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PREDICTION OF RUNAWAY EPISODES FROM
COMMUNITY-BASED TREATMENT FACILITIES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
APPROVAL PAGE.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES.....	iv
INTRODUCTION	
The Scope and Nature of the Runaway Problem.....	1
Characteristics of the Runaway.....	3
The Runaway Episode.....	5
Motivating Factors.....	8
Running Away From Residential Institutions.....	10
Running Away From Community-Based Treatment Facilities: A Statement of the Problem.....	11
METHOD	
Setting.....	18
Subjects.....	18
Procedure.....	18
RESULTS.....	21
DISCUSSION.....	28
REFERENCES.....	33
APPENDICES	
A. INITIAL PREDICTION POST CARD.....	36
B. TRACKING SHEET.....	37
C. FOLLOW-UP POST CARD.....	38
D. FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS.....	39

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Incidence of Runaways.....	Page 21
Table 2. Number of Runaway Episodes Per Youth.....	Page 22

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Percentage of runaways who returned within one day, within one week, within one month, and after one month.....	Page 24
Figure 2. Number of runaway episodes which occurred each month....	Page 26
Figure 3. Mode of return to the group home following a runaway episode.....	Page 27

INTRODUCTION

The Scope and Nature of the Runaway Problem

Estimates on the incidence of running away in the United States indicate that the magnitude of the runaway problem has reached "epidemic proportions" (Brennan, Blanchard, Huizinga, and Elliott, 1975). In 1969, approximately 500,000 youths under the age of 17 left home without the consent of their parents (Ambrosino, 1971). Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics indicate that between 1967 and 1972 there was a greater than 70% increase in the number of runaways (Brennan, et al., 1975). Based on a survey of youth in the Denver area, Brennan, et al. (1975) estimated that the incidence of running away is between two and four percent of the youth population. The same study estimated that four to seven percent of households with children between the ages of 10 and 17 (youth households) contain a runaway. This estimate agrees closely with data obtained by a nationwide sample of households conducted by Opinion Research Corporation for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (June, 1976). Based on telephone interviews with heads of households, the incidence of overnight runaways was found to be 1.7% of youths aged 10 - 17 and 3.0% of youth households.

Hildebrand (1963) has reported that in 1960 there were 5,067 runaways reported to the New York City Police Department. Since arrest statistics underestimate the actual number of runaways, these figures may not represent the full magnitude of the runaway problem (Shellow, 1967; Hildebrand, 1963). A National Health Survey has estimated that one out of every 10 non-institutionalized youths in the United States between the ages of 12 and 17 has run away from home at least once. This represents approximately 2.3 million youths (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, March 31, 1976).

While there has yet been no empirical research on the dangers which runaways face, the problems encountered by youths in their efforts to survive on their own have been documented by a number of authors. Based on interviews with runaways, Bock and English (1973), Ambrosino (1971), and Wein (1970) have described the lifestyle of runaways in large metropolitan areas. Obtaining food and shelter is an ever present problem for the runaway. Relying on halfway houses, churches, or handouts from strangers, the runaway may suffer from hunger and malnutrition (Ambrosino, 1971). It is not uncommon for the runaway to resort to prostitution, stealing, panhandling, or drug pushing to acquire food and shelter (Bock and English, 1973; Ambrosino, 1971; and Wein, 1970).

A lack of skills combined with the difficulties involved in obtaining the necessary legal papers make finding legitimate employment difficult, if not impossible, for the runaway (Ambrosino, 1971). Child labor laws in most states require anyone under the age of 18 to have working papers (Beaser, 1975). To receive an employment permit, a youth must have proof of age and in many cases s/he must also have forms signed by the school as well as the employer. While the intention of the legal statutes is to protect the minor, they make legal employment an impossibility for most runaways (Ambrosino, 1971).

The unavailability of jobs combined with a fear of discovery and a shortage of money, food, and shelter severely limit the survival options of runaways. In their efforts to survive, these youths are often exploited or victimized (Brennan, et al., 1975; Bock and English, 1973; and Wein, 1970). Incidents such as the mass murders in Houston in 1973 have aroused public concern with regard to the dangers faced by young transients (Brennan, et al., 1975 and Brennan, Brewington, and Walker, 1974). The result has been new funding and legislation aimed at providing local services for runaways (Brennan, et al., 1975). In light of

this increase in funding for runaway services, it is important to note that the majority of runaways do not seek help from traditional agencies (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, March 31, 1976). Brennan, et al. (1975) reported that relatives and friends were most frequently used as sources of help by runaways in the Denver area.

According to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (March 31, 1976), a major reason for this failure to use community resources is a lack of knowledge about the existence or availability of services. Beaser (1975) has found that the legal status of runaways serves to alienate them from institutions established to meet their needs. While the statutes are vague and vary from state to state, generally youths cannot attend school in jurisdictions outside that of their parents or guardian, cannot receive medical attention without parental permission, and cannot secure employment without a legal permit. The problem is further complicated by laws which place adults such as child care workers, employers, and physicians in legal jeopardy for assisting a runaway without the consent of the parents or guardian (Beaser, 1975).

Characteristics of the Runaway

According to Ambrosino (1971), the average age of runaways is 15. Tobias (1970) reports that most runaways are 15 and 16 years old. A number of sources have reported approximately equal numbers of male and female runaways (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, June 1976; Ambrosino, 1971; Tobias, 1970; and Hildebrand, 1963). However, based on a trend toward a more rapid increase in the female runaway rate, Ambrosino (1971) projects that females will soon represent a majority of runaways. In a study of runaways reported to the New York Police Department in 1960, Hildebrand (1963) notes that while males and females in his sample ran away in equal numbers until age 14 to 15, a change

occurred at age 16. The number of males leaving home at age 16 sharply declined, while the number of females leaving home at age 16 showed a slight increase. At age 17, the males showed a continued decline in the number of runaways, but the trend for females was sharply upward.

A large portion of the runaway literature deals with the personality characteristics of the runaway as compared to the non-runaway. Several studies have found that runaway youths have lower self-concepts than non-runaway youths (Brennan, et al., 1975; Levinson and Mezei, 1970; Shinohara and Jenkins, 1967; and Leventhal, 1964). On the other hand, Goldmeir and Dean (1973) found that both runaways and non-runaways had reasonably high self-concepts. This discrepancy may be due, in part, to the fact that their sample was taken from adolescents living in a relatively affluent suburban county. In a study of runaways from a girls' home, non-runaways were found to be greater risk-takers than runaways (Kessler and Wieland, 1970). Results from MMPI tests given to three groups of delinquent males in a training school revealed that runaways lacked good masculine identification and had a poor self-image (Shinohara and Jenkins, 1967). They were also found to be less decisive and less frank than a group of "socialized delinquents" (whose delinquent behavior consisted of cooperative stealing, gang activity, and association with other delinquents) and a group of "unsocialized aggressive delinquents" (whose delinquent behavior involved fighting, bullying, defiance, and destructiveness).

