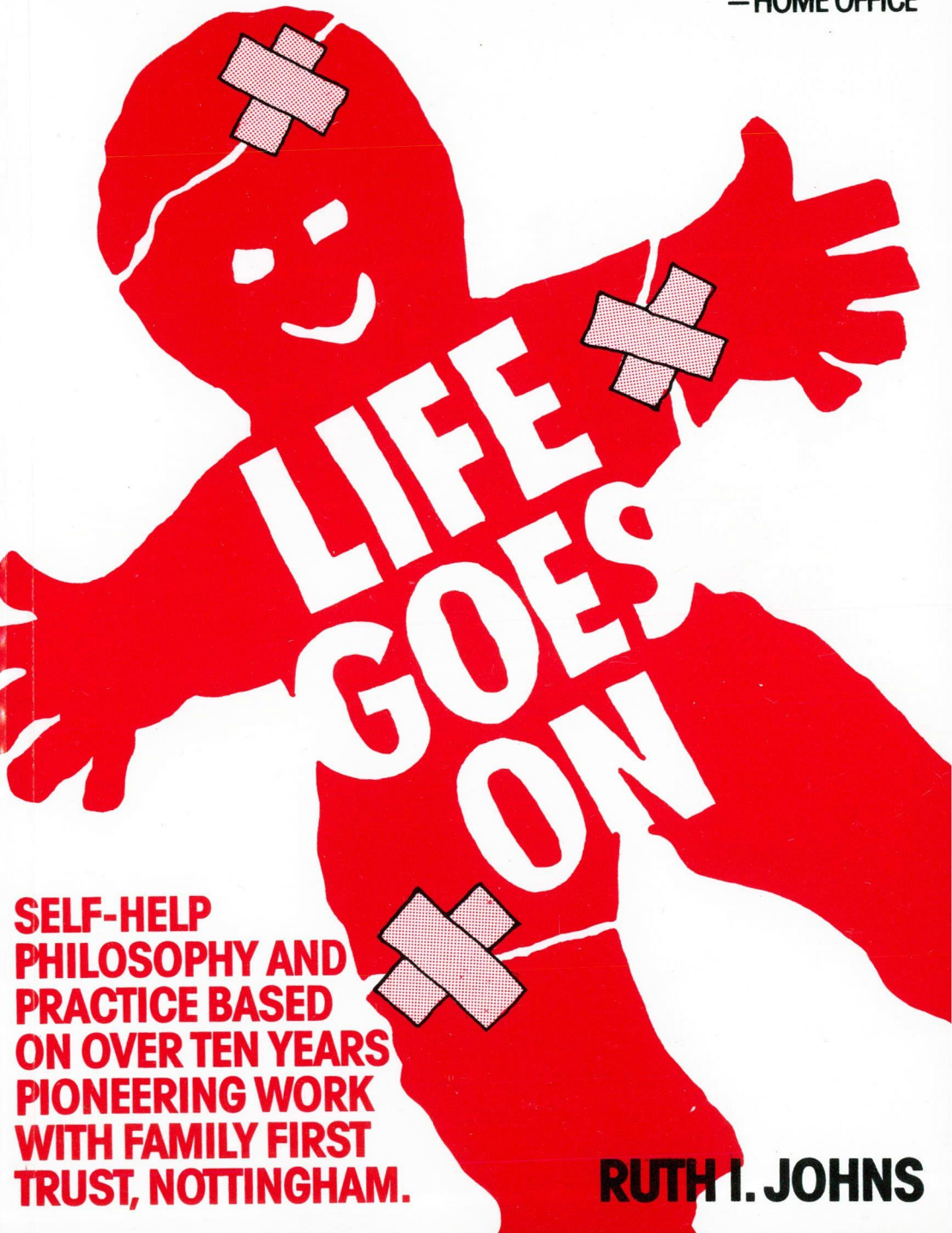
"Your project is a revolutionary idea."
—HOME OFFICE



SELF-HELP PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE BASED ON OVER TEN YEARS PIONEERING WORK WITH FAMILY FIRST TRUST, NOTTINGHAM.

RUTH I. JOHNS

LIFE GOES ON

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To Martin, Naomi and Neil

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruth I. Johns spent the first five years of her working life in journalism. Included in her varied career have been two years as an Import/Export Manager for Debenhams.

An early exponent of parents' self-help, she ran a registered playgroup when her three children were young. She was a founder member of the National Pre-School Playgroups Association, and was a practical campaigner for a humane vision of town planning in relation to high rise living and the then fashionable and indiscriminate demolition of urban communities in the name of "clearance".

In 1965, Ruth Johns founded the Family First Trust, in Nottingham, a self-help Housing Association and community organisation which inspired self-help projects in other areas of the UK and some overseas. This book is the result of her experiences during the ten and a half years she directed the Trust. During this period she also lived in one of the Trust's projects, through which she offered a pioneer approach to non-institutional accommodation for young mothers traditionally placed in Mother and Baby Homes.

In 1976, Ruth Johns became Director of the business sponsored Action Resource Centre (ARC) and developed this organisation from its post experimental phase to that of a highly successful catalyst in helping to develop self-help employment initiatives in local communities in the UK.

Ruth Johns now works as an independent adviser on self-help, and is a writer and publisher. She has contributed to a wide number of magazines and newspapers in the UK and in America.

Her discussion paper "Work – A Natural Responsibility?" (1980) is available from Action Resource Centre, Henrietta House, 9, Henrietta Place, London, W1M 9AG. £2.50 post free.

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PREFACE

When I started the Family First Trust in Nottingham in 1965, I had no idea its influence would reach out as far as it has, though I had a clear determination that it would be a local, small, self-help venture.

My thanks to all who have directly or indirectly helped in this book: that includes all who have played any part in the Family First story in its formative years. Some have come and gone. Not a few have taken Family First ideas into their future lives and jobs. Some invested a sizeable chunk of their life into Family First; like Muriel Sutherland, who was my able right hander for the first seven years. Their sustained efforts and experience – and their personal interest – have been essential to Family First.

Some observers, professionals and Politicians criticised constructively and prompted progress; others criticised destructively and made us more determined to achieve results. Occasionally came a measure of practical help which surpassed our hopes: like the gift of £54,000, to enable a housing scheme to get launched, from a donor who has always insisted on anonymity.

The Gulbenkian Foundation made it possible for this book to get written by meeting the expenses incurred. I could not have written it at the time when I did without this help. The Management Committee of Family First Trust gave me every encouragement and allowed me a day a week for eight months from my normal duties as Director.

If, before I started this book, I had known that even before it was finally typed, we would have moved to London to find my children launched in new educational directions and myself in a new job, I would have shirked the task. I can only express my warmest thanks to friends and colleagues who urged me forward into putting down some of my thoughts which they felt had relevance to today's world.

Though much of what is said in this book implies criticism of the 'helping systems' it is never intended to attack individuals, many of whom are aware of their difficult situation. It is perhaps ironical – but also significant – that the professionals, whose jobs are most in debate, include in their ranks those who have pressed me hardest to put pen to paper.

This book is a personal summary of ideas about "the human condition" drawing heavily on over ten years practical experience of working and living in an environment in which passionate belief in self-

help was the prime reason for never accepting that a new "client" referred for help was beyond a state of personal responsibility – even if her/his records over many years said so.

Although Nottingham's Local Authority features in illustrations, it would be grossly unfair to suggest or assume that this city is any more or less progressive than others. Readers who live in other locations and who are in any way linked with any part of the 'helping systems' will inject their own illustrative material as they read on: mine is mainly drawn from Nottingham and my involvement in Family First.

Thanks to Susan Pearson and Pat Baer for typing the MSS, to my mother for helping to correct the script; and to my children,Martin, Naomi and Neil, who shared the domestic hazards of a more than usually fast moving year (with doses of 'A' and 'O' Levels for good measure). Without them there would have been no Family First Trust. The future is theirs; their future is much more secure than it might have been if Family First had not existed. That, luckily, is also true for hundreds of other young people. I will remember Family First and all who have been part of it not only with great and lasting affection but also much gratitude.

RUTH I. JOHNS
1976

It is significant that although this book was written in 1975/76, it is not published until 1982. It has created considerable interest and been accepted by two publishers and then turned down because it was not thought to be of popular enough interest to attract high sales and because I refused to re-write my text along the lines of presenting an a.b.c. of how to run a helping agency. I don't believe it helps the right people to offer such blueprints – I want only to share my ideas and maybe, therefore, to help people to have confidence to find their own practical solutions in self-help.

Although some of the illustrative material is now historic, its poignancy and relevance is still valid and, therefore, I have not substituted it with illustrative material relating to my later work, which has continued to develop practical self-help, more particularly relating to the need to understand and develop new attitudes to and patterns of work in a post-industrial society. I have written about this elsewhere.

I have been told by publishers that this book is "almost too Political" which is more I feel a comment about the organisation of our present society than an objective comment about the book. I detest the trend to bend our social systems according to Political dogma rather than according to what suits people, and I believe this book to be a statement about people's needs not Politics. Some people will always, of course, take material out of context to suit their dogmatic beliefs rather than to open their minds. One of my remaining ambitions is to be able to write and publish more material which accurately relates practical achieve-

ments which enable dignity of living and of life. These achievements are often made in local communities by unpretentious people who offer a more positive view of progress than do many of our current institutional leaders.

RUTH I. JOHNS
1981

PART I

INTRODUCTION

This book will not appeal to those who are looking for a magical blueprint of how to organise self-help organisations. It will not provide neatly documented statistics nor precise conclusions.

It will, I hope, lead to some questions being asked by students and workers in the 'helping' professions who are not quite sure of their sense of direction, and who instinctively mistrust much of what they are currently being taught about their supposed "roles". I hope it will encourage laymen (you and me and the people next door) to see that they have – if they accept it – the prime role in deciding what kind of a society we live in and strive for. I hope it may encourage some who have genuine needs to feel that their life is more in their own control. It may encourage some, who assume they have needs which ought to be met as "of right", to consider or re-consider the value of self-help.

Because the Family First Trust, in Nottingham, offered a self-help practical approach to solving problems, it rapidly became a model which groups from other areas wanted to copy. In vain did any of them try to encourage Family First to grow very big, but I spent time and energy assisting in the birth stages of local community housing schemes, from Darlington to Melbourne (Australia).

When a group of people decide they want to tackle a particular social problem (like housing for young lone parents) their questions fall into two main areas. Firstly, there is all the factual, specialised and technical information which is needed if a project is to be well planned, well executed and, once established, well run. Although acquiring the knowledge is a formibable task, it is a logical one and it needs time, energy, a modicum of intelligence plus a lot of initiative and perseverance to locate the appropriate specialists and documentation. There is no great mystique, for example, about building regulations. But, in order to comply with them creatively, you need to have an architect who can interpret the aims of the project so the way a building is planned within the statutory regulations does not inhibit its objectives. Regulations have to be observed but must never be the dominating factor unless you want a building in which people feel processed.

Secondly, there is the far less tangible area which can be called "feel for the project." Having decided what are its basic aims in human terms and its basic philosophies, there is a vital need to clarify how these will be implemented so that day to day progress can flexibly reflect the agreed

aims and philosophies, and not evolve into a cosy bureaucratic minefield. Because of the fear of being unsuccessful in the interpretation of philosophy, many people, instead of taking risks and being courageous, seek safe, neat formulae which are doomed to create an administrative log-jam. We need far bolder understanding of basic human needs. A community scheme, like Family First, is a microcosm of life. Its development and the lessons we have learned could be applied in many situations: indeed they have been. Human beings, beneath their superficial differences (which get them unfortunately classified as, for example, 'one parent families') have basic common needs.

