

Drop-in Centres

Awakening 2000

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Contents

From The National Co-ordinator	3
Drop-in Centres.....	4
Introduction	4
The Goal of an Effective Drop-in Centre	4
The Strengths of a Drop-in Centre	5
Adding the Rest of the Outreach Process to the Drop-in Centre	5
Different Types of Drop-in Centres	5
Creating a Healthy Social Climate for Mission	6
(1) Open Climate “At home”	6
(2) Physical environment	6
(3) Appropriate time structuring activities	7
(a) Rituals	8
(b) Pastimes	8
(c) Activities	8
(d) Withdrawal	8
(e) Psychological Games	8
(f) Intimacy	8
(4) The Role of Extra Activities (away from the centre)	9
(5) Effective peer group discipline	9
(6) Predictability & Continuity	10
Building an Open Hospitable Team.....	11
1. Relationships on the Drop-in Centre Team	11
2. The Open Crowd	12
3. Recruitment of a team	12
4. Training	13
5. The Organisational Structure and Maintenance of the Team	13
6. The Team’s Spiritual Life	14
7. The role of a worker in a drop-in centre	14
Involving the Local Church.....	17
How to Get Started.....	18
1. Clarify your goals	18
2. Share your Vision	18
3. Research	18
4. Recruit and Train	18
5. Contact Church and Community Leaders	18
6. Set up your building	18
7. Team Structure	18
8. Set starting date and commence	18
9. Invite a Prayer Team	18
10. Open the Doors!	18
A New Way to Share the Nature of the Kingdom of God.....	19
Appendix 1.....	20
Psychological Games	20
Example	20
Appendix 2.....	21
Relationship Establishment Model	21
Phases of Relationships	21

From The National Co-ordinator

With the purchase of this manual you've begun to participate in one of the most fascinating experiments in mission the Church has seen for some time. Up till this point almost one million Australians will have been touched by the Aussie Awakening. This Manual represents a publishing event that is somewhat of a surprise in its own right. In only two years thousands of these "how to" manuals have been sold.

By September '96 100 manuals, all written by practitioners, will have been produced. These manuals do not pretend to be the last word in mission, but the editors invite you, along with the authors, to use them as a starting place to write your own chapters in mission experience.

As we approach the end of the millennium the church is at a crossroads. When Billy Graham visited Australia in 1959 over 1 million children were in Sunday School, Youth Groups and Church Schools. The church also had captured the market in the hatch, match and dispatch business and had regular contact with the Australian community. All of that has changed, spiritual hunger is as strong as it's ever been, but people have lost contact with the church and don't quite know how to find their way home.

These manuals are designed to help you, as a member of Christ's church, to reconnect those who need His love. They will show you how to touch people where they live and show them that because of the Christmas and Easter message, God has done all that is necessary to find their special place in His unfolding purpose.

Welcome to the adventure. You can either have adventure or safety but not both. God invites us to trust Him to work with us to see His kingdom of love born in the Australian cultural soil.

MAL GARVIN

National Co-ordinator Awakening 2000

Drop-in Centres

Introduction

This manual will outline how to run a drop-in centre which, given the grace of God, can make a profound impact on the lives of young people over an extended period of time. There is however, a word of both warning and caution before we begin. The writer of this manual believes that it is a common error to see drop-in centres as the grand way to launch youth mission into the community.

Where youth outreach has already been strongly built through an integrated outreach plan, drop-in centres can play a very important role. If day trips, schools work and other means of contacting young people such as streetwork have already established, and the bridging process into local churches is already in place, then a drop-in centre can play a special role in serving those young people who may not be interested, willing, or open to move into church based programmes.

Many young people need extra time in a place where they can grow socially, emotionally and spiritually through positive relationships with the team. This kind of work demands a high level of commitment, a strong and skilled team, and lots of patience.

The common mistake — to see the drop-in centre as the grand answer to mission. In fact drop-in centres work most effectively when they are a part of an inter-related package of programmes addressing the overall mission process. Because it is so energy intensive, drop-in centre teams usually find it extremely difficult to add the other necessary parts of the outreach process if they are not in place before they start.

Organisations such as Fusion, who have extensive experience in this area, are committed to the view that in starting a program of outreach with the intention of reaching a whole region, a drop in centre or youth cafe is not the best place to start! Usually it's better to build a team and develop their skills first by working in schools and/or a day trip programme or something similar.

Some time ago one of the national peak bodies for youth affairs did a survey of drop-in centres. They found that on average, secular drop-in centres only lasted for 6 months before closing. Church based drop in programs lasted about 12 months. A number of Christian youth mission groups in Australia have had experience in running drop-in centres. This manual draws on the experience of some who have run drop-in centres which have had a longer life than is common such as *The Attic* in Hornsby which ran for 25 years! The longevity of a drop-in centre does not happen by accident. There are some very specific factors at work which this manual will address.

It's critical that such projects last longer than 12 months, because it's often not until 2 or 3 years have passed that the real benefits start to become evident.

What is the secret of sustaining an effective drop in centre? How can it become part of a systematic youth outreach strategy to reach every young person across a region?

The Goal of an Effective Drop-in Centre

By the end of the time that a young person has been with the drop-in centre team our prayer would be that they have seen, heard, and experienced what the Christian faith is all about. This will have happened through their relationships with the team and the activities in which they take part. They will have been in an environment where the lifestyle and relationships of team members with them have shouted the claims of Christ so loudly that they will feel the tug of their relevance. After all, in longing for them to come to know Christ we are longing that will be saved from everything which stops them becoming the human being that God dreams they can be.

So, the goal of the effective drop-in centre is to produce an open atmosphere where young people are provoked to become more human in the Biblical sense — that is, loving, truthful, creative, and responsible.

(There is more helpful information on the Biblical thinking of this goal in the manual, 'Helping Aussies Reconnect')

As they respond to the ongoing call of the Holy Spirit in specific areas of their lives they will grow to manage their lives rather than be controlled by other influences such as old habits and attitudes, family history and so on. Whether they know it or not, each small step indicates the growth enabled by the sovereign work of the Spirit of God because this kind of growth can only be the fruit of the Spirit. Self control is in many ways the foundation to all of the other expressions of God's work in our lives.

The Strengths of a Drop-in Centre

* In terms of the Process of Contact and Outreach (See the manual '*Rethinking Mission in the 90's*'), the real strength of a drop-in centre is as a place where young people can experience positive role modelling from the drop-in centre team.