The relationship between self-concept and control of external forces has been studied by Leventhal (1963). Based on data collected from interviews with runaways and non-runaways, he suggests that running away is related to a perceived lack of control in various aspects of the runaway's life. According to Leventhal, the runaway group showed a marked overconcern with loss of control

and ego surrender and some reality distortion which are suggestive of prepsychotic functioning. In another study, Leventhal (1964) developed a scale for rating the degree of "inner control-uncontrol." When this scale was applied to the interview data of a group of runaways and non-runaways, runaways were found to have significantly more inner uncontrol. Inner uncontrol is manifested in higher levels of "impulsivity" and more frequent "direct behavioral expressions of aggression" according to Leventhal. He also found that self-destructive acts such as suicide were more frequent among the runaways.

Runners have also been found to be more delinquent than non-runners. Based on data obtained from questionnaires which were administered to a sample of households known to have experienced a runaway during the last year and a control sample of households in the Denver area, Brennan, et al. (1975) reported that petty theft, vandalism, beating up other people, gang fighting, joy riding, all forms of drug taking, and drug selling were more frequent among runaways than non-runaways. Brennan, et al. (1975) also reported that the frequency of delinquent behaviors which occurred during a runaway episode was higher than the frequency of delinquent behaviors committed by the non-runaways during a 12 month time period. Occurrences of auto theft, drug use, and drug sale were especially high in the runaway sample as compared to the control sample.

The Runaway Episode

Brennan, et al. (1975) reported that runaways occur most frequently in the month of June. Higher than average frequencies also occurred in March and September. September has been reported by Tobias (1970) as the month with the highest incidence of runaways. A statistical survey done by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, (June, 1976) found that the months of February through May tended to have the lowest rates of running away with only slight differences

in runaway rates occurring during June through January. Shellow (1967), on the other hand, reports little seasonal variation in the frequency of runaway episodes although his findings indicated a slightly higher incidence in the spring. These discrepant findings may simply reflect differences in the climates where the studies were conducted.

Regardless of the time of year in which they occur, runaway episodes, as a general rule, are characteristically impulsive and poorly planned. According to Shellow (1967), many runaways leave home without food, money, or extra clothing and have made no arrangements for shelter. Brennan, et al. (1975) found that approximately 70% of the runaways in their sample were not planned.

Runaways are as likely to run away with companions as alone (Shellow, 1967; Brennan, et al., 1975). The duration of the absence varies with the age of the runaway. Through age 12, the runaway is usually absent from home one day or less (Hildebrand, 1963; Brennan, et al., 1975). The tendency to stay away from home for more than one day begins at age 13 and increases with age. Brennan, et al. (1975) found that 46% of the 10 - 13 year olds were home within one day, 25% of the 13 - 14 year olds were back home in this time, and only 13% of the 16 plus year olds were home in this time. Reportedly, half of all runners were home within three days and about two-thirds were home within a week. Approximately 10% of the runaway youths were absent for longer than one month. Tobias (1970) has shown that 41% of the runaways in his sample of suburban middle class male adolescents returned home within one day. Results of a nationwide survey of 13,942 youth households conducted by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, (June, 1976) showed that four out of ten runaways sampled were gone one day or less and seven in ten returned in less than a week.

The majority of runaways remain close to home (Shellow, 1967; Tobias 1970; Brennan, et al., 1975). Both Brennan, et al. (1975) and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (1976) report that over 50% of the runaways in their respective studies traveled fewer than 10 miles from home. According to Gold (1970) and a study of missing juveniles in Minneapolis (Community Health and Welfare Council, 1969), boys are more likely to leave their home town than girls.

There is some disagreement concerning the mode of return of the runaway to his/her home. Brennan, et al. (1975), Gold (1970), and Shellow (1967) found that 40 to 50% of the runaways in their respective studies returned on their own. Brennan, et al. (1975) further reported that older youths were slightly more likely to return on their own than younger youths. However, among the missing juveniles studied in Minneapolis, (Community Health and Welfare Council, 1969) the majority of younger runaways returned home of their own volition while the majority of older runaways were apprehended. Youths who do not return on their own are located by parents, police, and friends or relatives according to Brennan, et al. (1975). The effectiveness of each of these three groups in locating runaways was reported as about equal.

Parent-report data obtained by Brennan, et al. (1975) indicated that approximately 50% of his runaway sample are reported as having only one runaway episode in the 12 month period prior to the interview. However, youth-report data suggested that most of the runaway youths had been away from home two or three times during the preceding 12 months. Both parent and youth reports indicated that a minority of runaways had run more than three times. In addition, the repeat rate was found to remain stable across age (Brennan, et al., 1975). However, according to Hildebrand (1963), the males in his sample reached a peak runaway frequency between the ages of 13 and 15 and showed a decline thereafter. Because Hildebrand's study was based on police records, the decline in runaway rate for males after the age of 15 may reflect a tendency for the parents not to report

the absences of older males. The runaway rate for females, which was reported by Hildebrand (1963) to increase after the age of 14, may be the result of a greater tendency for parents to report missing daughters as these adolescents reach sexual maturity.

Motivating Factors

In general, earlier runaway research approached the reasons and motives for running away from two perspectives: 1) running away as an indication of individual psychopathology and, 2) running away as an adaptive response to situational pressures (Brennan, et al., 1975). Shellow (1967) maintains that these discrepant viewpoints are the result of samples taken from different populations of runaways. Studies of runaways sent to juvenile courts, clinics used by courts, and police or correctional institutions tend to report findings of delinquent and psychologically disturbed youngsters (Shinohara and Jenkins, 1967; Rosenwald and Mayer, 1967; Hildebrand, 1963; Chamberlin, 1960). Studies based on runaway samples taken from non-correctional sources more frequently viewed runaway behavior as a healthy, adaptive response to an intolerable situation (Bock and English, 1973; Goldmeier and Dean, 1973; Ambrosino, 1971; and Wein, 1970).

