

HD WIDENER



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A PRIMER

FOR THE FAMILY REHABILITA-
TION WORK OF THE BUFFALO
CHARITY ORGANIZATION
SOCIETY PREPARED BY ITS
SECRETARY

FREDERIC ALMY

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PREFACE

THIS little Primer was originally written for the Charity Organization Society of Buffalo, and some of its paragraphs do not represent the methods in use in other cities. Experts differ as to principles of relief, and there are statements in this pamphlet which are not universally accepted, but probably no one could draw up a brief treatise on this subject which would be universally acceptable. The Primer is suggestive, but in no sense authoritative.

Nevertheless, there is so much confusion in the minds of many that some outline of principles is needed. There are experienced workers, for instance, who have no conception of the difference of treatment for widows and for deserted wives. Slight as this pamphlet is, it may stimulate thought, and help in cases of doubt.

F. A.

SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF RELIEF

THIS statement of some general principles with regard to relief is printed with great diffidence. Modern charity has its rules, but all its rules are made to be broken on occasion. In families that need help there is apt to be a complication of disorders, and one principle of relief will get in the way of another. A brief primer like this may be as dangerous or as misleading to an amateur as handbooks like "Every Man His Own Lawyer," or "Every Man His Own Doctor." Nevertheless, if used with caution it should be useful. A committee making decisions about families in distress must never forget that it is dealing with human lives, and that human beings cannot be moved about like chess pieces. For

one thing, they will not stay put; and unlike chess men, they have ideas of their own, which are often better than those of the committee.

A family must often be given time before coming to even a wise decision, such as going to a hospital, or moving to cheaper rooms, or giving up a losing business. In other words, interim relief, as it is called, must be given while inquiry is being made and a plan is forming, and even, in some instances, while the family is coming to a wise plan. It takes long patience to deal with balky families. The best success is apt to come when the family can be made to consider your plan its own. Interim relief should not, however, be allowed to delay constructive action unduly.

Remember also that in a charity organization society there is never any such thing as an unworthy family, though some cannot be helped wisely with material relief. The word unworthy is uncharitable.

A few general principles follow:

NO MALE SUPPORT

(a) WIDOWS

WIDOWS should be helped on a different basis from deserted wives, or wives with shiftless husbands.

Widowhood will not increase on account of unwise charity, though wife desertion may, and so may neglect of widows by relatives. Help widows with both hands; deserted wives with one hand; wives with able-bodied husbands with neither. If you help a widow, make the pension for six months or for a year at a time, and do not leave her to worry herself sick each month with fear for the next month. Of course, as the children grow to earning age, the pension will gradually decrease.

It is a mighty poor hen that cannot scratch for one chicken; but a widow with several children will need help to keep the family together. It is elementary that a home should never be broken up on account of poverty only. This should be done for immorality, or perhaps for cruelty and abuse, or even where the parents are too weak and

shiftless to make a safe home for the children. Sometimes, also, a home must be broken up temporarily while a mother goes to the hospital or is disabled at home, or because of a contagious disease, but no family, no matter how large or what the cost, should be broken up on account of poverty only. The home is the best place for the child if it is a good home, and this Society has taken the position that no mother, merely because of poverty, shall be deprived of the care and custody of her child.

Conversely, the Society takes the position that no child, merely because of poverty, shall be deprived of the care and custody of its mother. It has been well said that there is no greater cruelty than to compel a widow to neglect her children in order to support them, and the mother of a large family who is a breadwinner cannot be also a good home-maker. If the children are cared for by a child, who is often kept home from school for the purpose, they are apt to be ill-fed and to run the streets, and the reformatories and charitable societies pay the bill in the next generation. A mother with little children can use the day nurseries, but where this is imprac-

licable, the mother should stay at home, and the rule of this Society is to deny aid unless she does so. The day nurseries should be used as much as possible, and work in the home should be used also. Relatives or neighbors can sometimes care for the children, and sometimes we can dovetail two families and have a dependent woman of one family come daily to care for the children of another, so that one family will be relieved with work instead of two with alms.

It is well, however, to remember that the mother's industry and self-sacrifice is a good object lesson for the children. In short, the mother should have the opportunity to earn as much as she can without injury to her family, but should never be allowed to let the children get their own meals, get themselves to school, and roam at will after school hours. Relief is cheaper in the end. The results of unwise charity would appall us if seen.

The Society goes into psychology and tries to estimate the comparative value of mothers. If a mother is slatternly and keeps a poor home, the Society will not pay out much money to keep her there. But a good, busy mother

should not be allowed to work herself to death until "instead of six children she has six orphans."

