BROTHERHOOD OF ST. LAURENCE

PROJECT REPORT

ARC - 1976

THE ACTION & RESOURCE CENTRE

CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

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- Hayden Raysmith,

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THE ORIGINS OF ARC: BY FAITH OUT OF FRUSTRATION

The Action & Resource Centre for Low-Income Families is the product of forty years of frustration and four years of faith, hope and hard work.

It is built on the belief that the solution to poverty lies in changing the structure of society and proposes that this will be best done by giving disadvantaged families the power to change their own predicament.

As a voluntary welfare agency, the Brotherhood of St Laurence delivered services to the poor from the 1930's, employing professional social workers from 1953.

"Services to families were delivered through the Social Work Service and the Youth and Children's Centre. During the 1960's, as many as eight youth workers and six social workers were employed in these two services. The Social Work Service had an open-door policy which resulted in an annual caseload of approximately 600 families, most of whom came to the Brotherhood of St Laurence for financial assistance. The Youth and Children's Centre activities were open and the numbers of young people who attended is difficult to assess - one indicator is that attendance at adolescent club nights was in the region of 50-60, drawn from a pool of some 300 young people known to the service.

The following comments of a previous senior social worker aptly describe the type of families who used the social work and youth services provided by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, and the methods of work with the families utilised by the Social Work Service.

The families are mostly "economically, socially and personally disadvantaged to a severe, often chronic degree." Many of the "chronic aid seekers have built Brotherhood hand-outs into their patterns of coping with life." In the Social Work Service which was staffed by professional social workers, the method of work was casework, using financial and material aid as a tool.

By the late 1960's, the impact of the U.S.A. 'war on poverty', the Canadian Poverty Report and studies such as the Chemung County Evaluation of Casework Service to Multi-Problem Families, were having an impact on social policy ideas in Australia. This added to the frustration of workers and evidence from local studies such as 'The Have Nots' (a study of 150 low-income families).2

There was sufficient stimulus for the Brotherhood of St Laurence to rethink their approach to their work with multi-problem families and a decision was made late in 1971 to open a Family Centre with the following aims:

"Over a period of three years to systematically determine ways in which the social functioning and self-esteem of 'multi-deficit and 'multi-problem' families can be significantly enhanced. During this initial period, it should become clearer which particular approaches and programmes are appropriate or inappropriate to achieve the following goals:

1. To help the families to view themselves, not as passive victims of society, but as active participants who are potentially capable of change. This includes both change in themselves and the capacity to change the environment in which they live. Thus, the Centre will aim to fully involve them in making the decisions about their families' future.

2. To help the families to adjust to those aspects of the social structure which they cannot change, assisting them to effectively handle the social systems which most affect them.

3. To promote change in both public attitudes and existing social provisions which are often unsympathetic to poor people because they fail to conform to middle-class behavioural norms."3


These aims were later modified to strengthen the 'power' concept. The original aims stated that the project would "aim to fully involve" the families. By the time the Family Centre commenced operation in November, 1972, the aims related more to giving the families control of the Centre.

This was operationalised by a four-pronged power concept outlined in the first, second and fourth progress reports.

In brief, the Family Centre aimed to give the families power over decision-making, resources, relationships and information.

It did this individually with families, but also brought isolated people together in an organisation. They, therefore, had collective power, previously unknown and unavailable to them. During the Family Centre Project, the families were taught within limits to manage and use this collective power. A management committee was established in 1973 and by 1975, the membership was considering the organisation's future. The result of those deliberations was an Action & Resource Centre for Low-Income Families, a centre run by and for low-income people.

The philosophy of the Action & Resource Centre was basically the same as the philosophy of the Family Centre. That is, given the power, low-income, multi-deficit families will change their situation. ARC still aimed to provide resources to individual families as well as change society, but the emphasis and methods were different. More emphasis was placed on getting the families to act collectively. As the name implied, the main focus on ARC's efforts was on providing resources and undertaking collective action. Less emphasis was placed on activities and on developmental programs, but new opportunities were opened up by the employment of indigenous (family member) staff.

1976 saw the transferring of increasing responsibilities to these indigenous workers and to the Council and its standing committees. Many of the families had proved that given the resources they could change their disadvantaged situation. 1976 paved the way for the families to show that given the power, resources, skills, opportunities, motivation and support, they could control and run their own organisation with multiple benefits for a much larger number of low-income people.
ACHIEVEMENTS

The fundamental achievement is ARC itself. The fact that such a Centre exists is important.

David Scott's opening comment in the First Annual Report states "The First Annual Meeting of ARC is an historic event for the Brotherhood and ARC and also for social welfare in Australia." 4

A group of very disadvantaged families now belong to the society in which they live. Some became active participants rather than passive victims and all had an organisation which was theirs; a place where they were something other than dependent welfare recipients.

Pauline Windler, in a debate on whether ARC should continue after 1978, stated:

"I have summed it up in three words, 'The Powerless Poor'. Going back a few years to the BSL, when most of us were welfare victims, the BSL knew what they were doing was no good. It was only creating us to be more dependent on the handouts of the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood knew there was something lacking and the something lacking was that the poor lacked power." 5

Dependent and divided, deprived families remain at the whim of benevolent decision-makers who, in many cases, do not acknowledge the existence of poverty and, even more frequently, blame the poor for their own circumstances.

ARC provided an organisational base which provided the means for deprived families to act collectively.

Having been established, the effectiveness of ARC as an organisation can be measured on several dimensions. Its ability to provide help to families in need, its ability to achieve changes which benefit low-income people, its ability to present new opportunities and support for personal development, and its ability to build sharing-caring communities as support networks for low-income families.

5. Staff meeting transcript, 15/2/77. Debate "That ARC should not continue after 1978."
THE ACTION & RESOURCE CENTRE’S ABILITY TO PROVIDE IMMEDIATE HELP

The Family Centre Project developed the notion of providing resources to families with which they could tackle their own problems. These resources included money, telephones, information, transport, access, support and skills. The idea of providing resources was carried over into the planning of the Action & Resource Centre.

The Fifth Progress Report of the Family Centre Project outlined the rationale for a resource unit:

"The Resource Unit would be responsible for the provision of resources which poor people lack and which would attract them to the Centre. These resources could be of two types - existing community resources which are isolated in the community and struggling to exist by themselves, or new resources which have been suggested by the Family Centre Project experience and which could be planned and staffed by family members, e.g. a transport or an occasional child-minding resource. Although the name of the Centre implies that it would be open to the whole community, the nature of the resources would determine who used it. Important features of this Unit should be that it does not duplicate existing resources and that consumers become the decision-makers in the provision of their own resources." 6

The only cash assistance available at the start of 1976 when the income supplement stopped was through a fund called the Development Fund. It was available for courses, licences and spectacles and was to help people get jobs or better themselves. Only fifteen claims were made on this fund in 1976 amounting to less than $500.

The main resources offered, therefore, were through the four indigenous resource workers (Housing, Social Security, Employment and Consumer Rights), as well as the kindergarten and holiday host program.

Housing -

Each of these five parts of the resource unit developed very differently. The Housing Resource Worker, Maureen Wolf, quickly developed a network of contacts, including the Housing Commission, Halfway Houses, Tenants Union, Fitzroy City Council and SHELTER. She used these contacts effectively to cut red tape, do 'deals' and act generally as a broker for the family coming with a problem. Her position in the network was enhanced when she was able to develop two programs which provided money. The first was a Housing Loan Fund where a family could borrow money for rent arrears or to help place them in emergency accommodation. The second (which did not come into operation until 1977) was a Bond Guarantor Scheme which allowed the Action & Resource Centre to be a guarantor instead of families having to pay out large lump sums for bonds.

With the assistance of Jan Salmon, the Research Worker, Maureen kept detailed records of the work in the Housing Resource Area. These records showed that from January 1, 1976, to the end of October, 142 families had made use of the resource area with 36 returning more than once.7

The Loan Scheme commenced on the 3rd June, 1976, and by the 10th January, 1977, 34 families (54 adults and 86 children) had been assisted at a cost of $2,400.8

The housing resource worker not only provided information and cash but transport, telephones, skills, support and access.

7. Report to Peter Hollingworth, Chairman of Emergency Relief Housing Committee, 1976.

Social Security -

The Social Security Resource Area was a narrower and more clearly defined area. The task of Pauline Windler was to help people obtain their income security entitlements and teach them to use the system themselves. During 1976, 125 families were helped in this way. Pauline stated in the ARC First Annual Report:

"My top priority in this area has been helping the individual. The effectiveness has been that:

(a) I have had information immediately available, and have always been able to explain to people clearly.
(b) I can speak to the right person in the departments on their behalf.
(c) I have been able to put pressure on the departments.
(d) Sometimes I have been able to influence the decision in the person's favour.
(e) The matter is dealt with quickly - most times straight away.
(f) Provide follow-up until the matter is resolved.
(g) Offer of further contact and help.

