

HOUSING CONDITIONS IN RELATION TO CHILD PROTECTION

A Descriptive Examination of Significant  
Family Cases from the Children's Aid Society and  
the City Social Service Department,  
Vancouver, 1956.

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## ABSTRACT

There are many reasons for child neglect, and many variables in the family circumstances from which the need for child protection or removal arises; but in recent years bad housing has not been given the prominence it demands. Improvements in institutions, new treatment centres, modern school facilities, point up the contrast, when bad housing and demoralizing neighbourhoods place heavy burdens on marginal families, and handicap social services which attempt to be restorative.

To gain some perspective on family conditions associated with protection cases, active or potential, a small group of examples were chosen for detailed study; four from the Children's Aid Society and four from the City Social Service Department, Vancouver. All live in a semi-industrialized slum area, where there is general deterioration, and the housing is inadequate. Each family has an average of five children, ranging in age from one to sixteen years. Three of the families live in rented suites, and five in rented houses. Both parents are in the home, in all but two of the families.

The information for the study was obtained from personal interviews with the families, from agency case records, discussions with the social workers to whom the families are presently known. The resulting "word pictures" portray the home life and social environment, having special reference to child neglect and substandard family life. The various aspects of family life are described with special emphasis on the families' present housing conditions, their previous accommodation, economic status, the neighbourhood, the general health of the family, and their attitude in regard to present housing conditions. This is followed by an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the families, their interests and activities, the children's progress at school, and the use made of social services in the community.

A major implication of the study is that more adequate low-rent housing is urgently needed, particularly for families with a large number of children. If the parents, and especially the children, are to benefit fully from the educational, health and welfare services of the community, a good home which is a basic need, must be provided or made available. It is hoped that this study will serve as an introduction for further research into family living conditions, of more thorough examination of the influences which bear on children in neglected homes and neighbourhoods, as part of the process of creating a sound base from which social services can operate.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter I. <u>Issues of Child Protection</u>	
Child protection and the protective services. Social and physical aspects of housing. Economic aspects of housing. The concern of the social worker. Method of study .....	1
Chapter II. <u>Housing as Environment</u>	
Brief description of families. Accommodation. Previous accommodation. Economic status. Neighbourhood. Health. The tenant's response .....	21
Chapter III. <u>Housing and Family Life</u>	
Strengths and weaknesses of the families. Interests and activities. Education. Social Services .....	51
Chapter IV. <u>Housing and Protective Services</u>	
Local trends in slum clearance. Houses and families. Social work and families. Implications and recommendations ..	73
Schedule A .....	27
Bibliography .....	88

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## CHAPTER I

## ISSUES OF CHILD PROTECTION

Good family living, the foundation for a rich and constructive future, is the right of every child. It is an accepted fact that the best possible environment for a growing child is a normal home. Although the connotation of the term "normal" differs according to the different social, cultural and economic patterns, there are certain fundamentals which are considered as characteristic for the normal, well-adjusted family.

"Such a family should provide each child not only with the essentials of food, shelter, clothing, but also with love, sympathetic understanding, and the feeling of 'belonging', which is the primary requisite for the development of the child's sense of emotional security. The family should also provide the child with the possibility of healthy physical growth and the opportunity of developing his own personality and talents, helping him to grow up to stable, mature adulthood, capable of normal relationships with others, of exercising his responsibilities as an adult member of his particular society and of performing his task as a future parent."<sup>1</sup>

In the early emphasis on "rescue" of children from undesirable surroundings, it is now clear that there was a complete lack of understanding of the meaning of family ties, or of the importance which belonging in a family group holds for normal child development. Children were seen as "small adults", and it was not until the end of the 19th century that there began to be some understanding of the unique needs of the child. The mistake was not in the failure to see some of the needs of children -- the need for bread, bed, and clothes, for example -- but the mistake was in thinking that there was just one best way of meeting all these needs. Outdoor relief,

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1. Children Deprived of Normal Home Life, United Nations Publication, New York, 1952, p.4.

almshouse, indenture, placement of children in free family homes, each at some period has been seen as THE way to care for all homeless, neglected and delinquent children.

Mr. Charles W. Birtwell, who began work with the Boston Children's Aid Society in 1886, persistently asked the question, so that his voice could be heard by the leaders in work for the dependent child, "What does the child really need?" His contribution to the Society was the formulation of a basic philosophy that has introduced harmony, meaning and efficiency into the methods and systems of care for dependent children.

"The aim will be in each instance to suit action to the real need -- heeding the teachings of experience, still to study the conditions with a freedom from assumptions, and a directness and freshness of view, as complete as though the case in hand stood absolutely alone."<sup>1</sup>

Not only must we understand the bodily needs, the emotional needs, the intellectual needs of each child, but we must know also to what extent the satisfaction of these needs is inextricably enmeshed in associations with his own past experiences, his family, his friends, and his locality, in order to answer the question fully as to what a child needs. We must understand "a total personality in a total situation".

The White House Conference of 1909 on the Care of Dependent Children emphasized the importance of conserving family ties and providing home care for all children.

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1. Thurston, Henry, The Dependent Child, A Story of Changing Aims and Methods in the Care of Dependent Children, Columbia University Press, New York, 1921, p.185.

"Home life is the highest and finest product of our civilization. It is the great molding force of mind and of character. Children should not be deprived of it except for urgent and compelling reasons. ... Except in unusual circumstances the home should not be broken up for reasons of poverty, but only for considerations of inefficiency and immorality."<sup>1</sup>

For many years social workers have maintained the belief that keeping children in their own home, and preserving and strengthening home life constitutes the basis of the child welfare program, to which all other services should be related. Protection work, a "child protection service" has come to be a well-recognized branch of social work.

In a recent survey by a committee set up in British Columbia by the Child Welfare Division of the Canadian Welfare Council, to examine the philosophy, principles and practice in Canadian protection work, protection is defined as:

"A service on behalf of children, undertaken by an agency upon receipt of information which indicates that parental responsibilities toward those children are not being effectively met. The service is based on law, and is supported by community standards. Its purpose is the protection of children through strengthening the home or, failing that, making other plans for their care and custody through the court."<sup>2</sup>

What are some of the predisposing social factors which lead to breakdown in family life, causing child neglect? There is seldom or never any one cause, but rather a number of interacting factors, each aggravating the other. However, there are certain common defects, in part environmental, in part inherent in the character of the parents, which can be detected in varying degrees in most cases.

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1. Proceedings of the Conference on the Care of Dependent Children, Washington, D.C., January, 1909, Senate Document No.721, Government Printing Office, 1909, pp.9-10.
2. Child Protection in Canada, Published by the Canadian Welfare Council, Ottawa, June, 1954, p.8.

Child neglect and poverty are often found together, because both are the result of certain deficiencies in the parents -- for example, the father who is never able to hold a job, or the mentally defective mother unable to manage either money or children. This statement is not meant to imply that child neglect is indigenous only to the low-income, mentally retarded parents; however, a good proportion of the families known to the Protective Service can be identified as families which have suffered economic and social deprivations for many years, some for several generations. In most instances of neglect, it can rightfully be assumed that disregard of children is symptomatic of a serious personal problem in living with which the parent has been unable to cope.

"Certain descriptive phrases occurred repeatedly in reports of neglect situations ... 'Emotional immaturity of the parents' was noted, for instance, in 70 per cent of the cases analyzed intensively. The absence of one parent and/or a common-law union were common problems in many parts of the country. Neurotics or psychotic parents, poor housing and alcoholism were found in many neglect cases, both in British Columbia and in other areas ..."

Child Welfare Services in Canada have moved rather rapidly from a purely protective program for neglected and abused children involving assumption by the state of guardianship ordinarily held by parents, to a much broader program, including the prevention of conditions which create neglect.<sup>2</sup> This increasingly enlightened social outlook has brought into focus two significant concepts, namely, that no family can provide adequately for children solely by its own efforts, and secondly, the provision of case-work services aimed at helping parents to recognize what is wrong and thereby

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1. Child Protection in Canada, op.cit., p.12. A total of 147 families were surveyed by the Committee for this study.

2. Ibid.

discover how to correct the condition while the children remain in the home. Most parents do have within themselves the desire to be good parents as well as acceptable members of society; this justifies the approach of helping the children through helping the parents achieve their desires.

The concept that no family can provide adequately for children solely by its own efforts, especially in the urbanized and industrialized societies, implies that an increasing number of services are needed to supplement parental care, and these services must be supplied by the community. Proper housing, good sanitation, a good neighbourhood -- so important to the social life of the child outside of school, hospitals, churches, recreational facilities, libraries, and other character-building institutions, are society's contribution to the development of every child. If we are to reach our social goal -- the fullest development of the individual's capacities and creativeness, the community must provide these additional resources and facilities which every child needs, yet which are beyond the power of the individual family to provide. There are many possible situations where the lack of these can be every bit as serious a handicap in bringing up children as is inadequate parental care.

"The whole culture, too, combines to assist or to make difficult the process of child-rearing. This point is of special relevance here because parents need not only love for their children, but also confidence in their ability to rear them wisely if they are to do a good job. For the latter, they need society's backing."<sup>1</sup>

With increased knowledge and understanding of parent-child relationships, family ties, and with the preventative services being directed toward keeping the child in his own home, of strengthening family life, there is

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1. Witmer & Kotinsky, Personality in the Making, The Fact-Finding Report of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth, Harper & Brothers, Publishers, New York, 1952, p.102.

greater recognition of the intangible factors that make for good homes and neighbourhood, as well as the more easily evaluated factors, such as light, sanitation, space, etc. The part the home plays in the life of the family, its effect upon family life, is something that must be examined and studied in relation to the protection services.

### Social and Physical Aspects of Housing

In his book, Housing and Family Life, Dr. J.M. Mackintosh, Professor of Public Health, University of London, considers housing as one of the four pillars of social medicine. The four pillars he identifies are: the family, the house in which it lives, the food it eats, and the occupation of its members. The home must cater to many diversified activities in family living, such as the living together of parents and the privacy that means so much to the harmony between them; the nurture of children in the ever-changing conditions of growth to maturity; the preparation and service of food in a wholesome manner; personal hygiene and general cleanliness; quiet for leisure and sleep; and reasonable conditions for all the simple routine of family life.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the persons who live in poor housing also live in poverty; many suffer ill health and a few are mentally deficient as well. Poor health may take many forms; some diseases are associated with the qualitative physical factors found in poor housing -- dampness and insufficient heat, poor ventilation, poor sanitation, lack of proper food storage, the presence of dust, dirt and vermin. Some diseases are propagated by or associated with the social inadequacies found in poor housing, particularly overcrowding,

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1. Dr. J.M. Mackintosh, Housing and Family Life, Cassell and Co. Ltd., London, 1952, p.10.

insufficient bed-space, inability to isolate the sick, and poor housekeeping. It is extremely difficult to prove that poor housing, by itself, is responsible for the ill-health of the person who resides in substandard accommodation or in the substandard neighbourhoods known as slums or blighted areas. However, there is no doubt about the familiar correlation, and that many of the conditions of ill-health with which welfare agencies have to deal are heavily concentrated in poor housing areas.

In a number of studies it has repeatedly been observed that disease rates are higher among persons who are poorly housed than among those who are better housed.<sup>1</sup> Some may suggest that it is not the housing environment itself that encourages the incidence of disease; rather, the hypothesis is advanced that the population living in a poor housing environment has certain characteristics which, aside from housing, result in a high observed prevalence of disease. These characteristics are: low income, little education, poor diet, and health habits, and a lessened inclination to seek out medical attention when needed. Thus the issue may be people rather than housing. There is, however, a complex interaction between the two, and until further studies are made to show the reverse relationship, there is no denying the fact that the quality of housing considerably affects the health and family adjustment. Again, recent Canadian evidence is forthcoming.

In an address given by Dr. Albert Rose, Adequate Housing: Does It Make Better Citizens, Dr. Rose refers to the relationship between public health and public housing, and cites examples from a recent study made of the Regent

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1. Address prepared for the Canadian Conference on Social Work, June, 1954, by Dr. Albert Rose, Associate Professor, School of Social Work, University of Toronto. Reprinted by permission by the Community Planning Association of Canada, Ottawa, Canada, pp.9-10.

Park (North) Housing Project, Toronto, in this regard. One in every nine tenant families in the summer of 1953 were interviewed, as well as 21 professional persons -- public health doctors, nurses and other officials, social workers, teachers, and private physicians serving the project area and its families. The following conclusions were drawn:

"The predominant note in the interviews with professional persons was that of a trend towards a positive adjustment by the tenant families to a standard of living which is conducive to better health and well-being ... "

"Colds were less frequent for nearly half the families, infectious diseases were less for exactly half, 31 of the 48 families with children did not have as much sickness since moving to the project, while seven families claimed more ..."

"There can be no question that by and large, Regent Park, children are cleaner, healthier and doing better at school." <sup>1</sup>

Observations and comments regarding housing and the physical and mental effects of overcrowding are made by Alva Myrdal in her book, Nation and Family, which deals with the problems of population and family life in Sweden today. Recognizing that other detrimental factors related to poverty are nearly always concomitant with the influence of deficient housing space, the author made the following statements:

"Children and especially children in the pre-school age, together with adolescent youth, are the ones that are most threatened by the physical and psychological damages which a deteriorated or crowded home may cause. Infants are especially threatened by poor ventilation, unregulated temperature, and dampness ... "

Equally disquieting are the statements as to how the children fare intellectually and morally.

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1. Myrdal, Alva, Nation and Family, The Swedish Experiment in Democratic Family and Population Policy, published by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., London, 1945, pp.248-249.

"Despite the impossibility of directly and exactly indicating the nature and degree of the effects of housing, owing to our incomplete knowledge of causal relationships in the field of social morals and mental hygiene, it is still indisputable that such detrimental effects do occur. They may fundamentally decrease the mental well-being and working capacity of the individual, considerably increase fatigue and irritability, spoil the possibilities of a sane and harmonious family life within the home, decrease the efficiency of educational measures, and themselves directly contribute to the origin of habits and tendencies that work for family disorganization and delinquency."

It is perhaps the adolescent who runs the greatest risk in an overcrowded and deficient home. The lack of privacy, the impossibility of being alone or of bringing home companions will, together with the restlessness of this period of life, drive them to linger in pool-halls, in streets, in eating places, and elsewhere. All too often they quit school and leave home, only to escape the overpopulated parental home.

Psychological studies indicate that mental health in adult life is largely determined in its early stages by the child's reactions to the people immediately around him.<sup>1</sup> The attitude of the family toward the child and the child's response to that attitude determines to a great extent what his approach to life will be. It is not necessary to insist that a bad house prevents good family relationships within the home. Yet certain conditions necessary for good family relations are made extremely difficult when the housing environment is really bad. Sheer lack of space and privacy place the different members of the family so much in contact with one another that a perpetual state of friction and quarrelling may be common. The family circle in such conditions ceases to be the place where the child learns confidence in the world through love. Instead it may be the place where the child learns a bitter lesson of mistrust and hatred. Anti-social traits are an inevitable result. In an atmosphere pervaded by feelings of irritation and worry there is no opportunity for normal family relationships to be developed or maintained.

