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BRIEF to SPECIAL SENATE COMMITTEE on POVERTY

EDMONTON SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL

JULY 20, 1970

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July 20, 1970

EDMONTON SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL

STUDY COMMITTEE ON POVERTY

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BACKGROUND & PURPOSE:

THE EDMONTON SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL

Planning Councils throughout the country have changed dramatically during recent years. This change has been brought about by the demonstration of citizens' desire to respond actively to the massive social problems facing us today. In addition, the change has been provoked by the emergence of new local planning groups under federal, provincial and municipal government direction. As governments become more active in the planning field, it is evident that there is an increasing need for the incidence of a strong citizen-based planning organization which can also serve as the voice of informed judgement and constructive criticism.

A primary role of the Edmonton Social Planning Council is that of a change agent. As pressing social issues emerge in our community, it becomes ever more apparent that a means must exist whereby citizens can make their wishes known and can gather to resolve problems. The Edmonton Social Planning Council attempts to respond to the community and through constant review to identify those issues that the community should become actively involved with; to generate the community's interest and to provide a platform for discussion and action. This activity necessarily involves fact-finding and research, the compilation and presentation of briefs, the organization of public meetings, methods to resolve acute problems as well as providing a means of on-going study of emerging concerns.

In recent years the council has become increasingly involved in building relationships with the constituency and in social animation. The steady emergence of indigenous or self-help groups is another aspect of this change in which the council has become more involved. Groups such as these possess the initiative and drive to help themselves and having had personal experience possess understanding for other persons in similar situations. However they are aware of the need for consultation and information about resources and methods. Their success in comparison to more institutionalized and professional agencies, indicates that we can learn a great deal and that these groups may provide some real answers.

Our awareness of the poverty and powerlessness of about one-third of our population has grown with a sense of dread and frustration. The alleviation of poverty, the economically poor, the poor in spirit, the victims of discrimination and exploitation has become a central concern. Poverty is a psychological process depriving individuals and families of material comforts, human dignity and fulfillment.

desires and using their own personal strengths and resources.

We are confronted by a paradox: - a country of great natural wealth, resources and beauty, a burgeoning technology - apparently the means at our fingertips to dispel inequities and poverty forever and yet its constant existence and increasing visibility plagues us. It appears that an ethical revolution of some sort is required to reduce the expanding disparities that exist. Can governments play a role here in providing impetus and leadership for such fundamental social change?

The E.S.P.C. is dedicated to finding means to intervene in this situation where the complexities are compounding in the urban scene in particular. We are honestly attempting to work with the poor and the powerless, to listen carefully to the ideas they present and to encourage established institutions and organizations to do the same and provide opportunities for meaningful dialogue.