I have also worked very hard towards helping the individual to help themselves, by passing on to them telephone numbers, who to contact in Government Departments, how to approach the officers within the departments, and most important, what their rights are."  

A grant was received from the Department of Social Security to publish an information sheet designed for low-income people.

Social Security (cont'd.)

Pauline also developed an effective network of contacts which could achieve much quicker and better results than an individual acting on their own behalf. Despite this, however, the emphasis of the income security resource work was to transfer the skills and information to the families, which would enable them to act independently in the future.

Employment -

The Employment Resource Area established a demonstration Job Creation Program (called the Support Work Program - SWOP). Bob Williams and Bob Long (part of the year) were the resource workers and, although there were brief attempts to provide a job information service and careers information, their efforts continually returned to providing resources through the demonstration program.

A report by Bob Williams in the Action & Resource Centre's First Annual Report explained some of the reasons for this:

"The Employment Resource Area proved to be very frustrating to me after only a few months, because how can we help people get into the workforce when there are no jobs in the community? Just having information and relationships with C.E.S., Trade Unions, employers, etc., did not directly help the unemployed or their situation.

After discussions with many unemployed men from the Family Centre, the C.E.S. and Bob Long, in particular, we decided to try and create our own work, and assist the low-income community at the same time; this was achieved in the form of SWOP (Support Work Program)."¹⁰

The cost of the program in a little over a year of operation was $37,000, but was the major resource being taken up by men.

The annual report continues:

"The basic aims of SWOP have been to provide flexible work opportunities to the long-term and young unemployed, and provide a transport and handyman service to low-income people. Since our inception, we have employed 32 people and provided a service to over 600 clients, plus many jobs for ARC and the BSL (including ongoing contract work.)"

Consumer Rights

The Credit and Debt Consolidation Resource Area was originally established to assist families with budgets and debt consolidation.

The original concept of this area was changed completely and in February, the name also was changed to Consumer Rights Resource Area. This reflected the indigenous worker, Judy Cassar, asserting her ideas, rather than mimicking the professionals by whom she was trained.

The change of emphasis is shown in Judy's report to the Staffing Committee in September, 1976:

"The Consumer Rights Resource Area has also been moving towards social action. There is an urgent need for consumers to establish a power base to strengthen their aims for social change. If the situation is allowed to lapse in the present form of disinterest by consumers a G.M.I. and other resources will be of little or no benefit, because unless policies and legislation are changed to provide a better and fairer deal for everyone, consumers will continue to be underprivileged and the victims of rip-offs and consumers will not be any better off than they are now.

Consumer Rights (cont'd.)

"My work has tended to concentrate on helping change and formulating policy rather than providing a direct service. I have been trying to provide a link between the consumers and policy makers, that is between those making decisions and those providing services and those affected by these decisions or receiving those services."12

The main form of help was advocacy, where Judy helped people write letters or take a stand. In all, about twelve individual families were helped by the resource worker, but no detailed records were kept. In contrast, details were provided and disseminated on fourteen committees and liaison groups that Judy worked with during the year.

In terms of resource provision, the area gained fresh impetus from the skilled input of Support Worker, Patrick Murphy, who worked with Judy. During 1976, Patrick initiated and maintained two very basic savings schemes. The first was a Christmas Club savings scheme, with each depositor being eligible for a cash prize of $10.00 drawn once a fortnight. Forty-two members participated, saving $1,650.

The second was a Savings and Loan Project where a family could save $2.00 per week for 16 weeks and then be eligible for a $100 interest free loan. Again there was a $5.00 per week incentive prize. Sixteen members succeeded in becoming eligible for the first batch of loans and interest in the program is spreading.

Judy and Patrick, with the help of some other Fitzroy welfare people, are planning to inaugurate an ARC/Fitzroy credit co-operative later in 1977 as an extension of this work.

Consumer Rights (cont'd.)

As a result of the direct service offered through the various savings schemes, users are more frequently asking for assistance with budgeting and debt and credit problems.

Kindergarten -

In 1976, the kindergarten commenced with two half-time indigenous workers, Sandy Bowtell and Chris Williams. By August, the workers had lobbied successfully to have their hours extended to 30 hours per week and had re-defined their duties. The kindergarten was renamed the 'Play Centre'. None of the four permanent workers were able to stay for the full year and three temporary staff plus nine different volunteers assisted in running the Play Centre.

Sandy Bowtell stated in the annual report:

"We average ten children each day, from the ages of 18 months to school-age.

The purpose of the Play Centre is to teach the children to get on with other children, and to give the mothers an opportunity to get more involved in ARC and to know what ARC is on about.

The children have hot lunches every day, and they have been going out from day to day."13

Assistance was given to mothers in placing their children in outside kindergartens, enrolling in school, and using other services, such as health centres and family planning clinics.

Kindergarten (cont'd.)

In all, twenty families used the resource which provided information, meals, outings and casual child care in a manner not provided by any other child-care service. Parents did not need to be regular or look ahead. The only cost was 20¢ for lunch. The child could be between 18 months and 5 years and could be left for 5 minutes or 5 hours. For some of the families, it was also more accessible than other child-care services and made few demands on them.

Holiday Hosting

The Annual Report summarises this resource as follows:

"ARC employs a part-time, professional worker to arrange for the short-term placement of children.

In the six months from December, 1975 to June, 1976, 64 placements were arranged for the following reasons:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family emergency</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness of parent</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp or conference</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not eventuate</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

64

The scheme is a very important resource for the families and often avoids the children being at risk or taken into care. It also allows some parents to take part in camps, conferences and holidays which otherwise would be impossible.

The host families are all interviewed and carefully selected. During the six months mentioned above, only 14 new host families eventuated from 41 contacts, giving a total pool of 54 host families."14

THE ACTION & RESOURCE CENTRE'S ABILITY TO ACHIEVE
CHANGE WHICH BENEFITS LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Joan Benjamin (Social Action Worker) identifies two major types of change which ARC achieved in the last year. It raised the awareness of society to the existence and plight of low-income people and it changed low-income people's perception of themselves.

In terms of voting power, ARC has little direct political clout, and the use of the mass media to embarrass governments is a double-edged sword which was used very selectively.

Consciousness raising, both within ARC and in society more generally, was the major thrust of ARC's social action. Sixty-seven talks were given by ARC members and staff:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talks given by ARC members, 1976</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government Departments 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Schools 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary Institutions 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare Agencies 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Groups 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Presentations were made at the Australian and New Zealand Sociology Conference and the Social Welfare Department staff conference, as well as several welfare seminars and staff meetings of other organisations.

ARC held a seminar on job creation and took part in deputations and discussions with politicians and public servants.

Visitors to the Centre averaged more than one a day and included the Prime Minister's wife, overseas' academics, other community groups, students and interested local people.

On separate occasions, the Minister for Social Welfare, The Hon. Brian Dixon, and several of his senior departmental officers held lengthy informal discussions with the families, many of whom were able to give first-hand accounts of being clients of the Department. These discussions had an impact on both the families and the visitors although the long-term effect of such an impact is difficult to gauge. An encouraging sign, however, was that several months after the Prime Minister's visit late in 1975, a Canberra-based journalist contacted the Brotherhood having been informed of ARC by the Prime Minister. The number of people referred by previous visitors suggests that a visit to ARC does have some lasting, consciousness raising effect.

The same was noticeable with students. Five social work, welfare officer and youth work students had supervised placements whilst business administration, medical, high-school and other students, had one-day or half-day visits.

Consciousness raising with the families themselves is a continuing process which involved staff discussions, general meetings, conferences, camps, informal discussion with members, writing articles and reports and contributing to the fortnightly 'Bulletin'.

Joan Benjamin comments in her report to Council:

"How has ARC changed the poor's perceptions of themselves?

Those families who have become associated with ARC now see themselves as active participants. Examples in the appendix to this paper reflect the views of the more articulate. For every one paper, there would be many examples of members solving their own problems, of demanding accountability from services and providing feedback (often not favourable) to those services."16

In July, Shirley Wood wrote a paper on a new education initiative introduced at her son's school:

"The majority of children have not got the power of concentration which is strong enough to exclude all other happenings except the immediate thing at hand. You can take a normal, intelligent child from a 'closed' system and place him in an 'open' situation, only to have that child within months floundering to the point where remedial teaching is needed to correct the learning ability of this child.

To have an 'open' system requires a great deal of thought and time and effort. To my way of thinking, teachers should be tested as to their aptitude to teach in an 'open' school; as I don't think every teacher is suited to an 'open' school, just as I don't think that every child is suited to an 'open' school."  

