

Company of Young Canadians Stress and Strength at Crystal Heights

The psychiatrist, a jovial-looking chap with a well-tanned face and curly grey sideburns, sat on a folding chair in front of the entire group. "You are being torn apart," he said pleasantly.

Dr. Noel Murphy was the man speaking. The 50 - odd faces before him looked a bit haggard. They belonged to the first training group of the Company of Young Canadians. The place was Crystal Cliffs, a secluded collection of buildings on eight acres of field and sand owned by St. Francis Xavier University near Antigonish, N.S.

Clark Gable once slept there. "There will always be stress involved," the psychiatrist continued. "There is always a danger in bringing people from a structured society into an unstructured society where there are no rules, no authority."

Stress. That was the word Dr. Murphy used.

One trainer and one CYC volunteer were in hospital in Antigonish for psychiatric treatment. Two more had been asked to leave the course on Dr. Murphy's recommendation - one of them, a boy, taking a third volunteer, a girl whom he wanted to marry. And a husband and wife, both volunteers, had left in the middle of the night taking their 4-year-old son - it was after the wife decided she had acquired the mental powers to induce diarrhea in others.

On top of that, there was talk of the whole thing being subverted by the Communists, of brain-bending drugs in the food (which was bad enough without any outside assistance), of water tax collectors who were really spies in disguise, and of people sent to Crystal Cliffs as plants, purpose unknown.

Stress. One trainer preferred to call it anxiety and more than a few of the volunteers thought they were going nuts.

It was all sort of a game, of course. Something called Sensitivity. Or a human relations laboratory. Or, more technically, it was a 10-day exercise in group dynamics and by the time the exercise ended in the second week of July, Crystal Cliffs' cup was running over with dynamics and the first CYC training class had taken shape as a cohesive group.

Prime Minister Lester Pearson announced the formation of CYC in April of last year. It was planned as an organization of young people who would serve, initially at home and later abroad depending upon the success of the program, in areas of social need where the CYC had been requested.

The young people who turned up in Crystal Cliffs had agreed to spend the next two years on a monthly salary of \$35 plus room and board, with a \$100 clothing allowance and \$2,500 project expense account - all included in an entire budget of little more than \$1,000,000. They arrived at Crystal Cliffs June 27 for a training course that ended in July.

They came from almost every field-university students, the odd high school drop-out, a shoe salesman, a draughtman, professional engineers, school teachers, a psychologist, a carpenter, a few professional youth workers, a candidate for the United Church ministry, a radio disc jockey, a bearded ex-Army lieutenant

who played the guitar, and a few people who did nothing; most of them between the ages of 18 and 22.

Perhaps four or five could be considered as coming from a beatnik milieu. The rest were as straight and middle class as church on Sunday, which nearly half of them attended regularly. (One boy and girl even drove 70 miles to find an Anglican service, only to arrive as the congregation was coming out.)

They all had one thing in common - they felt they had something to offer.

They were piqued at being called do-gooders. They resisted any label, both for themselves and for the Company. A few of them had a bit of trouble deciding whether they had joined to do more good for themselves or for others but only a very small handful had serious doubts on whether they could stick it out for the full two years.

But about the sensitivity business.

The human relations laboratory, as Dr. Murphy explained, was to stimulate conditions in the field, "to find out what the problems are in a community... to analyze directions between people with the emphasis on intra-personal relations." Or as one trainer put it more simply; to condense about 10 years of normal community life into 10 days.

It was to teach people to get along with other people. It was to make them more sensitive - get it? - to other people's problems and needs.

Similar laboratories have been used to train members of the U.S. Peace Corps (which brought a heated reaction from volunteers when it was compared to CYC) and groups for community and youth work or going in to assist Indians and Eskimos.

Usually there are no casualties, and even in the case of the Crystal Cliffs program, to put the spot-light on the six who did not make it and leave the rest in shadow would be to take things unfairly out of context.

The idea was to gather 56 young persons of widely diversified personalities and backgrounds (although most of them were Anglo-Saxon middle class) and throw them into an unstructured environment without any authority or supervision, without any rules or guidelines except for one implied instruction; that somehow they were to try to build some sort of cohesive community composed of themselves which operated not on majority rule but on consensus - unanimous agreement.

Such a task could be a big order for a unit as small as a family of four. But for a group of 56, many fresh out of high school, whose whole lives had been chock full of authority figures and discipline, it turned out to be a nerve-stretching experience.

The freedom was not exhilarating. It caused hang-ups... and grief.

