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Dependency cases referred to a children's agency for protective services.

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SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

DEPENDENCY CASES REFERRED TO A
CHILDREN'S AGENCY FOR PROTECTIVE SERVICES

A Thesis

Submitted by

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(A.B., University of Rhode Island, 1952)

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science in
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1956
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The problem of protective care for children is an old and perplexing one. It is a problem existing in every community whether large or small, among the poor and economically secure, the intelligent as well as the mentally incapable. There is, however, a common characteristic in all:

...a breakdown of parental responsibility, with tensions and pressures on family life which result in dangers for children.¹

In the early years of child protection work, none of the societies in America had departed from the traditional role in acting as an arm of the law and adjunct of the police force.² There was ground for rational optimism, however, in the fact that, more and more, thought was added to kindliness and as surely as experience and study bring fresh truths to light so does the intelligent sentiment of the community sooner or later compel their adoption. The turn of the century heralded a new departure in policy making. Enlightened pioneers saw no hope for the future unless the low level of family life was raised.

They decided that the best principle of protection was the development of improved family life and prevention became the keynote.  

Whatever the organized social endeavor in whatever field, it all comes down in the last analysis, to the family as the basic unit of society, and to the child as its most important member. Child welfare, then is fundamental. In its broadest sense, it embraces all elements needful for the development of a worthy, successful manhood and womanhood.

Thus increased knowledge and social sensitivity were the basis of change in all aspects of child care. In view of the heightened concern regarding this problem which puzzles and defies reason this writer became interested in how the community is making use of its available resources whose express purpose is to combat this problem.

A. Purpose of the study.—Children's Friend and Service is a reflection of the community's concern for children. To this community, responsible for its creation and support, it is obliged to provide adequate protection to children whose present and future welfare seems in jeopardy of parental neglect. This writer is interested in how the community uses these services in cases concerning dependent

2/ Ibid., pp. 78.
The writer has in mind the following questions to be investigated:

1. Of the total dependency referrals accepted by this agency, what is the percentage of cases in which state commitment seems clearly indicated for the children at intake?

2. Are these referrals from the community appropriate in terms of agency function?

3. Are there some common characteristics in this group such as factors in family background and source of referral?

4. What is the caseworker's function at intake?

B. Scope of the Study. -- This study covers thirty-three dependency cases referred during the period January 1, 1953, through December 31, 1954 from Providence and South County. Cases from the Woonsocket and Newport areas have been excluded since they are not available to this writer.

C. Research Design. -- All cases from Providence and South County were tabulated from the intake worker's statistical control sheet. In most instances the reason for referral was given; however, when this was omitted it was necessary to read the record to determine if the case was appropriate for this study. A total of thirty-seven cases were found to have been dependency referrals which is the focus of this study. A work schedule was utilized to

\[1/\text{For the purpose of this study the term dependent child refers to any child deprived of care by a responsible parent or relative by reason of desertion, abandonment, illness, imprisonment and death.}\]
collect data.

D. Limitations and Value of Study.--This writer feels that this study may serve to help in the evaluation of the agency's program and services in terms of community needs. It has a direct bearing on agency policy regarding dependency referrals in which state commitment seems likely at the point of acceptance as Children's Friend and Service can provide only temporary care for such children. These cases might be handled more efficiently if referred directly to the state child welfare agency which at this point has no intake service for this purpose but does provide long term care.

The chief limitation of this study turns on the specific lack of information in some records at the point of acceptance with regard to available relatives who might be willing and able to assume responsible care for the dependent children in question. This writer assumes that although the intake worker frequently omitted this from the continuity of the record, further discussion had taken place. A cursory glance through the record after acceptance of the case and court summaries seemed to validate this conclusion. However, it was sometimes difficult to determine at what point the necessary information had been secured; therefore in tabulating data it was necessary to designate these situations as "indeterminate" and let the reader draw his own conclusions.
In addition to cases, the father was the only relative in the situation, but his ability to care for the children was most frequently questionable, either because of his employment, service in the armed forces, or implicit inadequacy. In almost all instances of this kind, the agency immediately became involved in the case by providing emergency shelter for the dependent child. Subsequent to this, there was an exploratory sequence pertinent to the father's ability to plan for the child's future care. In keeping with agency policy, these cases were largely characterized as "service at intake" instead of "accepted". However, in practice, despite what the disposition of the case is termed, the end result seems the same. The fact that the child is admitted to the agency's shelter appears to constitute or imply "acceptance" of the case or in other words, the case becomes the agency's responsibility, and according to precedent, remains such until an appropriate course of action is determined and carried through to a conclusion. Hence it was difficult for the writer to classify these situations. It, therefore, seemed best to term them "indeterminate" and perhaps it may be interesting to discover some association between the categories and final disposition of the cases.