We would be well advised to study those needs before setting about our politics, planning, education, housing and recreational programmes. Why devise a style of living which is bound to fail, and then spend years and millions of pounds studying the disasters and first-aiding them? Of course, we must try to rectify mistakes of the past, but this can only be achieved with any degree of success if we first understand what it is that human nature strives for, and how we can harness that striving into creative future planning.

I have therefore been persuaded to write more about the philosophy evolved from the Family First experience, in preference to an historic analysis of its development. Because some readers will be interested in detail of the organisational aspects of the Trust, Appendix I is included as a basis for their perusal of the day-to-day running of such a scheme.

In the book, I intend to outline the thinking which I have found helpful to those considering or newly embarked upon a community scheme. It has enabled people to have confidence in their ability to develop ideas and practical schemes which put people first, not in any sentimental, patronising way but as equals. If you really treat people equally, it follows that they have equal responsibilities as well as opportunities.

Ten and a half years working in a situation which has bared to me the realities of people's needs, the bumbling inefficiencies of our social helping systems and the complex and too often neglected interdependence of those needing help and those supposed to be giving it, has taught me that our society is sick mainly because it cannot see that it is causing its own sickness. The very procedures set up to cure in fact aggravate, or even cause worse crises. Then come more complicated 'cures' conjured up by people organising themselves into highly qualified, recognised,'helping' roles. I believe our main sickness is that we have frankly forgotten what life is for, that we have a common humanity, and that life should be qualitative in the real meaning of the word. It has something to do with provision of good material standards, but much more is at stake. Why do new estates, with all mod-cons in housing units built to put right the wrongs of the old slums, get vandalised, unloved and even hated? Why do people always blame their physical environment? Why does society put its financial resources primarily into the creation of better physical conditions when by now there is ample proof that, by

itself, physical and material affluence can lead to a greater despair than even that induced by poverty and poor physical conditions? At least the latter give just grounds for complaint and scope for hope and incentive to strive. When you have everything and are still miserable, then you are sick indeed, and there is no hiding place except the creation of ever more complex excuses, treatments, social systems, escape routes and "cures" to supposedly bring you back on course.

Social Services Departments are governed in their financial spending by so called democratic committees, who argue endlessly over expenditure of a few hundred pounds on, for example, a scheme the community wants to do at low cost to help itself, but pass at the flick of an eyebrow expenditure of millions of pounds whether it be truly relevant to helping people or not.

How many committee members know – or even want to know – if the quality of the service they corporately are providing is good value for money? So long as it all looks good, so long as they are meeting the statutory requirements. When perfectly good furniture and equipment are discarded because of the 'need' to spend 'x' thousand pounds to come up to an annual allocation of public funds rather than not spend it, do we ask questions or accept it not only as inevitable but justifiable? How much better might that money have been spent? But everyone is guarding their patch of the 'helping' system; there is a vested interest in spending other people's money which makes the vested interests of private shareholders look like a toddlers' game of ring-a-ring-of-roses in the midst of a battlefield.

Unless, as a society, each and every one of us realises that our freedom is nearer oblivion than we care to believe, and until we accept responsibility for human dignity, there are times ahead far more destructive than the hard times of the slump and the two wars which many people still remember. Reform on the scale needed cannot happen, I believe, just by changing the laws, by reorganisation of Government Departments, or by any one Political party. When we wait for 'Authority' to tell us what to do, it becomes so vast and unwieldy that its head is not able to see its feet. Yet, there must be a law and order, there must be security, so individual life and home are safe. The sickness I believe is partly caused by more and more people believing that every discomfort, every hardship, every shortage of money, every illness, every effort is one which "THEY" should do something about. Children are being insidiously taught at home, and instructed in school, to treat personal initiative with contempt. Lip-service is paid to 'projects in the community' – often children witness their efforts to do some "community service" organised from school as an excuse for teachers to skive off duties. That is the real lesson they remember. Very early lessons are learned that it does not pay to make extra effort, to stand out of line; better to accept the role of conformist, be left alone, and leave problems for the experts to deal with.

That there is a way through the sickness, I am sure, but not unless we

actively help to promote it. There must somehow, somewhere from within the hearts and minds of people, who assume too easily that the experts know best, be an upsurge of interest and a determination to work hard for standards and values which, if not worked for, will rot until enough people see the damage. The longer the rot, the harder the uphill return. We must trust people to lead who acknowledge and work for our real interests and the real interests of society: they are not necessarily the people who agitate loudest, who wear labels or who academically proclaim, in the interests of their own status, their belief in equality and brotherhood. They are not necessarily the industrialist; equally they are not necessarily the Union representative or General Secretary. They are not necessarily the teacher or the social worker. We must learn to value the factors in life which, when we have ripped off our prejudices, illusions and fantasies, are the basic material which leads to a qualitative life. How many people con you into believing that if this or that happened to you, you would be OK? It happens, and you are still not OK. This is because you are still you, and seeking solutions at someone else's instigation. How many people go to Australia seeking a new life and an end to their problems? Many succeed because they have the capacity. Others find they have taken themselves with them and that is their problem! The myth of being made whole without our own effort and without being expected to make a sustained contribution to the process must be exploded; it is convenient to blame other people, the past or society generally: it is hardly constructive. Luckily, through Family First I have seen many young people 'break through' to a constructive future from apathy, despair and a thousand and one problems: not one has ever done it until they found within themselves that vital spark which enabled them to make good use of the practical help around them. Housing and friendships may well be the practical help which has initiated the 'point of return'. The spark needs time to establish a flame. If 'help' also included answering every immediate want and need, if it took away every opportunity for testing the possibilities of self-help and personally being able to help others, the spark could have been smothered for ever. People without sparks are either apathetic, or aggressively rebellious in the sense of not caring what they do to others or indeed to themselves.

Family First has not been wholly successful, but it has perhaps given a glint of light in the face of a tide of social 'helping' attitudes which need critically examining. Its greatest strength has been its willingness to try to explore new ways of working toward self-help situations. It has never deemed failure or public criticism a reason for taking a safe path which merely hides growing problems rather than trying honestly to find a way through them.

If statistics are your measure of success, then the achievement of the Family First Trust in Nottingham will be almost invisible. If, however, success can be measured in terms of allowing human beings to surface from problems and become the individuals they have the potential to be,

instead of faceless cases or clients filed neatly into alphabetical order, then it has a considerable story to tell.

The easy-to-recognise facts are that, since it started in 1965 until the time of writing in 1976, it has housed over one thousand families or individuals who were homeless or in a state of severe crisis in their lives. It receives four or five new requests for help each working day – and emergencies out of hours. Of these, it deals 'in depth' with some 350 to 400 each year, as well as maintaining links with existing and many past tenants and contacts. It has built or converted 82 housing units varying in size from self-contained bed-sitters to large family maisonettes, prior to starting on a large neighbourhood rehabilitation scheme in 1976 involving some 150 housing units. In 1975, it completed a purpose built extension to its Family Centre: this now includes a Day Nursery, playgroups, a mothers' club, pop-in-chat facilities for anyone, a meals service for local pensioners, educational and recreational courses, social events, launderette and so on. Family First runs three service shops, holiday play schemes, a furniture service, it 'employs' a wide range of volunteers including young men who are doing community service as an alternative to prison, graduates who cannot find work, ex-hospital patients getting to know the world once more, housewives keen for a few hours' work involvement each week outside the home, former and present tenants, neighbours and a fascinating collection of professionals who help when able because they become hooked on seeing what can actually happen when labels go out and self-help comes in.

Family First employs the most interesting staff I have ever met! Among their thirty-three in number are cooks, nursery nurses, an ex-police-force Housing Manager, six part-time shop assistants and a Shop Manageress (who used to manage a Bridal Gowns shop), an ex-master decorator who runs the Practical Services Department, a former plumber who ran the van for the furniture service before becoming supervisor of property maintenance, an ex-medical secretary who manages the Family Centre, a community worker who came as a student on a training placement and stayed (by invitation!), an ex-Miss Nottingham who is a receptionist, the Office Manageress who joined the ranks after being made redundant by a leading firm of Management Consultants who were closing their local office, and part-time cleaners (who run more of the organisation than they realise!) Formal qualifications have never been a prerequisite of working for the Trust: talent is certainly looked for and a capacity for learning the job and for hard work, use of imagination and initiative. Each member of staff finds they are on occasion dovetailing for another: the qualified accountant may be found running a disco, chatting up old ladies or calming the newly arrived distressed 'customer'.

Family First is passionately dedicated to working in the local community and to staying small. Several years ago, SHELTER put considerable pressure on Family First to grow quickly, and indeed scoffed at the idea of its being able to be small and yet financially stable (the fact that its

finances balanced was ignored). It has been pressurised to 'go National' and to start branches here and there. It helps local groups in other areas to get schemes started, and has learned much too, but community involvement can only be a reality if it practices what it preaches. Family First has never fitted comfortably on to any forms devised by Government or Local Authorities because it revolves around people and not administrative convenience. It has frequently been criticised by people and organisations who did not know how it worked: as if its very existence was a threat. Some of its work has now become accepted practice in other organisations, both statutory and voluntary; it has given evidence to Government and other committees of inquiry.

Its small voice is one which people seem to want to hear, whether they approve of it or not. The controversial factor is its emphasis on self-help: self-help I once thought was a fundamental, basic and normal concept towards getting over problems. I have discovered the hard way that allowing people an opportunity to solve their own problems is like a red rag to a bull in some – and particularly social work – circles.

Whenever Family First is discussed for the first time, say with representatives from a visiting organisation, we are always asked how and why did it start? So many and varied people have contributed to its evolution, that I find it difficult to realise that it ever had a specific point of birth as relatively recent as 1965. (It became a registered Housing Association in 1966). Yet I am told that the mode of its birth led to its style of evolution; i.e. that the rebelliousness which enabled me to conceive its birth is the same kind of rebelliousness which enables others to find their feet through it.

So how did it come to be born? The course of any lifetime is precarious: a strange interplay of personality, personal circumstances and the period and place in which we live. Opportunities arise and may be taken or missed, or they may have to be sought. We mature, sometimes easily, sometimes more painfully, and sometimes we stand still. How stubborn is the overlooked truth that building on people's strengths rather than pandering to or dwelling and planning around their weaknesses is what is needed. If only social work theory and practice were based on the hypothesis of building on strengths!

When life knocks you down, you either go under, submerged by apparently overwhelming odds, or you rise up in anger and bitterness, or you rise up having discovered the nature of Hell with determination to find a more positive course. So much depends not only on the person concerned, but on those around him or her at the crucial time. The official helping systems see people in need as belonging to a different species – a harsh statement perhaps. But please remember it as you travel through these pages reading true stories, told not because they are strikingly unusual, but because they illustrate particular points.

At twenty-seven, I found the prospect of calm, undemanding death a lot more acceptable than the trauma of life. Only once did I get anywhere

near considering taking my own life. Even when I hit 'rock bottom' primitive protective love for the babies took charge and ruled that out as an alternative. But I would have welcomed death unquestioningly if fate had determined it at that time.

