

BROTHERHOOD OF ST. LAURENCE
67 BRUNSWICK STREET, FITZROY 3065
AUSTRALIA

BROTHERHOOD OF ST. LAURENCE

CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH
CENTRE

REPORT ON FIVE YEAR PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT

NOVEMBER, 1962.

1962.1

INTRODUCTION

In this report it is intended to review the work being done at present, make certain recommendations and where necessary provide historical background.

Report will be in seven sections as follows:-

SECTION 1	Long Term Aims	1	(a) Youth Work (b) School-age groups (c) Family Centre
SECTION 2		2 & 3	Community Involvement
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Items that were listed under short term aims will be covered in the above.

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SECTION 1 : YOUTH WORK

Brief History.

In 1933 Brother Wilson founded a Brotherhood Youth Welfare Department at the same time as the Brunswick Street property was purchased.

In 1937 a hostel for boys was opened with business and professional men forming a Welfare of Youth Crusade. In 1939 a probation officer was appointed to work with boys appearing before the Courts.

In 1950 hostel accommodation was closed and alterations made in order to provide club facilities catering for children of all ages. Due to a shortage of space, teenagers were not able to have a place of their own to meet but rather mixed with the younger children.

In 1955 a small room was made available for the teenage group with an average of twenty attending regularly. At this time discussion groups, outings and films were popular with a number of girls doing dressmaking and art work. Two girls were fully trained in dressmaking and another girl was recommended and accepted by the Prahran Technical School to do an art course. Two boys completed Senior Leaders' courses and trained as film projector operators at the Royal Melbourne Technical School. A number of members were encouraged and helped with night school work.

Both the increase in numbers and interest of members made it necessary to provide additional space for this group and the large room on the west side of the old building was made available. This was the only large room in the Centre and was very much used by the teenagers and other groups; 95% of the work of altering and renovating this part of the building was carried out by club members.

The main difficulty at this time was that there was still a wide age range using the same facilities with none wanting to take the responsibility for their care and maintenance. Another group could always be blamed if damage was done. Added to this was the difficulty of finding suitable leaders for this group, with very few members showing leadership potential.

With the opening of the new building in May 1959 the youth section expanded, taking in the two rooms on the east side of the old building. Members of our Club combined with a Melbourne Apex Service group to remove the wall between the two rooms, instal a coffee bar and renovate the original room on the west side.

Extensions resulted in an increase in membership from 10 to 20. A stronger group spirit was soon evident and feeling of belonging. Having worked to provide the additional facilities, the majority of the members were careful in the way they used the section which they regarded very much as their own. However, this never meant that committees had an easy time getting the place cleaned up at the close of each night. This section was then meeting as follows:-

Monday and Wednesday - Boys
Tuesday and Thursday - Girls

with mixed nights as arranged.

Suggestions that permanent mixed groups be scheduled were not favourably received. For a period of fifteen months the coffee bar and table tennis room were opened - this arrangement was very popular but had to be discontinued due to lack of staff. At this time the club had a management committee consisting of president, secretary, treasurer and two other members.

The main difficulty in operating was that up until 9 p.m. the junior and senior groups were using the new building and although at first youth club members were permitted to move into this section to observe activities going on, difficulties resulted and limits had to be imposed. Often by the time the young groups had vacated the new section, the popular roof area was then of little interest. Quite a number would come and go after spending an hour or so listening to records or just talking.

Although additional space had resulted from the erection of the new building, it could not be said that individual members were deriving a great deal of satisfaction from attending club but were coming for lack of anything else to do. This situation was true in varying degrees in all age groups, particularly in the after-school session where numbers were large and consistent and adequate leadership a constant problem.

The work being done by the N.S.W. Library and Crafts Movement came to our notice and to gain a firsthand knowledge of their programme two of our leaders went to Sydney to spend time with their director and see four of the creative leisure centres. It was soon obvious that with a wide variety of materials available and adequate facilities, children of varying ages were absorbed in creative work with a minimum amount of supervision. Discipline was not a problem as members set their own standard with the older children dealing with situations as they arose.

At the Easter staff conference in 1961 a verbal report on the Five Year Plan was given with a recommendation that every effort should be made to establish a play area at Fitzroy, thinking at that time mainly of the needs of the younger children. The visit to Sydney later in the year highlighted this and also the necessity of providing an under-cover area where creative activities could be introduced to all children of school age.