Merv. Parker, in a distinctive style which reflects the ability of families to say how it really is, better than anyone else, contributed a piece on the police after several families had had disturbing court appearances or been hassled on their way home:

"While being questioned by our law enforcers you cop abuse to provoke you into taking a lash-out at them; and some of the things they say are: 'Your mother should have dropped you on your head when you were a baby' ... 'You go to bed and have sex with your sister' ... 'Your mother was a slut' ... very nice words from people who ask for respect.

Some men lose their jobs if the police visit the place where they are employed. The workers, for fear of not being hired, do not tell their employer that they have been in trouble with the law. But when the law turns up at the work site, usually the police let the employer know the trouble he or she has been in, and they end up on the unemployed list.

If you have to appear in court and your clothes are not the best, especially if you have spent a night in the cells, the magistrate looks down on you as though you were trash."  


18. Ibid.
Having to defend their organisation, entertain visitors and give talks also helped the families to become more articulate and more conscious of their own predicament.

Gladys Shears was a great success in lecturing to some 120 volunteer trainees and Joan Benjamin's report quotes the following example of Gladys' material:

"People find themselves in poverty through no fault of their own in most cases, but through circumstances beyond their control.

For instance: You get married, you have a healthy husband who has a steady job and income. Then along comes illness and because you have not been able to save you end up on the poverty line. If circumstances are such that the breadwinner is never really healthy again you end up being poor.

People in poverty need more than money; they need other resources like education, decent housing, and a good general knowledge of how to go about getting pensions and benefits. They need to know their rights. There is a vast majority of people who don't know these things.

The constant battle of making ends meet, getting your kids an education and keeping your family housed causes you to lose your ideals; it embitters and sours you, you feel that everyone is against you and you end up being against everybody too and just try to cheat the system the whole time because there is no other way."  

THE ACTION & RESOURCE CENTRE'S ABILITY TO PRESENT NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORT FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

An important advantage of the Centre being run by family members is that they are able to give something. The families are able to participate without being put in the role of being recipients or consumers. This contributed to people feeling important, developing skills and developing self-confidence.

The most prized of these opportunities were the staff positions. At the time of the annual report there were 15 permanent indigenous staff with a further 4 who had left and been replaced.

In terms of status, the Council was the most valued of the non-paid opportunities. The Council at any one time had 9 elected non-paid members with twice that number serving during the year.

The seven standing committees had a total membership of 42, but only 4 people who were not on staff or Council took an active part.

Two conferences, one held for 3 days in March and one for 5 days in September, catered only for staff and Council members.

Four camps were held during 1976 with 44 places being used by 31 different people. Twenty-two were not on staff. Camps during 1976 created the added opportunities of employment by 2 members going on each camp as paid workers. Eight members benefited from the opportunity, 4 not being already on staff.

The SWOP employment program was an important means of involvement for unemployed men. As reported earlier, 32 people were employed by this program and for nearly all, this was the only opportunity used for personal development within the Centre.

Social action talks involved 18 family members and more were involved in hosting visitors. In all, 5 members not on staff or Council were involved.
The preparation of lunches, preparation for dances, Friday market, bulk store and elections all provided further avenues for contributing with a few people jumping at the opportunity to help in these more concrete and well-defined ways.

The principle of imparting skills and involving others was highlighted at the conferences, on camps and during other discussions, but on the whole, people found implementation of the principle difficult. Towards the end of the year staff were actively trying to involve assistants while each of the support workers was able to involve a few people in assisting them in their work. For example, 6 people helped with telephonist and reception work, one with accounting and 4 with typing. Three of these were people not otherwise involved.

A further 8 people helped out in the kindergarten, 4 on a casual paid basis and 10 others helped in the coffee lounge from time to time. Some also helped with transport, but none were new faces.

Activities are also an opportunity for personal development, although the opportunity to give is more restricted than in the above examples.

The activities, such as the Wednesday night children's program, and Tuesday night teenage program, are planned to help these members develop social skills, relate better to adults and learn creative and craft skills. The group's average attendances were 25 and 12 respectively. One indigenous staff member and one other member worked as volunteers on the Wednesday night program, but the key staff were professional, supplemented by outside volunteers.

Dances, Christmas parties, outings, general meetings, luncheons and football and cricket matches could also be regarded as opportunities where families can mix, relax, learn and not be clients. A total of 250 different people participated in these events, 70 of whom were not included above.
In round figures, ARC involved 300 people in positive learning experiences which contributed to their development and allowed them to escape from being 'welfare victims' as Pauline Windler put it. About 20 of these participated daily, whilst a further 50 participated at least once a week.
THE ACTION & RESOURCE CENTRE'S ABILITY TO CREATE SHARING-CARING COMMUNITIES AS SUPPORT NETWORKS FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

The problem with being disadvantaged and lacking resources is that each day is a struggle against problems which cannot be solved. Other people don't want to share those problems and the struggle leads to isolation. Social get-togethers are impossible, transport is a major difficulty, and people are worn out. Families might shift house, two, three or four times a year. They have to make new contacts, their children go to new schools and progressively they become social isolates, belonging nowhere and to no social group. Every family has crises and times when they need support, but low-income families have no resources and no community network which responds to their needs.

The community building aspect of ARC's work has been poorly documented, but there have been some memorable incidents during the year which have highlighted just how important this facet of the work has been.

One family travelled 130 kms. by taxi to reach ARC at a time of crisis. The husband who had been physically beaten was cared for, the children looked after, the legal matters dealt with, and accommodation found, without any professional involvement. It was spontaneous.

No longer do people go to court on their own. Others always go to support them and in the case of two teenagers, the Council decided to take some responsibility if they received probation. This action almost certainly kept them out of an institution.

Families who live within walking distance, now visit each other and assist by minding each other's children and by picking children up from school. Families get together for card nights, barbecues and cricket matches. By having the use of a utility and SWOP, families exchange furniture, friges and help shift each other.

Some families have developed the confidence to become involved in their own local areas, through community centres, health centres, child minding and school committees.
Many times families have been supported during an illness or other crisis, without the children having to be placed in a children's home. Two wedding receptions have been held in the Centre and furniture has been borrowed for others at home.

People exchange abuse, condolences and personal messages in the 'Bulletin'. Others receive visits in hospital which was not the case previously.

Belonging to something contributes to a pride and sense of identity. An ARC membership card is used as a form of identification, often a problem for a person without a driver's licence, and in unfamiliar settings, people will proudly introduce themselves as coming from ARC.
THE DIFFICULTIES

The achievements have been the provision of resources, undertaking collective action, creating new opportunities and building a sharing-caring community.

During 1977, two new research workers will make a more thorough study of the first two.

These achievements were hard won and many difficulties had to be overcome to enable an indigenously run and controlled organisation to emerge.

These difficulties included problems of goal setting, management, personal adjustment, attitudes and being an abnormal organisation expecting outside organisations to change also.

In the euphoria of progress and some remarkable achievements, it is difficult to remember and write about those difficulties. I have, therefore, chosen to quote a paper I wrote in May, 1976. It was controversial and the comments may be just as appropriately applied to many other organisations. However, it gives some insight into the problems in generating indigenous organisations for disadvantaged groups. Although it hurts, it is important knowledge in realistically tackling the problems of poverty and assessing the success of various strategies (See 'The Poverty Debate' later in this report.)

The rest of this report, the ARC Annual Report and reports by individual resource workers are testimony to the fact that most of these problems have been overcome. ARC has not 'made it' yet however; there are difficulties of competing goals, maintaining contact with low-income families and achieving change which now have to be faced.

"THE REALITY

In reality, the concept of a centre staffed and controlled by the victims: multi-deficit, low-income families, has many difficulties. At the end of my fourth week, I made the following notes:
THE REALITY (cont'd.)

'Depressing reality
Uncanny ability for self-destruction
Need for protection - they could not survive, they would see to that.'

A Centre run by low-income families means having a governing body (Council) and committees made up of low-income people, and having a staff wholly or mainly made up of the indigenous group.

Although there are exceptions to all of the following comments, the staff are generally low in basic skills, such as reading, writing and decision-making, but have made noticeable gains in these areas. They have also needed a great deal of direction and encouragement to avoid them being lost and confused in their work. This, however, does not seem to be very different from the professionals earlier in the project.

The three major impediments to staff performing satisfactorily are personal problems, poor ability to handle relationships with others and low self-confidence.

The lack of self-confidence or self-esteem is combined with a hesitancy to act, decide or take responsibility. The common defence is to opt out. Of the fifteen indigenous workers, one has resigned, four have handed in written resignations which were not followed through, and three have seriously discussed the matter. Combined with this, it has been necessary to suspend one worker from duties for a short period and threaten two others with similar action.

These figures in no way reflect the number of tasks workers undertake but never carry out, or the constant avoidance of necessary tasks. One of the major contributions of the five support staff is simply their reliability and dependability, which the indigenous staff lack.