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1. Bowlby, John. Child Care and the Growth of Love, World Health Organization, Pelican Books, London, 1953, p.90-93.

"... have again and again emphasized the importance of the emotional problems in the parents as being a major cause of the children being in need of care and have emphasized, too, the extent to which deprivation and unhappiness in the parents' own childhoods have been the cause of their present problems."

This sort of intangible influences at work are well described by Sir Cyril Burt, in his book, The Young Delinquent. Dealing with the importance of the family and home background he says:

"Of all the various social influences that affect the individual mind, the most important are those obtained within the patient's home ...

"In the earlier days, social investigators were inclined to look mainly at material conditions. Their reports on home circumstances were confined principally to such points as income, rent, expenditure, number of rooms, number of children in the rooms, and the sanitary state of the dwellings. Gradually, however, they have been led to recognize that mental conditions are more potent than economic. The cultural status of the home, its moral character and -- most important of all -- its general emotional atmosphere, these constitute the crucial factors in nearly every case. Here both social workers and psychiatrists have been brought independently to much the same conclusions; it is the child's reaction to the members of his family, and their reaction to him, that count for most in his mental and moral life."<sup>1</sup>

Any study which gathers the facts about the physical standards of families in low-income areas can see the handicaps which may prejudice good family life.<sup>2</sup> A recent study of Social Assistance families in Vancouver for example, has shown that they often lack the utensils required for the preparation of an adequate meal, or that cooking might involve so much additional work that the mother feels it is not worth the trouble to prepare healthful meals. There may be inadequate space, or an insufficient number of chairs for the family to sit down as a group for a meal. The home may require an excessive amount of work to keep clean, which would mean that it is left dirty most of the time. As a result, the family is unhappy, and the housewife is discouraged from trying to set or maintain any standard of home-making. There may be inadequate laundry and washing facilities. If this is

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1. Burt, Cyril, The Young Delinquent, University of London Press, London, 1944, p.119.
  2. Wilson, Warren, Housing Conditions among Social Assistance Families, Master of Social Work Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1953, p. 2.

the case, it could involve the expense of sending laundry out, or of the clothing not being kept as clean as it should be.

There are many other things such as lighting, crowding, lack of privacy, lack of opportunities for recreation, which would not inhibit the family from occupying the home, but would cause discomfort and hinder the fulfilment of wholesome family life. Although many families in inadequate housing are managing well enough to stay together, the poor physical standards are so influential that the family is unable to enjoy normal and happy family life. Neither physical nor mental health nor fullness of living is possible when a whole family is crowded into a single room of a city tenement. All the effects of poor housing may not appear at once, but they are potentially there. An unattractive, overcrowded home may produce a sense of inferiority which profoundly influences the personality, and the results may be seen later in the character of the children. They are ashamed to have their friends see where they live, and instead of inviting them to their homes, meet them at street corners, restaurants, and so forth.

As important as the house itself is the neighbourhood in which the residence is located. The location of the home and the surrounding environment play an important part in adult life, but even more in the attitudes and standards of children. Often-times the shortcomings of a home may be offset by a good neighbourhood in which the child gains acceptance and understanding, or, it may be the other way round, a good home may counteract the effect of a poor neighbourhood.

A study of twelve families in receipt of social assistance revealed that the families preferred living in their present neighbourhood, but desired better housing.

"It seems that on the whole, housing causes more dissatisfaction than does neighbourhood, although sometimes the neighbourhoods where the families said they would like to stay did not look, to an outsider, very attractive."<sup>1</sup>

### Economic Aspects of Housing

The other aspect of housing is its influence on the family budget.

A low-income family may be defined in the words of the National (Canadian) Housing Act, 1954 (Sec.2-13), as "... a family that receives a total family income that is insufficient to permit it to rent housing accommodation adequate for its needs at the current rental market in the area in which the family lives." There are at least two or three reasons why the total family income may be "insufficient". Most commonly, the family income may be both absolutely and relatively low, that is, well below the money income of the great majority of Canadian families.

"The social assistance family is unable to spend any additional money for adequate shelter and is often unable to find better housing within its limited budget."<sup>2</sup>

At the same time it is conceivable, as we all realize, that the family income may be "average" in the generally understood sense, while the price of housing accommodation adequate for the needs of the family is beyond a reasonable proportion of the income. The close relation between income and rent is recognized in the well-established formula that families below a certain level should not pay more than one-fifth of their monthly income

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1. Evans, Maureen, Living on a Marginal Budget, Master of Social Work Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1953, p. 36.
  2. Wilson, Warren, op. cit., p. 6.

income for rent.<sup>1</sup>

A most important fact is that children may be a specially heavy handicap in the housing market. Not only may "sufficient" family income become "insufficient" as the number of children increases, but the dwellings which would provide adequately for large families are no longer being built in this country, or are simply beyond the financial capacity of families with many children. There are many apartments which will not allow families with children to become tenants, even if they could afford it.

Low-income families then are certainly more likely to be found in the substandard structures which are characteristic of slum or blighted areas than in the better maintained neighbourhoods of the community. They have not been able in the past, and cannot now purchase a home of their own. Neither can they rent housing adequate for the family's needs. Either their earnings are too low or too irregular, or they suffer ill-health or disablement, or they have a large number of children. A small proportion are mentally incapable of the degree of responsibility and initiative required to save for, or perhaps to find suitable accommodation. Whatever the reason, they tend to find housing in less favoured areas of the city -- run-down, blighted, ill-equipped with facilities, built on cheap but unplanned sites. There may be various reasons for their moving there -- either because rents

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1. Wheeler, Michael, Evaluating the Need for Low-renting Housing, Master of Social Work Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1955, p.70.

"... It is evident for the most part that the families represented at the lower end of the scale, for whom a proportionate rent would be something less than \$35. a month, are worse off on two counts than families whose theoretical rent-paying capacity is between \$50. and \$60. a month. Not only do a larger proportion of these families pay disproportionate rents, but at that low-income level (under \$175. a month), a small increase of rent (or a small decline of income) is of great significance for the family budget."

are low or standards of child-raising are low, or because it is only in these areas that such families can feel "at home".

The cost of shelter holds the real key to the entire functioning of the family, and it is impossible to manage economically without gearing the budget to this basic requirement.

"If a family is on social assistance, the problem of housing is more acute than for the family with a higher income. The social assistance family is unable to spend any additional money for adequate shelter and is often unable to find better housing within its limited budget ... If the grant is computed on a "flat-rate" basis with no regard to the cost of shelter, then the family has considerable difficulty finding housing within the proportion of the grant specified for shelter, and may have to pay for housing at the expense of other family needs."<sup>1</sup>

The type of accommodation a family has, its general state of repair, and, to a large extent, the neighbourhood in which they live, are determined by the rent they are able to pay. Low-rent accommodation is likely to be draughty, inconvenient and shabby. Writing in the thirties, Bakke, in a study of the life of the unemployed in the United States during the depression, concluded that "living quarters are more symbolic of the family's social status than any other single item save clothes."<sup>2</sup> This is still true today for many whose income for one reason or another does not "fit their families."

### The Concern of the Social Worker

Public health and "general welfare" are the biggest and broadest of all nation-wide problems. And for the promotion and protection of the nation's health and welfare, decent homes are second only to a minimum of decent food.

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1. Wilson, Warren, op.cit., p. 6.

2. Bakke, E. Wright, The Unemployed Worker, New Haven Yale University Press, 1940, p. 269.

Even education in healthy living habits and responsible citizenship can hardly be truly effective as long as slum homes, through no fault of their occupants, are overcrowded and lacking in sanitary facilities, and as long as slum neighbourhoods with automatic regularity turn out large numbers of anti-social, defiant and delinquent children.<sup>1</sup> In recent decades social workers have become increasingly concerned with the effect of housing on the physical, moral, economic and psychological well-being of the family.<sup>2</sup>

Overcrowding, inadequate housing, of course affect large families primarily. Those large families in which children are small are most often economically unable to obtain adequate housing. From the point of view of human well-being, poor housing conditions have much more severe and lasting effects when they affect children of tender age than in other cases. The problem of overcrowding is mainly a child welfare problem, as the children are the chief cause - of both the overcrowding and of the poverty itself. These children are the ones that are most threatened by the physical and psychological damage which a deteriorated or crowded house may cause.

Not all personality problems or defects "come to light" as a result of bad housing, but a disproportionate number of welfare agency cases do originate in blighted areas. A housing survey undertaken in Vancouver in 1950 refers to "... the difficulties of coping with distress and social ills

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1. Bauer, Catherine, A Citizen's Guide to Public Housing, Vassar College, N.Y., 1940, p. 3.
  2. Borland, Wilson S., "Housing and City Planning", Social Work Year Book, 1951, p. 237.

when they are lodged in living conditions which destroy morale."<sup>1</sup> Within the same context the survey cites a commentary of the Vancouver City Social Service Department which refers to "the multiplicity of housing and emotional problems" bred in the blighted areas. Thus, housing, in particular, in its broader sense of neighbourhood, recreational and cultural outlets and mobility, meshes closely with all other social-economic factors influencing individual and family patterns of behaviour.

A recent study made of seven "hard-core" families known to the Family Service Agency, Vancouver, showed in the analysis of the long-term maladjustment and dependency of these families that one of the psycho-social components was housing. At the dates of initial contact with the Family Service Agency, four of the families occupied substandard housing, insufficient space, dirty and undesirable neighbourhood; two of the families were living with relatives or friends, and the remaining family was stated to have inadequate housing, but records did not indicate in what respect. Thus, in every case, the problem or crisis was brought to the agency -- that is, came to a head, at a time when housing was inadequate in some respect.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Marsh, L.C., Rebuilding a Neighbourhood, University of British Columbia, Research Publication, Number 1, 1950. The area chosen for the demonstration study comprised about forty blocks east of Main Street, bounded by Hastings East, Gore Avenue, Glen Drive and the False Creek Flats. "At a minimum, it can be said that 3.5 per cent of all recorded entries (cases registered with the Social Service Index, Vancouver, by the welfare agencies) in recent years relate to this area, and that the proportion is probably higher. (Since the population proportion is 2.2, this "case-load" can be considered as about 60 per cent disproportionately." p.25.
  2. Marcuse, Berthold, Long-Term Dependency and Maladjustment Cases in a Family Service Agency, Master of Social Work Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1956, p.29.

The parents known to many agencies, and particularly those whose children are in need of protection, often have personality defects which stem from their immediate or earlier psycho-social backgrounds. At a certain point in time these weaknesses are exacerbated by a congruence of socio-economic factors -- bad housing, unemployment, low income, poor health, etc., and the precipitating crisis arises, which causes the family to seek or require social services. The personality defects and the psycho-social factors can usually be identified in each case, but which is cause and which effect is not always clear and cannot be determined; however, the close interlocking of personality and environment is obvious. Because of the interdependence of personal and social factors, the destructive consequences of these defects affect not only the family, but society as well.

"Homes are the major factor in human environment, whether measured in terms of time, space or the importance of the functions carried on there. To the individual it is the place where he belongs. It shelters him from the elements, protects his personal property, and is the only place he can expect to find privacy. For the family, it is the housekeeping unit. The home must provide space and facilities for sleep and relaxation, for preparation of food and care of clothing for personal cleanliness, for recreation and social life, for procreation and for the training of children for everyday health requirements."<sup>1</sup>

Homes as a major factor in the environment have been stressed. We know all too well the interaction of the environment upon the personality. It is in response to the stresses and strains of a hostile environment that the pre-existing personality defects become apparent; or that hitherto adequate defences break down and can no longer help the individual maintain emotional stability. People, or families, do not "crack up" purely by chance. The tolerance level of individuals varies markedly, but given

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1. Bauer, Catherine, op. cit., p.2.

sufficient environmental stress, every individual will break down eventually. Modify the environment beforehand so as to eliminate its stresses and most of the break-downs can be averted. Modify the environment after the break-down and many of these individuals and families can be fully or partially rehabilitated.

The environmental forces which are to a large degree outside the direct control of the family cannot be ignored. It is these forces which are being given key consideration in social welfare approach by such countries as Great Britain and the Scandinavian bloc, in their stress upon income maintenance, health, and housing.

#### Method of Study

The aim of this study has been to show the effects of housing upon family life, of the inter-familial relationships when housing is inadequate, and of the family's adjustment or reaction to living in a slum or blighted area. With the co-operation of the Children's Aid Society and the City Social Service Department, both of Vancouver, four cases were selected from each agency. The selection of cases was based on the following factors:

- a) The cases had been active with the agency during 1956.
- b) They were family cases with the children residing with their parent or parents in their own home.
- c) All the cases were selected from the same area or locality of the city, namely between McLean Drive on the east and Main Street on the West, and between False Creek on the south and Burrard Inlet on the north. This area is considered one of the slum areas of Vancouver.
- d) The cases selected from the Children's Aid Society were protection cases, whereas the cases from the City Social Service Department had elements of protection. In all cases the social workers had commented on the inadequate or poor housing, which was seen as a factor in contributing to the family's adjustment.

- e) The cases selected were not representative of the worst housing found in this area, but more typical of the general kind of housing throughout this section of the city.

The social workers active on the cases first visited the families, explained the study, and asked their co-operation. The writer then visited the families and talked with as many of the family members as were available. The interview was structured so that the views of the family on the various aspects of their housing situation could be obtained, keeping in mind such topics as:

1. What were the problems or difficulties encountered in their present housing.
2. What did the parents or the children themselves see as advantages or disadvantages in living in this area.
3. Was their rent in excess of their income. How did their rent equate with 'for value received'.
4. What had been their previous experiences in regard to housing.
5. What did they see as meeting their need most adequately today.
6. What opportunities did the community offer the children and the parents in regard to recreation, entertainment.
7. Would they like to move away from the neighbourhood, or, if more adequate housing could be found in that locality, would they prefer to remain there.
8. How do the families describe the experience of living in inadequate housing. The effect on family relationships.
9. Has the housing affected the family's health; if so, to what degree.

The agencies' files on the families were read for previous history of the family, special note being taken of agency contact, services given, comments by the worker as well as by the family in regard to any housing problems, together with reports on children's progress at school, their

activities, and so forth. Several of the files contained comments or information about the personality of certain members of the family, their attitudes and the family relationship. In most of the cases it was possible to discuss the family situation with the social workers active on the case, and to learn from them the problems or difficulties encountered in helping or working with these families.

## CHAPTER II

## HOUSING AS ENVIRONMENT

To obtain adequate shelter is one of the greatest problems which confronts a family today, especially if it has a number of children, and if the income is low. Many families are crowded into various types of inadequate shelter because they are unable to find any other kind. They are to be found living in houses dilapidated beyond hope of renovation. The rooms are apt to be dark, with plaster and wall-paper coming off the walls, the stairways often steep, narrow and rickety, and the ventilation is poor, making the house difficult to heat. The difficulties encountered in trying to bring up a family in overcrowded quarters, which lack facilities or any semblance of comfort, need not be emphasized.