Since four case records were not available, it was necessary to eliminate them from the data analysis. The writer feels that this may be a limitation of the study.
because if these cases are not similar it would make a
12 per cent difference in the findings.
CHAPTER II

PROTECTIVE SERVICES FOR DEPENDENCY CASES

A. The Evolution of Child Protection.--- Man's inhumanity to children in bygone eras stands out as a badge of shame. Exploitation and neglect have been universal practices in many great empires, in Rome, England and China, only to mention a few.\(^1\) The opening of the nineteenth century found the English poor-law system with its inherent defects well established in this country. Destitute children who were public charges, were as a rule, cared for with adult paupers by the contract system, or in almshouses, by outdoor relief or even bound out as apprentices. As to neglected children, there were but few provisions for their rescue and care. They apparently remained with their families until the latter became destitute and were either cared for as pauper children or, convicted of offenses, were sent to jails and penitentiaries along with adult offenders. The rapidly developing central and western states generally adopted systems of poor relief similar to those throughout the East.\(^2\)

The statutes in force prior to the opening of the nineteenth century indicate that children rarely became

\(^1\)Ray S. Hubbard, op. cit., p.5.
\(^2\)Homer Folks, op. cit., pp. 3-11.
the subjects of public care except because of their parents' poverty or their own wrong doing. Indeed, in Massachusetts a special poor law was passed in 1735 for the city of Boston which provided that when persons: 

"were unable or neglected to provide necessaries for sustenance and support of their children, such children may be bound out by the overseers of the poor."[1] Numerous instances are found in the statutes of various states from 1790 to 1825, authorizing the binding out, or commitment to almshouses, of children found begging on the street or whose parents were beggars. Around 1825 there came a more general recognition, however, that it is the right and duty of public authorities to intervene in case of parental cruelty and to remove children by force if necessary and place them under more favorable surroundings for their development.

Step by step, legislation was established for the rescue of neglected children; the definition of the term became more precise and inclusive; agencies were created to enforce these laws and institutions established to care for these children. Law enforcement for rescue of neglected children, as well as further legislation, received great impetus from societies for the prevention of cruelty to children, the first of which was established in New York City in 1875. Curiously enough societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals were organized eight years prior to

[Ibid., p.167.]
this. In some cities these societies incorporated the protection of children into their program.\(^1\)

The establishment of public systems of child protection in various states in the decade 1870-1880 and the enactment of laws for the removal of children from almshouses, considerably changed the character and methods in private charities. In 1889 Michigan was the first to establish an exclusive state system for the care of children who became public charges. Children both destitute and neglected on application of the superintendent of the poor, were committed by the courts as wards of the state. The so-called "Michigan plan" gained wide recognition and had become adopted by eleven other states by the close of the century. The fact that sending a child to a state institution involved transfer of its guardianship afforded a logical and satisfactory division between the state and private agencies. This effected one of the most important developments in private charities for children as they were enabled to limit their efforts to temporary relief. During the last quarter of the century, children's institutions multiplied rapidly in all parts of the country. However, this was somewhat curbed due to the influence of agencies which favored the placing-out method and the remarkable success which attended this system.\(^2\)

\(^1\)Ibid., pp. 167-178

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 179-182
In 1909 the famous first White House Conference on Dependent Children was called by President Theodore Roosevelt. This meeting formulated a much better program for neglected and dependent children, and led to establishment of the Federal Children's Bureau in 1912. Similar White House Conferences have since been held and it was the third Conference in 1930 which accepted the advanced or liberal interpretation of child protection as opposed to the legalistic concept.

Child protection is a distinct form of social service to children. It aims to obtain results through advice, persuasion and parental education, but when necessary to take extreme measures; its agencies are equipped for the effective use of compulsion, discipline or punishment through a personnel trained in the use of the law and legal machinery for a social purpose.1/

Thus was crystallized the modern conception of the true functions of child protection which has become generally recognized and accepted everywhere.