* It also provides a continuing opportunity for long term therapeutic contact and counselling as relationships build between young people and Christian workers (the team).

* A drop-in centre provides the freedom to respond to whatever needs present themselves, such as entertainment, social development, or even Biblical education.

In many ways the drop-in centre's ability to allow for all this to happen is linked to the environment that is chosen or created in the centre. Much more will be said in the rest of this manual, but the key to the environment being appropriate is found in the team and the set of relationships that exist between team members. If young people can identify with the decor and programme as relevant expressions of their culture, then it will be a comfortable place for them to go and it is likely that they will keep coming and give the opportunity to build relationships.

Above all though, it is the ability of the team to tune their drop-in centre to the needs of their target group that will be reflected in how young people see and feel about the centre. So, it is important to keep in mind the needs of adolescents as the program is put together.

Adding the Rest of the Outreach Process to the Drop-in Centre

The effective sharing of the Good News needs more than what the drop-in centre can consistently provide for all that come. There needs to be a place where education can be given about the faith. There needs to be a place where there is a clear call to commitment, and there needs to be a place and a way to help these young people build bridging relationships into local churches where their growth in Christ can continue. So, as you can see, the drop-in centre prepares the soil so that it will be fertile when the proclamation of the Word, which is the seed, is sown.

It is then rather like getting to hear the name of a friend that they have already felt they knew for quite some time.

Different Types of Drop-in Centres

Christian drop-in centres vary considerably. At one end there is the low key lounges for young people to 'hang out'. At the other end of the spectrum there are structures like commercially based youth cafes and coffee shops. Some places have explored the alcohol free night club model. Other groups have explored a combination model integrating mobile cafes out on the street with a commercial cafe, alcohol free night club and a section for the more informal drop-in centre activities.

There are several key factors in creating a setting which is healthy socially and in which the values of the Kingdom of God are experienced by young people who come to the centre. They include the following:

Creating a Healthy Social Climate for Mission

(1) Open Climate “At home”

One church group decided to set up a coffee shop outreach program. For one year they were open every Saturday night. But in that whole year they never saw a single local young person from their target group actually enter their premises — a decorated church hall. Some local young people came and hung around outside but soon drifted away. One look inside told them that this was not ‘their scene’. A giant backdrop faced them as they looked in with a hill, three large crosses and the words, ‘Jesus saves’. The posters around the walls were all explicitly Christian ones, and the tables and chairs didn’t look so inviting as they were obviously Christians sitting at each table ‘ready to witness’. The music playing: unfamiliar contemporary Gospel. The lighting was white fluorescent tubes and you could get coffee and biscuits.

You have to admire the group for their stickability, but they certainly had not created a climate where the local young people would feel at home. It was an environment which the Christians liked. It reflected their culture.

On the other hand, another Christian group set up their drop in centre in such a way that you entered it through a tunnel and came into what was like an intriguing new world. Coloured lights, subtle murals (which each time you looked at them you saw something different), thought provoking posters, tables with red table cloths adding to the feeling of warmth in neat area and always some activity to focus attention happening in another area (a group of young people were making badges when we arrived, cutting out pop stars from old magazines and there was paint and pens around). There were board games, chess sets built into tables, and a basic menu of interesting fruit juices, milk shakes, various hot drinks, toasted sandwiches and raisin bread. It was hard to see who were the Christians running it and who were the clients and an ordered but continuous hubbub of conversations filled the place.

We need to create a climate which is open and hospitable. The physical decor will have impact on that, as will the activities offered, and the relationships between team members who operate the centre.

(2) Physical environment

One of the main benefits of a drop-in centre is that we can create in it our own environment. From the signs that hang in the window, to the general state of repair and condition of the building where we create first impressions, right through to the decor of the interior; the kind, and condition of the furniture and what is made in the kitchen, a certain intangible atmosphere is communicated to which clients will respond.

Here are some important things to keep in mind:

(a) It’s important to remember that people matter more than things, so if you were to have a new lounge suite which would make you super sensitive to people walking on it, or inadvertently marking it with cigarette burns or spilt coffee, it might be better to leave it somewhere else. Or if you’re going to have parachutes hanging from the ceiling, don’t leave a rope dangling tantalisingly inviting some adolescent to test his acceptance on it. If there are windows likely to be broken, it might be good to put some wire over them to minimise the chances. All in all, the purpose of the Centre and its furniture is to serve the people and the relationships that might develop, not to win a place in Home and Garden. On the other hand, a centre which has had a lot of work and creativity put into it will say something about how much you value the users of it and will assist in young people respecting it.

You may even be able to involve young people in the whole process. One team decided on a theme which captured for them the purpose of the centre, then ran a competition in local schools for murals they could paint in their entertainment area. An art class eventually painted the backdrops.

(b) The decor should suggest that it's home. It should have the feeling of a warm lounge room. Posters, murals etc... should stimulate creative thinking so that just looking around the walls should say something about the humour and attitude of both the workers and users. It's amazing the difference soft and/or coloured lighting makes too. Appropriate use of ultraviolet lights and fluorescent paint can give an 'other world' impression and can provide interest and warmth.

(c) The place should always be tidy, clean and hygienic, reflecting the creative order and self respect so that it makes it easy for people to want to modify their behaviour. It's not as easy to want to flick a cigarette butt across an obviously tidy room. And we also say something about our view of our clients by the quality of service we provide in keeping the drop-in centre in a pleasant state.

It's good to also remember that if you're part of an organization then your drop-in centre reflects the self respect, or lack of it, of the whole organization. (And of course, it reflects on Jesus' Kingdom!)

(d) Activities which focus peoples' attention for the time they are there will help create openness. They structure time effectively and create the climate where relationships develop more spontaneously. (See section on *Appropriate Time Structuring*). These can include board games, pool competitions, craft activities, badge making, etc... One team regularly tried to identify the natural groupings of young people coming and offer activities which recognised each group. e.g. boisterous high energy group, the musos, quiet reflective people, the deep and meaningful, pool and table tennis bunch etc... There's an interesting mix between the need for predictability, freshness, special projects and events.

