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ABSTRACT

This document presents a method, developed by the Institute for Child Advocacy [ICA], (a community based project which seeks to upgrade the quality of children's services in South Central Los Angeles) of using problem solving with community residents and agencies. This method of problem solving, previously used in a study of children being excluded from school, demonstrated that non-professional workers in a community agency can identify a problem, collect data, decide which are the proper channels through which to seek change and carry the process to completion. The art of problem solving is delineated in specific steps. In order to clarify the procedure, a step by step description of the Institute for Child Advocacy's study on excluded children is provided as an example.
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RESEARCH AS A TOOL IN PROBLEM SOLVING
AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

by

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
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THE INSTITUTE FOR CHILD ADVOCACY

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April, 1976

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April 15, 1976

Dear Fellow Advocate,

At the Institute for Child Advocacy we are continually evaluating our Project's impact. The publication you received was developed in response to specific needs of children in the community. We would appreciate your help in assisting our effort to collect data essential to evaluating this product.

After you have read the enclosed publication, please complete the brief tear cut questionnaire which is attached as the final page. Mail it postpaid to us as soon as possible.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Larryette M. Kyle, M.P.A.
Project Director
Institute for Child Advocacy

LMK/mai

PREFACE

The Institute for Child Advocacy (ICA) is a community based Project which seeks to upgrade the quality of children's services in South Central Los Angeles. The Institute's strategy is to use a community development approach which encourages citizens to act in their own behalf. Efforts are directed at eliminating obstacles which impede optimal development and inhibit growth of today's children.

The community development approach was selected because the target area, bounded by Slauson Avenue (South), Jefferson Boulevard (North), Alameda Street (East), and Figueroa Street (West), is characterized by a lack of adequate resources to meet the needs of the community and fragmentation of existing services. Many service agencies located within the community are unresponsive to the consumers of their service and are institutions which are perceived by residents as bureaucratic outposts of larger institutions controlled somewhere outside the area and having little or no understanding of and relationship to community need.

While the Institute was completing a study on children being excluded from school, we utilized a method of problem solving that we feel could be useful to others who are attempting to establish a foundation for demanding change. This method of problem solving showed that non-professional workers in a community agency can: 1) identify a problem, 2) collect data, 3) marshal forces

to decide the proper channels through which to seek change and
4) carry the process through to completion. Because this method
was so beneficial to the Institute, we felt the need to put to
paper what we had learned, in such a way that community residents
and agencies alike could utilize the same problem solving pro-
cedures in their day-to-day problems. This paper called "Research
As A Tool in Problem Solving at the Community Level" is designed
to eliminate the pervasive feeling that research is too difficult
for non-professionals or for those who have not received training
in research methodologies.

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INTRODUCTION

The problems of today are age old: war, poverty, discrimination, drugs. There has been considerable effort to "do something" about these chronic problems, yet these efforts to "do something" have rarely succeeded. Now more than ever before people are becoming aware of the need for change. But, as yet, no mechanism designed to solve the chronic problems of this nation has seemed to produce long lasting results. Thus, the problems are still here—and staying. Things are changing but often times to the detriment of and without input from those who are affected by those changes. Without this input conditions and problems are misdiagnosed and ill-defined and as a result solutions offered address conditions unrelated to the actual problems and their causes. This can be seen on national, state, and local levels. The effects of this misunderstanding and misdiagnosis of problems can be seen in the now famous "Moynihan Report" (Moynihan, 1965). Using the 1960 population census as his primary source of information, Daniel P. Moynihan, United States Ambassador to the United Nations, prepared a case demonstrating that the "deteriorating Black family" played a major role in the perpetuation of the "Culture of Poverty." He reported significant correlations between the divorce rate of Blacks, the percent of Black children receiving welfare aid, the number of Black children growing up in fatherless homes, the percent of Black "broken

homes," the I.Q. scores, the academic and occupational success, and the rate of delinquency among Blacks.