B. History of Children's Friend and Service.—

Rhode Island Children's Friend Society was established in 1835 in Providence and was the first charity devoted to the care of neglected and homeless children.¹

In 1879 the Executive Committee of the Rhode Island Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals petitioned the General Assembly to amend its Charter and include the protection of children. This petition failed to pass the House, because in the opinion of that body it would place children on the same level with animals. Under the name of Rhode Island Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the organization was incorporated April 20, 1882. The purpose of the organization, according to the constitution was "To provide for the more effectual prevention of cruelty to children throughout the State of Rhode Island."²

In those early years there were some institutions for children who had to be removed from their own homes, such as the Children's Friend Society Shelter and St. Aloysius Asylum. As these institutions were pretty much overcrowded the society rented a cottage to serve as a receiving home. Finding this inadequate, in 1886 the society purchased its own building to be used as an emergency shelter. This home was the only one in Rhode Island available to the community twenty-four hours a day. In 1951 it was

¹/Children's Friend and Service, op. cit., p. 7.
²/Ibid., p. 1.
relocated and is presently known as Lakeside Emergency Shelter.

In 1916 because of public demand and with a vision into the future needs of the community, the society pioneered in the field of foster home placing in Rhode Island by organizing a child-placing department in connection with its protective service. In 1946 the Rhode Island Legislature changed the name of the agency from Rhode Island Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to Rhode Island Child Service.

In 1949 Rhode Island Child Service and Rhode Island Children's Friend Society were merged into a single agency, called Children's Friend & Service.¹ This agency as it is known today is a multi-function state-wide children's agency which provides the following services; placement: adoption; protective; and emergency shelter.

¹Ibid., pp. 2-3.
C. Findings in Other Studies.— In a sense the Juvenile Court is the key to the entire program for child care. Besides its disciplinary function concerning juvenile delinquents, it has the sole power to determine, when petitions have been entered, whether a state of dependency exists, whether parents are wilfully neglecting their children, and whether because of this, the children shall be legally separated and made wards of the state. ¹/ According to statute these children are directly committed to the state's receiving agency, Children's Center. The state children's bureau has no power to control commitments nor does it play any part in the important investigation which should precede the court hearing. It has no authority to accept directly cases where the only question is whether or not the family or relatives are, or have any chance of becoming, economically able to give the minimum care necessary. In 1936 this procedure was denounced as contrary to good child-caring practices which dictates that the agency ultimately responsible for the child should make its own study.²/ In 1938 the Juvenile Court Commission proposed that complaints concerning dependency and neglect be first referred to a public agency for investigation before formal petition is filed


²/Bradley Buell, op. cit., p.27.
with the court. In answer to this question the following statement was contained in a Children's Bureau report.

The separation of children from their families is a drastic step—Our present methods of commitment of dependent and neglected children in Rhode Island throw the entire responsibility for the future of these children upon a state agency which has not been consulted or given an opportunity to prevent the breakup of the family.\^1

Up to the present time the aforementioned practices have remained unchanged. As a result of this, Children's Center has become overcrowded and a refuge for hard to place children thereby losing its essential feature of a detention home which was the intent of the law which gave it birth.\^2 On the other hand this agency which for many years has been making studies for admissions of children to public care also has a stake in the problem. This lengthy procedure consumes much of the caseworker's time which might be otherwise channeled towards casework in his work load. It would seem more efficient for the receiving agency to organize its own intake service for dependent children but this is a difficult task, would involve cost and time in training personnel and may mean an extra work load for the public children's agency.


\^2op. cit., pp. 80-84.
This writer feels that it seems all interested parties would derive many more benefits from the proposed change. This study does not purport, however, to discover the solution to this problem which is obviously not an easy task, but it is hoped that part of this study may be useful in reaching the most beneficial solution for all concerned.

Chedester’s study brings out some interesting findings. In 32 of 54 cases of children reported living in their own homes, the children were living with a mother who was either single or separated. This may indicate that marital conflict or personality problems are a causal factor in economic dependency as Mascari also reports that separation of parents is the most important single factor in dependency in families receiving Aid to Dependent Children payments. Of considerable interest in a study by the state Social Welfare research unit was the upward trend in the number of children under care who came from homes with parents divorced, separated.