There were days, weeks when the everyday effort of living seemed an impossible task. The body, tensed with apprehension at housing such seemingly incompetent components, refused to function without an almost impossible effort. The urgent demands of three children under four; the cold unfriendliness of yet another home in yet another unknown place; the need to get the house – which had been left particularly filthy (even to thick grease down the stair rails) – in some sort of order; the total feeling of tiredness, the sinking into apathy, the desire just to go to sleep and never wake up. The shops were a mile's walk away, the pram full of babies, the neighbours transpired to be all elderly and infirm or professional people out all day, we had insufficient ways of heating the home, snow lay around for weeks, the nappies wouldn't dry. That long, cold winter left an indelible mark; not least the knowledge at first hand that tiredness and apathy – symptoms which I have seen in hundreds of young mothers in the past ten years – can be the result of isolation and inner fears. The 'point of return' for each individual cannot be prescribed with some formula; but its need can be recognised at best spontaneously and intuitively by people personally in touch. Second best is to recognise the need for the 'point of return' through increased awareness to the needs of those around us. Confidence and hope can regrow when someone, somewhere takes time and trouble to see you as a person. It means that any of us on any day, even in the most unlikely places, can help or damage another's self-esteem.

Our actions, and reactions on the bus, train, at work, school, while shopping or out to enjoy ourselves take on a new dimension if we can see them as an integral part of life's lasting tapestry, and not just as a battle-field to be ploughed through at the fastest speed and with the least contact. I shall be making it very plain that I believe many social workers are neither trained nor encouraged to see their clients as people who have the potential for a personal 'point of return'.

I can still remember the poignant feeling of reaching through to freedom the morning a stranger took the time and trouble to help my eldest child, while I pushed the youngest two plus shopping. It was such a very ordinary, natural event that it seems almost foolish now to recount it. Yet natural events, alas, often get left undone. She talked to (and not just at) the children. She said she hoped she would meet them by the pool again and she meant it (Lichfield has a lovely pool in the shade of the Cathedral and we were watching ducks 'skate' on the ice). The warm natural actions of that very ordinary woman reversed gloom into hope. She made me feel that there was at least one other person in the world who valued the priorities I wanted to achieve. Although I did not realise it

at the time, the moment was catalytic. It put me back on course, giving me some confidence to make contact with the human race once more! Starved of normal social contact for a couple of years, I had become accustomed to feeling an outsider, too scared to make contact. Not my intention here to explain the story leading to such a situation. Some readers will no doubt expound the situation as a load of sentimental nonsense: others will know, from practical experience, exactly what I mean, perhaps especially mothers with small children whose 'intake' of warmth is low or nil, but whose 'output' needs to be very high and consistent.

The ability to be able to help oneself out of a mess is made possible when fear and despair give way to being able to see the light at the end of a long, dark tunnel. Instead of helping people toward the end of the tunnel, our social systems take hold of fear, despair and apathy and almost rejoice in bolstering them up, till being parasitical becomes a way of life rather than a temporary affliction.

Most of us sink low at some time, or several times, during otherwise competent lives. I reckon I was lucky because I did not then know much about official 'help'. It never occurred to me to seek any, except by going to the doctor, who was as helpful as reading the Iliad would be to a baby screaming for a feed.

To love your children without being able to do for them the things (and I do not mean just in the material sense) which you feel are so important gives the greatest pain of any experience I have yet encountered. To find even a partial way through is like seeing a beautiful sunset as a long-clinging fog suddenly clears: its strength is its basic simplicity. The joy of being able to tackle jobs, however hard, for those you love, is immense. The energy released when fear, apathy and inner doubts transform into warmth, determination and belief is as remarkable as the haunting ineptitude which daunts brain and body when under isolated emotional attack. Too often our 'helping' systems provide an added strain of making people feel 'on trial' as they are coldly observed or assessed ('emotionally attacked'), and a spiral downwards is assured by the very system which should enable the spiral to start turning upwards.

The realisation that if, as a young mother, I felt so hopeless and helpless, there were probably thousands of others who felt the same was the beginning of a line of thought which initially spurred me into looking about for ways in which a common problem might be solved. How many other mothers, for example, lived in neighbourhoods without any other children for their own to play with? A letter to the Local Press expressing an intention to set up a playgroup soon told me the answer. Yes, the world was full of fools like me! In retrospect it sounds all so simple.

Another move of town and yet another being discussed for reasons which I honestly felt were superficial and I said 'that's enough moving for now'. Already my eldest child found making friends difficult. He accepted the fact that nothing lasted. To protect himself, he found that if he did not

make friends (if he did not get involved) he would have none to leave behind. It was safer.

Family First was a practical expression of much I had come to believe in. It gave us roots – a real give-and-take involvement in life rather than always sitting on the sidelines wondering what was going to push you about next: hopefully it would provide the same sense of 'roots' for other families. It was better than merely theorising about other people's problems – or our own!

If I had known then what I have discovered over the past decade, I wonder if I would have had the courage to take what, with hindsight, looks like a leap into a new world. The Croft was a large, rambling Victorian house, part of which was to become our home. In the first two years my first husband shared a warm personal involvement in getting Family First launched – then, again, he moved on. It was the best two years we spent together.

I was luckier than many because I had a haven in Devon to which I could take the children for several weeks each year, including several at the end of that bad winter. My parents' home was a familiar and loved one to the children. It was on the Summer visit of 1965, that I wrote out the aims and objects of the proposed Family First Trust (Appendix II) and it is interesting to note the very similar philosophy of the later version (Appendix III).

In the Spring of that year, I can remember outlining the germ of the idea to Elizabeth Roché, then Secretary of the Nottingham Council of Social Services. I can remember saying that it would be possible if only we had some capital to make it happen. She said, nonsense! If money was the only obstacle, it would follow. The dream was to turn the rest of the house into self-catering flatlets for young mothers who would otherwise have gone to traditional 'institutional' Mother and Baby Homes or been homeless, or perhaps forced to stay at home in circumstances which hindered them from being able to build up a secure future.

The idea grew and was discussed with others who became interested. But where to find the capital needed to secure and modernise the property at the Croft in Alexandra Park, Nottingham, and to get the scheme launched?

With an optimism which verged on lunacy we were able to negotiate purchase of the property if the money could be raised within six months. Here was a situation essentially so much less secure, materially, than our succession of nondescript, lonely but nevertheless fairly 'secure' flats and houses: yet we felt more secure, relaxed and found some driving energy.

Acquiring legal status as a Voluntary Housing Association and Charity took time – and grit and determination to stick out for a broad constitution. Here was going to be no additional charity to embarrass future generations when needs changed. How much money is tied up in charities whose need to exist has long since vanished? I wrote an Application for Grant outlining the idea of creating a housing/

community scheme for young mothers, and sifted through the names of any large Charitable Trusts which might be approached. Miraculously, three listened: the Sembal Trust, the William Johnstone Yapp Trust, and the Gulbenkian Foundation. Through its Deputy Director, Richard Mills, the Foundation kept in close touch with the development of Family First. Especially in the early years when the work was frowned on in many quarters, not least by the Local Authority (which nevertheless used its services), the objective interest shown by the Gulbenkian Foundation was sustaining. The Foundation was also to help on a later occasion to enable the employment of a Housing Manager through a three-year grant: its influence has never led to intervention but has been a tower of strength. There were times when I felt unequal to the challenge which evolved (and which we did not foresee at the start) and a journey to London and chat over lunch at the Gulbenkian Foundation fortified my resolution.

Turning an idea into reality proved to be far more difficult than envisaged. I am no longer surprised at the lack of initiative shown within the community to help itself: where initiative raises its head, it is almost certainly dashed by such a barrage of unreasonable obstacles that defeat is more probable than success. And defeats lead to defeatist policies all round. It was hard enough starting Family First at the time: now it would be harder still because the plethora of red tape and bureaucracy has multiplied.

When told in cold blood that an answer from the Home Office can never be expected in under one month, when urgent matters get left in limbo when someone goes on holiday for five weeks; what does one do? The complete lack of urgency in Government and Local Government Departments over tasks which affect the urgent needs of individuals is shameful. It is the age of the civil servant: untouchable and untouched.

Countless times, one arrives in a Department for a discussion or clarification of some financial or planning aspect which must be cleared before a scheme can be approved. Although usually courteous, the person concerned often admits to recent transfer from another department, an insufficient knowledge of his or her subject – and sometimes an inability to master it (like several civil servants with no knowledge of accountancy struggling over financial aspects of housing subsidies, etc.). When a new Act is introduced, civil servants are organised to man the jobs involved. Their suitability for such jobs often appears to be an entirely chance process.

We lived at The Croft for a year while the builders were at work, not the most comfortable of existences but it had purpose. We moved around the building as the builders retreated or encroached. We were inexperienced and discovered much the hard way (for example, how not to trust professionals implicitly: an architect spent several extra thousand pounds without any authority to do so). Yet, in many ways, the early beginnings nurtured the principles which were to stay very much the

same. It was agreed that all eight members of the Management Committee should be actively involved in some way with the Trust: no big names for show only, no names to appear on the notepaper. We were a working organisation which intended to achieve rather than impress. In the early days, when the Local Authority was hostile and would not grant mortgages, we were told we should put one or two 'suitable' names on the Committee. Unanimously, the Committee agreed it would not be bought. Either we were doing a job which was worthwhile and therefore should be recognised, or we were not fit to be supported.

As soon as Family First became legal, it received publicity in the local and some National Press. The steady stream of callers began. I had never realised the enormity of the problem of human loneliness. Problems which I knew to exist began to assume a quantitative shape: the flood tide had begun. It quickly led to such basic questions as where do we go from here (expand or stay put?). Situations evolved and were resolved by constant questioning, hard work, and the involvement of a growing number of helpers.

Very early on, certain main themes began to be apparent. Firstly, that as a generalisation there were two types of people coming for help; those who genuinely needed it and those who saw Family First as just another place from which, if they could, they would squeeze something for nothing whether they actually needed it or not. Family First has frequently re-stated its aim to help those prepared to do something to help themselves. The skill is in discovering who is who, because social work reports may be vastly misleading.

It became apparent that unless Family First was to say no as a matter of principle to callers desperate for accommodation, it would have to expand; it also became apparent that if it grew beyond a reasonable size, the personal touch, which was its strength, would be lost. Right from the start tenants felt themselves to be part of what was going on in the community of which they had become part: this does not happen quickly or by accident but through people having time to spend with other people.

My mistrust of the motives of some people who operate the bureaucratic systems started when, as a young cub-reporter, I did the rounds of the Magistrates' Courts, the Divorce and County and Assize Courts, County Council meetings and those of the Urban, Rural and Parish Councils. Then there were the meetings to arrange 'big' events – like a Royal Visit; people to interview; small clubs and societies which held events needing 'covering', 'do's' at hospitals and a thousand and one events, occasions or interviews of a regular or 'one-off' type.

I quickly gained an insight into the whole backcloth of politics, power tactics, and saw how real needs of people so often were secondary to appearances and dogma and status. I began to formulate my own concept of morality which sometimes seemed to have little to do with the kind of morality that was officially proclaimed. Sherry at the Bishop's Palace to discuss a new Mother and Baby Home was an enjoyable occasion: but

even then I prickled at the concept that the mothers not only needed shelter and security, but also training to become good mothers and good citizens which presupposed that they could not possibly already be either. Because people need help does not mean that they are second class or indeed in any way necessarily different from those who are helping. If you sigh contentedly and say 'ah yes, but paternalism has gone' – just think again and find out what the welfare state does to 'clients'. Its paternalism is vast, unyielding, arrogant, very expensive and very degrading.