The poor ability of the indigenous staff to handle relationships with others is reflected in a lack of trust of each other, paranoid reactions constantly triggered off by rumours, and criticism of each other rather than support.
THE REALITY (cont'd.)

A few have major blocks in dealing with authority figures. Emotional transferences from earlier family relationships have a major and mostly negative effect on present interpersonal relationships.

Using the method of categorising the contributions of indigenous staff to the group as 'task functions', 'group maintenance functions' and 'meeting personal needs functions', the staff group are low on both task and maintenance, and high on personal needs. Other methods of systems or group analysis could be applied, but all would show low productivity and low cohesion.

The personal problems of staff range from drinking problems to child care, legal, housing, transport, health, marital and financial problems. Some of these are chronic, but no one week has passed without one or a number of these also being a crisis; the effect being that the person is unable to come to work or do his/her job effectively.

Apart from these very real problems, however, absenteeism is almost nil. The indigenous staff are highly motivated to come to work and to work extra hours. They enjoy working hard on clearly defined tasks, particularly where someone is taking an interest in what they are doing and is prepared to give immediate recognition and rewards.

The other part, to a centre run by low-income families, is the Council and the committees. These have suffered even more than the staff group from unreliability and people opting out. This is not surprising because there has been no financial reward and the most active group were the group which came onto staff.

Of the original nine Councillors elected in November, 1975, all but one had resigned by March, 1976.

The additional deterrents, noticeable in the participatory decision-making structure, are the conflict and power struggles. These frighten the majority of members who do not understand them and want to avoid being caught in a bitter wrangle. As power and responsibility have been transferred more and more to the Council and committees, these conflicts have heightened. They have revolved around the use of cars, personalities, offices, telephones, keys and personalities again.
THE REALITY (cont'd.)

The issue which stimulates most feeling, not surprisingly, is that of jobs. There have been bitter conflicts between those getting jobs and those not getting them; often under the guise of a smoke screen issue. One manifestation of this has been an undercurrent of tension between the staff group and the Council.

Those on part-time work have fought hard to get full-time work and conflicts over these issues have brought tears, threats, intimidation, manipulation and bitter struggles.

These conflicts inevitably engulf the most powerful member of staff, the co-ordinator. The combined feelings of people about parents, spouse, authority figures, confidants, power brokers, advocates and professionals, centre on that person. It is not surprising that feelings about the co-ordinator are ambivalent and variable.

Much of the energy of the organisation, therefore, is consumed in personal and internal group struggles.

Most new members or outside groups wanting to work with the Centre, are given a hard time, and there is little tolerance towards weaknesses or failings in others.

Despite this, however, there has been a consistent breaking down of social isolation amongst the families and a genuine sense of belonging instilled in the active group.

The remaining difficulty in a centre run by a deprived group is that their life experiences have entrenched some values and methods of dealing with organisations which are not in the interests of the Centre.

Dishonesty is common wherever money is involved and it is difficult to keep anything of value in the Centre. Wife beating is common and women (the major participants in the Centre and majority of staff) tend to be ruled over by their husbands. Most people never pay back a loan. Denial and projection are common defence mechanisms. Telling the truth is not a general rule.
Trust is hard won and is associated with a continuing feeling of insecurity. The organisation to which they belong is 'ripped-off' in much the same way as any other organisation. It is difficult to get much interest in common organisational goals or planning. Things are dealt with on a day-to-day basis and based on immediate gratification.

All of this reminds me very much of the work which has gone on in the aboriginal field. The group frictions, poor interpersonal relationships, lack of a long-term perspective, lack of trust, readiness to opt out, ambivalence towards authority, etc.

Some work with fringe urban aboriginals has been based on the assumption that they are developmentally retarded. Thought processes, gratification, emotional reactions and handling of relationships are more child-like or adolescent like. This rings true with very deprived whites. Many are concrete thinkers and are unable to think to any great degree in conceptual or hypothetical terms. It is common, for example, in the middle of a group discussion to have someone talk about an actual experience they have had which is unrelated to the issue being discussed. The need for immediate gratification is common. There is little ability to handle criticism. Actions are largely determined by how the person feels at the moment. People prefer to 'get their own way' rather than express their opinion, and people are often aggressive to elicit a response.

One difference between deprived whites and aboriginals, however, is social mobility. Low-income families have the same aspirations as other families. They want their children to do well. They want a house and car and the benefits of a consumer society. They do not want to keep belonging to the deprived, low-income group if they can move out.

Aboriginals remain aboriginals and mostly they have a pride in their race and their ancestry.
THE REALITY (cont'd.)

Aboriginals can fight for their rights and their land. Other ethnic groups have their languages, dances, songs, countries of origin and religions. Whilst minority groups are often disadvantaged, they have a corporate pride that adds to their identity and self-importance. Low-income, multi-deficit families lack this and this problem has impeded the development of organisations for the poor throughout the Western world."20

THE PROCESS DURING 1976

1976 saw the ideal of an Action & Resource Centre for Low-Income Families put into practice. The professionals had left, the income supplement ceased and there were new expectations of workers, members and the Centre as a whole. The change was traumatic.

The indigenous staff were lacking confidence in their skills and several wanted to bail out. The typist, secretary, receptionist, domestic and book-keeper (Support Workers) were required to provide more personal and skill support. The social action worker and research worker (professionals) were expected to take part without dominating. This particularly meant restraint in group discussions. The Council and committees had to make decisions and face the consequences. Members still came with personal problems but would rarely discuss them with other family members even if they were on staff. Families wanted things to do, but there was no one to organise them. Cash emergencies still arose, but there was no assistance available.

Members had intellectually agreed to the new style Centre, but at a gut level, there was very little acceptance to it. To cap off the lack of acceptance, some of the natural leaders, who had moved families towards accepting ARC, decided to be actively destructive and try to undermine the new Co-ordinator (professional) and the organisation.

The pressure cooker of anxiety, frustration and dissatisfaction manifested itself in conflicts, testing out and destructive behaviour.

Staff fought bitterly over status symbols such as keys, offices, the use of cars and the right to go their own way. People were preoccupied with manoeuvering to get jobs, change jobs or extend hours from part to full-time. The Council, committees and staff fought for control and often spent time undermining each other. The indigenous staff were actively anti-professional and the professional staff did not trust the indigenous workers.
Until late March most of the energy of the organisation was consumed in internal conflict. This did not reflect, however, the high level of motivation and how much people cared about the organisation and what it offered them. It was an exciting and dynamic period which prepared the way for goals to be set and ARC to develop, distinct from the Family Centre.

The social action work was unimpaired by the internal conflict. Family members, particularly staff, made a big impact when they spoke to outside groups. They joined new committees, made press statements and visitors to the Centre were noticeably affected by its dynamism and consciousness. They were able to both hear what was being said and experience the internal conflict.

Some people, such as those from the Prahran Action & Resource Centre, thrived on this and visited ARC over and over. Others felt it to be negative and had difficulty handling the experience. New members were actively rejected and an attempt by a women's halfway house group to become involved was given very short shrift.

At the time, it appeared that the organisation would fall apart from within, let alone reach any great heights as an organisation run by and for low-income people. Reliable work performances by the support workers and an enduring amount of personal support by them and the professional workers, however, gradually settled the anxiety down and developed people's confidence. The committees and Council developed guidelines within which they could work, the staff's hours and duties gradually settled down and all the vacancies were filled.

The position could not be described as stable, but after the first staff conference in March, there was more of a team feeling. There was a greater sense of trust and the first signs of people supporting each other.
The research worker believed that to establish organisational goals was important at this stage and commenced a round of questionnaires (Delphi technique) about where the Centre was going. These questionnaires and the discussions which went with them not only helped people clarify what they wanted ARC to be, but it showed up the gap between the gut reaction of wanting a sharing-caring club and the statements about the Centre being a power base for low-income families achieving social change. Expressed differently, it was the gap between personal needs and the needs of the Centre.

Both of these two phases of development (resolution of conflict, and goal setting) continued on for the remainder of the year, but they dominated the organisational process during the first and second quarters.

The remaining six months saw exciting development on all fronts by key family members, particularly the indigenous staff. They felt more secure, gained in confidence and began putting their own ideas into action.

The Housing Resource Worker developed a Housing Loan Scheme and Bond Guarantor Scheme. The Credit and Debt Consolidation Resource Worker decided to concentrate on influencing policy decisions and be an advocate for consumers. The Employment Resource Worker obtained further funding for the Support Work Program and the Social Security Worker became active in outside action groups. The Adult Link-up Worker took on a further role as House Manager and the Teenage Link-up Worker commenced a new pre-teen program on Thursday nights. The kindergarten workers redefined their role and renamed it the Play Centre.