"The strain of living for the housewife is severe and the tendency to give up is great, and it is only too easy to start a vicious circle -- the deterioration of actual cleanliness, followed by a lowering of the tone and spirit of the occupants, causing in turn a further decline in standards and leading to a nearly complete loss of appreciation of cleanliness and sanitation and all that these terms stand for."<sup>1</sup>

There can be no doubt that bad housing can accentuate difficulties already existent within the family, and will only exaggerate the shortcomings of what may already be "inadequate parents". It is not surprising that some parents give up altogether in the face of responsibilities which are too much for them. The pressures are such that it would take a superhuman effort for anyone to bring up a family well. The deplorable state of disrepair, the total absence of the ordinary amenities required for decent living can hardly

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1. Mackintosh, J.M., op. cit., p.31.

fail to bring in their train dirt, disease, apathy and neglect.

A review of the eight families chosen for this study will illustrate the housing difficulties that these families are encountering, its effect upon family living, their adjustment and response to it. Six of the families have both the father and the mother in the home, two are examples of broken families. In one of these there is only the mother, in the other the father assumes responsibility for the family. Three of the families have had agency contact since the 1940's, while the remaining five have had contact within the last five years. All the families live in rented quarters.

A brief descriptive summary of each family, together with an outline of their family composition, their accommodation and household budget will serve as an introduction to these families. The three families that live in suites will be discussed first, followed by a description of those who occupy houses.

Mr. and Mrs. A. are a young couple, the wife aged 34 and the husband aged 33. Mrs. A. was a ward of the Catholic Children's Aid from the age of four years until she was married. She is a slight, weebegone-looking woman. Mr. A., of French-Polish origin, with fat facial features, of medium build, dark complexion, was born in the North Okanagan district. He has worked as a labourer, but his work record has always been very poor. The couple first applied to the City Social Service Department for financial assistance in 1948, and their contact with the agency and the financial help given has been intermittent since that time. Rental arrears often forced the couple with their eight small children to move from one type of poor housing to

another. In May, 1956, the Catholic Children's Aid worker commented, "Family appear to present an increasing social problem rather than one of distinct unemployability." Repeated efforts by agencies to supply the requisite facilities for the family seemed as if they were trying to fill "a bottomless pit," as help given appeared to count for nothing. In October, 1956, Mr. A., who had been complaining for some time of arthritis in his arms, was diagnosed as having moderately advanced active tuberculosis. Later, within a two-month period, three of the children were placed in the Preventorium. Problems have arisen in regard to Mr. A's unwillingness to remain in hospital for treatment. Mrs. A. and the five children living at home have been granted social assistance.

The "B" family was first known to the Children's Aid Society in 1955, when Mr. B. had telephoned the office to complain of his wife's lack of care of their three children. He spoke of her drinking, and of her going out and leaving the children alone. Mr. B. had been separated from the family for about two years, but contributed regularly toward their support. Mrs. B's personal appearance is not good, being that of the somewhat lazy, indifferent, slatternly type, whereas Mr. B. is quite debonair, wanting to make a good impression and possibly to conceal many inadequacies.

The "C" family was first known to the Children's Aid Society in 1956, when a telephone call was received that the mother was extremely disturbed and threatening suicide. Because of the mother's mental state, there was concern for the safety of the children. Mrs. C. stated that the place she lived in depressed her and what had upset her most was the fact that the

elderly man who lived in a cottage at the rear was always complaining about her children. The C's are a young couple in their mid-twenties, with six small children ranging in age from six months to seven years. Mrs. C's standards of cleanliness are noted in her own personal appearance, as well as the children's. However, Mrs. C., who could be attractive-looking, does very little to make herself so. The unattractive, loose-fitting dress she wore only helped to emphasize her over-weight.

The "D's" were first known to the Children's Aid Society in 1953, when a neighbour complained that the parents were neglecting their five children and "leaving them alone." Later, the police reported that the parents were picked up on a drunken charge, and that the children were alone in a dirty, unkempt house. Mrs. D., aged 36, frail and delicate-looking, is immature and childish in her manner. Both Mrs. D. and the children look to Mr. D. for direction. The family is materially poor, but there appears to be warmth and affection amongst the members.

Mr. and Mrs. E. separated about six years ago because they "got on each other's nerves." Mr. E. (aged 64), and his four children, have been known to the City Social Service Department since 1951. The family had to apply for social assistance when Mr. E. was injured while working on a construction job. He was struck on the head by a falling brick and suffered concussion. He is almost completely deaf and has very little eyesight. Mrs. E., aged 37, and her common-law husband, who is a logger and whose work takes him outside the city, have always lived close or nearby Mr. E. and the children. Mrs. E. has helped to keep the children's clothes in repair, but

the arrangement in family living has not been conducive to good family relationships, and the children are divided in their affection and loyalties between the father and the mother.

Mrs. F., of Indian descent, has had great difficulty in adjusting to city life. Her husband, who is Swedish, is steadily employed with the City Scavenger Department and does not share his wife's dislike of the city. Early in 1956, a policewoman reported to the Children's Aid Society that the children in this family were receiving inadequate care, as the mother is constantly drunk.

The G's have been known to the City Social Service Department since 1940. They are a comparatively young couple -- Mr. G. aged 43, and his wife aged 38. From 1940 to 1953, Mr. G., who was a truck-driver, was never steadily employed, as he had difficulty both in getting and retaining a job. Alcoholism was his major problem. Periodic assistance was given the family by the City Social Service throughout the years until 1953, when it was recommended that continuous assistance was the only means of stabilizing and maintaining the family. Mrs. G., a small, rather delicate-looking woman, has worked hard to provide a home for her nine children throughout the years.

The "H" family has been known to the City Social Service Department since 1942, when Mr. H. suffered a back injury while working as a logger. He has remained in poor health ever since, and although he did try to return to work, his health would not permit this. Mr. H., aged 62, came to Canada from Finland in 1929. Mrs. H., aged 46, is of Indian-Norwegian descent and has been in receipt of the Blind Pension for several years. She is a stout woman, with an animated, friendly personality, and her blindness is not to

any marked degree a handicap to her. She moves with surety and quickness about the house and is an active participant in the children's activities. However, there has been difficulty in regard to Mrs. H's periodic drinking "sprees", when she leaves the family for several days, drinks excessively, and associates with questionable friends. During one of her absences from home in 1946, the children were apprehended and placed in foster-home care. The children were most unhappy separated from their parents and plans had to be made for their return.

SCHEDULE A. FAMILY COMPOSITION, ACCOMMODATION, APPLIANCES, AND BUDGET OF EIGHT FAMILIES.

Family	Composition (a)	Budget (b) (monthly)	Accommodation	Appliances
A.	Husband Wife 3 boys (11,9,1) 5 girls (7,6,5,3,2)	S.A. \$133.00 T.B. 52.00 allowance F.A. 30.00  Rent \$40.00	Suite: 4 rooms 2 bedrooms kitchen bathroom	Washing Machine (minus wringer) Mantel radio.
B.	Wife 1 boy (2) 2 girls (7,4)	Income \$120.00 F.A. 16.00  Rent \$40.00	Suite: 2 rooms 1 bedroom kitchen	Refrigerator Mantel radio
C.	Husband Wife 3 boys (5,2,1) 3 girls (7,6,3)	Wages \$292.00 F.A. 32.00  Rent \$47.00	Suite: 4 rooms 1 bedroom Living-room used as bedroom Kitchen Bathroom	Television Refrigerator Washing machine Telephone
D.	Husband Wife 2 boys (13,9) 2 girls (10,7)	Wages \$220.00 F.A. 27.00  Rent \$47.00	House: 6 rooms 2 bedrooms (living-room dining-room Kitchen Bathroom	Washing machine Television Telephone
E.	Husband 2 boys (14,6) 2 girls (16,11)	S.A. \$90.00 Workmen's Compensation \$23.00 F.A. 21.00  Rent \$60.00	House: 8 rooms 2 bedrooms (living-room dining-room Kitchen Bathroom (2 rooms rented)	Washing machine Mantel radio Refrigerator
F.	Husband Wife 4 boys (7,6,4,3) 1 girl (11)	Wages \$240.00 F.A. 27.00  Rent \$45.00	House: 5 rooms 2 bedrooms Living-room Kitchen Bathroom	Washing machine Radio
G.	Husband Wife 3 boys (15,13,9) 3 girls (16,14,11)	S.A. \$122.00 F.A. 38.00  Rent \$45.00	House: 8 rooms 3 bedrooms Living-room Dining-room Kitchen Bathroom	Washing machine Refrigerator Mantel radio
H.	Husband Wife 2 boys (13,12) 2 girls (16,8)	S.A. \$89.00 Blind Pension 60.00 F.A. 23.00  Rent \$40.00	House: 6 rooms 2 bedrooms Living-room Dining-room Kitchen Bathroom	Washing machine Television Telephone

(a) Ages of children given after names

(b) Abbreviations: S.A.-Social Assistance: F.A. - Family Allowance.

### Accommodation

The "A" family occupy a four-roomed suite on the second floor of an extremely dilapidated building, termed a "cabin". These "cabins" are primitive two-storey structures. They are a form of temporary housing unique to the Pacific Coast, and were built more than thirty years ago to house immigrants who were brought in to help finish the Canadian Pacific Railway. Today there are about twelve families occupying the available "suites". A narrow sidewalk leads from the street to the side-centre entrance of the building. A verandah about three feet in width, and with a low outside railing provides passage-way to the various suites on each floor. This is very hazardous, especially with children playing, as there is little to protect them from climbing up and falling over this railing.

The A's suite spells poverty and drabness. The door opens into the kitchen, which is dark, gloomy and depressing. The only furniture is an old wood and coal stove, a very worn wooden table and three old kitchen chairs, an old washing machine which is lacking a wringer, and a kitchen sink so rusty and dirty that it looks unfit for human use. Heavy, greyish-coloured plastic curtains draped across the kitchen windows and the glass in the door add to the already dismal appearance of the room. The ceiling is black with coal soot, as are the walls. The kitchen stove smokes so badly that Mrs. A. said it was useless for her to try to clean them. She had washed the walls a few months ago, only to have them as black as ever in a short time. A light-bulb hangs from the centre of the ceiling, and this burns day and night.

The two bedrooms were equally dark and destitute-looking. An old

chesterfield made up into a bed with a grey blanket over it, a small stove about two feet in height and placed close to the wall, and a mantel radio were the furnishings of this room. In the other room there was a bed with an old mattress and feather tick on it, with no evidence of bedding or blankets. Here and there were boxes in which clothing was piled. The bathroom was in an equally deplorable state. Because the stove smoked so badly and did not work properly, the hot-water tank had never been connected. As a result, all the hot water had to be heated on the stove. Mrs. A. uses a small tub in which to bath the children, because she could never heat enough water to use the bath-tub.

Mrs. A. had clothes-lines draped about the kitchen from corner to corner, as this was her only possible means of drying clothes in the winter-time. She could, if the weather permitted, hang a few things out on the verandah.

Mrs. A. said the landlord refused to clean or re-decorate the suite while they were there, because their stove would make it as bad as ever again. He was anxious for them to move, as he feared the health authorities would condemn it. Mrs. A. said he had been good enough to let them move in there when they could find no other place, and that she hated to make any trouble for him.

Mrs. B. and her three children live in a small two-room suite on the second floor of a dilapidated apartment building. A long narrow, dark corridor leads to the entrance of the suite located at the far end of the hallway. The heat in this suite is oppressive, which is possibly due to poor ventilation. The room gives a somewhat cluttered appearance, as so many things are crowded into this one room. In addition to the table and

chairs, there is an endless variety of boxes which serve as cupboards to store things in as well as to place things on. A two-plate grill is on one box, an Astral refrigerator, in somewhat precarious position, is on another. There is one small window in the room, which it is impossible to open. The other room, equally small and crowded, serves as the bedroom for the entire family. A cot and a double bed take up most of the space in the room. The bathroom, which is used by about four other families, is located about half-way down the corridor. Mrs. B. does have a small sink in her suite with hot and cold running water.

The C's have four rooms rented at the rear of a store. There is a narrow alley at the side of the building, which leads around to the rear. Very ricketty old stairs, which are quite unsafe, make the approach to the C's living quarters very gloomy and depressing. However, you feel when you enter the small kitchen that an effort is made to maintain some standard of home-making. The room is neat and clean, in spite of the poor state of repair. The furnishings, including the wood and coal stove, the washing machine, the refrigerator, are all comparatively new and in good condition. Bedroom and living-room furniture are combined in the next room, which is a fairly large room, and serves both as a bedroom and living-room. In addition to the bed, there is a chesterfield suite and a TV set. A smaller room is the bedroom for the three older children. There is a bathroom off the kitchen, but the C's have never been able to use the bath-tub because the pipes have rusted beyond possibility of use. Furthermore, the room is so cold in the wintertime that it is doubtful if it could be used for bathing. Mrs. C. has to bath the children in the kitchen sink, and this is becoming quite a

problem because the two older children are getting too large for it. Just at the rear of the premises is a little cottage in which an old-age pensioner lives, and beside them is a market stall for the sale of flowers, etc. There is no outdoor space for the children to play in.

The house that the "D" family occupies is also a small wooden frame six-roomed structure. It is one of a row of similar houses, all unpainted, grey, dilapidated and extremely weathered-looking. A few steps lead up to the front door off the sidewalk. There is no semblance of lawn or grass anywhere. A dirty, ragged curtain is hung over the window in the front door, and this serves as an indication of what might be expected inside. A Quebec heater is only a few feet away from the door as you enter the living-room. It is here in this one room that the family appear to do most of their living, including eating, sleeping, watching TV, etc. The furniture was very worn, dirty and tattered. Mr. D. said that he had attempted to re-cover the chesterfield several times, but that was as far as he had got -- the result being that the chesterfield and chairs resemble patchwork quilts.

Clothing, books, dishes, etc. were littered about the room or piled on chairs or tables. A clothes-line seemed to weave its way from corner to corner about the room. Mrs. D. uses this to hang her clothes on to dry in the wintertime. A chesterfield made up into a bed was at the far end of the room, and Mrs. D. pointed with pride to the new flannelette sheets on it, which she had bought by working for a short time in a restaurant.

The grey, dirty walls went unnoticed, as your attention was drawn to a large, rather flamboyant painting on one of the walls of the Madonna and Child. Mr. D. enjoys doing this copy work in oil-painting as a hobby, and

frequently decorates one entire wall with such scenes as "The Last Supper", and so on.

The kitchen at the rear is seldom used during the winter because it is cold and draughty. Upstairs are two bedrooms and the bathroom. Mrs. D. has had difficulty in getting decent beds and bedding, and complained that the children were not getting proper rest because of the awful beds they had to sleep on. The boys had tried building a "rumpus room" in the basement, and had constructed bunk beds, as well as a home-made stove. This effort did not prove too successful, as the boys found it much too damp and cold. After sleeping there one night, they decided that upstairs was somewhat better.