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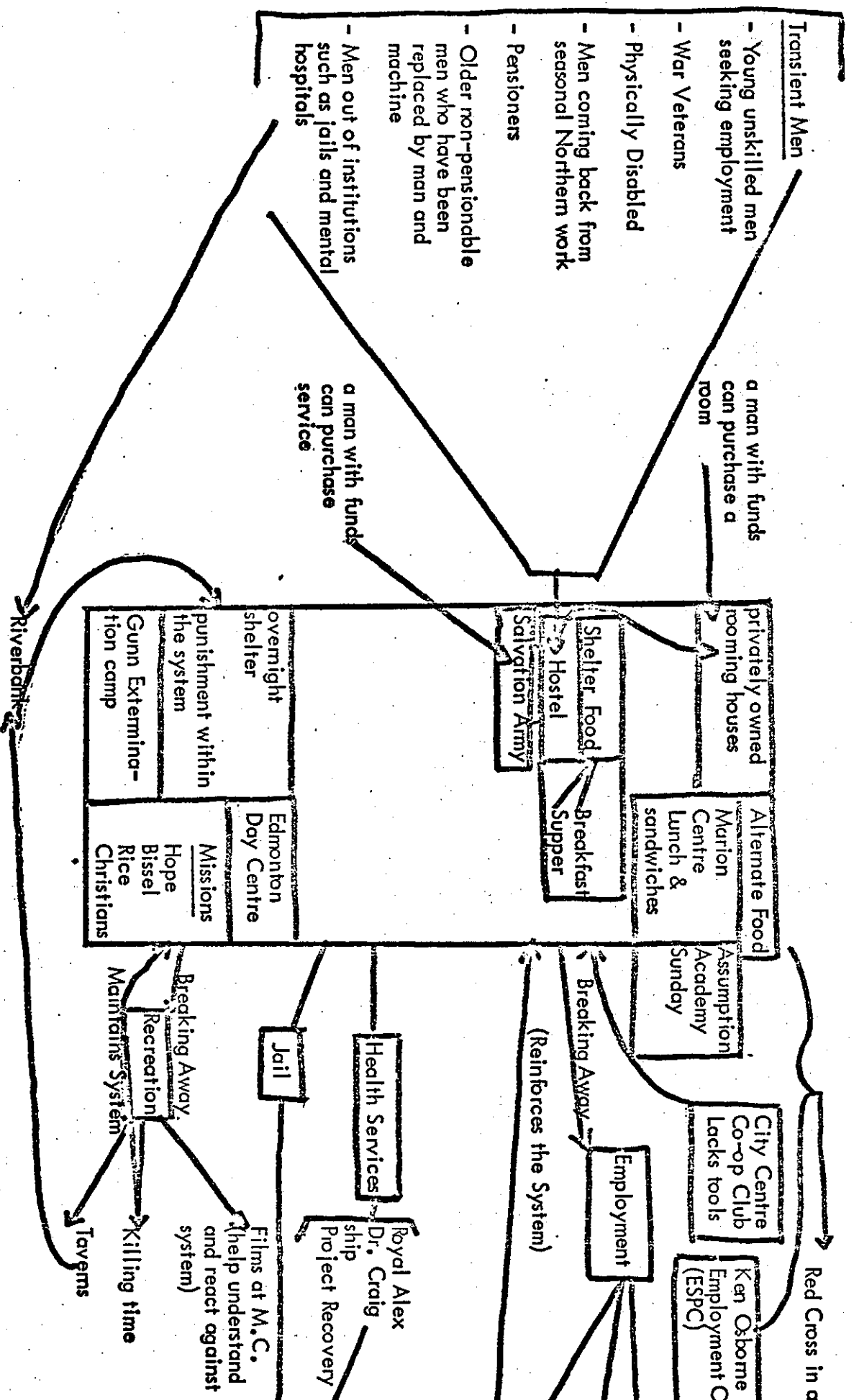
MODEL OF A CLOSED SYSTEM (Skid-Row)

One current part of our studies is presented here as a model of the closed systems that individuals and organizations both get locked into. This model illustrates clearly the futility of developing new programs without sufficient understanding of the parameters of the system. These programs, planned and designed on well documented needs, often make the situation less agonizing and less evident but actually serve to re-inforce and maintain the interdependency of the system.

The model we present is called "The Skid Row Concentration Camp". You will observe that once a man is caught up in this cycle it is virtually impossible to break away from it despite the many services and programs within the cycle that are designed to "rehabilitate" skid row dwellers and transient men. Similarly the service agencies are caught in the same circular network and seem almost as helpless as the men to extricate themselves. Consideration of this model leads us to recognize that freedom of choice and alternatives for men are missing. To add new services to such a system or to re-style the central core would only serve to cover up the real issues and delay any improvement other than a superficial one.

It seems essential that close attention be given to the culture of

THE SKID ROW CONCENTRATION CAMP SYSTEM



URBAN CENTRES

URBAN VALUES (Established Values)

- private property
- to be a competitive winner
- personal skill competency (education)
- financially secure
- ideologically sound
- member of the racial and ethnic power majority
- must consume production for the sake of consumption
- credit rating

