

" YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CENTRES "

Report of Conference enquiring into the aim and operation of a Youth and Community Centre with emphasis on the development, problems and future of the East Preston Youth and Community Centre - 19/20.8.1961

METHOD OF TREATMENT :

No attempt has been made to produce a verbatim transcript of the proceedings. The unanimous recommendations made will carry weight only in the presence of other evidence indicating the extent and depth of discussion.

Salient points of principle and theory are summarised in four sections as a supplement to the recommendations made.

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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS and interpretation of findings has been prepared by

Kim T. Wyman,
Director,
EAST PRESTON YOUTH CENTRE

Fitzroy, 15th. September 1961.

Conference on YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CENTRES

----- FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS -----

The Conference agrees in principle with the withdrawal of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence from the East Preston Youth Centre as from 1st. February 1962. It recommends that the following be given consideration and put into effect :-

PLAYGROUND AND RECREATION ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA - Part I

- (a) Takes over the tenancy of the Hall and adjoining land from 1st. October 1961 or as soon as possible
- (b) Investigates subsidy &c. to ensure continuity for 1962-63 and if necessary makes suitable approaches with the Brotherhood's support
- (c) Investigates possibility of Playgrounds Supervisor taking over one or both Thursday evening Junior Girls' Clubs (9 - 11 years) in accordance with common Playgrounds practice.
- (d) Establishes a working liaison with the East Preston Youth and Community Centre Committee.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH - Part II

- (a) Takes over the tenancy of 71 Tyler Street as from 22nd. December 1961
- (b) Establishes a working liaison between the Department's Pre-school Centre and Playgrounds

ALL (EAST) PRESTON CHURCHES - Individually or Collectively - Part III

- (a) Consider the findings of the Conference and its deep concern about the lack of a spiritual background at the Centre and in the community.
- (b) Consider the desirability and possibility of each Church actively supporting one of the Centre's activities. The Congregational Church may wish to commit itself to the Senior Boys' Club, the Methodist Church already committed to the Sunday School may wish to be involved in convening and examining a Programme Committee responsible for activities. Other needs are -

Teenage Club	- 4 leaders	October (URGENT)
Senior Clubs	- 4 leaders	before January
Junior Clubs	- 6 leaders	"
Cricket	- 2 leaders	when possible
Sports	- Committee	"
Community A/s	- 1 leader & Committee	"

- (c) Plan for the erection of a common Church for services by all denominations involved

EAST PRESTON YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE COMMITTEE - Part IV

- (a) Appoints an assistant Director as soon as possible to (i) take over as Director from 1st. February 1962 (ii) convene a Programme Committee responsible to it for all activities consisting of potential or likely leaders-in-charge of all sections including Sunday School, Scouts and Guides (iii) assist Brotherhood leaders with and provide liaison for recruiting and placing local leaders.
- (b) Secure the use of temporary premises as and when needed and take all possible steps to erect a building on the Ruthven Reserve as soon as possible.

BROTHERHOOD OF ST. LAURENCE

- (Part V)

- (a) Approve and put into effect the recommendations and content of this Report
- (b) (1) Approve the formation of a Training Council composed of experienced leaders whose ultimate aims will be
- (i) Recruiting, selection, initial training and placement of voluntary leaders
 - (ii) Undertake research into techniques and skills generally and visual and technical aids in particular
 - (iii) Maintain an up to date reference library and obtain information and assessment in connection with all youth activities, community needs, training courses &c.
 - (iv) Salvage, repair and distribute in a suitable manner any equipment which may be available from Salvage Division or other sources
 - (v) Assist with activities or start new ventures at the Brotherhood's Children's Centre and other Church or Community Centres
- (2) Make available to the Training Council adequate space at Salvage Division for a Raw Store (now EPYC room in old building), Fine Store, workshop and an office. ?
- (3) If the Bedford Van has no satisfactory resale value, since it has been approved by the Transport Regulation Board, seats have been fitted &c, make this available for repair and use at the discretion of the Training Council. /
- (4) Provide a budget allowance from 1.2.1962 of no more than £300 p.a. as well as electric light, use of phones and stationery. One of the initial tasks of the Council will be to ascertain ways and means of becoming self supporting and make recommendations to the Brotherhood.

