

# **Training Good Citizens: A Case Study of A Boys' Home in Hong Kong**

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## **Introduction**

### **1. Aims**

This research aims to evaluate to what extent institutionalization can help delinquent juveniles. I chose this topic because I am interested in the study of human deviance. "Deviant behavior refers to actions which transgress commonly held norms" (Giddens 2001: 153). Delinquent juveniles, who have committed to behavior prohibited by law, are one kind of the deviant social members (Trojanowicz, Morash & Schram 2001: 4). I am particularly interested in juvenile delinquency because I have experience in meeting those youths. In my part-time job, I have to conduct educational workshops for youths. Once I had to conduct workshops in a boys' home. That experience aroused my concern for juvenile delinquents. Those boys committed crime, and the societal reaction was trapping them in an institution. I doubted the rationale for using institutionalization as rehabilitation, and the effectiveness of it in changing the juvenile delinquents' behavior. Therefore, I carried out this study about institutionalization and juvenile delinquency.

This research studies one of the boys' homes in Hong Kong called, Blue Sky Center. The research focuses on how a specially designed institution can help transform deviant juveniles back to 'normal' persons. It aims to find out how an institution can reshape the juveniles; the effectiveness of the measures; and the actual function of this institution for the deviants and the society.

This study aims to provide some reflection and insights on the correctional services for deviant members in the society. First, what are the backgrounds of the delinquent juveniles and why they are sent to the center? Second, how does the institution educate and reshape them? What is the effectiveness of these measures? Third, can the institution succeed in transforming the delinquent juveniles to good citizens? After everything else, what are the actual function and role of the institution for the deviants and the society? Does it reflect any social problems or values? Are we

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really helping someone out there or are we hiding social problems behind the scene?

## **2. Definition of juvenile delinquency**

Juvenile delinquency refers to juvenile who has committed to behavior prohibited by law (Trojanowicz et al. 2001: 4). The exact lower and upper age limits differ from country to country. In Hong Kong, the age range of juvenile is 7 to 21 (Peng 1998: 15).

There are two categories of delinquent behavior. One category refers to behavior, which is criminal for adults, such as the serious offenses of murder, rape, fraud, burglary, robbery, trespassing and possession of drugs (Trojanowicz et al. 2001: 4). The other category is status offenses, which include running away from home, being out of control of parents, school truancy, and consumption of alcohol under legal age. These acts are illegal due only to the age status of the juvenile offenders (Bynum & Thompson 2005: 10). Juveniles are categorized as delinquent only if they break the laws and are caught by the police. Sometimes, people consider juvenile lawbreaking as childish pranks, “one-time” mistakes, and a normal part of “growing up” (Trojanowicz et al. 2001: 6). The decision to identify a juvenile “delinquent” is quite arbitrary, for being delinquent is a matter of degree.

## **3. Boys’ home as a social control**

According to the Deterrence Theory, “deviance will be discouraged (deterred) if social sanctions for nonconformity are perceived to be certain, swift, and severe (Gibbs & Schneider in Bynum & Thompson 2005: 406). It is assumed that juveniles are rational, logical beings who prefer to be rewarded for their conformity rather than punished for their deviance. If youths know that meaningful social sanctions will be forthcoming, they are less likely to commit delinquent acts (Bynum & Thompson 2005: 406).

There are two kinds of deterrence. One is specific deterrence, that a sanction is applied to a person in hopes that he or she will not repeat the same or a similar act. The other one is general deterrence, in which a sanction is applied to a person in such a way that not only is that person deterred from repeating his or her deviance, but others who learn of the sanction are also discouraged from committing the same or similar acts (Bynum & Thompson 2005: 406).

Social control of juvenile delinquency includes voluntary, informal, and formal control. These controls, in different degree, prevent juveniles from committing illegal behavior.

Voluntary social control relies upon successful socialization and the internalization of social norms and values in a person. Social norms and values will teach a person what is “right” and what is “wrong” (Bynum & Thompson 2005: 432). If the internal voluntary control of a juvenile is not strong enough to prohibit law violation, informal social control is needed. Gossip, ridicule, humor, ostracism, and peer pressure all can help control a juvenile’s behavior (Bynum & Thompson 2005: 433). The third type of societal defense against delinquency is formal social control. The schools, police, courts, and various social agencies all play an important role in implementing formal social control measures against juveniles. Juvenile probation, incarceration in juvenile institutions, or various community programs can be utilized in an attempt to prevent and control delinquency (Bynum & Thompson 2005: 433).

In this case study, Blue Sky Center serves as an institution to re-educate delinquent juveniles. It provides long-term facilities for juveniles to study and reside. Ideally, it integrates treatment and rehabilitation for the youths into the custody procedures. It serves as a formal social control and it is a specific deterrence on delinquent juveniles.

## **Introduction of Blue Sky Center**

### **1. Objectives of the center**

Blue Sky Center is founded in 1940s. According to the center’s print materials, Blue Sky Center aims to provide residential training and schooling to juveniles in need so that they can have “a meaningful life, be contributive to the society and become good citizens”. Its five objectives are to assist teenagers 1) to develop positively in behavioral, emotional and academic aspects, and enhance their skills in problem-solving 2) to establish healthy lifestyle, good learning attitude, appropriate social values and positive world view 3) to develop their potentials, self-esteem, responsibility and better social network 4) to cultivate communication and relationship with their families 5) be more aware of social issue and citizenship.

### **2. Structure**

Blue Sky Center consists of two independent institutions --- Osmond Hostel and

Sunrise Secondary School. The two institutions, located next to each other, provide residential training and schooling to juveniles who have behavioral and emotional problems. The hostel is funded by the Social Welfare Department, while the school is funded by the Education and Manpower Bureau. They are supervised by the same Executive Committee of Blue Sky Center but they have independent management. They cater for male teenagers, aged between 12 to 16, who have emotional and behavioral problems. Sunrise Secondary School provides in total 135 placements for Form 1 to Form 4 education. The Osmond Hostel provides 104 placements, and only Form 1 to Form 3 students in Sunrise Secondary School can reside in it. Parents can apply a placement for their sons through the social workers, professional counselors to register in the Central Co-ordinating Referral Mechanism of the Social Welfare Department. Principal of the school can also refer their students to Blue Sky Center. According to the assistant superintendent Mr. Ho, approximately 1/3 of the trainees come here due to probation, 1/3 due to Protection Order by the court and 1/3 due to the Police Superintendents' Discretion or serious family problems.

Worth noticing, I get the consent to carry out this research from the management of Osmond Hostel only, not the school. Therefore, all the fieldwork was conducted in the hostel (or activities organized by the hostel). All the male juveniles I met are those who study in Sunrise Secondary School and reside in Osmond Hostel.

### 3. Osmond Hostel

Osmond Hostel goes under the Social Welfare Department. The Social Welfare Department aims to provide “residential training to young offenders to help them change their behavior and social attitude through the employment of social work methods so that, upon discharge, they are better equipped to live as law-abiding members of the community” (Lo 1997: 6). Boys reside in the hostel are called “trainees” (*hok yuen*, 學員)

Within Osmond Hostel, there are three units. Counseling Unit is responsible to follow up individual cases and provides counseling to the boys. Residential Care and Training Unit is responsible for looking after the boys. Administration and Support Unit maintains the operation of the hostel and it does not have direct contact with the boys.

There are four houses (*ga tze*, 家舍) in Osmond Hostel: Topaz, Ruby, Emerald and Sapphire. Each house occupies one floor of the building, and it has its own

bedrooms, bathrooms, a kitchen and living hall. Each house has approximately 26 boys but it varies because there are boys entering and leaving the center throughout the year. The house is the most important place in the hostel because it is where the daily living of the boys are carried out.

The houses are run by housemasters (*ga tse dou si*, 家舍導師), who are the staff responsible for looking after the boys as well as maintaining discipline within the houses. There are three male housemasters in each house, and in total there are 12 housemasters. They work on shift and usually only one housemaster is on duty at a time.

## **Methodology**

Methodologies in this research include participant observation, in-depth interviews and literature review.