Although these statistics reflect the reality we see down these "mean ghetto streets," the author misinterpreted them and shifted the responsibility for these statistics from society and onto the Black family. In essence, the Moynihan Report says that the Black family is responsible for these statistics when in actuality it is not. Misguided society proceeds as though Moynihan's is a case in fact and, as a result, the solutions offered to eliminate poverty have been ineffective or implemented in an ineffective manner.

As a people we have become most adept at pointing to problems, yet we have a lot to learn about vital steps that follow identification. From finger pointing and protest to solving a problem is a long and usually complex route.

At the Institute for Child Advocacy we realize that with the many difficulties facing us today we can no longer afford to tread down deadends, detours, and self-created obstacles courses. We can no longer afford to indulge in emotion laden yet ineffective approaches that have hindered our former efforts to reach solutions. Above all, we cannot afford to let ego domination by the few waste the valuable resources of the many. It is time to leave these hinderances behind and use the techniques that are designed to support a common ideology. These techniques also help people to make good use of their time and abilities, and

reach an optimum level of positiveness in obtaining the understanding and support that can make solutions workable.

THE PROBLEM SOLVING ATTITUDE

Problem solving requires more than logic and research methodology. It requires you to be open-minded enough to be able to set aside old ideas and habits without paying a high emotional price. That is, you must be aware of and open to the new rules of the game.

We all have a tendency to reject on the basis of past experiences and encounters. If we don't trust the source we refuse to look at the idea. If we don't like the container we throw away the contents. We locate our enemy, we fight him, and we overlook any use we might make of him. This we no longer can afford to do. We must check thoroughly and list all resources that may be available to us. If possible we must also get information about the enemy and his resources. By doing this we enable ourselves to anticipate impediments and objections to our problem solving methods.

THE NAME OF THE GAME

Day after day we are confronted with problems, and we suffer discomfort if we fail to reach a satisfactory solution. The successful problem solver is one who first understands what his problem is and can anticipate obstacles to solution. Those who don't succeed often times meet their doom, not because a problem is too complex to overcome, but because they failed to identify

it properly... Instead of becoming aware of the problem, they become aware of the difficulty, the pain, and the frustration, and lose contact with their surroundings. Like a prize fighter, they are stunned by a powerful blow and don't know where they are. This suggests the first question we should ask whenever we are confronted with a problem: Where am I?

After Adam ate of the forbidden fruit and opened up the world of problems for mankind, he hid in terror. According to Genesis, God called out, "Adam, where art thou?". Theologians and philosophers have wondered why God, knowing all things, should have to ask. The answer they have given is that God knew where Adam was; God wanted Adam to know.

It is not enough to be aware of a problem, we must know our relationship to that problem: what does it mean to me, who else is involved, and what does it mean to them.

Once we become aware of the problem and our relationship to it, only then are we ready to approach basic steps that must be taken if solutions are to be found.

THE ART OF PROBLEM SOLVING

The Art of Problem Solving involves at least two elements, A) where you are and Z) where you want to be. The task then is to get from point A to point Z. To do this you must get started and you must honestly want the best solution.

STEP I. DEFINE THE PROBLEM

We start by defining our problem. To define your problem effectively, it is useful to keep in mind the meaning of the term "definition." Webster's Dictionary describes it as: "The action or the power of describing, explaining, or making clear."

The definition can also be considered the meaning, the point, the significance, the value, the implications, the effect, the impact and the force. To clearly define a problem one must be able to relate the problematic situation to each of the above. For, the only way to clearly identify and define a problem is to thoroughly investigate and examine it. Examination of a problem situation exposes the true causes. In examination you start with the obvious and probe deeper until you know every little fact about what contributed to the problem. Your investigation must be thorough enough to be conclusive. That is, it must prove something. It must answer the question "what's the trouble." It must go deep enough to describe beyond question, answer all objections, and cover all angles.