The "E's" house is an eight-roomed wooden-frame structure, built a considerable distance back from the street. A large excavation is in front of the house, and as a result the house must be approached from the neighbouring walk. The house borders the alley at the back, leaving no room or space in the back yard.

The house is in somewhat bad repair, but had had a coat of green paint which improves its appearance. The long hallway into which you enter serves as a storage place for the refrigerator and the boy's bicycle. The living-dining-room is plainly but neatly furnished with only the bare essentials, including a dining-room table, covered with a bright red plastic table-cover, a few rather rickety chairs, a sideboard and a chest of drawers. Mr. E. complained that there wasn't a cupboard in the house, except the one he uses to keep the family's food in. Several boards are also rotten in the floor and you had to be rather careful where you stepped, although Mr. E. had tried to fix them.

The kitchen was very small, with only room for the wood and coal stove,

the sink, the washing machine and a small utility table. Off the kitchen was a small bedroom, with two or three cot-beds where Mr. E. and the two boys sleep. The two girls have a bedroom upstairs. Mr. E. rents the remainder of the rooms upstairs as a self-contained suite to his wife and her common-law husband.

Mr. E. works hard to make the house clean and attractive, and recently painted the walls and ceilings in all the rooms downstairs. However, he was rather discouraged to see it getting dirty so quickly, from the soot and grease which filters in around the doors and windows.

The family seldom or never use their front door, but instead go out of their back door, through a vacant lot to Pender Street.

The "F's" live in a very dilapidated, rickety little five-room bungalow. A small wooden fence separates it from the street. The steps appear ready to tumble down, as does the entire house. Inside the plaster is torn off in patches, together with the wallpaper. Mrs. F. has a variety of plastic curtains hung over the windows, which tended to shut out what light there was, and only give the room a darker, more depressing atmosphere. Two very old chesterfields made up the living-room furniture, together with a wood and coal heater boosted up on bricks and with a sheet-metal jacket surrounding it.

The other rooms, consisting of two bedrooms, kitchen and bathroom -- are all very small and equally as drab in appearance as the living-room. Mrs. F. complained bitterly about the house being "like a barn". They cannot heat it even with two stoves, and nearly freeze to death all the time. The landlord is anxious for them to move, as he wants to renovate the house completely so that he can increase the rent.

They have a small amount of space at the rear of the house, but have never bothered to try to plant a garden or to fix it up in any way.

The "G's" have lived in their present house for over five years. It is a large eight-roomed house, which is cut up or divided by long and narrow hallways, making the rooms for family living very small and congested. The house looks somewhat dilapidated and in need of repair and painting. There is a small front lawn which affords an opportunity to plant a few flowers, etc.

The living-room is very small, and although the furniture is old and worn, there is a neatness and cleanliness about the room. This same pattern may be observed in all the rooms, and the impression gained is that Mrs. G. spares no effort in order to maintain a fairly high standard of housekeeping. They have found it very difficult to heat even the downstairs of the house, and this means there is no heat at all in the three bedrooms and bathroom upstairs.

The rooms are very dark, as little light seems to get into the house, especially at the sides, as the neighbouring houses are built so close on each side that the light is shut out.

The house in which the "H" family live is a small, six-roomed wooden frame structure. It is old in style and badly in need of paint. There is a very small plot of land at the front of the house where a few flowers are planted. At the side is a narrow strip of land, and it is here that the H's are able to plant a vegetable garden. At the rear of the house is an old tumble-down shed, in which they store their fuel, etc. There is insufficient space for a clothes-line at the rear, so Mrs. H. must use her neighbour's when she wishes to hang her clothes outside. Last summer Mr. H. built a neat

little picket fence at the side of the house.

The outside of the house is drab in appearance. However, bright red floral paper curtains are hung at the front windows, and several potted plants on the window ledge give colour and brightness to the house. The glass in the front door was polished and clean. The impression gained as you entered the house was that the family took pride in making their home a pleasant place to live in.

The front door opened into the living-room, which is a fairly large room in comparison to the other rooms. The furniture, consisting of a chesterfield suite and a TV set, was all assembled at one end of the room, leaving only a Quebec heater and a studio couch at the far end. The floor was covered with linoleum; pictures and knick-knacks, etc. were hung on the wall. The room was bright, and such things as doilies on the arms of the chairs, plants, etc., gave it a home-like appearance.

There are only two small bedrooms, with Mr. and Mrs. H. occupying one and the two girls the other. During the winter months the two boys sleep on the chesterfield in the living-room, but in the summer they are able to fix up a bedroom for themselves in the attic. The girls have decorated their bedroom with dolls that they dressed in fancy costume, and on the plastic cover for their clothes cupboard, they have pasted in an attractive pattern pictures of their favourite movie stars.

The kitchen is small and crowded with the few essentials of furniture normally found in a kitchen. Mr. H. made a substantial-looking cupboard from lumber he had carted home from the junk-yard. This served as a place to store food, cooking utensils, etc. Neither the kitchen itself, nor the table seemed to afford space for the family to sit down as a group for a meal. Off

thekitchen was a room which serves both as a bathroom and a utility room. It was here that Mrs. H. kept her washing machine and had lines hung on which to dry her clothes in the wintertime. There was also a pantry, with a sink in it, and a few cupboards. A wood and coal stove, in good working order, meet the family's need for all cooking purposes, etc.

#### Previous Accommodation

During the eight years the A's have been known to the agency, they have moved on the average about twice a year, and from one poor, inadequate place to another, never with sufficient space or furniture. Between 1952 and 1954 the family moved from Vancouver to Creston, B.C., and later to Saskatchewan, where they lived in a two-roomed ramshackle house. They were repatriated to Vancouver toward the end of 1954, and lived for a while with a relative in a two-roomed house. They later secured a five-roomed house, in which a kitchen wood and coal stove was their only source of heat. Worker's comment after one visit was, "The children had measles. They were without socks and their legs were blue with cold." The house was described as shabby, damp, dark, and badly in need of repair. It was condemned by the health authorities, and the family moved to the present suite early in the year.

The "B's" have lived in the present location since coming to Vancouver about three years ago. Mrs. B. said that as a child, she herself was raised in such "dives" as "The New Star Rooms," and had hid in the theatres and church doorways rather than go home.

The "C's" have lived in only one other place, and that was a small two-roomed suite, which did not allow them sufficient space and they disliked being forced to live in such close quarters with other people. Mrs. C. has

lived in Vancouver all her life, and in this same area, but she recalls her family home as being fairly adequate and comfortable.

The "D's" have moved only once since they were known to the agency in 1952. According to Mr. and Mrs. D., they have never known what it is to live in a "decent" place, and it would seem that even though their present housing situation leaves much to be desired, it is no worse, but somewhat better, than where they have lived previously. Mrs. D. spoke of the terrible time she had with the plumbing in their former place -- there was flooding, leakage from pipes, etc. The place was condemned by the health authorities, and this necessitated their moving in 1953.

The "E's" had lived for a short time on a small chicken farm before they moved to town in about 1954. The family had enjoyed living in the country and the children had difficulty in getting used to the city. When they first came to town they lived in a three-roomed suite. The suite was shabby and needed re-decoration; furthermore, the rent was \$50.00 monthly. There was no ventilation in the girls' bedroom and the father considered the quarters were unhealthy. Neither did he like to have his children exposed to the drunkenness that was common in the apartment block.

In 1952 the Catholic Children's Aid Society were asked to help the F's because of the housing problem. The F's have lived at their present address since becoming known to the Society. They had previously lived at Osoyoos, B.C., and although Mrs. F. does not describe their living quarters as being adequate, she liked living in the country and was happy there.

The "G's" were living in a four-roomed house when first known to the agency in 1940. The house was in a poor state of repair and they had no furniture. In 1946 they lived with Mr. G's sister and brother-in-law, in one

room with a kitchenette, making a total of eleven persons crowded into this small space, until Mr. and Mrs. G. could find more adequate shelter. They obtained a three-room suite. Their only sleeping accommodation was a double bed and a davenport for eleven people. The oldest boy went to live with his grandmother. In spite of the poor and inadequate furnishings, the worker's comment was, "The suite was always clean and home-like in appearance." The floors were cold and draughty and the children were seldom without colds. Mrs. G. was forced to dry laundry over the stove. In 1951 the family moved to their present location, which is the closest the family has ever come to experiencing accommodation that in some measure meets their needs.

The "H's" were attempting to buy their own home on Glen Drive in 1942 when Mr. H. had his accident and the family had to apply for social assistance. In the intervening fourteen years, the family has moved only three times, from a two-roomed suite to a four-roomed house, to their present home in April, 1956. Before the family moved to their present home, they felt that they were living "underground", because their house was situated between two large buildings which shut out any sunlight. Neither did they have a bathroom or shower, and Mrs. H. and her daughter used to go to the neighbours for a bath.

### Economic Status

The "A's" have been in receipt of social assistance since Mr. A.'s condition was diagnosed as moderately advanced active TB. This is the first time that assistance has been granted to the family continuously, but throughout the years temporary assistance was given the family "to tide them over" periods of unemployment, which were quite frequent, due to the man's inability to provide adequately for his family at any time. Their rent is \$40.00 a

month, and they must heat and light the place at their own expense. Mrs. A. said she has about \$40.00 a week for all family living expenses -- to buy food for herself and the five children at home, pay for the fuel, the incidentals the children require at school, as well as such extras as dry-cleaning. Mrs. A. said that she has had some of the children's clothes at the cleaners for several weeks, and that she did not know when she would ever be able to spare the money to get them. Mrs. A. said it was impossible for her to wash and dry such articles as snow-suits, woollen clothing, etcetera, in their house. Mrs. A. thought they were fortunate in being able to get such things as medicine for the children, including Neo-Chemical Food, free of charge. She does have to pay for Vick's ointment and nose-drops which the children require when they have colds.

Mrs. A. has been encouraged by the nutritionist of the City Social Service Department to do her weekly grocery shopping at one of the larger department stores rather than shop at nearby corner shops. She usually buys items that are pre-cooked or easily prepared, because her stove is of little use in either cooking or heating. The lack of storage space, facilities for keeping foods, also creates problems in both shopping and meal-planning. Since Mr. and Mrs. B. have been separated, he has been paying weekly towards his wife's and children's maintenance. Until recently he used to pay her \$100.00 monthly, of which \$28.00 had to be paid for rent of suite. When the rent was increased to \$10.00 per week, Mr. B. began paying \$30.00 weekly to his family, thereby leaving \$20.00 weekly for all household expenses. Mrs. B. does not complain about managing on this small amount. Mr. B. is employed as head barman at one of the small hotels.

Mr. C., who is employed as a mixer with a construction company, earns \$73.00 weekly, and except for occasional slack periods, he is fairly steadily employed. Their rent is \$45.00 monthly and they must heat and light their place. Because it is draughty and poorly constructed, it is difficult to heat, in spite of their using between one and two tons of coal a month during the winter trying to keep warm. Mrs. C. shops weekly at one of the Safeway stores and likes doing this, because she knows how she can best plan her meals for the week, without the family eating well for a few days and having less later on. They have also planned to buy various pieces of furniture, paying for them on time-payments. They recently bought a large refrigerator, and when this is paid for, Mrs. C. would like to get a vacuum cleaner.

Mr. D. is steadily employed with a shipyard firm, and earns approximately \$60.00 weekly. Mr. D. states that even though he is earning a fair wage, he finds it difficult to manage and get everything the family needs. The rent is \$47.50 per month, and they have to buy between a ton and a ton and a half of coal per month in the wintertime. Then there is their light and telephone bill every month.

Mr. D. does the grocery shopping each night on his way home from work. He did try getting a large grocery order one week, but said that the children never stopped eating until it was all gone. He thought he could not afford to shop this way; it was cheaper to buy sufficient only for the day. Lack of space to keep food also hinders them from buying any quantity of food.

Mrs. D. said that there never was enough money to buy clothes and bedding, and she wished she could get "an order" once in a while, but she doubted "they" would help her because Mr. H. is earning a fair wage. She shops at a Saint Vincent used-clothing shop for many of their clothing needs, such as shoes, underwear, dresses, etc.

The "E's" monthly income consists of \$90.00 social assistance, together with \$23.00 from the Workmen's Compensation, plus \$21.00 family allowance. Mr. E. talked as if he was able to manage quite well on this amount for his family, but said he had to shop and plan his meals carefully so as to give his children a good variety of nourishing food.

Mr. E. did pay a rent of \$70.00 monthly, but after he had re-decorated the rooms, the landlord reduced the rent to \$60.00. He did not disclose the amount of rent he receives from the two rooms his wife occupies. Mr. E. must also heat the house, which he claims is difficult to do in the cold weather because the house is so draughty.

Mr. F. has steady employment as a labourer with a construction company and earns a monthly wage of approximately \$240.00. Their rent is \$45.00 per month. Mrs. F. complained of what it cost them for fuel, saying that they had to buy between one and two tons of coal a month, and the house was still cold. Their shopping for food, buying of clothing, etc., did not seem to follow any particular pattern, as Mrs. F. said that she sometimes did the shopping, and sometimes her husband did. As was evident by the household furnishings, little or no money was spent on home improvements.

The "G's" are in receipt of social assistance of \$122.00 monthly. The family was put on social assistance when it was determined that, due to Mr. G's failure to provide adequately for his family over a number of years, this was the only possible means of maintaining and stabilizing the family. Their rent is \$45.00 per month, but it costs them very little for fuel, as Mr. G. has a fair amount of old lumber given him from buildings that are being torn down.

Mrs. G. does most of her grocery shopping at one of the corner stores. They allowed her to have credit there one month, and she has never been able to

get money enough ahead so that she is free to shop at the larger stores.

However, the grocer knows she has a large family and often gives her bargains in some things, which helps to offset the extra she may pay for other items.

The Kinsman Club gave Mrs. G. a new portable sewing machine, and now she says she irons and then sews -- doing her patching and mending as she goes along. She sews and makes over clothing for the children, and because of this the children are better dressed than they would otherwise be.

The "H's" have been managing on social assistance, and Mrs. H's blind pension, for several years, and seem to have become quite expert in doing so. Mrs. H. said it was the "little things" such as toilet articles, school supplies and haircuts that she had difficulty in finding the money for; she said she liked to encourage the children to be neat and particular about their personal appearance, and this meant buying such things as hair oil, tooth paste, etc.

The purchase of clothing is centred around the children's needs and wants, because the mother considers it most important that they dress like other children, and not be made to look different because they are on relief. Mrs. H. has a considerable amount of clothing given her by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, which together with Jane's cast-offs, takes care of her needs. Mr. H. remarked that he never got anything new, and that was why he looked so shabby and dirty. Mrs. H. was quick to remind him that his "logger friends" give him lots of clothes. Occasionally good used clothing is given by the City Social Service Department worker for the children, and they also receive clothing in their Christmas parcels.