Numerous studies have produced results which suggest that running away behavior is related to family conflict (Brennan, et al., 1975; Goldmeier and Dean, 1973; Bock and English, 1973; Ambrosino, 1971; Baer, 1970; Shellow, 1967; Hildebrand, 1963, and Foster, 1963). Goldmeier and Dean (1973) found that the runaways in their sample were more likely to have had an unhappy relationship with their parents and to feel that they were unfairly punished more often than non-runaways. Brennan, et al. (1975) found that the families of runaways were characterized by: 1) more frequent use of social isolation as a form of punishment, 2) a higher incidence of marital conflict, 3) a lower tolerance for deviance

in the youth, 4) lower levels of overt praise and affection, 5) higher levels of punishment through making the youth feel bad or rejected, and 6) more indulgence. In addition, runaways were reported to experience more expressive rejection and feel significantly more negative labeling by parents than non-runaways (Brennan, et al., 1975).

Family breakdown has also been found to be related to running away. Goldmeier and Dean (1973) report that runaways are more likely than non-runaways to come from homes where one parent is absent. Similarly, Shellow (1967) and Foster (1963) have reported that runaways are more likely to come from a broken or reconstituted family than non-runaways.

Problems at school have also been shown to be closely related to running away. Shellow (1967) found that runaways were absent from school more often, had lower grades, and were more likely to have been retained at a grade level than were non-runaways. Because these characteristics were more true of the male runaways than the female runaways, Shellow suggests that boys are more likely than girls to run away because of school problems.

Questionnaire results from a study by Goldmeier and Dean (1973) indicated a number of differences between runaways and non-runaways in the area of school performance. Runaways tended to have lower grades, less interest in school, more difficulty getting along with school counselors, and less interest in a college education. Additionally, Brennan, et al. (1975) have reported that the school relationships of runaways are characterized by less involvement, a lack of interest in being involved, low academic expectations, low aspirations, negative labeling by teachers, and highly negative attitudes toward school.

There is some evidence to suggest that runaway behavior is affected by peer relationships. According to Brennan, et al. (1975), runaways spend more time with their peers than non-runaways. Additionally, the peers of runaways have

higher levels of delinquent behavior and runaways experience more peer pressure towards deviance than do non-runaways. Goldmeier (1973) has suggested that runaways are more likely than non-runaways to turn to peers for help when in trouble.

Running Away From Residential Institutions

While the bulk of the runaway literature deals with running away from the natural home, several studies have considered the problem of running away from residential treatment institutions. A study by Haupt and Offord (1972) compared groups of male runaways and non-runaways and female runaways and non-runaways from a residential treatment facility for emotionally disturbed and delinquent youths. They found that the average runaway ran three times and was gone for approximately two days each time. While boys ran most often in the fall and winter, girls were more likely to run in the spring and summer. Male runaways scored higher on a hardship scale of social dislocation, physical and sexual abuse, were from a higher economic strata, and had higher IQ's than did male non-runners. The reverse was true for female runners and non-runners.

O'Connor (1973) has also compared runaways with non-runaways at a correctional school. Results indicated that runaways were older and had greater experience in running away before commitment than did a control group of non-runaways. The runaway was found to be more likely to fail on parole, to be less flexible in making adjustments, to have fewer outlets for self-expression, and to be more interested in physical activity than the non-runaway.

Research on 74 runaways at the Illinois State Training School for Boys (Levine, 1963) showed that whites, returnees, and youths from rural communities were more likely to run than blacks, youths committed for the first time, or youths from urban areas. Scores on the Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale did not support the hypothesis that the disproportionate number of runaways who had

been institutionalized fewer than 30 days was the result of anxiety about being separated from the family. Youths committed for "escapist offenses" such as drug and alcohol use were found to be more likely to run than those committed for assault.

In examining the reasons for running away from residential treatment facilities, Chamberlin (1960) considered the case of a 14 year old male who ran away several times while undergoing psychotherapy at a state hospital. According to his analysis, running away meets four needs: 1) the need for independence, 2) the need to express aggression toward authorities, 3) the need to be loved, and 4) the need for self-esteem. Levy (1972), who has also considered the problem of running away from residential treatment facilities, has also offered several reasons for the behavior: 1) defiance, 2) "psychotic disorganization," 3) a desire for independence, and 4) a need for fusion with parents. In a study of boys who ran from "approved schools," Green and Martin (1973) found no evidence to support the hypothesis that running away is a learned behavior. However, their findings did reveal a relationship between running away and the circumstances surrounding admission.

Running Away From Community-Based Treatment Facilities: A Statement of the Problem

In 1967, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice affirmed that institutions had failed to meet the needs of juvenile offenders. The Commission recommended that community-based programs be developed as major treatment alternatives for juvenile offenders on the grounds that these programs are less costly than institutionalization and are at least as effective if not more effective in reducing recidivism (President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, 1967).

In a preliminary report on residential programs for juveniles in the United States, Vinter, Downs, and Hall (1967) defined community-based residential programs as facilities which handle from five to thirty adjudicated juvenile offenders. Located in urban areas, these group homes are distinguished from institutions by their location in the community which enables the youths to attend local schools and secure local employment. As an alternative to institutionalization, the community-based approach provides an opportunity for youths to receive treatment within the context of their families, schools, and communities.

One of the treatment models developed for group homes is called the Teaching-Family model (Phillips, Phillips, Fixsen, and Wolf, 1974). The treatment program in Teaching-Family homes is administered by a trained couple (called teaching-parents) who live in a home with five to eight youths. The teaching-parents provide 24-hour-a-day care and supervision in addition to training and instruction aimed at correcting the behavioral deficits which led to the youths' presenting problems. Weekend visits to their natural homes enable the youths to work on parent-child relationships with the aid of the teaching-parents. Working closely with each youth's teachers, probation counselor, and other involved agency personnel, the teaching-parents coordinate a comprehensive treatment program.

The treatment program, as it is implemented by the teaching-parents, consists of four basic components: 1) a motivation system in which points and privileges are earned or lost based on the youth's behaviors, 2) teaching of social, self-care, maintenance, and academic skills, 3) a self-government system which enables the youths to take part in making decisions about the

treatment program, and 4) family style living with an emphasis on the development of close and lasting relationships.

Throughout the United States, there is a growing interest in community-based programs in general and the Teaching-Family program in particular. The total number of community-based facilities has greatly increased since the late 1960's. According to Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) census data, from 1971 to 1973 there was a 73% increase in the number of youths assigned to state-run community treatment programs. Projected increases in the number of Teaching-Family homes across the nation indicate that 52 new group homes will be added in 1976 bringing the total number of Teaching-Family homes to 112 (Teaching-Family Newsletter, October, 1976).