Experience in Family First has taught me that in no field is our society more in danger of forgetting the basic personal needs of human beings than in the 'helping' system, backed by a proliferation of legislation, administration and professional talk-shops. I would go as far as suggesting that the growing amount of personal violence may have quite a lot to do with our current ideas and practices about 'helping' people. Our helping systems may, taking the long view, be increasing abnormality, and perpetuating a vested interest in keeping clients as clients, whose dependence increases as their ability for asserting personal choice and self-determination diminishes.

My own roles within Family First were several and all inter-related. I directed the Trust and therefore had the usual responsibilities in relation to planning, administration, staff, finance, etc. A constant watch on the flexibility of services was possible because all parts of the Trust's work interact and were known personally. The Director works from The Croft and sees many of its new customers, tenants, neighbours, etc. and is kept very much down to earth.

The Croft is a complex which includes the original house, modernised into flats for young Mums; a Family Centre and Day Nursery; fourteen flats for a range of families and individuals and Family First's main office. The Croft has remained a focus for all developments within Family First in Nottingham and a focus of neighbourhood activity thus integrating Family First firmly into a "normal" environment.

I lived with my family in the original house at The Croft (Family First's first housing project) and, in a voluntary capacity, acted not as warden but simply as a neighbour. So that when a young mother went into labour, had a sick child, or needed particular help, there was someone nearby who could be approached and who knew what, if action was necessary, should be done. There were no paid staff "in charge".

This book will give nobody tidy, stage-by-stage instructions for building a community or neighbourhood organisation. Stereotype blueprints, of course, should not exist, for each situation in each community is so different and the personnel involved very individual. If people can only function with detailed blueprints, they are not the right people to be getting involved in 'helping' situations. If, however, a basic practical philosophy and open-mindedness exists – backed by common sense, hard work and some thorough business ability (not muddle headed administration) – then something good can happen.

The central core of any successful venture is a few people who have vision, a capacity for hard work and an ability to delegate and to welcome new talent. They need to be neither militant nor submissive. They need to remember that those who run the systems through which, in order to comply with the law and innumerable regulations, they have to operate are public servants and not Lords and Masters. It is better to note this with quiet, tenacious dignity, backed with accurate knowledge, than with obnoxious, arrogant militancy. Never assume knowledge all rests with the other side: it must be sought out and sifted and understood: a real test of enthusiasm when it comes to such things as Parliamentary Acts.

The violence of militant agitation, the pulling to pieces of anything and everything simply because it happens to exist is horrifying as it leads to nowhere but anarchy: yet the erosion of individual basic needs and personal freedom and dignity by the growing forces of bureaucracy and the 'helping systems' is also a pernicious form of violence.

The two 'sides' are set in what could well become, as far as any quality of life is concerned, a bitter destructive cold war, with outbursts of visible violence which lead, in turn, to a hardening of attitude on both sides. We need clearly to look at violence and go back to square one to ask ourselves what is the meaning of it? What is the meaning of our existence? What matters and what is superficial?

VIOLENCE

What do I mean when I use the word violence? I am only discussing voluntary violence, not the violence which stems from mental disorders: for example, someone who is a psychopath may commit violence and his or her mental state is, at the present state of knowledge, incurable. Here we are only talking about voluntary violence.

When the subject of violence is raised, most people conjure up pictures of war, murder, vandalism and so on: the types of violence which hit the headlines. Declaring war is to engage in violence by 'agreement' between defined enemies. It is significant to my theme of the de-personalising of relationships to mention that in recent decades there has been an increase of terrorist type 'warfare' which does not have such 'agreed' targets. It entwines innocent victims on purpose and not just incidentally because they were in the way of 'targets'.

Violence, like many other things, is subject to fashions and current social customs. In one age it may be deemed manly to fight duels or to capture slaves. We look back and wonder how people could be so cruel, especially sometimes in the name of religion. We have our own fashionable and currently acceptable forms of violence: the massacre on our roads, for example. In a century's time, people may well reflect on our yearly toll of dead and maimed on the roads with the word barbaric on their lips. Each age has its own arrogance, its special dangers and strengths, and the next age evolves with new ideas and customs providing rising generations have the energy and wit to think, work and to try to improve things. How far and fast any civilisation advances or decays in its quality of life, surely has as much to do with people's attitudes and a balanced sense of social responsibility as with any particular measurement of technological progress. It could be said that our own civilisation is in danger because, in the name of technological, scientific and material progress, we are de-personalising the basic ingredients of our common humanity and, in so doing, we are threatening ourselves with social confusion which cannot be remedied by technology, science or affluence.

I call the "basic ingredients of humanity" the inescapable facts of life: birth, living (which involves many aspects of loving and aggression) and dying. We increasingly de-personalise all three. By doing so we violate our innermost nature, sometimes with disastrous results. Later, I will be dealing at some length with these "basic ingredients". The de-personalising process is currently fashionable and is prevalent in many

spheres. The attack on our "basic ingredients" is formidable and this violation often goes unchallenged. It is increasingly backed with the law and social customs.

Part of the de-personalising of life takes place at work. Doing a job without doing it 'in context' makes for discontent, for arrogance and misunderstandings. It is sometimes impossible to relate the job done to the final product whether it is a machine being built in a factory or a job being done in the offices of the 'local' Planning Department. The latter may well now be in a country mansion many miles away from the nearest town it serves. Most of its officers may be new to the area and have little knowledge of it and little opportunity to get to know it. How can one not echo with feeling the words of the elderly man who said cynically, "They don't care about my problems (subsidence at the back of his property). They sit at desks and don't even know my cottage exists except as a mark on a piece of paper." When an area planner cannot tell me what happens in the first street 'outside' his area then I wonder about his job motivation.

Planning Departments which sit on decisions for large projects, yet manage to phone you in the morning after a Press Report about improvement to one small property to say "Surely that does not mean that you have started without Planning consent?", violate respect. The report appeared about the opening of a shop (no consent needed) and someone in the Department thought Family First might have started converting the flat by the side of the shop without approval! Big Brother is watching.

There is, I believe, a widespread but as yet little recognised form of personal violence which is more insidious, dangerous and erosive of a stable community than the violence that hits the daily headlines. It is the intrusive legal violation of other people's lives inflicted by people who do not actually make decisions or exercise any personal responsibility for their actions. It is the violence which inflicts 'policy' or dogma at any cost: it is the power games played by bureaucrats: it is the excuses for incompetence, apathy and greed dressed up as plausible reasons.

"Re-organisation" for example, was the excuse meted out for years in countless Social Services Departments after the Seebolm Report first stirred in the one-time Children's Departments. That was in 1968. Subsequent Local Government re-organisation prolonged the excuse.

I have sometimes felt so angered by the slowness, inefficiency and hedging by Local Authority Departments that I could cheerfully have thrown bricks at the Town Hall!

Sometimes the only person to whom you can voice a complaint is the only person in a particular department who seems to be helpful. That is terrible, because if they show an aptitude for helpfulness, they get loaded with more than their share of work: in self-defence then they can become apathetic too as a tactic for survival. In fact, the system seems carefully planned to create people who can only pass the buck.

Over the decade, my filing cabinet has received its share of the kind of official letters which come when lack of real decision making in the face of a tangible policy is dressed up to appear as if you are the nutty ones for wanting a decision. Said Nottingham's Town Clerk, in defence of his Council's unwillingness to loan money for building flats and day nursery in 1969, to William Whitlock, MP, "I am sure the Trust are enthusiastic and anxious to expand their services quickly, but the proposals for the flats and day nursery are a little too ambitious, and I would have thought the Trust would be better advised to increase their activities by stages when they have concrete evidence from their own experience of the demand for the service they wish to provide." Phew!

The flats and nursery got built in 1973/75 (by which time building costs had more than doubled).

For some years we constantly met criticism from the Local Authority along the lines that we were either too small to engender support and confidence, or that we were trying to grow more quickly than thought desirable. In any event, the practicalities were that the Local Authority tried to squash any initiative put up by Family First either through Committee 'decisions' or, more disturbingly, through actions of councillors or Chief Officer directives to staff. The ironical situations which arose were many: social workers would daily be asking the Trust for housing and help for their clients, while asking us if we could please not tell their superiors as there was a directive that they should not use Family First. When Family First started, I was naive enough to suppose that it would be able to work in close harmony with the statutory welfare agencies, and we discussed our plans with relevant departments. Only the City's Housing Department showed any early and real co-operative interest and consistently maintained it over the years.

At the time when Local Government re-organisation was being planned, active co-operation with the Local Authority became frankly impossible. Departments assumed we would go on helping their needs, but never saw co-operation as a two-way process. The time had come to take a tough line and I made an impassioned statement about the City Council administration concerning the fate of Family First. We had succeeded 'in spite of rather than because of' our Local Authority. The statement hit some sore spots: it brought publicity. It brought, for the first time, a number of officers and councillors to see what in fact we were doing. One councillor implored us not to say she had visited: she would be blacklegged she said. Democracy? We were able to prove without any shadow of doubt that the majority of our work in terms of people sent to us desperately in need of housing came from statutory departments: we said if the Local Authority went on stubbornly refusing to acknowledge the contribution the Trust was making in terms of practical co-operation, then very reluctantly we would function as a national body (i.e. taking more people from other areas) and not as a local community scheme (which we believed and still believe is the best way to function).

The gulf at that time between the social workers employed by the Local Authority and its decision makers was farcical. While the bosses attended meetings and spoke of the 'insignificant' homeless problems in the City, social workers were sending their homeless clients out armed with an accommodation list which scraped the bottom of the accommodation barrel. On one list we looked at were three known brothels. On one occasion, a DHSS visiting officer found a young mother at one of the brothels and was so concerned that she had involuntarily found herself in a dangerous situation 'on the advice of her social worker' that he arranged for the police to remove her to our accommodation.

Times have changed and there is now a better atmosphere between the Local Authority and Family First. It became accepted because it succeeded. The corollary to this could be dangerous. Once successful it would be much easier to operate without sufficient self-criticism and care to see that resources are well used. Family First sets itself rigorous standards and this is not in danger of happening: but it could because the very public pressures which make creative thinking and practical schemes difficult to achieve also make it easy for existing 'successful' organisations to exist simply to sustain their organisation rather than because they are still making a positive contribution.

But though the atmosphere may be better, the inefficiency of the public sector grinds on, and is another contributory factor to pressurising other bodies into eventually accepting their indecisive low standards of efficiency. For example, when Family First has a scheme which has to be discussed at a Housing, Planning or some other Committee, the decisions made (if any) are only seldom communicated to the Trust. The onus is always on the Trust to seek out the decision. When our own Management Committee meet, it is a matter of course that decisions which affect other people are, within a week, communicated to those concerned. This surely is a basic courtesy and a vital means of communication?

Are the public really conned by the outward gesture of statutory decisiveness which is reported, especially before national or local elections? The announcement that a house was being offered for use by battered wives made news when battered wives got themselves into the news. The Local Authority concerned could boast it was doing something. But where was the decisive action and planning which is creative rather than the expediency-type decision to soften people up?

