

Psych department's research on Point 3 has accomplished a lot...



Rod West, director of Point 3.

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have found that about 70% of the people we treat get rid of their habits. Granted, a lot of these people might have relapses after they leave, but they'll never forget the feeling of being rid of their habit; and if they get rid of it a second time, maybe that time it will be permanent. The most important thing about getting people dried up, even if it's for only a short time, is that from then on they know they can do it. The psychological effect of even temporary success is tremendous.

"As far as relapses are concerned, we really have no idea yet how many people have them - we haven't been around long enough. Eventually, with continuing research, we'll be able to figure this out, and it will give us a much better idea of just how successful our operation is."

West says he has enjoyed his association with the project. "It's a very satisfying job," he says. "Perhaps the biggest feeling of accomplishment comes from watching a sick addict come here for the first time and watching him change and evolve while he's here. It's very interesting to see a pile of shit walk in the door and then to see a person walk out a few months later. After all, when they come here they're at rock bottom, and most of them have lost all hope for improvement and all interest in life. But while they are here they tend to take on a new vitality, a sort of self-renewal."

The houses where the people live, West says, are very much like homes where ordinary families live. "They have their problems and their confrontations, just like members of an ordinary family, and they try and work them out together. Sometimes close friendships develop. It's all very interesting to watch from a sociological viewpoint."

The project has had a few dramatic successes. "There's one guy here," says West, "who was on junk continuously for 22 years without ever being dried out, even for a short period of time; but he's now completed a methadone withdrawal program administered by Dr. Craig, and so he's dry for the first time since he was 20. Then there's a girl who we picked up off the street a few months ago; she was on the verge of death from malnutrition. But now she's off heroin and methadone both, and she's in good health too."

"Another thing that happens to a lot of people who come here is that they get jobs and become useful, functioning members of society again. This gives us a great feeling of accomplishment."

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As we all know, if a person is to be particularly knowledgeable in a field, he or she must be able to combine a sound basis in theoretical know-how with lots of good old trial-by-fire practical experience. At the Point 3 Project, Rod West and his crew have, over the past year assimilated a lot of practical knowledge about dealing with alcoholics and drug addicts; however, by West's own admission, they know little about the addictive personality and in general, what makes an addict an addict, and how the addict can be helped. This is where Dr. T.M. Nelson, chairman of the Psychology Department at the U of A, comes in.

Last April, after the project had been going for about four months and at which time it was still on pretty shaky ground, West and Nelson got together and decided that what the project needed was some research which would help the workers to better understand the workings of addicts. Last summer, under the Opportunities for Youth plan, the project received a grant of \$10,000 to carry out research, and twelve students were hired for the summer. Also the Psychology Department had received a grant of \$8000 to investigate various aspects of the drug scene in Edmonton, and much of this has been used to research the project this winter.

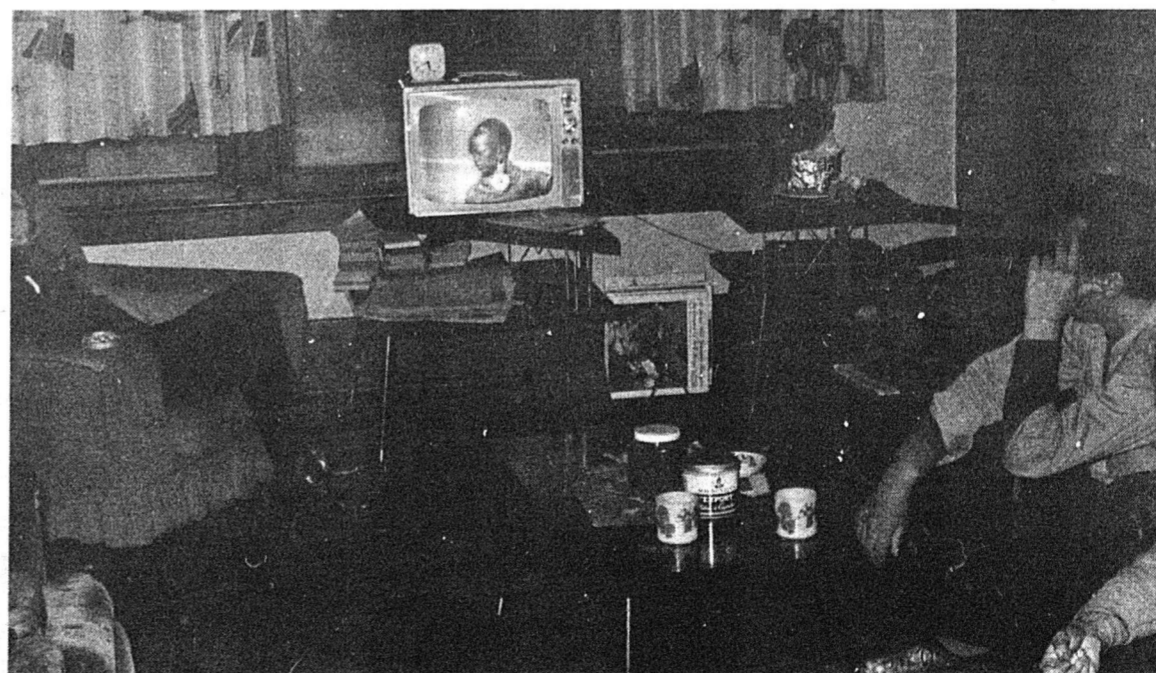
Dr. Nelson noted that he and the department had three reasons for getting involved with the project. "Firstly, our department does evaluation work for public agencies in the process of training honours and graduate students; the Point 3 Project is just one of many things we have researched. Secondly, we are interested in human behaviour on a research level, and within this field drug use is very important. Finally, of course there is the matter of grants which enable us to do the research and even pay people to do it."

West's reasons for wanting the research done included a desire to learn more about the psychology of addiction and a desire to find out how good a job the Point 3 Project was doing in helping addicts.

The research is many-faceted, and a great bulk of the data has already been collected, with work still going on. A total of five students, plus a methodologist, a faculty member of the psychology department, a non-student and a member of the Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Commission are involved on a part-time basis, collecting information and translating it into a form which can be fed into a computer to be analyzed.

One of the students, Joanna Miazga, is trying to produce a short questionnaire which would diagnose the patient's level of addiction. As with all other questionnaires being compiled by the researchers, producing this one is a rather long process. "What we do", said Nelson, "is compile about 50 questions, use them for awhile, and then throw out the useless ones. We keep the useful questions, and then do the same thing a couple of times over again with new sets of questions. Finally we arrive at our completed list of questions, but it certainly takes awhile to decide which questions are relevant."

Carol-Ann Nichols, another student, has been studying mood fluctuations within treatment centres in an effort to provide a means to assess the stability of the setting. "What we're doing here," noted Dr. Nelson, "is trying to figure out what the best environment for addicts is, that is which environment causes the least significant emotional vicissitudes in the patients. We want the atmosphere to be as relaxing as possible, and so this part of our research is very important."



Residents of the Point 3 Project relax in front of the communal TV.