STEP II. ANALYZE YOUR PROBLEM SO YOU WILL KNOW WHAT HAPPENED,
WHAT'S HAPPENING, AND WHY

Unless you have thoroughly researched your problem and you are confident that your information is comprehensive and accurate, DON'T ASSUME that you hold the last word. If you are sure that you do know what you're doing back your own judgement to the limit. A formula for confidence in your own judgement is to ask yourself three questions. First, "Do I know what I'm talking about?", Second, "Am I sure my information is correct and complete?", Third, "Is my conclusion based on sound reasoning?" Once you get to this point and have determined that you have the best interpretation of the situation you are well on your way. You will then be able to work toward winning respect for your opinion and support for your cause.

It should be obvious now that the first skills in problem solving demand that a lot of time be spent checking out, finding out, and locating the problem. This means that in order to have satisfying and lasting results, the interest at this point must be in the problem definition rather than the solution.

STEP III. SET-UP YOUR OBJECTIVES AND DON'T GET LOST

Now that you have defined your problem, analyzed your situation and you are determined to work it out, you come up against a big "HOW."

Before you can answer the how, you must see your objective clearly. You must see it first as a whole and then in detail, then each detail must be assembled into the finished result in your mind. When this is done, you can answer the question "HOW" intelligently. The important thing is to recognize your objective and make sure that it relates directly to your problem definition and is in fact your "Where you want to be."

When considering your objectives you must be sure to write down your objectives and separate them into appropriate categories. For each thing that you want to accomplish you must have an outcome objective, one that is measureable, and a process objective which relates more to method. Your outcome objective is your "where I want to be" and your process objective is your "how."

STEP IV. FIND THE MEANS TO REACH YOUR OBJECTIVES

What have you got to work with? By what means do you intend to solve your present problem? A surprising fact about mankind is his totally unexpected array of talent for accomplishing the unexpected. Back in 1904 a Black woman, Mary McLeod Bethune decided to build a school. With only \$1.50 she opened a school in Daytona, Florida which was known as the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute and which grew to become a highly recognized school for girls. That school is now, after amalgamation with Cookman Institute the Bethune-Cookman College.

Like Mary McLeod Bethune, you have within yourself hidden resources which will come to your aid whenever you beckon. Sometimes you don't know your capabilities until you discover them accidentally. At other times you may find yourself preparing for something, just what you don't know, in case you have a chance to use a new skill. But you know what you want to do. What do you have to work with? What hidden talents lie right beside you, ready for you to grasp and use as tools? What kind of crowbar do you have to pry loose the secret to your problem? It is likely that there is something right before you that will provide the means to solve your problem. There is—if only you look for it. So start searching. Find the means to reach your objective.

STEP V. ORGANIZE YOUR DATA

Earlier in this paper it was stated that many attempts at problem solving fail because of misinterpretation of the problem.

It was then recommended that your problem be analyzed and that you write down certain bits of information, as you go along. This gathering and writing down of information related to your problem and its solution is called data collection. Data is information that can be measured by counting, classifying, categorizing or ranking. In essence, data is the information you use that defines your problem, answers your questions and determines your course of action. The best way to collect data is to make notes of everything you do throughout the problem solving procedure. If you have a meeting to discuss the problem make a note of:

1. The date and time of the meeting.
2. Names of persons who attended the meeting.
3. What was discussed in the meeting.
4. Date and time of next meeting.
5. The outcome of the meeting.

Without data you're heading down a deadend street. With your data in order your solution will be close at hand.

STEP VI. PLAN YOUR WORK

Most people can get as far as "I know what I want to do," but often they can't see how to do it. How do you use your idea? Apply the means! It was once said, "You have to plan your work, and then, work your plan."

What do you need in order to work your plan? Do you need an opportunity? Money? Manpower? A lawyer? Do you need research? It is likely you need these and more. Understanding this you put to paper what you have to do to reach your objective. Be specific. Get right down to details. List all approaches.

