

Publicity by Way of the Barn Door

By JOSEPHINE STRODE

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WHEN a teacher of social work first came to our district she asked us what books we had for study. Did we have *Social Diagnosis*? Changing Psychology in Social Work? The Art of Helping People Out of Trouble? We did not! Did we have *The Survey* or *The Family*? We did not! Finally in despair she asked, "Well, what books do you have?" In the middle of a general silence one of our members spoke up. "Lady," he said, "there's one book we all have that you can count on, and that's a Sears Roebuck catalogue."

So it is now, when we are asked about our publicity methods. Probably a good many unorthodox particles of hay stick out from them, but for all that we know that publicity for Main Street is not so different from that for Fifth Avenue. The catch is in knowing how, when, and where to put the emphasis.

This matter of emphasis recalls a story about William Allen White. It seems that at a dinner party someone told of a family, in the covered-wagon days, that was spending the night in Missouri before going on to Kansas. That night when the child in the family said her prayers, she concluded with "Good-bye God, I'm going to Kansas." Mr. White took up the challenge. What the child very likely had said, he insisted, was, "Good, by-God, I'm going to Kansas." Just a matter of emphasis.

The welfare services for which rural social workers seek publicity are essentially the same, of course, as those in urban areas; and rural publicity has the same two-fold aim of bringing information to the people and of promoting their understanding of the program, thereby insuring their cooperation with it. Likewise the tools of publicity are essentially the same in rural areas as in urban centers: talks with individuals, speeches, newspaper articles, radio, community councils, case committees, reports and so on. How those tools are used constitutes the distinctive difference between rural and urban publicity, a difference that grows out of the very nature of rural existence itself and what it does to the minds and life of the people. Before a rural social worker attempts to plan or to engage in publicity she must be very sure that she understands clearly the basis for and the nature of rural consciousness and rural conduct.

An important consideration in any program of rural publicity is the tempo of rural life. Things can't be done in a hurry. Farmers are accustomed to waiting six months or longer for a crop. In western Kansas, we've been waiting six years!

When the county commissioners come to town to consider welfare matters, or any other county affairs, they drive in, stop at the grocer's to leave their milk and eggs, stop in at the corner drugstore for a chin with the boys, have word at Aunt Mary's about coming out to dinner next Sunday, and finally, around ten or eleven o'clock, turn up at the courthouse. Here sitting around a big table—or, as it is, in the small counties, around a big, pot-bellied

This is the second of a series of articles by Miss Strode on "the process and problems of social work where the county is the unit of administration and practice runs out over the back roads to the villages and remote farms." Material for this article was contributed by workers in thirty-nine western Kansas counties and was written originally by Miss Strode for a session of the Social Work Publicity Council at the Seattle meeting of the National Conference of Social Work. Coming next month: Education on the Rural Job.

stove in a room over the hardware store—they prop up their feet for leisurely consideration of any matters needing their official attention. But they're in no hurry about it. Frequently there'll be silences of many minutes, broken occasionally by such general remarks as, "Well, looks like another Methodist crop this year."

(To the uninitiated a Methodist crop is one which is saved by a

"sprinkling.") Townspeople come in and out to swap bits of news and ask questions; it may be an hour or so before the commissioners get around to the business of the meeting.

The wise social worker with a proposition to put before these men learns to take it easy and to wait. If she has the "feel" of the tempo of rural life she'll enjoy the leisure, the humor, the back-chat, and be so much a part of the situation that the commissioners will not be conscious of her as an outsider. But let her get fidgety or restive, or press her point by talking too much, and her proposition will not get a hearing let alone approval. It will die aborning.

I recall a man from a large midwestern school of social work who came out to us to supervise. He was quick-thinking, executive, and accustomed to pushing his program and getting things done. Before his first meeting with the commissioners we cautioned him about taking his pace from theirs and he really tried to slow down. But the experience was painful for him. He was amazed to discover how long county commissioners can "jes' set."

WHAT this man didn't appreciate, of course, was that the commissioners weren't "jes' settin'." They undoubtedly were "sensing" him out just as surely as if they had asked him a flood of questions. He was accustomed, probably, to getting acquainted with people by talking with them, but rural people appraise a person by means of some inexplicable feeling about him. The farmer learns to feel things about the weather, his cattle, his crops, the land, and the winds. They can't talk to him, so he has to sense their meaning. Likewise with people, the farmer is deliberate and slow in his approach to acquaintance. He gets to know people largely through his feelings for them and the reaction of his organism as a whole toward them. His silences are as pregnant with meaning as his speech and he is not impressed by a flow of words. It takes few words, simple, direct, meaty in substance, and based on good hard facts, to touch him.