### **1. Participant observations**

“Participant observation comprises the fairly prolonged immersion of the researcher in the context that is to be studied with the purpose of gaining first-hand knowledge of that context, primarily through observation of individuals as they go about their normal activities.” (Bryman 1989: 142)

I started to contact Blue Sky Center, in the summer 2005, for the permission to conduct a study there. According to Alan Bryman (1989), there are three types: covert, full and indirect (Bryman 1989: 143). The participant observation I did is in between covert and full.

On one hand, my role as a researcher is known when “negotiating entry” (Bryman 1989: 143). I get the consent of the assistant superintendent of Osmond Hostel to visit the hostel regularly, participate in their activities, and have interviews with the trainees and staff. On the other hand, other staff and trainees did not know my true status until I invited them for an interview. The assistant superintendent introduced me as a volunteer to the center. I helped to conduct a six-session English training workshops for the boys so that I could have a “work role within the organization” and conduct covert observation (Bryman 1989: 143).

I carried out the participant observation from mid-September 2005 to early March 2006. This involved taking part in different kinds of activities. First, most of

the observations were done in Ruby House. I stayed in Ruby House from 4pm to 9pm, to observe the boys' daily interactions and have some casual chat with them. The observation time in the house was always after 4pm because, during daytime, all the trainees are at school, where I was not permitted to go and observe. At 9pm, all of them must go to bed so I have to leave. Because I visited the hostel regularly, about once a week throughout the last three months, the staff and the boys got used to me and they felt comfortable with my presence. The boys were willing to chat and play with me.

Second, I conducted observations of staff meetings. Every afternoon around 3pm, all the staff on duty held a meeting. The staff from the hostel and the school met to discuss or report the performance of the boys at school and in the houses. These meetings are very important because the staff can get the most updated information about the boys and sometimes they will discuss the case of a particular boy. By joining these meetings, I learnt more about the operation of the center in the "backstage".

Third, I joined various mass activities, such as mid-autumn festival barbecue, Christmas party, visits to the Shek Pik Prison, and English training workshops. In these activities, I got to meet come together with boys and the staff from other houses.

These participant observations provided me with abundant field data for the study. I was familiar with the operations of the hostel, including the routines of the boys after school. In addition, I could establish social network within the center so that I could invite the trainees and housemasters to be my informants.

## **2. In-depth interviews**

I have conducted 15 in-depth interviews with the trainees and social workers. These interviews are semi-structured in that I use "a schedule but recognizes that departures will occur if interesting emerges from what respondents say and in order to get their version of things" (Bryman 1989: 149).

Nine informants are trainees living in the center, but their length of stay varies from two months to three years. The interviews were about their background information; experience in the hostel and school; their opinions on discipline and punishment; any discrimination from the public; and the effectiveness of the center in educating them. One informant is an ex-trainee who had lived in the center for two

years and he left the center for six months to return to a mainstream secondary school for form 3 education.

Three of the informants are housemasters working in the center. They provided opinions on the center from the staff's perspective. One informant is a social worker who has practical training in the center for a year in her undergraduate study and her job now has a close contact with the center. One informant is a circus trainer who has conducted circus-training workshops for the boys. They provide an outsider's perspective on the center.

### **Literature Review**

There are a number of studies on juvenile delinquency in Hong Kong. The earliest research on juvenile delinquency in Hong Kong began in the mid-1970s by the Hong Kong government, Ng et al. (1975) focus on the causes of juvenile delinquency. Studies conducted after that also focus on the causes, such as Ng (1994), Chow, Tang and Chan (1987). These studies were guided by the social control theory, and they usually discuss the relationship and bonds between delinquent juveniles and social institutions, such as family and school, which provide social control (Choi & Lo 2002: 98). Poor family relationships hinder juveniles' attachment to school. These factors push them away from conventional social institutions to search for external emotional support from undesirable peer, leading them to commit crimes (Choi & Lo 2002: 98).

In 1980s, some researchers focus on the differential association and subcultural theories, for instance, Lo (1986). He suggests that youths commit crime due to the association with undesirable peers, especially the triad society, and that the subculture of the group cultivates youths' motivation to commit crime (Choi & Lo 2002: 100).

From the 1990s onwards, "social interaction" and "labeling" theories became popular (Choi and Lo 2002: 105). For example the findings of Lee (1993), Vagg et al. (1995), and Ngai et. al (2001) emphasize the negative impacts of labeling, that labeling will push a delinquent youth to further involvement in the criminal subculture (Choi & Lo 2002: 102-104).

Nonetheless, there are deficiencies in the study of juvenile delinquency in Hong Kong. First, most of the research focuses on the causes for juvenile delinquency rather than evaluating society's remedy measures for these delinquents. In addition, the evaluation reports are done by government departments, such as the Social Welfare

Department and Correctional Services Department. As a result, in my study on a male juvenile care center in Hong Kong, I found very few example good reference materials. Second, most of the researches are done by scholars in sociology and social work, who usually use questionnaires as the main methodology. There are abundant figures in the analysis but the voices of the targets of study (the juveniles) are omitted. We do not know how the delinquent juveniles think about the topic.

In “A Study on Sentencing Options for Young Offenders in Hong Kong” (Peng 1998), there is wide-ranging discussion on the effectiveness of custodial and non-custodial punishments. Nonetheless, the information comes from literature review, analysis of law, critics, annual reports of departments and statistics, and questionnaires with leader representatives in Hong Kong (Peng 1998: 16). Worth noticing, it includes voices of “leader representatives”, such as lawyers, head of a non-governmental organization, scholars, committee member of the Crime Fighting Committee, but the opinions of the actual receiver of the punishments are never incorporated.

The official evaluation of the punishments for delinquent juveniles by and large relies on “reconviction rate”, such as the research by the Social Welfare Department on probation, and the research by the Hong Kong Prisons Department (renamed Hong Kong Correctional Services Department at present) on detention center (Chiu 1997: 115). The “reconviction rate” is generated from the official crime rate of the Royal Hong Kong Police. The reliability of the figures is suspect because only those who recommitted in crime, being caught and sent to the judicial proceeding are included. Many released juveniles commit crime without being caught by the police (Chiu 1997: 115).

The study that I found more anthropological is the report “The Effectiveness of Custodial Care or Supervision on the Rehabilitation of Juveniles” by Chiu (1997). He interviewed five juveniles who had lived in detention center, or boys’ home. Although the research scale is small, it reflects the opinions of the juveniles. The interviewees pointed out that going to the custodial institutions can have a deterrence effect on them in committing crime again. However, the deterrence effects come from the cruel life inside instead of a positive care and education.

As a result, in my study, I aim to have an anthropological study in evaluating the service provided by a boys’ home. My focus is how do the boys (the actual receivers of the service) think about the center instead of how the social workers explain they



can help the boys.

### **Organization of this essay**

This project paper will be divided into five sections. In section one, I will discuss the nature of the service of Blue Sky Center. I will discuss how Blue Sky Center complies with the essence of “total institutions” suggested by Erving Goffman (1961). In section two, I will introduce the backgrounds of the trainees in the center. I will give three examples of the boys to show their reasons for becoming delinquent and hence trainees of the center. I will also discuss how “labeling” relates to their delinquent behaviors. By understanding the nature of the center and the backgrounds of the boys, we can be more prepared to understand the following sessions, which will discuss the training of the center, the result of the training and the deficiencies.

In section three, I will discuss the methods adopted by Osmond Hostel to train the boys. We will see that, it emphasizes “discipline” and it uses “punishment” and “reward” as the tools to achieve this objective. In section four, I will evaluate the effects of the training, as mentioned in section three, on the boys. The boys do learn something from the training and improve their emotion and behavior. Nonetheless, the effects are temporary, and they cannot transform the emotion and behavior of the boys in a long-term.

In section four, which is the focus of this study, I will analyze the deficiencies of the training in the center that lead to the failure in training the delinquent juveniles into good citizens. Five areas of deficiencies will be discussed. They include the inconsistent systems of punishment in the center, discrepancy between the training inside and the real world outside, fakeness of the improvements of the boys, fakeness of the nurturance provided by the staff, and the result of stigmatization on the boys.

Finally, I will draw a conclusion. If Blue Sky Center cannot fulfill its aim of “training good citizens”, what is the value for it in the society? In the conclusion, I will explore the real social function or role of this juvenile care center in the society and give some reflection on the studied topic.

