

THE LISTENING POST

Wisconsin Plans for Solution of Youth Problems

THE 1945 Wisconsin Legislature was confronted with the problem of what it should do to assist in the solution of problems facing youth. The first step was to determine whether there was a problem serious enough to demand the attention of the Legislature. A joint legislative interim committee was appointed which held twenty-two public hearings at which nearly 4000 persons appeared. This committee concluded that there was a problem and made the following recommendations to the 1947 Legislature:

1. That the Legislature create a Youth Service Commission and a Division of Youth Service within the Department of Public Welfare.

2. "Your committee recommends that the schools of Wisconsin wake up to their responsibility in educating future citizens by accepting the fact that their responsibility extends beyond that of imparting knowledge to an even greater obligation to train future citizens in how to live and get along with other people in today's society."

(a) By adapting the school curriculum to better serve the needs of the large percentage of children who will not go to college.

(b) By introducing into the school curriculum, from the elementary level on up, education related to the most important responsibility of living—namely, that of parenthood and family living.

3. Juvenile courts should be granted authority to excuse from compulsory school attendance boys and girls under special circumstances. (For those not able to profit from formal education.)

4. Because the schools can discover at an early stage tendencies toward delinquency and misbehavior, it was recommended that school boards employ school social workers or visiting teachers.

5. Provision should be made for mental

hygiene services in the schools by providing child guidance clinic services.

6. Mental hygiene services should be expanded in the Department of Public Welfare.

7. Provision should be made for psychiatric services.

8. There should be provision made for divorce counsels in counties.

9. A "cooling off" period for divorce cases was recommended following the filing of papers.

10. Travel expenses were recommended for special probation officers.

11. It was recommended that boards of education provide time whereby pupils could be excused to attend classes in religious instruction. (This would require an amendment to the constitution.)

12. Legislation should be provided for more effective enforcement of laws pertaining to adults and parents who contribute to the delinquency of minors.

13. It was recommended that there should be a State Board of Alcohol Studies.

14. The legislation for the sale of alcoholic beverages should be clarified.

15. The State of Wisconsin as well as the local governing body should issue tavern permits.

16. There should be better provision for dependent children.

17. There should be child welfare workers in every county.

18. Provision should be made for integration of child welfare services.

19. Detention centers should be provided instead of the use of jails.

20. It was recommended that the State University assume more responsibility for training leadership for recreation and consulting services.

21. Social service exchanges should be provided on a community basis.

22. There should be stricter enforcement of child labor laws.

23. Better buildings, equipment, and

personnel should be made available for exceptional children.

24. The creation of a continuing study committee within the Legislature for the purpose of adjusting legislation to better meet the needs of youth conservation.

The 1947 Legislature created a Youth Service Commission of eleven members appointed by the governor. A Division of Youth Service was established as the seventh division of the Department of Public Welfare. There was also established a Division of Mental Hygiene within the Department of Public Welfare as well as a committee on alcoholic studies.

The Youth Service Commission has approached its responsibility by organizing two major committees:

- (a) Diagnosis and Treatment
- (b) Prevention and Community Services

The former concerns itself with the care of juveniles committed to the Department and how more efficient and effective methods can be developed to rehabilitate these young people so they can resume an important place in society. A staff in the Division of Youth Service

has been established to carry out such a program.

The latter's purpose is to reduce the delinquency problem by the development of services within the local community. Inasmuch as the school reaches all the children of the community, its role is probably next in importance to that of the home. A social welfare educator has been assigned to the staff of community planners as a consultant. The self-survey is used in helping the community plan more adequately for itself.

Similar programs have been developed in California (California Youth Authority), Minnesota (Minnesota Youth Conservation Commission), and more recently Massachusetts. Other states such as Michigan and Texas are giving this plan consideration.

So far Wisconsin seems to be the first state to stress the use of the school as a source whereby an attack can be made on the prevention phase of juvenile delinquency. No program has been developed far enough as yet to draw conclusions concerning what results will be forthcoming.—Leslie W. Johnson, curriculum director, Superior, Wisconsin, public schools, for the ASCD Legislative Committee.

The Changing World

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Suggested Readings

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