(3) Appropriate time structuring activities

Above all, it is the ability of the team to fine tune their drop-in centre to the continually emerging needs of their young people using the facility that will affect how young people perceive the drop-in centre. It is therefore important to consciously monitor the needs of adolescents and directly apply this information in putting together a drop-in centre programme. The role of the team is critical here because it is impossible for one or two people to have the level of awareness necessary for all of the people using the centre.

(Briefing and debriefing meetings immediately before and after the program will be important as well as special times of prayer and planning.)

It's been said that adolescents have a very large "Id" (instinctual drive and energy) but a very weak ego (facility to stay in touch with external reality and be personally productive in it). This explains why there is such a short attention span when the fortunes of the adolescent self are not at stake.

All of us have internal pressures, or as Gestalt therapists would call it — 'unfinished business'. For all of us these unresolved issues in our lives clamour for attention. It takes a lot of energy to hold these pressures at bay while we deal with the here and now, and it's not easy for adolescents to do that for long stretches of time.

The problem is, however, that if we do not serve them by ensuring that there is a variety of positive choices of activities that have meaning for them, it takes a lot of energy for them to decide how best to manage themselves.

At such times they can readily revert to what might be called "archaic feelings and behaviours" where they cease to be productively in touch with the here and now.

If nothing positive has been provided for young people to do, they will most certainly find something and it may not necessarily be constructive. After all they have to do something with their time.

Put simply, if there are no positive options for time structuring, we should not be surprised if young people often gravitate to negative options. They can readily revert to inappropriate expression of feelings and ways of behaving that come from 'hot current needs' or unresolved parts of their past and in so doing cease to be productively in touch with the here and now. In fact, they can slip into destructive attitudes and behaviour which can

overtake the kingdom values we are wanting to see rule in the drop-in centre. It's amazing how quickly negative thinking and behaviour can breed.

In their book, *Born to Win*, James and Jongeward suggest that there are 6 ways that human beings generally structure their time.

(a) Rituals

Used normally when people are dealing with awkward moments like meeting people for the first time; coping with grief; dealing with significant times such as when 2 families are joined by marriage.

(b) Pastimes

Here people talk about superficial things like the weather, politics, cars, sport, etc... These exchanges are often used by people who don't know each other well or sometimes out of habit. There's no real intimacy and time is structured comfortably. Nobody feels uncomfortable. You come and you go. You've not been touched. You literally, 'pass time'.

(c) Activities

These may be crafts or positive social activities like a bush dance etc...where people participate either on their own or with others. Usually there's the opportunity for positive experience of creativity, and relationships with others. A healthy structuring of purposeful activities usually reflects to individuals a positive self image, and provides a setting in which intimacy can occur.

(d) Withdrawal

When life in the real world is painful. It is possible to cope by picking up your marbles and going home — withdrawing into a world of your own, where you can't be reached.

(e) Psychological Games

All of us have put together a view of ourselves, of others, and the world in general that acts like tinted spectacles through which we view everything that we experience. However wrong and destructive those ideas are, we spend most of our energy protecting ourselves from the possibility of change.

Psychological games are happening when all the people's internal histories make contact with those of other people. Its like a tape recorder within them replaying ways of feeling and behaving from times in their past. The whole process occurs at a non-rational level. Relationships develop till either or both parties have their internal histories confirmed usually destructively.

Game playing has been the destruction of more than one drop-in centre or voluntary youth service, and it could be said that the capacity to read games and take appropriate intervention is one of the necessary skills that workers must develop if a drop-in centre is going to be attractive and productive. Its too easy for drop-in centres to become quite destructive for the clients who use them.

(f) Intimacy

When I'm secure enough to be unconcerned about external threat and can feel comfortable in drawing near to my real inner world, in a way that also permits you to draw close to your real inner world, we may make deep and significant contact as human beings. This contact provides for the opportunity to be loving and truthful, in a creative yet responsible manner. This is the heart of helping people grow. This is the means by which they are gently provoked with the real option of becoming more human in the Biblical sense.

We are not suggesting here that people simply pull themselves up by their own boot straps and become everything that God wants them to be by their own effort. Rather it is a recognition that in any given moment God is presenting every human being with the possibility, like the writer of Ecclesiastes, of participating with Him in seeing what is 'beautiful' in that time. Each experience we share becomes an opportunity for growth where they can choose to affirm or reject the scarred image of God that he Has created within all of us.

Intimacy is special but it can also be exhausting, so its not appropriate to see intimacy as a continual exercise but if we don't experience it at least every now and then, we are living a less than human existence because God has made us to love and be loved. In the long run, we can have wall to wall ping pong tables or pool tables, bush bands and outings, and they may be pleasant pastimes, but unless they lead to the option of intimacy, they can all get in the way of the central purpose of the Centre. That purpose of course is, the attempt to put people into a social structure in which they are provoked to become more human in the Biblical sense (as one part of the overall process of contact and outreach).

Activities which can be used include anything from making surfboards (in a shed out back preferably); live bands or solo artists; drama groups; quiz shows, Trivial Pursuit; the Ungame; to craft activities like screening T shirts or badge making; and watching particular videos.

It is actually quite amazing and amusing what young people enjoy and what is helpful. In one drop-in centre where relationships were well established a team member working with 6 year old children organised finger and foot painting. They loved it. They had a 2 month project building a giant paper mache whale on a trailer. Team members wrote and performed life skits on a range of themes from typical experiences at school, with parents, boy-girl relationships, unemployment. Sometimes the young people would interrupt and give their own dramatised 'corrections' to the skits and spontaneous group discussions would emerge.

Celebrations and ways of giving recognition can be important at birthdays, getting a job, finishing school, Christmas parties with a feast and presents and so on.

(4) The Role of Extra Activities (away from the centre)

One of the dangers of a drop-in centre is that its very predictability can produce certain levels of adjustment in clients that become habits, preventing them from going further in their self discovery or spiritual journey. It's possible for pecking orders to develop, for certain areas of sensitivity to surface between clients and staff and for static sets of relationships to develop. An example of this is maybe where the team can see non-Christians come up to an edge of interest in responding to Christ, but because of peer pressure in the centre, never take a clean break. So it's important to have extra activities that take place outside of the drop-in centre. They can be camps, day trips, nights out, bush dances etc. It is important from time to time to take the clients out of the predictable environment, to mix them with other peers (hopefully young people from the local churches if elements in the process of youth contact and outreach are working effectively). This permits a shake up of the social patterns and to see new sets of relationships becoming life options.