### **Section 1: Blue Sky Center as a “total institution”**

According to Erving Goffman’s *Asylum* (1961), “total institutions” are institutions, which are totally, or almost totally closed to the outside world (Burns 1992: 144). Blue Sky Center can be regarded as a total institution because it complies with the three characteristics suggested by Goffman. By understanding the characteristics of a

total institution, we can be more familiar with the nature of life in Blue Sky Center, in particular the Osmond Hostel.

First, the main characteristic of total institutions is “closure”, that the contact between people inside and outside the institution is prohibited, especially to those inside (Burns 1992: 145). In Goffman’s word, there is a “barrier to social intercourse with the outside and to departure that is often built right into the physical plant” (Goffman in Burns 1992: 145).

This is true of the Blue Sky Center. Trainees in Osmond Hostel are not permitted to leave the center unless for holiday or with special permission. The hostel and the school are two buildings connected with each other. There is one main gate of the whole center. They live in the hostel and during daytime, they go to study in Sunrise Secondary School right next to it. Trainees’ activities cannot exceed the boundary of the center. Their family members cannot visit them unless they are required by the center and have registered ahead of time. Obviously, the contact between people inside and outside the institution is prohibited.

Second, there is “rationalization” of everyday living in total institutions (Burns 1992: 146). Everyday life such as work, play and sleep is centralized. Inmates have to follow “a tight, uniform schedule which is ‘purportedly’ determined by the prescribed aims of the hospital (Burns 1992: 146). The most important point is that inmates cannot choose the activities. People in the public may also follow a schedule to work under an authority. Nonetheless, they have the right to choose for themselves.

There is also “rationalization” of everyday living in Blue Sky Center. There is a tight, uniform schedule for the trainees to follow. From the moment they wake up at 7am, their activities are arranged into different timeslots until the time they go to bed at 9pm. A simplified timetable is as follow: 7am - wake up, wash and dress, tidy up their beds; 7:30am - morning exercise; 8am - breakfast; 9am - go to school; 12pm - lunch; 3pm - assembly in the hall; 4pm - return to the hostel or extra-curricular activities; 6pm - dinner and cleansing of the house; 7pm - free time; 8pm - self-study; 9pm - go to bed. The exercises in the center are explicitly repetitive. Everyday, the boys do the same activities in the particular time slots. The center uses this timetable to regulate their lives. All boys can only do what is allowed in the assigned timeslot.

Third, total institutions are characterized by “bureaucratic organization” which means that there is a prominent demarcation between lives of the staff and inmates

(Burns 1992: 146-147). It is because the inmates are the subject of the “closure” and the staff has power and authority in the institution (Burns 1992: 147). This demarcation may lead to resentment and hostility. In Goffman’s word, the inmates and staff “tends to conceive of the other in terms of narrow hostile stereotypes, staff often seeing inmates as bitter, secretive, and untrustworthy, while inmates often see staff as condescending, highhanded, and mean” (Goffman in Burns 1992: 147).

This is also true of Blue Sky Center, especially the Osmond Hostel. In Osmond Hostel, living arrangement of the housemasters is separated and they can enjoy freedom of communication with the outside world. As the housemasters work on shift, their stay in the center is relatively temporary. Moreover, the staff has the absolute authority to decide what is right and what is wrong. They can judge the behavior of the trainees who cannot oppose the decision and punishment imposed. Trainees are under the control of the staff.

To summarize, the nature of Blue Sky Center complies with “total institution” suggested by Goffman. It is important to understand this because it directly relates to how the center educates the boys, which will be discussed in the next section.

## **Section 2: Backgrounds of the Trainees --- Delinquent Juveniles**

Blue Sky Center serves male teenagers aged between 12 to 16 who are considered to have emotional and behavioral problems. The Osmond Hostel provides 104 placements for Form 1 to Form 3 students in Sunrise Secondary School.

According to the Assistant Superintendent Mr. Ho, approximately 1/3 of the trainees come here due to probation (they have committed in crime and are found guilty by the court); 1/3 due to Protection Order issued by the juvenile court (they have serious family problems); and 1/3 due to Police Superintendents’ Discretion (they have committed in less serious offenses). Bear in mind, not all trainees in Blue Sky Center have criminal records. A few of them come to the center because their family cannot look after them, and some of them are “offenders” not “criminals”. Nonetheless, no matter what the reason is, all of them have some emotional and behavioral problems.

It is difficult and impossible to conclude a single cause for their presence in Blue Sky Center. This is because each of them has his own background and story for being sent to the center. In this research, I do not aim to analyze the causes for juvenile delinquency. Rather, I will focus on to what extent an institution specially designed

for delinquent juveniles can help. For that reason, the following is just a brief review on the backgrounds of the trainees to facilitate better understanding of the people studied.

I have chosen three example of cases of the trainees here to reflect some of the causes for their delinquent behavior and hence the reason for coming to Blue Sky Center. Three of them are chosen because their experiences can reflect the most common backgrounds of the trainees in Blue Sky Center: come from financially deprived and single-parent family (usually female-headed) with poor academic results and delinquent siblings.

## **1. Case Studies**

### Case One: Sam

Sam was assigned to Blue Sky Center by court for serious truancy and missing home. According to Sam's account, he had played truant and escaped from home since Primary 5. He did that because his parents could not look after him.

“My father died when I was in Primary 5. My mother was always away from home to work. She also tried hard to make me forget my father's death. Eventually, she got sick and went into the hospital. For most of the time, I was alone at home. Later, my mother left \$10,000 for me to look after myself. Then I just took the money and went away from home. Also I was totally absent from the school.”

He used to spend the day with his friends whom he knew from the internet bar. His friends were older than him, around 15-16 at that time. They brought him to play, such as skateboard, daub on public facilities. Eventually he learnt how to smoke and drink alcohol.

Because Sam often did not go home, his mother called the police. However, he continued to escape from home after taking money from his mother. Therefore, the police transferred his case to the social workers. Yet, his performance did not improve at all and he broke the probation order. As a result, the court sent him to Blue Sky Center.

### Case 2: Alex

Alex's father left the family when he was small. Alex lived with his mother, an elder sister, a twin brother and an uncle. His family is economically deprived and they

receive Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) from the government. Alex went to Blue Sky Center because he truanted seriously in secondary one. In addition, his emotion fluctuated easily and he would bully other schoolmates who irritated him.

“Since 13 years old I started escaping school. It was because I was sick, had asthma and then stomach-upset, so I had sick leave for half a month. I could not catch up with the lessons and homework when I returned school. Then I truanted again. For the nine months of secondary one education, I attended school three months only.”

Because of Alex’s frequent absence from the school, the school social worker transferred him to a boys’ home. However, he did not like that one and eventually he was arranged to come to Blue Sky Center. Alex admitted that the problems in his family were a key reason for his truancy.

“I always quarreled with my family and my twin brother. I fought with my twin brother over using the computer. My family is a single-parent family because my dad dumped us. We are CSSA family (family receiving financial assistance from the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme) and my mum had to work full time. So she could not take care of me.”

Alex said that his twin brother also truanted frequently, so both of them just put blame on each other. Moreover, his elder sister also quit school after secondary three. Consequently, he had a tendency to run away from school.

### Case 3: Kim

Kim also comes from a CSSA family that is economically deprived. In 2005, he stole a bicycle and he was caught by the police. During the period of bail, he committed another offense. He planned with his friend to “borrow” the cell phone from strangers and not returning it. Then they could sell it for money. They did not know there was a police next to them and overheard their conversation. He successfully “borrowed” a cell phone from a stranger and then the police caught them. He was at first sent to Pik Uk Prison, for stealing the bike. He was in jail for three weeks. Then, he was assigned by the court to Blue Sky Center for the planned deception of cell phone. He has been in Blue Sky Center for two months.

Kim explained that he wanted money because his family could not provide him enough. He did what he did that because his friends asked him to do so. Under the peer pressure, he thought it was okay to do such kind of deception. Wining the acknowledgement from his friends is very important to him.

## **2. Labeling and their deviant behavior**

Though I do not aim at analyzing the cause of the trainees' deviant behavior, there is a relevant topic I would like to discuss in this section. It is the "labeling of deviance" suggested by labeling theorists, such as Howard Becker and Edwin Lemert. Labeling theorists focus on the process through which society defines acts as deviant and the role of negative social sanctions in influencing individuals to engage in subsequent deviant acts (Clinard & Meier 2004: 104).