Use your imagination. Can you visualize anything other than what's directly in front of you? Try everything. List everything possible and seemingly impossible. The number of solutions you can list here depends largely on your imagination and your thoroughness in completing previous steps. Sometimes it is something seemingly trivial that tips the scales in your favor. Very often a serious problem is solved when, while writing this kind of list, some small idea put down more in desperation than in earnest, glows with promise and eventually becomes the choice solution.

RESEARCH

This problem solving method also called research always starts with a question or a problem; a hypothesis. The research method described here consists of a number of closely related activities that continually overlap. These activities are so interrelated

that your thoroughness in handling the first steps may determine the results of the last. There may arise serious complications and difficulties if all steps to problem solving are not completed with thoroughness and facility. Keep in mind that each step in the problem solving process is a prerequisite of later steps.

Now let's see how far you've come in the problem solving venture. You have admitted that you have a problem and have decided to do something about it. You have determined where you are and where you want to be. You have set down to paper every possible solution you can think of—every course of action that will lead to settlement of your problem. You have completed six steps in problem solving:

1. Define your problem.
2. Analyze your problem so you will know:
 - a. What happened.
 - b. What's happening.
 - c. Why.
3. Set-up your objectives and don't get lost.
4. Find the means to reach your objectives.
5. Organize your data.
6. Plan your work.

There's only one thing left for you to do and that brings us to the final step in problem solving:

STEP VII. WORK YOUR PLAN

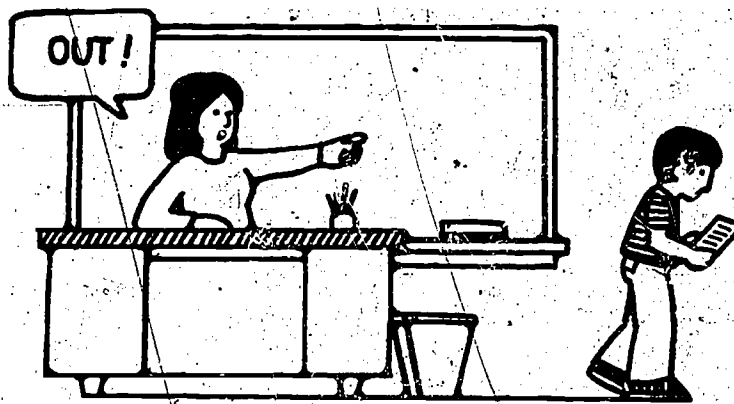
The last step in this problem solving procedure can well be the easiest if you have thoroughly completed previous steps. You have defined your problem and thoroughly analyzed it. You have set-up your objectives and found the means to reach them. You have organized your data and planned your work. To work your plan

you implement your solution. It's not enough to simply reach a solution, you must see that solution in practice. Once you implement your solution, you no longer have that problem. It's time then to move to find a solution to another problem.

THE EXCLUDED CHILD: A CASE FOR CHILD ADVOCACY

The Institute for Child Advocacy is not advocating this problem solving procedure because the literature says it works. On the contrary, ICA is advocating it because our experience has proved this method to be a positively advantageous and effective one.

To give you a clearer picture of how beneficial this procedure can be, we would like you to join us in a step by step example of one of ICA's past experiences utilizing the procedure described in the first part of the paper.



STEP 1: DEFINE THE PROBLEM

When it came to our attention, a problem had already been recognized, three students were not attending school due to some type of exclusion.

NOTE: Oftentimes you the reader will have to recognize the existence of a problem before an attempt can be made toward solution. A good method of doing this is to confront the issue objectively. If there is anything you do not understand, something you're not sure of, or something that just doesn't seem fair...QUESTION IT!