Their rent is \$40.00 monthly. They find their landlord very cooperative in making repairs to the house. He is always willing for Mr. H. to

go ahead and make the repairs, and to deduct the cost of the material from the rent. They must heat the house themselves, but they are fortunate enough to have a good deal of old lumber given them, which is almost enough to meet their fuel needs. They have the monthly expense of telephone, and light bill, as well as the monthly payments on their washing machine and TV set.

Mr. H. has control of the purse-strings and does most of the shopping for groceries at a nearby grocery store.

Neighbourhood

As all these families live in the same area of the city, a general description of the neighbourhood would serve equally well for all. The houses are built close together, mostly run-down and in need of paint. Only a few feet of land separates the house from the sidewalk, thereby leaving little or no space for lawn or garden. Some houses have only a rough fence separating them from the sidewalk. The backyards also are equally small, and the wide alleys, which are quite common to this area, have provided space for an extra shack or house to be built. Mrs. G's married son and daughter share one of these houses, located in her backyard. The H's do not even have space for a clothes-line in their backyard, because an old shed takes up all the available space. This same situation is repeated in the case of the C's, and the children are deprived of any place to play. The H's are the only family to have space for any kind of garden, and that is due to the fact that there is a small vacant lot beside them.

Trees, flowers, green grass are conspicuous by their absence, leaving nothing to relieve the grey monotony of the area. Several vacant lots are noted along the streets -- those that have not been used by the junk dealers to store their scrap-metal, etc. have become choked with grass and weeds, and

littered with garbage. The E's, the F's and the H's all have factories, warehouses or industrial plants of one kind or another, across the streets from where they live.

The streets are narrow, as are the sidewalks. Last summer the street on which the A's live was widened and now has become one of the main traffic routes. Because of the factories, warehouses, etc., in that area, the traffic consists mostly of trucks and transport vehicles. Two of Mrs. A's smaller children have been struck by cars. The children have no place to play except the sidewalk. Janet was hit when she ran out into the street while playing, and Doreen was hit as she was endeavouring to cross the street. Mrs. A. complained of the speed at which the traffic travelled, and of the drivers' disregard for pedestrians. Both children had to be taken to hospital and treated in the emergency department. Fortunately neither was seriously hurt.

The "park," which is the one playground area for all these families, is also unattractive as it lacks trees, shrubs -- and grass, because it is surfaced with asphalt. There is a small wading-pool, which the smaller children enjoy in the summertime, together with a few swings and teeter-totters. Even the schoolyard affords little opportunity for play and sports, because it has been heavily over-built. Across the street from Mrs. G. is an open green field, which is used mostly as a baseball diamond. Nothing has been done to make this playing-field attractive, but the greenness of it alone does tend to make that particular area a little more pleasing than the others, which have nothing at all.

Health

Mr. A, who had been complaining of arthritis in his arms for some time, which had handicapped him in working, was found to have moderately advanced active tuberculosis in October, 1956. He was committed to hospital for treatment, but has failed to co-operate with the health and hospital authorities by his refusal to remain in hospital. Three of the younger children were later placed in the Preventorium, following an examination of all members of the family. According to Mrs. A., there is a long history of tuberculosis in her husband's family. Mrs. A. talked of the doctor cautioning her to be watchful of the children and herself getting colds, etc. Mrs. A., who is thin, sallow and frail-looking, complained of having had a cold for a week. She pointed to her washing which she had drying on lines draped about the kitchen and said that the dampness it created in the room certainly did not help her cold! The children are also pale and thin, with neither skin nor clothes looking as clean as they might be! They have, however, managed to remain relatively free of colds and any illnesses during the past few months.

Both Mrs. D. and Mrs. G. looked somewhat tired and careworn, but neither complained of ill-health. Mrs. D. seemed listless, as if she lacked energy to do anything, whereas Mrs. G. has a great deal of nervous energy and had need to be always working. Mrs. D. recently had all her teeth out, and is waiting until she gets enough money to get her dentures. Mrs. D., who is short and stout, looks to be healthy physically, but her depressed, morose state would indicate poor mental health. Mrs. H. is the picture of health. She is stout and energetic, and in spite of her blindness she has an optimistic, happy attitude about herself, her family and friends. The complaints voiced by Mrs. B. in regard to health problems were of a minor nature -- nothing

serious and nothing in particular. She felt tired a great deal and for no particular reason; she had no inclination to do anything, not even her housework. She is quite happy to sit around all morning in her housecoat and do nothing. It is Mrs. C's over-weight that worries her, and she has sought medical treatment for it. Mrs. C. complained of the cost of the pills the doctor prescribed, but if they will help her to lose weight, she is willing to do without other things in order to follow the treatment. She also complained of her "nerves" and of how she cannot stop talking if she gets someone to talk to. When she becomes depressed she finds it helpful to talk with someone, as it relieves her feeling of pressure and "pent-up" feelings.

Both Mr. E. and Mr. H. have had to be granted social assistance because of injuries received while employed, which resulted in their not being able to compete in the labour market. Mr. E's injury was to the brain, and he has black-outs which occur periodically. His eyesight and hearing are both very poor, and he complains of arthritis in his right arm and hand. However, he manages to keep quite active between his household chores and the "odd jobs" he does at the church. Mr. H. suffered a back injury and it has continued to bother him throughout the years. He is a tall, thin, delicate-looking man, and he worries a great deal about losing weight, also about his inability to obtain gainful employment. He is able, however, to do various chores around the house, to make the necessary repairs, and to work in the garden. All these things help to relieve the monotony for him and to give him some status in the family. Mr. D. remarked that his health had been "pretty good" throughout the years -- at least he has always been able to work steadily and never lost time from his job because of illness. He is rather a slight man, of average height. Neither Mr. C. nor Mr. F, nor Mr. G. were seen by the

writer, but there appears to be no problem in regard to their health.

Against this background, the children in all eight families appeared remarkably healthy, with the exception of the "A" children. At the time of the writer's visit to the "F" home, the two younger children were convalescing from very bad colds. The mother blamed the cold, draughty house for their slow recovery. Mrs. D. said she hated to see any of the children ill, because it was such a problem in looking after them owing to lack of space and facilities.

#### The Tenants' Response

Mrs. A. is most anxious to find another place to live, but feels somewhat defeated before she even starts -- not only because of the number of children she has, but because of the family's history of tuberculosis. However, if Mrs. A. had a stove that worked properly and a place to hang her clothes other than in the kitchen, she thought she would be quite satisfied. The thing that Mrs. A. wanted most was a house with a basement, where she could do her washing and hang it up to dry. She complained of the dampness created in the rooms because of the wet washing draped about, and of the difficulty of their getting rid of a cold once they got one.

Mrs. A. did not wish to move away from this neighbourhood. She has lived there the greater part of her life, and felt at home, even though she does not know too many people in the tenement building or on her street. She has a sense of security in that her church takes an interest in her and the children, and she would not want to leave on that account. Mrs. A. thought there were many disadvantages about living as they had to, but she sounded an optimistic note in that she thought that children such as hers had just as good an opportunity of turning out well as those who had it much easier. She

commented on the children's willingness to help and always being ready to do their share, even if it were only to sweep the floor.

Although Mrs. B. has always complained about the place where she lives, she has never made any effort to find more adequate accommodation. She dislikes it because of the cramped quarters, lack of space for the children to play in, but one advantage is that there is always someone in the apartment building available to baby-sit for her. She seemed to rely on an elderly couple down the hall to accommodate her in this regard. Mrs. B. was loath to leave the city and preferred to live in this area as she felt "like a fish out of water" if she got beyond Woodward's.

Mrs. C. said that she would be happy to live in a chicken-coop if it were her own and there were a few feet of land around it. Where they now live they haven't a square foot of land of their own for the children to play on. She dislikes quarrelling with the neighbours about her children, because they are not "bad" children, and she hates to see them constantly harassed about where they can and cannot play. Mrs. C. said she would do almost anything rather than spend another winter in their present quarters. She is encouraging her husband either to buy or build a place. Location seems immaterial to Mrs. C., who says she would be happy living anywhere but where they are. However, as they are the only tenants in this place, they consider that they have been spoilt for living in an apartment block. Both she and her husband agree that they do want a house of their own. Mrs. C. feels fortunate in that they do not have to pay too high a rent where they are. They had rented the rooms for \$28.00 when they first moved there, but the rent had gradually been increased each year, even though the landlord has never considered making any repairs or changes in the place.

The D's did not voice any complaints against their present living accommodation, because, as Mr. D. stated, "We don't know what it is like to live in a decent place, because we never have." Neither did they criticize the neighbourhood, because "the neighbours are no better than we are, and we are no angels!" Their attitude toward the situation was one of acceptance -- where else could we live?

Mr. E. thought it was a bad neighbourhood to bring children up in, and complained of the number of drunks who wandered up their streets. He always meets any of the children at the bus-stop if they are coming home after dark. The oldest girl said she was ashamed to tell anyone where she lived, especially the girls at school. However, Mr. E. said he felt at home in this part of town, as this is where he has always lived and he liked it there because he knows so many people.

Mrs. F. would like to move out of Vancouver as she hates the city. She would be happy to live on Lulu Island, but her husband refuses to leave the city because of his job. Mrs. F. hates bringing her children up across the street from a factory, and where they have no place to play.

Mrs. G. said she would like to live in a decent house just for once. Her present home is such an improvement over other houses they have had that she feels quite grateful to be as comfortable as she is. Any time they talk of moving, the children object, saying they cannot move from there because they cannot leave their school and their friends. Mrs. G. thought some of her friends who had lived there and now live elsewhere were "putting on airs" when they said they would be afraid to walk down the street at night. She thought you were as safe on that street as elsewhere in the city. She told of her neighbour's daughters who are insisting that the mother sell their house,

because they have to have a "decent address" to give when they go to apply for a job. Mrs. G. has not encountered this problem with her children as yet, but they may insist that she move!

Since moving to their new home, the H's have taken "a new lease on life", and feel that they are just beginning to live after spending five years in a place in which they never saw the sunlight, and where the floors became water-soaked every time it rained. Mrs. B remarked "We will stay where we are until we are carried out," adding, "Our place is like a palace compared with Mrs. A's who lives up the street."

The remarkable feature which impresses everyone who examines the problems of poor housing is not the fact that some parents neglect their children in difficult circumstances, but that in unfavourable circumstances many manage not only to rear a family but to make a place into a home. However, no matter how hard the parents may work to make their home attractive and comfortable, the structural decay, the lack of space, impose hardships and restriction on the family's way of life.

## CHAPTER III

## HOUSING AND FAMILY LIFE

The committee which studied Child Protection in Canada in 1954 found that the "protection families" had certain characteristics which distinguished them from what is usually regarded as the average population. There appeared to be certain patterns of environment and adjustment among these families, and the committee described them thus:

"This family would be in receipt of an inadequate income, would have poor living standards and average or lower intelligence. The parent would have poor emotional health but might have good or poor physical health. They would be poorly adjusted socially although their occupational adjustment might be fair. In other words, these families were partially or wholly unable to maintain themselves properly, as families, without help. A major exception was noted, in the group of families of good income and superior intelligence in which emotional neglect existed without low physical standards."<sup>1</sup>

The protection families are often regarded as the most difficult and hopeless cases with which to work, and because of this feeling, they tend to receive less attention than other cases in the worker's caseload.<sup>2</sup> In order to help these families, a study must be made of each family against its proper background. The parents' early experiences, their environmental pressures

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1. Child Protection in Canada, published by the Canadian Welfare Council, Ottawa, 1954, p.12.

2. The Social Worker; The Use of Authority in Protection Work, by Gordon K. Askwith, October, 1955, p.7.

"Protection is often looked upon as the hardest part of Children's Aid work. For many of us who carry mixed caseloads, it is the protection work that is left to the last. It is the one we ignore, cross our fingers on, or just hope we don't hear from for another week. It can be all the squalor, the unpleasantness, the hopelessness rolled into one. It can also be all that we wished social casework was not and all that people mean when they say, "How can you put up with such depressing situations in your work?"

must be known and understood, as well as how they have coped with emergencies and difficult situations in their past life. The children must be seen as individuals, and knowledge obtained of their relationships within and beyond their family, their capacities and troubles, their school life and their play.

If treatment is to be appropriately focussed and "the use of community resources" to have meaning, it is necessary to assess the strengths and weaknesses of these families, as well as understand the complexity of practical and emotional stresses in which the parents and children are caught. The eight families reviewed for this study were found to have many characteristics in common, but in no two cases were the problems identical. The questions which arise are: what are the strengths and weaknesses of the families in relation to the protection incidents, to what extent were the various family members helped to use resources within themselves and the community to remain together as a family unit, and to what extent have they been happier and better for having done so?

### Strengths and Weaknesses

Throughout the years the "A" family has been known to various welfare agencies in the city, they appeared to have been improvident, shiftless and incapable of providing adequately for their children. Mr. A's work record as a casual labourer was very poor. In one month his total earnings for doing odd jobs was ten dollars. Periodic assistance had to be granted by the City Social Service Department, but any assistance given the family seemed to be of a palliative rather than a rehabilitative nature. The A's became the typical "problem family", known to many welfare and health agencies, but the family conditions remained unchanged. Mrs. A., who was considered of low mentality,

made little effort to improve conditions. The living quarters were always dirty and untidy, as were the children. The parents had little control over the children, who behaved as they chose, with little direction and guidance. Mrs. A. appeared lethargic, discouraged and unable to plan for the future. She had no regard for her personal appearance.

The two older children were apprehended and taken into care, in 1948, when the family had no place to stay. More recently, following the birth of the youngest child, it was considered inadvisable that he be discharged from hospital to such poor, inadequate home conditions, and was temporarily placed by the Catholic Children's Aid in a foster-home.

The strength of the family seems to be in the fact that they have stayed together and that neither parent is alcoholic. However, there has been an improvement in Mrs. A's personal appearance and housekeeping standards and general attitude these past few months, since the strain of overcrowding has been somewhat relieved, with four members of the family away from the home and in hospital, and with the knowledge that she has a certain amount of money coming in regularly. Under present housing conditions, when any simple household chore, such as cooking a meal, washing clothes, etc. becomes a major task, it would be almost impossible to expect any radical change or improvement. Yet with supportive help and encouragement, Mrs. A., though still very dependent and insecure, does show some potential for change and growth.

