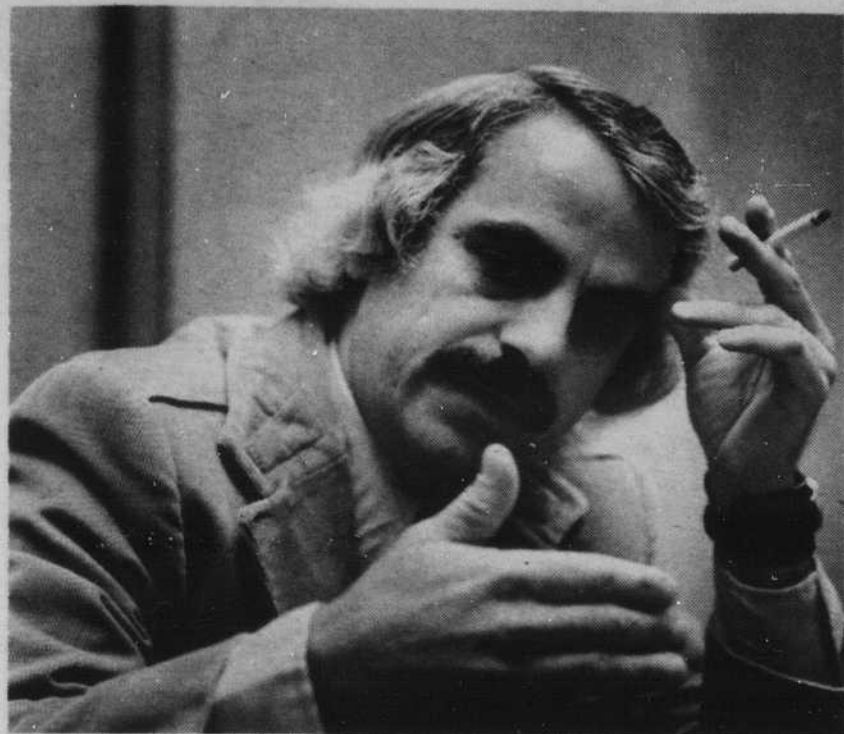




Miller

Volunteer group aids social service users

Red tape and hassles.

These aggravations often lurk behind the good intentions and benefits offered by social service agencies, some say. The Better Social Services Bureau (BSSB), created just last June, provides a way out.

BSSB is a volunteer organization whose members act as advocates of clients who aren't getting the quality of service they want or need from a social service agency, or who need help in becoming eligible for an agency's benefits.

The Bureau also refers people to social service agencies if they need help and don't know who can help them, said Clive Miller, chairer of the BSSB committee. "But," he explained, "we started out as, and still see ourselves as more than a referral agency...We're there to receive complaints and to resolve those complaints in their (the client's) favor."

One of the Bureau's main concerns, added Miller, is that many of the agencies that give "life sustaining" services (food stamps, housing, financial aid), are getting large, increasing the chance of the client not being seen or heard.

The members of BSSB attempt to resolve the client's complaints by direct action, said Miller, by going with the client. "We try to follow an advocacy model rather than mediation," he said. Even in a case in which the client is wrong, he added, the Bureau tries to help the client understand, and to help him find other ways of solving his problem.

The BSSB office is located in an old house at 673 W. 10th. "What you'll find when you go in there is a bunch of busy people," said Miller. Most of the complaints are phoned in, he explained, (Phone 345-5457). Each call is then referred to one of the members, who handles the case on a person-to-person basis.

The Bureau, part of the Lane District of the National Association of Social Workers, supports its free services on the dues of the Association. The members, who work in a variety of social service agencies, volunteer their off-work time.

BSSB, said Miller, is modeled after the Citizen Advisory groups found in Britain, which were also set up to help the individual. The British groups, however, now work with agencies on problems that affect a large class of people, as well, offering consultation and lobbying. BSSB, according to Miller, hopes to continue in their footsteps.

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