1/Hugh L. Chedester, A Study of Some Social Factors Involved in Fifty Seven Aid to Dependent Children Cases, Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Boston University, 1951

2/Mary J. Mascari, Case Work Services with Families of the Aid to Dependent Children Program in Rhode Island, Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Boston University, 1949. p.19.
or where one or both parents had deserted. Does some interrelationship exist between those families who are economically dependent and those whose children are committed by the court as wards of the state, and does domestic conflict play an important part in this?

D. Approach to the Complaint.—The intake worker has a threefold responsibility: to the agency; the referring person; and to parents.

Protective service begins with the intake worker whose responsibility is to accept requests for service and to evaluate them as to whether or not they are within agency function.1/

To pay due regard to the community's concern for the welfare of a child and at the same time respect the sovereignty of the home and parental rights is not simple.2/

The primary responsibility to the referring person is to understand his reason for referring and to help him understand the services of the agency. The purpose of the complainant must be carefully examined but the validity of the complaint is based on how sufficient the information is with regard to the neglect of the child. He is to be helped to understand that only with such valid information will the worker have the right to intrude on the privacy of the home.

The complainant must be fully aware of the implications of such an invasion of privacy, so that while his identity may be protected, he assumes moral and social responsibility by giving specific and substantiated


evidence of neglect. In interpreting agency function and limitations it is pointed out that the child is the primary focus and that the agency is only concerned with the parent's behavior insofar as it effects the adequate care of the child.

The initial responsibility to the parents is to make them aware that the agency has accepted the community concern about the care they are giving their children. A candid statement of the complaint focuses for parent and worker the limits within which the parent must do something; the parent is not asked to change himself but the situation which is detrimental to the child's welfare. If a parent wants to continue to exercise his parental rights the agency is ready to help with his plan. It is the worker's responsibility to make clear the realities with which the parent must come to grips including the fact, when necessary, that the agency may invoke the authority of the court recommending removal of the child.

1/Henrietta L. Gordan, op. cit.; p.3.
CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF DEPENDENCY REFERRALS AT INTAKE

During the period January 1, 1953 to December 31, 1954, a total of thirty-seven dependency cases were referred from Providence and South County in Rhode Island. In analyzing the total dependency referrals during the year 1953 it was found that twenty-four cases had been referred but since two records were not available they were eliminated from this study.

It was noted that the largest single group of referrals was received from other agencies. The police and school departments were the next largest groups, the latter, occurring at the beginning of the school year. The majority of referrals occurred during the spring and fall with the absence of any during the months of extreme weather, August and December.

During the year 1954 a total of thirteen referrals were received but two cases were eliminated from the study since they were not available. Similarly the largest single group of referrals came from other agencies, the police and school departments. The decrease in referrals over the previous year may mean that parents are being reached and helped by other resources in the community before their problems become emergent.
In 1953 of the total referrals received 36 per cent of the families referred were previously known to the agency and composed the group which were accepted. Only one dependency case was referred twice during the year for the same reason and was finally transferred to the placement department in the agency. In those cases comprising the group not accepted, protective service was not necessary because of one or two reasons. In three of the cases mothers had deserted, leaving fathers with the child, who perhaps by reason of employment needed help in planning for its care. Mothers returned in two instances before protective service was necessary and in the third case the father was referred to the placement department in the agency. In the remaining two cases not accepted mother had left the child in good care and although not desertion it was a case of poor planning on her part. In both instances the complainant withdrew
as the mother returned for the child relatively soon. Even though these cases were not accepted some service was given in the way of advice and interpretation.

In 1954 none of the referrals were rejected. This may be due to a change of workers in June, 1953, and the introduction of a new statistical control sheet as there seemed to be an increase in the amount of service given at intake.

In this year the group of cases which were given some service comprised 54 per cent of the cases which were previously known to the agency. None of the cases were referred during the year twice for the same problem.

During the year 1953 it was noted that the largest number of cases referred was comprised of intact families. The majority of these cases were accepted and assigned. A cursory glance through these cases indicated that marital conflict was most frequently an underlying problem and that the mother was usually the head of the family. A previous study of protective services in the agency of the year 1953 reported corresponding information.1/

### Table 2. Marital Status of Families Referred by Disposition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Accepted and assigned</th>
<th>Given Service</th>
<th>Not Accepted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated (permanently)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- This category also includes couples who are temporarily separated.

