

They Wanted Citizen Involvement, And They Got It—the Hard Way

Thomas Callanan, 35, father of seven, was a social worker with Juvenile Court, a probation officer for ten years and is now president of the New York State Probation and Parole Association.

Callanan: We wanted to open a foster home in the South Bronx. This would be a nice, approved apartment with four or five bedrooms and eight kids. They'd live with carefully selected parents, a man and a woman who liked kids and had been selected and trained to live with these kids.

So we thought we'd do this in the community these kids came from. It's a lower-middle-income area, integrated—whites, blacks and Puerto Ricans. The kids come from

there and none of them had serious offenses all truancy and runaways. But they came from terrible households—drugs, alcoholism, beatings.

So we held a big meeting in the local high school to explain the thing. We didn't want these kids who never committed any crime except truancy or running away from home to be sent to an institution.

So in came the community groups, the parochial school principal and the heads of the PTAs and groups like that. I thought they were going to kill the poor probation officer. They were all for "community involvement" but they were violently opposed to letting these kids move into that house.

The nun who is principal of the Catholic school said they already had enough kids around with severe problems. The head of the PTA said they didn't want problem kids in their schools.

What you've got to remember is that these people live in a high-crime area—I mean drugs, armed robbery, pocket-book snatching. These were eight 14- and 15-year-old kids, about six blacks and a couple whites and they had to go back to their old households—parents beating them—couple of parents absolutely out of their minds, a couple of alcoholics—living in the same neighborhood. The kids are going to end up in an institution.



THOMAS CALLANAN
...he tried

Youths Unaware They Are Suicidal

Paul McCormick is on the staff of the O.H. Close School for Boys, in Stockton, Calif., an institution for juveniles convicted of serious crimes.

McCormick: It's amazing how many kids are suicidal and are not aware that they are, that they are getting themselves up to kill themselves.

Question: If they don't know, how do you know?

A: They overdose, they drive a motorcycle at 95 miles an hour on a rainy night. Here they become aware that they had been setting themselves up deliberately that a part of them was looking forward to the escape of death.

Q: Why would a child subconsciously be trying to kill himself?

A: Because his mother had told him, for example, that they would both be better off if they had never been born.

The parent from conception on may be disappointed in bringing a new kid into the world. The kid is born and he's programmed to believe, "Gee, if it weren't for me, my mother could have a happy life." The secret, magical message is: "I would approve of you if you didn't exist."

Down in the child part of the kid he gets the feeling, "Mother will love me when I'm dead." In order to bring that awareness we ask some very pointed questions, like, "How long do you think you'll live?" Answer, "Oh, if I keep up what I'm doing, 12 to 18 months before I'm 20."

Q: This isn't just melodrama on the part of the kid?

A: Oh, no. These kids have overdosed. They've been taken to the hospital and had their stomachs pumped out. They've been saved from death. They've been cut down from trees where they hanged themselves.

Q: So what do you do with a kid like that?

A: You alert him to the magical messages he's been getting all his life. Here's a conversation that's very common:

"You think you'll die before you're 20. How are you going to die?"

"Well, I may overdose."

"O.K., you've overdosed and you're dead and you're lying in your coffin. Who's at your funeral?"

"Well, I guess my mother and my father."

"What's your mother feeling?"

"Well, I guess she's feeling terrible."

"What's she saying to herself?"

"She's saying, 'My whole life is over now. He's dead.'"

What this kid means is that he's waiting for his mother to tell him that he means everything to her, but the only time she's going to say it is when he's dead. Part of him knows that, so he has set that up.

And when I say this, is not in his awareness, I mean it's not something that he has thought out in a very rational, overt way. But part of him knows that and we can bring that into his awareness.