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COUNCIL OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
OF
EDMONTON AND DISTRICT

THE FUNCTION OF RESEARCH IN THE COUNCIL: A BASIS OF OPERATION

INTRODUCTION - This paper will describe the basis for the function of research in the Council of Community Services of Edmonton and District as is presently seen. Although the Council has always recognized the importance of a factual basis and a scientific procedure for its operations, it was not until about two years ago that the need for a more specialized approach to this aspect of Council work received greater emphasis. At the time it could be seen that some important gaps existed in the Council's approach to problem solving in the community. Consequently the Council undertook to have one of its staff members trained in a specialized program of research for community organization. This program was carried out on the assumption that the incorporation of a staff member with research qualifications would enhance the work of the Council generally. It is only natural that individual staff and Board members of the Council held various views on what this enhancement might entail specifically. Now that the training has been completed and preliminary staff discussions have taken place over the past six months, the point has been reached at which it is possible to provide a basis upon which research in the Council can be developed.

RATIONALE - Research may be described as the use of standardized procedures in the search for knowledge. As the Council is ultimately concerned with the development of a better community, particularly its health, welfare, recreation and rehabilitation provisions, the Council's immediate tasks are to help solve the problems which stand in the way of such a development. This problem solving process has a scientific basis, and the Council personnel (staff, board and committees) are, therefore, committed to a scientific approach. Research, as described above can be seen as one of the cornerstones of such a scientific procedure. The search for knowledge in a Council setting is, therefore, not a wide open seeking guided by curiosity, but rather a very specific search for

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facts which will assist the Council to find solutions with the various problems it is considering. More clearly defined objectives, better knowledge of facts, and a scientific approach should assure improvement in the community problem-solving process. Research related to community organization, i.e. research in the Council is, therefore, "an operational type of research to produce findings for direct application to immediate problems."¹⁾ It is in this context that we must view the function of research, both general and specific, in the Council of Community Services.

Before this may be misconstrued as implying the functions solely of the research consultant,²⁾ let me hasten to add that the implications are intended for the whole Council, board, committees and staff: for board and committees in their approach to community problems and the policy which is set in regard to them; for all staff as part of their everyday working method. Research, in other words, is not the responsibility solely of the research consultant.

SPECIFIC FUNCTIONS OF RESEARCH IN THE COUNCIL - Based on the foregoing rationale we are able to ferret out the following major specific functions of research in the Council designed to meet specific gaps in our work at this time. (This does not mean that these are the only functions of research, nor that at a later date other functions may not be substituted or added.)

1. A Pool of Information - To collect and analyze general data about the community - demographic, ecological, economic, etc. - relevant to the interests of the Council in order to assess the present social needs of the community, and to project these needs into the future.

2. Service Statistics - To encourage agencies and organizations both public and private to keep such records of their services as may prove pertinent and useful on an ongoing basis. To collect these service statistics and sometimes other more specific data from the organizations in order to make these available for current Council projects.

3. Research Related to Council Projects and Council's Planning Function -

Research as shown above is usually a component of any Council activity which involves a study process. Not all of this research, however, is or should be conducted by a research specialist. Some examples of research in this area have been suggested by Edelston¹⁾ and have been appended to this paper.

In this connection it is important to realize that research is an integral part of the planning process. To the extent to which research in a Council becomes crystallized in a separate department, pursuing its own course, to that extent will the value of meaningful planning decisions be greatly impaired. This is the main reason why it is better to speak of a research unit within the Council of Community Services than of a research department; the latter gives the impression of being a separate ancillary service to the Council. Research must at all costs remain an integral part of the total planning process of the Council even though at times the research component in a particular project may be such that it appears to have a separate entity of its own. But whether the research component in any particular project is carried out by the research consultant or by any other staff member from the Council it must be remembered that "the essence of that which constitutes research lies in what is done, not in who does it."³⁾

4. Research Services and/or Consultation to Other Agencies and Organizations:

a) To encourage social agencies, departments, and organizations in the community to be critically aware of their operations and to incorporate, where feasible and desirable, a research component in their work.

b) To provide consultation upon request to such organizations in the community that have no research staff of their own.

c) To have communication with other research organizations or departments in the community-to be knowledgeable about their "pool" of information and to exchange ideas and information.

CONCLUSION - It must be stressed again that these are only beginning - even though fairly well documented in principle - thoughts on research in the Council. In other words, it represents more a position paper at this point, and practice may show considerable change from what has been outlined here. It is not foreseen, however, that there will be many fundamental changes in the concept of how research is integrated with the total process of the Council.