Widowers do not fit under the title "No male support," but are most conveniently considered with widows. Unless relatives can come in to care for the children, it is usually necessary for the father to place his children in an asylum, and he should pay the bill.

NO MALE SUPPORT

(b) DESERTED WIVES

NEARLY one-tenth of the families dealt with by this Society are those of deserted wives. The evil has grown so serious that men drop their families upon charity with confidence whenever there is a fresh baby or a family jar, and return when convenient. The "intermittent husband" is one of our chief problems. We have many families who have been deserted half a dozen times.

Until 1905 wife desertion was not even a misdemeanor in New York. It was merely disorderly conduct, like stealing a dog. It is now by state law a felony, punishable by two years' im-

prisonment. (The law in other states varies, but is easily ascertainable.) We do not help a deserted wife until she swears out a warrant for the arrest of her husband, and our city overseer of the poor follows the same rule. We have brought home for punishment from California and Texas worthless husbands who were not worth the cost of transportation, for the sake of the example. Probation of the man in the home on good behavior, supporting the family, should usually precede imprisonment. It is cheaper and better. Sometimes the wife tries to reject a disagreeable husband after his return and wants to live on our charity instead.

It will not do to help a wife merely because she says she is deserted. The husband is often around the corner.

Second or third desertions have a different rule of treatment. Where a wife has been deserted, has been aided, has taken her man back, and has been deserted again, the rule is to give no aid to keep the family together. She should be told this when aided the first time. A breaking up of the family for even a few weeks will often bring the husband back to his burden, and show him that

charity means business, besides having a remarkably deterrent effect on other intending deserters. Many weak men love their children and would not desert them if no help were near.

All charity rules have their exceptions, and each family problem must be dealt with individually. The deserted wife problem is only less difficult than that of the wife with a shiftless husband.

NO MALE SUPPORT

(c) SHIFTLESS HUSBANDS

THIS problem is almost insoluble. It includes, of course, the intemperate husband. The ordinary rule is for the wife to have the husband sent up for non-support, but with a timid wife and a beast of a husband this is not easily arranged. Probation on good behavior under promise to support the family is better than imprisonment with its stigma and waste, if the probation officer is a good one and makes the probation mean something. Drunkards who promise to do better may often be helped by medical advice, by church connections, or by enlarging their recreational opportunities.

Cruel as it seems, it is seldom wise to put material relief into a family where there is an able-bodied man. Money given to a drunkard does not feed him but his drunkenness. Money given to an idler or a spendthrift feeds the idleness and the improvidence. It is a wise rule that the wives and children of such marriages must suffer, and it is not well to interfere lightly with the divine laws of providence. To do so is to assume a very grave responsibility.

Nevertheless extreme suffering must be averted, and food and clothes, not money, can sometimes be given in such a family, but it should be bread-and-water relief, disciplinary relief, so to speak, and of the shortest duration. It is certainly permissible to give the children clothing if doing this really insures regular school attendance.

One trouble is that husbands are not bad or good all the time. The man does not absolutely refuse to support his family, but supports it three days out of four; or half supports it all the time. Often he is "sick"; or is looking for work which he does not want to find. He would rather work others than himself.

Any large charity organization society has problems daily that would tax the wisdom of Solomon and the patience of Job.

NO MALE SUPPORT

(d) UNEMPLOYMENT

UNEMPLOYMENT is fortunately a vanishing problem at the present time (1910) for the industrial situation is fast becoming normal. Ordinarily the Society gives no aid to the families of able-bodied men except through work, but during the last two winters it could not find work. Artificial relief work, or "made work," was disapproved of as humiliating and wasteful, but a few men were tested out with legitimate work at a fair wage for which they were paid ostensibly by the employer, but really by the Society, which furnished employers with a little free labor, not of the best quality. The men did not know they were being tested. When any considerable quantity of work was found, it was divided among as many families as possible in lieu of relief.

When material relief was given it was

intentionally meager, partly from financial necessity and partly in order not to delay the return to employment by giving the comfortable relief which disabled families receive.

Various men of influence gave a special agent of the Society letters of introduction to employers, with which he canvassed for jobs.

The Society endeavored to make such able-bodied relief educational. Some effort was made to have men attend night schools where English was taught, or manual training schools, as a condition of the relief. Similar efforts were made with some of the women.

