

Training school's image unchanged

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COBOURG — Barred windows, concrete walls, tasteless food, tight-lipped teachers and barren rooms — that is the image many people have of training schools.

That image, however, is no longer true, says Joe Slaven, superintendent of Brookside Training School in Cobourg. There are no bars at Brookside. The wards of the school live in modern residences with private rooms, stereos and large colour televisions. Their food is prepared by professional chefs and the administration

offices are in an elegant old mansion that was once the summer home of wealthy Americans from Pittsburg. A stream twists among the old trees on the 40-acre site too.

"Training schools still have a bad reputation," Mr. Slaven said in a recent interview. "But they don't deserve it."

Brookside is one of 10 training schools in Ontario. Boys and girls, aged 13 to 17, are committed for offences such as breaking and entering, theft and assault.

"The children are sent here for committing an offence that, if committed by an adult, would cause the

adult to be charged," said Mr. Slaven.

A friendly, white-haired man with a deeply-lined face, Mr. Slaven has worked in training schools for the past 21 years. He said the number of children being sent to training schools in the province is decreasing.

"We have 56 boys now," he said. "Back in '57 we had as many as 250 kids." With its staff of 75 now, the school has a capacity of 115 children. Mr. Slaven said it cost about \$70 a day to keep a child at Brookside. If the school were filled, he said, it would cost about \$50 a day.

There were a number of

reasons for the decline in children being sent to the school. Probably the most important, he said, was the repeal last year of section eight of the Training School Act.

"Under section eight, any parent could have their children sent to a training school. Many children were sent to training school for not attending school regularly." He shakes his head. "It must make a lot of the children who were sent to training schools then cynical about the good it did them."

Another reason fewer children are now sent to training schools is because

there are more alternatives to the schools. Many delinquent boys, he said, are now sent to community and foster homes and some, with severe emotional problems, are sent to psychiatric treatment centres.

A third reason for the decline is that judges are becoming reluctant to send children to training schools, said Mr. Slaven.

The decrease in students has both advantages and disadvantages. "It's meant the staff has fewer children to look after, but the ones we do have right now have a lot more emotional problems. They require a lot more supervision." The children are "under 14-hour-a-day care," said Mr. Slaven.

Despite this, he said, there are still problems. The grounds are not fenced and some children run away.

"We've had a lot of children running away from here. There will always be a

child running from a training school." About 40 students were allowed to go home for Christmas, he said. All but two returned, he said one came back on his own the day after he was supposed to and the other was arrested in Picton.

"We have a responsibility type program. The limits are set by the children. If we sent 40 out and 20 don't return, we obviously won't send as many out the next time," Mr. Slaven said.

Because the children are, in many cases, responsible for themselves, Mr. Slaven said there is always the chance some will commit suicide.

"There have been no attempted suicides. Certainly the children threaten it. The lines in his face deepen. "It's one thing you live in fear of."

"We have a full case history on each child, so we have an idea who might be capable of it."