Proposals to acquire land adjacent to the Brotherhood were considered by the Board so that necessary developments could take place as well as provide for possible expansion of B.S.L. work at Fitzroy.

The school holiday period in May of this year was used to try out the first section of the creative leisure centre. This was most successful with the staff recommending that this section continue to cater for all children from 5 to 12 years each afternoon during the week. This decision meant that the upstairs section of the new building would be available on certain nights for the exclusive use of the group.

Due to a change in staffing of the centre the youth club was meeting only on Thursday evenings. The Management Committee (elected by Club members) was given the opportunity of recommending how they would like to use the facilities and at what time. Subsequent to this the club was opened on Tuesdays for mixed activities with a regular Friday night dance. Mondays and Wednesdays were available for band practice, committee meetings and small groups.

In July 1960 a full-time Social Worker was made available to the Children's and Youth Centre from the Social Service Bureau. Her work was concerned mainly with the junior-senior club members and involved home visits, the preparation of case histories, discussion with leaders, some Court reports and assistance with camp referrals and planning. The social worker was also available in a consultative capacity.

This position was recommended in the Five Year Plan and although it was filled for only twelve months, the contribution made by the social worker proved invaluable. From July 1961 the Social Service Bureau staff have accepted any referrals in relation to the social problems experienced by club members.

Aims

The majority of youth clubs provide merely recreational facilities, whereas we are also endeavouring to help with personality and emotional problems, employment needs and matters associated with varying degrees of anti-social and illegal acts. A large percentage of our members would be unacceptable to other known youth clubs.

The immediate aim is to gear the programme and facilities of the club to the needs of those attending with the ultimate purpose of enabling each individual to attain happiness and satisfaction in living.

Working with Individual Members

The following are some examples that suggest the importance the club assumes for members of this group and hence the necessity of a flexible approach and selected leadership.

"K. was born in the local area, a member of a large family. Most of his early life was spent in institutions, the B.S.L. being involved in all placements and contact with the family. From the age of 14 his behaviour problems became more acute and he was sent to a mental hospital. Later followed a period when trial leave conditions were broken, resulting finally in a period in the community under supervision of his mother. Periodic outbreaks of larceny and violent verbal attacks on members of the family were often followed by damage to the home and threats to kill his parents. Youth workers have been constantly called upon to reason with K. and assist the police during these violent outbursts. Now 24, this young man appears to have very little future; however, over the years he has never caused any disturbance at the club, in fact it has provided a respite for him from the tensions within a sub-standard home in which he lives. It has also provided an outlet for his artistic abilities and desire for friendship and interest in helping younger children."

"E. was brought up in the local area and came under special notice when in the junior boys' section. During a film screening he asked to talk privately with the leader in charge and revealed that he and his brother were too frightened to go home as their father had locked himself in the house after causing injury to E's, younger brother. Over the years attendance at club and annual holiday camps have been highlights in E's, life. Due to the father's excessive drinking the mother moved, taking the children with her. Contact with E. was lost for some time until the mother formed an illicit relationship. Police action followed E. sleeping in an empty house and he asked the authorities to contact us. A try-out period back in the home was not successful - this was followed by a time in this area with a family associated with the club. Difficulties experienced in adjusting to this new life were many, and considerable time was spent by the social worker and youth leader involved."

"A more recent instance concerns two members of the club. A. is a lad of 14 years and sister K. is 15. Both these members were regarded as reliable and stable members although it was recognised that there were certain difficulties in the home mainly due to the father's attitude and way of life. A. and K. became very concerned about their father's state of health earlier this year. Recently he was admitted to hospital for an operation. On the same day the mother unexpectedly took ill and was likewise admitted to St. Vincent's; her condition deteriorated rapidly and some weeks later the children were informed that she would not live. During this period club members and leaders endeavoured to give every support to both parents and K. and A. As the father was unable to attend the funeral, a leader was with him at this time with representatives of the club attending the service. It was foreseen that there would be many difficulties due to the father's restrictive attitude, indifferent health and gross self pity. Immediate work with this family involves regular contact with the Mission Sisters (K. is being prepared for confirmation) and with the City Newsboys Club where A. has been receiving wrestling instruction. Regular visits to the home with a view to building up a good relationship with the father are an essential part of the club work."