DISABILITY

(a) SICKNESS

IN case of sickness it is obvious that after all proper sources of aid from relatives, lodges, etc., have been exploited the Society should give adequate relief, and this means that every effort should be made to effect a cure, even if the cost is large. When a hospital is essential and the patient is balky, patience should be shown and interim relief may in some cases be given

while the patient is being persuaded, but all relief should sometimes be denied, in exceptional cases, to compel treatment which is unquestionably necessary.

It is important to know as definitely as possible how long the sickness may endure. Where the sickness is intermittent, or only partially disabling, it is important to keep in close touch with the physician and know just how much work can properly be required. It is as wrong to let a willing sick man work who should not, as to compel an unwilling sick man to work when he should not. The volunteer physician and the district committee can often question the city poor physician or the family physician on this point more successfully than the district visitor can.

Nothing is said here in regard to tuberculosis, the treatment of which is now being pretty fully presented to the public. It may be said, however, in regard to relief, that where the father is able to pay but unwilling, the Society will buy a cot, a tent, or a reclining chair for a tuberculous child when it would not think of buying food or clothes, for the reason that the disease is contagious and a social menace. Each

advanced case of tuberculosis breeds at least five more.

DISABILITY

(b) HANDICAPS

FOR the blind, for the crippled, for the partially disabled, occupation supplemented by relief if necessary is a kinder gift than relief outright. An artificial leg, or education for a suitable employment, may cost a large sum and yet be cheaper in the end than continuous support. Peddling is a most undesirable occupation for handicapped men, and usually ends in mere begging.

DISABILITY

(c) OLD AGE

THE chief danger with old age is that charity will relieve children from their proper burden. We know how much easier it is for one mother to support six children than for six children to support one mother. The Society has several times sued children to compel support, and has shamed many more into support by threatening suit.

The county almshouse is a comfortable and suitable home for shiftless, improvident old age, or for dissolute old age which has earned this bed and should die on it.

The private Home has dangers for the reason that it does not bring relatives out from cover as the threat of the almshouse will. Moreover, most private Homes have a waiting list and an entrance fee of \$250 or more which must be raised; but nothing worse than the private Home should be considered for self-respecting old people of the better sort, whether the relatives will help or not. Sometimes the county poor officer will commit to a private Home on a weekly payment.

Often it is best to keep an old man or woman to the end in the home in which many years have been spent. Any institution, either public or private, usually separates an old couple. We need more institutions where old people can be kept together. When relatives will take care of old people, but without kindness, it is unkind to insist always on such support. A hard child-in-law can be very hard. So can own sons and daughters, but reconciliations of dis-

affected children are often accomplished. In fact, family reconciliations are a part of the trade of a charity organization visitor. Good relatives in other cities are often willing to give a home, but it is not always well to transplant an old tree.

CHILDREN

THE treatment of children is almost the whole of charity, and yet only the barest outline can be sketched here.

One of the commonest mistakes is to suppose that the welfare of children can be separated from that of the rest of the family. There must be separate treatment for all of the family group who require it, and adults are not hopeless. The best of all gifts to children is opportunity,—for pure air, pure milk, pure water; for health, education, and morality. We use constantly the settlements, the playgrounds, the juvenile court and probation, the child labor laws, the truancy force, the schools and libraries. The over-worked, underfed child makes the spent man.

A reformatory for difficult children is a last resort, too often used. Even

the George Junior Republic, so invaluable to Buffalo, involves association with offenders. Home under probation through the juvenile court should be tried out first.

We should seek to obtain medical inspection of all of our children in order to remove physical defects which would handicap them in later life and lessen their earning power. A diagnosis for incipient tuberculosis is always asked for where there has been exposure.

The Society conditions all its pension relief on absolutely regular school attendance by the children. If the weekly school report from the public or parochial school shows slack attendance, unexcused, the pinch of hunger the following week is voluntary. It is not an unkind or humiliating condition of aid. The committees of the Society do not enforce this policy sufficiently. We find it necessary to warn the teachers with every request for school reports that they must not disclose their knowledge of the situation either to the child or to its schoolmates.

A father who does not make his child go regularly to school can be fined five dollars for the first offense, and fifty

dollars for the second, and Judge Nash has been good about enforcing this. There are similar provisions in other states besides New York.

Under a new law passed in 1910, parents are subject to the jurisdiction of the juvenile court in Buffalo, and can be punished in that court for the offenses of their children.

If a shiftless father will not provide fit shoes and clothes for a child to wear to school, both moral and legal coercion should be brought to bear, but in addition to this the child should be got to school, and, where necessary, clothes should be provided.

By all means observe the child labor laws. Relief for the mother is always better than child labor.

VOLUNTEER VISITORS

VOLUNTEER friendly visitors are a cardinal part of our work, but a discussion of their finding and guidance is not pertinent to this article on relief.