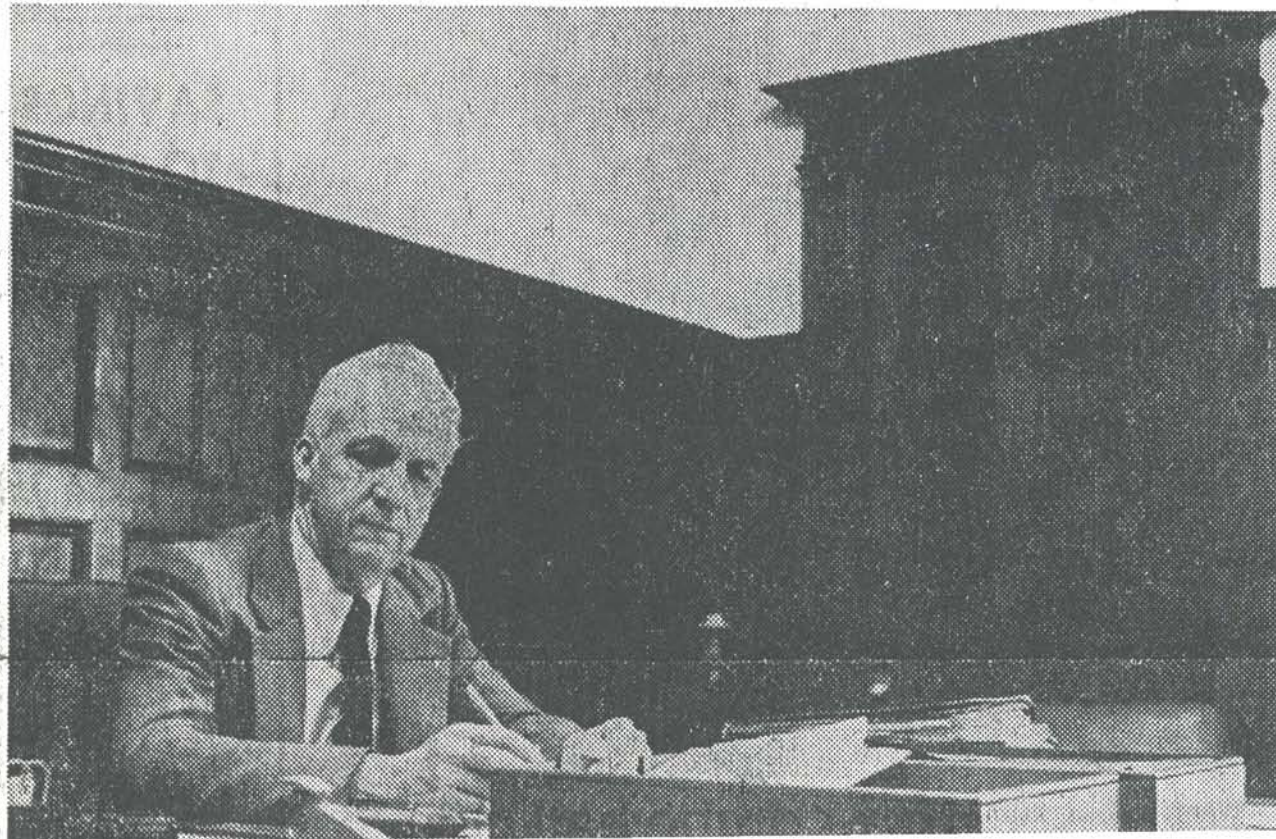
School not right for all

COBOURG (Staff) — Despite all the screening and testing, some children are still placed in training schools even though they don't belong in them, Joe Slaven, superintendent of Brookside Training School here says.

Duane Taylor was one such student, he said. Mr. Taylor was sentenced last week to four years in jail for attempting to rape a four-year-old girl last summer. Throughout the trial it was repeated that few centres

Children who are constantly unmanageable are given what Mr. Slaven calls "the ultimate punishment in the school — the dissociation rooms."

The three rooms measure about five feet by six feet each. The grey concrete block walls are bare. The rooms are empty except for a bed and in the middle room there is only a mattress. "That's so a child doesn't hurt himself if he's really upset," Mr. Slaven says, pointing at the plastic



Superintendent Joe Slaven in school's office

Teach life skills and basics

COBOURG (Staff) — If a student at the Brookside Training School here turns his attitudes around, he can be back in the community within seven months, says Joe Slaven, superintendent of the school.

He said all the wards of the school go through four stages during their time at Brookside. The first lasts for a month. During that time the children are supervised constantly. Their performance is reviewed at the end of the month and, if it's satisfactory, they're allowed to go to the second stage. This stage lasts two months. During it the children are allowed to walk the grounds alone to and from classes.

In the third stage, they're allowed to go home on weekends. During the fourth stage, they're released from the school. Mr. Slaven said it takes about seven months for a student to complete the stages.

Mr. Slaven said he thinks the program helps training schools fulfill their purpose. Asked what their purpose was, he said: "To provide an opportunity for a boy or girl to be removed from their home, their community,

their problems and be given a chance here, with the help of the clinical staff and supervisory staff, to re-establish their values, and, hopefully, make the change that will allow them to return to their community."

Harry McHugh, assistant superintendent of the school, agreed with Mr. Slaven.

"The kids have it a lot better here than they would at a regular school," said Mr. McHugh. An energetic man with an engaging smile, he entered a classroom where four or five students sat at desks and discussed the National Enquirer's predictions for 1978. Most scoffed at a suggestion that Telly Savalas will grow hair, while Farrah Fawcett-Majors will lose hers.