The sight of Council Committee members opening reports and details of the Agenda as they sit down around the Committee table, explains why important items on that Agenda go back for "further consideration". This is a tip of the apathetic iceberg which is slowing down decisions which affect important issues like housing and urgent community work. When there are people in the community willing and able to tackle the community's problems earnestly (and often without pay) then it is surely the job of those who – of their own free will – have become 'public servants' to make the process as straightforward as possible. Instead it is

quite the reverse. Community initiative is often actively discouraged and only those who are quite determined and who know how to handle bureaucracy 'make it'. It is time public servants realised that they are paid (or volunteer) to serve the community and are not its judge and jury rolled into one.

Procedural techniques are often designed to safeguard anyone from being committed to a decision which demands initiative at the appropriate time. Yet the techniques are disguised to make us feel protected from errors of judgement! There has been much emotive talk and mis-statement over battered babies and abused children. Scapegoats have to be found, and new procedures designed in theory to safeguard children but, in practice, to safeguard people from being held responsible for decisions about children. The situation is complicated, but I am sure the public is not as dim as those who try to 'cover up' unfortunate events try to make out. A society which is afraid of decisions is doomed to failure, and part of the failure will be an increase of personal violence. The more procedures try to prevent this eventuality the more it will happen and the more (if we perpetuate our present thinking) we will feel the need for 'extra' safeguards. Our local Social Services Department has recently introduced a 163-page manual on "non-accidental injury to children – guidance notes on procedures", which (like other such documents) is a future recipe for exonerating people who follow the procedures from 'blame' or 'error'. The procedure is designed to take away failure of the professional people involved: will it prevent non-accidental injury?

This self-inflicted bureaucratic social damage is manna for the militant groups whose interest is not really the good of the affected people but manipulation of disaster for their own (usually Political) ends. I often feel frustrated working between the bureaucrats and the militants – both are so ready to destroy to save their own skins, both evade personal responsibility and both show an egotistical disregard of the true feelings of the very people they purport to work for.

This misrepresentation of people's needs can be spread by the articulate minority in any sector of society who verbalise well but forget they may not be 'typical' spokesmen. When Man Alive 'did' a TV programme on one-parent families we were invited to nominate anyone who wanted to participate. We threw the invitation out to anyone interested. Only one mother went: significantly she was a highly articulate, powerful women's lib left winger. Her views were truly spoken for her personal feelings but were certainly not representative of the majority in her situation for whom she professed to speak.

The violence of de-personalising relationships for commercial gain should make us alive to the need to assert the real values of human loving and caring. They are threatened. When a young person thinks that if someone touches them it is, as a matter of course, an "invitation to sex", then it makes nonsense of any true sense of caring which may involve an

encouraging hug, a hand around the shoulder, a helping arm across the road, and so on.

I shall be dealing at some length with the 'need for caring' and, to my mind, the immense damage now being done by so often making out that all physical contact has overtones – or undertones – of precopulative loveplay.

If the quality of life is of value, is it always desirable that the quickest method of work be deemed the best? For example, are rural communities served better by machines than men? It is wasteful of human resources to see worthwhile rural communities disappear, houses and cottages left empty (unless and until they become the domain of of 'weekenders'). How can there be any community life if perhaps over half the population has gone? Have the families which had to leave necessarily found a more worthwhile lifestyle? Even in financial terms is the saving overall real or just illusory? So often one form of subsidy replaces another. Money is not saved and humans are sacrificed.

There is violence in size, the myth that size means greater efficiency and cost effectiveness. The frequency and nature of 'promotion' in industrial mid-management careers and some professions uproots families with small children perhaps six or more times in the children's first ten years. These families do not usually find themselves immediately accepted in a community in the same way as other itinerants (e.g. Army families) who have a joint lifestyle or those who move into communities able and willing to support them in the early settling in days (e.g. Methodist Ministers). The 'isolated' itinerant families often move into areas of housing where others are similarly isolated itinerants – such areas are usually easily recognised by the frequency of 'For Sale' signs. Some estates have, over the years, developed a community shape and new families find it easier to settle in and join in playgroups etc. Others are lonely wildernesses where those who do not go out to work feel totally isolated and often very insecure. Many women want to enjoy the early years at home with their children and feel guilty when they cannot fulfil their maternal role constructively. These women are more likely to harm their children than perhaps any other group. Many husbands are pre-occupied with getting on, paying the mortgage and keeping up with what they deem their right niche in the rat race. Their wives can become strangers. They are sometimes very unwilling fodder of the more militant arms of the feminist movement.

When discussing the 'basic' ingredients of human nature, some people may feel my language is too simple. I make no apology. The first, and perhaps hardest lesson I learned when I started the Family First Trust, was that what I regarded as naive and commonsense because of people's need to keep their dignity and a sense of personal responsibility was regarded by others as new and innovatory. Describing the Trust's first housing scheme (non-institutional housing for young single mothers), a Home Office Official used the words "revolutionary idea".

The second lesson was to grasp the enormity of the problem of communication. I had always thought of 'education' as a unifying force. At present it is not. Too often it is used as a weapon. I see no virtue in being deliberately obscure. When teachers talk of the need "to break a child's sense of identity and then to re-form his concept of his potential", when social workers 'assess' their clients – often in front of them – with cumbrous jargonised language which confuses rather than clarifies, when sociologists seem to derive childish delight from the examination of human weaknesses (other people's of course, and from a safe distance) and in assessing one theory against another: then it is time that ordinary poeple asserted their influence in a cool, calm way. The experts about life are all those who are living. That we may need specialist skills to help educate, guide or heal us at particular times should not give the specialists any right of power over us. Their language should be that which clears not blurs! We are becoming a nation of voyeurs, said a colleague recently, when she described with feeling the indignity with which a family who came in need of help had been treated by the 'helping' professionals who discuss 'clients' in a vulture-like way.

A knock on The Croft front door has on occasions been answered by a lone mother to a stranger who stated coldly that he or she had come to interview unmarried mothers or battered wives for research purposes. I get phone calls from students asking to interview a specific number (one even said she would bring her camera) – "We are not a zoo" I say rather harshly. The point is quickly understood when made. But should it have to be made?

The first housing scheme we got off the ground still bore the marks of my extreme innocence about the depth of insensitiveness which people can show. We allowed visitors who had contributed towards the scheme financially an opportunity to look round. This was after the tenants had moved in.

I felt a wave of utter frustration and disgust when I saw one woman open a drawer and look through it to see what was in it, another examined the food in a larder and gave a monologue on the tenant's food habits. It had never occurred to me that the visitors would come to examine the tenants rather than the property.

Never again did that happen! A person's home is their private castle. In recent years I have been equally miserable to see how visitors can be allowed to examine everything in childrens' homes, and in Probation Hostels, and so on. The resident young people may have no place which is truly private. Even if some form of 'training' is necessary in certain circumstances, the whole object of it is to bring young people to the point where they are able to live as 'normal' members of the community, accepting responsibility for themselves. Privacy is an integral part of 'normality'. A 17-year-old who lived at The Croft for a while arrived from a Probation Hostel with blonde hair from the tops of her ears down, and dark brown hair from the roots to the tops of her ears. It looked

decidedly weird and she obviously felt very embarrassed about it. Six hours after she moved in she was blonde to the roots. So I asked her why she had only just decided to do it. In the Hostel they were not allowed to colour their hair. Indeed the girls did not purchase their own sanitary towels, etc. but got them 'handed out'.

If these incidents were the exception then it would be unfair to recite them, but they are not. If people in charge of people or 'in Authority' cannot be seen to show respect for humanity and the individual human being, how can young people be expected to discover a respect for themselves, let alone for others? If those 'in Authority' can be seen so obviously to be 'using' their clients for some form of personal power satisfaction, how can clients have the least faith in their advice or 'help'?

I am sometimes accused of taking a tough line about this philosophy of 'using' (or violating) others. But we really are beginning to lose sight of the reality of self-responsibility. A young woman from a Remand Home became a tenant. A few days after she moved in, her social worker called to see her at 11.00 a.m. The tenant was in bed. She had money in her pocket and she was supposed to be looking for work. The social worker found there was no food in the flat, and promptly went out and purchased some from the shop across the road. The tenant was neither ill nor stupid: in fact she was bright enough to think the whole incident very funny. I found the incident just another sickening example of how misguided is some current practice toward 'clients'. The social worker concerned explained away the incident by saying she was 'building up a relationship'. Nonsense. Taking away a person's choice to be lazy or effective in relation to themselves erodes the possibility of establishing a proper relationship and develops a 'using' or 'dependency' habit which is injurious for both sides.

Denying or forgetting the basic needs of normal life leads to an unhealthy preoccupation with abnormality. Of course people with handicaps and special needs require help – but they do not need to be treated as less human, or isolated and over-protected from 'normal' life.

I was asked by a group of workers from a local psychiatric hospital to attend a meeting to discuss possible ways in which Family First could provide accommodation for young people with housing problems following discharge from hospital. The meeting turned out to be one at which about twelve psychiatrists and social workers were present. The immediate reaction was "what sort of hostel would you provide", "what would be the qualifications of those in charge", "how much would it cost per week", and so on. In their minds there was no question about the need for yet another institutional scheme. When I suggested that we should first find out whether a traditional hostel was what was required, I was treated with rather chilly glances. Even chillier, when I suggested that we first find out what the young people felt they needed. When you suggest the latter, people immediately think you are going to pander to people. Nothing is further from the truth.

Our first housing scheme was carried out after finding out what young single mothers wanted. What were the circumstances in which they felt they could cope best? When asked this question directly, most people can give a very accurate and fair answer. If these circumstances then come to fruition and people abuse them, then appropriate action is needed. To be tough for the sake of being tough merely creates hostility. If people act badly in a constructive situation, then discipline has some meaning. The word discipline has become a dirty word, but we all need discipline, or a framework within which we work, especially when we are young.

Nothing fills me personally with more sorrow – even despair – than the baffled young people I deal with who have grown up without any kind of restraint or framework. Sometimes they have had a very high material standard at home. They feel unloved. Although adolescents probably never did much care for parental 'rules' the fact remains that the parents who are most respected are those who provide fair and firm 'yardsticks' but who do not equate breaking of the rules with rejection. Too often 'strict' parents equate obedience and agreement with 'goodness' and the giving of 'love'. If you disobey your parents you do not love them, or you will make them ill, or, worse still, you are not worthy of their love.

The young people who when they 'come round' from a suicide attempt are not glad but tell you cold-bloodedly every new day that they wish they had died, are not depressed because they have fallen out of love, lost a job, or got a severe temporary depression. They simply cannot see themselves as having any value at all as human beings: they feel worthless. These often are young people of high intelligence and, potentially, strong character. They hate themselves; therefore, they cannot love. They may try to make relationships, but only shallow ones transpire. They may become promiscuous, take to drugs, and 'drop out' in the real meaning of the word (not as a temporary phase or pastime).

These are the young people who have been violated. Luckily, human resilience being what it is, some 'come through' but some do not. One tenant at The Croft 'fought' the friendship of others for over a year because she could not accept herself as a person worthy of being liked. Eventually, thanks to one very tenancious good friend, she developed the ability to respond in a relationship, she discovered the joy of both being thought someone of value and of being able to make a contribution to the wellbeing of others. Today she is happily married. The longer I work with young people, the more I discover about the individual 'break through' point: the point at which despair turns into hope. It seems to have very little to do with medical and social work help as we usually understand those terms and a great deal to do with good neighbourliness and friendship on equal terms. The violated spirit perhaps cannot respond to a de-personalised voice; this is why the social worker who goes shopping merely to 'build a relationship' is doomed to fail and only makes matters worse. It is her job to be 'nice', to 'run around', to 'cope'. But she will not

be around at weekends, during summer holidays, and at Christmas – only your family and friends are – if you have any.