For example on one occasion the Attic drop-in centre had a grant to buy a billiard and pool table. Next news, all the kids from the local pool room started coming to the drop-in centre for the use of the pool table which was great. There was an expansion of clientele. However, many of them were such expert pool players that new levels of hierarchy emerged within the drop-in centre. These kids almost seemed to be taking over. But it was found that when many of them came away on a day trip, they weren't so good at playing football in the sand, or Storm the Fort. Their position in the pecking order modified, and we were able, once more, to be in charge of the values which ruled in the social climate of the drop-in centre.

(5) Effective peer group discipline

The best way to create healthy norms in the drop-in centre as well as deal with emerging difficulties is through non-directive discipline. Team members, in their relationships with each other, begin this process by first of all modelling in their relationships with each other, an agreed upon set of expectations — so that it's normal for other people to respond with similar behaviour.

The moment a group breaks down, its often normal for some 'heavy' to do the disciplining and in doing it, to hook all the unresolved authority problems within the clients. The result then, is that the heavy gets rejected, tensions build between the team and the clients, and the 'heavy'. At this point we are well on the way to the playing of a destructive psychological game.

As we have seen it is possible for time to be structured destructively by playing psychological games. If team members are not aware they can be hooked into playing a destructive role in what we call a drama. (See Appendix (A))

A worker with an understanding of these dramas and having the right skills can make a big difference in these moments. Essentially the need is to help people get in touch with how they are feeling and behaving as well as what life is like in this moment for the other person. Once this has happened the 'players' are into a mode of adult reflection where there is possibility of helping them move towards responsible and aware choices.

A team worker who models a loving, truthful, creative and responsible pattern of behaviour has a good chance of calling the young clients out to those same values, thus provoking them to be more authentically human in the Biblical sense.

So we would want to suggest that the Drop In should operate off some basic ground rules such as: people matter and, the need for co-operation, rather than a list of do's and don't's. Discipline is the responsibility of the whole team.

By establishing agreed upon principles and procedures to handle violence, passionate couples, alcohol being consumed or brought in or drunk outside, drugs, and even whether or not to allow smoking, this area becomes the whole group's concern and not just that of the team leader. (*Aside: In regards to smoking, it is worth being aware that there have in recent times been a number of court cases where businesses have been held liable for the effects of passive smoking in their building.*)

This is where a commitment to training is important in learning how to beckon out the responsible thinking part of young people in the centre, to be skilfully sensitised to 'dramas'. Once again it is very important that the team has a time of briefing and debriefing linked to each programme so that incidents can be explored with the whole team and a standard approach agreed upon by the team.

On one occasion a young girl ran amuck late at night brandishing a knife threatening a number of both team and other drop-in participants. In the team debriefing, there was initially anger, hurt, and a desire to 'kick her out and never let her back.' She had been the persecutor, we had felt like victims, so now we would reverse the role. As the team reflected we considered her background and noticed that we were in danger of acting out a game that she had been a part of many times commencing with rejection from a violent father and a schizophrenic mother, through a series of foster homes. In the end she would draw near in relationships then do something that would trigger rejection. We concluded that perhaps it was easier for her to 'act out' destructively than to face the possibility of someone else initiating the rejection. Either way the result was the same. She drew a conclusion along the lines that suggested messages like, "I'm not lovable." "You can't trust other people" "They always let you down" and so on.

The team agreed that we needed to communicate that certain behaviour was unacceptable and what the consequences would be next time, but that we also needed to share with her about our other reflections. The next week this occurred. One of us invited her to reflect on the previous week, then shared our guesses and asked what she thought. She agreed burst into tears. We had refused to play the game. For her this became a turning point in her growth.

An example of a common 'drama' is what as known as The Karpmann Triangle. We need to be wary of being hooked into playing a complementary role in a drama.

(6) Predictability & Continuity

Predictability and continuity are important keys to the building of trust. It is important that the drop in centre is open when it says it will be. For those who are still learning how to structure and control their own lives this means that there is some stable, predictable place in their life's experience. That predictability has an importance that is hard to measure, but part of the power of a drop in centre is that it's alive in the youth community's mind whether they go or not, they know that it's there and available, and when it's available.

It's like a tap. When you turn it on you expect water. So, when you're feeling a bit lonely, or you've gone through a rough patch, or are asking important questions about your existence, then in your mind the drop-in centre must be there, and predictable. This predictability creates a certain level of trust both amongst the adolescents, and the community, and lends important authority to the message of those who run it.

One young man who had attended a drop-in centre for two years moved interstate for a year. After returning, he dropped back in and said, "You're still here and everything's the same. I thought you would be." Another young man came to and from one drop in centre a number of times over five years. In between he would ring at times of loneliness when he was half drunk, from wherever he was (Alice Springs, Gold Coast, Cairns, Sydney) to the centre and speak to different team members.

Building an Open Hospitable Team

The key to the environment being appropriate is also found in the team and the set of relationships that exist between team members. If young people can identify with the decor and programme as relevant expressions of their culture then it will be a comfortable place for them to go and it is likely that they will keep coming giving the opportunity to build relationships.

The main thing we have to offer those who come to our Centres, is not the activities, or our counselling skills, or our entertainment. They can get all of that and more, elsewhere. But what they can't get elsewhere is the benefit of the atmosphere in a Christian drop-in centre; a model of what Christians are like and how they interact with one another and those around them. (Especially those who are difficult to handle).

There's something special that happens when a committed team of Christians come together in Mission. It's been our experience that the Spirit of God chooses to move in a way that is observable and significant to Christians and non-Christians alike. So the drop-in centre becomes a place where God meets young people through a team of Christians working together.

Two drop-in centres have told the story of a young man coming in and after observing the environment saying, "What is this place? Its like heaven" In one of them, the conversation went on, "Yeah. I guess it is. What you're seeing is just a dim reflection of what God is like. Do you like it?" "Yeah, its great - long pause ... How come everyone around here are mates - those two guys over there were beating each other up at 7.00".

But none of this happened by accident. There was planning, prayer, discipline and hard work. There was an ongoing dynamic in the life of the team which provided a fertile ground through which the Spirit of God could work.

1. Relationships on the Drop-in Centre Team

To work effectively, the team has to be an operational arm of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, which is God ruling on earth, as He does in heaven, through his people. "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven". It has both a spiritual dimension to it, and a practical here and now social dimension. God chooses to rule through his people and the gates of Hell are not to prevail.

