

The Public Welfare Bureau and Its Service to the Community

An Institution Concerning itself with the Conservation of Family and Home Ties and the Rehabilitation of the Homes Where Misfortune Has Entered In.

By A. R. Gephart, General Secretary Public Welfare Bureau

When a poor man
Lives in Portland
And becomes an invalid
Or dies
And leaves no insurance
Or gets old
And has no savings
Or deserts wife and children
Who keeps his family together?

For thirty-four years
Winter and Summer the
Public Welfare Bureau, has been
Husband and Father to such
Helpless families.

SINCE the Public Welfare Bureau was first organized in Portland, Oregon, in 1888, when it was known as the City Board of Charities, aid has been given in 46,559 cases. Although the bureau's primary concern during its entire life of thirty-four eventful years, has been families in distress, it has from time to time given considerable aid to homeless men. At the present time, the Bureau is exclusively a family agency, which distinguishes it from most other charitable and correctional institutions, who are dealing with the individual fragments of broken families.

The Public Welfare Bureau concerns itself with families that are in distress and whose misfortune of some kind is threatening to break up the home. Its primary object is to conserve family life. It is rendering such aid and service to families that are breaking up on the rocks of poverty, ill health, bad housing, etc., that prevents the disaster, helping as many as possible to rehabilitation.

Most other charitable and correctional agencies conduct their work between four walls with a roof over them. The walls of the Public Welfare Bureau's building are the boundary lines of Multnomah county and the sky is the roof.

The Bureau's charges are not confined in crowded dormitories and do not march in lock-step from the dining room to their work and

from their work to double-deck beds, though many of them do live in crowded rooming-houses and miserable homes. They are not the members of the community who have committed crimes for which they are being punished, nor those who are so feeble of mind and body as to require care in an institution. Those charges of the Bureau for whom most can be done are the families who are perfectly normal in their physical and mental endowments, but who have suffered the misfortune of unfavorable circumstances or an unfriendly environment.

In normal times, this group is small. During periods of unemployment or other emergency, the percentage, of course, is much larger. By far the larger part of the Bureau's charges are families

suffering from handicaps of mind or body which makes it impossible for them to "keep the pace" in the competitive struggle for the necessities of life.

The first work of the Bureau, in the order of procedure, is to provide those physical necessities which unfortunate families need in order to live. The most important work of the Bureau, however, whether judged from the viewpoint of the families needing help or the interests of the community as a whole, is the effort on the part of the Bureau's staff to help folks to help themselves. This service involves a multitude of possible aids, such as directing the family to medical service that will make the bread-winner able to work or relieve the family of some other burden of ill health; the finding of employment; enlisting the interest of relatives, churches, lodges, unions, benefit societies, and any others who should have a prior interest or who can render special service; the improving of housing conditions, etc.

If the family presents a problem of juvenile delinquency, desertion

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