Only one case appearing in the group "other" concerned a widow. In the year 1954 there seemed a proportionately larger decrease in cases concerning married couples whereas the other categories remained almost static.

In those cases referred during 1953 most of the families had an income from private employment however two were not accepted. Generette found in his study of the same year that 56 per cent of the families referred were receiving income from private employment.\(^1\) As one might expect those families receiving public welfare or whose economic status was tenuous comprised the bulk of referrals which were accepted and assigned or given service. Those families classified under "other" were

\(^1\)op. cit.
receiving income from service allotments, unemployment benefits or were between jobs, the latter being mostly the case. It was this group which received the most service at intake.

Table 3. SOURCE OF INCOME OF FAMILIES REFERRED BY DISPOSITION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Accepted and Assigned</th>
<th>Given Service</th>
<th>Not Accepted</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private employment...</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was noted that none of the families in either year received income from self-employment which would indicate some lack of initiative and imagination. More of the families referred during the year 1954 in contrast to the previous year were receiving public welfare thus making this the largest group referred. It seems significant to note that the year 1954 in Rhode Island marked one of the all time lows in unemployment largely due to much of the textile industry having been moved to the South.

If it were possible to have all the information concerning whether relatives are willing and able to assume
responsibility for the care of a child during the intake process; especially when state commitment seems likely, perhaps much time and effort would be conserved and more properly channeled. However, this is not always possible as families quite often do not maintain close ties with relatives and frequently live at some distance apart making for delays in reaching them. If emergency shelter is necessary, and such plan is often necessary, the agency must enter the situation.

Table 4. The Problem in Cases Referred in Terms of Emergency Service Given

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Number of Cases</th>
<th>Emergency Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Mother deserted child with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. father............ 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. relative........ 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. neighbor........ 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. no one........ 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. other........ 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Child dependent for other reasons.... 4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals........ 28</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that 67 per cent of cases accepted necessitated emergency shelter. In the remaining situations the worker helped to implement another plan for the child's care. Quite often foster-boarding homes
were used when the emergency shelter was filled to capacity. In only one instance was a relative willing and able to accept the child until more permanent plans could be worked out for its care. In analyzing these cases it was found that in all instances it was mother's absence from the home or her disappearance which precipitated the referral. It was noted before that marital conflict was chiefly the underlying cause for the mother's desertion. Therefore, it follows that most often the father was left to care for the child. In all of these situations except once emergency care was required because the father was either working, in the armed forces or too distressed and/or inadequate to make a suitable plan himself. In the second group comprising "other" one situation involved a mother who was being hospitalized and another who was incarcerated. A third case involved a teen-age girl who was rejected by her step-parents and a fourth concerned a teen-age boy rejected by his own parents who were divorced. In the majority of cases, when shelter was not provided, the mother had returned before this was necessary.
Table 5. Final Disposition of Cases In Terms of a Willing and Able Relative at the Point of Acceptance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Own Home</th>
<th>State Commitment</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Number of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. There was a relative</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. No relative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Indeterminate</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that the largest single group of children who were committed to the state come under the category termed "indeterminate". Where there seemed to be no apparent relative able to assume care for the child a proportionately smaller number of children had to be committed. It was curious to note, however, that where there seemed a resource in relatives none of them assumed care for the child as he was either returned to his own home or other plans were made.

The category "other" included two instances where plans for temporary foster care was secured until the remaining parent was able to make more permanent plans for the child with the agency's placement service. In three cases, the father made a suitable plan of his own. In the remaining cases a teen-age child rejected by the
step-parents, became of age and self-supporting, therefore
the case could be closed and a teen-age boy joined the armed
forces. In none of the situations were there any relatives
besides the father from whom any plan or provision for
the child's care was forthcoming. In only one situation
accepted was it clearly not known whether there was a
responsible relative who might assume care for the child
and this child was finally returned to its own home.
CHAPTER IV
THE FUNCTION OF THE INTAKE WORKER
AS ILLUSTRATED IN CASE RECORDS

Much has been written about short contact interviewing
and it is said: "that the most important thing in any
contact, but especially in the first, is to set the keynote
of the client's participation and responsibility on as
high a level as he is capable of at the time." The
client must be kept in possession of his problem at all
times although he does have an understanding professional
person ready to help him work out some solution. Thus,
whether or not, the client's needs can be met through the
agency he is constantly being prepared to utilize his own
resources.