Becker suggested that deviance is a "consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender'. The deviant is one to whom label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label" (Clinard & Meier: 105). Therefore, to Becker, no one is innately deviant or delinquent. Only those who are caught successfully by the authority would be called "delinquent".

It is necessary to discuss "labeling" in this case study of Blue Sky Center. It is because Blue Sky Center serves male juveniles with emotional and behavioral problems, who indeed are delinquent juveniles with less serious offense. No matter what causes lead to their delinquent behavior, those boys are not officially regarded as "delinquent" or "people with emotional and behavioral problems" until the remarkable moment of moving into Blue Sky Center. One can imagine that there are many juveniles who committed crime without being caught. They can still enjoy the status of being "normal" teenagers. The difference, conform to Becker's idea, is whether a person is labeled by the society successfully or not.

Entering Blue Sky Center symbolizes the "label of delinquent" being tagged on them. It also affects how the boys perceive their delinquent behavior. Lemert classified deviant behavior into "primary deviation" and "secondary deviation". "Primary deviation" refers to the "original causes" for the deviant behavior (Wright 1984: 67). He paid little attention to the original causes of primary deviation but emphasize the effective causes of secondary deviation (Clinard & Meier 2004: 103). Secondary deviation is an outcome of societal reaction.

“When a person begins to employ his deviant behavior or a role based upon it as a means of defense, attack, or adjustment to the overt and covert problems created by the consequent societal reaction to him, his deviation is secondary” (Lemert in Wright 1984: 67)

In the case of the boys in Blue Sky Center, secondary deviance occurs in a subtle way. Trainees are negatively evaluated by the society. It affects how the trainees believe in themselves. For one thing, they adopted their label of “being bad” to explain and defend against accusation from other people on their emotional and behavioral problems. Informants always showed contradictions in describing themselves. When I asked them, “Are you bad?” they insisted they were not bad. However, at another moment, they justified their behavioral problems by agreeing to the label tagged on them.

“If we are not bad and we don’t have problems, we don’t have to come” (Jerry, Trainee).

In short, I want to emphasize that, though I use “delinquent juveniles” to refer to the trainees in Blue Sky Center, the definition and accuracy of the term is arbitrary from the perspective of labeling theory. Readers must keep in mind that I call them “delinquent” and “deviant” because they have committed crime and are caught by the police. Entering Blue Sky Center is the remarkable evidence that they are tagged with a label as “delinquent juvenile”. We must be skeptical with the term “delinquent”. We should constantly ask ourselves a question: does a delinquent juvenile equal to a bad person? Boys in Blue Sky Center are delinquent, but they may or may not be bad.

Last but not the least, I do not aim at making excuses to exculpate their faults here and consider all their delinquent behavior as “a societal reaction to the labeling”. Nonetheless, from my experience of getting along with the boys, I found that they are quite innocent because most of them have a broken family. If one grows up in an environment with no parental guidance, love, care and support, one would easily do things wrong. They are somehow victims of broken families. Furthermore, it may be true that, they are “delinquents” because we label them as “delinquents”. The society set up an institution to deal with the delinquents but ironically, the “clients” are actually “created” by the society.

### **Section 3: How Does the Center Train the Boys?**

The primary official task of Blue Sky Center is to train trainees to be good citizens. It

rehabilitate the delinquent juveniles and deter them from repeating undesirable and illegal behavior, such as running away from home, truancy, robbery and thieving.

Blue Sky Center serves as a training school (providing schooling and residential training). The philosophy of training schools for reforming delinquent juveniles is based on the Deterrence Theory. “Deviance will be discouraged (deterred) if social sanctions for nonconformity are perceived to be certain, swift, and severe” (Gibbs and Schneider in Bynum & Thompson 2005: 406).

Osmond Hostel’s aim is deterrence, that “a sanction is applied to a person in hopes that he or she will not repeat the same or a similar act” (Bynum & Thompson 2005: 406). This hostel does by deprive the trainees of their freedom. It also demands strict discipline, the attitude they lack of. Ideally, these sanctions enable trainees to understand the cost of committing delinquent behavior, so that they can be more conform to social rules.

As discussed in the previous section, the long-term institutionalization provided by Blue Sky Center conforms to Erving Goffman’s concept of “total institution”. According to Goffman, “total institution” has the following characteristics: 1) a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals; 2) cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time; 3) together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” (Goffman 1961). Therefore, trainees eat, sleep, work, go to school, and play within the restrain of the institution.

In Osmond Hostel, trainees reside and work there as a group. There is no individuality. Trainees sleep, eat, bath, study and play together in the same space and time. Their lives are “formally administered”. There is a rigid timetable for them to follow. Everyone’s life is identical. Trainees are semi-cut off from the society because trainees study and reside in the same place and they cannot leave the center. Only on Saturday afternoon, they can go home for holiday and they must return on Sunday evening.

## **1. Discipline**

Discipline is the foremost requirement of the trainees’ behavior. There is “rationalization” of everyday living in the center (Burns 1992: 146). Everyday life such as work, play and sleep, is centralized.

As discussed in section one, trainees in Osmond Hostel have to follow a tight



and uniform schedule. From the moment they wake up at 7am, their activities are arranged into different timeslots until the time they go to bed at 9pm. Apart from the timetable, boys must follow the instructions of the housemasters. In the hostel, housemaster has the absolute authority to decide what is right and wrong. When the boys want to do something, for example to take his soda from the freight, he must get the permission of the housemaster first. On the other hand, if the housemaster assigns them to do something, they cannot say no or they will be punished. Therefore, the boys in the hostel must learn how to obey regulations and instructions.

“Discipline’ is the foremost requirement to the boys’ behavior in the hostel. As the housemaster Sunny stressed,

“We must have discipline. If there is no discipline in the hostel, we cannot accomplish many things. I believe that it is natural for them to be non-disciplined and I understand the reasons. Nonetheless, it doesn’t mean that I have to consent to it. My duty is to manage them. I have to ensure everything meets my expectation.” (Sunny, Housemaster)

Yet, it is not easy for the boys to follow regulations from the staff. Bear in mind, most of the trainees were sent here because they broke the law. Some of them committed crime, some escaped from schools and family, some are ill tempered. Informant Joe said repeatedly in the interview, “If I can be controlled by others, I wouldn’t have play truant...If I am disciplined, I wouldn’t have to come”. Therefore, the staff require two measures, “punishment” and “reward”, in order to enforce discipline.

## **2. Punishment**

From the observations and interviews, I found that punishment is an effective means, and seems the only means, to enforce discipline in the center. The behaviors and interactions within the hostel are always related to punishment. The staffs control the boys by threatening them with punishment, while the boys conform to the instructions in fear of the punishment.

There are two kinds of punishment in the hostel. One is physical work, such as washing dishes, sweeping and cleaning floors, preparing for mealtimes. The other one is closely related to holiday, such as late-leaving on Saturday and stay behind in the hostel for the whole weekend. Nonetheless, only the latter one has the threatening

effects on the boys. It is because the boys can leave the center only once a week. They can leave the center on Saturday afternoon and they must return before 4pm on Sunday. The holiday in weekend is the happiest and most important time for the boys, because this is the only period they can be free. As a result, the most severe punishment is the deprivation of holidays. All the interviewed trainees agreed that they were most frightened of losing their holidays.

The informants explained that, they are actually not afraid of the housemasters. They are obedient to them because they have the power of depriving their holidays. Informant Alex said, "At our age, life in Blue Sky Center is like living in a prison already. It's tough." Deprivation of freedom deters them from causing troubles in the hostel. For example, they knew that fighting would result in the "stay behind" punishment so they would control themselves from doing that.

Apart from deprivation of freedom, "losing face" also deters the boys from causing troubles. They are afraid of losing face in front of their friends.