These instances are not exceptional. Almost every club member is facing problems of adjustment, which are heightened by environmental factors and family breakdown.

Present Staffing and Availability of Centre

Due to the sharp increase in membership and extended hours the present staff is unable to meet the demands being made. At present an average of 40 are attending on Tuesday nights with only three regular leaders available (2 staff, 1 voluntary). The voluntary leader provides an essential continuity at the door, remaining on duty to collect fees from 7.30 till 8.45 p.m. During this time valuable contact is made with members and necessary club records are kept up-to-date.

At 8.45 p.m. one staff leader takes a group of 8 to 9 to St. Luke's Hall for basketball practice and is assisted by an outside coach. Prior to their leaving this group usually get together to discuss relevant matters and the leader's time is fully occupied with them and/or members of the programme committee.

From 9 o'clock onwards members remaining at Club like to go into the hall for rock'n'roll or use the milk bar or coffee bar-T.V. facilities. The need for specialist leaders is from 7.30 to 9 p.m. when members are in a more receptive frame of mind. The basketballers have requested an extra night for practice and social matches, and Wednesday has been set aside for this purpose.

Members of the band find it difficult to practice within the homes they come from and request the use of a room either on Monday or Wednesday nights.

Friday night has been a major undertaking with minimum attendances of 60 and maximum of 130. There have only been two regular male leaders present with other voluntary staff as available. Of twelve or so young men who have offered to help only two are able to come on a regular basis.

Sunday evening at 7.30 a devotional service is held in the Chapel and it has been decided to have a known staff member leading this until it becomes an established part of club life. Likewise with the discussion group which follows, outside leaders will only be invited twice a month. This additional function has already suggested many avenues of personal and group needs but these cannot be followed up with the present staffing.

A group of girls from a local factory have been invited to use the clubrooms on Wednesdays at lunch time - this no doubt could be extended and provide a good contact point as we seek to balance the numbers attending this section of the club.

Over the past months the clubrooms have been used on five nights of the week and most Saturdays for boys working on renovations and extensions to the sound system and helping with the cleaning up of properties 73/75 Brunswick St. Two full day outings have also been arranged, one a working effort at Carrum Downs, the other a trip to the snow. B.S.L. cars are cleaned on Saturday mornings by a member of this group.

Development of Work During 1962

The Club reopened in February this year after being closed for four months. This was brought about by a number of factors and took place only after careful thought and frank discussion with members of this group. Strong pressures were being exerted by certain members at this time and a very unhealthy attitude was developing, the non-payment of fees being one symptom.

Various members on returning this year said they believed the closing of the club was the best thing that could have happened as it made them realise more than ever that it was over to them to work together to build a good club.

Discussions took place at this time regarding the method of operation and it was decided not to have a president, secretary/treasurer and two members forming a committee, but to try three committees with quite a few more members being involved. Members of the smaller committees found themselves in a difficult position at times with few being able to stand up to pressures when away from the club.

The three committees decided upon were - Management, Entertainment and Industries. This new set-up involved fifteen, with a convenor responsible for meetings and one staff leader available as and when required. During the early part of the year committees came together for a meal and went to separate rooms for discussion and planning, returning as a group to share relevant matters. This meeting was arranged on a non-club night, was well attended, and was no doubt an improvement on the former method of involving the members. The breakdown in this came with the leaders being unable to be available on a regular basis due to other commitments and with one leader finding the pressure of working at the Salvage Division during the day very demanding. These meetings were only successful when thought could be given beforehand and satisfactory arrangements for a meal could be worked out by the members in consultation with a leader. The committees desired to meet once a fortnight with a general meeting of the whole club every six weeks.

For the past few months the industries and entertainment committees have been meeting only spasmodically and due to personal difficulties of one of the members and the unsuitability of another, the management committee has been non-operative for some time.

In spite of the lack of opportunity for discussion and planning, the industries and entertainment committees helped greatly in the running of the club but were not being greatly helped to overcome difficulties as they arose and thus strengthen as a group and as individuals.

During this year there has been a much healthier attitude by members in regard to responsibilities of membership and an interest in the club paying its own way rather than everything being "on the Brotherhood" - an attitude which comes through particularly from those whose families have fostered this within the home.

The opening of the new section for the younger children provided a great challenge to the youth group. They were told that additional space could be made available to them on the condition that it was well used, also that an extension of hours was possible. The committees were given a month in which to discuss this with the membership and to report their findings.

