
ON TEEN-AGE CANTEENS

A Memorandum

prepared by the

**ASSOCIATED YOUTH-SERVING
ORGANIZATIONS, INC.**

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AMONG the significant phenomena that have developed in our community-at-war is the increased awareness everywhere of the existence of large groups of teen-age young people. For the first time, many adults realize that there are adolescents in the community who are restless, on the loose, wanting security and seeking to experiment with new adventure. We find among them increased tensions as well as an increased sense of responsibility. At the same time, they demonstrate their own aptitudes in meeting some of their major problems.

The adolescent population does not make up a new sector in our American community. However, war has intensified our focus on their needs and interests.

Adolescence has long been recognized as a period of difficulty, insecurity, tensions and problems of adjustment. But in wartime many of these characteristics are heightened and sharpened.

One of the major developments in communities throughout the country has been the establishment of what is now popularly known as the "teen-age canteen." This has resulted from the natural desire to help American young people find satisfactory outlets for their energies, their skills and their creative ideas.

The constituent units of the Associated Youth-Serving Organizations have been concerned with and involved in teen-age canteen programs since their inception. They have functioned either as cooperating agencies together with other interested groups in the community, or as direct sponsors of teen-age canteens within the agency itself.

Therefore, a committee was appointed by the chairman of the AYSO to study this development and to review materials and reports that have been made available. The following is a memorandum which the committee has prepared summarizing some of the general principles that stand out in the current thinking concerning the teen-age canteen. In several instances direct quotations have been included.

This is not a how-to-do-it outline. Material of that kind is readily available and is listed in the bibliography attached. This memorandum attempts to set down some of the basic principles, cautions and suggestions, and lists significant points which local groups should watch out for in initiating and continuing to develop teen-age canteens.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

1. We recognize and urge others to recognize the need to give young people an opportunity to develop outlets for individual and group expression, to plan their own activities, to initiate programs, to carry them through and make their own evaluations.

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2. Where teen-age canteens are set up, they should be developed as part of an on-going program of service for youth, whether it is the school, the public recreation, the youth serving agency, the church or other continuing program.

3. It is thoroughly unsound to conceive of and establish a teen canteen as an independent facility and program unrelated to the total experience of youth in the community. It should be viewed as an element in the total educational and recreational experience of young people and as part of a rounded development for them.

4. In any pattern of work with youth, provision must be made for new and more meaningful programs from the initial interest. Although the primary motivation for the youngsters in the teen-age center may be dancing, adequate guidance and leadership should develop new interests such as hobby groups, group projects, discussion and study groups, and service activities which have a lasting value to the individuals in the program and to the community.

5. While increased demands and interest in youth service might influence us to accept commercial backing, we cannot justify compromising our primary responsibility to youth and community—youth's welfare—for short-range objectives and conveniences. Nor can we afford to separate canteen activities from long-range activities for which we have been developing standards of professional practice and responsible guidance.

6. The financial support of commercial organizations desiring to help youth should be channeled into developing adequate youth service programs through socially acceptable community methods.

7. Commercial organizations or firms, which are interested in helping youth, may wish to establish foundations, using their company names, to endow special work in such areas as leadership training, research, guidance and group work scholarships for graduate students.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. Teen-age canteens have a real place in the agency and community youth programs. These centers answer the adolescent's need for lively recreation and a place of his own where he can plan his social life.

2. Canteens are not the panacea to all adolescent's ills, and the center as such has no importance except as it is related to what happens to boys and girls in their total experience.

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3. The teen-age canteen provides opportunities for young people to plan program and set standards and assume responsibilities. It provides opportunities to plan and work with adults and to develop program content.

4. When developed independently of regular youth serving agencies, the teen-canteen programs lack permanency and stability because they are not closely integrated with the educational objectives common to the youth serving fields.

5. The use being made of existing facilities and the participation of youth in existing programs must be examined. It is not enough to have available recreation opportunities. Youth itself must feel it has some part in program planning and direction.

6. An analysis of the history of the first fifty clubs to come to the attention of the National Recreation Association shows that about one-third were the result of youth initiative, one-third of public and private youth agency initial interest, while one-third were the outcome of steps taken by local civic agencies such as P.T.A., luncheon clubs, American Legion, women's clubs, Chambers of Commerce and Junior Chambers of Commerce. Centers established since then have been increasingly the result of adult initiative.

PRINCIPLES OF OPERATION

1. **Committee in Charge.** Where an existing recreational agency sponsors a canteen in one of its own buildings, or organizes special teen-age programs of the youth center type, it should set up a youth-adult advisory committee to take responsibility for the program or the center. These committees help to develop opportunities for youth and for youth and adults to work together.

