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Vincent Hagel
Western Washington University

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karums inside

by Larry Katz

We here in the Karums Collective not only work with one another, but we also work with kids. All of the kids we work with have been busted; most of the kids we work with come from broken homes, and their parents are either very poor or non-existent. In 1974, the only way society could deal with these kids was to lock them up so they do not cause trouble. Once a kid's been locked up the first time, chances of the kid being locked up again are pretty good. When a kid's been locked up twice, the chances become greater that the kid will be locked up a third time. Some of these kids break laws; for some the only crime is being under 18 with shitty parents.

The big question is what to do with these kids. A lot of people who are in "kid business" believe that dealing with kids is just a matter of having proper facilities, properly trained people and continuously growing funds from outside sources. Some people believe that handling kids is simply a matter of caring about kids enough to want to take care of them. We do not believe that either of these

two outlooks is sufficient. Good intentions alone are very seldom successful in helping kids learn what they have to know to make it in the world.

The standards and criteria used to determine "qualified personnel," the type of facilities usually extended and the source of money invariably leads to a situation that is not only non-productive in terms for working with youngsters, but is, in many cases, destructive. For example, a person with a doctorate working within an institutional setting costing millions of dollars of state and federal money, usually creates a situation of high dehumanization, insensitivity and invariably breeds a big business atmosphere of dishonesty and distrust. Meanwhile, the question still persists — "What can be done with these kids?" Meanwhile the excuse remains: "Certainly what is being done is not the answer; however, it is better than nothing at all."

For those of us here at the Karum School, this answer is simply not good enough.

UP FROM SECURITY RISK

Kids usually come to the Karum School weighted down with labels of all sorts and descriptions. They are often times runaways from very undesirable circumstances. They come "institutionalized" — usually geared to tell us pretty much what they think we want to hear. Most of them have spent time on the streets and attempted to "get by" on what little they know with the help of what friends they thought they could rely on. For little boys, this usually means eventually falling in with "rip-off" artists because at 15 they cannot get a job even if they had the skills. For little girls, this usually means using their bodies as a means of staying alive. For this reason most of the little boys come to us with records. This means they have been arrested, heard in a juvenile court and found guilty of some sort of crime — usually larceny or auto theft. Little girls usually come to us with diseases. They are usually picked up for incorrigibility or runaway and are involved in various forms of what are called sexual deviancies. By the time

we get them, the little boys are usually pretty calloused, and the little girls are invariably in pretty poor health. They have been processed by institutions which are extremely sexist and which have taught the boys to be "tough guys" in the classic Cagney tradition, and the little girls that it is desirable to be "young ladies" much in the Ida Lupino tradition. Needless to say, the best that has been done to them is emotional homicide.

Kids who model themselves after the worst that society has to offer — kids with values that will keep them getting busted for the rest of their lives — kids who are sad, lonely, miserable, fucked-up and locked-up. These are the kids we work with in the Karum School.

WORK IS LOVE MADE VISIBLE

The Karum School is run by people who are part of the Karums Collective. The Karums Collective is an organization of people who have managed to stay together for over four years on trust, determination, care, love and a lot of hard work. We are addressing ourselves in this article to those people who share our concern for young people, particularly kids in trouble, and who are interested in the alternatives available for these kids. The collective and the school have been established as two separate legal entities. However, the same driving force and philosophy characteristic of the collective are integral parts of the Karum Group School. Much of this force is based on four basic philosophies:

1. Work as love made visible.
2. Experience as learning.
3. Honesty by example.
4. Alternative as a genius life-style.

Let us explore each of these.

Work as love made visible is a genuine working phenomenon at Karums. Those non-residents who have participated in the Karums work experience are aware of the unique nature of work and how it is done here. Far from being the source of alienation which is so commonly the case in Western society, work in the Karums Collective is a means of communicating, understanding and building relationships with one another and our environment. Our experience of work is not that it brings us closer to God, but rather that it brings us closer to one another. Our experience of work is not that work is a means to salvation, but rather it is a process, an experience and an end unto itself. For those who are literate enough to understand Calvinism, it is obvious

from the outside

by Pam Dwight

Just northeast of Bellingham, in Everson, there is a combined collective and school situated on 63 acres of tilled and forested land. My task in visiting this place was to "find out about it."

On approaching the Karum Group, via the gravel driveway, I passed by an animal shelter with pastures before it, a brand new stable almost hidden behind trees, and a car garage, surrounded by imported cars like BMWs and Mercedes Benzs.

At the end of the drive is a cluster of buildings, the actual living and teaching quarters of the Karum Collective and Karum Group School. Of that gathering of buildings, a "Geodesic Dome" imprinted an image of "new," of "different" of, "change" on my subconscious. After seeing the remaining portions of the grounds, which included two gardens, more pasture lands, kennels and fields of corn and grains, I decided that this *collective* was just like any other very small farm, except for the dome. (Not too many families live in domes).