Police
Control
of
protection of

TRANSIENT MEN

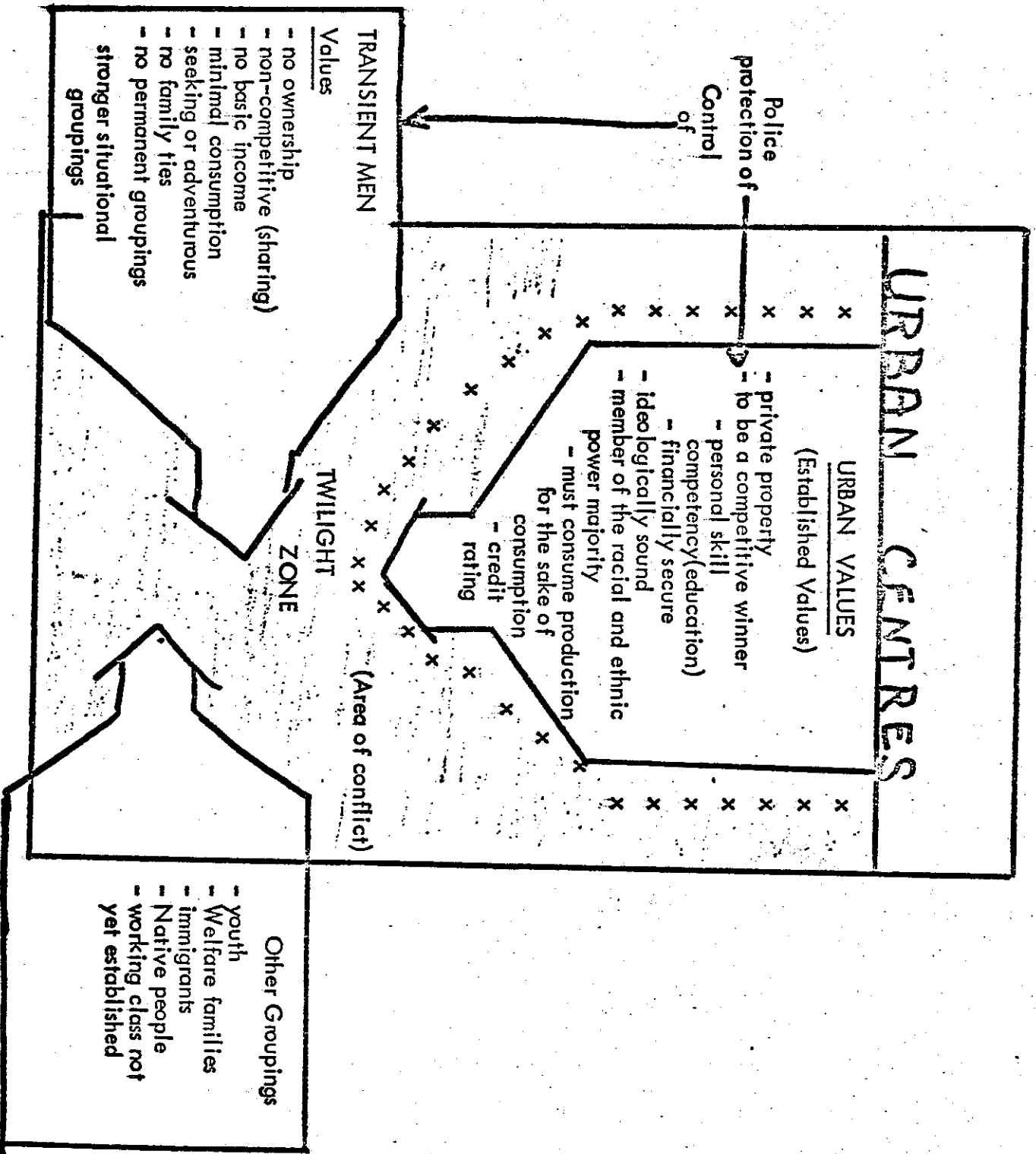
Values

- no ownership
- non-competitive (sharing)
- no basic income
- minimal consumption
- seeking or adventurous
- no family ties
- no permanent groupings
- stronger situational groupings

TWILIGHT ZONE

(Area of conflict)

- ### Other Groupings
- youth
 - Welfare families
 - immigrants
 - Native people
 - working class not yet established



SOME EXAMPLES OF ALTERNATIVE MODELS:

We have asked three groups to describe to you the goals and methods of their organizations and the support they have secured financial and otherwise.

These groups will speak for themselves and have prepared the brief outlines that follow:

1. F.U.T.U.R.E. Society
2. Growing up Together
3. The Sturgeon Valley Housing Co-operative.

F. U. T. U. R. E. Society

The F.U.T.U.R.E. Society; not an agency but a social action group of convicts, exconvicts and interested citizens wanting to help each other to help themselves in leading a responsible, productive and purposeful life.

An excon, when he leaves an institution is at the bottom of the ladder and because he was there when arrested his chances are 20 out of a 100 of making the first step.

This usually raises the question, why is the recidivism rate in Canada 80%? The following are some of the reasons:

(A) Lack of cold cash

The average man leaving an institution has about \$10 to his name.

(B) The real or the maginary rejection of the excon in the community

A better understanding of the excon and the community and the community and the excon must come about.