"When I first came here, I was not familiar with the regulations and I was always scolded by the housemasters. I was scolded whenever I did something wrong. I lost face in front of all the others! I was extremely angry! I wish to curse him back but I dared not. I could only give up my thought of fighting back because of the holidays. Now I have adapted to it. I just ignore him when he blames me." (Jerry, Trainee)

Worth noticing, usually the staff threaten to give punishment rather than actually implementing the threat. Once, the assistant superintendent Mr. Ho and housemaster Sunny emphasized to me,

"Everything is intimidation. The actual punishment we can exert is no more than 'stay behind', 'shift to another house' and 'deprivation of snacks'... It is very important that the boys are still terrified by the possible punishment." (Mr. Ho, Assistant Superintendent)

"We must have punishments, though it may not be effective all the time. On the other hand, awards sometimes motivate them to perform better but if there are too many awards, this method becomes useless." (Sunny, Housemaster)

If they punish them too often, the boys may get used to it. Then punishment will have no effect at all. The narratives of trainee Jerry demonstrate how trainees are deterred from rule breaking in the hostel without actual punishment.

“The person I am most afraid of is the assistant superintendent. He always teases us. If you do something wrong, he will pick on you in the assembly and let all students know about it. It makes you feel very embarrassed. When we line up, if he calls your name, everyone will stare at you. You will feel weird and humiliated.” (Jerry, Trainee)

From my observation, discipline in Osmond Hostel is quite effective. It is because the punishment is strictly enforced. It complies with Deterrence Theory that “certain, swift, and severe” punishment in the hostel keeps trainees from violating the rules.

### **3. Reward**

On the other hand, staff also use reward to encourage the boys to behave better. Again, there are two kinds of rewards. One is the reward of food, such as soda, candy and cup noodles. Another reward is related to holiday, such as early-leaving on Friday and late-return on Sunday.

Staffs usually use rewards to attract the boys to do better in some tasks, such as dictation, tidy up their room, proper behavior in outings, etc. Here is an example accounted by informant Alex:

“Those snacks (the candies in his hands) are awards from the “Dictation Awarding Scheme”. You can get one ticket by obtaining 90 to 95 marks in dictation and two tickets by obtaining 100 marks. one ticket for a candy; two for a soda or potato chips; three for a instant noodle; four for a cup noodle; five for one bowl noodle!” (Alex, Trainee)

Boys value these rewards very much, even though it is just snacks. It is because they cannot bring any food to the hostel. For this reason, they will do a favor for the staff or study hard, in exchange for a candy.

“A candy is already attractive to us. Don’t you find that we were so happy to get the candies from you last time? We don’t have any sweets here. If you just need

to answer one question to get a candy, you will answer desperately, won't you? If we live outside, we can drink 10 coca-cola a day but we cannot do that here. You don't have soda here so it became precious. It is precious so you want it. You want it so you fight for it!" (Alex, Trainee)

Nonetheless, getting rewards of longer holiday time is very difficult and very few boys strive for that. Reward is less effective than punishment in controlling the boys.

In brief, the center tries to train the boys in sober habits of discipline and conformity. Punishment, as suggested by Deterrence Theory, are strict and firm so that trainees are deterred to offense the rules. The awarding system works as a complementary method to motivate the boys to conform.

#### **Section 4: The Effects of the Institutionalization on the Boys**

From the data collected from the in-depth interviews and participant observation, institutionalization cannot train the boys to be "good citizens". In the short-term, the center can improve the boys' behavior and emotion. However, in the long-term, it may not help very much. Undoubtedly, the boys have experienced some "improvement" in their behaviors after entering Blue Sky Center. Most of them have become more disciplined and self-control, and they have corrected some undesirable behavior.

"I am less easy to blow up! In the past, my emotion always exploded. But now I will not do that because of the holiday."(Alex, Trainee)

"In the past if someone irritated me I would punch him right away! Now I think twice before I leap."(Jerry, Trainee)

"In the past, I always wandered around in the street at mid-night but I don't now. Now, I do wash the dishes at home. I never did that before entering Blue Sky Center." (Sam, Ex-trainee)

However, most of their improvements are limited to the time in the hostel only. The effects are short-term. It can be seen obviously in their contrasting behavior in the school and the hostel. When they are in the school, their performance is not desirable (however, I could not conduct observation at school. All the accounts about the school are based on reports by the boys and the staffs).

As ex-trainee Sam described, "in hostel, we are tame as sheep; but the school for

us is ‘a chicken coop without closing the gate’ (*mo yim gai lung*, 無掩雞籠, literally means out of control and in a mess)”. Informants have many examples of how they upset the rules in school.

“We can fool around at school but no way in hostel. In the class, we can pick on the teachers and they will tease you in return. At least we can have this chance to make fun of each other... Sometimes, a student is harassed by another student, and leads to a fight. Then other students became the spectators and yell, “Hit him! Hit him!” and guessed who would win. Of course, we think it is childish and stupid to fight but it is too boring at the center. Fighting is a kind of entertainment here.” (Jerry, Trainee)

“For example, we don’t want to study English, and then we will say, “Let’s watch Harry Potter!” If the teacher rejects us, we will mess things up. Sometimes we make up reasons to see the social worker to escape lessons, or wander around the school during toilet break... Sometimes, two students don’t go well with each other. They have some “fire” already. Then we will say, “if you can endure it, you can eat shit!” We add fuels to the flame and stir up more troubles. Yeah!” (Sam, Ex-trainee)

As a matter of fact, trainees can be very different even within the center. As a result, I am doubtful about whether they will behave well when they return to the ‘normal’ society, where they will not face the same discipline and punishment. One extreme example is Joe, who becomes decadent whenever he leaves Osmond Hostel. He said, “I am not disciplined when I go out. Seven out of ten hours I am playing snooker and video games instead of staying at home. And I can starve for a whole day.” Other informants are more positive. Most of them said they became more mature after entering the center and they would not commit to the same fault again when they go out. However, the staff and boys mentioned that quite a number of ex-trainees committed crimes again after they left the center.

“Our behavior must have improved here but no one knows how we will become when we are released. We often visit prisons (visits organized by the Correctional Service Department) and the assistant superintendent always met some prisoners who are trainees in our center in the past!” (Alex, Trainee)

“(If I leave Blue Sky Center) Maybe less fighting but not none. I will hold it unless I am forced to do so. If I forgive someone many times but if he still

irritates me, I must hit him. Entering here, to be frank, cannot help anything. However, my temper has become less violent.” (Ken, Trainee)

“It’s difficult to tell (whether he will engage in fighting outside) but I don’t think entering here helps. It just presses my emotion inside. You cannot hold it if someone irritates you. I used to fight with people. Living inside just prevents me from fighting with others. I don’t fight here because there are no circumstances for me to fight but it is not because I have really changed.” (Carl, Trainee)

Thus, institutionalization cannot transform the boys’ behavior and emotion in the long-term. The effects of the training at the center on the trainees are temporary. In the following section, I will analyze the problems encountered in the training of Blue Sky Center, which leads to the failure to rehabilitate the boys.

### **Section 5: Deficiencies in the Training of the Center**

In the previous section, I have pointed out that the “improvement” in the boys’ behavior is rather a short-term result, instead of a long-term transformation. In this section, I am going to analyze the deficiencies in the training of Blue Sky Center, which lead to the failure of the center to “train good citizens”.

#### **1. Inconsistent systems of punishment**

Above all, the contrasting behavior of the boys within the center can be explained by the discrepancy between the punishment systems in school and in hostel. At school, the punishment is lenient. They will be punished only if they have accumulated 30 demerits within a week. A student will be get five demerits for saying a curse word; ten demerits for fighting. The boys emphasized that usually the teachers were soft-hearted if they ‘beg’ them for not recording the demerits. In the view of the boys, they can bully the teachers. Therefore, they always create troubles to the teachers and disrupt the lessons.

However, in the hostel, the staff enforce the punishment firmly. If the boys do not follow the staff’s instructions, the staff will immediately mark down their names. If the staffs decide to punish a boy, he can do nothing to change, even though it is not his fault. There is a slang in the hostel, “Obey first. Appeal later” (*sin fuk chun, hau sheung so* 先服從，後上訴). Trainee Jerry and Mo accounted their experience of being a scapegoat:

“One morning, I heard the housemaster arguing with another trainee, “if you want to oppose me, you can organize a demonstration”. Then the boy rebutted, “It’s not a must to have demonstration to oppose you. I prefer a hunger strike!” I thought the reply was funny so I laughed. But I was punished by the housemaster for that laughter. I had to wash the dishes just for a laughter! We have to take the unfairness easy. We cannot complain. They always advocate “Obey first. Appeal later”. If we have obeyed and suffered the punishment already, there is no point for us to appeal!” (Jerry, Trainee)

“Yesterday when I was having a shower, the housemaster came in and asked another two boys to keep their voice down. But the boys kept playing loudly. Then the housemaster came in suddenly and ordered all of us to shut down the water! We were all freezing and shaking. After a few minutes, he allowed us to open the water again. I think it was not fair! It was “collective punishment”. He is the housemaster so he can do what he likes!” (Mo, Trainee)

As discussed in section one, Blue Sky Center is a “bureaucratic organization” (Burns 1992: 146). The staff are authorized to give order to the trainees and make decisions related to their fate. The jargon “Obey first. Appeal later” is a clear evidence of characteristics of “bureaucratic organization”. It was just a saying. It is hard for the boys to fight with the staff because they have no power in the center. Therefore, the boys dare not fight with others, cause troubles or say a curse word in front of the staff.