The Industries Committee requested the library for a printing and publishing room, the store and part of the craft room for a milk bar-canteen. The Entertainment committee requested use of the old office as a meeting/cloak room and the heavy store for equipment not being used constantly in the radio and projection room.

The committees reported that they would like to use the facilities as often as possible but realised this had to be arranged to suit the 12-14 years group and the availability of staff. A Tuesday night mixed club and a Friday night dance was accepted as the best that could be provided until the staff increased.

In a relatively short time the Industries Committee has accomplished quite a lot. The members commenced selling malted milk, without ice cream, and Coca-Cola chilled by crushed ice. They soon realised that this was costing money or sales, and so they discussed the possibility of having a cooler installed for the drinks and a refrigerator for bulk and other ice cream. These two machines cost them £24 a year in rental - this will be met by profits made and to date one Coca-Cola film show has been arranged raising £5 to help offset this annual expense.

The printing room was set up and a monthly paper, "Teen Topics," produced. The Gestetner Company made available a member of their staff to instruct in the use of lettering guides and other aids. A tracing machine was loaned and later one member made an identical unit out of plywood scraps (an £18 machine was made for a total cost of 5/-.)

The Gestetner Company showed further interest by donating an electric duplicator, valued at £120. This section is also equipped with a good range of lettering guides and shading plates.

A limited amount of outside work has been done by this committee and it is hoped that other members may be able to operate the machine so as to guarantee a quick service for outside work. The committee has discussed the possibility of selling shares in this industry in order to have funds on hand to get the typing done and to provide the stocks required for the duplicating service. A past voluntary leader is interested in helping to follow up this suggestion with the committee, and to guide them in the preparation of a report which will detail the scheme.

The Entertainment committee has been made up largely of members of the band - their main interest being in their instruments and the rock'n'roll dances. It has been necessary for the leader to remind the group constantly of the need for overall planning with a comprehensive programme. There is no doubt that quite a lot more could have been accomplished had the leader been able to spend more time talking with individual members and with the committee as a whole.

October was set for the annual general meeting and beforehand some discussion took place as to the future committee procedure and duration of time members would hold office. It was decided to have only two committees - namely, programme (taking in management and entertainment) and industries. Elections would be held twice a year, the first as soon as possible after Easter and the second in October.

The rapid increase in membership has made the task of the committees very difficult, particularly on Friday nights when a proportion of non-club members are admitted. Sales from the coffee and milk bars range from £5 to £7, which indicates the need to provide adequate stocks and committee members to take a turn at serving - the whole tempo of the dance depending on adequate staffing in this and other areas.

Two committee members were given the opportunity of doing a leadership training course with the Victorian Association of Youth Clubs, the registration and half the camping fees being met by the Brotherhood. Both members received good reports for work done during the first weekend and are obviously keen to further their knowledge in this field.

On Sunday 5th August members of the three committees were invited to the club for supper and asked to indicate their feelings regarding the club programme, which till then had not provided directly for the spiritual needs of the members. The group was left by themselves to talk freely, later reporting their views and recommendations to the leaders present. Very helpful comments were made with warnings given as to the possible effect, if members thought they were being compelled to go to church. After further discussion it was agreed to hold a devotional service in the Chapel each Sunday night at 7.30 to be followed immediately by a discussion in the coffee lounge and supper. Club members were to be asked for topics they would like discussed and arrangements would be made to have outside people come and lead the discussions each alternate week.

It is felt that this is a most important decision as far as the club members and staff are concerned. From time to time individuals indicate that they need help as they think about the meaning of life and matters which affect them personally. We have in the past felt at a loss to meet this need as well as to provide an opportunity of talking directly of the principles on which the organisation is built, of our faith and trust in God.

In the short time that the Sunday evening programme has been operating two things have been clearly seen. Firstly, there is an obvious need for spiritual help and secondly, careful planning, preparation and follow up will be essential.

Immediate Needs and Future Development

The immediate needs on the activities side are governed by the fact that the club is in the main forming natural interest groups, i.e. radio and electronics, men's and women's basketball, band and table tennis players. In order to cater adequately for these groups, seven leaders are required.