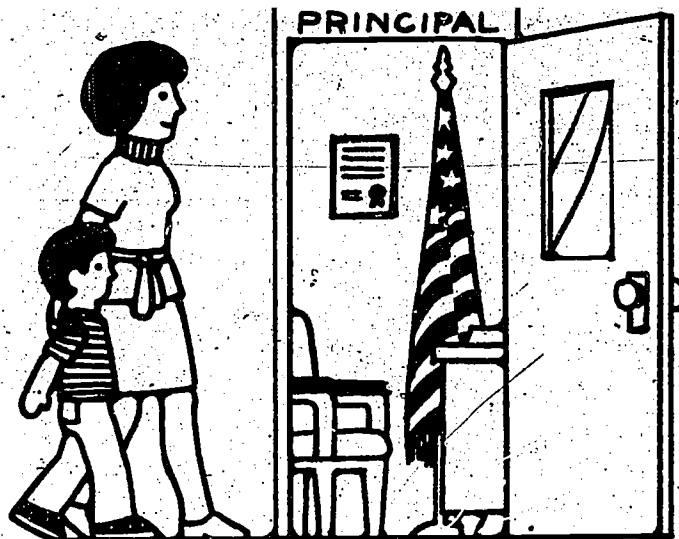
REMEMBER: The only stupid question is the unasked question!

At this point, ICA intervened in an effort to obtain appropriate placement for these three students.

By involving ourselves in this placement process, the Institute became aware of policies and practices of the educational system that appeared to be inadequate and at times unjust.

It occurred to ICA that if these policies and practices could adversely affect these three students, then they could potentially affect a high number of students similarly situated.

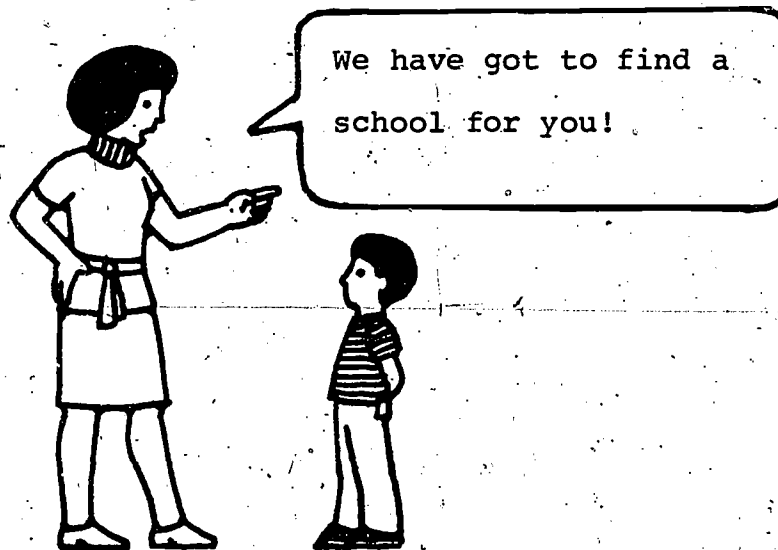
We defined our problem as: "Children being excluded from school for unjust reasons and for indefinite periods of time."



STEP II: ANALYZE YOUR PROBLEM SO YOU WILL KNOW WHAT HAPPENED, WHAT'S HAPPENING, AND WHY

The Institute for Child Advocacy followed the formula for "Confidence in your own judgement" stated earlier, and asked three questions. First, Do We Know What We're Talking About? Yes! In trying to secure placement for three excluded children we learned that some of the policies of the school system were not adequate for meeting the needs of all children. Through further investigation we were able to determine that the practiced procedure for exclusion in the schools was unjust, because it allowed children to be excluded for undetermined lengths of time without being placed. Second, Are We Sure Our Information Is Correct? Yes, because ICA had conducted a thorough investigation to determine exactly what legal rights children were entitled to. The United States Constitution states that children are guaranteed a free public school education. We went a step further to investigate alternative educational placement for children excluded from regular public school. From that investigation we concluded that the school system should be responsible for finding placement for these children. Third,

Were Our Conclusions Based On Sound Reasoning? Yes! It stands to reason that the school system should find an alternate setting since they are the source which determines when a regular public school environment is not suitable for a particular child; not to mention that our educational system is supposed to be in pursuit of the best interests of all children.



STEP III: SET-UP YOUR OBJECTIVE

In setting-up our objectives, we followed the outline stated earlier under STEP III:

Our Problem Is:

Children are being excluded from school for unjust reasons and for undetermined lengths of time.