Mrs. B. and her husband separated in 1953. Their marriage had been an unhappy one, and Mrs. B. said her husband despised her for not being educated. Mrs. B. felt keenly the deficiencies in her own life. She said she was an unloved, unwanted, deprived middle child, and called herself the "family work-horse." She became an unmarried mother at an early age and was sent to

the Girls' Industrial School for being incorrigible. Her own mother had had a similar kind of girlhood, and Mrs. B. worried in case this same pattern would be repeated in her own children, especially in the case of Florence, the eldest child, whom she had difficulty in relating to and in accepting. Florence had been the "apple of her father's eye," and had lived with the father and paternal grandmother until she was three years old. Mrs. B. said that she had been "stuck" with Florence, ever since the day they brought her three years ago to spend Christmas with her. Mrs. B. had tried to "dump" Florence in her father's room at his rooming-house, but the caretaker had stopped her. The mother complained that she was unable to handle her. She was lying and stealing and was "hateful" and abusive with her younger brother and sister. The school nurse and teacher both complained that Florence is poorly clothed and that her mother is very harsh with her. She was described as an "unhappy and unwanted little girl". The mother was desirous of having Florence placed in a foster-home.

The father was interviewed regarding Florence's behaviour and possible apprehension. He admitted that he had been paying less attention to Florence than formerly, adding that he "couldn't see where this made the least bit of difference to the child". He thought his wife was harsh, cruel, unsympathetic and treats Florence "worse than a dog." She is made to dress and care for the younger children, and the mother does not get up to get her breakfast -- only "shouts and hollers" at the child until she is up and away to school. The father was, however, reluctant to consider apprehension at this time. After his interview with the social worker, he began to pay more attention to Florence, to visit her on Saturdays, which alleviated the problems in regard

to her behaviour.

The mother's attitude toward Florence was not exhibited toward the other two children. With them she seemed more relaxed and more accepting. Her hostility toward Mr. B. may have been expressed in her treatment of Florence. Yet it was quite evident that, when given the opportunity to talk about her own deprived childhood, and given recognition of her own needs and fears, she was able to modify her own behaviour to and treatment of Florence.

The "C's" have encountered many stresses and strains in relation to family living because of their poor and inadequate housing. Their greatest stress has been the lack of playing space for their five oldest children, ranging in age from two to seven years. These children are healthy and robust and need room to run and play, but as soon as they climb down from their rickety door-step, they are trespassing on neighbour's property. An elderly man who lives in a small cottage at the rear raises a "rumpus" each time the children go out. Mrs. C. has tried to compensate for the inadequate housing and lack of play space by giving the children good food, and lots of it! This method of coping with the problem has only tended to create more problems, for Mrs. C., as she has gained an abnormal amount of weight, making her sloppy and unattractive in appearance. Mr. C. does not seek the companionship of his wife, and spends his evenings and weekends with friends on fishing trips, etc. Mrs. C. feels the lack of attention from her husband, both for herself and for the children, and thinks this is his way of escaping from an unattractive wife and home. Mrs. C. has become so depressed by the situation that she has threatened suicide.

Because of the poor marital relationship, a referral to the Family Agency was discussed with Mrs. C., which she was unable to accept because she doubted

her husband's willingness to go. She was supported in her plan to talk with her husband about his lack of attention to the family and try to have him become more understanding of their needs. Mrs. C. also sought medical treatment for her excess weight. Mrs. C. shows affection for her children and is anxious to provide adequately and well for them.

The "D" family has been known to the Children's Aid Society for a period of four years. During that time, two complaints have been received of the parents drinking excessively and of the children being left alone. Neither of the parents can be regarded as alcoholic, but admit they enjoy going to the beer parlour for the "occasional beer!" This seems to be their only interest or activity outside the home. Mr. D. has always had steady employment of one kind or another, and although he has never earned a large salary, has managed to provide fairly adequately for the family. There have been one or two occasions on which the family has been helped with clothing for the children. Mrs. C., who is frail and delicate-looking, makes rather an ineffectual contribution to the family living. Possibly for this reason there is a lack of home-making standards, with each member of the family doing whatever he pleases. There is no semblance of meal-getting, meal-planning.

During the writer's visit to the home, one of the children busied himself making toast -- the bread suspended on a coat-hanger over the open fire in the Quebec heater, another ate heartily of a big bowl of shredded wheat, with the package of cereal and the milk carton placed nearby on the floor. Dirty dishes were left wherever they finished with them, as evidenced by the litter scattered about the room by those who had had their breakfast.

The children were not inhibited in their talk and play, and appeared happy and contented in their unrestrained and undisciplined surroundings.

However, the effects of such a home atmosphere may be shown in Joanne's delinquent behaviour. Joanne, the oldest child, quit school at the age of fourteen, and went to work in a restaurant. This afforded her an opportunity to escape the parental home, but it also provided her with the opportunity to come in contact with a man several years her senior. Joanne was brought to the Detention Home after she had lived with "her friend" for a week in a tourist cabin. She showed no guilt or regard for moral standards when she discussed the episode with her worker, and saw her friend as someone to provide her with the "beautiful" things of life, such as pretty clothes, etc.

The mother despairs of the deplorable home conditions, but seems unable to effect any change or improvement. The father is less disturbed, and appears quite content with the situation. It may be that he has given up caring, as he cannot envisage any change. His interest in oil-painting affords him a pleasant escape from rather depressing surroundings. This interest is shared by all the members of the family.

Family living has been somewhat complicated for the "E" family, in the fact that, although Mr. and Mrs. E. are separated, Mrs. E. and her common-law husband have lived either in the same apartment building or in the same house as the rest of the family. The children are ambivalent in their feeling towards the mother, and the frustrations of both the father and the mother are often focussed on the children. Dorothy, the oldest girl, has been scornful and resentful of her mother's behaviour, and hopes that she will "never be like her." However, when the family moved from the apartment to their house, Dorothy was anxious that the mother move there also. The younger girl, Betty, misses the mother's actual being in the home more than the other children. The father has not been able to be consistent in his discipline, and this has

aggravated behaviour problems. Betty is nervous and high-strung, bedraggled in appearance and rejected by her classmates.

In spite of the difficulties created by the marital problem, Mr. E. has shown a keen interest and desire that his children do well in school. He encourages their participation in community and church activities, and shares this interest with them insofar as it is possible. He insists that the children bring their friends to the home, as he wants to meet them, and to know what his children are doing.

In meeting and talking with Mrs. F., there is little evidence that she is happy or finds enjoyment in making a home for her husband and children. She is a depressed, morose, uncommunicative person. This may be due partly to her cultural background as well as her own deprived childhood. She has been a confirmed alcoholic for years. Her husband, whom the writer did not meet and about whom there is little information on agency file, sought help with his wife's problem of alcoholism from the Family Service Agency. This would indicate his concern about the problem and his desire to do something about it. When the mother neglects the children because of her drinking, a sister who lives nearby comes to the family's rescue.

Mrs. F. would like to move away from the city, as she dislikes city life. However, her husband, who has steady employment here, is unwilling to consider such a change, as the security of a job outweighs the benefits of living elsewhere.

Mrs. G. would appear to be the "strength" of this family, insofar as being able to maintain and keep the family together with little or no support from her husband. Throughout the years, Mr. G. was unable to maintain steady employment because he was alcoholic, and periodic assistance had to be given

the family by the City Social Service. Mr. G. worked as a truck-driver when he was employed, but blamed his lack of education for his inability to get the kind of jobs he wanted.

Mrs. G. has worked hard to maintain a fair standard of home-making even in crowded and congested quarters, and has tended to be protective of both her husband and her children.

Within the "H" family there have been many stresses and strains throughout the years. A competitiveness has existed between Mr. and Mrs. H. to dominate the family. Mr. H. seemed desirous of making Mrs. H. dependent on him, and her blindness could easily have brought this about. However, she reacts with resentment to Mr. H's treatment of her as a child. It was observed that, as Mr. H. related incidents of her "cooking blunders" because of her blindness, Mrs. H. became hostile and defensive. This situation has possibly been aggravated by the fact that Mr. H. is unable to provide for the family, which makes him feel inferior as well as hostile toward society generally. Mr. H. has never taken out his citizenship papers, although he has been in this country for twenty-nine years. Mrs. H. maintains there is only "one true Canadian," and that is the Indian, so nationality provides another area of conflict between them.

Mrs. H's periodic "drinking sprees" have, however, tended to create problems for the family. During these periods when she would be away from the family, Mr. H. would assume management of the home with the help of the eldest daughter. The children are critical and resentful of their mother's behaviour at these times, threatening not to let her return to the home. However, when she does return - "it's as if she had never been away," -- and she becomes the good wife and mother to the family again.

Mrs. H's impaired vision has not handicapped her in making a wonderful contribution to the family relationships, and to the life of her children. She has a confident appearance, is talkative, and has a good understanding of the children's needs and how they can best be met. Her interest in the family is shown in her desire to purchase for them a TV set, which brings her little or no enjoyment personally, because of her poor sight, but is a source of entertainment and amusement for her husband, who cannot go out or join the family in their activities.

#### Interests and Activities

The A's seemed to have had little opportunity for recreation and family activities. The Saturday afternoon show, if the mother can "scare up" enough money, seems to be the outing of the week for the children. They all go together and usually stay from early afternoon until nearly six o'clock. Mrs. A. says there is a park about five blocks away from them and there is a small wading pool, which the youngsters enjoy. She tries to go with them, as she is uneasy if the children are there alone because of the number of "old men" who hang around the park. There seems to be little for the children to do after school and in the evening. They had been going to a neighbour to watch TV in the evenings, but these neighbours were moving. The children attend the Separate School, and the mother has been appreciative of the interest the nuns take in them. She is hopeful that they will be able to get the oldest boy a paper route, so that he will have something to do. The children usually attend church and Sunday School and any church activities for children. In the summer the older children have gone to camp for a two-week period.

Mrs. B. complained of the lack of space for the children to play.

There is a junk heap at the rear of the house, and it is here her children and all the others in the neighbourhood seem to congregate and chase one another over and about this pile of junk. Last summer Mrs. B. had the opportunity to spend the summer at a logger friend's cottage on Salt Spring Island. This gave them an opportunity to get away from the city, and for the children freedom to play. None of the children is old enough to attend or to belong to any club or community group. Neither do they have any church connection. Mrs. B's escape or diversion is an occasional visit to the beer parlour.

Mrs. C. has never had any opportunity for recreation because she has always been tied to home with the care of babies. She has resented her husband's lack of concern, and indifference to her need for diversion. He has tended to come home from work, then leave immediately afterwards with his chums to go fishing, and on weekends he was usually away most of the time. The social worker helped Mrs. C. to talk with her husband about this, and there has been an improvement, in that he did take Mrs. C. out to dinner and a show one evening, and is interested in planning with his wife to find more adequate housing. The children attend a nearly Sunday School, but have not reached the age to take an interest in clubs. Mrs. C. is looking forward to the summer when she can take all the children away to the beach for the day. She said she would have to walk there because she could never get on the bus with five small children and the baby in the carriage. Mrs. C. did not seem daunted by the distance she would have to walk -- she thought it would be worth it if the children could play and enjoy themselves for the day.

The children in the "D" family did not appear to be overly interested in community activities, clubs, etc. Neither of the boys attend the Gibbs Boys'

Club nor the Pender Street "Y". The reason given was that it was just for "kids" in Grades II or III, and there was nothing there that interested them. Janet seemed to be the only one who belonged to any clubs, and she attended a group for girls, sponsored by the Kinsman Club once a week, and then went to a club meeting for girls at the church. Mr. D. complained that there seemed to be nothing around there to interest boys and that was why they got into trouble.

On Saturday the three younger children usually attend the afternoon show, while Mr. and Mrs. D. do the grocery shopping and go for a "couple of beers." Billy, the older boy, usually works in the afternoon for a junk collector.

The family attends St. James's Church, but Mr. D. said he didn't like going there, as he never knew what they were doing!

Mr. D's interest in oil-painting is shared by the family, and they all take pride in his efforts. Mr. D. said he had learned to do it by going to the library when he was off work and reading about it. He has never had any formal training, but he did study printing at night school last winter, and he has found this knowledge useful on his present job. He also spoke of doing wood-carving as a pastime.

The family has no shared activities during the summer months. The children go to the parks occasionally with their playmates, but complained of there not being any nice parks around where they live to play in.

Mr. E. is interested in all the activities of the children and often participates in any way he can. He has encouraged Dorothy to become interested in the First United Church Young People's Society and in the CGIT group. There seemed to be a lack of companions in the neighbourhood for her, but the

association with the church helped her to meet and become acquainted with other young people.

Robert was encouraged to join the Boy Scouts, and a uniform was obtained for him. The uniform was much too large, and the other boys teased him saying that "he wore skirts." Robert then refused to attend either the Boy Scouts or the church group, because the same boys belonged to both groups. He attends the Gibbs' Boys' Club, and is interested in boxing. His father has attempted to base his attendance at the club on how well he is doing at school.

Mr. E. wants the children to bring their friends to the house, and frequently Robert and his friends have a "jive" session.

Mr. E. spends a lot of time doing odd jobs for the church, and helps occasionally to serve meals at the Salvation Army, etc. He says he has got ten or twelve children attending Sunday School who never used to attend, just because he goes and calls for them and takes them along with his own children.

Mrs. F's children are not old enough to belong to clubs or groups, with the exception of Frances, who is eleven. Frances did attend a group in which they were taught cooking, but she did not enjoy it, so only went a few times. The children sometimes attend a Mission Band at one of the churches, but they do not go to any church or Sunday School. Mrs. F. expressed disappointment about this, and said she would like to have them attend the Catholic Church, but her husband refuses to give his permission.

Mrs. F. complained of lack of space for the children to play in. She worries if they are on the streets because of the traffic, and about the fact they are near the waterfront, yet she feels she cannot keep them shut up indefinitely and always be watching them.

Mrs. G. likes her children to bring their playmates and friends home

with them and to play in their own house. They have a record-player and an old piano with which the children amuse themselves. There is a small park across the street from them, so the children have a good opportunity to play ball, etc.

The children attend the various activities at the Pender Street "Y" on the average of about twice a week. They are not very keen on going to summer camp, but instead prefer going to Surrey to visit with Mrs. G's relatives.

The "H" children have always been eager to take advantage of any club or group activities and the parents have shared this interest with them. The boys became interested in the activities at the Pender Street "Y", and joined a friendship group as well as a cooking class, when this was suggested to them by their CSSD worker. They also joined the Gibbs' Boys' Club. Susan joined a Charm class at the "Y", which she seemed to enjoy. However, this past year or two, the mother's and the children's activities and interests seem to have centered around the recreation program of the CNIB. The mother takes the children to the church services, their picnics and outings in the summertime, and to concerts and entertainments during the winter months.

Swimming has been a sport they all enjoy, and Mrs. H. plans frequent trips to the beaches with the children -- going, as Mrs. H. states, to the "high-class" places (by which she means English Bay). Mrs. H. does not take a lunch with her for the children, as she does not want them to swim while eating, but insists they have a good dinner when they get home. In winter-time they occasionally go to Crystal Pool, and when Susan was offered a reward for her high marks in school, she preferred going with her mother to the Crystal Pool rather than to a movie. The children have not been eager to

attend any summer camp, saying they would rather stay home and go to the beach with their mother. The father never joins the family in any of their activities, but is interested in whatever they do.