The pre-occupation and administrative convenience of labelling people is in itself a violation. Because you have a wooden leg, or a low I.Q. or are very old and infirm does not mean you cannot still make an active contribution in a 'normal' community.

I am frightened at the growing 'specialising' in social aid in spite of the so called generic approach in Social Services Departments. "I'm not getting the experience with residential delinquent adolescents which I would like" said one young worker looking for a new specialised job attached to an institution. She was currently working with 'geriatrics' and went on to say that it was "easier to get work with geriatrics but I am still hoping for an opening of my choice." Maybe, she was only trotting out the jargon which is used so liberally on Social Work Training Courses when people can become puppets.

Several of my friends have been on mature student Social Work Courses and have invariably been shocked at the attempted erosion of dignity. One is currently in her tutor's 'bad books' because she has rightly refused to discuss personal and easily identifiable details of individual case histories of 'clients' she worked with on a Training Placement with a Social Work Agency.She maintains that this information between client and worker is confidential and not public property. Students' own job motives are not only searched (which is reasonable) but their own private lives discussed and sometimes a student is reprimanded for not being willing to discuss, say, her matrimonial life. This intrusion (violation) seems aimed at making the one intruded upon feel less secure. We are developing at all levels a destructive approach to life; nothing is left private or special, everything must be delved and prodded and always assumed to be dubious. Success is greeted with scorn more often than acclaim, and security resented.

Indecision is the parent of delay, and delays ..... another form of contemporary violence? When we first started actively planning job creation in addition to the involvement of community service offenders, one of the organisations we presented a scheme to was the Construction Industry Training Board. The letter went on October 6th 1975. A telephone call came on January 21st 1976 in reply. The speaker had to have a report in by the 26th and MUST therefore visit on January 22nd or 23rd. I muttered something about there had been plenty of time. The speaker earnestly declared the letter had only just been passed to him and he would try and help and to do so he must visit as a matter or urgency. He did. But it is this sort of circumstance which drives people to 'take it out of' the very people who are trying to help – as he was.

With the advent of the 1974 Housing Act (although Family First had been a registered Housing Association since it started) like all Associations it had to re-register with the Housing Corporation and be

approved or rejected. More negotiations, explanations, reversal of policies, and delays (violation). The card produced here explains one of the delays – does not anyone have a sense of humour let alone a sense of urgency?

Date 28.7.75

Housing Act 1974 – Registration of Housing Associations

Your application for registration was received from our Regional Office today.

It will receive a final appraisal in this Division (and be referred to our Finance and Accounts Division should this be necessary), before being considered by the Registration Committee (of officials) who will make a recommendation to the Registration Panel of the Corporation's Board. The application will then be referred to the Board at its monthly meeting for determination.

You will appreciate that these procedures will take some time and whilst we fully accept that you will be anxious to know what progress your application is making, we would ask you not to telephone or write merely to enquire about progress. This will let us get on with the job of registration.

We will let you know as soon as we can once a decision on your application is made, but if you do not hear from us within three months, then please feel free to give us a reminder.

_____ Registration and Management Division, 122 Kings Road, London, SW3 4TS.

One of the most useful roles of the Voluntary Housing Association movement, we had believed, was its ability to find and put into action housing for minority groups which was flexible and which tried imaginative ideas. If they worked they were copied; if they failed, everyone discovered something useful without creating a huge long-term catastrophe (like high rise blocks). We were assured the Housing Corporation would be flexible. At a Conference, one speaker on 'minority groups' chanted out the accustomed list, and stressed the Corporation would look favourably on schemes for special needs, especially the single homeless. The mental processes in the hall were not hard to register and the questions confirmed them. There were Associations going to do 'special' schemes simply because it would be easy to get maximum subsidy. They were abdicating the decision making about schemes based on the nitty gritty realities in their own areas, or they were in danger of doing so.

"Welcome to the Public Sector," said a spokesman at one conference

soon after the 1974 Housing Act. I am confident Government support need not mean an abdication of responsibility, and that there is a way of co-operative working. Occasionally, some scheme is proof of the possibility. But it only happens when the individuals on all participating sides TAKE decisions which they stand by. The machinery of power, alas, makes it easy for abdication of the necessity – and even the incentive – for making decisions and being accountable for them. Procedures too easily take over. Ask a question, and you get a list of quotations from circulars, or an invitation to go and talk some query over (another day wasted?) with someone who knows little and who offers tea charmingly.

Family First has a Job Creation Programme (JCP) scheme paid for by the Government through the Manpower Services Commission. It works because the team is small and because they can see results. There are six school leavers, one slightly older labourer, and two supervisors who are from the building trades and who were out of work. The leader works the young men hard and expects a disciplined approach to work; but he is also very interested in them as individuals. Some have problems in reading and writing and, from an enjoyable contact with work experience, now realise the value of learning. Why, they say, could not people (parents and teachers) make them understand this while they were at school? The leader runs informal 'lessons' in lunch breaks. One lad has already found regular employment and two more may do so soon. We notified the local office of JCP about needing a replacement for the lad who had left. We talked about our interest in assisting those employed temporarily with us through the scheme to get permanent posts. "We were creating a rod for our backs," we were told! The attitudes and procedures at regional level do not always match the ideas and ideals laid down.

I could recite much chapter and verse on this point but so could anyone who has tried to work between statutory and voluntary agencies.

I would argue that the young men on our Job Creation Programme and thousands like them are the product of an era in which decision making was and is a dirty word. Many young people have left many years of formal education without the rudiments of knowing how to live, let alone how to work. Those who meet the likes of Family First's JCP leader are lucky: they discover within a few short weeks that life can be fun, that achievement is partly what makes it so, and that learning is not what it has been made out to be (a mug's game) but a necessary tool to live a qualitative life. The corporate indecisiveness of a culture which makes the realisation of this basic knowledge such a chance process instead of a way of life is a corporate failure (a violation of life's potential). Luckily, the individual can still find a path to real success: luckily, individuals can still have an effect on corporate thinking. There is some urgency that more individuals without dogmatic Political axes to grind but with real concern make their voice felt. A voice which works in favour of accepting

responsibility rather than abdicating decisions; a voice which is prepared – if necessary – to be unpopular.

With what tenacity do TV interviewers try and unnerve their subjects; the headlines excitedly tell us everything that has gone wrong and there is eager comment about the misdemeanours of the 'successful'. Perhaps because we have such a low opinion of ourselves we are lowering the standards of 'success' so there is less and less incentive to try? I am no great advocate of exams but I see little merit in a 'competitive' exam system which increasingly makes it easier for everyone to 'pass' at 16. If the object of an exam is merely to prove one has attended school for a given number of years, why not simply issue a certificate which says so? The present education system seems hellbent on not only missing the basic facts about the real needs of slow learners, and 'non-academic' children, but also on stunting the development of those who are inclined to academic brilliance. They are being made to feel failures because they want to learn.

Incompetence is excused and almost worshipped in certain circles: success (and I'm not equating 'success' with material income but in the wider sense of achievement) is derided. I recently found myself in hot debate over a surgeon I do not know personally but who has operated on and advised very successfully several people closely known to me and many Family First tenants. Someone said it was not fair he should live in 'such splendid' surroundings. We debated the equation of income and responsibility and success. I maintained that if a surgeon was on the wards at 9.00 a.m. each day (sometimes six days a week) operating for up to 3-4 hours three or four days a week and seeing a never ending list of old and new patients, etc. at other times, it was not a privilege to live in quiet surroundings but an absolute necessity for him in order to recharge himself. To live at that kind of pressure, taking so much life and death responsibility, may not make him a 'better' man but it certainly makes it imperative that he should be able to relax in order to maintain his work responsibility.

Today we seem very loath to acknowledge that people have as much right – and need – to be different as they have to equal opportunity. A healthy society should nurture its talents wherever and whenever they spring up. They are unlikely to flourish in the sterile educational and social and political scene we are currently contriving. Far from enabling everyone to have equal opportunity to succeed it will only ensure that everyone gets the same level of pressure to become nothing in particular. This pre-occupation with equality of success equates success purely in material terms not in the quality of life. The surgeon with high I.Q. and the ambition and skill to reach the top should earn more than the man around the corner who jogs along happily in a routine job doing it well but never wanting to shoulder any responsibility. But both can have an equally satisfying or equally disastrous life style in terms of real quality.

That quality will depend on their ability in relation to life's 'basic ingredients'.

Is it the mental violence induced by greed which makes it 'necessary' to pull down the high fliers to a level easily obtainable by the rest? A society which is increasingly absorbed in pulling down can only destroy itself. Because the basic quality of life is not seen as a goal there is a growing danger that identifiable status for individuals or families, whose future seems insecure, may be achieved most easily not by effort to overcome their difficulties but in the acceptance of labels which bestow on them the right to be looked after. For example, a young man wrote to us saying that he had a RIGHT to walk into a social agency and to have all his burdens lifted from him; handicaps or pseudo handicaps can be acquired in order to get attention, and society through the proliferation of its helping professionals seems only too ready to 'take over' rather than to help re-establish the potential for independence.

In a stable family, children are gradually given greater independence as they grow toward maturity. In the family where adults are unable to 'let go', children can be smothered, and regarded as possessions with minds which must submit (they therefore often rebel). In a family where adults offer total permissiveness children find it difficult to mature, and to gain an adult independence. Similarly, if society's professional helpers smother and prop up (or at the other extreme adopt a totally undefined role) then people, far from being helped, just rely more and more on the professionals, or flounder. To meet individual or family 'wants' without allowing the people concerned to make some positive contribution toward solving these wants, is to take away dignity in the human condition. In the end this approach helps nobody, The gratification of needs without the involvement of those possessing the needs is a concept, I believe, which has all the hallmarks of an insidious type of paternalism. The helping role of the professional should be geared to the attainment by 'clients' of society's 'normal' situations: the incentives should be made positively to encourage self-help and the attainment of potential. At present the incentives too often are for 'giving up' and being apathetic. No society can be healthy if it has a vested interest in being sick!

It is difficult to tread a 'middle course'. For example, Family First may house someone who has been institutionalised all their life and they may adapt and 'grow' into independence. But then they may also learn the art of milking the system! Whereas last year we could be persuading 'Authority' of the necessity to allow a person a chance of independence, next year we could be 'protecting' Authority from the pressures of the newly 'independent' person who has jumped on to the violent bandwagon of manipulating the system instead of being manipulated by it. Indeed such pressure serves only to make those operating the system more defensive, the agitators more militant and the recipients more cunning. The loss all round is in human dignity which is never obtained through trying to 'use' anything or anybody. The word "Rights" is a vexing one.

We none of us can demand housing, education, medical care, finance, let alone personal affections as 'of right'. If there were some way of providing everyone with their material wants who would be doing the providing? If it were the State then we could cease talking of rights and talk only of handouts which those in power provided. Their choice would then be paramount and the fuss about Rights purely academic.

If those in power decide the priorities, 'They' also demand the money in the way They deem fit in order to supply society with the wants They deem fit. Where then is anybody's basic right of choice? Where is the point of making an effort? In the long term, people will only put personal effort into something they believe in or something which offers an incentive: ideally it should offer both. The institutionalised person who is able, given a fair chance, to grow into independence, needs a continuing personal and social incentive, not a welfare Rights officer who says "Don't go out to work, you can claim this, that and the other." The fact that the person *wants* to work seems to be regarded as a total irrelevance. Eventually energies which could have been productive can be diverted to get maximum 'benefits' with the ensuing pattern of social isolation and personal boredom.