Despite this increase in the number of community-based programs, current research has not yet considered the problem of running away behavior from the perspective of the community-based residential treatment facility. Running away incidents are of particular concern to those involved in the creation, administration, and implementation of group homes for several reasons. First, the runaway episode is a fairly common event in the group home setting. The Bringing It All Back Home (BIABH) Project has collected some preliminary data on runaways from eight Teaching-Family homes in western North Carolina. Results indicated that during a twenty-two month period, the combined number of runaway episodes from eight group homes was approximately four per month. The estimated incidence of running away ranged from a high of 48% of the youths served in one home to a low of 5.5% of the youths served in another home (Bringing It All Back Home Project, 1975).

This relatively high incidence of runaway episodes is probably related

to the number of youths admitted who have a prior history of running away. The BIABH pilot study revealed that the mean number of runaway episodes per youth prior to placement in the group home was 3.7 for those who ran away after entering the program (Bringing It All Back Home Project, 1975). Furthermore, the non-punitive, non-secure treatment environment which has been created in the group homes for the purpose of effecting behavioral changes creates a situation which makes running away one alternative for resisting such change.

A second concern with regard to running away from community-based facilities is centered around the generally disruptive effect which the episodes have on the homes in which they occur. According to the pilot study, the average runaway remained absent from the home 5.5 days (Bringing It All Back Home Project, 1975). For those youths who remain in the group home, the cohesiveness of the therapeutic family unit is altered by the prolonged absence of one or more family members. Furthermore, the runaway episode affects the absent youth in that it obviates his/her active contact with intended treatment for the problems which led to his/her admission to the group home.

Third, running away often places the youth involved in social, physical, or legal jeopardy. Results from the BIABH study indicated that 57% of those youths who eventually returned to the group home had had some contact with the juvenile court authorities during their runaway episode. Seventeen percent went to court as a result of the running episode, and 15% were detained in jail (Bringing It All Back Home Project, 1975). In addition to his/her probable contact with the juvenile court, the runaway is likely to engage in

behavior such as unrestrained sexual activity, drug use, and a variety of illegal activities all of which invite untoward personal consequences. As a result, running away frequently results in the youth being removed from the group home setting. Approximately 20% of the runaways in the BIABH sample did not return to the group home and 45% of those youths who did not return to the group home were sent to training school (Bringing It All Back Home Project, 1975).

Finally, because the group home is dependent upon local resources for services, financial support, and referrals, the home's relationship with the community plays an important role in the success or failure of the program. Running away episodes and their accompanying activities undermine this relationship in that they reflect badly on the homes from which the youths ran.

The detrimental effects of runaway behavior on the youth as well as on the community-based treatment program point to a need for the development of effective intervention strategies which will reduce the frequency of running episodes. Intervention strategies designed to decrease the probability that a runaway will occur can be categorized roughly as follows: 1) on-going treatment strategies, 2) post-runaway strategies (consequences), and 3) crisis intervention strategies.

On-going strategies which are built into the group home treatment program are intended to reduce the probability that a runaway will occur. For example, individual and group counseling, which is a component of many existing treatment programs, can be used to help a youth understand the real-life consequences of running away and to explore alternative solutions to his/her problems. Role playing is another treatment strategy which can be used

to reduce the likelihood of a runaway by introducing new alternative behaviors into a youth's repertoire through the use of behavior rehearsal. A third strategy for minimizing the frequency of runaway episodes in a non-secure community-based facility is to make the group home a pleasant and fun place to be.

Unfortunately, with the exception of strategies aimed at creating a pleasant treatment environment, on-going intervention strategies have the potential for contributing to an increase in runaway episodes. Frequent discussions of running away which occur in the context of counseling and role playing may, in fact, prompt youths to run away.

When a runaway episode has occurred, post-runaway strategies are used to decrease the probability that this behavior will occur in the future. Included among intervention strategies for dealing with runaway behavior after it has occurred are: 1) a reduction in available privileges, 2) counseling directed toward helping the youth see the relationship between his/her behavior and the consequences which occur as a result of that behavior, and 3) reducing the reinforcement which a youth receives for running away by minimizing the attention that s/he may receive as a result of the episode.

In light of the limitations in both the on-going and post-runaway intervention strategies, it would seem advantageous to focus on the development of crisis intervention strategies which can be used just prior to an imminent runaway episode. The use of any crisis intervention strategy is, however, dependent upon the teaching-parent's ability to anticipate the runaway attempt. Once a probable runaway has been accurately anticipated, intervention techniques can be applied to divert the incident.

It will be the purpose of this study to determine the extent to which trained professional teaching-parents are able to predict the occurrence of runaway behavior. Descriptive and situational variables which prior research indicates may be related to the problem of running away as it relates to community-based residential treatment facilities will also be analyzed. Data will be collected on the incidence, duration, and disposition of the runaway episode in addition to the predictability. If runaways can be reliably predicted, then there will be an attempt to determine which factors (youth behaviors, stimulus circumstances, etc.) are the most accurate predictors of runaway behavior. The usefulness of the results of research in the area of crisis intervention techniques is dependent upon a relatively high prediction rate. Therefore, if runaway behavior cannot be reliably predicted, then future research in this area will focus on the development of procedures to train the necessary prediction skills.

Setting

Data were collected from nine Teaching-Family group homes which comprise the Bringing It All Back Home (BIABH) Project. Each home is designed to provide community-based, family-style treatment for youths between the ages of ten and sixteen who are in danger of being, or who have been, removed from their natural homes because of severe behavior problems. These youths have been classified emotionally disturbed, pre-delinquent, undisciplined, delinquent, or educably retarded. A pattern of academic failure, theft, truancy, drug abuse, defiance, aggression, and running away is characteristic.

Subjects

The subjects were 12 teaching-parent couples who had each received 60 hours of pre-service training in principles of behavior, community-based treatment facilities, motivation systems, describing behavior and providing rationales, teaching, working with teachers and agency personnel, family-style living, establishing a self-government system, individual and group counseling, psychological, behavioral, and administrative record keeping, public relations, and special problems (such as drugs, alcohol, sex, etc.).

Procedure

In order to avoid including trivial absences in the sample, a youth was not counted as a runaway unless s/he was absent without permission eight hours or more. For the purpose of this study, a youth was considered a runaway if: 1) the youth left the group home without the permission of the teaching-parents and was gone eight hours or more, 2) the youth left the group

home with permission, but did not return within eight hours of the specified time of return, 3) the youth left his/her natural, foster, or other home during an authorized visit without the permission of the parents or guardians and was gone eight hours or more, 4) the youth left his/her foster, natural, or other home with permission, but did not return within eight hours of the specified time of return, or 5) the youth left school without permission and was gone eight hours or more.

