

be paid in the life-style of our industrialized, stressed and computerized society. The Addiction Research Foundation of Ontario, which is funded by the provincial government, has an on-going research study into the persons who inhabit "Skid Row." They are also looking at other heavy drinkers. For many with serious problems are holding down responsible and well-paid jobs.

Drink not criminal

ARFO came up with a solution to the problem, which was in sharp contrast to previous ones. Dr. David Archibald, executive director of the Foundation explained: "There has been a considerable growth in recent years of willingness on the part of many to consider alcohol abuse as a public health rather than a criminal matter.

"Society has now reached the point at which steps can be taken to help the offender to break out of his drinking-arrest-jail-drinking cycle by providing an alternative to jail."

The end to what has become known as the Revolving Door Syndrome is now in sight. The foundation has set up a network of 15 detoxification centres in Ontario which handle many cases of drunkenness picked up by the police. They cater for women, too.

"In these a person can recover from the immediate effects of inebriation in a warm and non-punitive atmosphere where he is encouraged to take a hopeful view of his problem and to begin to seek ways of dealing with it," said Dr. Archibald.

In 1971 the Canadian Liquor Control Act was amended to permit a police officer to take a person drunk in a public place to a "detox" centre instead of charging him. Usually the drunk has to agree to go there — the essence of the experiment is that there is no compulsion. For the Foundation had found that the Revolving Door procedure of shunting persistent drunken offenders in and out of jail or courts did not solve the problem, was of no help to the offender — and therefore was a waste of taxpayers' money. Often the general health of the drunks was quite good, so that they were also wasting expensive hospital and medical facilities if taken into the casualty departments.

Following the amendment to the law, a pilot project started up in Ontario. This proved that the "detox" philosophy was effective. Social worker, Mr. William McClure, who works in the Ottawa detoxification centre, summed up the findings. "We found that the centres didn't cost a whole lot of money, they met the crises, people recovered calmly from their intoxication, and only a small percentage needed high-priced medical help."

What is the approach to the drunk who perhaps might be abusive, shouting or singing when he arrives on the doorstep? How, I asked, would I be treated if I arrived drunk at his centre? Mr McClure, explained in the easy, relaxed voice that one of his recovery unit assistants would

use: "You would be invited into a room where there would be other people in varying states of drunkenness, invited to sit down, and offered refreshment. You would be treated like a human being instead of as a drunk.

"Soon you will realise that there is a whole bunch of other guys like you in varying stages of intoxication — some of them will be in bed. You are treated as though you are a person who has an acute illness. "You will be asked: 'How are you feeling?' Gradually, as you come to grow more confident in your new surroundings and enter into the general chat and conversation, one of the staff may come over and talk to you. They are not doctors nor are they social workers. The staff are what you might call trained amateurs — on the paid staff of the centre — who have a cool, calm attitude to crisis and want to help others. They use a 'talk-down' technique to draw out the patients problems which is therapeutic in itself."

In the early "detox" centres doctors and nurses were used to talk out the patients' problems, but they did not get a true response because of their professional relationship.

"I might ask where you were when the police picked you up, how you feel about being brought here, but there would be no detailed questions at this stage. You would be told you were free to leave, but since the police would probably pick you up again, you would be invited to stay the night. We would telephone your wife or a relation to explain where you were — but only if you wanted us to."

The centres have sleeping accommodation, showers, recreation and dining room — residents share in preparing meals, and other chores.

Sobering-up stage

"The next day, even though you are still not feeling right, you will be given breakfast and coffee and other meals with some of the other people who may have been there for two or three days already. This sobering-up stage maybe takes about 48 hours.

"After this a member of the staff might say to you: 'now, you've been here four times in one month. What are you going to do about the problem? Instead of going home and maybe getting drunk again, why not go to one of the half-way houses for four to six months — there will be no cost?' We might even re-train you for another job. Alternatively, we might help you get a room with welfare assistance if you have no accommodation." It might take seven visits to the centre, sometimes, before the person starts to tackle his problem.

The "detox" centres work closely with Alcoholics Anonymous. The sobered-up drunk would be invited, if he really wants to kick the drink habit, to go to an AA meeting. It may be he will go with a couple of the other alcoholics at the centre he has become friendly with in the last few days. They would have been attending meetings

already and have told the man that AA was helping them overcome the illness.

Significantly, this gentle, guiding hand emphasising self-determination and self-help seems to be having a much bigger effect on the province's drink problems than the punitive fist of the law.

"I would say that about 20 per cent of the people do attempt to make a choice in terms of accepting some follow-up help for themselves," said Mr. McClure. A small percentage needed medical help and were admitted to the local general hospital with which every "detox" centre is linked.

Positive results

The pioneers of this approach to drunkenness in the big cities are not approaching the problem so much in terms of curing people of drinking, though that may be useful. Rather, they aim to improve the problem, to enable people to control their drinking excesses that result in them falling into the hands of the law. Of course, not all the clients at the "detox" centres are brought by the police. Some inebriated former residents often find their own way to the centres!

"Although it is difficult to talk about a cure, I think that a lot of people recover from alcoholism among the thousands so far treated in Ontario; exactly how many, is being carefully researched at present," he said.

Costs of the "treatment" are surprisingly low. It costs \$9 — \$13 (£4 — £6) per day for each resident. Although the Ottawa centre has been going for less than a year, already there are signs that it is having an effect on the bottom five per cent of alcohol victims — the hard-core "Skid Row" inhabitants. Three of the worst alcoholics have now been sober for about six months. Others are showing encouraging signs. It is limited but certain progress among the toughest alcoholic group.

In other centres, too, it is early days to assess the long-term results statistically — but there appears to be confirmation that the system is working. Inspector Jack Marks of the Metropolitan Toronto Police, who has co-operated in the Foundation's scheme to set up centres there, says it is essential to get the drunks out of jail and into a rehabilitation programme.

"Even those that aren't helped much can at least be treated in a more humane way," he said. "Who knows? Maybe, after a few trips to the "detox," somebody there will be able to reach even those cases."

Already there is an encouraging bonus from the scheme. In 1971 there were 28 suicide attempts in Toronto — 23 of the people involved were charged with alcohol offences. "Out of thousands of these persons we've taken to "detox" units there's never been an attempted suicide," said Inspector Marks. Police, doctors and social workers agree: detoxification centres represent a better way of handling alcoholics.