The relation of friendly visitor is not one to be lightly entered into. It is not for a temporary crisis, but involves con-

tinuous oversight, perhaps for a long time, by the same visitor. The Society stands for the principle of individual visitors, and a pastor or church worker who visits a group of families is not rated as a friendly visitor by this Society. No one visitor should be given more than two or at the very most four families, and each family should be seen at least once a fortnight in the earlier stages of acquaintance.

It is not to be supposed that volunteer friendly visitors will lighten the work of the paid visitors of the Society. On the contrary, they increase it, but the results may be well worth the cost. Volunteer visitors unguided are very likely to do more harm than good.

THE CHURCHES

THE churches, even in Buffalo, are not used as they should be, but they are not undervalued.

Faults of character are largely the cause of poverty, and the church is the chief agent for building character. In trying to lift delinquent families to a better life we should use continually the influence of the priest or pastor, and of

the church connection, although like the public schools we cannot ourselves teach religion.

CITY AID

THIS Society has always taken the position that municipal relief should be given in institutions only, and that outdoor relief, or relief to the poor in their homes, should be left to private charity. This is partly because indoor or institutional relief is less open to fraudulent use, but more because of the attitude of the poor towards public relief. They have a feeling of right to it, and fling themselves upon it without thrift. New York, Brooklyn, and Philadelphia abolished public outdoor relief long ago, and Washington, San Francisco, St. Louis, and other large cities have practically never had it.

In 1877, when this Society was formed, it began a crusade against city outdoor relief, which reduced it in three years from \$100,636 to \$28,295 per annum. In 1898 it began another crusade which reduced it in three years from \$104,107 to \$38,851 per annum. In 1908-1909, even with the great indus-

trial depression, the amount was only \$47,547. All this aid, since 1877, has been investigated by the Society as well as by the city, and approved or disapproved by the committees of the Society, and when disapproved it has seldom been continued. The saving to taxpayers through this work has been enormous.

Even so purged and checked the Society disapproves of city aid. The stigma and humiliation of city aid, though often salutary, are as often hurtful. Moreover, the city aid is given with no constructive plan, and with no follow-up work, such as this Society relies on to lift families out of their poverty instead of tiding them over into next week's misery. There is nothing of which we are so proud as that in part through our work, there were fewer dependent families in Buffalo in 1907 than there were thirty years before, in 1877, when the city was only one-third as large.

Since city aid exists, the Society uses it as follows: It asks the overseer of the poor to send to it for relief all first applications where aid is likely to be temporary; or where there are children

of an age to take notice; or where there is an able-bodied man in the family; or where there are young couples. If the aid is continuous, or the family has been for some time on the poor books so that the habit has been formed, the Society seldom seeks to substitute its aid for the city aid. On the other hand, if a family comes first to us, or is sent by the city to us, we very seldom seek to place it on the city even if the aid is continuous and heavy.

NEW APPLICATIONS

WITH all new or recurrent applications for aid two points which are too often forgotten should always be passed on by our committees:

1. Shall a weekly record of the children's school attendance be obtained?
2. Is a friendly visitor needed?

PENSIONS AND BUDGETS

WE divide our relief into temporary relief, which does not seem likely to continue longer than three months, and pension relief, which seems likely to continue three months or more.

With pension relief there should always be:

1. A good friendly visitor if possible.
2. A weekly report of the school attendance of all the children.
3. A medical examination of all the children for physical defects (of seeing, hearing, breathing, etc.) or for incipient tuberculosis. We do not intend to spend perfectly good money in bringing up imperfect children when perhaps a slight operation would remove their handicap and give them full earning power.
4. A budget, including standard food cost.

This budget, with standard food cost, should always be figured out in advance, if pension relief seems probable, in order to save the time of the committee. It should be reviewed, of course, by the committee, and should always be entered on the face card. In figuring a budget the district visitor should consult with the sub-committee on cases, or with the secretaries of the Society.

A budget is an estimate of the living cost of the family under tolerably decent conditions. It should be kept clearly in mind that the budget is the total cost

of living without any reference to what the family is earning, or receiving from any source.

The budget, less what the family earns, or rather what it ought to earn, and less what the relatives give or ought to give, is the measure of relief. This is a very simple truth, not always understood.