We need a revolution! Not one with guns, blood and anguish, but with time, effort and caring. One which can bring about a dynamic change of heart, and prevent our society from gathering an ever-growing 'dependent' population coupled with a rapidly enlarging and expensive-to-run governing bureaucracy. If we do not see the need to re-assert basic human dignity then we may expect an ever faster acceleration of violence in one form or another.

Political intolerance is, in our society, a fast growing form of violence on liberty. When members of extreme Political persuasions try, for example, to become tenants of this Trust with the direct aim of creating trouble there is need for clear and positive thinking. I do not believe people have a right to destroy opportunity for others in order to make Political self-styled 'Lords' of themselves. Nor do I believe that people have the right to criticise, condemn and interfere without proof that their interest is more than an academic or dogmatic whim. Recently I spent an hour or so discussing housing with a member of a rather 'extreme' group who was criticising the whole housing system and everything that had or was being done in the housing field. His tone was "*this* should be done" and "*that* should be done" and what were *we* doing about it. I said we had managed with very slender resources to house some 1,000 families and quickly asked him what he was doing. Only advising, of course. Advice backed by nothing but a Political dogma. He could have been using his energies to help *provide* housing.

When I see the rate at which new housing is vandalised and environments fall apart I cannot help wondering if we are determined to commit social suicide. The money it takes to house a family is no less real whoever is footing the bill – Government, Local Authority, private

landlord or owner occupier. The money has to come from somewhere and if present new housing stock is not cared for, how on earth shall we ever create enough homes?

A few years ago, a local housing estate had stickers all over it saying "Rent is Dead Money" – what is wrong with our political and educational system if anyone can imagine that the finance for housing can *all* come out of some Public Purse? Where do They get it from?

When we discuss with a "grumbly' tenant the economics of providing a housing unit he or she is usually amazed with the facts – why cannot some basic education about such things be given in school especially in that still largely wasted 16th year? Even the grimmest housing estates in our country could very quickly take on a totally different – and much more encouraging aspect – if each tenant contributed something to his home environment. If we could stop thinking THEY were going to do everything to put the world right and started doing a little more for ourselves. It is ironical that the practical things which can most easily improve the quality of life cost far less than the gadgets and electrical goods, etc., which are supposed to show our status. But quality demands effort and imagination.

In spite of all the adverts for whiteness, shining furniture, and sparkling floors, we are a dirty society. Visit homes in most areas and you can be shocked not at lack of material goodies but at smells and dirt. It costs very little to be basically clean – it takes effort. What a joy it is to find an odd 'palace' among the dreary houses in a row waiting for 'clearance'. There will always be one or two homes which, right to the end, are bright and welcoming. The occupants are seldom those who can make the effort most easily. Often they are old and achy but they have a pride which is now too often regarded as unnecessary, even sissy. Why don't window boxes appear on balconies of more housing estates, why cannot people be allowed to paint exteriors in different colours, why cannot individuality bloom? It is not simply a matter of saying "the environment does not lend itself" – people have and still do make the desert bloom where there is a will, effort and caring. Our life can still be in our hands, not the Local Authority's or the Government's unless we choose to abdicate all our freedom.

Our environment may not be ideal. It is made every minute worse by negligence, apathy and the gulf in understanding man's nature by both bureaucracy and the inciters to agitation. When you go to a Voluntary Housing Advice Centre and in answer to a sensible enquiry about housing get only a Politically orientated booklet on "How to Squat" the approach is so identical to the one track "I'm right and you'll do what I say" approach of the faceless bureaucrat.

Let us no longer delude ourselves that "helpers" intend necessarily to help according to need. They are as likely to dictate according to Political dogma or personal prejudice. Unfortunately, knowing your own and other people's 'rights' is becoming an important business, alas too often it

seems with a vested interest which serves only to further isolate those purporting to be helped. Many people who strike an 'unlucky' patch and who genuinely need help know all too well that knowing your rights can be about as helpful as knowing the names of the Continents if you are waiting for a late bus.

Violence you may feel is too strong a word to use in some of the contexts I have introduced. I think not. The violating of human dignity emotionally by breaking down the individual's ability to cope and to make decisions has disastrous effects not only upon the individual but upon those whose lives interact with him now and long into the future. The social damage can be far greater than the physical violence of a thug upon an innocent victim. That is both nauseating and visible. It incites immediate responses such as "bring back the birch" or a psychological explanation of the event. Our mixed up feelings over violence, our inability to come to terms with it in ourselves, our projection of it on to others and our willingness to use 'scapegoats', stems from our inability to accept aggressive feelings as a normal part of life. But aggression can be harnessed for good as well as for destroying.

Aggressive feelings in most people are as real as the need for sexual love is to most people. The two are not entirely unrelated in some people. Sexual energy can be perverted and we are fairly regularly given examples in the media of other people's perversions. I believe natural aggression can also be perverted. One of the most dangerous aspects of its perversion is its sometimes innocent disguise. Violation of human dignity can be achieved as well by a smartly turned out official with efficient looking briefcase from the Town Hall as by a layabout thieving opportunist lounging idly in the Market Square.

It is time we put reins on our aggressive feelings and channelled them to constructive purposes. Freedom is hard to regain once it is forfeited. Life's 'basic ingredients' need protecting and understanding – let us look at them in some detail.

WHAT IS A FAMILY?

No discussion of life's 'basic ingredients' will get far without mention of 'family'. We need to think of the meaning of 'family'. The popular image of family life can be very stereotyped – it reflects a folk lore concept of 'family' as much as a real one. Families can be severely damaged by their struggle to attain the folk lore concept. Social work, planning and work patterns can all build up the 'image' with disastrous consequences on 'real' family life. The image of 'family' presented, say, by many children's stories is one facet of the folk lore about family life.

Until very recently, most public discussion of housing meant housing for families with two adults (parents) and 2 or 2.5 children! That most human adults have the need for 'pair bonding' is indisputable. Even young adults who have been badly hurt by relationships of older members in their own family usually feel the need for a partner. The majority of families will probably have two parents and a number of their own children. But we must accept that children brought up in other circumstances are not less worthy, nor potentially less able, and certainly should no more be victims of sentimental or punitive attitudes than children being reared in what we usually term 'normal' families. There are many children being reared by adoptive parents, or in one-parent families, and sometimes in many other types of family. For example, an older brother or sister may assume responsibility for younger members of the family in the event of death or desertion of the natural parents. In an attempt to provide a community background for their young, a minority of people have experimented with different types of commune.

There is a tendency today, and I fear a growing tendency, to regard children in minority but by no means unusual family situations (e.g. one-parent families) as being automatically in special need. Although one-parent families indeed do have problems (as do other families), they are by no means all likely to be problem families. If the children go to school with their teachers feeling that they are likely to be less effective or less capable than other children, then these children will probably fulfil the teachers' estimation of them.

Children are very sensitive to feeling ostracised or different from their contemporaries. We do all children a great injustice to separate them from their contemporaries simply because of the status or circumstances of their parent or parents. In the past, children from orphanages have suffered tremendously from the stigma of their status and address. In

retrospect we can see the damage that was – and still is sometimes – done. Yet we still precipitate exactly the same type of social isolation of particular groups for reasons which are without validity. I find the 'Born to Fail?"* approach unfair. It creates too many assumptions which are ill founded. Every time a child, say from a one-parent family, is made to feel different, he or she is a peg nearer fitting his pigeon hole image. We are actually creating deprivation – then we study it!

The fact that certain groups have a higher incidence of problems may have little to do with their status, but everything to do with not being accepted as 'normal'. 'Special provision' for minority groups can pander to a self-fulfilling prophecy which continues to misrepresent and hide the potential normality of those in the groups.

Accepting all types of family and all children as equal does not, as some people like to think, jeopardise the 'normal' family. When I first started work in Family First, there was a lot of hostility to the concept of allowing young unmarried mothers an opportunity for equal parenthood (not to be confused with 'special'). By giving them the opportunity to rear their baby in their own homes without any kind of institutional management we were genuinely thought by some people to be creating a threat to what they regarded as a correct way of life. I argued then from belief what I now argue from proven experience that allowing a single parent an equal opportunity to be a good parent does in no way threaten a 'normal' happy two-parent family situation.

That it may unsettle a family situation which has stresses underneath the surface is quite true. But the fault is not with the single parent, but with the family which is failing to resolve its own inadequacies and seeking to present an outward appearance of respectability by making a scapegoat of somebody else.

Such an attitude is not only injurious to the single parent family but also very harmful and injurious to the children within the so-called normal family situation. We will be looking at many aspects of life which occur in the family and between the family and its neighbourhood or the outside world. But when I talk about a family, I mean not only the so-called 'normal' family but any family.

My definition of a family is a group of caring individuals in which, when there are children in the group, one or more adults accept a continuing personal responsibility for them until maturity is reached. The caring should include loving, disciplining, provision of material necessities, opportunities for learning and breadth of experience in neighbourhood relationships and the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Such a definition does immediately call into question the relationships with children which are of a stop/go nature. I am not now referring to

* "Born To Fail?" : National Children's Bureau report by Peter Wedge and Hilary Prosser, 1973. (Arrow Books).

inevitable circumstances like hospitalisation but to the voluntary circumstances in which so-called caring adults use children to suit their own convenience rather than considering the real needs of the children. This is not a narrow philosophy which says that caring adults should be totally absorbed with the rearing of the young in their care, but it is a philosophy which derives from the necessity of children to feel beyond any shadow of doubt that the adult or adults in their life have got the capacity and willingness for continuing care. This capacity and willingness is of inestimable value; far beyond that of material comfort in a particular home.

In Family First, we too often see the emotionally debilitating effects upon grown-up children of parents who, while never having shown true continuing concern over the years, still manage to exercise a powerful – and often very negative – hold over their offspring. Even as adults, children yearn for the acceptance of loving concern from their parents. They are often driven to seek it, and can be repeatedly shattered not to be able to 'earn' it. For example, a tenant of Family First gets offered a permanent Council flat. Although she has proven she can fend for herself, she feels compelled to seek parental approval for the move.

Her parents, as a matter of course, offer disapproval which she conforms to by turning down the flat, and thus shuts off (at least for the time being) her next step in growing independence. The blow to her growing confidence causes a ripple of crises as she begins to doubt her ability to manage, and her parents then rally in with fondly sounding sentiments of how they were sure their daughter could not have coped in the new flat. They point to her lack of confidence as proof. Having caused havoc, quietly, discreetly but nevertheless ruthlessly effectively, they then again disappear from view for months, leaving their grown-up daughter to try to rebuild her life yet again single-handed. She again feels the extreme hurt of the rejected child who needs to be loved.

"You're lucky we're not like Jenny's parents," can be said or implied in many ways by Sarah's parents who, from the shaky situation of their own marriage, vent their feelings by 'bringing down' Jenny's separated parents. The harm to children in both families is unnecessary, and subtly they learn social skills aimed to disguise hurt with false sweetness. Sarah picks up methods of expression and attitudes toward Jenny. But, at eleven, she cannot understand that her parents are protesting rather too much. One of the nastiest ways our superficial social skills work is that, having got our own domestic values confused and our priorities jumbled, we then seek to offload our inner dislike of our acquired standards by projecting them onto others. When children are involved this common and perhaps unrecognised dishonesty (violence) is corrosive to domestic morality.