A recent book by Stuart Chase, *The Tyranny of Words*, surely illustrates a point about rural people. He says that for words to have any real sense to a listener they must have "referents," that is the listener must be conscious of the thing or happening to which the words refer. Anyone who has listened to the talk of rural people knows how rich in referents their words are. I remember hearing a county sheriff say that he couldn't walk "hawk and buzzard." It took me some time to figure out that one. You see

when a hawk attacks, he darts straight, swift, sure, direct to his prey. A buzzard, however, circles slowly in great deliberate circles, descending gradually on his prey.

Publicity experts stress the importance to interpretation of knowing the language of a community. The problem goes deeper than that in a rural community, because in order to understand the speech, you have to know the life.

Rural people are upstanding, accustomed to dealing with their own problems. When your nearest neighbor is ten or twenty miles away, you think and act for yourself and you learn to be mighty resourceful about it. Just the same we social workers, it seems to us, can learn a lot from the way these people help themselves and each other. Cooperation and interdependence are the very fabric of their life.

As Josh Lee says, "Folks that have lived on oxtail soup and beef tongue to make both ends meet" are pretty apt to have something worthwhile to contribute to the business of budget-making. A farmer who has had his living wiped out by a summer of drought, or his cattle frozen in one cold night of winter, or his stand of wheat eaten up by grasshoppers is going to be able to stand up under the shock of learning the limitations and restrictions of the welfare program. Furthermore, he usually can give the worker some mighty good pointers on how to eke out county allotments, whether of work, commodities, or money.

NOT only is the rural citizen capable of solving his own problems but he so has the habit of thinking things out from scratch that he wants to know all the facts on which our social work policies are based. It is not enough to tell him that because of the financial condition, relief allotments can be only so much. He'll want to know all about that financial condition, how much it is and why it is, and how come it isn't enough. Living kind of simple, as we rural folk do, our mental apparatus isn't very complex, and we think pretty much in terms of the ABC's of everything. Like children we ask plenty of direct questions because we want to know all about things, and we've got plenty of time to find out.

Because of their roots in our democratic pioneer life, our rural people dislike class distinctions and anything that makes for differences, such as strangeness in dress or speech, or in ways of doing things. They are particularly sensitive to insincerity or artificiality. A worker from the state office once came out to a far western county in Kansas to persuade the county commissioners to hire a trained social worker from "outside." This particular county is in the heart of the dust bowl. Heavy black blizzards are almost daily occurrences in the dust season, and the morning on which the state worker arrived at the county seat was the morning after a particularly heavy, dirty storm. Coming in on an air-conditioned train, the state worker was turned out all in spotless white. The chairman of the county commissioners, an ex-cattle baron and ranch owner who had ridden the range as a cowboy from Denver to the Rio Grande, tells the story:

Here, she come along, all purty as my wife's pet duck after a swim—white shoes, white hat, white dress, everything white! "My good man," sez she, "my good man, can you tell me where I'll find the chairman of the county commissioners?" Me—there I was black an' dirty from the dust, sweepin' up the hallway of the court house so folks could get through the dust without wadin'. I looked like the janitor would'a looked, I reckon, if we'd had one! "My good man," sez she again, chokin' on the dust I was raisin' with my sweepin', "where

would I find the chairman of your county board?" I never stops sweepin'; an' raisin' more and more clouds of dust, I sez to her, "I jes' been up to his office, Ma'm, and he ain't there!"

When a rural social worker understands somewhat the pattern and psychology of rural life, she can use some of the usual channels of publicity. In leadership at community councils she keeps to the spirit of rural living. Her speech, dress, and tempo of activity is gauged by the place, the people, the occasion. She is frank, sincere, detailed, thorough, vivid in her presentations. She leaves the responsibilities for decisions with the people, and, if she is intelligent, furnishes just enough leadership of an inconspicuous sort to get them working together cooperatively.

IN newspaper and radio publicity, the social worker bears in mind the feeling of rural people toward too much talk. In regions where practically all the people have suffered severe hardships, pathetic case stories are in bad taste. Tragedy and pathos come close to all of them, and they are not accustomed to talking about their own troubles or feelings. Rural people are like the two Englishmen who, in silence, were viewing a sunset in the Alps. Finally one of them said, "Not a bad sunset, that." "No," said the other, "but no need to get so bally sentimental about it."

There is really very little that a rural social worker actually can say in words to get help for tragic cases. Some of us have found the best way to gain the cooperation of a group is to ask some member of it to drive out with her to the home of the particular case. Not a word need be spoken; once the case is seen the neighborly response is immediate, substantial, heartwarming. The technique may not be according to Rule No. 711, but it gets results.

There are times when cases need to be interpreted to the rural community as a whole, but as a rule case committees, as city social workers know them, have not proved successful. The reason for this, it seems to us, is that the community as a whole is in itself a natural case committee by reason of everyone's intimate acquaintance with every one else and with everything that goes on in and around the town. Some of our workers do their best case committee work at women's clubs, sewing circles and card parties. When a group of women meets to sew for missions, or whatever, the history and conduct of some of our problem clients are discussed with a freedom which would startle an orthodox case committee. By being present at some of these gatherings, the social worker can, if she is skilful, drop a word here and there and lead the gossip around to points that she wants to emphasize.

