JAIL COUNSELOR SAYS

Many Factors Bring Crime

By MARTHA AYCOCK
Adviser Staff Reporter

Seventeen-year-old Tommy stole a pair of tennis shoes. He was arrested and sentenced to a term in the parish jail. When he is released, he will probably steal again.

Tommy (not his real name) is like many of the youngsters that show up in jail. His father is on welfare, his mother is sick. He is the second oldest of 12 children. Tommy took the shoes because he needed them to “dress up” for gym classes at his school. Without the shoes, he received an “F” in the class. To get the shoes he became a criminal.

Many Factors
What contributes to criminal behavior?

There are many factors, says Mrs. Rayburn D. “Marty” Ocamb, a counselor at the parish jail.

Mainly the reasons are environmental, lack of education, lack of a job, lack of a secure family life.

Mrs. Ocamb, who was hired by the Lafayette Juvenile and Young Adult program to work with youths in the jail, also does volunteer work with older prisoners. The most dissatisfying thing about her work is the repeaters, the prisoners who serve their time, go back out into society and get arrested for something else.

No Better
The problem is they return to society no better than when they were removed from it, in many cases worse. They still have no money, no trade, no pride.

This is the situation that Mrs. Ocamb deals with. By finding jobs, starting a study-release and work-release program, by showing them that they’re worth something as human beings, the counselor can see a reduced rate of recidivism.

Cooperation is one thing Mrs. Ocamb and Dr. Geraldine Lambert, head of the USL psychology department, don’t have to worry about. The prisoners especially the young ones, are eager for help.

When a prisoner is admitted to the jail, he’s isolated for a few days. Often he is bitter about his experience and has to become accustomed to retrained living.

Statistical Data
To try to get to know the prisoner, Mrs. Ocamb conducts an interview with him. The questions she begins with get statistical information and then she dives deeper into his personality: how does he get along with family, friends? How strict are his parents? What is their reaction to his school or job? What does he do with his spare time?

Usually the young prisoner has dropped out of school between the seventh and 10th grades. They have no clothes and they’re tired of being teased about their poverty. The young dropout does a lot of housework and cooking and starts to associate with others — like himself, who have no money and nothing to do.

When the youth is arrested he often has no feelings of guilt. In some poverty pockets of the parish, theft, carrying concealed weapons for protection and fighting have become a way of life. And upon release from the jail, many of the young persons have commented “Keep my spot warm. I’ll be back.”

Before trying to find the prisoner a job, evaluations are made and help for emotionally disturbed is offered. The Mental Health Center donates time and medicine and the sheriff’s department, which cooperates with the program, supplies transportation.

There is a drug abuse clinic and occupational therapy clinic which also aids the men.

The prisoners are looking for help and Mrs. Ocamb tries to get them to think about the future. They come to her because “They know I’m here and I’m on their side.”

One way of getting gripes out in the open is the trustees’ Wednesday night discussion with Dr. Lambert and Mrs. Ocamb. At these meetings, the counselors encourage the men to participate in the discussion, to offer something to express themselves.

Strike Against
The counseling, the special clinics and tests can do just so much. If the prisoner doesn’t have a better environment to go into when he leaves the jail the program has a strike against it.

Most of the prisoners are not high school graduates but they are capable of doing good work when trained for it as they are at the rehabilitation center.

Here’s one place where the community can help complete the program, with jobs. A prisoner costs thousands of dollars a year, supported by taxpayers, says Mrs. Ocamb.

A working man supports himself.

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