There is a big contrast between the discipline requirement of the school and the hostel. The control exerted by the hostel on the boys is absent whenever the boys go to the school in daytime. The deter effect created by the hostel is weakened. Although the school and the hostel have independent management, they should cooperate to establish a fair and consistent system of punishment. I believe the training of the center can be more effective if the training of the school and the hostel are more consistent.

## **2. Discrepancy between the training inside and the real world outside**

Within Blue Sky Center, Sunrise Secondary School provides schooling to the boys so that they can receive “proper” education while Osmond Hostel provides residential training to the boys so that they can have a “regular disciplinary life”. The problem is that, the environment inside the center is very different from that outside. Ironically, the education in Sunrise Secondary School is much easier than outside, while the

control in Osmond Hostel is much stricter than outside.

First, the education level in Sunrise Secondary School is far below standard. Both the housemasters and trainees admitted that the syllabus at school is too easy.

“It is too lenient inside. They are teaching Primary 6 syllabus in Secondary 1; form 1 syllabus in Secondary 2, so on... There are very little homework because most of the assignments are done in class. We just copy some sentences and vocabulary. Dictation is about a few vocabularies only.” (Sam, Ex-trainee)

After studying some years in Sunrise Secondary School, the boys' education is far below standard. For example, Alex is in form 3 education and he is the most outstanding student in class. He joined the English training workshops conducted by me. However, his competency in English and Chinese is poor. He did not know how to pronounce simple vocabulary such as “fork”, “spoon”, “bill”, “would”, etc. He wanted to write the Chinese character of “a watch” (錶) to indicate the pronunciation of “bill”. He did not know how to write it. Then he drew pictures instead. Therefore, it is easy to imagine how worse the other students are in terms of education level.

Obviously, Sunrise Secondary School can provide them a placement only, not really a “proper education”. When students return to the mainstream schools, they will face a lot of problems in catching up the syllabus. I would conclude that studying in the school of Sunrise Secondary School is like escaping from the fact of their incapability in academic arena. It is not a good thing for the boys in the long-term.

Second, Osmond Hostel put a lot of control over the trainees so that they can be disciplined. Nonetheless, when the trainees are released and return to the society, nobody will control them in the same way as the housemasters did inside the hostel. Consequently, when the boys are released to the real world outside, they may not sustain the disciplined life they learnt inside. Housemaster Mark explained that they aimed at control things inside the center. Things outside were out of their control and it is not their concern.

“We can control their emotion inside the center. Of course, some of them have an entire different world when they are released. We cannot control everything they come across outside, such as information and people. We cannot control those elements..... Inside, we supervise their living. We control what time they wake up, have meals and self-study. Nevertheless, when they are released, if



their family support is not adequate, probably the life rhythm inside is broken down instantly. It is difficult for them to supervise themselves outside.” (Mark, Housemaster)

Therefore, there is a gap between the training inside and the world outside. Furthermore, “deprivation of freedom” and “disciplinary” somehow are not related to the trainees’ original problems directly. For instance, if a teenager is violent, he should be taught how to control his emotion and settle things in a peaceful way. If a teenager misses home frequently, he should be taught how to build up a good relationship with the family. Locking them up in a center is not rehabilitation but punishment. Of course, the deprivation of freedom gives them a lesson. It shows them the consequence of breaking rules. Nonetheless, this indirect way of rehabilitation may not solve the fundamental problems of the trainees. As a result, the improved behaviors of the trainees are short-term. In a long-term, the effectiveness for the center to rehabilitate the boys is in doubt.

The experience of ex-trainee Sam also demonstrates the failure of the training at Blue Sky Center. When I first interviewed Sam, he had left Blue Sky Center for a month and he was attending preparation class in a normal secondary school. In that interview, he said he learnt a lesson from Blue Sky Center and he would put effort in his study. Ironically, when I interviewed him again after three months, he said he only went to school for a week since my interview.

“(since the interview) I attended school for one week only. I just went back to sleep. I wanted to get a job. Then I worked in McDonald’s. I didn’t want to study because it was so boring...I was sent to another boys’ home of the government for 28 days (for breaking the probation order). I was released on Jan 16 this year. Then I have the Chinese New Year holidays. Well, this year I have attended one day of school only up till now. This Monday I went back. There was no lesson on Tuesday but I didn’t know why. It said I had to come back for 3pm to 5pm only. I didn’t want to waste money so I didn’t go back. Wednesday was holiday and I didn’t know why. Today I was absent because I had to see my probation officer.” (Sam, Ex-trainee)

As a matter of fact, Sam did not really “learn a lesson” from Blue Sky Center. In the second interview, he said he knew he would be punished for truancy but he still did it. Of course, in his mind he knows what is right and what it wrong. Nonetheless, in the reality, he cannot avoid committing fault. As explained by the housemaster

Mark, the effects of their training on the boys vary. The center does not ensure the boys can be as good as inside the center after the release.

“It (the effectiveness of the training in Blue Sky Center) depends on how much the boys can learn. If they think they need it (disciplined life), they will change. Some kids might think that they have been here for two years and nobody will control them after their release. It’s their choice... There are too many factors in the society we cannot control.” (Mark, Housemaster)

Facts speak louder than words. Using discipline to control trainees in Blue Sky Center has a short-term effect but it cannot transform them in the long-term.

### 3. Adaptation versus transformation: being a “con artist”

As concluded by many researchers about juvenile institutionalization, “young offenders learned to be “con artists” who did not benefit from the institutionalization, but merely adapted to it” (Bynum and Thompson 2005: 415). It is also true in Osmond Hostel. The changes in the boys’ behavior can be seen as a kind of adaptation to the environment in the center.

Trainees explained that it was important for them to adapt to the environment in the hostel. If you want to be a “successful” and “smart” trainee, you must have good acting (*shik zho hei*, 識做戲). That means you have to act according to the situations. If not, you are a “kai boy”, literally mean “an idiot”, who will be bullied by the staff and other trainees.

“When I know this housemaster will not punish me, I will mock him. If this housemaster will definitely punish me, I will say less and pretend to be ‘infantile autistic patient’ (*zi bai zai*, 自閉仔)! The more docile boys are actually smarter boys. They know how to “act” in front of the staff. For example, in the assembly, some *kai* boy don’t know the assistant superintendent is coming and they don’t act properly. Some trainees are smart. They stand very straight immediately!” (Alex, Trainee)

“If you are particularly troublesome, always give a hard time to the housemasters, of course, they have bias toward you and you will have a hard time.” (Sam, Ex-trainee)

Nonetheless, the skills of being “just fit” are very complicated and somehow arbitrary. To be a “smart” trainee, one has to be “naughty” sometimes to gain friendship from the others, but “docile” at other time to get advantages from the staffs. Doing the right thing at the right time needs one’s ability to comprehend.

“If you know how to communicate with other trainees, you can make many friends inside. You will not fight with others. You may cause troubles with your friends. However, if you are very quiet, always hide at the corner to read, we will not care about you, even though you do not cause troubles to the house. Other trainees will “assign” you to do this and that. “Hey! Get the slippers for me!” They’ll treat you like a servant!” (Sam, Ex-trainee)

“Yup. We do try to get “performance” (*bok biu yin*, 搏表現). For example I treat my roommates nicer. Other trainees say I am sarcastic when I behave just a bit nicer. But if I don’t “perform”, how can I get such “advantages” like early leaving on Friday evening?” (Joe, Trainee)

“If you are too wicked, you may be “taken chicken”( *zup gai*, 執雞) by others. That means when I punch you, all other unrelated people will join in to beat you!” (Alex, Trainee)

From the accounts of the informants, we can see that trainees have to be sarcastic in order to “survive” in the hostel. Pretending to be docile can establish better relationship with the staff. It is important because being sarcastic, sometimes, can rescue their “lives”. Ex-trainee Sam has narrated one interesting experience of being a “sarcastic artist”.