Information on the incidence, predictability, duration, and outcome of runaway episodes was collected from the teaching-parents during a 12 month period between February 1976 and February 1977. In order to minimize the effort required of the teaching-parents, a post card reporting system was used. The teaching-parents were asked to fill out and mail a preaddressed stamped post card as soon as they had reason to believe a youth might run away. This Initial Prediction Post Card (see Appendix A) asked whether the youth would probably run within one hour, within 24 hours, or after 24 hours but within five days. In addition, the degree to which the teaching-parents were confident about their prediction was measured by asking them to express their confidence in the prediction using a percentage from 0 to 100. To avoid hampering the effectiveness of the treatment program, teaching-parents were cautioned that their runaway prediction should not affect any efforts to prevent a runaway from occurring through the use of available intervention techniques such as counseling, role playing, point consequences, or family conference.

After the Initial Prediction Post Card had been completed and mailed, teaching-parents recorded any changes in their prediction on a Tracking Sheet (see Appendix B). An entry was made on the Tracking Sheet when there was a

change in either the teaching-parents' percent certainty or their reasons for the prediction. The Tracking Sheet was terminated when the percent certainty reached zero, or the youth ran away, or at the end of five days, whichever came first.

Upon termination of the Tracking Sheet, notification of whether or not the youth ran was done by way of a Follow-Up Post Card (see Appendix C) which was filled out and mailed together with the Tracking Sheet. Included on the Follow-Up Post Card was information regarding the date and time of the runaway if it occurred and the intervention techniques that were used to prevent the runaway. In order to determine the number of runaways that occurred but were not predicted, a Follow-Up Post Card was sent when any runaway occurred from the group home.

Outcome information on predicted as well as unpredicted runaway episodes was obtained by telephone to minimize the number of forms which had to be completed. Upon receipt of the Follow-Up Post Card, the teaching-parents were contacted to determine whether or not the runaway had been found. If the runaway had been located, teaching-parents were asked whether or not the youth returned to the group home, what happened to the youth while s/he was gone, and the in-home consequences, if any, upon his/her return (see Appendix D). If the youth had not yet been located, the teaching-parents were called periodically until either the youth was found or was released from the group home after a two week absence.

RESULTS

Incidence

As shown in Table 1, 34 out of 132 youths served by nine group homes ran away at least once. The percentage of youths served who ran away at least once averaged 25.8% and ranged from a low of 7.7% in one group home to a high of 50.0% in another home.

Table 1

Incidence of Runaways

GROUP HOME	NUMBER YOUTHS SERVED	NUMBER RUNAWAY YOUTHS	% YOUTHS SERVED WHO RAN AWAY
Phoenix-boys	10	5	50.0
Agape	9	3	33.3
Youth House	25	7	28.0
Landship	26	7	26.9
Horizon	15	4	26.7
Boys Town	4	1	25.0
Reflections	18	4	22.2
Phoenix-girls	12	2	16.7
Copper Kettle	13	1	7.7
Total	132	34	$\bar{x} = 25.8$

The 34 runaway youths ran a total of 52 times. Table 2 indicates that 22 or 65% of the runaways ran only one time. Twenty-one percent of the runaways ran twice, 12% ran away three times, and 3% ran away four times.

Table 2
Number of Runaway Episodes Per Youth

SEX	NUMBER OF TIMES YOUTH RAN AWAY				TOTAL NUMBER RUNAWAY EPISODES
	1	2	3	4	
Female	13	3	3	0	28
Male	9	4	1	1	24
Total	22	7	4	1	52
%	65	21	12	3	

Predictability

Despite the relatively high incidence of running away, trained professional teaching-parents accurately predicted only 17% (9) of the runaway episodes. Eighty-three percent (43) of the runaways were not predicted by the teaching-parents. And, while 18 runaway predictions were made, only 9 (50%) were accurate. Fifty percent of the teaching-parent predictions were false in that they were not followed by a runaway episode.

In order to determine the extent to which successful predictions are related to teaching-parent experience, a point-biserial coefficient of correlation was computed between success in predicting and the length of time the teaching-parents had been on the job at the time the runaway occurred. The resulting correlation was .58 and can be considered a large effect size ($t = 6.33$, $df = 50$, $p < 0.001$) (Cohen, 1969). Thus, while accurate runaway prediction rates were poor in general, there was a tendency toward improvement with experience.

An examination of the teaching-parents' confidence in their predictions shows that their certainty about an anticipated runaway was slightly higher for correct predictions than false predictions ($r_{PB} = .40$). For those predictions which were in fact followed by a runaway, the percent certainty reported by teaching-parents ranged from a low of 50% to a high of 90%. Certainties about those predictions which were not followed by a runaway episode ranged from a low of 25% to a high of 80%.

Once a runaway prediction had been made, the most frequently used method of intervention was counseling. To a lesser degree, teaching-parents also used teaching, family conference, points, role playing, and contracts. Physical restraint was not used as an intervention technique.

Because the number of accurate predictions was so small (9), it is difficult to determine what factors were used successfully in predicting a runaway. However, accurate predictions were most frequently (in four out of nine successful predictions) based on the fact that the youth had recently experienced an aversive consequence in the group home such as a large fine and/or a loss of privileges. Other factors which were used as a basis for the initial prediction included youths being in school or the group home against their will, youth verbal behavior, and a call from school regarding a youth who had skipped class.

Duration

Fig. 1 shows the duration of the runaways' absence. Thirty-six percent of all runaways returned within one day, 40.4% returned within one week, 19.2% returned within one month, and 3.8% were gone longer than one month. The tendency to be absent longer than one day increased with age. Seventy