In real terms, this means that there needs to be people who are sensitive both to the values of the Kingdom, and the guidance of the Spirit. They are people who have developed disciplines to help them be aware of what's going on in every part of the drop-in centre.

Workers should be spread out through the centre in such a way that there is no uncovered corner. If there's a likelihood of trouble outside the centre, a worker should actually be on duty there, with a view to intervention before trouble can start. The task of the team is to be in contact with each other for support; to be aware of what's happening around them; and to be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit of God. There should be an elder, or more experienced team leader who is in touch with every staff worker, lending support and intervening when a staff member finds themselves in a situation beyond their present capacity to cope.

This approach, of a living organism being a vital body of Christ in the here and now, has been the historic way that Fusion has worked, with powerful results over the years. It first came into being through necessity at *The Den* in Bathurst, when the team was surrounded by violent outlaw packs who were committed to the destruction of each other and the Den. But time and time again, as Christians

prayed and functioned together as a body, as they were aware and had the courage to intervene, miracles were seen to take place, and the gates of Hell never quite prevailed and dozens and dozens over the years were touched by the reality of the Kingdom of God in a very direct and specific way.

2. The Open Crowd

Some of the same principles found in the mission manual on festivals also apply in the drop-in centre. There is a need to construct an 'open crowd' - a group of people which by its nature calls others to come and join it. They are all welcome. Even those who only vaguely look like human beings! It is not closed or forbidding to become part of. Everyone is drawn spontaneously to its core, to participate, and they are not self-conscious about being there.

Imagine yourself walking into a drop-in centre to find a whole group of people crowded around S cane toads in the centre of a circle. You couldn't help but push in trying to see what's happening. On the other hand, imagine walking into say, a Vietnamese drop-in centre and you're the only person who can't speak their language and they're all sitting staring at you as you walk in (no offence implied to our Vietnamese friends). That for you is likely to be a closed crowd and you will feel uncomfortable and conspicuous.

Open crowds require a group of people at their heart committed to hospitality and having warm, open relationships with one another. They are not as spontaneous as they might first appear.

3. Recruitment of a team

If you're going to have a 1:3 or 1:5 ratio of users to workers, so necessary if the principles of the Kingdom of God that we've spoken of, are going to be modelled, there'll be a need for a continuing process of recruitment and training.

As young people move through various natural phases of their lives, there'll be times when their phase of the work on the team is over and it is right for them to move on. A natural sense of loss will be encountered by the rest of the team. Even so, if there was not any natural feelings of loss, the same team, operating month in and month out without new members, could lose its sense of vision and excitement at seeing clients' grow with changing attitudes and developing an interest in spiritual things.

New people coming into the team will bring a fresh new vision of what might be. After a few brief months it is entirely normal for the initial enthusiasm and idealism to be affected as team members discover the gap between their skills and self-awareness and the challenges the outreach brings. There may even be some history of incompetence and pain which produces tarnished idealism and which can affect expectations.

If there is a continual flow through of new people, and if they are effectively trained they can ensure the maintenance of an ongoing dynamic in the life of the team. In addition, drop-in centres can be important training grounds for young people who are brought into contact with ordinary Australians and trained to feel comfortable in understanding and communicating with them.

In the whole process of recruitment it can be a helpful and telling question to ask, 'Why would some eligible Christian young person not want to work in a drop-in centre?' These questions provide a starting place for both the upgrading of the centre and its services. We can deal with valid criticisms, and put in place the education and promotional activities that are needed giving us a way to deal with unhelpful perceptions of the ministry.

Often, drop-in centre staff can look like a holy huddle who've got it all sewn up. For most ordinary young Christians it's a bit of a terrifying prospect to survive amongst the culture they've observed as they've walked past the centre. They may be willing, but feel unskilled, perhaps apprehensive, and worse still - unwanted. It's very important to give opportunity and direction to those looking to discover how to begin. So in recruitment, two key issues are:

- i) to spell out clearly how you become a team member
- ii) to give a clear indication of the training programme and support systems that will be available to those who join the team.

4. Training

One very useful course to provide basic tools for all workers is the Theodynamics Course offered by Fusion and it is an invaluable starting point for team training. It has three integrated streams to develop foundational skills, understandings and values for discipleship and mission- Living With God, Living With Others, and Living With Yourself. Scripture Union in some states also have valuable experience through their history with Theos.

Beyond that effective training for the local situation must take place. First, there is the administrative training that deals with principles and procedures fundamental issues like, "What will we do if somebody comes into the drop in centre with alcohol? How do we feel about couples becoming passionate in public?" In other words every team member needs to share a common understanding about ways of dealing with crises. It's important that these issues be spelt out, and procedures overseen until they become a normal part of the life of the team, particularly in the early stages of the work.

Then there is training in the philosophy of the work. What is the purpose of the drop-in centre? This is very important if those who are used to a more decision oriented form of outreach and evangelism are not to become disenchanted within the first fortnight when dozens don't come to Christ. They need help to see how the whole programme works and how the drop in centre and their functioning in it contributes to the eventual outcome.

Then there is personal training, in social skills like listening, etc. Once again Theodynamics is a useful starting point but there are other elements of training worth focusing on specific skills in these areas such as conflict resolution for example.

And of course there's also Biblical Training so that the faith of the worker is integrated into their behaviour, their awareness of themselves and how they come over to others, and their view of the world. In this way their attitudes and actions in the centre are not just activist expressions of adolescent enthusiasm, but in fact are a working out of their faith in mission. There is possibility then of a community of faith developing with others on the team, and the transcendent dimension of their faith being kept alive. This helps team members keep in touch with the meaning of their service in the centre, and brings a broader reality into their relationships with those who come into the drop-in centre.

How will the training happen? First of all make sure that your team has a regular time of getting together and that part of its purpose is to set aside time for training. Training is never ever completed. Even the basic training needs to be repeated because skills need revision, new people join the team, or we can forget and lose focus.

5. The Organisational Structure and Maintenance of the Team

Accountability needs to be spelt out very clearly. Who's responsible to whom and for what? People need to know what's expected of them it doesn't hurt for job descriptions to be both written and spelt out.