(C) Good-will Institutiions

Hostels, Food centres, Clothing centres, for the poor degrade a man and provide an environment which quite easily can lead the excon to prison.

(D) Opportunity for retraining apprenticing and further education

Any man leaving an institution should automatically be given the opportunity to further his rehabilitation either by apprenticeship, schooling or any other training available. This applies only if institutions in Canada are designed to rehabilitate the excriminal, mentally ill, handicapped or any person in need of rehabilitation.

(E) Employment

Also private employment agencies are exploiting handicapped people by charging a fee taken out of the man's wages..

(F) Agencies and Departments of Governments

Because agencies and Departments of Governments are competing for money and have to account for every penny there is little room for new ideas and experiments. Support is usually cut off when self help groups reach a point where services are actually duplicated, even if the service might be better. Because there are strict rules and regulations and guide lines to follow, most social workers are first dedicated to to the establishment and second the client.

F.U.T.U.R.E.

AN IDEA -- A PURPOSE -- HOW IT WORKS

THE IDEA:

To form an organization of ex-inmates and interested citizens wanting to help each other to help themselves in leading a responsible, productive and purposive life; to establish a society dedicated to advance the status and well being of ex-inmates of penal institutions.

THE PURPOSE:

1. To originate and promote improvements in the general welfare of the members and to make available to members opportunities to participate in a variety of activities: card clubs, curling, bowling and other physical and social functions as well as discussion groups, public speaking and any other group activities.
2. To provide opportunities for members to enter educational facilities.
3. To establish, create, administer and maintain a fund for the purpose of aiding or assisting ex-inmates to rehabilitate themselves in the community.
4. To establish, construct and maintain suitable premises for the Society.

HOW IT WORKS:

One of the major problems the ex-inmate has in his or her re-entry to society is the problem of finding or being able to make new acquaintances and friends. It seems that in a great number of cases, when the inmate is released he does not want to go to any unfamiliar places where he might find new friends, for the fear of being left alone. He feels that he doesn't know how to become involved and active, he has a feeling that these people are different and he doesn't belong. The F.U.T.U.R.E. Society will greatly relieve this idea of rejection by providing:

1. An environment of persons with a common objective, which of course is a sincere desire to become respected citizens of society.
2. A relationship of acceptance, which will allow the inmate to meet new and purposeful people while he is in the company of old friends.
3. By creating an association of respected and successful ex-inmates, hence proving to the new member that ideas of ex-inmates not being accepted or having the same opportunities as other people is fallacy and that people are accepted and respected not for

GROWING UP TOGETHER

This special programme for small children began in the fall with a group who came together through the Boyle Street Project Office. They thought that it would be a good idea to start a programme for children of parents who could not afford other facilities for their children. The group decided that the mothers in the group should have the control of the programme, and would also be able to work in the school on a voluntary basis.

The mothers group also wanted to set up a programme for themselves which could take place at the same time as the children's programme. Sacred heart Parish Hall was secured for the programme. It took about six months for a number of groups who were boycotting the programme. The programme for children began shortly before Christmas. The group however had received no funds when it started the programme.

The programme: 2 hours from 1:30 - 3:30 daily. The children were picked up at their homes by volunteer drivers. Once in the playschool the children had various activities, free play time, experience with art materials, music, toys and other equipment such as films and tape recorders. The children also went on field trips to places such as library, museum, university farm, the childrens' zoo. There were two resource people who were in attendance daily along with the mothers who came in to the school. The total staff situation was volunteer. The playschool ran until the second week in June. The only financing that the group received were two donations from church groups amounting in total to \$50.00, and the payment of the utilities for a period of three months.

Who was approached for funds during this time: The two school boards, the public and the separate, the parks and recreation department. The school boards were certainly interested in the programme but their answer was the same---we are spending public monies and therefore must be responsible for how these are used---no money without strings (CONTROL) The parks and recreation department refused funds to the group because they had their own programme and could not see the point of giving a grant to a community group to run its own programme. The mothers group did not want a park and recreation programme for their children (there has been a history of conflict between the mothers in the Boyle Street area

their own programme. Each mother was to work in the school for two months on a paid basis. The mothers also said that there was a definite need for them to have their own bus for transportation rather than rely on volunteers.

