they had just been turned over to the Jewish child placing society. As part of the routine preparation and investigation of a pending placement case, the boys were given a physical, a psychiatric and psychological examination. There were evidences of malnutrition, carious teeth, poor habits of personal hygiene but no deformities nor serious pathological conditions. Neurological findings were negative.

Clinic notes taken during and immediately after the psychological examination record of Mart:

C.A. 6 yrs. 4 mo.            I.Q. 66

M.A. 4 yrs. 3 mo.        Basal age, 4 yrs.    Upper limit, 5 yrs.

Memory Span—Forward, auditory—5 digits (mode for 7 yr. level).

Reverse, auditory—failed to comprehend (mode for 6 yr. level).

Vocabulary—restricted, both in extent of vocabulary and ease in the use of known words.

“Mart’s mental deficiency is well reflected in his performance test results. He was interested only in those well within his ability (3 and 4 yr. level) and was greatly pleased whenever he completed one. The difficulties he encountered with the more complicated ones made his interest lag and he showed no desire to complete them, even calling upon his younger brother to assist him. (Sam had been brought into the examining room to be with his brother in an effort to still his crying.) Mart evidenced little discrimination of form and did not profit readily by practice or experience, showed adequate motor coordination, poor persistence, low energy supply, deficient comprehension. Mart is poorly informed, though comparing his performance today with the report of an earlier examination six months ago, there is some improvement evident. Basal age on the Terman Revision is four years and of

the five year group, he could name the primary colors. He failed in the comparison of weights, aesthetic comparison and executing three simple commissions. His auditory memory span of 5 digits forward would indicate a better range of distribution of attention than any of the other responses today.

“Tentative Diagnosis, ‘Not higher than a middle grade moron.’ ”

Having been present for the latter part of his brother’s examination, Sam became quite calm emotionally and as long as Mart was allowed in the room, his cooperation remained satisfactory. The record of his examination shows,

C.A. 4 yrs. 5 mo. I.Q. 80  
 M.A. 3 yrs. 6 mo. Basal age, 3 yrs. Upper limit, 4 yrs.  
 Memory Span—Forward, auditory—4 digits (4 to 7 yr. mode).  
 Visual—Not determinable.  
 Reverse—Did not comprehend.

“Sam was interested from the beginning in all the performance test material he saw. With the tests within his range of years, he did very well. He showed good discrimination of form, and size; displayed accurate muscular coordination, abundance of energy and increased efficiency on the second trial. He appears to have particularly good manual dexterity. Obviously Sam has not been taught nor given much childhood information, neither has he acquired it. He cannot count beyond two and he failed to copy the square. Showed unfamiliarity holding a pencil. Each verbal response was elicited only after promising that he might ‘play with other games.’ Once when opposed, he left the room but returned amicably when called. He is stubborn, persistent, willful and energetic—a potential if not an actual conduct problem at present.

“Tentative Diagnosis, ‘Normal dull, untaught. His infantile stammer, if it persists, should be treated at the University Clinic.’ ”

Here we have two boys in urgent need of a home. The psychological findings indicate Sam to be of normal intelligence, though woefully untrained in general and especially deficient in verbal expression; anti-social in his group relations. His brother confided that Sam “was good for you today. He never talks much, only to mother.” Mart on the other hand was passive, uncritical, easily influenced, quickly fluctuating in the quality and time element of a response—mentally defective.

Where should they be placed? In an institution? Together? Apart? As neighbors? In a childless family? With other place-

ment children? Under supervision with their mother? After considerable discussion and several conferences it was determined to place them together. Accordingly, Mart and Sam, shiningly clean, equipped with new clothes and a "free from" (contagion) certificate, entered their new home, where several "family-children" of about their own age accepted them as of themselves. At the office this particular home was listed as an "average home" from the material side, presided over by a cheerful Jewish mother and housewife. There was no servant, and each child had a few tasks regularly assigned to him and for which he was responsible. Her own children obeyed her simple restrictions as a matter of course and the transient or temporary placement cases who had been there previously, soon learned to follow their example. She was a busy mother, though her maternal care could apparently include a few more than her own. To her, children were children; they were to be fed, kept tolerably clean, sent to school, early in bed and up promptly on schedule. They should be busy among themselves and unhampered by unnecessary "don'ts."

A year later the boys returned for a re-examination. Their intermediate case histories record regular contacts on the part of their Visitor but there have been no serious difficulties. Their adjustment had been gradual and at present seemed complete. The boys' parents were kept informed of their progress. The father had not yet been released and the mother offered no interference, neither did she visit them.