2. **Funds.** It is important that fund-raising efforts be tied up with some permanent agency to provide the best possible assurance of continued support and operation.

3. **Adult Leadership.** Most centers are under the direction of adult leadership, usually employed leadership. In some cases this employed leadership is confined to the services of a matron or hostess. However, **competent professional adult leadership skilled in the supervision of young people is urgently recommended.**

4. **Agency Leadership.** Where canteens are sponsored by public or private recreation agencies, one or more staff members are usually assigned to the center. It is of utmost importance that this leadership be of the highest type—wise, unobtrusive leadership which

will help advise and guide youth in its own planning and activities.

5. **Co-recreation.** The teen-age canteens are all co-recreational. There is no doubt but that this is one of the chief desires of youth—for boys and girls to be together.

6. **Dancing.** Dancing is a primary feature of the activity program. Young people are going to dance. It is up to community leadership to see that dancing takes place in a wholesome environment.

7. **The Snack Bar.** Almost every teen-age center has a snack bar, a place where refreshments are served. Quite often these bars imitate the cocktail bar—milk, coca-cola, and other soft drinks being served. The sale of refreshments at the bar can often be a fine source of revenue. Prices must be kept at as low a level as possible.

8. **The Game Room.** Where space is available, most of the clubs have separate rooms for various activities. There is always a game room. Here ping-pong, checkers, chess, monopoly, and a host of games are provided. Another room is for phonograph music; another for reading and writing. These rooms can expand into other activities according to space available in the center.

9. **The Juke Box.** Practically all of the centers have a juke box. This also can be a source of good revenue for center maintenance. It provides the everyday music for dancing. Occasionally, some of the centers hire orchestras by means of a special charge for a particular occasion or revenues earned from the juke box. There can be no objection to occasionally hiring an orchestra.

10. **The Canteen Idea.** Youth likes to feel that it has a place similar to that of the soldier or sailor and with the same type of activities. Anything in the form of decoration or program that is like those in the servicemen's clubs will be helpful.

11. **Fees.** Practically every center charges a fee to the youth participating in its activities. This fee may be on a monthly or yearly membership basis or on an activity basis. Practice selects any basis that brings in a definite and regular sum. Every effort should be made to keep the fee as low as possible so as not to prevent any youth from participating due to the cost.

12. **Youth Responsible.** The one outstanding feature in practically all of the canteens studied is that youth shares and accepts a large responsibility in the administration and direction of its program.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Obviously the teen-age canteen is but one facet of a total service program for adolescent youth. If we stop at that point we fall short of our responsibility. Communities need to continue their concern about adolescents. During the transition period, their young people will be facing a new series of adjustments. There will be new factors to consider—the withdrawal of employment opportunities, the return of veterans to the community, the re-establishment of normal home life, the opening up of new educational opportunities, the development of new perspectives about personal and vocational plans. The youth serving agencies should be concerned with an expanding program designed to meet the changing needs of the adolescent in the postwar period.

The teen-age canteens are a co-educational and a co-recreational program. They demonstrate the validity of mixed activities for the high-school age group.

During wartime we have learned how to mobilize the resources of the community, to work together on special jobs, to bring positive results, to solve specific problems. The teen-age canteen development is an example of how we have been able to cooperate effectively. It has made a definite contribution which is well recognized in the community. In terms of postwar needs, communities will have to gear their resources to adopt programs for youth to changing patterns. Youth agencies will have to continue to demonstrate their flexibility in directing their skills and resources.

The teen-age canteen development demonstrates again the ability of young people to assume responsibility for the planning and operation of projects which are important to themselves. We will need to discover in the future how we can continue to provide outlets for this proven desire and ability of young people.

We encourage and are willing to work for the extension of services through already existing organizations. This means that we must continue to have sound planning, adequate financing and adequate leadership in the youth field.

The above memorandum is the first progress report of the committee appointed by the AYSO. A second progress report will grow out of reports from local units of member agencies. Such reports will help to determine how far the youth serving agencies have gone in expanding their work with teen-age young people. **Therefore, readers of this memorandum are asked to furnish the committee with**

- (1) pictures, stories and reports on teen-age canteen programs;
- (2) materials on new developments in programming for this age group in terms of expanding services to meet adolescent needs; and
- (3) impressions, ideas, principles that have grown out of experience and major planning with the adolescent program, such as youth councils, teen-age centers, community-wide pageants, and so forth.

Send reports to your national headquarters.

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