It is customary to figure the budget by adding together the standard food cost per week, the rent per week, and estimate for coal per week, without any allowance for clothes or other sundries. This is crude, and often hard, but it is the highest measure of relief which this Society has reached as a general rule. The more intelligent district committees of the Society do not limit themselves to such a budget by rule of thumb, but make a separate study of each case. A very rough and ready way of figuring a budget is to estimate what the breadwinner of the family would earn if living and able-bodied, and call that, minus \$1.50 a week for his food, the budget.

In measuring relief after the budget has been estimated it is very often allowable to leave some margin for in-

visible sources, such as relatives not brought from cover, money in a stocking, aid from neighbors, unknown church charity, etc.

It is often not cruel to wait a while and see what happens if the aid asked for is denied; and the results are sometimes surprising.

The budget should be closely watched for changes. One member of the family in the hospital for a time instead of at home may make a difference of a dollar or more a week.

The standard food cost as estimated for Buffalo in 1908 after a study of many families is \$1.50 per week per man. The cost for the other members of the family is figured as follows: Woman, .8 as much; boy, 16 to 14 years, .8; girl, 16 to 14 years, .7; child, 13 to 10 years, .6; child, 9 to 6 years, .5; child, 5 to 2 years, .3; infant, .2. Have this revised at the office of the Society's registrar, to prevent mistakes. This standard food cost is suggestive only, but the Committee on District Work voted in 1908, that it should always be entered on the face card, together with the estimated budget, where relief for three months or more seems likely. The face card

should always show the date when this computation is made. However superficial this food cost may be, it is based on careful study, in Buffalo, and is better than mere guessing.

Sometimes the standard of living is so low (because of extreme thrift, or low wages, or dissipation) that the standard food cost as stated above is more than the family or its neighbors are used to. Give a Polish family an American pension and it will put half of it in the savings bank. In such cases it is important to remember that the standard of living cannot be raised by mere relief. If a family is to be aided for a few months only, during disability, it is cruel to give adequate rooms and food and then leave the family to its old resources. But when the relief will last a year at least, so that a definite impress can be made, it pays to do a good job according to normal standards, provided always that the family seems to be of good type, responsive to treatment. Weeds should not have the same culture as flowers.

It should be added that there are many who disagree with the principle of the preceding paragraph, and are opposed to giving a pension larger in

amount than the ordinary income of the neighbors.

LOANS

THE relief should be either a gift or a loan, and the loan should not be a disguised gift, called so in order to save the feelings of the recipient. The Committee on District Work voted in 1909 that all loans by the Society be secured by a note at the central office, and collected if possible when due, unless canceled or extended by vote of the district committee which made the loan.

PAUPERIZING

OUR friends will please take notice that as yet nothing has been said of the fact that pauperism is contagious, or that easy aid kills character. No space will be given here to these texts of thirty years ago, though they are as true and important now as then. The emphasis of modern charity is laid on constructive relief. As Joseph Lee says: "Modern charity gives more in material support than the old, and it is

entitled to do so by its knowledge of where material support can help. But it places the accent not upon the material, but upon the spiritual side.”

PREVENTION

THIS paper is on Relief, but it should be made perfectly plain before closing that although modern charity emphasizes relief, it cares far less for relief than for cure, and far less for cure than for prevention. Nothing in all this relief work, beautiful as it is, so fires our imagination or seems to us so valuable as the preventive work which strikes at the causes of poverty.

To abolish poverty we must attack disease, ignorance, vice and unjust social conditions. To meet these we have many weapons. They include work on tenements, tuberculosis, public playgrounds and baths, reformatories, probation, juvenile courts, child labor, truancy, manual training, pure food, safety devices, industrial legislation, and so on through a long and blessed list.

Most of this is “community work,” as we call it, dealing not with individuals, but with groups and classes, and re-

quiring legislation and agitation. The more human and intimate "case work," with individual families, is like the Red Cross work, which should go hand in hand with an effort to abolish war. "Case work" is an indispensable basis for the sympathy and knowledge which alone will make the mass work either possible or valuable, and, moreover, case work must always supplement mass work at every turn.

APOLOGY

THESE suggestions have been put together on a hurry call, so to speak, to accompany a report on the standardization of district work which was needed for immediate publication. There is no other brief summary of the questions here touched on, so far as the writer knows. It should be of service to the ten district committees of the Buffalo Society, but the expert secretaries of other charity organization societies may find it full of holes.

“ The daily work in a charity organization office, to be well done, demands :

An intelligence that shall not slumber.

An earnestness that shall not tire.

A patience not to be overcome.

A sympathy that will not suffer itself to be chilled.

And none know better than those of us who have attempted the work how miserably easy it is in these respects to fail, and how miserably certain we are, when we fail, to err.”

EDWARD T. DEVINE.