DEVELOPMENT AND FUNCTION OF THE FAMILY
SERVICE PROJECT AND EXISTING CENTRE

Introduction:-

Mr. David Scott, Director of Social Services of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, presented background material which was referred to throughout the Conference. The following may give sufficient if not adequate insight into the growth and activities of the Brotherhood prior to the 1960s and the Family Service Project within its framework :-

Early history of the Brotherhood:-

During the depression years of the early 1930s, four Anglican priests led by Father G.K. Tucker banded together in Newcastle, N.S.W., a hard hit mining parish, to enable them to give effective help and guidance to unemployed men and their families. At first conceived as a Church Order dedicated to the service of man through Social Welfare, the Brotherhood of St. Laurence was named that after the Church of St. Laurence in South Yarra where Father Tucker worshipped in his youth and in the spirit of Laurence, a priest in Rome during the early years of Christianity and later canonized, who when commanded to produce the gold and treasures of the Church which he was to guard, collected instead the poor, infirm and aged on whom he spent much of it and declared .. These are the treasures of the earth ...

Past, Present and Future

In 1934, Father Tucker came to Melbourne, started an unemployed men's hostel, obtained the present site of Carrum Downs to which he moved many families living in appalling conditions in some of the inner suburbs, particularly Fitzroy, and realized that the solution to immense social and economic problems which he encountered could only be found when the lack of interest and apathy prevailing in the community were overcome. During the next decade, public opinion underwent many changes, a growing number of helpers and supporters came to Father Tucker's aid and the task of the Brotherhood became more clearly defined - show that it can be done, how it can be done and when it is being done, tackle the next problem !

By the early 1950s, Carrum Downs became a model settlement for the aged, the Coolibah Club the first centre to which the lonely elderly citizen could come, eat, sit, talk or read and if need be get help, the first A.A. group was started, free milk was available to children in Fitzroy Schools and elsewhere, plans for slum reclamation were under way, films like "Beautiful Melbourne" and "Gael does not cure" were produced and widely circulated to promote understanding and social action. At the same time there emerged the beginnings of permanent services where nobody else could carry on - Social Service Bureau staffed by trained Social Workers, the Children's Centre at Fitzroy tackling health problems which then were far-reaching, and several others - backed by continuing research, enquiry and social

to say nothing of Christian action in such seemingly diverse fields as Housing, plight of Pensioners, dependent children

In current terminology, the Brotherhood is frequently described as a Social Welfare Agency, sometimes as a Social Arm of the Anglican Church, a Welfare Organisation, a Charitable Society. There may be a need, a use for all these terms but bearing in mind its history, generic rather than specific function and its aims governed by Christian teaching, the name and description are synonymous in the best sense of the word "Brotherhood".

Family Service Project

One of Melbourne's post-war problems was the concentration of many homeless families at Camp Pell. For some it was a transitory centre where they were temporarily accommodated, for others it became the "end of the road". Loosely termed problem families, they were rejected by prospective landlords and some by the community as a whole on any one or more of several grounds - too many children, moving a lot, excessive drinking, inadequate standards, poor employment record of wage earners.....

The Brotherhood worked with and helped some of these families for a number of years and in 1955, the Family Service Project which envisaged a more comprehensive and efficient service was started with the co-operation of the Housing Commission. Its immediate aim was to help rejected and deferred applicants for Commission homes to achieve this goal. The intrinsic aim was to help these families develop towards becoming self-supporting and socially satisfactory family units, able to provide a healthy and stable environment for their growing children.

Many if not most of these families were known to all Social Welfare Organisations but the approach had been functional rather than diagnostic, frequently fragmentary and often conflicting. In the following years when many of these families were rehoused at East Preston, the Family Service Project Workers sought to meet their overall needs and by early 1960, more than 70% were in Housing Commission homes. Although detailed findings are still being compiled this and other evidence indicated that intensive casework in the area if continued, would defeat its aim and the Brotherhood would become a prop rather than an encouragement .