So what was the big deal? The difference, I was informed, was the fact that all of the materials were either paid for by the members of the group or contributed by outside sources. The Karum students and staff built every building, hoed every garden and dug every ditch. Mutual cooperation is an asset of the collective and school. However, they accepted assistance from neighbors and other friends as a last resort.

There are two definite entities within the group, the Karum Group School and the Karum Collective. The purpose of the school is to "deal" with "juvenile delinquents," whom I found to be polite, gentle and amusing, though a bit cautious. Those kids live in what appeared to be an extremely structured situation of work, entailing mutual cooperation and classes, instructing them toward "emancipation." From observation, I found that trust and a genuine fondness for one another were important. There were no locks to be found anywhere. I was told that locks just weren't necessary. Does the school "rejuvenate delinquents?" It's too soon to tell. I can only say that I saw members of the staff attempting to "deal" with students. But, what's more, the students were actively trying to participate with the group in return.

The collective is a communal life-style for eight staff members. The staff are the leaders and examples for the kids of the school. They exercise a non-intoxication manner to help kids. Three of the staff members expressed pleasure in the kids' energetic involvement with the collective. But from what I could observe, the staff was pretty energetic in their own right. How else could such a place have been designed and constructed in a matter of months?

I made the mistake of asking a member how and why he chose to be a part of an alternative life style. I was quickly informed that no one chose to be in the group, it just happened! Well, happening or not, it's new for them; it's an alternate way.

that our approach to work is certainly not Calvinistic. Those who are well read in Marxist philosophy, particularly early Marx, may find similarities there in what we are doing.

How do we relate this rather progressive and radical idea to kids? Kids, by and large, have more politically very conservative values. Our peer group (aged 21-30) may appear to have politically radical values, but the ability of our peer group to live these values and to implement genuine change through work is very limited. It is, perhaps, for this reason that "Collective" as a living idea and a realistic alternative in the United States is all but dead. Kids, on the other hand, are much more flexible in

their own thing," the choices legally and technically are ours and not theirs to make. This practical reality may come as quite a shock to old school liberals, but it is, nonetheless, the truth. Until age 18, someone, somewhere, holds ownership papers on these kids; and we do not absolve ourselves from that responsibility by refusing to recognize that this is so. It makes little difference whether or not we see this as desirable; this is how things are.

We feel a tremendous amount of responsibility for youngsters in the Karum School. We feel the responsibility to teach them and to help them go through their growth changes. Youngsters have a lot of energy. In

most cases they require only a little positive direction to pick things up. The youngsters in the Karum School learn quickly and work hard. The only security provision that we have is trust. We have no locked doors; we have no fences; we have no physical restraints normally associated with facilities that work with juvenile delinquents or kids in trouble. We maintain a non-intoxicant environment which makes it nice and legal and gives us a lot of integrity when we talk to kids.

Work as love, made visible, is realized in the Karum School by allowing youngsters the opportunity to experience the philosophy of work by following the examples lived by the staff. This provides youngsters in the school with the unique opportunity to participate and get involved in a genuine working collective. Thus, youngsters learn by experience a highly desirable way to spend time working cooperatively with one another and with us. They learn to do jobs by listening to the information provided and following the example of those who know how to perform the jobs. Our integrity as people and as staff members is always on the line. Honesty by example — do as we do. Youngsters internalize values when they experience them and see other people experiencing them — people enjoying one another, people building together from values that facilitate this process. A kid, like anyone else, wants to feel good, feel close and feel good about what he/she is doing. This applies even to kids who the courts have decided are delinquents. Kids at the Karum School have been overheard to say, "I feel good and enjoy myself in spite of myself."

REASONS WHY

1. I would like to stay with the Karum Group.
Why: Because I see my self one or two years from now being emancipated, and to do that I feel I need to learn a whole lot more about me self and other importend things about life. And I want to start taking life more serious than I have been. And I feel that the people here can help me. Also I would like to prove to my self and to others my abilities and that I can make it.
I am tired of the life I've been leading. I feel that it is about time that I get my shit together and grow up and take better care of myself.
2. I really don't want to be locked up but if I can't be where I feel I can make it I would take my chances on the streets.

15 Year Old Karum Member

terms of their ability to adjust both mentally and physically. Kids have a lot of energy: they can either expend that energy running from cops or expend that energy building and learning skills.

This brings us to the classic cop-out most commonly used to justify the failure of liberal educators when confronted with the inability of radical teaching approaches to communicate alternative values and the implementation of an alternative life-style. The classic rationale is, "Children are individuals, entitled to the same rights as anyone else; and the fact that they can't realize radical values is simply the result of the fact that they are doing their own thing and no failure on our part. We have no right to interfere." This is pure bullshit. With regard to the rights of kids as individuals to "do

LETTER TO A PROBATION OFFICER

Dear P.O.,

I thank you for giving me a chance with my life. I have wanted to change for a long time but no one ever game me a chance until now. I have had a great time here with people I can trust and are willing to help me. I am still fucked up but getting better.

I an learning about my self and other things that are importend in my life. I am in class now and I like my schedule. I feel I am willing to learn something for my self.

Thank You,
15 Year Old Karum Member