It is generally good strategy for rural social workers to confer with people in the fields or in their homes, rather than to try to get them into town for committee meeting. A man on our staff used to carry his lunch in a paper package when he went into the country on visits. He'd eat while he talked with a farmer in the field, or while the two of them sat and talked on the porch at noontime. The quiet of the leisurely country noon hour is conducive to the discussion of pressing problems with a minimum of word. Here again "jes' settin'" isn't all it seems to be.

Frequently we secure our best cooperation through induction, by personal contacts or friendly services. One of our county directors got an operation for the mother of the town twins by spending the evening in the swing on the mayor's porch, talking town gossip with the mayor's wife to the music of the katydid. Another worker was

over the local newspaper by writing the obituary notices for the editor.

Some of our social workers have cashed in on chance happenings, taken with good will and humor. One of them still laughs about the day when a big burly farmer barged into the office with blood in his eye. He'd come after a work order, and was going to get it or "break every winder and pipe in the d— building!" Wishing to appear at ease until the man had finished his tirade, the worker teetered back in her chair. Zoom! the chair shot out from under her and she folded up between the wall and the desk. The man laughed, and she laughed; and after he had helped her up, they laughed some more. He apologized for scaring her and listened to what she had to say. Since then they've been the best of friends, and the man is now a staunch supporter of the welfare program.

A rural worker must have not only a clear social philosophy and know her social work techniques and programs but, if she is to interpret those techniques and programs and gain support for them, she must be knowledgeable about the physical setting and the state of mind in which they must be rooted. She must know more than a little about plowing, planting and marketing, about the granges, the 4-H clubs, the cooperatives, and the farm labor movements. She must know a combine from a threshing machine, a go-devil from a disc. She must know the life that goes through the barn door as well as what passes through her office.

It is said that when prosperity comes back, it will come through the barn door. Certainly, if rural social work publicity is to succeed, it must approach through the barn door of reality.

In-Service Training for Public Welfare

2. The Hows

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IN the preceding article [see *In-Service Training for Public Welfare—The Whys and Whats*, page 310, *Survey Midmonthly*, October 1938] we looked at the possibilities of in-service training in building up the staff of a public welfare agency, and the type of training-on-the-job most useful to workers at various levels of academic and professional education.

Before going on to discuss the relative merits of various methods of in-service training it is necessary to clarify the relation of in-service training to day-by-day supervision within the agency. Here the most important factor is the view of supervision held by each member of the state field staff and by the supervisors in the local offices. Supervision may mean to these individuals merely the direction of the mechanics of the job, a checking up to see if rules and procedures are properly carried out, doing no more with the staff than to try to fit them into the complicated agency pattern. Such a concept of supervision has no room for the kind of in-service training that has been described. In fact, such a supervisor will have to change his whole concept and practice of supervision. He must first benefit by the type of education and training which is adapted to his own need and his particular job before he can use his supervisory function to stimulate and guide the growth of his staff members.

Supervisors who accept a teaching function and a direct responsibility for the development of their staffs as of the essence of supervision and organize their own work accordingly are already giving in-service training. They focus their supervision upon helping each visitor to develop knowledge and skill, and to attain freedom from the prejudices, conflicts and needs which limit his ability to make effective use of his knowledge.

No matter how much these supervisors are able to give their visitors, they will continue to need and want help themselves—to grow on their jobs, to improve their methods, to profit by the experience of other supervisors in the agency and outside, and to relate their work to the total

function of the agency and to the community. And this additional knowledge and skill in a beneficent, not a vicious, circle will in turn be used by them in the development of their staffs.

This type of supervision is the most important of all the methods which can be used for in-service training. All other methods are either tools of supervision or auxiliary to the supervisory process.

When the many current names of methods (I have recently listed twenty-eight) are sorted out and the methods themselves reduced to their essentials, there seem to be three basic tools of in-service training: individual conferences, groups of various kinds, and written material (typed, mimeographed, printed).

The extent to which these three methods are used and the ways in which they are used should be determined by the subject matter to be taught and by the objectives of the teaching. Certain materials can be handled much better by one method than by another. The accessibility of the supervisor or teacher and of the staff members concerned must also be taken into consideration, as well as the pressures of the day-to-day job.

There is much to be said about the use of individual conferences and reading material, but perhaps it will be more helpful at this point to discuss some of the problems connected with the use of groups, as this method seems to have given rise to more confusion than either of the others.

Groups have been used for in-service training in a great variety of forms. The groups have been large or small; they have been made up of persons of similar background and interest, and of those differing widely in both. Groups have been formal, or informal, meeting occasionally or regularly for discussion or instruction which has been planned with a definite sequence, or to consider only immediate problems. The training period has ranged from less than an hour to a continuous six weeks' institute. The names applied to these groups are legion and seem to have no consistent relation either to form or content. In the