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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 1954

The Public Welfare Program in Mecklenburg County

By WALLACE KURALT

(Editors' Note: The following article is excerpted from Public Welfare News, the official publication of the N. C. State Board of Public Welfare. Mr. Kuralt is now in his tenth year as superintendent of public welfare in Mecklenburg County.)

ONE OF the biggest problems concerning welfare work in Mecklenburg County is that the taxpayers in general do not understand the extent of real need in our population. Most taxpayers become exceedingly emotional when they see an individual family problem and feel that there is not too much that can be done for this particular family.

At the present time we are helping one-fifth of all the aged over 65 years of age in the population with old age assistance. However, a few years ago we were helping one-fourth. As the Old Age Survivors Insurance program expands, this percentage gradually decreases. It is, therefore, hoped that the government will eventually be able to more adequately meet the needs of the eligible and who cannot qualify for Old Age and Survivors Insurance.

ILLEGITIMACY PROBLEM A difficult problem faced by the Mecklenburg County welfare department is illegitimacy. Many taxpayers believe that the Aid to Dependent Children program is responsible for illegitimacy and that the department of public welfare should be able to control public morals.

Actually, the rate of illegitimacy in the county is lower now than it was prior to the beginning of the Aid to Dependent Children program. But in the handful of aid to dependent children families where the mother does continue to have illegitimate children after having first received ADC, unfavorable attention is focused on a very excellent program.

We believe that illegitimacy is not a reflection on the ADC program—it is a reflection on our culture.

Lax morals become a concern to the public only when they reflect in the tax rate. It is encouraging to note that the illegitimacy rate in the Negro population of Charlotte is about half what it was several years ago. For example, in 1932 the illegitimacy rate was 30.38 per cent. In 1948 it was 18.36 per cent, and the rate in the Negro population is still decreasing. The trend of the illegitimacy rate in the white population in North Carolina is slowly upward. In 1932 the rate was 4.22 per cent. In 1948, 8.89

per cent, and more recently it is 10.5 per cent.

The aid to dependent children program in Mecklenburg County financially enables difficult problem. The most frequent cause of financial need in aid to dependent children families are desertion, abandonment or imprisonment of a parent.

Compared to the national average in ADC cases, the rates of desertion, death of father, and high status of mother, are high in Mecklenburg County as reasons for applying.

Compared to the state averages in ADC cases, Mecklenburg has a high rate of desertion.

REHAB PROGRAM TOPS The county has a much lower rate than federal or state averages in physical or mental incapacity of father to support. This may be a reflection of an excellent vocational rehabilitation program.

The department of public welfare is actively encouraging activities in the field of education for responsible parenthood. It is believed to be the most hopeful answer for solving problems of desertion and unmarried parenthood.

It has been known for a long time that the greater number of recipients of public assistance in Mecklenburg County are relatively uneducated persons. Very few recipients have had education beyond the seventh grade.

This fact naturally poses a question: Why not place greater emphasis on school attendance? Such emphasis, however, immediately points out the need for additional funds to help families.

It has been well established that the school with an adequate lunch program will attract children better than the school without one, and the children who are fed a good lunch in school respond more readily to education.

It is undoubtedly true that children would respond equally well to an opportunity to attend school with decent clothing, with money enough to buy the books and supplies that are required, and to pay the other educational fees that are charged today to such an extent that we could raise a real question as to whether public education in North Carolina is any longer free education.

There is probably no preventive social work and hence productive than to help children get to school and stay in school.

RELATED SERVICES The county department of public welfare is closely associated with other tax supported services such as Vocational Rehabilitation, group work and recreation, mental hygiene, public health, State Board of Paroles, employment service, and the Federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare, as well as the local departments of health, education and welfare.

Every applicant and recipient of public assistance is automatically evaluated as a possible vocational rehabilitation referral. It is recognized that in the program of vocational rehabilitation we have one of our excellent programs for the individuals self-sustaining.

It is estimated that for every one dollar spent for vocational rehabilitation services, ten dollars comes back in federal income taxes because of the individual's increased earning power after treatment and counseling.

Any broad social program to develop the whole person is incomplete without group work and recreation. Recreation, as a public program, however, should not be considered as something just desirable for children or for poor people, nor solely as an outlet for the individual. Recreation at its best is a group activity, or, better yet, a family activity for everyone in the community.

Mecklenburg County is very fortunate in having a mental health clinic equipped to do diagnostic and therapeutic work with children and their families. This clinic is supported partially by federal funds made available locally through the State Board of Health, partially by funds from the United Appeal, from fees charged the patients able to pay, and from the Hygiene Association memberships.

Public health services have been particularly meaningful in maternal health, venereal diseases, and tuberculosis clinics, as well as in the field of sanitation. The foster home program depends heavily on sanitation engineers (and incidentally on eye inspectors) to help in the licensing process. The vital statistics unit of the Public Health Department, of course, indispensable insofar as the administration of public welfare is concerned.

The State Employment Service keeps many unemployed from having to apply for public assistance. The agency not only finds jobs but administers unemployment insurance funds.

The success of the Parole Division for which the county department of public welfare acts as agent, is best shown by the fact that since 1935 when the work began, not a single parolee under supervision has been convicted of a major crime in the county.

THE VOLUNTARY AGENCIES It is only reasonable to ask, with nearly three million dollars a year being spent out of public taxation for assistance purposes and a multitude of social services being offered by the department of public welfare, "What is the role of the Community Chest agencies, civic groups, churches and other private organizations?"