As they came into the Clinic, two outstanding gains were immediately apparent—their improved appearance along with physical growth and their increased poise and social security. With Sam it was almost unbelievable. He opened the Clinic door without waiting for an answer to his knock and greeted me with "I came in to do some blocks. This is Jack," pointing to a boy whose acquaintance had just been made in the waiting room. Sam appears now an active happy boy of five, easily expressing himself clearly and well. The pent-up rebellion of last year is released in the spontaneous expression of his interests and energy. He has attended Kindergarten and progressed satisfactorily. Mart too shows some improvement but to a lesser degree. He has gained in persistence and is perhaps less passive. Physically, the boys were given a clean bill of health.

The report of the psychological re-examinations is in substance as follows:

Mart—C.A. 7 yrs. 8 mo. M.A. 5 yrs. 9 mo. I.Q. 75

Basal age, 5 yrs. Upper limit, 7 yrs. Vocabulary limited.

Memory Span—Auditory, forward—6 digits (mode for 10 yr. level).

Learning—Not 7 digits on 6 trials.

Reverse—Did not comprehend.

Visual—5 digits.

“Mart showed some improvement in his performance tests over last year’s efforts. They are however still below the median for his age group. He worked happily, even pleased with himself, and was not critical of his errors. Proceeded purely by trial and error method when the solution was not perfectly obvious. Showed some increased efficiency on second trials. His range of information has broadened but not sufficiently to bring him up to the average of his age. He remembers few specific items taught at school, though he makes a better analysis of a simple situation. He does not know right from left nor can he count beyond twelve. Failed to copy a diamond. He does however know “what is the thing to do” in situations familiar to children of his age, such as probably being late for school or having broken another’s property.

“Diagnosis confirmed. Subnormal intelligence, not above middle grade moron.”

Sam—C.A. 5 yrs. 10 mo. M.A. 5 yrs. 9 mo.

Basal age, 4 yrs. Upper limit, 7 yrs. I.Q. 98

Vocabulary—apparently adequate in scope but does not comprehend definition.

Memory Span—Forward, auditory—6 digits (10 yr. mode).

Reverse—Did not comprehend.

Visual—Not determinable as he does not know digit signs.

“Sam demonstrated superior ability in manual dexterity. His analysis of form and position is exceptional for one of his years. This ability should be fostered and taken into consideration especially at the time of choosing a vocation. He has good energy supply, is persistent and steady in his effort; works quietly, spontaneously, critically and apparently with enjoyment. He assembled the Healy Construction B within two and a half minutes (10-12 yr. level) and replaced the blocks of the Dearborn Formboard correctly within 6 minutes when all of them had been removed. He wanted to try the Healy Pictorial ‘Day at School’ and failed completely, not placing one correctly, though he worked earnestly and long. This would seem to indicate that his discrimination and analysis are as

yet concerned with form and concrete material rather than with situations and ideas involving judgment. His range of information has expanded greatly and his manner of speech has also improved. He still speaks softly though with assurance. Perhaps the greatest development during the year is in his manner of social contacts. The shy, uncomfortable child of a year ago, entered the Clinic today self reliant, smiling, eager to do whatever was asked of him.

“Diagnosis: Normal intelligence. Shows particular ability in manual dexterity.”

These clinical notes of the re-examination portray interesting companion pictures to those of the year previous. Their graphic representation clearly shows the progress made. Taking the previous scores, records and reports together with those of the re-examination, I have evaluated on a five point scale the different abilities and characteristics of each boy at each examination. The scale is purely arbitrary though consistent—1 being the lowest value referable to all children, 5 the highest; 1 indicating low grade defective, 5 superior ability. 3 is average, normal. The scores of the first examination are indicated by the solid lines, those of the re-examination by the broken lines. Each score level has been further divided into low, middle and high, which means that the boys' performances have actually been rated according to a 15 point scale. The subdivisions have been indicated by the position of the marker within the diagnostic column. The list recorded contains only those qualities which were definitely evaluated at the first examination. It makes no pretense at being complete.\*

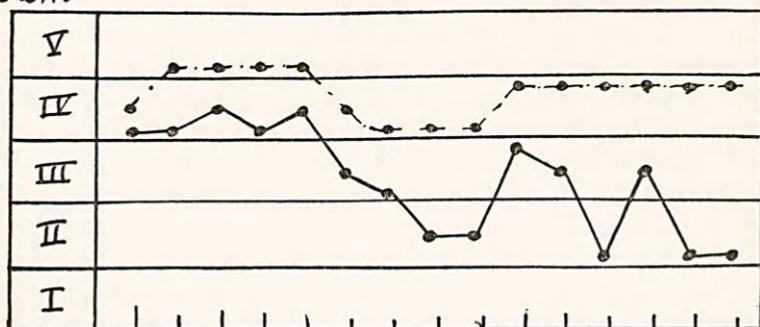
Graph I represents Sam's scores; Graph II those of Mart.