Before we set about recruiting new leaders the overall paid staff needs to be adequate otherwise a close team spirit will not be possible, groups will not function effectively and committees will cease to operate in a way that will influence the group and have a beneficial effect on the individuals concerned.

Again it is stressed that we are working with young persons with many personal problems and because of this involvement of time during non-club hours is essential. It is also significant that this work is carried on as part of a total service to this community and therefore consultation and sharing with other members of the B.S.L. staff is a part of the day-to-day commitments.

In terms of personnel, our needs are as follows:-

Administrative. A person responsible for the overall staffing and supervision of this section, the recruiting of leaders as required and planning of in-service training. The latter needs time for individual discussion, group sessions and conference with all other workers in the leisure centre.

Regular leaders' bulletins, library facilities and opportunities to evaluate the work being done are all essential aspects; likewise research into methods used by similar agencies both locally and overseas.

Regular contact with club activities with involvement in a particular group activity. Personal counselling and visits to institutions as required.

Contact with local churches, employment service and police with constant community contact so as to have a knowledge of environmental factors and pressures.

The preparation of Board reports and other material as required from time to time and attendance at staff and sub-committee meetings.

Leader-in-Charge

This full time position requires the services of a person to be responsible for the day to day planning of activities working closely with members of the programme committee. This work involves close liaison with all activities' leaders and adequate time for preparation work.

Continuity of involvement results in requests from club members in regard to employment and other personal needs. The leader needs to be sensitive to the concerns of others who are not able to approach those likely to be of help.

Representation at Court in certain circumstances is an important part of the work, to which is added the preparation of relevant written material, discussion with the social worker, other leaders, home visits and follow-up work.

A certain amount of community contact and opportunity to meet other professional workers (Victorian Institute of Youth Leaders).

Monthly report to be written and regular sub-committee meetings attended.

All arrangements necessary to enable weekend activity to take place whether it be camping for small groups or day outings, working bees, etc.

Activities Leaders

As has been indicated seven part-time leaders are required immediately in order to meet the needs of existing interest groups. In the past, we have relied upon voluntary people to take particular activities but this has very much limited the work that we have been able to do. The majority of volunteers have no particular skills and are not always able to come on a regular basis.

The filling of vacancies should, where possible, be arranged on a voluntary basis, but failing this the payment of a fee should be made. In making this recommendation the capacity of the members to contribute additional money for special activities is taken into account.

The future development of the youth work requires very careful consideration. Our present and, to a greater degree, our future work must be seen as a part of the total service being offered to this community. The opening of the downstairs creative leisure centre has had an effect on what is being done in the teenage centre, at this point mainly the releasing of a greater area and facilities.

The steady increase in numbers has indicated the need to provide a meeting place and the keen participation on the part of many attending is most encouraging. The aspect that is important to consider is - how does this section link with that catering for the younger children? What will be the future needs of those coming through to the youth section? In what ways can our planning of additional properties overcome existing and future problems? What is a suitable title to describe the overall work being done?

All staff involved need to have the opportunity of discussing freely their thoughts in regard to the matters mentioned, and of working within the framework of the Fitzroy planning committee.

GENERAL:

Meals. Over a long period of time difficulty has been experienced in regard to meals, both for paid and voluntary staff. Quite an amount of time can be wasted here and, in some cases, present a financial burden.

The City Newsboys' Club have for a long time provided an evening meal for all leaders. In doing this they have enabled the voluntary and paid staff to meet together prior to the commencement of activities. Two of our leaders have discussed this service with the Newsboys staff and meet with them at the meal table. They believe that the cost involved is very low in relationship to the return gained by having a more effective and closely knit team of leaders.

It is recommended that a meal be available to staff and voluntary workers each evening as required at a cost of 2/-. If possible the services of a pensioner to be obtained so as to keep preparation costs to a minimum.

Transport. The youth group has had the opportunity of a number of outings of an evening and weekends. On numerous occasions the Salvage Division has responded to appeals to help with transport. However, this is often at great inconvenience to them and presents difficulties in regard to advance planning of functions.

A 1940 Willys car was given for the purpose of enabling members to get out of the inner area but this vehicle is no longer safe at speeds over 35 mph, and is therefore very limited in its use. With the formation of a basketball team and invitations to play social matches at other clubs, the need for having a suitable waggon of our own becomes more urgent. This matter is at present being discussed by the Industries Committee and it is their intention to submit a report as to the finance of such a vehicle.