Our Process Objective Is:

To identify all children excluded from school in the Administrative Area B of the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Our Outcome Objective is:

To provide appropriate educational placement for these excluded children.



STEP IV: FIND THE MEANS TO REACH YOUR OBJECTIVE

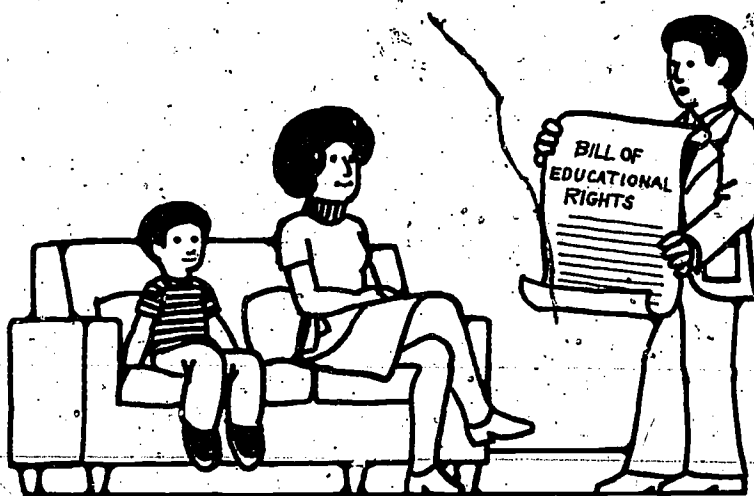
Our job at this step was twofold. Firstly, ICA had to find a means of identifying children in our target who were excluded from school. Since the schools cannot give out this information, we went to a higher authority, the Coordinator of the Administrative Area B. The Coordinator had been so helpful to the Institute in the case of one of the three students originally excluded that we enlisted his resources for pursuits in behalf of other excluded children.

The Coordinator sent letters to all Area B principals, requesting a list of all students excluded from school during the 1972-1973 school term, and asked that they respond within a week. All the principals responded to the request. Letters were then sent to the parents of the excluded students informing them of ICA's interest in their child's educational well-being. Secondly, ICA had to find the means to provide appropriate educational placement for the children that would be identified. To reach this objective it was necessary to obtain as much information as possible about each child's exclusion. To this

end, an interview form was designed to gather information during both the phone contact and the home visit.

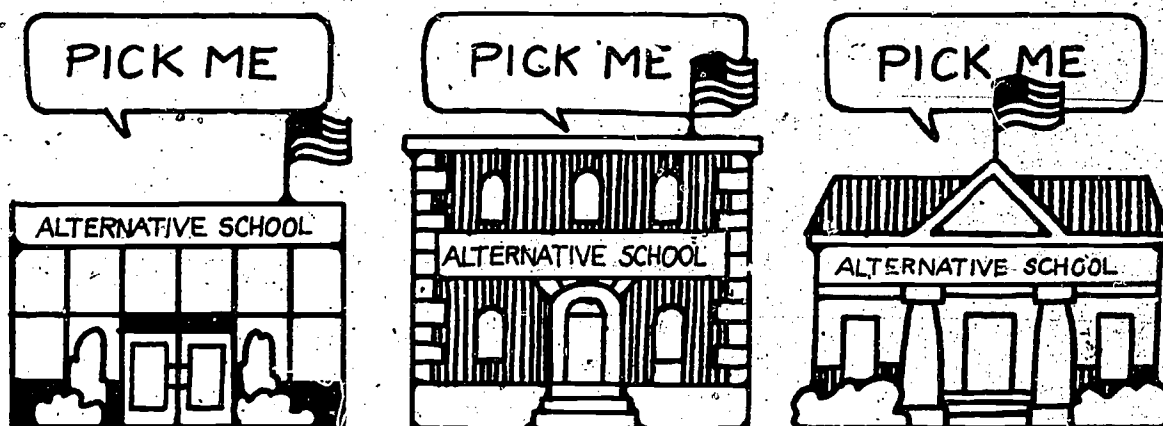
Upon receiving a response from a parent, the staff person arranged a home visit with the parents and the child. Then the staff person arranged conferences for the parents with the school personnel.

