

Abused Child Needs Concerned Citizens Help

By Gerald Mann

Social Service Department

"Where do you live?" This question is frequently directed to all citizens of Yancey County when we visit in other areas of the state or nation. As a whole, we are very proud and quick to expound upon the assets which our county has to offer, because there are many. We are indeed fortunate to live in an area of fertile soil, beautiful mountains and streams. Not only are the people hard-working, courteous and friendly, most of them are concerned about their neighbor and community. We can boast of many fine churches and schools, with excellent facilities for shopping and the receiving of medical care. Yet, from all of this, I am quite sure that all of us would agree that our greatest asset is our children. Parents are relieved that we are away from those areas which constantly witness demonstrations, rioting, and burnings. We do live in a garden of Eden location when compared to many of the social ills which confront our nation, but we do have problems.

Child abuse and neglect does exist in our county, with the latter appearing in large proportions. Last year over 2,000 cases of child abuse and neglect were reported to county departments of social services throughout the state. It has been estimated that this many more cases go unreported and these children receive no protection because they are too young to do anything about the situation. It is important that we recognize what constitutes, or causes these abuse-neglect situations to occur, and then take remedial action to correct them. Let us observe a theoretical environment.

Mom and Dad have been married for 12 years. They have none children, with another one expected soon. Both parents were unable to complete more than the fifth grade in formal education, and the income earned by the father from non-skilled, part-time labor is far from being sufficient to meet the needs of his family. His wife must stay at home because three of the children are of pre-school age and need her attention, as well as the duties in the home. Mom and Dad have never been recipients of family planning counseling or of counseling otherwise as to the time and expense incurred when another child is brought into the world. So the pattern continues. The father tries hard to provide, but he keeps getting farther behind. He can't buy clothes for his children so they become neglected in this aspect, usually appearing ill-clad, and dirty. They do not receive enough to eat, and will grow up in a state of malnutrition. The home is crowded, and children of op-

posite sex must sleep together or there is three or four in a bed. Debts are piling up, and when a child becomes sick the parents try "home remedies" instead of taking their child to a doctor. Children are allowed to roam as they please out of doors in extremely cold weather, or to stay out late with any kind of company, thus increasing their chances greatly of becoming delinquent or pregnant. Under increasing pressure the father begins to drink, and to seek other areas of pleasure. The children become witnesses to these unwholesome circumstances and form patterns for their future life. In a fit of anger the father severely beats and bruises a child. This goes unreported, but the child suffers. The children in school are allowed to become truant. The parents state, "I do not have much of an education, so why en-

courage and support my children in this." "I get by, so will they."

What usually occurs in situations such as these is desertion. Then the children are further neglected, feeling unloved, and unwanted when a parent leaves. It is at this point that social agencies are sought to begin trying to assist in remedying the situation. In most cases requiring protective service the typical client is the abused-neglected child. It is obviously not possible for him to ask for help, and therefore the community must "reach out" to find him. It is significant also, that although the child is the client, it is not possible to help him without establishing a casework relationship with the parents.

North Carolina law protects persons who report suspected child abuse or neglect. These referrals are also handled in

strict confidence. The law requires the county director of social services to investigate and take whatever action necessary to correct the situation.

Let us accept the fact that child-abuse and neglect does occur in our beautiful county, but more than this, let us become concerned enough to do something about it. Let us remember that "help" not punishment is the key-word. The abused-neglected children can best be helped by helping their parents.

Suppose we look at this situation from an economic viewpoint, one in which all taxpayers will be interested. The ten children in this home will in all likelihood marry ten spouses. On an average, each couple will have five children, or a total of fifty. These children will marry and have numerous families of their own, and the cycle magnifies greatly.

If these children and parents grow up in a neglect-dependent environment, the chances are more than equal that they will also become parents who neglect, and require public assistance. If the problem could have been reached much earlier, imagine the heart-break and expense which could have been avoided.

Scholarship

James B. Geouge, a son of Mr. and Mrs. Ben F. Geouge of Burnsville, Route 5, has been awarded the \$250 Feldspar Corporation scholarship at Warren Wilson College for the 1970-71 academic year.

Geouge is a member of the sophomore class at Warren Wilson. He was graduated from East Yancey High School in 1969. Geouge is majoring in Biology at college.



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