

**WIL LOU GRAY OPPORTUNITY SCHOOL
AD HOC COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF APRIL 23, 1997 MEETING**

The ad hoc committee to study strategies for increased enrollment at Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School met for a scheduled meeting in the Research and Training Center on April 23, 1997, at 2:00 p.m. Present were Dr. Louise Scott, Mrs. Clotilda Diggs, Dr. Marvin Efron, Mr. Russell Hart, Mrs. Sandra Franklin, Mr. Al Butler, and Dr. Mary Catherine Norwood.

Dr. Scott gave a brief background of the Opportunity School, the mission of the school, and the type students we serve.

Dr. Norwood said the school has evolved over a period of years and has gradually shifted to serving different populations. We see a declining approach to us in terms of at-risk youth. We suspect that most of that is related to the fact that more school districts are doing more things to try to retrieve dropouts and to provide alternatives to suspension or expulsion. Parents are reluctant to send their children away from home unless that is a last resort for them. However, we see our population of students in those coming to us shifting in composition. Over the last few years we have had younger students, 15 and 16 year olds, where in the past, the greater population of students was 17 and 18 year olds. She said we receive many inquiries about serving younger students. Some of these inquiries come from John de la Howe School regarding students they cannot serve in that age range. Apparently we could draw the conclusion from those inquiries that many youngsters are getting into difficulty and needing other services at an even earlier age in the State of South Carolina. Dr. Norwood said she thinks this reflects that more students are getting into trouble at the middle school level.

She further explained we have traditionally served fewer women than men in our programs. Dr. Norwood said she felt there was a less need for services to younger females. The population has also changed in its racial composition among the male students.

Dr. Norwood said we have developed a number of programs. We feel certain we have a variety of services available that are planned for the students we currently serve. We seem to have an adequate number of inquiries and applications at this time but we are not maintaining maximum capacity. We currently have 15 day students.

Dr. Norwood said any agency/institution needs to always look to the future and how to meet the needs that evolve.

Mrs. Diggs felt we are looking at a shift of purpose and composition. She said we want to retrieve dropouts and retain the population that is already in-house

and possibly appeal to a younger population.

Dr. Norwood explained how we are presently recruiting students as follows:

- Calling on schools
- Calling on social service agencies throughout the state
- Exhibiting
- Visits are given in the homes upon request
- Tours are given at the school
- Communicate with superintendents, principals, guidance counselors, and target those groups for exhibits
- Various groups use our facilities and learn about Wil Lou Gray.

In the past we have worked with VR, Midlands Tec, and DSS. Recently, we have looked in terms of working with the new welfare act. We have a Memorandum of Agreement with DSS but have not received any applicants through them. We also have a child care facility available on campus.

In further discussing strategies to increase enrollment, the committee made the following recommendations:

- Require all boarding students to enroll in the JROTC program. However, Dr. Norwood indicated that additional students in JROTC would require another instructor.
- Accept 14 year olds and house 14 and 15 year olds in the same dorm.
- Work with DJJ and the court to identify at-risk students with them
- Get students before they reach the court system. DJJ may have students that show possibility of rehabilitation. Dr. Norwood she talked with DJJ and they feel they have students who could be more appropriately served. These students are under their jurisdiction and we have regular holiday breaks and they see that as a deturant. Dr. Norwood asked them if they had appropriate students would they consider staffing the breaks? DJJ students' problem may be as simple as truancy, home rebellion, or parents just can't manage the child.
- Consult with SC School for Deaf and Blind. Dr. Efron said SCSDB has let schools know they have short term placement. They also have an outreach program. They contract with school districts throughout the state. He said Wil Lou Gray could contract with school districts to bring students here to improve reading skills, etc. and then the students would be sent back to public schools. Also, he recommended in small school districts we could send some of our staff to the school districts to help them.
- Develop a Student Council or Student Government. Dr. Norwood said we have a lot of turnover and this has not been too successful in the past.
- Need more extracurricular activities to involve students.
- Review our programs we have to offer and see what we have to attract students.

- Review the different types of students WLGOS would like to serve. Do we want to continue serving at-risk students, serve disabled students, serve students who have not passed the exit exam in their school district, or serve younger students? (At this time, Dr. Norwood said, according to board policy and legislative proviso, WLGOS is locked into serving students 15 years of age or older).
- In reference to day students, increasing acceptance of drug use among young people, Dr. Norwood said this is hard to control. Additional day student enrollment is not encouraged.
- Before the next ad hoc committee meeting, the committee could contact school districts about their needs that we can meet.
- Continue to have WLG student ambassadors appear in public schools to inform them of WLGOS.
- Continue to mail admission packets and posters to high schools and middle schools.
- Dr. Efron informed the committee that John de la Howe has a sale every Saturday of crafts made by their students. Dr. Norwood said we could recruit our local master gardeners through the Extension Service because we have the green house on campus.
- Review our vocational courses and advertise students could be certified in those areas. Most students are going from school to work rather than continuing their education.
- Offer second languages.
- Host the legislative delegation. Send the WLGOS brochure to all legislators.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 21, 1997, at 12:00 noon in the private dining room of the WLGOS cafeteria.

The committee adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,



Clotilda Diggs, Chair
Ad Hoc Committee

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