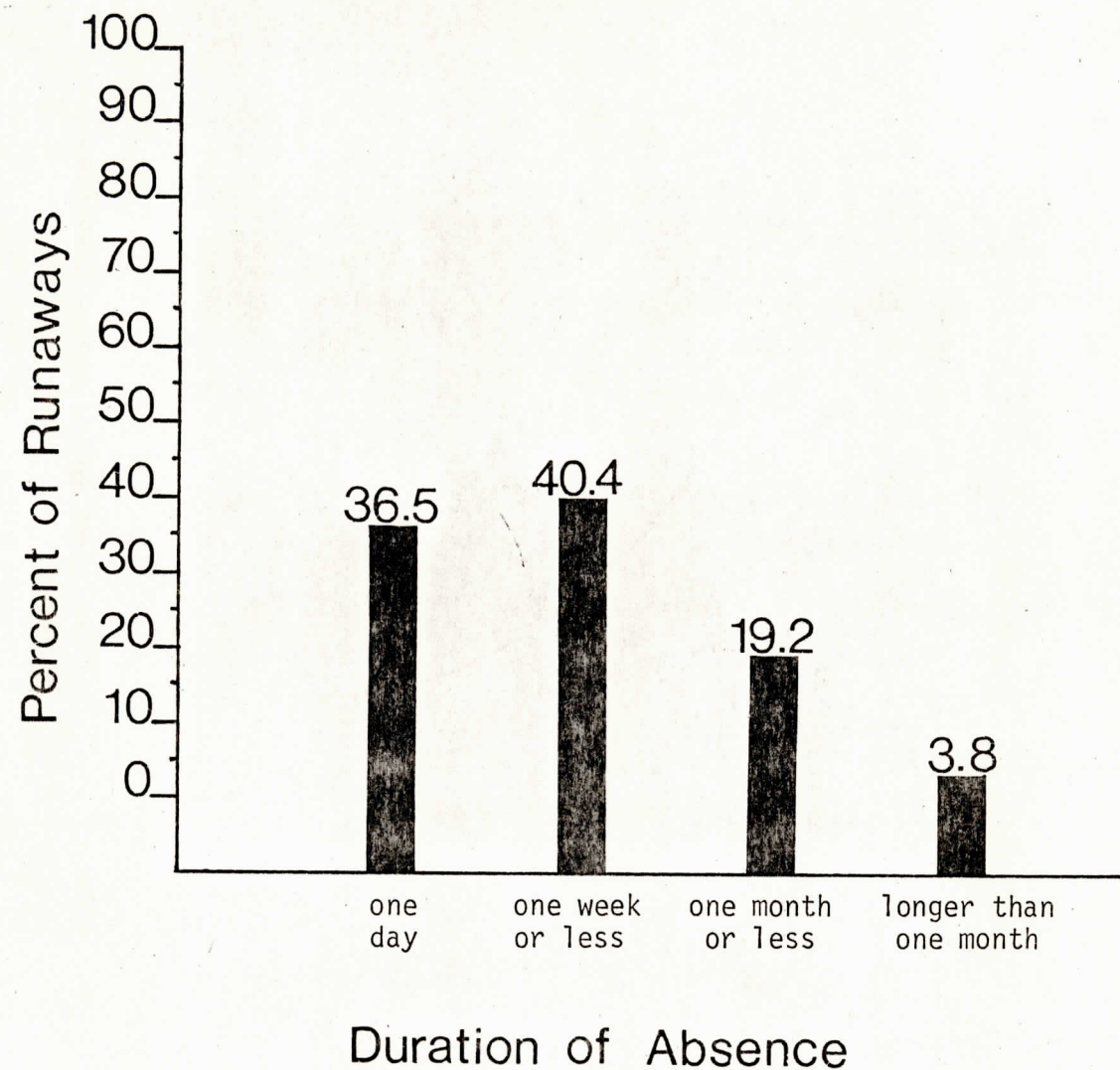


Fig. 1. The percentage of runaways who returned within one day, within one week, within one month, and after one month.

percent of all runaways between the ages of 12 and 13 returned within one day, while only 30% of the 14-15 year olds and none of the 16 year olds returned within this period of time.

Statistically significant differences were found between the mean age of male and female runaways. The mean age at the time of the runaway was 13.9 years for males and 14.6 years for females ($t = 2.71$, $df = 50$, $p < .01$). The mean duration of the runaway episode was 3.54 days for males and 7.25 days for females. Due to the large variance in the length of absence for each group, these differences were not significant ($t = 1.41$, $df = 50$, $p > .1$).

As can be seen from Fig. 2, more runaways occurred in March than any other month. A greater than average number of runaways also occurred in the months of May and June.

Disposition

Follow-up data collected on each runaway episode shows that 77% of the runaways returned or were returned to the group home. Of the 23% of the runaways who did not return to the group home, 11.5% were sent to training school and 11.5% were sent home. As shown in Fig. 3, 45% of the runaways who returned to the group home were brought back by the police and 30% of the runaways came back on their own. Irrespective of whether the runaway episode resulted in the youth's return to the group home, 60% of all runaways were detained in jail and/or went to court as a result of running away.

Out of 52 runaway episodes, there were only three dangerous incidents reported to the teaching-parents. These incidents included an attempted suicide, driving under the influence of alcohol, and a sprained ankle as a result of almost falling into a well.