“Once I did something wrong and the teacher deprived me of my holiday. I was outraged! I seized him by his collar and pushed him to crash on the tip of the door! I thought I fxxk myself up that time! Nevertheless, I was lucky! It is because, on that night, I gave a performance of break dance and circus for the community outside. You know what, it saved my life! The housemaster said if I could perform well on that night I could have holiday! Then, I definitely tried all my best to perform! I didn’t have any punishment but gained back the holiday instead!” (Sam, Ex-trainee)

As a result, trainees’ performance is staged. Of course there are some moments

they can act properly (conform to the regulations). However, these performances do not mean they become a more conforming juvenile. They may just do that for foreseeable benefits or to avoid foreseeable punishment.

#### **4. Inefficient education provided by the staff**

The education provided by the staff is not serious enough. The official aim of Blue Sky Center is to train juveniles with behavioral, emotional and academic problems into good citizens. However, staffs do not act according to the aim in reality. Of course, on their front-stage, staffs present all the activities, arrangements and punishments as designed for the goodness of the boys. Nonetheless, usually they have another intention in their back-stage.

Housemaster Sunny explained that their “primary mission” each day is “nothing happened and the day passed peacefully”. He does not care so much about the development of the boys. He thinks if they do not cause troubles, his expectation is reached already.

“‘Nothing happened!’ That means the day has been ‘safe and sound’ and nothing special happened. To be frank, although the boys in my house are relatively docile, they were sent here because they are to a certain extent offending and troublesome. If on a day none of them causes any trouble, they have done an excellent job already! Hence, our daily objective is ‘Nothing Happened’!” (Sunny, Housemaster)

Most of the time, arrangements in the hostel is decided not for the best benefit of the boys, but the most convenience for the staff to control them, and for the benefits for the reputation of the center.

As discussed previously, trainees sometimes act in a sarcastic way in front of the staff. Indeed, housemasters are familiar with the trainees’ fakeness. Nonetheless, they actually appreciate it because it can help maintain discipline (as trainees follow their instructions). On the contrary, trainees do not realize that the housemasters are even more sarcastic than any of them. Housemaster Sunny pointed out that, it was very common for the staffs to tell lies to deceive the boys. They will cooperate to “act” in front of the boys. He raised an example.

“When a boy has caused troubles to housemaster A. A told housemaster B about

it. Then, B would pretend to side with the boy and talk to him secretly, “I heard a rumor that housemaster A would punish you heavily. I know it’s not your fault but you better show your guilty to housemaster A”. In most of the cases, the boy will believe housemaster B wants to help him whole-heartedly without realizing housemaster B is indeed helping housemaster A. Sometimes, the assistant superintendent is involved and threatens the boys in a similar way. Sometimes the lies we make are very exaggerating.” (Sunny, Housemaster)

Sunny explained that trainees cannot “deceive” the staff in the way they did to the trainees. It is because the staff has meeting everyday. According to my observation in their daily staff meeting, housemasters of each house reported the most updated news of the boys to the superintendent and other staffs. The counseling unit and representative from the Sunrise Secondary School also reported the behavior of the boys daily. Therefore, the staff can know all information about the boys, both belong to their house or not. They are very familiar with the situations. Consequently, it is uncomplicated for them to make up a lie to the boys.

Here is another example of the fakeness: the hostel held an English café training workshops (the one conducted by Sunny and me). There were more than 20 trainees registered but there were only six vacancies. Therefore, the staff conducted a “pseudo interview” to select the most suitable participants. The truth was that the interview was just a show for the boys. They had already chosen participants already before the interview. They called it “*um pun* (暗盤)”. He interviewed everyone to give an illusion that everyone had equal chance. The staff did that because they wanted to choose the most stable & obedient trainees for the activities. Other characteristics of the trainees were never considered. As a result, learning opportunities always fall to certain trainees.

In another occasion, I joined the visit to the Shek Pik Prison with the trainees and the housemasters. On the trip to the prison, the housemaster in-charge gave a briefing to the trainees. Ironically, his briefing was quite unrelated to the program. His speech was like this:

“I know most of you have visited this prison more than twice and the activities are boring. Tolerate it. Don’t do anything improper. You know tomorrow is the holiday. No one wants to have any trouble. Okay?” (Housemaster)

This incidence coincides with what I have mentioned, that is the staff care about

the reputation of the center rather than educating the boys.

In short, the staff do not provide a real nurturance to the juveniles. If the staff themselves do not aim at adding values for the boys, it is quite impossible for the center to train up good citizens.

## **5. Stigmatization**

Ideally, by entering Blue Sky Center, the boys can eliminate their label of being “delinquent”. However, in reality, entering Blue Sky Center cannot remove the label and stigmatization is a common result. Edward Lemert suggested that a deviant person is placed in the charge of organization specifically designed to deal with him but that kind of placement results in stigmatization. “Stigmatization, refers to “a process attaching visible signs of moral inferiority to persons, such as invidious labels, marks, brands, or publicly disseminated information” (Lemert 1972: 65).

When stigmatization is widely publicized, it will undoubtedly give rise to extensive discrimination against such persons (Wright 1984: 90). In the case of Blue Sky Center, the boys do receive stigmatization due to the placement in Blue Sky Center rather than removing their label as delinquent juvenile. Worth noticing, from the informants’ account, the boys encounter discrimination mainly from the social workers and teachers, rather than the public. It is because the nature of the service of Blue Sky Center is not “widely publicized” or “widely recognized” by the public.

According to the informants, they did not face discrimination from the public. The reason is that the name of Blue Sky Center itself does not tell the nature of its service. No one knows it is for delinquent juvenile. Therefore, people perceive it as an ordinary school and would not have prejudice on them.

“Who knows there is a training center here? Be honest, how many people are familiar with schools in this District? Even though residences downhill don’t know there is our school on top of the hill.” (Alex, Trainee)

Nonetheless, all the trainees stressed that they would not initiate to tell other people about their school in details. They avoid mentioning that they are studying in a “boarding school”. It is because it is uncommon for people to study in a boarding school in Hong Kong. People will think it is strange to be in a boarding school and will be curious about the reason. Most of the informants said they were most afraid of

the relatives because they usually embarrassed them is they know they study in a boarding school.

“It’s irritating, especially the elderly and the aunts who are nosy. They think that you have to come to Blue Sky Center because you are bad. They will ask you all about the stuff inside the center. They are just curious, not caring! They will add things to what you’ve said. It’s embarrassing.” (Mo, Trainee)

“If they know what our school is, they will make us feel embarrassed. Some relatives are nosy and they will check my school up on the internet and gossip among other relatives!” (Carl, Trainee)

As a result, the trainees try to mention their school in a “casual” way so that people are not suspicious or curious about it. Obviously, they do not want their label as a delinquent juvenile to be “widely known”. If they encounter people who know nothing about Blue Sky Center, trainees can enjoy the status of “ordinary” teenagers without any presumed “moral inferiority”.

Ironically, people who work in youth services and education may know about that Blue Sky Center serves delinquent juveniles. These people have more prejudice toward the boys.

“My elder sister’s friend is a teaching assistant in a secondary school. She met me and asked which school I studied. At the beginning, I didn’t want to tell but she insisted to know. Then I told her I was a student in Blue Sky Center. My answer terrified her and she immediately stopped the conversation...It was because she knew what Blue Sky Center is. She knows what our center is because some of their students may have been transferred here. People working outside the education field do not know what kind of students we are. Another category of people who know is social workers. Nonetheless, they are very good in “acting”. They are sarcastic. They will not show you they have bias on you because you are delinquent!” (Alex, Trainee)

As a result, trainees from Blue Sky Center encounter difficulties in finding a mainstream school for education. (Sunrise Secondary School provides education from form 1 to form 4 only and Osmond Hostel admit students up to form 3 only. Usually trainees will move to another school after form 3 education.) Here is the experience of ex-trainee Sam in searching a new school.

