

Chapter I

Administration and Its Importance

WHAT IS SOCIAL WORK? Many have been the definitions of social work. None of them are very satisfactory.

Noah Webster's successors in unabridged editions of his Dictionary do not even mention social work. They do describe social service (which is about the same thing) as follows: "Any activity designed to promote social welfare; specifically, organized philanthropic assistance of the sick, destitute, or unfortunate by a hospital, church, or charitable agency; welfare work."

Even the Social Work Year Book, the biennially revised bible of social workers, does not define social work. The 1945 version makes a stab at it, however, in the article on Social Work as a Profession: "Modern social work may be described as a professional service to people for the purpose of assisting them, as individuals or in groups, to attain satisfying relationships and standards of life in accordance with their particular wishes and capacities and in harmony with those of the community." That is all right as far as it goes, but—

Here is what social work means, for the purposes of this book: social work is service to human beings, either individually or in families, as members of groups or in communities (and the term "community" has become steadily enlarged until some people think it covers the world). Social work as a profession uses techniques or skills which are known as case work, group work, and community organization. Closely affiliated and, for the purposes of this book, included within the realm of social work are professional services aimed at the treatment and prevention of physical and mental illness and at the attainment of social reform.

WHAT IS A SOCIAL AGENCY? For our objectives, social work is practiced through social agencies, which are given this name because they serve society. They are of two main types, according to the sources of the funds with which they operate. A private agency is an organization that is financed wholly or in part by contributed or invested

funds. A public agency is a department or branch of government supported by tax funds. To apply to or in behalf of human beings the professional techniques of social work described above, a social agency employs the special skills and procedures of public relations and of social work administration.

Essential to the operation of a social agency are a definite purpose and a specific program of activity. The agency's work is performed under responsible leadership and through a reasonably competent staff, in behalf of persons other than those who operate the organization. Although a social agency is organized and conducted not for profit but for social service, it may well adapt to its uses and employ successfully many procedures which by the sharp stimulus of the profit motive in the management of business and industry, as well as by operation of the altruistic motive in social work, have been demonstrated as effective. We shall therefore discuss the ways in which an agency of social work, broadly defined, may be effectively administered.

WHAT IS ADMINISTRATION? The administration of a social agency may be defined as those functions of its operation which are concerned with its management as distinguished from its professional treatment. Administration, for example, is concerned not so much with what records should be kept as with how those records should be kept; not so much with the purpose of the agency as with how the organization established for fulfillment of that purpose may be housed, staffed, and operated. Contrasted with the human service which is the fundamental purpose of social work, administration is the "business" of social work.

Consequently we shall neither discuss in this book the professional standards of social work nor describe any particular technique of social work. Professional standards will be promoted and social work technique improved, however, if the organization which strives for them runs its affairs on a businesslike basis. Effective management and effective human service are supplementary. That social agency which is most businesslike usually is most effective in performing the social service to which it is dedicated. Sound administration and competent professional service are the head and the heart which are essential to the effective activity of the body of organized humanitarian endeavor. That is social work!

GROWING SIGNIFICANCE OF ADMINISTRATION. The question of administration is of greater importance now, in these days of peace and reconversion after the Second World War, than ever before. Great

philanthropic foundations examine the methods of social agencies before they make their appropriations. Better business bureaus and charities endorsement committees of chambers of commerce require reasonably sound methods of administration, as well as other criteria of merit, in the social agencies which they certify to prospective contributors. Community councils of social agencies have developed cooperative social relationships in most of the large American urban areas. Community chest budget committees (and, through them, contributors) in nearly 1,000 communities are demanding business-like methods in the operation of the social agencies for which funds are appropriated. Public health, welfare, and social security services are maintained on an increasingly large scale and cover every community in the nation. At the same time, increasing demands for the expenditure of public funds in a multitude of ways are putting pressure on public social agencies to make good their claims for a share of tax budgets through effective management of the funds which are appropriated.

The growth of national and urban population and the war-born recognition of the value of health and welfare services to all the people have resulted in increased demand for these services. Furthermore, the increase in the national income has made available greatly increased funds given or paid in taxes for an expanded program of social work, the administration of which presents a problem greater and more challenging than ever in our national history.

The large and growing demand for competent administration is also a natural complement to the modern development of professional standards in diverse fields of social work which has followed the earlier days of social pioneering. Moreover, the post-war world, in this atomic age, is ever changing, and the social agency must through sound administrative practices be equipped to meet quickly the changing needs of changing times. Now more than ever must a social agency be competently administered if it is to serve effectively human beings in community, state, nation, or world.

QUESTIONS

1. What definitions of social work can you find or make?
2. What definitions of a social agency can you find or make?
3. What definitions of administration can you give?
4. How would you apply these definitions to social work administration?

4 *A Handbook for Social Agency Administration*

5. How do you think the social agencies you know compare in their administrative practices with businesses you know?

6. What examples can you find of the pressure of philanthropic foundations, community councils of social agencies, community chests, charities endorsement committees, better business bureaus, and public authorities for better administrative methods?