At a glance we see what different types of children these brothers are; Sam characterized by wide variations from the median, Mart always centering about the zone of bare sufficiency. At the first examination Sam was untrained, repressed, handicapped in speech but energetic and clever along the lines of manual dexterity. His sociability was decidedly low. At the re-examination, his most

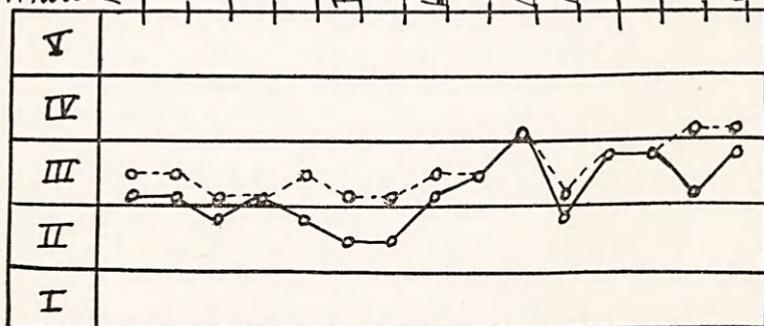
\* In determining the evaluations made, both the quantitative and qualitative factors were considered. For instance in rating the performance tests, the responses were compared with the percentile distribution of the time scores already standardized for that particular test. This comparative rating was then modified by the qualitative rating, determined by the method of performance, *viz.*, trial and error or planfulness. As to the I.Q. rating, being considered indicative of general proficiency, I would indicate a score below I.Q. 50; II above 50 but below 70; III above 70 but below 90; IV above 90 but below 115, and V above 115.

obvious development is noted in the field of motivation. Within the space of a year he has grown in social poise, in ease of conformity to accepted social standards and in cooperation and con-

Graph I  
Sam



Graph II  
Mart



trol; the range of his general proficiency has widened and he has become spontaneous in verbal expression, free from embarrassment and stammering. What did it?

Mart's psychograph shows some development but not such striking advance as his brother's. His low intellectual mediocrity

remains fairly constant, though his social reactions did improve. He gained too in range of information. He is, however, a borderline case, passive and lacking the forceful energy which so characterizes Sam.

From the child placement point of view these graphs illustrate what a satisfactory home can do in one year for an anti-social child of normal intelligence and what the same foster home can do in the same time for a passive conforming subnormal child. Certainly their individual abilities are in the ultimate outcome a largely determining factor. There is nothing in the case record nor in either boy's attitude which would give the slightest indication that either had been favored in the home, or had been subjected to discrimination in favor of the other or indeed of the family-children. In fact the children apparently "just grew" and grew with one another. I am inclined to hold that therein lies the secret of the success in this particular situation. Of course it is unwarranted to suppose that this home is the best of all possible ones for Sam and Mart. Obviously, however, it has afforded a setting in which each has had the opportunity to develop his individual possibilities with a remarkable degree of freedom. The ideal of the best home is to be self-disciplinary. Necessary discipline should be inevitable in its certainty, but its importance never over-emphasized. Many a child of imagination filled with a sense of the dramatic consciously enjoys holding the center of the stage in his family-drama every time he plays the rôle of *enfant terrible*. Anything to gain attention! Why not enliven a dull rainy day or one when everybody is too busy to give much attention to his young Lordship? The punishment which follows is usually administered in a high, emotional key and may smack of injustice, thus affording the best kind of a situation to enkindle defiance and retaliation or foster ingrowing misunderstanding.

Homes of children should consistently maintain standards well enough within their individual reach, so that no child feels himself to be held apart from the group. For child welfare it is more essential to be emotionally stable than intellectually brilliant. This does not mean that the lives of the older members of the family should be entirely dominated by the whims of the younger, but it does mean that each as an individual should be conscious of sharing the freedom of self-expression which the home affords. Whether aware of it or not, this foster home seems to have incorporated these characteristics in the every day living, with the result that the

mechanics or structural framework of discipline was largely submerged in the children's full busy days of school, work, play, sleep and off again to school. Their home materially satisfied their physical needs and afforded the boys enough of the simple luxuries for them to be accepted as substantial citizens in the neighborhood and at school. Socially they were "secure" within the family and within the community.

Undoubtedly play also contributed very largely to the development of Sam and Mart during the past year. Contrast their pent-up lives amid intrigue, law-evasion and the necessarily hurried movings from place to place. Under no conditions do children develop as spontaneously as in competitive and cooperative sport—especially when their equipment largely depends upon the player's ingenuity. Team-play, obedience, subjection of the individual to the power of the group, speed of decision, quick right action, "game" acceptance of criticism and defeat, modesty in victory—these are the lessons best learned at play, for here they are self imposed and clearly justified without being personal and without the dictatorial imposition of adults.

Whether or not their present home will continue to meet their individual needs is a matter of conjecture. That they have grown and have been happy there, is beyond doubt. The problems of the future will largely depend upon the boys' personality development. With periodic re-examinations—physical, psychiatric and psychological—serious pitfalls should be avoided.