Youth and Community Activities

An integral part of the programme was work with children and adults in group settings. Shortage of trained staff, lack of experience, support and funds were obstacles which at times seemed insurmountable. There were a few ups and many downs, grim prospects of Clubs closing but someone always managed to carry on. Eventually a reasonably stable pattern emerged. During the last two years, attendance at Clubs and activities increased to a total of more than 300 individuals and facilities were available for all members of the community - Pre-school and Afternoon Group (Children under 9 now run by the

Playgrounds and Recreation Association of Victoria), Junior (9-11) and Senior (12-14) Clubs for boys or girls, Teenage Club; Sunday School, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides are supported by ancilliary centrally controlled activities such as Sports (Football and Cricket as well as Basketball and other indoor games), Camps, Teenage Dances and fortnightly Community Pictures.

The aim of all these activities has not been to create another Youth Movement but rather to secure the interest and co-operation of people and groups in this and neighbouring communities who believe that the purpose of youth activities is not only the somewhat nebulous Citizenship of Tomorrow but creative enjoyment for everybody today.

Conclusion

In this small segment of the Brotherhood's activities, it has been shown that it can be done. 1960 saw the formation of the East Preston Youth and Community Centre Committee, a group of citizens representing all walks of life in the City of Preston who pledged themselves to the building and maintenance of a new Youth and Community Centre at East Preston. Since this Committee will take over in February, the basis of the Conference was to examine how it has been done, determine how it can be done better and attempt to tackle the next task.

THE PLACE OF A YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE
IN SOCIAL WELFARE AND THE COMMUNITY

Introduction

In 1958, the Brotherhood initiated a research study into Leisure time activities particularly in new housing areas where facilities are inadequate or non-existent. The report will be available shortly and is recommended for referral in conjunction with this Section. The theme - what people do, what people would like to do and what should be provided is too extensive for concurrent consideration. Based on a random sample of 200 families, the Brotherhood found that in these and probably other communities

- (1) All interests are centered around the home
 - (2) There is a marked negative approach to youth activities
- ... Keep them off the streets ...

The Conference restricted itself to considering the effect that a Centre can have especially on children and by implication to its necessity in the community. Mr. Bob Horman, Director of the Victorian Association of Youth Clubs and Mr. Elery Hamilton Smith now a Public Relations Officer with that Association but formerly a Social Group Worker in charge of activities at East Preston for 2 years, presented background material. Reference was also made to roneed material (in Appendix) and films from the State Film Centre (see Agenda)

The attitude "Keep them off the streets" can be motivated by an interaction of several reasons ranging from ... they are a nuisance... noise, horseplay, to ... they'll get into trouble ... police, sex. One fragment of evidence is numerous, in themselves justified, complaints by neighbours and authorities when children congregate around Club buildings which only too frequently are adjacent to homes. Leaders are blamed whether or not the children belong to their club or any club, noise level and damage caused by the same children if Clubs did not function are not considered and a paradoxical situation is reached when a parent complains of misbehaviour by children playing on the other side of the fence who on investigation are found to be her own daughters. This type of situation is by no means exhaustive or exclusive to East Preston. Some understanding of the development pattern of any individual is necessary. The following is a summary of facts and theories accepted by the Conference.

Crucial levels in Development

Birth to 1½ years The child develops ability to form close relationships and to identify with others. Considerable evidence suggests that deprivation particularly of mother's affection perpetuates a vicious circle of mal-adjustment in later life, next generation parents only to start again with the second generation.

Youth and Community services can influence a child's development during this stage only vicariously by providing play and/or educational activities for children at all stages designed to reinforce adequate behaviour and attitudes when the child itself becomes a parent.