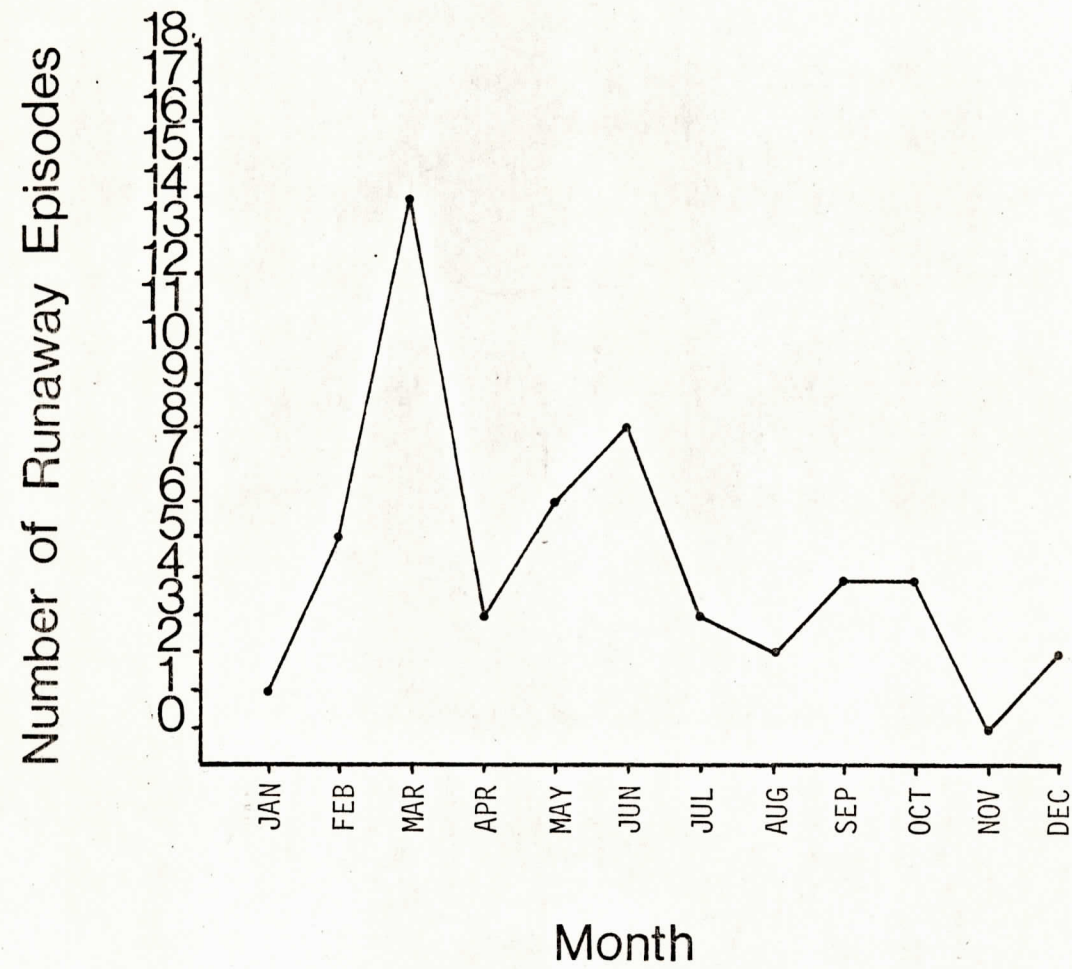


Fig. 2. The number of runaway episodes which occurred each month.

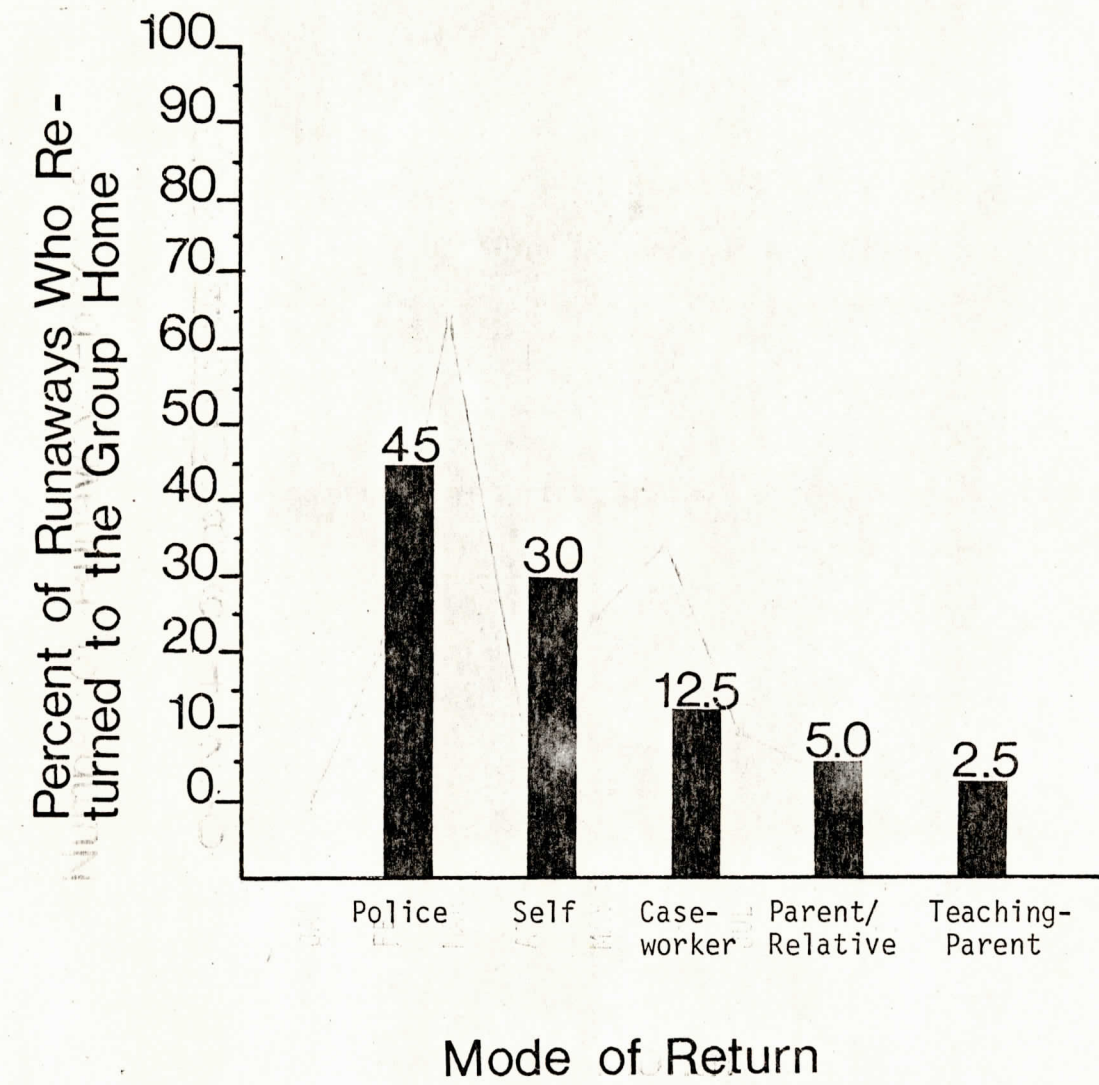


Fig. 3. Mode of return to the group home following a runaway episode.

DISCUSSION

The incidence of running away from nine community-based treatment facilities (25.8% of the youths served) is considerably higher than estimates of between two and four percent of the youth population in the United States (Brennan, et al., 1975). In light of the fact that youths who often have a prior history of running away are receiving treatment in non-secure community facilities, it is not surprising that the incidence of running away from these homes is higher than national estimates. It is, however, surprising that well trained child care professionals were able to predict only 17% of the runaway episodes. Furthermore, only 18 runaway predictions were made during the entire year of data collection, and only 50% of these predictions were actually followed by a runaway episode.

It is apparent that the 60 hours of pre-service training which all teaching-parents receive in group home administration and the Teaching-Family model does not prepare them for the task of anticipating potential runaways. Consequently, the usefulness of runaway intervention techniques which can be employed prior to an imminent runaway episode will depend upon the development of training procedures which will increase the teaching-parents' prediction skills.

Because the number of successful predictions was so small, it was not possible to isolate those factors which would be the most accurate predictors of runaway behavior. Unpleasant experiences such as a loss of points, a loss of privileges, or problems during a weekend home visit were the factors which were most frequently used as a basis for runaway predictions. Once

a runaway prediction had been made, counseling was the most frequently used means of intervention. The modestly strong correlation between successful predictions and length of time on the job ($r = .58$) suggests that since prediction skills appear to be related to experience, they can be identified and taught. Another indication of the trainability of prediction skills is revealed in the fact that teaching-parents were more certain about accurate predictions than inaccurate predictions. Because of the impact which a runaway episode can have on the youth as well as on the group home, it would be advantageous to train teaching-parents to anticipate runaways rather than rely on the passage of time to facilitate the acquisition of these skills.