The first contact the client has with an agency sets
the whole pattern for future case-work relationships.
Even in the short contact some relationship is formulated.
There are innumerable ways in which the first person who
interviews the client, in this case the intake worker, can
build on or destroy a relationship and help the client to
achieve his highest potential. Perhaps, first of all,
the worker must have some conviction about the client's
innate capacity to help himself before he can be of any

1/Bertha C. Reynolds, An Experiment in Short Contact
Interviewing, Smith College Studies for Social Work,
(September, 1932), 3:103.
service.

Now the actual service to a client with his practical necessities turns on the intake worker's skill and knowledge. He must have with him a bag full of resources which are so much a part of him that he is able to quickly size up a situation, telescope the problem and help decide on a course of action from the beginning. As a representative of the agency beholden to the community, the intake worker must be ready to interpret agency services in terms of the client's needs. Perhaps the most challenging problem involved in this is turning a refusal into an experience of constructive value for the applicant. As some of the essential theory regarding the intake interview has been discussed, it might be good to look on the practical side of the issue to see what actually does happen.

Case A: A Case Not Accepted

Father came to the agency saying he had been referred by the police. He wanted to complain about his wife who left him and his three children a week ago. He seemed a disturbed person showing this by rapid talking, flushed face, and many gestures, making it difficult to get a clear picture of what had happened. Father said mother had no reason to leave, there had been no trouble. She is fond of sailors and he thought she had gone to New York with her brother and girl friend and visualized her running around. He had immediately notified the police of mother's disappearance and she was listed as a missing person. However, if she is picked up she cannot be made to return unless there is a warrant for abandonment. Father spent a great deal of time rebelling
against this and seemed consumed with the idea that mother ought to be made to care for the children. The children were all right as his sister had the baby and his landlady was caring for the other two children. His parents were nearby but he did not want to go back to them as they said he "didn't keep jobs." At the present he is out of work as he has spent so much time running after mother he lost his job. The worker suggested public welfare but he kept talking about what mother must be doing this past week. He was not interested in placing the children.

This worker had listened to father's story with a sympathetic ear and at the same time had quickly sized up the situation. She told father that the agency could not help him unless he knew where his wife was or until he felt he could not plan for the children himself. In the latter case the worker outlined what services the agency could offer. She advised him to go home and get some rest and to come back if he located his wife or wanted to talk about plans for the children. Three weeks later father returned and was seen by the placement intake worker regarding plans for the children.

It was important in this situation that the intake worker be fully aware of agency policy and the legal involvements in the situation. She took enough time to ascertain that the children's welfare was not being endangered. Once this was secured and the worker had a clear picture of the situation she outlined and interpreted under what conditions the agency could be of service. Although kind and sympathetic, she did not take sides in
the situation or at any point allow the father to lose possession of his problem but helped in clarifying it for him.

Case B: A Case Given Service at Intake.

A police woman escorted father, a Chief Petty Officer, and his three children to the agency. Mother had left the home and being in the Navy father did not have anywhere to place his children temporarily until he could make permanent plans for their care. The worker could see the children were restless and nervous making it difficult to discuss the problem with them around. Immediate plans for them were discussed and father decided the children should be taken to the emergency shelter right away and he would come back again to talk about his problem.

In this short interview the worker had already made some diagnostic mental notes about father. He seemed a rigid person and more concerned with punishing mother than how her absence was going to effect the children. When he returned a second time the possibility of relatives taking the children was discussed. His only relative was a brother and at the worker's suggestion he decided to get in touch with him. In the third interview father came prepared with a plan of his own. He wanted to place the children with a shipmate's friend. The worker discussed in great detail father's responsibility in the selection of a home for the children. He wanted worker to visit the home and the worker explained that he seemed capable of making a good choice, that this was his responsibility and that he should take a real interest in the children once they are placed. Father removed the children from the shelter and asked that the worker not reveal to mother where they were going if she should come back.

A few days later mother had come to the agency and seemed quite interested in her children. The worker could not violate his promise to father but agreed to discuss this matter with him. The worker talked with father's attorney and then father. He pointed out that mother still has a right to see her children since there was no legal action
taken to terminate these rights. It was a hard decision for father to make. He thought it over and called the worker later to say he decided on not letting mother see the children. The worker agreed to keep his promise to father but let him know he would discuss with mother her need for legal counsel. When mother came to the agency again, the worker suggested she retain an attorney but as she had no funds she could not, therefore, the worker suggested two agencies where she could receive adequate legal service at no cost and mother accepted the advice.