The further on the year went the more exciting these initiatives by members became. The four resource workers decided to make themselves more accessible and work more closely together. They did this by moving out of their isolated offices into a common 'resource room' which became the focal point for the Centre's services. The Support Work Program survived and fought on until it received $15,000 government funding with a promise of more. The camp program looked at new alternatives and enlisted the help of the National Fitness Council.
The legacy of this development was that more and more people were left behind. Council achieved a basic level of decision-making, but never kicked on. The committees were either chaired or dominated by staff members, often because they were the only regular attenders and Council was seen as a 'rubber stamp' for their decisions.

Members who still wanted the Centre to meet their personal needs in times of crisis or, just be around the place, fought a rearguard action for more activities, the return of professionals or just dropped out. There was intermittent attention-seeking and destructive behaviour by some members who felt left out, such as messing up offices or breaking coffee lounge furniture. The indigenous workers' strengths lay mainly in being advocates rather than performing routine organisational tasks or conducting developmental programs. The kindergarten/Play Centre, camping and pre-teen night, were all programs that deteriorated as the year progressed, mainly because indigenous workers lacked the knowledge and skills to conduct a developmental program.

Opportunities for personal development, therefore, were confined more to being on staff or Council and those who could not make this step felt the loss.

Despite these problems of old members being left behind and new members being rejected, there remained a remarkable resilience amongst the members. The sense of belonging to something and of it 'being theirs' was very strong. There were no less than ten luncheons during the year. Over fifty people turned out to vote at each election. The two dances and children's Christmas party were well attended and an average of fifty people attended each of the football and cricket matches. The General Meetings always had over their quorum of twenty, even when the constitution was being adopted. Some members kept up their protesting for the whole year and one said after a very chequered year of being both helpful and destructive, "The trouble is; what happens to this place, happens to me."

The year, therefore, was dominated first by the need to resolve the internal conflict; second, the need to establish goals; and third, by the need to close the gap between the rapidly developing members and those left behind.
None of these were completely resolved, but the progress was most encouraging. The first annual report and Annual General Meeting reflected this progress. Thirty people contributed to the report and the meeting, the goals of ARC were listed on the cover and the meeting was capably run by the elected Chairperson of the Council.

The organisation also retained its dynamism. There was plenty of energy in the system although nobody quite knew how it would be harnessed and directed. There was also a confidence amongst the key members, which grew steadily throughout the year and which helped people to face up to solving the problems which remained.
On July 28, 1976, Dot. Peillon, Chairperson of ARC Council, and Bishop James Grant, Chairman of the Brotherhood Board, signed a contract. Having provided the resources and skill through the Family Centre Project for low-income families to form their own organisation, the Brotherhood then helped formulate a written Agreement about the relationship between the two organisations.

The Brotherhood undertook to provide a building, furniture, equipment, telephones, two cars, a utility, a mini 'bus and underwrite the budget until the end of 1978.

The Co-ordinator and Social Action Worker were Brotherhood appointments, but the ARC Council took over the hiring and firing of other staff. The Brotherhood also saw research as a benefit which they wanted to fund and continue until 1979.

The mechanism for liaison on research matters, social action, finance, constitution and general management were all clearly spelled out as were the methods for controlling and accounting for funds.

Everyone knew where they stood and acknowledged the integrity and dignity of the new organisation. The program was not only anti-poverty, but it was anti-dependence, anti-paternalism and anti-charity. The agreement was realistic. The families had real resources and real control. They had a power base, a negotiating position and a sense of security, at least until 1979.

The written Agreement (Appendix E) has proven to be as important as a constitution. It has helped to stabilise some basic conditions which have allowed ARC to develop. During times of controversy, negligence or failure, the members of ARC knew there were some rights, property and independence which could not be taken away from them. On occasions, they could snub their critics or demand that some things be done on their terms. They could have some bad relationships without having the carpet pulled out from under them.
Not all members liked this position of independence. It meant a change from a life-time of dependence for many and involved skills in decision making and accepting responsibility that they had rarely needed before. Many of their old skills in getting handouts or beating the system were no longer appropriate. Many did not believe it anyway. They believed that nobody ever gave away control to that extent. They believed that no matter what words people used, things never really changed for them, and they had a life-time of experience to support their scepticism. They could not believe it too much because if they did, they would be vulnerable to being hurt and disappointed. To cap it off, some families had had links with the Brotherhood for generations. It was part of their life. They knew Father Tucker and David Scott and hung on every word Peter Hollingworth said on the television or in the paper. They were not going to give all that up for some fly-by-night organisation run by people like themselves.

To some extent, those feelings still exist, but families are joining ARC who have had no previous association with the Brotherhood. The very involved, original family members are also enjoying the autonomy. They represent ARC at conferences and seminars. They speak on behalf of low-income families, not the Brotherhood. They prepare their own budgets and have successfully made submissions to the Social Welfare Department, Department of Youth Sport and Recreation, Department of Employment and Industrial Relations. Although these submissions have been supported by the Brotherhood, they have been presented on the merits of ARC in its own right.

The obstacles to complete autonomy are many and include problems in being registered, either as a charity or a co-operative, ownership of capital, such as the building or cars, tax exemption and sources of funds. The risk that autonomy simply means extinction is presently being faced. Negotiations have already begun between ARC and the Brotherhood as to how ARC can achieve complete autonomy with at least a minimum of financial and organisational security. These negotiations will be broadened to include a range of government departments and other bodies.
THE FUTURE

ARC is based on several assumptions and principles, one of which is that the membership should have increasing control over the future form of the organisation. Already they have modified the original, professionally conceived model and as their confidence grows, even greater changes can be expected. It is, therefore, not possible to say exactly what will happen, but there are some known factors which will influence the future of ARC.

The Centre has reasonable security of funding until the end of 1978. From 1979 on, what happens to ARC will be greatly influenced by its finances.

The first 12 months of ARC were spent consolidating an organisation controlled by the membership. The second major influence in ARC's future (after finance) will be the ability of that organisation to achieve its goals. To do this, ARC must successfully achieve the chain of tasks shown on page 36.

Apart from finance and the ability of ARC to achieve its goals, it must also resolve the difficulty of having competing goals.

To provide opportunities for personal development has been interpreted to mean that indigenous staff would learn new skills and then move out. The consequences of achieving this goal would be that the best staff would constantly be moving out of ARC, weakening it as a source of resources and advocacy for low-income people. The number of professional staff would also need to be increased to support and train the newcomers, thus weakening the control by the low-income membership.
Task to be achieved

Method used during 1976

Influencing attitudes; consciousness raising; applying ARC principles to other organisations; influencing other power groups and decision-makers; changing legislation, administration and service delivery.

Speak and act on behalf of low-income people not just self; demonstration of principles; demonstration programs; written material; visitors to ARC.

Help members understand causes of poverty as outside themselves and the potential for change. Meetings, Bulletin, coffee lounge, home visits, personal discussions, resource work.

Membership, sharing-caring centre; interest in others; doing things with others; activities; being able to give to others and contribute to the Centre committees and Council.

Use resources, take part in activities, SWOP, help with lunches, dances, etc.

Home visits, coffee lounge, Bulletin, activities, resources, personal contact, written material.
If ARC concentrates on social change and resource provision, however, the multi-deficit low-income family will find it difficult to become part of the organisation because of the lack of support and development opportunities.

The attempts to build activities and a sharing-caring community have the effect of making ARC a locally-based organisation, whilst the social change and advocacy work has a national focus.

If it concentrates on resource and service provision, it will be seen as just another welfare agency and low-income people will be reluctant to belong to it or see it as their centre.

Crystal Ball

If I was asked to predict what will happen, the following would be my reply:

The organisation will be increasingly run by the membership, led by the indigenous staff. Their style of leadership will be more autocratic and committees and Council will exist more for accountability than for decision making before action is taken.

The real power will reside with the staff, with the representative structure of the Council and committees legitimating their work and being an important public forum and check against deviation from the fundamental principles of the organisation.

There will remain the need to have a resident professional who can be a support and mentor for the leadership as well as mediator behind the scenes and a hidden weapon to be used as an advocate in some critical situations with outside bodies. This person could be a policy officer, accountable to the membership and indigenous leadership, but not the head of staff.

The Co-ordinator's position as such will vanish and the main responsibilities spread over a number of the indigenous staff.
Crystal Ball (cont'd.)

The Fitzroy centre will become more important as an information and action centre and, at the same time, new links will be made with community based organisations. In some cases, ARC will initiate their own community-based organisations. ARC's experience and technology will be in increasing demand. Already demand is exceeding supply and the move to localise will exacerbate this. ARC's style of working will be increasingly through networks of sympathetic friends and coalitions, and expertise and support will be drawn more from volunteers and outside professionals as ARC becomes more confident and is less threatened by such input.