- 3 to 5 years: Development of sexual identification - the child wonders and determines whether it is and should act like father or mother or whatever adult has a close relationship with it. Absence or domination of either parent may lead to later conflict.
- Children in this age group are served by pre-school centres, kindergartens &c and it is curious that in view of the general acceptance of this principle, the field is considered exclusively a woman's province.
- 7 to 10 years: Latency period - the preparation of foundations for adolescent and later attitudes. This suggests not only the need for example on the part of leaders but a positive provision of experiences and programmes which will take into account a full range of interests - play, reading, vocational and entertainment.
- 11 to 17 years: Adolescence - a time of turmoil, quest for independence, social and economic status, sexual adjustment. It is interesting that the adolescent, teenager or whatever other name is used, is a creation of the last 50 years. This combined with current sales centered propaganda and negative stresses on juvenile delinquency &c suggests that adolescents as a group are overemphasized.
- The developmental foundations have already been laid; adolescents do not want to be taught but rather shown opportunities to learn, to experiment, to use independence. Similarly they do not want lectures on biology of procreation but rather learn how to fit sex meaningfully into their lives.

Importance of Heredity

The nature-nurture controversy has raged for almost a century, the pendulum of popular and scientific opinion swinging from one to the other. The impossibility of observing behaviour of two or more individuals with identical hereditary characteristics except in rare cases of identical twins leaves this open as a major field of enquiry. There is sufficient evidence that heredity and environment interact and the current thought is that both are of importance.

A child inherits certain definite physical characteristics - eye and hair colour &c, as well as tendencies - to some type of physical build, intelligence level and temperament. Characteristics cannot be changed or altered but tendencies are subject to the influence of environment.

Environment

The analogy between physical and mental tendencies is frequently not appreciated. Good nutrition without adequate exercise does not result in a healthy build and similarly teaching or learning without adequate opportunities for experience do not result in say a maximum intelligence level. Most important aspects of environment are those which affect personality development and ideally the function of a Youth Centre would be to fill the gaps left by parents, school, church and friends. Since gaps of this sort are not the same for any two individuals, such a broad approach is practically useless.

Culture

With the arrival of many New Australians, the concept of different

cultures in terms of socially acceptable learning and behaviour rather than fine arts, can be appreciated more easily. Generalities about any community may be an indication, although probably inaccurate, of a particular cultural background. Thus "Italians are good churchgoers; Italians carry knives" may indicate that the carrying of a knife may be a normal, socially acceptable practice to an Italian. It follows that if he is told that it is an offence to carry a knife, he will take steps to ensure that he is not caught - the "habit" will disappear only through understanding and by gradual assimilation of the "new" cultural pattern.

The City of Preston may have and probably has, a number of sub-cultures distinguished by language usage, attitudes and value judgments toward occupation, sex, private property &c., role concepts of what mother and father do within their own families.... A leader may understand young John who takes Tom's bike for a ride around the block. If John takes it home, the explanation to any accusation of stealing such as "Tom's a mug to have left it there" will be hard to accept. This may be an example of a sub-cultural background, certainly requiring change but by easy stages - experience of other people, talks about possible personal inconveniences, everybody forgets something sometime.. rather than by force or attempt at reform. Any misbehaviour should be interpreted within the cultural patterns of that community rather than the community in which the leader or worker was brought up. Any individual must be accepted as a person for what he is, not what he could be or should be.

Juvenile Delinquency

There is a similarity of attitude behind this tag and "Keep them off the streets" approach. That it may be a sign of normal health - physical and mental - appears radical at first impression, yet it is apparent that the adolescent needs to experiment to adjust as an individual in a complex and progressively more unstable community. In the absence of enlightened guidance and opportunities, such experimentation frequently leads to breaking the law. Repeated transgressions are always a symptom of something else - brain damage, sexual mal-identification, revolt against parental or other authority, revolt against cultural differences and/or a cultural norm or pattern.

The task of Leaders

There are many schools of thought, each of which is capable of some defence. These range from ... Let's give the kids a jolly time ... to the so called ... scientific approach ... Either extreme is inadequate - the leader's and child's impression of a jolly good time may not coincide with the result that leaders loose children or children loose leaders; on the other hand amateur (or quasi) psychology or still worse, psychiatry seldom achieves anything but harm.