The worker did several important things here. First he helped father with his immediate practical needs regarding the children, made a quick diagnosis of the situation and helped father to use his greatest potential in finding a solution to his problem. However, the worker was aware of the dynamics in this case and focusing on the children at all times he tried to prevent their being used as a pawn in this problem of marital conflict. The worker remained professional at all times with both father and mother, recognized each as an individual and refrained from being judgemental. He was able to keep his promise to father and yet took courage in letting him realize the agency's role in this matter, pointing out the legal involvements. The problem and its solution were never taken away from father at any point and the worker keeping the children in focus was able to help both parents.

Case C: A Case Accepted and Assigned.

Father accompanied by his brother, came to the
agency to complain about the care his wife has been giving their five children aged 5 to 13. Mother left the home a few days ago and has not returned. She is in the habit of doing this and although she does not stay away very long, the children do not receive adequate care when she is home. Father's brother supported his charges saying he has seen the children playing until one o'clock in the morning, that they are always dirty and that the house is "absolutely filthy."

The father went on to explain that he has been living away from the home for the past five months although they are not legally separated. He is presently running a cleansing business of his own but has been paying all the bills for his family and has been visiting every day to bring food. He has just been hospitalized for severe headaches and has taken about all he can from mother although his main concern is for the children.

After assuring father that the agency was concerned with this matter and would try to help, the worker pointed out that father had certain responsibilities and outlined these for him. First, if the children are unsupervised, the worker told father he should do something about it but the main factor is for him to decide on what action he can take in relation to assuming full responsibility for his children, if he feels his wife is not doing this. In doing so, the worker suggested father seek legal advice. Due to the apparent desertion of his wife it was expected that father would assume responsibility for the children temporarily as there were no relatives willing to do this and he agreed to this. In the meantime the worker planned to try to locate mother to talk about the entire situation promising to send out a worker in a few days to look in on the family if the mother could not be contacted.

As the worker was unable to determine mother's whereabouts the case was then assigned.

It is again apparent that the worker attempted to get a clear picture of this situation before disposition.
This worker did this quickly and after assuring father of the agency's interest and concern, his involvement in the problem was elicited. The worker pointed out what his first responsibilities would be, that is, immediate care for the children. Father agreed to assume this himself on the basis that his relatives were unwilling and that it was really his problem. Secondly, the worker outlined the long range focus for the children indicating they need a permanent home with at least one responsible parent suggesting that father think over what action he would like to take and seek legal counsel in making his decision. At the same time the worker made clearly known the agency's role in the problem. By attempting to locate mother, not only did the worker have in mind getting the full picture of the problem but he was recognizing mother's rights. This would have afforded mother a chance to discuss her feelings with an unbiased, sympathetic, helpful person. The purpose was to establish a sound relationship for future casework and to involve her as well as father in planning for the children which is the agency's chief focus.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to find out how the services of Rhode Island Children's Friend and Service offering protection for dependent children were being used by the community. The following questions guided the study.

1. Of the total dependency referrals accepted by this agency, what is the percentage of cases in which state commitment seems clearly indicated for the children at intake?

2. Are these referrals from the community appropriate in terms of agency function?

3. Are there some common characteristics in this group such as factors in family background and source of referral?

4. What is the caseworker's function at intake?

In the two years studied January 1, 1953 to January 31, 1954, it was found that thirty-seven dependency cases were referred from Providence and South County. Four cases were eliminated from the study as these records were not available and this was considered a limitation of the study, because if the cases were not similar it could make a 12 per cent difference in the findings.

In reference to the first question it was found that a further limitation of the study was the lack of specific
information in some cases concerning the willingness or ability of relatives to assume care for the child before the case was accepted. These situations had to be classified as "indeterminate". In both years studied, 18 per cent of the referrals accepted were situations in which there were no responsible relatives willing and able to assume responsibility for the child's care. In 50 per cent of the cases accepted, there was a questionable possibility of there being a resource in a relative whether the father or some one else. In 28 per cent of the cases accepted, there was definitely a relative who would assume care for the child.