"That's one of the life skills classes," said Mr. McHugh. The children attend regular classes in the morning and in the afternoon, attend classes to learn such things as managing their money, woodworking and cooking.

Eric Carleton, the school's principal, said the courses are accepted by the provincial governments as equivalent to regular school. "We teach basic math,

English and Canadian studies," he said. In addition to school, the children have a wide variety of leisure activities to choose from, said Mr. Carleton.

One of the school's students, taking time out from his woodworking class, agreed with Mr. Carleton. "You couldn't ask for a better (training) school in Ontario," he said. He was thin and tall for his 13 years.

"I've been here for 10 months," he said. "I ran in September, plus I failed four review boards," he said, explaining the length of his stay. He said he spent seven months in the security cottage. "I had a problem with other boys. I was getting into too much trouble."

He said he was sent to the school for breaking and entering "and other things I don't want to discuss because they're too bad." He said he'd probably leave the school next month. "I finally made it. I think I've come a long way."

Peter Nicholas, Brookside's chief social worker, said the boy had improved, despite the fact his parents would not come to the school for counselling

with their son.

Mr. Nicholas, who's been at the school for six and a half years, said he, or one of the school's three social workers, tries to meet the parents of all the children.

"What tends to happen," he said, "is the parents are afraid to get involved. They're afraid we'll label them as bad parents or something."

Mr. Nicholas said most parents are middle-class, though there are wealthy and poor ones. Most, he said, have one common characteristic: they have difficulty controlling their children.

He said most parents also do one of two things: they underprotect or overprotect their children.

Both he and Mr. McHugh agreed that training schools are necessary. "But maybe," said Mr. Nicholas, "it's time to change the name."

Mr. McHugh agreed. "Training school does have a connotation of brutality. But if anybody says they wouldn't send their child to a training school, it's because they don't know what it (the school) has to offer."

Mr. Slaven said the 17-year-old was at a baseball game in Warsaw with a supervisor when the attempted rape occurred. At the trial in Peterborough, a psychologist testified Mr. Taylor's intelligence was only slightly higher than that of a mentally retarded person. The psychologist said Mr. Taylor would probably attempt another rape if he were freed.

Mr. Slaven said the youth had been in and out of foster homes and training schools since 1969. None, he said, had been able to give Mr. Taylor proper treatment.

"He was certainly not a child who belonged in a training school. Duane had a very serious emotional problem and he should have been in a treatment centre," Mr. Slaven said.

The youth was sent to Brookside as a last resort, he said.

"We still have a small group of children here who would be better off in treatment centres. It is frustrating to have that type of child here because we can't treat them properly," he said.

"We have one security cottage for the high-risk children," said Mr. Slaven. Children who are uncooperative, or who regularly break the rules are sent to the cottage, he said. Most stay for about a week. There are now seven children in the cottage he said.

"We review their cases once a week, and most are let out then."

While in the cottage, the children are constantly supervised, he said.

ed in the heavy metal doors. "They're kept in there no longer than 10 to 12 hours," he said. "They go in there and think things out. They're checked on every 15 minutes to make sure they don't harm themselves." He said the rooms are often empty for weeks.

If any of the children constantly cause trouble, the first step in disciplining them is to do a behavior report on them. Mr. Slaven said the report describes in detail the prohibited behavior of the child. When a child is given a BR, as they're called by the students, he discusses it with an administrator.

As Mr. Slaven walked back to his office from the dissociation rooms, he passed two boys of about 15. They were waiting in a hallway for an appointment with a member of the administration. One of the boys, thin with curly black hair, sat on a hard chair. He looked morose. "I just got a BR," he said to his friend. He smiled thinly. "I stole an extra piece of butter at dinner."

His friend, a short boy with long, blonde hair, smiled: "That's not so bad. Don't worry."

The blonde boy was asked how he like Brookside.

"It's a hole," he said quickly. Then he smiled. "No. It's not so bad. The only bad things are not being able to smoke and not being able to go downtown."

But, said Mr. Slaven, the children are allowed to go downtown. "When they are in the second stage (of rehabilitation), they can leave the school grounds with their parents on weekends.

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