The daily program was divided into three parts: a full Company meeting, where attempts were made to reach consensus on problems within the Crystal Cliffs community (such as laundry and rides to church and mice in the dormitories); and two training group sessions, where about a

How a group of young people tore each other emotionally apart in the interest of helping others during the first training course for the Company of Young Canadians, held in Nova Scotia last month.

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dozen volunteers sat around under the direction, or directed non - direction, of trainers and talked about anything, very similar to a group therapy confessional.

What one individual said, the other members of the T-group probed. If a person stood up to look out a window, or brought a package of peanuts with him to a session, or said he hated his mother, the others tried to analyze the action.

"It would have been very hard for anyone, no matter how experienced to avoid becoming involved," Dr. Murphy said.

Involvement. That was as big a word around Crystal Cliffs as stress. And there were other words; communicate, reaction, feedback (response), and one to describe all sorts of problems - bind, as in I-am-in-a-bind.

"It was a time for problems to come out," Dr. Murphy said. "And when they do, defenses fall and all sorts of insecurities are made apparent. I should point out that the psychiatric problems held by anyone taking this course would have come out eventually, either here or later."

Reverend Roger Roy, a trainer, Roman Catholic priest and adult educator from Montreal, put it this way: "No one had any specific duties, no one had any role to play within the group. This was very, very hard for young people who have a strong sense of identity. They became anxious. They would have been happier if they'd had a wall to run into. But then this was an education process and anxiety is inevitable as one moves from step to step."

The volunteers were not told what was going on, and the few who had been through human relations laboratories before kept silent. There is a story to the ones who went away. They can have names; Martha, Harry, Bob, Diane, Janet, Helen and a trainer called Fred.

Harry came from a slum and wanted to work with the Eskimos. He did not understand what was going on in the laboratory and felt uncomfortable because everyone in the company had accepted him and tried to make friends.

On the third day of the course, he posted a sheet of paper at the front of the room listing the problems he wanted the Company to discuss - masturbation, lesbianism, Negroes, Indians and Eskimos and so on - and a few of the volunteers, not knowing who was the author, criticized the semantics. They said Negroes and Indians should not be classed as problems. (CYC had three Negroes and one Indian).

Harry, who wanted something to fight, found what he wanted. While the volunteers sat in silence, he loosed a half-hour har-

angue. He described, colorfully his problems - how, for example, he had once had to indulge in homosexuality to stay alive - and he aimed most of his attack, for no apparent reason, at the trainer he called Smiley: Rev. Stanley Searle, a United Church minister from Tatamagouche, N.S.

The tension in the room was sticky.

Helen, a girl of 19, who unknown to the CYC selection board had undergone psychiatric treatment before she came to Crystal Cliffs, could take no more of it and ran out.

In her dormitory room, she began kicking over chairs and knocking things onto the floor. When one of the girls came in to ask the trouble, she said she wanted to get drunk, that she always get drunk when she was upset.

At that point, Martha came into the room. She was a strange wispy girl, plain, with rimless glasses, living apart from the rest in a sort of a strange reality of her own. First she said she would go to Antigonish and get drunk with Helen and then she rolled on to the bed laughing hysterically.

A third person joined the group; Harry. He stayed long enough to hold Martha's hand in silence for about three or four minutes while the two of them looked into each other's eyes.

about it. Her husband was threatening to come here and take her away. She didn't appreciate the laboratory. She felt threatened. She was like a yo-yo-in-and-out of the group. She couldn't quite understand it. Everyone was interested in Martha but she was preoccupied by her own problems. I have recommended she see a marriage counsellor."

About Helen?

"She was geared to failure. She felt that her efforts in the past had also led to failure and that she had failed here. She was terrified that I would send her home. She was out of contact with reality. Everything was amiss."

In hospital, Helen was kept under sedation and not allowed visitors. Dr. Murphy did not send her home.

The trainer called Fred was another clergyman. He had been the Company instructor on the day Harry sounded off. Stress got to him and the other trainers decided they should restrict him to his room.

One of the Company volunteers, looking for another trainer, came running into the staff quarters and found everyone, Fred included, sitting around a garbage can. In the can was a loose-leaf binder which Fred said contained his notes for the past eight years. "All gone," he said.

"No it's not," the volunteer said. "It's right there in the garbage can." Fred - in the jargon of Crystal Cliffs -- had a strong reaction. He threw it in the fireplace and set it ablaze. Later that day he went to hospital.