In relating results it was noted that in 1953 five out of thirteen cases appeared in which the children were committed to the state. These cases were classified as "indeterminate" and "no relative". It was also noted that where "there were no relatives" a proportionately smaller group of children were committed to the state. In 1954 three out of six cases resulted in state commitment, where there was "no relative" or the situation was "indeterminate". It was interesting to note that children went to their own homes or other plans were made when there was a possible relative to assume their care.

In summary it appears that in less than 20 per cent of the cases are there no relatives to assume responsibility for the child at the point of acceptance. But only
one out of every two or three cases results in state commitment. In 50 per cent of the cases referred the possibility of there being a relative is questionable and in this group it appeared that a higher percentage of children were committed to the state. These two groups combined represent better than 65 per cent of the cases accepted and exclusively comprise the cases which result in state commitment totalling 28 per cent of the cases accepted. For various reasons already stated it appears a difficult task to determine at intake whether a case indicates long term care, something which this agency cannot provide, or perhaps only something temporary which is its proper function. Better than 65 per cent of the cases referred required emergency shelter which is properly a service this agency offers the community. In the bulk of these cases the possibility of a relative assuming ultimate care for the child was "indeterminate". Thus if providing emergency shelter is distinctly this agency's service to the community, better than 65 per cent of the cases accepted are on this basis alone and it can be expected that 42 per cent of these cases will require state commitment.

With regard to the appropriateness of referrals it might be answered simply by counting cases not accepted which totaled five in a two year period. However, since 28 per cent of the cases result in state commitment, it
might be speculated that agency services are not properly interpreted by the community. Yet better than 65 per cent of the cases referred and accepted require emergency shelter, a distinct agency service to the community. It was further substantiated that this group of cases requiring emergency service are those which result in 28 per cent of the total cases accepted, requiring state commitment. Thus it can be concluded that referrals to the agency are appropriate within its present framework and that in providing emergency service the agency of necessity becomes involved in the cases in which state commitment seems more than likely.

It was noted that the marital status of the bulk of cases accepted is married. A cursory glance through the cases indicates that marital conflict was most frequently an underlying cause. Generette's study in the agency seems to also substantiate this fact as well as a recent bulletin, Rhode Island Welfare. This again brings to mind the appropriateness of these referrals. However, since we cannot divorce parental problems from the endangering effects they may have for children, the agency is fulfilling its services in focusing first on the child's welfare and can at a later time extend service to these parents in marital conflict by referring them to the proper family society.

Those families receiving welfare or in the group classified other, the majority of which are temporarily
without any income, constitute the bulk of cases referred and accepted by the agency. The data collected for this study, however, does not yield whether the families receiving welfare were the same as those whose children were finally committed to the state as dependent. Yet it might be generally said that marital conflict seems closely associated with both problems. In examining cases with regard to source of referrals there was such a wide variety of possibilities a table to show this would not have been feasible. It may suffice to note that other agencies, the police and school departments appeared most frequently as the source of referral.

In the cases illustrated it appears that every agency must have on its intake staff highly skilled workers, capable of forming a relationship and a diagnosis of the problem without benefit of preparation in a relatively short space of time. The first contact with the agency is the most important as it sets the keynote for future relationships. Therefore the worker must be warm and sympathetic yet he must not unduly encourage the client to become dependent on him but rather lends him ego-strength in accordance with his current level of functioning. He helps clarify the problem for the client, advises but does not take the problem away from him; though he offers alternative opportunities through which a solution may be reached. As an agency and community representative, the intake worker
must be well able to interpret agency services, turn a refusal into a constructive experience for the client and refer him to other community resources when necessary.

Accepted:
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


SCHEDULE

Client

1. Case number
2. Case name
3. Race
4. Religion
5. Residence
6. Family composition
   a. parents
   b. number of children and ages
7. Parental status
8. Source of income
9. Known to agency before
10. Is there a responsible relative who can offer the children a home at the point of acceptance.
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Not reported
   d. Indeterminate

Problem

11. Source of referral
12. Problem as seen by referral sources
13. Problem seen in cases refused by disposition

Service

14. Disposition at intake
   a. Accepted and assigned
   b. Not accepted
      1. Reason
      2. Any interpretation
   c. Service given at intake

15. Was emergency shelter provided
   a. Lakeside
   b. Foster home
   c. Relatives or other

16. Final disposition of case