Contrary to the picture of exploitation and danger painted by Brennan, et al. (1975), Boch and English (1973), and Wein (1970), the group home runaways in the present study reported only three potentially dangerous incidents. Due to the inhibitory effect which the teaching-parents as figures of authority may have had on the accuracy of such reports, this number may be an underestimation of the dangers which runaways face. It would appear, however, that the biggest danger faced by runaways is the juvenile justice system. Running away adversely affects a youth in that there is a high probability that the runaway youth will come into contact with the court or the police. Presently, when a runaway has occurred, the teaching-parents contact local law enforcement agencies after a youth has been absent more than three hours (Phillips, et al., 1972). This is not intended to reduce the frequency of future runaways, but rather to facilitate the youth's return to the group home. However, 23% of the runaways do not return to the group

home. In addition, this policy sets in motion a legal chain of events which in this study resulted in 60% of all runaways being detained in jail and/or going to court.

In the present study, a majority of the runaway youths ran only once or twice and most returned within a week. These findings are consistent with data collected by Brennan, et al. (1975) on runaways in the Denver area. Brennan, et al. (1975) also reported that most runaways in their sample returned voluntarily. However, this study found that only 30% of the group home runaways returned on their own. The number of group home runaways who return voluntarily would perhaps be higher if group home policies with regard to dealing with runaways were changed to preclude the instigation of police and court contacts. Because there is such a high probability that a youth who runs away from a group home will become involved with the police and/or the courts, efforts to decrease the frequency of running away from community-based residential treatment programs should be accompanied by measures which would decriminalize the act of running away itself.

It is the delinquent behaviors associated with running away that are detrimental to the youth and the community rather than running away in itself. Single-time runners are more delinquent than non-runners but less delinquent than multiple runners (Brennan, et al., 1975). Consequently, delinquency intervention programs need to focus on maintaining runaways at a minimum. A goal of group home treatment programs then becomes to develop intervention techniques which provide a youth an alternative to running away when s/he feels the immediate need to escape.

One method for doing this might be to provide an "instant relief" situation by enabling the youth to invoke "guest status" as soon as s/he felt the need for an immediate but rather temporary escape. Termination of the youth's guest status would occur only upon his/her request. As a guest, the youth would not be subject to the routine group home responsibilities. That is, the youth would not earn or lose points and privileges, would not be expected to assist with maintenance tasks, would not participate in individual or group counseling, and would not share in family decision making. This would enable the youth to have some relief from the pressures and responsibilities which may have prompted him or her to run away. However, as a guest, the youth would not be making progress toward completion of the treatment program. Because the youth would not have access to the same privileges that are available to the other youths in the group home, the "instant relief" situation would in all probability not last for an extended period of time.

For those situations in which a youth may feel the need for a more extended period of relief, s/he could be offered a place to run to. A controlled runaway environment would provide a safe means of escape as well as reduce the likelihood that a youth will engage in illegal activities.

While both of the above suggested intervention strategies could be initiated at the youth's request, their implementation prior to an imminent runaway would be facilitated by the teaching-parents' ability to anticipate the episode. Furthermore, the use of intervention strategies prior to an imminent runaway will not have a significant impact on the reduction of runaways from the group home unless teaching-parents receive additional

training to increase their ability to make accurate predictions. Subsequent research should therefore attempt to isolate the factors involved in making successful runaway predictions and then incorporate this knowledge into existing training programs.

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APPENDIX A
INITIAL PREDICTION POSTCARD

Group Home: _____

Youth's Initials: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Youth will probably leave: (Check one)

- ☐ within one hour
☐ within 24 hours
☐ after 24 hours (up to five days)

Express your confidence in the above prediction as a percentage (0 - 100%) _____.

APPENDIX B
TRACKING SHEET

Youth's Initials _____

Day	Time	% Certainty (0-100%)	Please state as specifically as possible the behaviors or events which led you to make the prediction. Then, report any changes in your % certainty and specify your reasons for change.	Can't Specify/ Just a Hunch
1			Initial Prediction:	
			Changes:	
2			Youth will probably leave: (Check one)	
			<input type="checkbox"/> within one hour	
			<input type="checkbox"/> within 24 hours	
			<input type="checkbox"/> after 24 hours (up to five days)	
			Express your confidence in the above prediction as a percentage (0 - 100%)	
3				
4				
5				

APPENDIX C

FOLLOW-UP POST CARD

Group Home: _____

Youth's Initials: _____

[illegible]

What did you do to intervene?

- [] Counseling [] Teaching
[] Point Fines [] Family Conference
[] Role Playing [] Physical Restraint
[] Other _____ (specify)

APPENDIX D

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Call T-Ps five days after youth runs. If not back, call two days later.

1. Did the youth return to the group home? _____ Yes; _____ No

a) If yes:

Date: _____ Time: _____

Under what conditions? _____

b) If no:

Where did youth go?

2. What happened while the youth was gone?

a) Did the youth engage in any illegal activities (e.g., drug or alcohol use, breaking and entering, shop lifting, truancy, sexual promiscuity)?

If yes, specify: _____

b) Was youth's life endangered (e.g., rape, assault)?

If yes, specify:

3. What were the consequences upon the youth's return to the home (e.g., sub-system, loss of hometime, loss of bonds, no consequences)?

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which trained professional teaching-parents were able to predict runaways from community-based residential treatment facilities for adolescents at risk. Data was collected by way of a post card reporting system on the predictability, incidence, duration, and disposition of the runaway episodes. Results showed that an average of 25.8% of the youths served in the group homes ran away at least once. Despite this relatively high incidence of running away, teaching-parents accurately predicted only 17% (9) of the 52 runaway episodes. While accurate runaway predictions were infrequent, there was a modest correlation (.58) between success in predicting and the length of time the teaching-parents had been on the job at the time of the runaway. This suggests that since prediction skills appear to be related to experience, they can be identified and taught. Furthermore, the usefulness of runaway intervention techniques which can be employed prior to an imminent runaway episode is contingent upon the development of training procedures which will increase the teaching-parents' prediction skills.

Results of this study indicate that the biggest danger faced by group home runaways is the juvenile justice system. Sixty percent of all runaways were detained in jail and/or taken to court. Twenty-three percent of the runaways were removed from the group home as a result of the episode. Because there is such a high probability that a youth who runs away from a group home will become involved with the police and/or the courts, efforts to decrease the frequency of running away from community-based residential treatment programs should be accompanied by measures which would decriminalize the act of running away itself.