At about this time the Province put out a Request for Proposal for someone to run a pre-school programme in the area in which the group was running its programme. The group decided to put in a proposal to the government. This proposal emphasized the fact that a pre-school programme was much too limiting and went on to explain what type of a programme would be desirable. Once again the proposal was rejected--- it is interesting to note the money was given to the schools. At present the school is not operating, and the group is planning to re-open in the fall--- hopefully by then they will have received some financial assistance, so that the programme can have some stability.

The whole idea of the project was set up to provide educational opportunities for both the parents and the children. This is certainly not done in the school system and is one of the reasons that the school has had a hard time getting financing, Another reason is the fact that the mothers want to have the major say in the control and development of the programme for their children and themselves. The programme will no longer be unique if it allows itself to be sucked up into the school system.

THE STURGEON VALLEY HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE: GENESIS

Today, you can buy a pleasant house, but you can't buy a pleasant neighborhood. You can even have a part in designing your house, but you generally can't have a part in designing your neighborhood -- that is, its communal facilities, such as schools, parks, recreation centers.

Is it possible for the people who are going to live in a community to help design their neighborhood facilities, and then to retain control over them after the community has been developed? Can they do this, and, at the same time, develop a community where citizens can retain their privacy if they want to?

Recently, a group of people from all walks of life, of all ages, and of various income-levels met together for nine consecutive evenings and attempted to answer these questions. These meetings were carried out with financial assistance from CMHC.

At first, they discussed their dreams -- about what they wanted in a house and in a community. There were art students at these meetings who could translate these dreams into visual form -- that is, into drawings.

People dreamed of houses with double-sinks in the kitchen; bedrooms with plenty of storage space; & rooms which can be rearranged as new children are born and as older ones leave home; rooms that are cool in summer and warm in winter; doors that are wide enough to move furniture through; sound-proof walls; houses that do not look like boxes. In

adequate laundry facilities. In short, communities built primarily to satisfy people's needs.

People dreamed of a community where all sorts of people can live that is, professional people, working people, rich people, poor people, people of various ethnic groups, retired people, pensioners, welfare-recipients, disabled people, young people, large families, etc. In short, people dreamed of the sort of mixed community that low-cost government housing, and other types of developments have not been able to provide.

These are the things that people dreamed about. But, in our society, can such dreams come true?

The group found that such dreams can and have come true in North America.

Representatives from the 200-unit Willow Park Housing Co-operative in Winnipeg and from the Calgary Housing Co-operative described ways in which people can make such-- dreams-- their dreams about houses and communities come true.

A family living in a Co-operative Housing development has special advantages over both ordinary ownership and renting. An ordinary homeowner has no control beyond his ~~own~~ property upon the actions of his neighbors. A renter has no control at all. Co-op families exercise a large measure of control of their community by adopting reasonable rules designed to keep their neighbourhood a pleasant, safe and decent place to live.

At this point, the group investigated the possibility of actually developing a co-operative housing community on a 100 - acre site in St. Albert.

The site has the advantage of being located in one of the most scenic areas of the metropolitan area. The site offers a view of the Sturgeon River Valley. The site is zoned residential comprehensive. There are no odor or air polluting industries in the immediate area.

The present owners of this site, the Oblate Order, have given the group a free, six - month option on the land.

Representatives from GO-OP local co-operatives, credit unions, and the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation answered basic questions regarding possible ways at financing the development.

Various architects, engineers, interior designers, and landscape architects helped the group to explore design possibilities.

These professional advisers informed the group that the site itself has a great potential for any type of development that the group might wish to start.

A co-operative was formally incorporated. It is called the Sturgeon Valley Housing Co-operative. Shares are currently being sold for \$1 each, and a steering committee was formed in order to publicize the co-op, recruit more members, and work on further development of the general plan of the prospective community.

Co-op membership is open. Anyone who is interested in participating in the development of a co-op housing community is welcome to join. All co-op members, including new members, will be able to have a voice in drawing up initial plans for the community.

In September, there will be a general meeting of all co-op members where

CONCLUSIONS:

1. We must allow people self determination to develop themselves thereby guaranteeing our society the full richness of human experience, and the variety of human approaches and responses that make the ideals that we jointly hold of community and neighbourhood worth having.
2. We support the idea of a guaranteed income so that there may be a real equality of opportunity for everybody, and to provide a reasonable degree of satisfaction of life for everybody.
3. Resources must be made available to groups and organizations who are developing programs based on ne. models. Means must be established whereby personell and financial support can be secured without the imposition of rigidity and controlling techniques.

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