The answer is very simple. In spite of all that public tax funds do, tax supported agencies leave broad areas of unmet social needs in Charlotte. The low monthly assistance payments to recipients of financial assistance speaks for itself, but the crime rate, the di-

verse rate, the incidence of domestic instability, the incidence of neglect of children speak even louder.

Anyone who has ever participated in the activities of the Community Council in Charlotte knows that social problems loom large. These problems call for the concerted effort of both public and private agencies.

The preventive aspects of the work done by the Community Chest (United Appeal) and other private agencies in the county should not at all be overlooked. It is not a question of "Can we get along without these agencies?" — It is a question of "How can we stimulate greater public support and greater community leadership?"

It is a serious mistake to think that government can or should attempt to deal with all of a community's social problems.

It is only as we become individually aware of these problems and alerted to our individual responsibility for helping to solve these problems that we will be able to approach the type of community which we all want. Where as the department of public welfare is supported by public taxation, the Community Chest, churches and other private agencies depend on voluntary contributions for their continued existence.

Most of the agencies, organizations, and societies which bring richness into the lives of individuals are privately supported organizations. Throughout the United States, the Community Chest, or United Appeal, agencies have provided financial needs in families, and have moved toward offering the public more and more enlightened living services.

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some of the United Appeal agencies offer the same type of services to the public that the department of public welfare offers. We believe that the public can choose between the public and private agency in matters of family counseling, adoption, child welfare services and family case work.

SOCIAL ACTION Government and private agencies have been developing social resources rapidly since the early 1890's. Yet, we are continually meeting people who are experiencing social insight for the first time, and who are shocked by what they see.

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The Price Is Much Too High

SHORTLY after his inauguration in 1953 Gov. William B. Umstead suffered a heart attack. He was hospitalized, and since then he has spent a considerable portion of his time in the hospital or in convalescence at home. Last month he spent three weeks in Watts Hospital in Durham, seeking relief from a persistent cough and insomnia which have worsened his heart condition. After this period of rest and treatment he felt better and returned to work. Almost immediately he contracted a severe cold.

Despite his condition, the governor mustered strength enough to attend a meeting Thursday of the Advisory Budget Commission. The Raleigh press corps noted that he was under considerable strain, more pallid than usual, and weak. That evening, upon doctors' orders, he returned to the hospital. His doctors reported that the governor's inability to shake off his cold had aggravated his heart condition.

William B. Umstead is one of the most conscientious men ever to occupy the executive mansion in Raleigh. He has

driven himself to continue his task. Lesser men, with health so delicate, could not have done it. He has conducted the state's business from his bedside. He has worried over the state's precarious financial situation, the manifold problems resulting from the school segregation decision, the legislative program for the General Assembly session only two months away.

These burdens and others which a governor must bear would tax the stamina of a robust man. They will, we frankly fear, crush an ill man, which the governor is.

For this reason we suggest to him that he resign, in order that he may take the complete rest which he desperately needs, and thus regain his health. The state administration works best in the capable hands, those of Lt. Gov. Luther Hodges. After a year or two of rest, Gov. Umstead might well be able to return to the service of the state to which he has already given yeoman service as governor, senator and representative. The price he might pay, for continuing in office now, is much too high.

Mr. SNPA And 44 Million Readers

ONE OF THE chief architects of a tradition that keeps southern newspapers at the top of the heap in U. S. journalism is Walter C. Johnson, a 76-year-old bundle of energy from Chattanooga, Tenn. For half a century he has worked untiringly behind the scenes to promote the welfare and prosperity of Dixie through a vigorous press.

Next week in Boca Raton, Fla., at the annual convention of the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association, Mr. Johnson will retire as the organization's secretary-manager. Truly, it will be the end of an era.

Since 1909, this genial southern gentleman has held every elective office in SNPA. He has been secretary-manager for the past 15 years.

During his long years of service, Mr. Johnson was perhaps known only to a few of Dixie's 44 million daily news-

paper readers. But his influence was, in one way or another, felt by all.

His contributions include successful efforts to bring about a closer liaison among southern newspapers, to promote better business and advertising practices, more efficient production methods, better news coverage. And probably most important of all, Mr. Johnson called Dixie's attention to the region's great pine forests and their enormous value as a source of raw materials for the manufacture of newspapers. Awakened to this challenge, the South built a new basic industry that is still thriving, still expanding. Along with this industry came increased emphasis on forest conservation and tree farming.

Mr. Johnson's influence has been great. His long and unselfish service has been a primary factor in the growth of the association. He is, as Editor & Publisher says, "Mr. SNPA."

What Can Be Done About The Din?

BADGERED by the squeak and squawk of 20th century civilization, many an earthen is in a quandary, skimming the outward edge of sanity today.

Noise—great booming waves of it—is an impertinent intruder in every form of life. It makes the nation's million dollar factories unbearable, the sleek, modern offices intolerable and the spic-and-span cities unendurable.

But oh, to the scientific mind is, instead, adding more noises to the 20th century. For instance, a subway strap has just been invented which plays a tune when grasped by a passenger.

There are many scientific trends: howling airplanes in the sky without at least one half time ceremony in which 40 massed high school bands screech their way dissonantly through STARS & STRIPES FOREVER, everything from banks to banks.

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Our needs are fairly simple—just a little peace and quiet now and then. Remember the wartime Meatless Tuesdays? How about a Silent Sunday? Really, that's all we ask.

"extreme uneasiness, headaches, tremors, nausea, tenseness and insomnia."

A New England firm has even developed an "electronic ear" that can dissect any sound it hears into 84,000 bits of information per second for precise and accurate analysis.

All that is left to do is to invent a machine that destroys what the electronic ear discards.

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