Larry has a paper route, which gives him an interest and keeps him busy after school. Occasionally the boys help an old lady who has a small grocery store, and she takes a motherly interest in them. Gardening and working around the home seem to be Mr. H's chief interest. He is delighted to have the small plot of land in which to grow a few vegetables. Mrs. H's fondness for flowers is shown by the number of potted plants she has. Susan is interested in sewing and knitting, and does most of the sewing for the entire family, as well as knit socks for the boys. Mrs. H. helps her in both activities, so far as her eyesight will permit.

### Education

Four of the "A" children attend a Separate School. John, the oldest boy, aged ten years, is in Grade III. Mary, aged eight, is in Grade II, as well as Helen. Mrs. A. seemed to think the children were doing quite well at school, and was satisfied with their progress. When Florence started school last year, her school record revealed her chronological age as five years and nine months, and her mental age as seven years and seven months. However, this high potential did not develop in actual practice. She stood seventeenth in a class of thirty. She missed considerable time from school, was restless and was continually rubbing her eyes. In the classroom she was co-operative and always eager to please. When her father began to spend more time with her, both her behaviour and school record improved. There were no problems around the schooling of the two "C" children. They enjoyed school and the classroom

activities and were doing well.

Susan, aged sixteen, attends Technical School, and is taking a course in stenography and dressmaking. Susan's teachers remark on how conscientious she is. She is anxious to excel in her studies, and gets mostly A's and B's on her report card. Susan hopes to get a job as dressmaker with the Theatre Under the Stars this summer, whereby she will be earning as well as getting experience in the work she is interested in. The family is most anxious for her to finish her schooling, so that, as Mr. H. remarks, "She'll not have to go on relief like us." The three other children attend Seymour Street, and seem to be doing quite well in their grades. Mrs. H. takes an active interest in the children's school work, and never fails to attend the Parent Day programs, etc. She considers this as helpful and encouraging to the children in getting to know their teachers and the school principal.

Joanne D, the oldest of the "D" children, took her first year of Grade VIII at Templeton Junior High School, which she failed. She went back to repeat the grade, but quit after only a few months at school. The School Board questioned giving permission for Joanne to leave school because she was only fourteen years of age. However, on examination of the home situation, the attendance officer stated that she did not wonder at Joanne's wanting to quit school and get away from home. Billy, aged thirteen, is in Grade VII, and is repeating his year at school. He did not seem very enthusiastic about school and is looking forward to quitting so that he can get a job. Janice and Jack, aged ten and nine, are both in Grade IV, because Janice is repeating her year. Evelyn, the youngest, aged eight, is in Grade II.

Dorothy E., aged sixteen, is taking her Grade XI at Britannia High School. She is enrolled in a secretarial course and seems to be doing quite

well. The Ball League has loaned her a typewriter so that she may practise her typing at home. Robert, aged fourteen, was placed in Grade IX at Britannia High School on trial. He shows a preference for sports rather than academic subjects, and has quit school so that he can take a shoe-repairing course, in which he is interested. He is anxious to start earning money so that he can help his father. Betty, aged eleven, is backward at school, and is in the IV Grade at Strathcona School. The teacher's opinion of Betty is that she would do better academically if the home environment was more stable. Larry, the youngest, has started school this year and seems to enjoy it. He has had difficulty in learning to read, but Dorothy has been able to help him and there has been an improvement.

The three older "F" children attend Strathcona School and seem to be doing quite well. Frances, aged eleven, is in Grade V, and her school work is satisfactory. David and Donald are in Grade I. Mrs. F. would like to enrol the two younger children in kindergarten, but doubts if there will be space because she was late in applying.

The six younger "G" children are all attending school regularly and doing quite well. They seem to enjoy their school associations and activities, and the mother has had no difficulty in getting them to attend. Dwayne, the oldest boy, has had a very good scholastic record, and although now employed he would like to return to school and study engineering.

### Social Services

To what extent these families have used and been able to use the services of the community and of the agencies is interesting to note. In this part of the city there is a limited number of recreational facilities available. With the

exception of the churches, which play a leading part in the life of the community, the young people look to the Gibbs Boys' Club and the Pender Street "Y" for their activities outside the home. Many of the social workers known to these families throughout the years have endeavoured to encourage and develop the children's interest in the various groups and activities. The parents' concern that the children be "kept off the streets" has always helped to make this problem easier. This was shown very clearly in the work with the "H" family and the "E" family, when both the parents and the children were interested in activities suggested to them by the social worker. Most of the children have remained interested and have continued to attend the various classes regularly. As well as developing skills, they have the opportunity to meet and associate with other people and to form standards of behaviour.

Mrs. C. was concerned about her four-year-old boy, Edward, who was becoming a behaviour problem, partly due to the fact that he was restricted in his play activity, due to lack of space. The social worker told Mrs. C. of the Day Nursery, and was able to help her arrange for his going there daily during the week.

The church's interest in the families known to them and living in that area is shown by reports on the agencies' files. In some instances the social worker has contacted various church members when help is needed in regard to a family's problem. Dorothy E. was enabled to become a junior leader of a Young People's group because her worker had talked with a church member about Dorothy's need to have a good "mother figure" with whom to identify, and of her need to gain self-confidence.

The children's attitude or response to summer camp was somewhat revealing. Although this is a community service which is planned largely for such

children as these, because they lack space to play and an opportunity to get away from the city, most of them appeared uninterested. Those who were of camp age had attended one of the summer camps at least once, but they were not anxious to go again. They offered no reason for this, except that they preferred going to visit relatives in the country, or, as in the case of the H's, they preferred going to the local beaches with their mother. A summer holiday was something that parents had never anticipated, but Mrs. A. thought a few weeks at a summer camp would make her feel a lot better.

The Christmas hamper which is arranged for and provided through the local Christmas Bureau was mentioned by several families as something they looked forward to and really counted on! One or two families related rather unfortunate incidents regarding those hampers. The E's had had theirs stolen on Christmas Eve and were left with nothing for Christmas dinner. Mrs. H. said they had always got two hampers previous years and had counted on them this year. The one that came had a ham in it, which they cooked and ate a few days before Christmas, thinking that the one with the "usual chicken" would come later. Mrs. H. had bought her cranberry sauce in anticipation. Unfortunately it did not come and the family had to send out to a restaurant for fish and chips for their Christmas dinner.

The one occasion on which a visiting homemaker was requested was refused because of the dilapidated condition of the home. Mrs. C. was expecting to enter hospital for confinement, and arrangements had to be made for the care of the children in the home.

Many of the services provided under the Municipal Public Welfare Department enable those families on social assistance to receive special services and grants according to their need and circumstances. Mrs. H. receives the Blind

Pension of \$60.00 per month, thereby increasing their total income by about thirty dollars. Likewise the A's, because of the tuberculosis in the family, are granted social assistance for each member of the household, and an extra forty dollars monthly can be authorized toward the rent payment. However, Mrs. A. has not succeeded in finding other accommodation even though able to pay extra for rent. Dentures were supplied recently to Mrs. H., and glasses were provided for one of the "G" children. These services are available together with dental care for the children under eleven years of age, of persons in receipt of social assistance. All recipients are entitled to the services of their own doctor. Drugs, hospitalization and specialist services, as prescribed by the attending physician, may also be provided.

The Metropolitan Health Nurse also aids the families in regard to health problems, by periodic visits to the home as the need is indicated. Occasionally the school nurse brings to the attention of the social worker problems in regard to children, as was the case of Florence B. The nurse observed that Florence was constantly rubbing her eyes, seemed most unhappy and looked neglected. Her report to the social worker enabled him to help both Florence and her parents.

The services of the Mental Health Clinic have been used in trying to assess the situation in regard to both the A's and the G's, because of the apparent inability to effect any change or improvement in these two cases, of long-continuing contact with various agencies.

Casework help was given to several of the families with problems in regard to inter-personal relations. The worker enabled Mr. and Mrs. B. to see that the problem of Florence's behaviour was largely the result of their own treatment of her. Mrs. B. was given an opportunity to talk about her own difficulties as a child and to express her fears in regard to Florence. Mrs.

C. was helped to express not only her anxieties about their inadequate housing, but also about the poor marital relationship. The problems encountered in the "F" family because of the parents being separated -- and yet not being separated -- were also recognized and dealt with as effectively as possible. The agency is still not satisfied with the family situation, but the support and understanding of the worker has prevented the situation from deteriorating, and has enabled the children to make a relatively good adjustment.

The value of continuous agency contact with a family is shown in the "H" family. They have been known to the City Social Service since 1942, and although there has been a change of workers during that time, the family has regarded each worker as someone who knows them and is interested in them. The use of authority, limit-setting, which are aspects of protective family work, were used in 1946 when the children were apprehended and placed in the care of the Children's Aid Society. This created within the family an awareness of their need for one another, as well as helping them, especially Mrs. H., to realize a more acceptable standard of behaviour is required in the protection of children.

The intolerable housing and degrading environment present problems and difficulties not only to the tenants, but to the social agencies which are trying to help these families. Many of the families are desirous of improving their situation, and the social worker feels that until some change is effected in this family's living conditions, it is hopeless, or almost impossible, to work effectively with the family. In a few cases, such as the B's and the D's, they have come close to "giving up" -- they have become insensitive to their environment because they have never experienced better, and lack incentive to move out or to search for better accommodation. Housing is also a budget

matter -- and where is the better housing to be found? This is a question that must be answered. Encouragement and support by social workers can help to mobilize the strength and resources of these families, but can it improve their standards of living?

CHAPTER IV  
HOUSING AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES

This exploratory study of family living, which is merely a beginning in a large field, has been an endeavour to show the day-to-day living of fairly large families in an area where poor housing, together with industrialization, competitive employment and unregulated urban development have created problems not only for the families who live there, but for society as a whole. Extreme cases, either in regard to housing or to protection, were not chosen for this study, but rather those that may be considered representative of the majority of families living there. The dirtiest of homes and the worst cases of neglect and cruelty are not necessarily found in the worst slum areas. They may occur in circumstances where there are ample opportunities for reaching higher standards. However, the description of the social environment of children living in these areas shows clearly the kind of soil in which the roots of such evils as child neglect, problem families, etc. are to be found. Housing and neighbourhood improvement are among the policies needed to prevent such families from carrying on the same pattern of dirt, disease and delinquency from one generation to the next.

Evidence of the need for slum clearance has not been lacking; there have also been practical recommendations for dealing with this problem. The Vancouver Housing Association for the last fifteen years, an affiliated member of the Community Chest and Council, has conducted surveys and continuous educational campaigns on every aspect of housing needs in the metropolitan area. A high proportion of the population of this province is very well housed,

but certain groups are very poorly housed, so poorly in fact, that "the existence of such conditions in a wealthy community such as Vancouver presents a challenge to our social conscience."<sup>1</sup> The poorly housed include those who could afford adequate housing if it were available, as well as those who cannot afford to spend more for shelter. Those who could afford better houses are forced to take what is available at the rents demanded, even though the rent is normally commensurate with a better standard of living. In 1947 an exhaustive survey was made of a specific area in Vancouver and practical proposals for the rehabilitation of the area were included in the final report.<sup>2</sup> In spite of this and the existence of legislation which makes such projects possible,<sup>3</sup> not a single acre of slum has been cleared in Vancouver for the purpose of putting a rehousing project in its place.

The Canadian National Housing Act of 1938 has helped to build a great number of what might be described as "middle-class houses", but it has scarcely scratched the surface of Canada's real housing problem, which is the provision of decent homes within the reach of people in the lower income brackets. The housing crisis has come at the precise time when this country is welcoming the start of what should be one of the greatest waves of immigration in its history. The majority of these immigrants will, in all probability, want to live in the city, and this will place an additional strain on our already inadequate housing.

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1. Stratton, P.R.U., "The Housing Scene", Houses for All, Proceedings of Housing Conference, Vancouver, B.C., Jan. 1954, sponsored by Vancouver Housing Assoc. in co-operation with Community Planning Assn. of Canada (B.C. Division), p.1.
  2. Marsh, L.C. op. cit.
  3. The Canadian National Housing Act of 1938, contained a slum-clearance section, including provisions for the setting up of local Housing Authorities.

The existence of bad housing is harmful not only to the occupants themselves, but to society as a whole. Partly because of lack of income and partly because of inadequate public measures to deal with the housing problem, a great many Canadians have been forced to live crowded together in dwellings and in neighbourhoods that hinder rather than promote wholesome personal development.

The degree to which housing inadequacies contribute to the problem families, child neglect, is difficult to assess, because of numerous other factors in the situation. It is equally difficult to assess the quality and effectiveness of the casework help given these families. However, a complete answer to the problem can only be found in an examination of both aspects of the problem. The provision of good housing and an adequate income will undoubtedly improve the lot of the majority of people living in slum areas and give them an opportunity to live happier, healthier lives, but one does not always necessarily follow the other. The human factor, the people themselves, must not be overlooked in our planning for and dealing with the problem. A new house or better accommodation does not automatically provide all that is necessary for successful family life, and eradicate all other social ills -- but it makes no sense to leave poorly functioning families in depressing, crowded and uncomfortable conditions; nor to "pour" welfare services into families whose environment offsets recuperative and rehabilitative effort at every turn!

### Houses and Families

Overcrowded living conditions are among the most disabling in their effect on family life. Apart from the risks involved to physical health, they are a constant source of emotional strain, causing the inevitable family

frictions to be magnified out of all proportion. The resulting lack of privacy is demoralizing, both for the parents and children, and the intensification of personal contacts which occurs under these conditions is not conducive to the development of satisfying personal relationships.

The eight families reviewed in this exploratory study were found to have a maximum space of half a room per person, when one room per person is taken as a standard, which is minimal. This is not taking into consideration the cubic capacity of the room, its adequacy in regard to light and heat, as well as the sex, age - of the members of the family, which would have to be taken into account to give an accurate figure for each dwelling unit.

What does this degree of over-crowding mean to the parents and the children in the home? It is difficult to assess or to analyze, because of the number of variables in each home situation, such as the size of the rooms, the kind and quantity of furniture, bedding, the age of the inhabitants, and above all, their habits. Lack of heat or lack of furniture may force the family together in one room, even if there is more space available in the home. Lack of space, too small a table, and in some cases a shortage of chairs, dishes and cutlery, prevent the family from sitting down together to a properly laid table. Meals become "scrappy" affairs, with the children running in and out, eating largely what each one wants and when he wants. It is interesting to note that in some cases both the parents and the children seemed less sensitive to their disorganized surroundings, less aware of the irritations that are keenly felt in an orderly environment.