Activities will re-emerge as an important way of involving families without them having to present with a problem. They will also help relieve the problem of ARC being seen by low-income people as just another welfare agency.
THE POVERTY DEBATE

Australia's Delayed Entry -

No longer is the poverty debate in Australia about whether poverty exists, but at long last, we have joined the rest of the world in talking about how it should be tackled.

Similar to both England and America, Australia saw two parallel streams emerge to relieve the distress of the poor. They were the Charity Organisation Society and the Settlement Movement:

"The Charity Organisation Societies saw the answers to poverty in retraining of the indigent, improving his moral standards, removing him from the influences of deprived family life, and subjecting him to the knowledge and counselling skill of an experienced worker or skilled upper-class volunteer. The Settlement Movement was primarily concerned with environment and the effects of the social structure; it thus concentrated its efforts on reconstructing neighbourhood life, on improving facilities and resources in a single geographical area, and on the stimulation of one program participant by another through group effort."21

These differences in ideology are still reflected in today's approaches to poverty.

Both the depression and the second world war prompted new incomes - job policies which acknowledged government responsibility and built in more of a floor of security than had previously existed.

Australia's Delayed Entry (cont'd.)

With post-war reconstruction, full employment, an expanding economy and an education boom, poverty failed to be an issue during the 1950's and 1960's. It re-emerged in the late 1960's in most of the developed Western countries. The United Kingdom first saw some expression of the issues in the 1964 Kilbrandon Report on 'Children and Young Persons' and the 1966 report on 'Social Work and the Community: Proposals for Reorganising Local Authority Services in Scotland'. 1968 saw the Seebohm Committee's Report on 'Local Authority and Allied Personal Services' in England.

Canada tabled its poverty report in 1970 by which time the U.S.A. had effectively dismantled its 'War on Poverty' as such.

The U.S.A., influenced by Cloward & Ohlin's 'institutional opportunity' research on juvenile delinquency, the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime, and the Ford Foundation's Gray Areas Program, commenced a new national strategy for tackling poverty in 1964.

President Johnson said, in his budget speech of that year:

"I propose a program which relies on the traditional, time-tested American methods of organised local community action to help individuals, families and communities to help themselves."22

Rhetoric which was to be heard from Canberra almost a decade later.

The lag in the development of new programs in Australia to combat poverty can partly be explained by a lag in the development of the social sciences and professional training, and the fact that it took longer for a socially progressive government to win offices in Australia. Kennedy's narrow win over Nixon in 1961 and Whitlam's narrow defeat by Gorton in 1969 helped widen the gap.

The awakening of interest in poverty in Australia is very adequately described in Chapter 1 of Peter Hollingworth's book, 'The Powerless Poor'. At a national level, it did not become an issue until the Federal election of 1972 resulting in the Poverty Inquiry and its Reports of 1975-6. Because of the late development of a national inquiry, several non-government initiatives preceded these reports and the Whitlam Government had been and gone. Australia paid for this late emergence by everything happening at once. New programs were initiated concurrently in nearly every policy arena, and over 50 new commissions and inquiries started in late 1972 and 1973 alone. Despite the different timing, the striking feature is the similarities between each of the countries mentioned.

Where the anti-poverty programs have come from and what the present debate is about is of considerable importance to the Action & Resource Centre. Not only does Australia need to avoid being left behind again, as we were in the 1960's, but the Family Centre Project - ARC - is now one of the longest running, planned, anti-poverty experiments in the world which spans nearly the whole of the Australian renaissance.

**Similarities Across Countries**

The programs of North America, the United Kingdom and Australia endeavoured to involve people generally in local assessments of their needs and then help them act on those needs by creating and integrating both services and opportunities.

Marris & Rein refer to the "ideal of local authority services, co-ordinated about needs rather than professional traditions and bureaucratic jurisdictions, sponsoring research and reinforcing a community's own initiatives ...")

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In reviewing programs in both the U.S.A. and the United Kingdom, they further commented:

"... But they (U.S.A. and U.K.) are searching, by much the same means, to resolve the same fundamental problems - this growing disparity between the demands upon the social services and their resources, which no increases in taxation or contributions seem likely in themselves to meet; the assimilation of newcomers; and the alienation of democratic control in a complex interdependent society."25

The underlying rationale for this approach is just as consistent across countries. Program designers saw the problems of poverty, delinquency, etc., arising from the service and opportunity structure of society. They wanted to break down the isolation of individuals and disadvantaged groups and counter the growing sense of alienation. Decision making had to be brought close to those affected by the decisions and a comprehensive approach to problems had to replace the specialised approaches of professional groups and centralised departments. The localising of services and involvement of recipients in decisions about those services were two methods used to achieve this. The coordination of services was another, although approaches to this varied from statutory restructuring in Britain to the formation of funded voluntary groups in Australia.

All countries insisted that priorities should be based on research and this sentiment was reflected in Australia by the burgeoning of social planning, the Karmel report on schools and the Social Welfare Commission's and the Department of Urban & Regional Development's attempts to use indicators of need.

There was also clear feeling that services for the poor led to poor and stigmatised services. The needs-based research and community development techniques both were seen as ways of having universal, non-stigmatised programs able to discriminate in favour of the disadvantaged.

Marris & Rein state:

"Community development can be seen as a way of using resources for services selectively, without the stigma of a personal means test. Run-down city neighbourhoods, where housing is worst, schools are most overcrowded and people are poorest, can be discriminated for special assistance."[26]

The Importance of Power

Most assessments of these programs and of this era indicate that the programs failed to involve the most disadvantaged, they failed to achieve a significant degree of institutional change and most centralised bodies/departments and professions remain dominant in the fragmented provision of services. The initial attempt at a community action strategy fell a long way short of the original dreams. The basic reason was that it was politically vulnerable.

There was a reluctance to commit resources and to devolve power and having released a little of both, the system quickly recoiled. No strategy could have been expected to work in a period of less than 5 years and yet most of the anti-poverty measures had lost momentum by a third budget. It is clear that many power brokers accepted the strategy because they believed that local self-help would be cheaper and more efficient than the central, specialised approach. In fact, not only were needs revealed, but more and more articulate groups began supporting action for more resources to meet these needs. To some extent, these expectations were caused by the way the plans were introduced. The programs became trapped by their own rhetoric. Aggravating this problem was the underlying assumption of consensus. Kravitz refers to the early avoidance of the problem this assumption created in the U.S.A:

"There was a gnawing question about the capacity of a structure based on 'consensus' to work effectively for broad social change, but none of us, in our euphoria over the opportunity to mount the program at a nationwide level, were really prepared to raise openly that question."27

Marris and Rein make the same observation:

"... Assuming that the interests of professional services and the community are mutual, and that self-help will reinforce the intentions of government. As we shall see, these are risky assumptions and community action can be seen rather as an attempt to redress the balance of power between citizen and government."28

The planners failed to take adequate account of the dimension of power which covertly influenced the whole of the strategy.

Yarmolinsky, in commenting on the beginnings of the Office of Economic Opportunity, said:

"But there is an irony in the failure of the original task force ... to anticipate the violent reaction of poor people and poor neighbourhoods to the opportunity to affect their own lives through community-action programs. In a community as sensitive to the problems of the distribution and transmission of power as Washington, the power potential - constructive and destructive - of the poor themselves was largely overlooked."29


'Maximum feasible participation' proved to be more threatening than had been envisaged, not only to the national governments which stimulated it, but to local governments, provincial and state governments, traditional charity organisations and a host of power brokers. There was little objection to the rhetoric of participation which was included in the Economic Opportunity Act of the U.S.A. and the discussion papers of the Canadian and Australian Assistance Plans, but there was certainly a backlash when it was put into practice. Accusations were made in all countries that the conscious stimulation of participation was a conspiracy, an insidious plot against existing power groups. Participation was certainly about power, but it was not possible to mount any substantial argument that it was a pre-planned national conspiracy in any of the countries mentioned.

Ecklein and Lauffer reviewed 57 community development, participatory programs in the U.S.A. and in their introduction said:

"Participation is of critical concern to the organiser. It may be seen as an end in itself, or it may be viewed as a means for training leadership and building a power base. Local participation may be aimed at overcoming the increasing centralisation of decision-making power at levels removed from the people whose lives are directly affected by those decisions. For some, participation is an antidote to the massive institutions that threaten to destroy 'community'.

Participation may also be seen as a regenerative force, as an alternative to alienation, and as a means of enhancing human dignity and expressing man's humanity. Many organisers express an explicit faith in man's ability to deal with the personal implications of social problems through interaction on a face-to-face level."

An Australian review of community development by the Social Welfare Commission states:

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"However, one interprets these applications of community work techniques and use of community development programs, the evidence suggests that programs directed towards changing the balance of power, devolving decision making and pressing for a more equitable distribution of resources, are the ones most vulnerable.