January 1963.

Gustave A. deCocq.

- 1) Harold C. Edelston, Research in Health and Welfare Council, a paper delivered at the Institute of Research Related to the Administration of Social Welfare Programs, sponsored by the Social Work Research Section of the National Association of Social Workers, Chicago, November 1960.
- 2) The term "consultant" it seems, reflects more truly the nature of the work than the title "secretary" or "director."
- 3) The Function and Practice of Research in Social Work - Social Work Research Group, May 1955.

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APPENDIX 1

SOME ILLUSTRATIONS OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES OVER THE PAST SIX MONTHS

1. Consultative

- (a) Welfare Information Service - review of tabulation of daily statistics; some thoughts ^{on} ~~are~~ monthly and annual reporting.
- (b) Inter-Institutional Committee - review of previous surveys. Suggestions for analysis and reporting. This is probably a good example of the integration of research and planning. The staff person responsible for this particular Council project made use of the research consultant in the following ways:
 - (i) In the initial phases of the project there was consultation on the various methods of gathering pertinent information.
 - (ii) After the information had been gathered in three different ways, the planning staff member submitted his analysis to the research consultant for his comments. Further discussions were held on the best way of presenting the data, and the inferences that could and could not be drawn.
 - (iii) Part of the report was actually written by the research consultant because of a greater familiarity with the data and the way they could be presented.

It may be noted in this connection that at no point in this study was the research consultant related to the committee, nor really asked for the implications of the findings in relation to the purpose of the study; this was the sole responsibility of the planning staff person.

- (c) Day Care - in connection with recommendation #1 in the report from the Day Care Committee, a review was undertaken of the two independent studies undertaken earlier. The first concerned a study on day care needs, carried out with the help of the Jasper Place census. The

second was the study of the University Women's Club among industrial nurses. This was preliminary to a staff analysis of recommendation #1 of the day care committee's report.

2. Data Gathering

- (a) Information on Health, Welfare, Recreation expenditures 1941-1951 at 5 year intervals.
- (b) Transportation for the Handicapped - data on routes, finances, personnel, etc.
- (c) Preliminary fact-finding through interviews with department stores and various government departments on Day Care in the community.

3. Analysis and Evaluation

- (a) 1961 Dominion Census data as they pertain to Greater Edmonton on a continuing basis; e.g. Ethnic group, Age, and Religious denomination distribution; incidence of delinquency; characteristics of delinquents, etc.
- (b) Other sources that from time to time come to my attention; e.g. newspaper clippings, periodicals, etc.
- (c) Aging Study- Editorial Committee: In addition to serving as secretary to the committee, to provide liaison with the author and consult on technical details.
- (d) Analysis of Community Chest and United Fund budgets over the past 5 years, to determine rationale, trends.

4. Community Information - Initial contact with such bodies as Edmonton and District Planning Commission, the City of Edmonton Planning Department, Statistics Division, Provincial Department of Industry and Development; City and Provincial Welfare Departments, with a view to developing plans for seeking city-wide information pertinent to Council Planning.

APPENDIX 2

SOME ILLUSTRATIONS OF RESEARCH RELATED TO COUNCIL PROJECTS OR COUNCIL'S PLANNING FUNCTION.

1. Ascertaining current demand for a service

Examples: Survey of leisure-time preferences among teen-agers.
Special record-keeping on unmet requests for service or surveys of waiting lists.

2. Ascertaining the prevalence of the incidence of a problem in the community

Examples: Surveys of prevalence of disease, drug addiction, alcoholism, etc., by questionnaires administered to all likely sources of information. Application of nationally derived ratios to estimate local prevalence.

3. Describing available specified resources within a circumscribed geographical area

Examples: Survey of recreational opportunities for aged.
Existing resources for family life education.
Resources for the handicapped.
Report on public bathing facilities.

4. Describing agencies' constituencies

Examples: Characteristics of patients in X hospital during specified period.

5. Evaluating effectiveness of service

Examples: Controlled practice studies of value of Social Service Exchange.
Opinion survey among former agency clients.

6. Developing administrative tools or policy standards for community-wide use

Examples: Family budget guides.
Position classification, salary ranges and personnel practices studies.

7. Developing tools and guides for use in community planning and central allocation of funds

Examples: Priorities plans.
Analyses of national dues payments by local agencies.

8. Estimating future incidence, costs, population, utilization of services, etc.

Examples: Estimate of deficits to be incurred by voluntary agencies from relief expenditures necessitated by recession.
Estimate of future cost of foster home program to be initiated by a chronic disease hospital.