As the difference in size between larger and smaller families consists mainly of young children, it is clear that the evils of over-crowding and bad housing fall most heavily upon those who are least able to resist them. Thus

the children in large families have as a rule worse housing, less maternal care, and much less chance of higher education than the children of smaller families. When there is overcrowding, there is less play-space both inside and outside the home for the children, and when play is repressed, there is a direct thwarting of the child's development. The mother becomes harassed and irritable trying to cope with the situation, scolds the children when she realizes that under normal living conditions -- if the children had a place to play in -- it would not be necessary. Another important aspect of overcrowding is the lack of bedroom accommodation. The average number of bedrooms per family available in the cases studied was two, whereas the average number of children per family was five, and in all cases, with the exception of two, both parents were in the house.<sup>1</sup> It is common for the younger members of a family to be without sufficient sleep owing to sharing sleeping quarters and the impossibility of segregating the children into age-groups where so many share one room, one bed. They are also kept awake by the talking, the radio or TV -- the activities of the older family members encroaching upon the rest of the young. Thus the overcrowded home does not afford the school child the room and quietness he needs in order to study, but robs him of adequate rest as well, thereby either causing him to repeat his grades, or to quit school earlier than he should.

In dealing with the problem of overcrowding, the experience of Sweden and its method of dealing with it is an important example. When the plan for social housing was developed in Sweden, it was centered around the needs of the family. The scheme of subsidizing families instead of houses is, perhaps

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1. Wheeler, Michael, Evaluating the Need for Low-Rent Housing, Master of Social Work Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1955, p.1.

"Overcrowding and disturbed family life have obvious connections, and it is significant that broken homes as a whole comment less than any other family types on the effects of accommodation on family living. The less exacting requirements of the broken family in terms of sleeping accommodation may account for part of this."

the most important Swedish contribution to the world-wide housing problem. Superficially, Swedish housing standards are high, except in one respect, namely, overcrowding. They recognized the problem of overcrowding is mainly a child welfare problem as the children are the chief cause both of the overcrowding and of some of the poverty itself. Concretely, it is the children who are ill-housed. The Swedish housing policy became focussed on the children. The children had not chosen to live so unfavourably, and the parents' right to harm children became generally disputed. A law about foster-children, where the responsibility of society was indisputable, had earlier prescribed that so many persons may not be housed in one room that risks for their health arises.<sup>1</sup>

But in the housing sanitation regulations concerning the family's own children, this risk for health was stated as "grave risk for health" in order to sanction the intervention of authorities. Now the regulation was changed so as to protect children in a family fully as much as children who already were under direct community control.<sup>2</sup>

The importance of housing as a budget problem is recognized in the well-established formula that the average family of low or moderate income should not have to spend more than one-fifth of its income for housing. The smaller the family's income, the less flexibility there is in the proportions spent on food, clothing and shelter, until a point is reached at which it may be impossible for the low-income family to pay more than one-fifth of its income for rent, and

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1. Children's Aid Society, Vancouver, Policy Manual, Home-finding Department Section, p.5.

"Sleeping accommodation -- It is required that a bed of his own be provided for each child. Two sisters or two brothers may share a bed during a temporary emergency placement. Babies up to one year of age may share foster-parents' bedroom where the room is large enough ... "

2. Myrdal, Alva, op.cit., pp. 256-57.

also maintain a desirable minimum standard of living. In so many ways, shelter is as much an essential as food or clothing, but the low-income family cannot "shop around" for housing that is within its ability to pay to the same degree that they can shop for economical purchasing of clothing and food, because the demand far exceeds the supply, and they have to take what is available. The choice of housing available to those families is severely limited by the low rent they can afford and, for the most part, their accommodation tends to be of low quality characterized by a high incidence of structural inadequacies and poor facilities. The unwillingness of the landlords to rent to families with children, and particularly large families, has meant for the most part that the only accommodation open to this group is the kind that does not rent easily because of its inferior quality. There are few bargains in low-rent housing, and many of them are liabilities.

"Unfortunately, it frequently happens that low and moderate income families not only spend a larger proportion of their income on rent than do higher income families, but they also get less housing in terms of these basic requirements for their money. The slum provides the most dramatic evidence of what happens when poor housing is coupled with the problem of living on a marginal income. Long before that extreme is reached, however, the effects of inadequate housing are felt in increased family tensions, fatigue, ill-health, and in the constant frustrations of a normal family life."<sup>1</sup>

The inferior type of accommodation which these families are forced to occupy is frequently dictated by the low rent they can afford to pay. However, by the time the rent is reckoned up for each room (the average rent is \$45.00 monthly, the average number of rooms is four), it may not even be cheap accommodation for the low-income family. The cost of utilities, especially

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1. Wheeler, Michael, op.cit., pp.27-28. This was a survey of the housing and income circumstances of the families who applied for entrance to the Little Mountain low-rental housing project.

the heating costs, is a frequent complaint among such families, including those surveyed in this study. Facilities for storing and cooking food were also in most cases totally inadequate. Under these conditions, housekeeping becomes not only unnecessarily expensive, but an unrelieved chore for the mother, whose reaction to the excessive strains is liable to take the form of a punitive and restrictive attitude toward the children.

From the cases studied, the "H" family may best illustrate the effects of improved housing upon family life. Where they had lived previously, large buildings on either side of their small four-roomed house prevented any sunlight from reaching them. As they put it, the family felt "as if they were living 'underground'". They lacked proper bath and toilet facilities, and insufficient bedroom space allowed the family members no privacy. This was particularly disturbing to the oldest girl, who was in her early teens. The unhappiness in the home was shown by the mother's drinking, the family complaining about the other children in the neighbourhood, and wishing they could move from "that district". By contrast, their "new" home, which is in the same district, but which has more room, some garden space, proper bathroom facilities, etc., has given the family a "new lease on life". There is a happiness in the family, a pride in their home, which is sensed in the family's behaviour and conversation. The family has gained in social status, and there is an increase of interest in community activities.

### Social Work and Families

The problem of improving the content of family life, of remedying the problems of child neglect, delinquency, and other social evils, involves far more than the improvement of material conditions alone. As long as immorality,

neglect and delinquency go unchecked we are destroying the basis of improvement in family life which we hope material advance will bring. We must seek to understand the history, character, personality, and outlook of the people concerned. We must obtain a full-scale picture of the lives of the people with whom we are dealing. Family life, especially parent-child relationships, must occupy the central part of the picture; to a large degree all other parts of the picture can only be understood when looked at in relation to family life.

The "A" family shows only too plainly how, because of lack of knowledge and understanding, such families can drift along from one squalid dwelling to another, from one crisis to the next, from one organization or public department to another, with no agency being able to effect any change in the life of the family during the eight years it has been known to them. Why were the different agencies unable to effect any improvement? Why, if the quality of family life never showed signs of improving, were the children allowed to remain in such surroundings, and with such parents?

These questions must be asked -- even if the answers are not simple. The answer may, in part, be the lack of co-ordination of the different social agencies involved. If each agency is interested in only one particular problem of family life, each meeting the need or crisis that falls within its scope, at that particular time, the total effect may have no endurance. It is not unusual to find that little effort is made to ascertain whether other agencies are calling, and often they are unaware of the extent to which other social services are involved and what the others plan to do. Often the agencies are not clear amongst themselves as to where the final responsibility for dealing with the family lies. The "A" family is an example of the failure of such methods, and it is by no means an isolated one. Frequently the un-coordinated

mass approach to the problem family defeats its own end. The parents become exasperated by repeated questioning and tired of being told what to do, sometimes by people who, though genuine in their intentions, have no idea of the difficulties which beset a large family with a small income, living in a slum home.

Since Mr. A's illness, the agencies were able for the first time to coordinate their efforts in helping the family. The response of Mrs. A. has been encouraging, even if that of Mr. A. has been the reverse. It will take time and effort to effect any appreciable change, but if a desire for a better way of living can be aroused within the family, and they can be supported and guided in the attainment of this, the children at least will benefit permanently.

It takes time for a social worker to get to know a family well enough to appreciate what are the real problems involved, and even longer to decide such vital questions as to whether the children should be removed from the care of their parents, who seemingly are unable to provide adequately for them. The chances are that before enough is done to see if a change can be made in the home life, the family, if it is a "restless" one, has moved and the case has to be passed over to the workers who cover the new district. It is possible in this way for families to go on living in deplorable conditions without any worker being in touch with them long enough to take effective steps for improving or remedying the situation.

Of course there are parents who, because of subnormal intelligence, emotional instability, lack of character and habit-training in their own childhood, are incapable of looking after a family. Nevertheless, when this is the situation, the community should not stand idly by and let home conditions drift into worse squalor, because it has a duty to the children. In the

interests of their future well-being, they should be removed from such homes and given an upbringing in surroundings which correspond as nearly as possible to a normal home life. The social worker must guard against leaving children too long in an environment which warps their minds and bodies when there is little hope of enduring improvement because of the irremediable failings of the parents; she must also guard against too hasty removal all because no one, and no resources are available to make a sufficient effort to improve the standard of home life, thereby depriving the children of the stability and affection which only real family life can give. with greater appreciation and understanding of what the home and the parent-child relationship contributes to a child's development, efforts should be geared to give parents the greatest possible chance to provide a good home for their children. But this approach must be reinforced by services which will give the parents the utmost encouragement, material help and inspiration to achieve higher standards.

It is no accident that public housing (i.e., low-rental, subsidized projects), in the United States, in Britain, in Scandinavia and elsewhere, has proved one of the most effective "bases of operation" for better childwelfare, health, educational and recreational services. A social worker can make a better contact, there is more willingness to co-operate on the part of the tenants; the children become better in their school attendance, and less likely to substitute for their depressed environment the joining of anti-social gangs.

#### Implications and Recommendations

Of the eight families interviewed, only one expressed a wish to leave their present neighbourhood. There may be various reasons for their desiring to remain in this central, older part of the city. One reason may be that they

do have a sense of belonging, of identification with their neighbourhood. It is the only part of the city in which they have lived, and with which they are familiar. They are close to work and to the down-town area, and there is the bond of similar and related occupations, which is one of the strongest in uniting people of a community. The feeling that one belongs to a local community, in the life of which one can play a significant part, and for which one develops a sense of responsibility, is the foundation of democracy and good local government -- a feeling which should be encouraged and maintained. However, the families do desire better living conditions so that their standard of living may be raised both as a family unit and as a community. At present, because of the "bad" name of the district, young people who are attending high school, or who are seeking employment, state that they are ashamed to tell anyone where they live. They feel they will be discriminated against or looked down upon. They have become "third-class" citizens, with little or no social status, largely attributable to the fact that they are living where they are, and through no fault of their own.

It is sometimes implied that those who lack standards of home-making, whose houses are dirty and disorderly, would soon destroy a better house in a short time. This may be true in some instances, but it is highly improbable that the majority of families would not respond favourably to better housing. It must be remembered that some of these families have had little or no opportunity to form standards or to know what it is to live in a decent house. We cannot expect better housing or a changed environment to bring about an immediate change in the "housekeeping" habits and social behaviour of any group of the population. There will be need for re-education and constant supervision in many cases, and this points up the need for competent home-management,

which plays an important part in the re-housing of families in England!<sup>1</sup>

The worker gets to know the family before they leave their old home, helps them through the removal and keeps in touch with them during the first difficult weeks while readjustments are being made and the family is finding its place in the new surroundings.<sup>2</sup> The full benefits of good housing are brought to bear on the child population and the extent of these benefits can only be properly measured over a lifetime.

The tenant families who do not care form a small but hard core of the undesirables. These undesirable tenants may be described as "social recidivists". They are lazy and shiftless and neglect themselves and their children. Although they have no idea of the elements of child-care, they are not actually cruel, but fluctuate between the two extremes, of over-indulgence and abuse. Most of the children from these disorderly dwellings are quite happy in their relations with the parents and a strong bond of affection exists between the children themselves. This type of family presents the greatest problem to the social worker -- should these children be left with the parents, or should they be removed? An interesting and valuable comparative study could be made of the children in such families -- of those who were left with their parents and those who were removed.

The provision of more adequate housing is not the only form of service or treatment that the majority of these problem families require. The case-worker in the protective agency must help the parent with his personal problems, for only with such help can the parent succeed in his role. Often the neglect

1. Hall, Penelope, The Social Services of Modern England, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., London, 1955, p.93.

2. Marsh, L.C., op.cit., one of the proposals made in regard to housing administration of the urban rehabilitation project was as follows: "The day-to-day operation would be in the hands of a project manager and other appropriate staff ... It is essential that at least one member of the executive staff should be a professional qualified social worker with suitable experience .. There are many fields where their function is vital

is evident in environmental conditions which lend themselves to some improvement without involving the parents too deeply -- for example, poor housing, improper diet, etc. The caseworker must do all in her power to help the parents recognize these conditions and avail themselves of community resources to improve the situation. But, to a large extent, she also has to help them to understand that there must be some related emotional problems to explain why they have not already sought help when it was available. In the past, environmental changes which parents made without becoming aware of why they had allowed their home life to deteriorate so grossly have proved successful only for a brief period.<sup>1</sup>

It is necessary to bring into the foreground more of the facts of existing housing and its effect on family life. The people who live in bad areas and in poor housing often do not complain about their housing inadequacies. This may be due to the fact that they have never enjoyed any better accommodation, or that housing becomes a matter of concern only when they have to vacate and look for another place to live. In a study made of the applications for accommodation in the Little Mountain Housing Project, it was found that the people in the low-income bracket and in the poorest housing were least able to make their needs and desires known.

"Any interpretation of the different responses of applicant families to their accommodation can only be conjectured. Allowances must be made for the degree of articulateness which is required for a person to be able to describe poor housing in terms of its effect on family relationships; and there is reason to believe that the worst housed families are often the least able to make their needs and preferences known. Obviously a great deal depends on the standards of adequacy adopted by the families themselves, and on the particular urgency of the situation at the time of applying ..."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Gordon, Henrietta, Casework Services for Children, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, Mass., 1956, p.397.
  2. Wheeler, Michael, op.cit., p.51.

Therefore the responsibility for social action to bring about better housing lies partly with the health and welfare agencies that are working with these families. As long as families are left to exist in such conditions, we can hope to see little benefit from the money spent in maintaining them there. The choice between spending money constructively on public low-rent housing, or on palliatives, is constantly available -- and not sufficiently recognized. In this industrial age, the pioneer home is gone, and government aid is necessary to provide decent housing within the means of the low-income group. The question is, whether to pay for better housing or for the damage done by substandard housing -- which is far more expensive to rectify later. We have the alternatives of housing them in foster-homes, hospitals and institutions, or in clean, light, sanitary surroundings, where both body and soul will have a chance. This we must decide.

"The costs of wretched housing and demoralizing neighbourhoods are not escaped -- there should be no mistake about this. They are borne, day after day, by the men, women and children who live in the run-down districts of our own cities; but they are borne also in some part by every property-owner and every taxpayer. Public low-rent housing, in the last analysis, is the choice of spending money constructively instead of wasting it on palliatives; using it to subsidize decent living and the opportunity of healthy citizenship, instead of subsidizing demoralization, apathy and delinquency ..."

These words applied to the general issue of slum clearance by Dr. Marsh in his Vancouver ("Strathcona") Survey of 1950 may well be the closing words of the present essay, treating of some of the less familiar, perhaps neglected aspects of child protection.

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