The purpose of the conference was to enable the parents to become well informed of their child's status, how and why that status came about, and what, if any action was taken after the exclusion.



STEP V: ORGANIZE YOUR DATA

Keeping in mind the many flaws in the school district's exclusion procedure, an assessment of the data pertaining to every available aspect of each child's exclusion was made. The social family history and the educational evaluations and recommendations provided by the school were cautiously and objectively studied and alternative educational resources were located.



STEP VI: PLAN YOUR WORK

An assessment was made of the educational facility with regard to its ability to meet the individual needs of each excluded child.

Some of the excluded students were not, prior to their exclusion, approved for Sedgewick funds, a funding for private school tuition.* ICA arranged for the appropriate testing for some form of counseling at Central City Community Mental Health Facility to increase the potential for re-enrollment in public school for September, 1973.

*Parents of handicapped youngsters who are in a private school or apply for a private school placement due to lack of an appropriate public school program, are eligible to apply for funds for private school tuition under Education Code 6770-6873.



STEP VII: WORK YOUR PLAN

Upon the final selection of the educational facility best suited to meet the child's and families needs, the Institute began to implement the necessary procedure for enrollment of the child.

In some instances it was necessary to assist in obtaining and completing admission forms. In all instances, the Institute made the initial referral contact with the school and arranged counseling appointments.

Our problem was solved, and yours will be too, if you follow these seven steps to problem solving:

- Step I. Define Your problem
- Step II. Analyze your problem so you will know what happened, what's happening, and why
- Step III. Set-up your objectives
- Step IV. Find the means to reach your objective
- Step V. Organize your data
- Step VI. Plan your work
- Step VII. Work your plan

SOME GENERAL HINTS.

HEALTH

If your problem is related to Health you need to find out:

- Which clinics and hospitals serve your neighborhood.
- Where they are located and how easy or difficult they are to reach by public transportation.
- Are they accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals.
- What kind are they? (public, private, volunteer).
- Is discrimination in any form practiced?
- What kind of consumer complaint mechanism have they established?

WELFARE

If your problem is related to Welfare you need to know that:

- You may apply for aid and it must be acted on promptly (decision must be in writing and reasons given if aid is denied).
- You have a right to a fair hearing if you are dissatisfied with what the Welfare Department decides.
- A social worker, hearing examiner, secretary and sometimes one other county employee are the persons who you will face and who will decide your case at the fair hearing.
- The Welfare Department must respect your rights and your personal dignity, and they must keep any and all information on you confidential, unless you give written consent for release of information.

EDUCATION

If your problem is related to Education you may need to find out:

- Who are the members of the Board of Education?
- What is the age and physical condition of school buildings and grounds?
- Are the schools overcrowded?
- Are there as many special facilities such as science laboratories, school libraries, gymnasiums, and cafeterias in your schools as in schools located in other areas.
- For this information it would be useful to obtain much of this information from students.

CRIME AND DELINQUENCY

If your problem is related to Crime and Delinquency, you should remember that:

When stopped by the police you should:

1. Be cool and calm.
2. Not discuss anything with the police except your name and address; always carry proper identification.
3. Never resist physically. Never curse.
4. Get the policeman's name and badge number. Write the information down.
5. Ask for a search warrant if the police want to search you, your car or your house.
6. Never agree to a search, but don't try to stop the police if they search anyway.
7. Tell the police that you want your lawyer present before any search takes place.

If you are arrested you should:

1. Never struggle or resist arrest.

2. Ask the police what the charges are.
3. Not discuss any details with anyone except your lawyer.
4. Not sign any papers.
5. Be allowed to make two phone calls: one to your family or lawyer, and one to a bailbondsman.
6. Be brought to court not longer than 48 hours after your arrest. (Time spent during the weekend is not included in the 48 hours).