Ecklein and Lauffer state:

'Not accounted for ... however, are the multiple pressures from other sources, the potential or actual backlash that may overshadow most gains from the organizing activity, and the changes in other sectors of the society, all of which impinge on the problem of concern, and all of which affect it?

Organisers are frequently unprepared to deal with repressive measures. They may not be aware that the severity of repression may be in direct proportion to their actual effectiveness in producing structural change.'\(^{31}\)

The Australian Government's comfortable acceptance of grant-in-aid social workers in ethnic agencies compared to the allergic reaction to welfare rights workers in ethnic agencies provides a good contemporary example of the above.

Marie Mune states:

"One of the myths of community development was that it was about increasing the power of the local people. In reality, it was usually about introduction of centrally planned innovation."\(^{32}\)

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The value of a community action strategy is yet to be properly tested and evaluated. The explosion of small innovatory experiments into national programs was in retrospect a precipitous way to launch the strategy. The lack of ongoing national policies left the programs out of context and having to fight their own political battles. And the lack of real understanding of the power issue left the strategy unprepared for the backlash.

The other major shortcoming of the community action strategy for the poor was the lack of a 'jobs and income strategy' to go with it.

James Sundquist who edited 'On Fighting Poverty' and Patrick Moynihan who chaired ten week-end seminars, conducted by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, which were the basis of the book, made the following comments:

"There are many improvements that can be made. Most notably government-wide co-ordination of the War on Poverty ... (and) ... a new and dynamic economic component to the War on Poverty ..."33

... The members of the seminar out of which this volume grew were united in their judgment that a 'jobs and income strategy' has to be adopted."34

Moynihan said in summary:

"Regardless of how poverty is defined, we cannot rely on either a service or an opportunity strategy. What we must have is income redistribution. After long hours of sociological discourse, one fact remains clear: The poor do not have enough money."35


34. Ibid, P.244.

35. Ibid, P.244
Implications and Opinion -

Sundquist ended 'On Fighting Poverty' by saying:

"The War on Poverty needs research, yes, and experimentation and evaluation. But already much more is known about how to conquer poverty than is being used. The general directions in which the country has to move are clear enough: the creation of jobs for the poor, the maintenance of income, the improvement of services, the development of competence among the poor as individuals and communities, and the abolition of the ghetto and all that it stands for."36

Focused more narrowly, Peter Townsend, in addressing the Seebohm Committee Report, concluded by saying:

"The formal aims of a programme of community development, which arise from an analysis of different kinds of inequality should be fourfold; the equalisation of resources locally; the reduction of isolation; family support and community integration."37

And the community action strategy, Marris and Rein end the preface of their second edition of 'Dilemmas of Social Reform' with the following summary:

"Thus each of the principles of community action is, in itself, hard to realise successfully; each is liable to run into conflict with others; and the conception as a whole is politically vulnerable. The American experience we recount in this book found no very good answers to these problems. Yet the principles themselves are surely right; the causes of social deprivation are indeed interdependent, and call for a correspondingly integrated intervention to cure them; we still need far greater knowledge to understand how best to intervene; and all such rationalisation will become oppressively paternalistic, if it is not counterbalanced by a new assertion of democratic autonomy.

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The difficulties are daunting, but the decade of experiment we have tried to interpret is more than a warning. Through all the disappointments, the false starts and turning back, there appears at the end the uncertain outline of a subtler and more sensitive pattern of government, where people will be at once more in control of their own affairs, and better able to negotiate for a common good. The history of community action is a record of the search for this ideal.38

The conclusions one draws from all this depends a great deal on personal attitudes and previous experiences.

I agree with Robert Levine, "the one thing which is least likely to work is an approach along a single line, appealing though its intellectual simplicity may be."39

The strategy used must be multi-facited. Townsend talks of five social services: health, education, housing, social security, and family and community welfare.40 Alfred Kahn talks of six, adding unemployment raining to the above.41 The Australian Poverty Report adds legal services, transport and communication services, recreation services and religious services to give a list of ten.42

An Australian anti-poverty strategy should encompass all ten.

The strategy should also be capable of lasting longer than three years and not be too distracted by short-term survival goals. I believe the five year time period used in Britain, for the Home Office Community Development Project, is desirable.

To achieve a multi-faceted, planned and researched strategy over more than three years requires selected projects on less than a national scale. Such projects should be continually set up using a variety of approaches. To have a national welfare boom quickly followed by a national welfare backlash every 20 years simply prevents the development of expertise in how to handle our complex society. It also leads to politically expedient social policy rather than rational social policy.

The anti-poverty strategy must also contain a system of positive discrimination. Tax cuts, more schools and hospitals, and a buoyant economy only affect poverty when they are linked to anti-poverty measures such as building hospitals in low-income high risk areas.

Finally, no strategy will work unless it involves the disadvantaged. It must develop the competence of the unskilled, transfer resources, decision-making and jobs, and provide motivation and support. But we must not be unrealistic about the time, cost and difficulties of achieving this. Politicians look for panaceas. The ARC experiment is not one and we must not become trapped by our own rhetoric and overstatements.

The Action and Resource Centre for Low-Income Families endeavours to encompass those features. It is a multi-faceted, anti-poverty program in its fifth year (and at least one more to run), making mistakes and having some successes, but building expertise as it goes. Many of its benefits discriminate in favour of low-income people as do the major funders of the program (Brotherhood of St Laurence, Social Welfare Department, Department of Social Security and the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations). It has worked hard at transferring power to the low-income members and the majority of staff are indigenous workers.

Its survival depends on consciousness raising rather than a Machiavelian approach. The poverty war must essentially be fought by the poor; their consciousness must be raised to understand what is possible and to believe in their own abilities and value to society. The electorate must feel threatened, understand and identify with the problem.
They must be willing to transfer resources and power. If that implies a new social morality, then that is what is required. The wars on poverty of the 1960's and early 1970's were lost by the poor before they got into battle. Except for building in certain basic rights and basic conditions, no national strategy would work now; there is a great deal of groundwork to be done first and ARC should be regarded by all policy makers as one of a number of vital Australian projects.
APPENDIX A

GOALS

1. To defend the rights of low-income people and establish a power base for low-income people.

2. To provide learning opportunities.

3. To provide information geared towards helping families (resources, services, rights, etc.)

4. To build an organisation in which families are involved and participate; providing pleasure and enjoyment, friendship and motivation.

5. To develop ways of creating change.

6. To offer opportunities for:
   (a) work,
   (b) learning,
   (c) children's program,
   (d) belonging to something,
   (e) feeling needed.

### APPENDIX B

**STAFF**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Hours Employed</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hayden Raysmith</td>
<td>Co-ordinator</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan Benjamin</td>
<td>Social Action</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dot. Emery</td>
<td>Coffee Lounge (Family Member)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gladys Shears</em></td>
<td>Research Assistant (Family Member)</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan Salmon</td>
<td>Research Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Margaret Blair</td>
<td>Holiday Host</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vida Streader</td>
<td>Play Centre (Family Member)</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandy Bowtell</td>
<td>Play Centre (Family Member)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patrick Murphy</td>
<td>Accounts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norma Hampton</td>
<td>Bulk Store</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary d'Aprano</td>
<td>Receptionist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anne Jacobs</td>
<td>Typist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judy Priest</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sue Stewart</td>
<td>Bulk Store (Family Member)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merv. Parker</td>
<td>Link-up &amp; House Manager (Family Member)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris. Williams</td>
<td>Camp Worker (Family Member)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judy Cassar</td>
<td>Consumer Rights (Family Member)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maureen Wolf</td>
<td>Housing (Family Member)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pauline Windler</td>
<td>Social Security (Family Member)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bob Williams</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judy Till</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paula Walsh</td>
<td>Wednesday night program</td>
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<td>Peter Andrianakis</td>
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<td>Vicky Young</td>
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<td><em>Bob Long</em></td>
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<td><em>Carol Sowter</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Jenny Fichtenbaum</em></td>
<td>SWOP (Family Member)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* No longer staff members

**Action & Resource Centre, First Annual Report, 1976.**
APPENDIX C

COUNCIL

Dot Peillon  Chairperson
Shirley Wood  Secretary
George Emery  Treasurer
John Roberts
Ray Walters
Milly Kelly
* Doug. Parker
* Evelyn Mundy
* K. Sheppard
* F. Barnes

(* No longer active Council Members)

STANDING COMMITTEES

Finance
M. Wolf (Convenor)
M. Parker
G. Emery
P. Murphy
V. Streader

Camping
J. Roberts
E. Mundy
P. Parker
J. Cassar
C. Williams
M. Greenwood

Staffing
P. Windler (Convenor)
D. Peillon
S. Wood
G. Shears
E. Jenkins
S. Stewart

Social
J. Priest (Convenor)
S. Bowtell
A. Jacobs
E. Mundy
D. Emery

Community Relations & Social Action
G. Shears (Convenor)
J. Cassar
S. Wood
J. Benjamin
D. Griffiths
M. Kelly

Building
R. Walters
N. Hampton
B. Long
J. Roberts
M. Parker

Constitution
G. Greenwood (Convenor)
M. Greenwood
A. O'Connor
H. Raysmith

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<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Operating Income</th>
<th>Operating Expenditure</th>
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<td>Fees for Services</td>
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<td>Youth, Sport &amp; Recreation Department Grant</td>
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<td>Social Welfare Department Special Grant</td>
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<td>Salaries</td>
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<td>Domestic Overheads</td>
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<td>Transport</td>
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<td>Income Supplement (past year)</td>
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<td>Activities Camps Store</td>
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PART A

A 1. OBJECTIVE:
To establish a working relationship between the Action & Resource Centre, previously the Family Centre Project, and the Brotherhood of St Laurence, based on an understanding that the Brotherhood of St Laurence will underwrite the Project financially within the limits of an approved annual budget subject to review and the availability of Brotherhood funds, and provide buildings and facilities for a further three years (1976/78) and that during this time the Centre will work towards complete autonomy.