"He was tired psychologically," the psychiatrist said. "But the cleansing seemed to help him. Whatever was triggered off was beneficial to him as a person. Only, as an experienced person, he doesn't feel too good about it." He left hospital at the end of the laboratory.

Bob and Diane were married with a 4-year-old son. Bob was an artist, she was highly impressionable - and enter Lynn Curtis. Curtis is a he not a she. He is also a he with a strong personality.

He led the handful of radicals at Crystal Cliffs. Later he was elected chairman of the whole community. He also became convinced that some of the people at Crystal Cliffs were plants, persons sent to the community to promote stress and anxiety in the group.

Helen was taken to hospital that night. Dr. Murphy suggested Harry and Martha should leave two days later.

"The stress of the group removed the pressures Harry had built up over the years," Dr. Murphy said. "He was actually relieved when he left although the laboratory was a useful thing for him. It was the first time in his life that he was accepted so openly and so willingly by so many people. As a result, he had to create people to fight."

Janet went with him.

"He said Janet was the girl he loved. He also said he had a fiancée in Toronto and that he would marry an Eskimo woman to help him with his work." Dr. Murphy recommended that he have outpatient psychiatric treatment - paid for by CYC - once or twice a week for a period of about three months.

Martha's situation was more complicated. She came here physically separated from her husband but not emotionally separated from him. The problem was left unresolved when she came here and she felt guilty

It was Curtis who made the suggestion to Diane that the hallucination drug LSD was in the food. He was joking, of course, but Diane took it seriously.

On the fourth day she went around staring at people. Bating her eyelids. Looking vampish. "I can make you have a strong sexual response, can't I?"

"No," he said. But there was more to it than that. She suspected Vancouver writer Ted Poole, who had come to Crystal Cliffs as an interested observer and was nicknamed the carnivorous Marshmallow for some strange reason, of being the man who had come around to her house to collect water taxes. And she felt that by turning her stare, and her will, on people she could make them have diarrhea.

At 3 a. m. Bob decided that a longer stay in Crystal Cliffs would be harmful to his son. The family left, rucksacks on back, to hitchhike, somewhere.

Those who remained talked - and there was only one thing to talk about: those who had gone away. Trainer Arni Arason, on loan from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, announced to his T-group that he had "reached a plateau". It was time to ease the pressure. His group went out and played volleyball in the sun.

"If you are selecting dockworkers," Dr. Murphy said, "the job would be easy. But dockworkers are not what we're after. The fact that six have gone away does not throw me one little bit."

"I was surprised at the original selection but no matter what criteria was used, you are bound to get 10 to 12 per cent who will not make the grade. After all, where can you pick 60 perfectly stable human beings? How do you select a group of people with the guarantee that some won't fall flat, fall badly on their faces when confronted with stress?"

"I asked in particular how one or two people slipped through. But it's pretty hard to tell in Ottawa from the performance of people (on the criteria of selection) how they will perform here. I think a psychiatric examination would be valuable in selection and the nearer the actual beginning of the course that it is given, the better."

Dr. Murphy, who works in the Antigonish hospital and is also attached to St. Francis Xavier University, said he was asked to



A group training session during the ten-course for young people of the Company of Young Canadians. Everybody took part, everybody was analyzed but not everybody survived. One who did was Lynn Curtis, 24, is the son of a Vancouver school principal. Before coming to the Company of Young Canadians, he attended the University of British Columbia for a year and University of Victoria, another year, and spent his summers with the civil rights and peace movements in the United States.

stand by and assist the community on the fourth day of the laboratory.

The volunteers, before they were accepted, filled out a detailed application form and sat through four hours of psychological tests. Dr. Murphy said he was aware of parts of the training program and some of the selection criteria last spring. "I did not give any advice because I did not consider it my role," he said. "I did not want to interfere in this community."

And the people who stayed? Antigonish did not know what to make of them. Some residents thought they belonged to the U.S. Peace Corps. There were rumors in town of drunken parties in Crystal Cliffs and sex orgies beyond description.

It was not like that, in fact, pick any run-of-the-mill patriotic Canadian off the street and bring him into Crystal Cliffs for a look and he would have concluded there was still hope for his country if this was the calibre of people who could be attracted to a project like CYC.

The volunteers' concern was the responsibility each member felt for the others in the Company. There was group anxiety until they were assured that the people who went away would be looked after and - more important - that they were still members of CYC and would always be welcomed back.