“They (teachers in the schools he had applied) asked: why your school (Sunrise Secondary School) has such a small class size? What is it actually? Then I had to explain many things. They suspected my academic results in Sunrise. They thought my former school was strange. Some of them did not know what my school was and thought it was a special school (for mentally-retarded students). That means some of them had prejudice toward me.” (Sam, Ex-trainee)

In addition, I heard from a housemaster that there was an incidence about Sam in finding a new school. One secondary school was interested to admit Sam and its staff called Blue Sky Center to ask about the nature of the school. After knowing Blue Sky Center was a center serving juveniles with emotional and behavioral problems, it rejected Sam’s application. Apart from that, trainee Alex, who still lives in Blue Sky Center now, has tried to move out in the previous summer. He encountered stigmatization similar to Sam.

“I tried to find a school outside after form 2. My average marks in school is 75 and above. I should be able to find a school in between band 2 and band 3. Nonetheless, those schools said my results were not good enough after seeing my academic report...Of course they knew what Blue Sky Center was. (Do you think they assume you are a bad student because you are from Blue Sky Center?) May be so, but you cannot argue at all if they deny they are prejudiced against you!” (Alex, Trainee)

Another example is the comments from housemaster Sunny. When I asked whether he had prejudice against the boys before he knew the boys, his answer showed a strong perception of the boys’ moral inferiority.

“I must have prejudice against them! You cannot treat them as normal people because they are not! All of them are not normal...If you don’t have prejudice against them and don’t take precautions, you will suffer...You must be alert against the boys no matter they are normal or not!” (Sunny, Housemaster)

Obviously, entering Blue Sky Center cannot help removing the label of “delinquent juvenile” tagged on the boys. Paradoxically, teachers and social workers, who are supposed to nurture teenagers, have the most prejudice against the boys. The key is whether the ‘label’ of the boys is being acknowledged. Stigmatization has a big negative impact on the boys because the discrimination hinders the boys from finding a good secondary school. They can only return to band 3 secondary schools where the



learning environment is not favorable. It becomes a vicious cycle for the development of the boys.

**Conclusion: The “Real” Function and Role of the Center in Society**

From the analysis and discussion in the previous section, we can see that Blue Sky Center is not really fulfilling its aim of training deviant juveniles to be good citizens. The training of becoming a disciplined person does not transform the delinquent juveniles into good citizens in a long-term. The reason is due to the deficiencies of the training of the center. These include the inconsistency of the punishment system, the discrepancy between the training inside the center and the real world outside, the fakeness of both the trainees’ behavior and the staff’s nurturance, and finally the stigmatization from the institutionalization on the boys.

If this rehabilitation center is neither effective nor contributing in transforming the boys, what is the value for its existence? According to the assistant superintendent Mr. Ho, the cost of the service of Osmond Hostel per trainee is very high, approximately \$85,000 a year. This considerable does not include the cost of the schooling in Sunrise Secondary School. Why does the society need this costly institution? Perhaps, Erving Goffman’s analysis on hospital for the mentally ill provides us a good insight on the actual role of institutions specially designed for deviant social members. These institutions may not be a haven for patients, but they ease face-to-face interaction for the rest of us (Manning 1992: 106).

“[I]nstead of being a curative institution, it (mentally ill hospital) now resembles a holding bay for individuals who are primarily a social nuisance...the ‘true clients’ of mental institutions are “relatives, police and judges” for whom the behavior of the mentally ill is extremely disruptive (Goffman 1961: 334).”

Blue Sky Center as a place to keep delinquent juveniles, it has a similar function with the asylums mentioned by Goffman. As discussed in section one, Blue Sky Center complies with Goffman’s definition of “total institution”. Blue Sky Center, similarly, “resembles a holding bay for individuals who are primarily a social nuisance” (Goffman 1961: 334). The boys, who come to the center are usually the most “troublesome” and unpopular students at school. Blue Sky Center is a holding bay for these students so that teachers, social workers and parents do not have to “face” their disruptive behaviors. Blue Sky Center has a middle role between typical school and jail for undesirable juveniles in the society. Apart from that, by trapping

those boys in the center, it prevents them from committing illegal behavior. At least during the time at the center, trainees can behave more properly and desirably. The loose education in Sunrise Secondary School provides placements for them and enables them to escape from the stress of “standard” education, which they hate most. Thus, they do not have to face their incapability in the academic arena. The most important thing is that they can have a school to study.

“No school outside admits us. When you don’t have any placement at all, you will not mind what the school is. This center admits you even though it knows you have emotional problem. I should come, shouldn’t me?” (Alex, Trainee)

“I come here because no school outside would admit me. If I can have a placement outside, I would not study here.” (Carl, Trainee)

Osmond Hostel can only provide 104 placements but the demand from normal schools and social workers is much higher. Probably, when a boy gets the placement, the happiest persons are the social workers and teachers of his original school because they do not have to face him anymore. Moreover, having less delinquent juveniles also help to improve the reputation of the school.

Housemaster Sunny remarked, “The social workers and the school, of course, want them to leave and come here...we receive students who are not accepted by any schools outside”. Informant Alex told me when he truanted frequently in secondary one, the social worker always persuaded him to sign the agreement to come to Blue Sky Center.

“The social worker always said ‘Please sign! Please sign!’ (the form of the Central Co-ordinating Referral Mechanism) She just wanted me to leave the school as soon as possible...She was crazy! She always asked me to sign. I was an idiot! If I didn’t sign it, I could study outside<sup>2</sup>”. (Alex, Trainee)

Furthermore, according to housemaster Mark, there is a new trend in Osmond Hostel, in that there are increasing numbers of teenagers with mental problems coming to the hostel. Receiving these boys has a negative impact on other boys.

“The kids with mental problems lacked the ability to follow discipline. However,

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<sup>2</sup> Alex was referred by social worker. He did not obtain probation order. Therefore, he was not obliged to enter this Blue Sky Center.

they have mental problems so we have to bear it. When there are two kids with mental problems among ten kids, it ruins the control of the other eight kids. Other kids will think that they can violate rules because they are idiots. It's not fair that they cannot do something slightly wrong. Then we have to explain a lot of things." (Mark, Housemaster)

I find it quite unreasonable for mentally ill boys to live in Osmond Hostel because they are not the target of the center. They may have post-traumatic stress disorder, or hyperactive symptom. Mark explained that it was because these mentally ill boys were neither serious enough to go to mentally ill hospital in Castle Peak, nor normal enough to study in typical schools. Nonetheless, due to their mental problem, they usually have behavioral and emotional problems. That is why they become "eligible" to live in Osmond Hostel.

"They are those wandering around the margins. The population of these people is not large so they just shift from one hostel to another. Just try where they can stay longer." (Mark, Housemaster)

To conclude, I would like to use Goffman's idea. Instead of being a rehabilitation institution, Blue Sky Center resembles a holding bay for delinquent juveniles who are primarily a social nuisance. The 'true clients' of rehabilitation institutions for youths are "teachers, social workers and parents" for whom the behavior of the delinquent juveniles is extremely disruptive. Blue Sky Center may not be a haven for the youths, but it eases face-to-face interaction for the rest of us, especially the social workers, teachers and students in mainstream education. Delinquent juveniles are "deviant" members in the society and the society always needs some specially designed institutions to hide the problems behind the scene.

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培養良好公民：一間香港的男童院的個案研究

張惠珊

文章摘要

本文以香港其中一間男童院『藍天中心』為個案研究，探討院舍訓練對改造青少年罪犯的成效。本文分析院童的背景、男童院的特點、教導方式及成效，進而討論這類院舍深層的社會功能。藍天中心以獎勵及懲罰訓練院童服從紀律。這方法只有短暫效果，未能長遠解決院童的行為問題。本文指出院舍訓練的缺點包括：院內的懲罰制度不一致；院舍的培訓與社會實際環境有距離；院童行為上的改善只是適應院舍制度的虛偽表現；職員未能全心全意教導學員；及入住院舍為學員帶來標籤化影響。本文總結指出，這類院舍真正的社會功能是為社會上不受歡迎的青少年提供一個貯藏處，減少其他社會人士如家長、主流學校的老師、學生及社工受他們擾亂性的行為影響。