What is the middle of the road course? An approach which takes into account such diverse factors as developmental needs of the individual, shortage of time the average leader has for study or preparation,

positive results achievable in about 3 hours out of 168 the child has to fill in each week ... A useful analysis is obtainable from three possible aims a Centre, or for that matter any welfare organisation, may set itself.

1.

SERVICE

In our framework this involves occasional car trips and other visits, dances, pictures &c. which may be undertaken by potential leaders or interested people who are not familiar with groups or individual children on the one hand or leadership skills or experience on the other. Providing that these activities are adequately organised, arrangements are reliable and leaders or helpers are content to show rather than teach, change or reform, service of this nature is both necessary and valuable. Another way of evaluating "service" is that it fulfills the "keeps them off the street" hope, provides amusement, entertainment and some experience. These are necessary factors but there is also a need for constructive developmental opportunities.

2.

SUPPORT

Social Work as a science takes a middle of the road course between helping the poor because they are poor by traditionally charitable and mainly religious organisations and intensive psychotherapy administered by a medically qualified psychiatrist which may determine and eradicate the causes if they happen to be psychological. It contains two distinct approaches. The first is diagnostic, which develops techniques of examining a client's behaviour, thoughts and social problems and provides dynamic treatment. The second is functional, which provides an opportunity for an individual to form a stable relationship with the Social Worker who helps rather than treats. Both approaches are based on established scientific evidence and despite continuing controversies, both can work effectively. The functional approach seems a more satisfactory one in Youth Work.

The task of a leader is to arrange (as distinct from provide) attractive, enjoyable activities oriented to meet the developmental needs of the individual. Apart from bringing children in and keeping them, this will serve as a common ground where a relationship may grow between the child and the leader as a person. Such a relationship will be one of friendship - where the child or individual may without obligation obtain advice and guidance. Particularly during the adolescent years, the relationship will be one of fellowship - apparent equality, common rights and responsibilities. This poses a dual obligation on leaders - they must have the necessary skills to arrange suitable activities and possess attributes of maturity - insight and understanding of one's motives and actions so that an immature person may benefit out of any relationship with them.

3.

SUBSTITUTE

A psychiatrist may feel himself qualified to take over the role of parents, school... Any other person, if still not convinced that he is not trained for or capable of this task should at least start reading (ie. H.J.Eysenck "Sense and Nonsense in Psychology" &c.)

THE PLACE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCHES
IN A COMMUNITY YOUTH CENTRE

Introduction

In one sense the present Centre was started as an extension of the responsibility of a Church. In another sense, leaders have consciously avoided and are withholding any spiritual background from their work, firstly to avoid sectarian squabbles and secondly (and this is probably synonymous) to cover up the lack of liaison between the Centre and Churches of most denominations.

It may not be true to say that most Churches have shown no interest in the area generally and the Centre particularly; it is true that practical support and co-operation during the past years has been minimal. Some years ago, the Methodist Church started a Sunday School within the Centre's activities and the Rev. Keith Leigh and Mr. Lindsay Brehaut have been very active during the last three months. The Anglican Church has given intermittent support through its Y.A.F. and Mr. Vernon Collins who recently moved to live in the area is active in home visiting and counselling. The Congregational Church is preparing to help since the Rev. Roy Forward took up his ministry and partly as a result of the Conference, three of its members may be able to act as leaders. A representative of the Ministers Fraternal has attended meetings of the East Preston Youth and Community Centre Committee.

Possible reasons for unbalanced and uncoordinated development

The Rev. Roy Forward, Mr. Lindsay Brehaut and Mr. Vernon Collins presented background material. Reference was also made to printed and other material.

The primary reason for the lack of overall support may be one of geography. In the initial years of the Centre, the Churches were not easily accessible, now they may still be too far away - the nearest at least a mile away. The Churches themselves were either new or serving too large an area and both clergy and laity had "their hands full". Other reasons are a matter of speculation - a large proportion of adults are, in any event by birth, Roman Catholics; others were openly hostile or wished to exploit possible material aid; in the general community the quest for security after the Second World War led to a Church Hall mentality ... let's build a better Hall; buy a new organ ...; the social barrier between old residents and newcomers takes many years to break down ...