Communication. In a drop-in centre its essential that there is leadership through shared consciousness. Good leadership will help develop a common approach, shared understandings, and an awareness of one another as valued and understood individuals within the overall team. Important issues need be discussed together so that principles and procedures are owned by the whole team.

To achieve this, there's a need for a forum to be established where issues can be aired. 'How do we cope when it happens?' 'It happened last week, and I didn't know what to do... etc.'

The briefing meeting before starting is also a time where the goals of the outreach can keep on being specifically restated and a particular focus be brought to bear for that session. In one team the leader would often do this by setting immediate objectives such as: "OK I want each of us to think of three people to pray for. Tonight I want you to try and find out something about each of them that is special to them." Or "Tonight pray that God will give you the opportunity to significantly affirm two people" Or "Pray that God will give you the opportunity to give growth promoting feedback to someone who trust you tonight." During the night, the leader would quietly ask, How's it going and would quietly pray for that member in response. At the end of the night, the clarity of focus had often meant that there were wonderful things shared. The skills and confidence of team members grew correspondingly.

As well as communication within the team there needs to be communication with those who influence the team such as parents, Church members etc. That is why there is a need for regular prayer bulletins, family nights etc. This will help the team feel surrounded by a network of people who are supporting them and valuing the work that they're doing. Support networks will then help liberate more resources and minimise distrust that can affect team morale and strength.

And then there's communication to the wider public. It's important to stay in touch with police, authorities, headmasters those people whose opinions of the centre will effect its functioning. Effective communication with the local media, helps keep the public informed, be more relaxed about the drop in centre down the road and the strange people who hang around it.

6. The Team's Spiritual Life

As we've said before, the main thing we have to contribute is the life of Christ. One of the things that made the monastic systems of early Church father, Basil of Cappadocia, so effective was the corporate spiritual life of the brothers. Their 'one another ministry' kept their vision of God so clearly before their eyes that they weren't swamped by the prevailing culture.

The moment we become just welfare workers we are likely to suffer the fate of many welfare workers (burn out).

It's our personal devotional lives, and individual contact with God, strengthened with the fellowship of brothers and sisters, that creates the opportunity for eternity to break into time. Prayer for individuals on the team and for the clients produces a rare capacity to see people through the eyes of Christ. God has granted to team members the divine privilege of developing a relationship with other human beings, first of all on the team and then in the drop-in centre, which can reflect the hope of redemption.

Intention does not guarantee performance in human relationships. It can help to provide structured opportunities to help the team develop the 'one another ministry' - times of prayer for one another where workers are asked to share their struggles and joys in the outreach, times when individuals are approached so they can be encouraged or given feedback and so on.

So, if a drop-in centre is going to be effective, the 'togetherness life' of the team, its recruitment, its training, its maintenance and its spiritual life is absolutely foundational. Equipment and programmes run a distant second to team life if any drop in centre is going to take its goal seriously.

7. The role of a worker in a drop-in centre

◆ Serving: It's important that as a member of the team, each person has an attitude of servanthood. That is, to be looking for opportunities to care for others, be they team or visitors. Such a commitment is an important part of creating an hospitable climate.

◆ Building relationships: It's important to participate with the young people using the centre in whatever activities they are engaged. Often workers find it hard to begin relating. This is much easier if the young people are involved in some activity because then you can begin by reference to it. E.g.. "How are you going? Would you mind showing me how to play this game?" or perhaps sit down with some people playing monopoly and remark, 'Who's winning?' 'Would you like someone to take over the bank?' etc. If they're not engaged in some activity, try offering service. E.g. 'Gedday. Would you like a cuppa?'

◆ It's also important to remember names. Learn to make a mental note of the name when you're first introduced.

◆ It's pretty out of the ordinary to begin discussing intimate issues in a relationship until a bridge has been built between you and another. In our country, a person's faith is considered an intimate issue. Our task is to listen both to the person and the Holy Spirit to discover when is the right moment to raise such issues. This is a matter of knowing how best to ensure that the great treasure of the Gospel will be shared and heard with the greatest opportunity for respect. If we share before the right time we may actually devalue the message because we unnecessarily create resistance through disrespecting where the other person is at.

The Mission Manual, *Helping Aussies Reconnect* provides's training on Content and Process and The Role of Rituals in Personal Evangelism which will be of assistance in this area.

No doubt you'll develop your own style and skills in relating to a particular bunch of young people.

◆ As a rule of thumb it is helpful to begin the night together with a prayer and briefing meeting. This gives an opportunity for any last minute clarification of roles for the night, sharpen any specific goals which the team may set for the evening, and to specifically pray for each other and young people you are getting to know.

◆ Before you speak kids will be sizing you up. Be open and friendly. Acknowledge them with your eyes, smile, rather than only relate to those you know.

◆ Here's some other opening lines which may help:

Have you been here before?

Gedday, I'm....., I don't think I've met you yet.

Where are you from?

What do you normally do with yourself each day?

What do you guys usually do on.....Saturday nights?

Do you know many other people here?

Would you like a game of pool?

So you're into heavy metal, eh?

◆ Sometimes the first conversations are very brief. It may take some weeks for trust and intimacy to develop. That's OK. Most of us are cautious when we're meeting people for the first time too

◆ Try to avoid pumping them especially if the young person doesn't seem to be responding. If you are getting short answers and they are avoiding eye contact, it probably a good signal to you that its time to back off and ease yourself out of the conversation politely. 'I'll catch you around. It was good to meet you, Mick.' Next time if you remember his name and greet him with it, he may be more relaxed.

◆ Relaxed conversation, love, caring, and a willingness to listen are our tools. It can be a slow process to build relationships and gain respect.

◆ Some of their language, dress or even their attitudes or music may offend you. It's important to look beyond tough exteriors and see the often insecure and lonely person inside.

◆ The drop in centre is very much about creating the kind of climate where such a level of trust, respect, and relevance have been seen, heard and experienced that the proclamation of the Gospel at events such as camps and day trips will go off like a bomb shell in the hearts and minds of those who have been around for a good while. In general, up front sharing of the gospel to the whole

group will not often be so appropriate, at least until relationships and trust develop. Even at that point the danger is that because new people are coming and going some will be ready to handle that style of presentation and others will not.

When respect is earned young people will give you opportunities to share your faith and it'll be the right moment for you. Often they will seek you out to talk more deeply about their lives but this takes time. On the other hand, it is your task to sense what the Spirit of God is doing and also be ready to take initiative if there seems to be openness in the relationship.