There were persons like Teri McLuhan, CYC's secretary and the daughter of University of Toronto professor Marshall McLuhan, who spent almost all her time at Crystal Cliffs looking out for the people who were feeling the pressures.

The volunteers were aware that a Globe and Mail reporter and photographer were present for the whole laboratory. They even threw a party for photographer John McNeill when he left.

And Russell Alcorn, minister of the Antigonish United Church and a trainer. He made everyone his responsibility. "When you look at Russ," one of the volunteers said, "you see the real meaning of Christianity. There's nothing phony about what he believes in."

Bill Currie was the same way. He is young, in his early 20s, not a trainer but a member of the staff, and he had this sensitivity. When one member of the group was unhappy, he was unhappy.

"But look, said a CYC member, 'you people from the newspaper have seen things here, under this stress, which aren't going to bring a very positive reaction from the people who read about it. But if we can't stand your criticism, we won't be able to stand the criticism of the people we go out to work with. Go ahead and tell everything you see.'"

Okay, so there were parties, one or two. And there was drinking, a little bit, by a very few. So where young people get together, where aren't there parties and drinking? Sensitivity was only part of the training, anyway.

But by the time the laboratory ended, the Company had learned to reach consensus - almost easily. They could sort out the unimportant problems (mice in the dormitories) from the important (how to govern themselves).

They could operate a canteen on the honor system. No store-keeper: just a bowl to put money in and \$600 worth of cigarettes, candy and soft drinks lying around. "The only store I could never rob," said Lynn Curtis.

After the 10-day human relations laboratory ended, Profes-

or Desmond Connor of St. Francis Xavier University, a social scientist, took over for the next 10 days to give a course in community development.

A New Zealander, Dr. Connor started out in life as a farmer. He has a degree in soil conservation from the agriculture college in Guelph. Then he decided that it was more challenging to develop good people than good soil and went off to Cornell University to get a master's degree and doctorate in the behavioral sciences.

In 1956, he evolved his own training program and he has the distinction of training 16 U. S. Peace Corps groups -- more than any other person - as well as groups for Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO) and the Department of Northern Affairs.

"The idea," he said, "is not to teach any greybeard course. What I wanted to do was create a self-teaching group. The isolation here is good for it. (Crystal Cliffs is eight miles from Antigonish and visitors were discouraged.) Someone at the university offered the Company a television set. I said, no, no, unless they wanted one." No one did.

AIMS OF THE COURSE

He had four aims to his course: to teach the volunteers to be community observers, to teach them how to diagnose community problems, to teach them strategy in community development and to teach them how to stimulate community development.

"When I start, I have a group of school teachers, social workers, experts from other fields. What I try to finish up with is a crystallized single unit."

"In the strategy of community development, the volunteers must become a resource to any community which requests them. They must be a source of information.

For example, in a group I worked with in Halifax last year there were 400 adults wanting some sort of retraining but 75 per cent of them were not aware any program of this sort existed in Canada.

"In community stimulus, they've got to avoid becoming too involved in middle class methods. If you want to get information to a community, you don't put out a mimeographed news letter. You use individual contact - the corner store, or the older woman who might serve as a clearing house for information.

"The volunteers can't go into a community like college boys - great talkers and paper men. Often they will have to prove themselves by working along with the people they want to help."

He used films illustrating community problems and had the Company analyze them. He brought in Rocky Jones, a Negro (whose wife is a CYC volunteer) working on the Nova Scotia project, a community assistance program in the Halifax slums.

He gave the Company a skills survey to find out what members had knowledge of such things as carpentry and construction work and house painting, and he had them teaching others.

And there were a few days of learning about the cultures of the Indians and Eskimos, of picking up a bit of the language. Not much in total, only a month. But when it was over, the Company of Young Canadians, the first wave, was as ready as it would ever be to go out and become... involved.

Clark Gable? Crystal Cliffs was once a resort, very exclusive. It has the right setting: rich, green highlands, the sea, a lagoon, beaches. Clark Gable was there as a guest. No one knew when, exactly, but it excited some of the girls.



Swinging in a chair tied to a rope dangling from a tree was just another way of letting off steam, during a training course for the Company of Young Canadians held at a former plush resort on the coast of Nova Scotia in July. More than a few of the volunteers thought they were going nuts during the 10-day exercise in group dynamics. Fifty-six young people came to Crystal Cliffs, but seven of them (one, a trainer) fell victim to the strain of human probing.



"You are being torn apart," Dr. Noel Murphy tells the CYC's first training session, in which the object was to condense about 10 years of normal community life into 10 days.