The need for a spiritual background

It is not essential that all leaders in a Centre be practicing Christians, it is important that every leader thinks out carefully his or her own attitude to the Church(es) and forms a mature judgment.

If the task of a Centre is supportive, aimed at providing opportunities for development through personal relationships, the exclusion of a spiritual background, opportunity to enter the fellowship of

a Church of the individual's choice and the lack of example and witness of life based on a religious or rather spiritual foundation, can on the best possible view be interpreted at least as neglectful.

Apparent Obstacles

The Constitution of any Centre affiliated with the Victorian Association of Youth Clubs provides that its membership and activities be non-denominational. State legislation makes similar demands on these and other organisations in the welfare field which are registered and/or seek financial aid from the Hospitals and Charities Commission or any other body such as Y.O.A.C. &c. Experience in community activities suggests that this approach is wise - the fight between two "denominations" over the loyalty and allegiance of an individual or a group is ugly to watch and to a child can be disastrous.

A growing awareness of the need for unity as distinct from uniformity may in time lead to universal understanding. In the meantime, divergent doctrines can surely be avoided to the point where all or most Churches can become anonymously involved as a body, support the Centre and in liaison with leaders, resolve common principles of faith and witness through which every individual may have the opportunity of joining or rejoining in the responsibilities, fellowship or activities of the Church.

The future task

Leaders are only able to illustrate the needs - the moving force must come from the Church. It is hoped that Churches, whether individually or collectively, act as a matter of urgency on the following

1. Define a theological basis for the task,
2. As a part of their mission, undertake social and economic investigation into the needs and problems of the community in their area,
3. Whether or not they have a leadership training scheme, find prospective or suitable leaders and place them in the Centre's framework and
4. Maintain a close liaison between leaders, committees and Churches.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Other words such as worker or counsellor have distinctive qualities: some of which are applicable, but by usage, the word "leader" seems preferable despite its strong flavour of taking charge, a person in control. It can be shown experimentally that children, indeed individuals of all ages learn mainly from the leader as a person and not from games, crafts or other activities. Any consideration of principles of programming outside this range would be futile without reference to a particular leader and/or a particular group.

The leader's overall task and obligation have already been outlined. Insight and skill as requisites may be put in another way - the resolution of co-operation, competition and conflict coupled with an aim to vary, diversify, enlarge and enrich any group's activities or experiments.

Practical implications

Many people enquire about leadership as a way of helping the Brotherhood children or the community. Very few of these actually come, prepared to do whatever is necessary on a regular basis. When a prospective leader arrives, the person responsible for a Centre, club or group breathes a sigh of relief, mutters something about the satisfaction of leadership, highlights recent achievements, overlooks more recent failures and problems in fear of scaring the newcomer away and introduces him or her to a group of children. Usually sooner than later (if he hasn't found in the meantime that some important and pressing obligation has momentarily been overlooked and leaves) the prospective leader is on his own. Alternatively he finds out the joys of mixing powder paints, keeping records, collecting subs, sweeping the floor and is never on his own. If this be an exaggeration, it should be permissible to make the point that recruiting, selection, initial training and graded experience have for various reasons been incidental to rather than a preliminary to effective leadership.

Training courses are provided by VAYC, YMCA, YWCA, BSA, the National Fitness Council and some Churches. These may cater effectively for established Centres, potential leaders from the ranks of teenage clubs and leaders actively engaged in work with children. None of them provide recruiting, selection and initial training.

A possible solution

It is not necessary to examine in detail the problems experienced by leaders in new ventures or the needs of communities where new ventures should be started - lack of time, money and equipment. The need is obvious for establishing a body which would recruit, select and initially train potential leaders, then feed them to any youth or community organisations where their services would be mutually advantageous. Such a scheme would have other uses - research, promoting understanding between the many independent organisations, machinery to provide initial momentum to new Centres, equipment salvage and distribution the list could be endless.