◆ Don't think you're a failure because you are not often verbally sharing your faith if there is clear evidence that the relationships are developing and that Kingdom values are being demonstrated in the life of the centre. You will still be sharing the Gospel at a process level. As St Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, there is both a message and a ministry of reconciliation. The message and the ministry give one another credibility and are inseparable to the Gospel.

What we are speaks much louder than what we say, especially to Aussies. We should be working at reflecting God's nature in our lives, in the way we relate to one another and also to those who come into our centre. Its important to stay relaxed and yet alert. Look out for one another and watch for:

smoking where its not allowed
(In our times this is becoming a legal issue in public buildings).

rough use of equipment or furniture.

alcohol being smuggled in.

young people being left out, or not being given a go.

lonely kids.

team members who need a hand or support or prayer.

someone causing trouble.

moments to serve in cleaning up, preparation etc.

◆ Learn from others. Talk and share about some of the things you find easy or hard. Be involved, caring, open, loving, patient, a listener, genuine, accepting, prayerful, consistent.

◆ Avoid being detached, disinterested, closed, aggressive, an excessive talker, excessively pushy with the Christian message, being judgemental, outside of God's influence, soft on house rules.

◆ The "onion skin diagram" in Appendix B, may be a helpful way of measuring together the movement towards growth of young people during the time you've been open each day or week. It's good to meet afterwards to share how the journey has been for one another and to measure that progress.

◆ Another critical part of preparing ourselves for work in a drop in centre is to learn how to lead someone to Christ. A number of organisations have training units which will be of assistance. It is our experience that God uses mostly those people who have prepared themselves to be good midwives to those going through the experience of new birth. The Mission Manual, *Helping Aussies to Reconnect* has helpful material in this area as well.

Involving the Local Church

If other elements of the model are working, there should be, within local churches, young people who understand the philosophy of the drop in centre, and who act as staff workers on the team, providing effective bridging places into the local churches.

It is critical that those bridges be established, because the life of the drop-in centre will be limited by the failure to build them. One of the great dangers of a centre acting in isolation is that it can become a cul-de-sac. It needs church networks to provide support for kids, particularly for those who are socially ill equipped. If the team is not careful. Young people like these can tend to become dependent solely upon the centre and can tend to tip the balance so that more 'healthy' kids don't want to come.

There is a spiralling effect that becomes self selective, wearing out workers and creating a climate that in the long run is not helpful to the disturbed young people themselves. So we need a funnel, not a cul de sac. A cul-de-sac creates a situation in which kids who become Christians will be dependent upon the drop in centre for their nurture. This means that the centre has either to direct its resources in that direction, or neglect the needs of the kids, keeping its own focus on its goals of mission and outreach.

On the other hand, if we work in co-operation with local church programmes, they can be fed into youth groups and into established cell groups. Support groups like these can act as a kind of halfway house and alternative support group. In addition, as clergy and elders see their churches growing they'll be more open to their young members joining us as partners in our mission.

How to Get Started

1. Clarify your goals

First up clarify your own goals in mission by putting them down briefly on paper. This will be provide a useful reference point for your own thinking as well as helping you articulate the vision in a way that can be consistently shared with others. Write down the need, what you want to do, how you expect the drop-in centre to help you achieve what you want to do. Write down how you will make sure that all aspects of the mission process are addressed. Like all the Awakening manuals, this manual starts from the assumption that you are committed to working with God's people to answer the question, 'How can I pray, plan, and act so that all of my region will be reached for Christ over the next six years.'

2. Share your Vision

Share your vision with a group of trusted Christians and invite them to start a prayer and action group with you to do whatever is required to see the vision become a reality.

3. Research

Do your homework by researching more the need of young people in the area, where they hang out, what they do, possible locations for a centre that take these things into account, finance and other resources you will need and how to locate them.

4. Recruit and Train

Begin actively recruiting, training, and building a group of people into a team that has the skills and spiritual life needed. Include them fully in the planning and preparations.

5. Contact Church and Community Leaders

Make contact with Church and community leaders and relevant agencies sharing your vision

and inviting cooperation. A visit to your local media outlets would be worthwhile at this point asking who it will be best to talk to and how best you can keep them in touch.

6. Set up your building

Get your building and set it up. While you are doing this it will be wise to keep all the neighbours well informed and invite their participation. The good will you build will be worth a lot and may well need to be drawn upon from time to time.

7. Team Structure

Regroup and make sure that your team structures are in place and that the team has a shared vision, shared values, shared positions on basic policy areas (dealing with alcohol, how to be hospitable etc.), and that there are ways for decisions to be made together, conflict to be resolved, support to be given and so on as outlined in the manual.

8. Set starting date and commence

Set your starting date and commence publicising through the other means of making contact with young people you already have. These other contact processes will be an essential foundation needed before you contemplate opening the doors.

9. Invite a Prayer Team

Invite a prayer team to undergird the process each time you run the program.

10. Open the Doors!

Open the doors and welcome them in. Remember the first clients are your own team. If you and other team members think this way at all times, the welcoming attitude where people feel recognised and valued will be there from the moment a newcomer arrives. Keep trusting God.

A New Way to Share the Nature of the Kingdom of God

It's important to keep in mind that our whole task is to put our theology of man into a concrete, social process. The aim of the drop-in centre for us, is to do theology in a dynamic way structurally. Put another way, we are deliberately planning how to make the face of God visible to the participants through the individual lives of team members, through the shared life of the team, through the programme content, through the way we set up the building etc., and of course in the way we relate to every one who comes in. They ought to glimpse a dim reflection of what is like for heaven to come to earth.

This then is the philosophy that ought to be the key to the formulation of drop in centre programmes. We will be open to any activity that helps people move forward in their capacity to relate to others in a purposeful way and frees them to be more authentic. It permits us to see programming dynamically. We will continually be asking the question:

“Are our clients becoming more or less loving? More or less open to the possibility of truth? More or less creative? More or less responsible?” As they become more aware of their own motivations, attitudes, and behaviour and the possibility of growing are they becoming more free to choose new directions for their lives.

And that gives us a dynamic way of measuring how successful our work is. Rather than just measuring by the number of commitments to Christ, we can in this way measure growth towards such a commitment as well as growth beyond it.