Even for the person who is not directly concerned with issues of police brutality or other "official lawlessness," it is important to know about police practices and how the courts operate.

Arbitrary arrests as well as intentional police harrassment are common.

You will have to get most information about the police from informal sources since little is published. Passing as a criminology or sociology student may yield useful information in the form of written materials or interviews with policemen.

RECREATION

If your problem is related to Recreation you will need to know:

- What hours recreational facilities are open.
- Are they well maintained?
- Are schools used?
- Who are the people of power in recreation?
- Where do you go to create more and/or better recreational facilities.

NOTE: For more information in all these areas refer to the Institute for Child Advocacy Resource Manual.

FOR INFORMATION

1. Most states and the federal government have laws requiring that public documents have to be open for public inspection. These are usually called "Public Information," "Right to Know" or "Freedom of Information" laws. But just because you have a legal right to information this does not mean that you will be able to get it. If a government official refuses to release data you can:
 1. Ask to see his supervisor.
 2. Try to get someone with better connections to get you what you want.
 3. Fight it out in court and/or hold a demonstration if you have determined that this will be worth your while.

You can also obtain many federal documents and publications fast and free by writing to your Congressman or Senator, or directly to the agency or congressional committee involved.

2. You should be careful to consider how you want to approach different sources for information. In a library it is unnecessary to identify yourself, but in other cases you may need a "cover" in order to obtain cooperation. The most effective and universal "cover" is to pose as a student doing a term paper or thesis. If you decide to adopt this identity make sure you act and dress the role.
3. When you're trying to get information from someone it's a good idea to ask general and open ended questions first and then casually move into your primary area of concern. Try not to ask questions that can be answered with a yes or no and you might discover more than you had anticipated.
4. It is very important that you read at least one local newspaper regularly. The newspaper will keep you up to date on local issues, people in the news, and important upcoming meetings and events.

It's a good idea to keep your own file of newspaper clippings for reference. If possible, use the newspaper's own library and clipping file. It can be an invaluable source of history and background on almost any individual, issue, or institution. If you cannot gain access, a sympathetic newspaper reporter may be able to check things out for you.

5. The main branch of the public library is likely to have a special collection of pictures, books, and newspaper clippings about your city. The librarian can assist you in getting the information you are looking for.

The public library is also the place to check for recent books about your city (e.g., Urban renewal, education, politics, society, etc.). They are frequently written by journalists, political scientists or "insiders" and may contain interesting tidbits not found elsewhere.

6. Large colleges, universities and associated research institutes have good libraries containing books, pamphlets, doctoral dissertations, reference works, and reports about your city and state as well as background information on specific issues.
7. That common household item, the telephone book should not be overlooked as a research tool. It's the first place you should look for addresses and phone numbers. For similar but more extensive data consult Polk's City Directory. There should be an up to date one in your city's main library. This directory commonly lists the name, address, phone number and occupation (sometimes even place of employment) of almost every family, business and organization in the city, arranged by name, address and phone number.
8. Sympathetic professionals can be useful as sources of information, money, or services. A lawyer can tell you about the courts, doctors about hospitals, social workers about the welfare department, etc.

One talkative guy with "inside" information can be as valuable as any book, report, or document. Newspaper reporters, labor leaders, present or past politicians and government employees can provide you with important leads and a fairly accurate over-all view of what's happening.

9. For first hand knowledge of the ways in which the forces of authority and power oppress and exploit the people are unquestionably your best source.

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RESEARCH AS A TOOL IN PROBLEM SOLVING AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

In an effort to evaluate our publication and to assist us in program planning, we would greatly appreciate your taking a few minutes to respond to this questionnaire. Please complete (name optional) remove, and mail postpaid to us.

1. What is your response to the study as a whole?
____ Very Positive ____ Positive ____ Neutral ____ Negative ____ Very Negative
2. Do you find the study useful or informative? Yes ____ No ____
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