A 2. ADMINISTRATION:
2.1 The Family Centre Council and its Standing Committees will be fully responsible for the Action & Resource Centre. All decisions about the Project will be ultimately made by the Council; all staff will be accountable to the Council; all expenditure will be by Council decision, in accordance with other clauses in this agreement.

A 2.2 The day-to-day running of the Centre will be carried out by the Co-ordinator acting as the Council's agent, who shall be appointed by the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

A 2.3 All staff except the Co-ordinator and the Social Action Worker will be hired and fired by the Council through its Staffing Committee. Selection of staff will also be carried out by this committee using other people as appropriate. All Action & Resource Centre staff will work as Action & Resource Centre, not Brotherhood of St Laurence staff and be introduced in this way when speaking to groups, etc.
PART A (Cont'd.)

A 2.4 The appropriate wage rates and work conditions for all members of staff will be in accordance with the Awards used by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, after consultation with Family Centre Council.

A 2.5 The allocation of the duties and responsibilities of all staff members will be decided by the Family Centre Council on the recommendation of the Staffing Committee, and the Co-ordinator acting for the Council will ensure these duties and responsibilities are carried out.

A 2.6 No charges are to be incurred unless approved by the Family Centre Council.

A 3. FINANCE:

3.1 The Brotherhood of St Laurence will provide the finance necessary to run the Centre providing sufficient funds are available to continue the Brotherhood's overall services. A budget will be agreed upon between the Family Centre Council and the Brotherhood of St Laurence to maintain the Centre's operation as laid down in the statement of objectives. The Family Centre Council may also seek its own finances, but until the Centre is properly constituted under the Hospitals and Charities Act or some other relevant Act, all submissions for funds must be approved by the Brotherhood of St Laurence to eliminate duplication of submissions and confusion for the fund-givers.

3.2 The Family Centre Council and its Standing Committees will not issue purchase orders or incur charges other than those within the scope of the accepted budget without prior approval of the Co-ordinator after discussing the item with the Executive Director or his deputy.
PART A (Cont'd.)

A 4.  LIAISON BETWEEN BROTHERHOOD OF ST LAURENCE AND ACTION & RESOURCE CENTRE:

4.1 The Co-ordinator will attend Brotherhood of St Laurence Executive and Board meetings, thus the Co-ordinator will be a resource person for both the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Family Centre Council; also the main method of liaison. A representative of the Family Centre Council may by invitation attend Brotherhood of St Laurence Executive, Finance and Board meetings where items of importance relating to the Action & Resource Centre are being discussed.

A 4.2 The Family Centre Council will elect one Action & Resource Centre member as a representative as well as the Co-ordinator on the Brotherhood of St Laurence Research Committee. The Social Action worker and the Co-ordinator and one other Action & Resource Centre member will be representatives of the Family Centre Council on the Brotherhood of St Laurence Social Issues Committee. Any press statement or social action will be carried out in the name of the Action & Resource Centre except where there is agreement between the Action & Resource Centre and the Brotherhood of St Laurence to take joint action.

A 4.3 The Brotherhood of St Laurence will appoint a research worker and a research assistant to its Research Department to continue the research program within the Centre. The research assistant will be an appropriate Action & Resource Centre member, and both will be employed by, and included in, the budget of the Brotherhood of St Laurence Social Issues Department.

4.4 Part A of this agreement will remain operative for the future three years of the Centre (1976-78) whilst Part B will be renegotiated annually between the Family Centre Council and the Brotherhood of St Laurence within the terms of Part A.
PART A (Cont'd.)

A 5 PROGRESS OF CENTRE

5.1 The Brotherhood of St Laurence will require an annual review of this agreement. Such annual reviews will include an assessment of progress of the Centre and an account of all expenditure.

5.2 The Brotherhood of St Laurence will require a monthly report of the Centre's activities to be presented to its Board of Directors. Such monthly reports will be presented to the Board by the Co-ordinator on behalf of the Family Centre Council which will prepare such reports.

A 6 CONSTITUTION AND LEGAL MATTERS.

6.1 The constitution of the Action & Resource Centre should not conflict with the Brotherhood of St Laurence Act. Should this occur, the BSL Act shall be the overriding document.

6.2 This agreement shall be regarded as an internal Brotherhood of St Laurence agreement where the BSL still remains the finally responsible legal entity and where BSL tax exemption still applies.

PART B

B 1.1 The Family Centre Council will continue to be provided with the buildings and facilities currently used by the Centre. It will be responsible for ensuring that repairs and maintenance of all buildings and facilities are carried out, and the cost of such repairs and maintenance will be borne by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, providing reasonable care is taken.

B 1.2 The Family Centre Council is responsible for cleaning the building, but the cost will be borne by the Brotherhood of St Laurence within the limits of the budget. The Action & Resource Centre will manage its own cleaning contract as soon as the contract with the current cleaner expires. Expenditure on the contract and the standards to be attained will be set by the Brotherhood of St Laurence.
B 1.3 The Brotherhood of St Laurence will provide funds to employ the following staff:

1 Co-ordinator
1 Social Action Worker
7½ Resource Workers
5 Support Workers
½ Domestic Worker, and
other staff by mutual agreement.

Qualifications on this finance are that the Co-ordinator and the Social Action Worker must be persons acceptable to both the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Family Centre Council and that one of the support workers shall be a book-keeper.

B 1.4 The Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Family Centre Council require the following accounting duties to be performed by the book-keeper:

1.4.1 To report all accounts to the Family Centre Council. Approval for payment may be authorised by the Co-ordinator who will forward them to the Brotherhood of St Laurence for actual payment, providing accounts are for items included in the accepted budget.

1.4.2 To prepare time-sheets for wage payment (to be signed by Co-ordinator) and forward them to the Brotherhood of St Laurence who will pay wages, as this is usually a job for a trained salaries clerk.

1.4.3 To manage a cash imprest for the Centre.

1.4.4 To maintain a record of the money spent within the Activities program.

1.4.5 To maintain the books and accounts for the Bulk Store.

1.4.6 In co-operation with the Brotherhood of St Laurence maintain a record of all expenditure in the Action & Resource Centre and to report monthly expenditure to the Family Centre Council for budgeting purposes.
B 1.4.7 To work closely with the Treasurer and the Finance Committee of the Family Centre Council.

B 1.5 Bulk supplies such as stationery will continue to be provided and charged to the Action & Resource Centre by the Brotherhood of St Laurence until the Centre is properly constituted under the appropriate Act, as this is the only way to obtain tax exemption.

B 1.6 Telephone services will be provided through the Brotherhood's switchboard, but the Centre will have its own telephone number in order to establish a separate identity. This arrangement will continue until such time as a separate switchboard is practicable.

B 1.7 Insurance payments on the property and for workers' compensation will be paid for on behalf of the Action & Resource Centre by the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

B 1.8 The vehicles currently used by the Action & Resource Centre will be lent to it by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. These vehicles at the date of the agreement are the two cars, the utility and half the minibus. Occasional use of these vehicles by the Brotherhood of St Laurence staff will continue, wherever necessary, although all bookings except the minibus, must be made through the Action & Resource Centre and no vehicles may be taken without a booking. The Family Centre Council will be responsible for the cleaning, maintenance and repair of these vehicles and exercise reasonable care whilst in their control. Costs and repairs incurred whilst the vehicles are under the control of other Departments will be charged as an expense to such Department. The vehicles will continue to be registered in the name of the Brotherhood of St Laurence who will arrange for periodical changeover of all vehicles and the Action & Resource Centre will assist in the selection of the type of vehicle to be purchased.

(Sgd) James Grant (Sgd) Dot Peillon  
(Brotherhood of St Laurence), 28/7/76 (Action & Resource Centre, 28/7/76)