Appendix 1

Psychological Games

There are both legitimate and illegitimate or destructive dramatic roles people can act out like a script in a play. People unhelpfully can take on the role of a character however most can be recognised as Persecutor, Victim or Rescuer.

James and Jongeward suggest that these roles are legitimate when they are not being play acted but are realistic and appropriate responses. E.g.:

A Persecutor: Someone who sets necessary limits on behaviour or is charged with enforcing a rule.

A Victim: Someone who qualifies for a role or position but is denied it unjustly.

A Rescuer: Someone who helps a person who is functioning inadequately to become rehabilitated and self reliant.

The roles become illegitimate and destructive when they are played for the purpose of manipulation. E.g.:

A Persecutor: Someone who sets unnecessarily strict limits on behaviour or is charged with enforcing the rules but does so with sadistic brutality

A Victim: Someone who does not qualify for a job but falsely claims it is denied because of race, sex or religion.

A Rescuer: Someone who, in the guise of being helpful keeps others dependent upon him or her.

A drama occurs when roles switch and the people involved are capable of playing all Three roles getting hooked to a circular pattern of behaviour. A particularly common form of drama is known as a Karpman Triangle.

Example

Son (as Persecutor, yells angrily at mother) You know I hate blue. Here you went and bought me another blue shirt!

Mother (as Victim) I never do anything right as far as you're concerned.

Father (rescues mother, persecutes son) Don't you dare yell at your mother like that young man. Go to your room and no dinner!

Son (now as Victim, sulking in his room) They tell me to be honest, and when I tell them what I don't like, they put me down. How can you satisfy people like that?

Mother (now as Rescuer, sneaks him a tray of food) Now don't tell your father. We shouldn't get so upset over a shirt.

Mother (as Persecutor, returning to father) John, you're so tough with our son. I'll bet he's sitting in his room right now hating you.

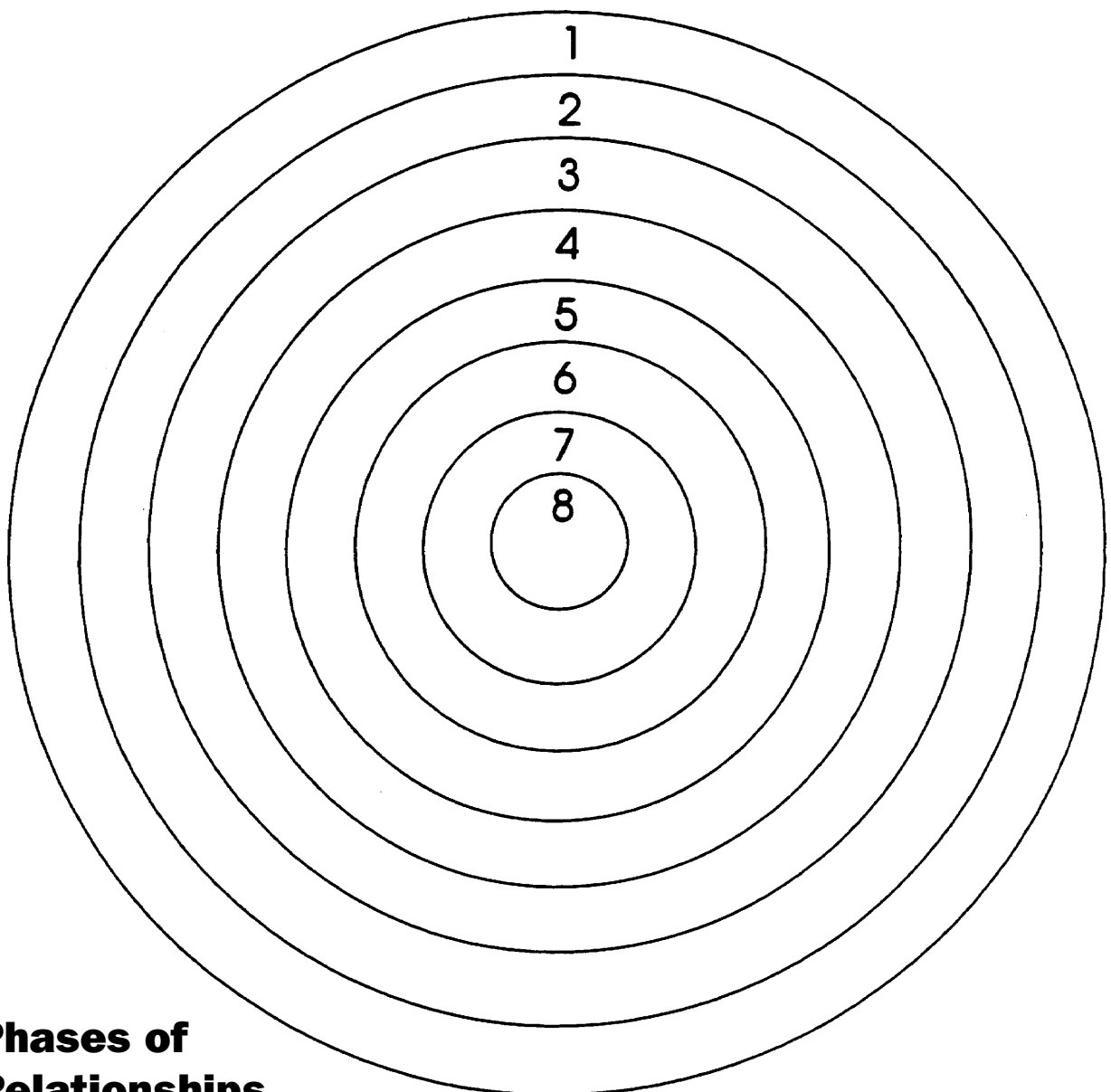
Father (as Victim) Gee, honey, I was only trying to help you, and you kick me where it hurts the most.

Son (calling out as Rescuer) Hey, Mum. Lay off, will ya? Dad's just tired.

This drama is particularly destructive because the players often get locked into a recurring and circular or rather triangular pattern of role switches. Often a player who feels "victim" will respond by "inviting a third player to play a rescuing role."

Appendix 2

RELATIONSHIP ESTABLISHMENT MODEL



Phases of Relationships

1. Casual nonverbal
2. Casual verbal
3. Relationship Testing
4. Mateships
5. Role clarification
6. Role reinforcement
7. Relationship renouncement
8. Transaction