
ANNOTATION

Grebstein, Lawrence C. and Van Wyk, Judy A. *Turning the Tide of Male Juvenile Delinquency: The Ocean Tides Approach*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2016. 301pp.

This study about an effective rehabilitative approach to working with male juvenile delinquents is, for a number of reasons, relevant and important for Lasallian educators. The Ocean Tides program – which is grounded in the Lasallian core beliefs that each youngster is unique, has promise, and is worthy of respect and that caring and trusting relationships are key to student success (130-133) – is, according to these authors from the University of Rhode Island, a modern-day success story worthy of emulation. Since the time of the origins in seventeenth-century France, work with male delinquents has been an important part of the Lasallian educational mission [cf. *John Baptist de La Salle and Special Education: The Story of Saint Yon* by Othmar Würth (Lasallian Publications, 1988)]. Furthermore, there is a long and vibrant history of Lasallian initiatives on behalf of delinquent youth and orphans in the USA [cf. *Brother Barnabas: Pioneer in Modern Social Service* by William J. Battersby (Saint Mary's College Press, 1970)].

Ocean Tides "is a residential program [in Rhode Island] that is an alternative to youth prison. It is a structured program that includes individualized education in an excellent school, individual and family counseling for every resident, closely supervised residential life, and a variety of . . . special activities designed to help the residents develop necessary personal and social skills, provide them with new experiences, and expand their awareness of the world outside of their limited environmental backgrounds. The program is designed to reduce unnecessary strain, provide the young men with positive alternatives to criminal activities, and help raise their levels of self-esteem" (255). Members of the staff are viewed as role models (86-87). Good caring relationships set the tone and are often the key motivator for growth (93, 87, 133-134). The overarching philosophy of Ocean Tides is that all youngsters have worth (179). "Negative behaviors" are viewed by staff and faculty "as alterable mistakes rather than irreversible signs of a defective character or flawed personality. 'I am no good' is replaced by 'I did something wrong' or 'I made a mistake'" (135, 154, 39).

The authors' thesis is that "research evidence now supports the prediction that juvenile delinquents fare significantly better in rehabilitative programs than in youth prisons or home confinement" (xii-xiii, 254-259) and that the Ocean Tides program [which "is 63% less expensive to the state than its own youth prison"] is a paradigmatic model of just such an approach (253, 73-74, 130, 134, 13). Their study is presented as "the first of its kind. It is first to amass comprehensive data on juvenile delinquents from so many different sources" (xiii, 19-23); and the authors assert that their book "describes a proven, multidisciplinary approach to significantly reducing violent behavior among juveniles" (77-122). It also provides "useful empirical information about male juvenile delinquents" (17-39) and includes "new and important data on the effects of family violence" (53-76), "guides professionals in replicating the success of the Ocean Tides program" (123-156), and "provides readers with successful strategies for

interviewing and working with adolescent male juvenile delinquents” (179-222). The authors posit that the book will also provide help for teachers, nurses, and counselors dealing with youngsters exposed to abuse or parental violence.

A brief history of juvenile delinquency in the United States between 1865 and 1975 [the date of the establishment of Ocean Tides] is provided in the book’s first chapter (1-15). Why juveniles commit crimes, the effect of parental violence on adolescents, and the merits of rehabilitative over a punitive orientation to dealing with delinquents are important topics considered by the authors.

In discussing why and how juveniles become delinquent in the book’s third chapter (41-52), the authors prefer, from among a number of perspectives presented, to view crime as “a way of coping with strains that come from cultural, social, and individual mechanisms in the imbalance of reinforcements over constraints against criminal coping” (51). In explaining this position, they draw heavily on the work of criminologist Robert Agnew’s work (48-51, 254) in which he “identifies five life domains that are essentially the social places where life happens. They include the self, family, school, peers, and work” (48). “Variables in the five life domains exemplify various types of strain – they prevent goal attainment, remove or threaten to remove things that are positively valued, or they present or threaten to present negatively valued stimuli” (49). The Ocean Tides program, vis-à-vis this perspective, was, consequently, “designed to reduce unnecessary strain, provide the young men with positive alternatives to criminal activities, and help raise their levels of self-esteem” (255).

The authors note that the “young men described in this book are not like other boys their age. They are more likely to be poor, deficient in basic educational and social skills, and lacking positive family and social support networks. Contrary to popular beliefs, they are not inherently bad or evil, but are missing some of the essential elements necessary for success in life. Instead of thinking of them as broken, it is more adaptive to conceptualize them as incomplete. The task of rehabilitation is to make them whole by filling in the structural and emotional voids they need to function better in society and into adulthood” (253, 154).

“Delinquent youngsters often turn to antisocial behavior because of lack of competencies, skills, and knowledge in socially acceptable and conventional areas. They frequently do not like school, regardless of their intellectual or cognitive abilities, and often do not do well. . . . In many cases they have fallen behind their peers by failing one or more grades and have lost motivation to learn. It is important for these youngsters [if rehabilitation instead of punishment is truly the goal] to receive enough education to be eligible for employment, specific vocational training, or continued education” (126). The Ocean Tides formula for “rehabilitating youthful offenders” is presented, then, as one of “taking them away from. . . negative experiences, providing supportive surrogate parenting, helping them to realize their own potential, and emphasizing their own talents and strengths to guide them away from crime” (xi-xii).

Family, as per Agnew’s general theory of crime, “is the most prominent life domain in childhood” (53). The authors note that the “Ocean Tides data provide a great opportunity for a more thorough analysis of the effects of direct child abuse and exposure to PIPV [parental interpersonal violence] on delinquent males” (55). The authors assert, in the fourth chapter of the

book (53-76), “that boys who are exposed to physical or emotional PIPV are also more likely to be personally physically or emotionally abused” (67) and that “boys who were physically or sexually abused or boys who were exposed to physical PIPV were more likely to act violently” (74). “Our research shows that exposure to a bad family environment, particularly witnessing or experiencing parental interpersonal violence, has devastating effects on children, but those ill effects can be diminished with the right interventions” (254).

In the book’s tenth chapter (253-259), the authors suggest an important avenue in need of further research and study. “Our research clearly shows the effectiveness of a program that is based on one year in residence. There is no indication that a shorter program [in part, motivated by budget cuts] will be as effective in rehabilitating youthful offenders” (257, 253). Consequently, there is a need to obtain, by “additional research that is multidisciplinary, longitudinal, and in depth,” the necessary evidence to support the policies away from residential rehabilitation and in favor of home placement that is currently in vogue (258-259).