A family, of course, need not include children (although every member must once have been one!). It is a pity that the conflicts and pressures of population control, 'safe' abortion and so on have landed on us at a time

when the role of women is at an historically interesting – but as yet still unresolved – stage.

On top of the current questions surrounding femininity and equality and the need for population control are the more subtle fashionable pressures which suggest that having children is perhaps second-rate to having a career. No woman should be made to feel that having a child is a 'must' – neither should she be made to feel that, if she has maternal stay-at-home feelings, she is inevitably a let-down compared to her working sisters. There are many highly confused women (and some men) who would like to be enjoying their children's young years at home but who are not. This is a tragedy for eveyone concerned. It sounds so naive to say that, because children are essential to the continuation of civilisation, their nurture and care in the full sense of the word (and not just the physical) is the most important job of all. Yet surely we have forgotten this. Maybe men have historically often chosen to forget it. Are women not in danger of slaughtering their unique strength hypothetically to prove equality and in so doing denying future children a fair opportunity? Women of course can achieve many careers and being mothers is not the only goal. But a personal choice not to have children should not carry the corollary that children are not worth having.

At best, having and rearing a child is not just women's work: thank goodness for the growing number of men who want to share their children's childhood. But beware (now that men can respectably be interested) of those who are using paternity to claim custody of and interest in their children for their own ends. If some women are falsely using the 'equality' thing to further their own personal vendettas on a particular man or children, increasingly some men are claiming to be loving, housekeeping fathers to avoid facing themselves and to 'get at' someone. A father avoided a prison sentence because he said he could be housed by Family First in order to provide a home for his little girl. Once he had a flat and had avoided the sentence, the little girl was 'parked' away elsewhere. Eventually his social worker believed our worries were justified.

There could be a rather sentimental surge of 'pro father' custody orders, etc. in the next few years in the wake of our overdue realisation that men can and should be allowed to care adequately for children and that women can be hostile to them.

The fact that children are 'fought over', put 'in care' and manipulated in a thousand and one ways indicates that, in our social priorities, they count fairly well down the list. This is not a failure which can be cured by more legislation. Nor can it be explained away by pointing to particular parents (how scapegoat parents suffer on public display in the Press). It is a reflection of our society's dislike for children. Travel by train with small children in this country and people will sit as far away as possible. Car parks get planned and play spaces forgotten. The nuclear family is often so small that if the adults in it stop caring there is no extended family

which fills in. Increasingly, even if there are relatives they do not feel any obligation, let alone love, to want to assist – it is supposed to be a "Social Services problem". Many of the young mothers we house have families – only some show any interest. Others may offer an invitation at Christmas for the sake of a sentimental fantasy of family Christmas. It gets hollow when the rest of the year counts for nothing.

The Law, with frightening clarification, is taking more rights away from natural parents and putting more power into the hands of the Professionals. I read the British Association of Social Workers' suggested very lengthy Code of Practice for Social Workers following the Maria Colwell episode with a sense of foreboding because in many social work offices the people making the decisions are far less experienced than those they purport to be able to help.

What needs saying, and what social workers never seem to say when defending their actions after a tragedy, is that some tragedies will unfortunately always happen. If we lived in a society in which the most perfect social systems were operating and in which all individuals accepted and tried to adopt a responsible attitude, tragedies would still occasionally happen.

No legislation will prevent the occasional outburst of uncontrolled temper or the unforeseen mental disorder which suddenly proclaims itself and results in tragedy. But the best way to minimise the likelihood of tragedies is not by making more stringent controls, nor by giving 'Authority' the opportunity to make parents feel even more insecure by threats of taking away children. Children become even more of a commodity – a bargaining point.

We need an upsurge of confidence on the part of parents or adults rearing children in their own ability for continuing care. The professionals should be helping to create this confidence not rigorously eating it away. I will be dealing later on with the role of professional 'helpers'. Only when children become accepted as worthwhile within their own family, within its neighbourhood, within its society will the risks of 'abuse' begin to fade. Misplaced public hysteria over the trauma of 'Children at Risk' means that a social worker can quite easily be emotionally blackmailed into a course of action because of the fear of publicity 'should anything go wrong'. When something does go wrong scapegoats are called for, new procedures are introduced and eventually new laws probably made.

It gets more and more impersonal – ever more likely to cause tragedies because personal love and care seem to count for little. Is it not a trifle 'sick' that so many of the growing army of professional 'helpers' leave their own still fairly young children at home alone so they can work for other people's so called deprived children? Workers can spend time and energy planning and carrying out community work miles away from their home area where it may urgently be needed. Well it must be for the money? Not always. Why then? The answer is complex and varies from

person to person. But a common reason for choosing the work away from the home area is "I don't want to get that involved." We need to think about the real significance of that very carefully. The 'helping' professions are currently brimming with people who fail purposefully to practise what they preach.

While thinking about defining a family, I looked up in my dictionary the word 'family' and I like what I found. "FAMILY (fam i li) L. Familia, from famulus, a servant. Those that live in the same house, including parents, children and servants; father and mother and children; such a group including other relations: children, as distinguished from their parents; those who can trace their descent from a common ancestor, or house, kindred, lineage; a race, a group of peoples from a common stock; a brotherhood of persons or peoples connected by bonds of civilisation, religion, etc.".

If only our social environment and helping systems had been built around this definition. To adjust our already inflexible social systems to a wider concept of family would demand a degree of initiative, enthusiasm and imagination which is not yet obviously available. But I believe it is dormant. In monetary terms the transition need not be expensive. Continuing to ignore the necessity for radical change could be economically as well as socially disastrous. But the radical change has got to grow from within the community, to develop around individuals, and groups of individuals, who have the confidence in themselves to get committed and involved in their own patch of the universe, facing conflicts as and when they occur, making decisions, agreeing to disagree, compromising, sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing and trying again.

What is tough is to be early in the field, to get committed, because then everyone else wants to lean on the innovators. The skill is in gradually delegating and increasing participation. If there are quarrels and disagreements in a group or neighbourhood it does not matter providing progress can be made – it is better to argue a point with a neighbour than to beat the wife or lose temper with a child. We forget sometimes just how basic we are – it would pay us to understand that although we can channel our 'basic ingredients' like aggression we cannot escape them. An unalterable fact of life is death however hard we push away any dealings with it and pretend it will never happen. It will! Feeling loving and feeling angry are also inescapable and can be used or abused: only a fool can pretend that he is not touched by such basics.

We need perhaps to take a new look at why people deviate from the 'norm'. Why are 'illegitimate' babies still born? Why are children so bored and apathetic about education now it is there? (How our elders fought for the right to education). Why do young people deliberately break and spoil their surroundings? We can read and amass much information about deviation, we can try to provide sophisticated 'help' systems, we can patronise or feel sorry, be angry and/or punitive. We can,

I believe, also miss a salient point. There is in society the very obvious 'pendulum' principle – the swing from one extreme toward a middle course, the overstepping of the centre and a swing back. Much deviation is, of course, a commentary on the present age, but what we may overlook is that the remedy is more 'basic' than we usually believe.

A young mother with a muddled, deprived or over-indulgent background may welcome her illegitimate baby in a primitive and powerful way which her elders and advisers find disturbing. She may make a mess of her relationship with her child not nearly so much because of any unsuitability for motherhood but because of the complicated pressures put on her to feel inadequate and different.

I will be dealing in some depth later with the attitude of young mothers because I believe we can learn much from them about family life. I would not agree with a psychiatrist friend who believes all single mothers have an urge to produce, but, through observation at first hand, I realise that some single mothers can show a quite uninhibited enjoyment of birth and their babies which would be a joyous sight in more two-parent families. Yet the Born to Fail tag is on the children and the primitive enjoyment may not be backed with the knowledge or experience which can sustain it. Society's sin is in wanting to preserve the folk lore image about the circumstances in which children should mature properly. Children can cope extremely well with a wide range of circumstances. No child should be ashamed to take his friends home because society has labelled his home 'different' – the criteria for feeling welcome in a home should be based on mutual interests, friendship and caring, not on the status of the adults within or its material trappings.

PART II

BASIC INGREDIENTS

The basic ingredients of life are those inescapable factors of being born, living (including loving and aggression) and dying. Here lies the root of our common humanity. Yet, in the name of 'help' these basic ingredients are often banished from their natural habitat (i.e. where they can be accepted within the context of personal relationships). Do many of our problems arise because we forget that becoming advanced technologically and materially is not a substitute for personally accepting these basics? It should be possible to accept them and also to acquire a high degree of technological, material and cultural attainment: thus perhaps fulfilling the requirements of a truly successful advanced civilisation. Some few individuals may achieve this balance: as a society we certainly do not. There is evidence to show that 'primitive' societies can live in a civilised way if they respect and come to terms with their basic ingredients. Is there any evidence that people can organise themselves into a stable long-lasting civilised way of life relying on technology and affluence, whilst ignoring their basic ingredients?

Take a realistic look at the way we live. The ever increasing demands on the 'helping' systems; the growing cult toward highlighting abnormal rather than normal human situations arising from birth, living and death; the increasingly clinical separating of the normal acceptance of these basics from personal, family and/or neighbourhood events into banished, institutionalised or even furtive ones. Could these trends not only lead to more violence and the lack of personal care already mentioned, but also to the eventual acceptance, through desperation and confusion, or even apathy, of a dictatorial form of Government? There is something in our culture which has long cherished individuality and enterprise. They are now severely under attack. The question which needs to be answered is whether we intend to make a stand for normal personalised practices concerning our basic ingredients, or whether we intend, in the name of synthetic freedom for our egos, to abdicate all personal care and responsibility? If we do, we can hardly grumble at the inevitable consequences which will end real freedom, and produce a conveyor belt cradle to the grave "Big Brother is watching you" way of life. If we want loads of 'abnormal' people in order to provide others with impersonal 'helping' jobs, we are going about it very excellently.

i. BIRTH

Birth is not just a biological process by which all mankind comes forth from the womb into the world; it is also perhaps the most emotionally exciting – and fearful – experience to be encountered. It takes you to the very frontiers of time and life. You read into it whatever is haunting your innermost being; perhaps a being usually very well disguised from your own view as well as other people's. It is a miracle, a longed for event, a biological nuisance, an inescapably inconvenient way of producing future generations, a heart-breaking trauma: it is what you have made it by the sum total of your life from your own birth. Its challenge is historic: you are past, present and future. It is certainly more than being 'induced' at an hour socially convenient to a doctor. It is more than the assurance that you will leave the hospital in a matter of hours or days with an infant successfully processed physically to standard specifications. However standard the infant, his mother (and, if he is present, his father) have been mightily influenced by the nature of his entrance on to life's stage. However standard he may appear, he is already unique. In spite of the streamlined clinical processing, what has happened to him has never happened before – because he is himself and nobody else.

Working at Family First and living at The Croft has brought me very close to the birth situation. After about two years living 'on the job' I can remember saying, with tongue partly in cheek, that single mothers were having babies as a protest against our materialistic society rather than because they were simply foolish, careless or uncaring (which is still the widely held public view). At the time we had had a run of tenants at The Croft who became pregnant after protracted deep disagreements at home, school or college over their future, for which there were highly ambitious plans which the young women concerned found unacceptable. With another eight years' experience, I have taken my tongue out of cheek, because it is very obvious that having a baby is an 'escape' to very many single (and some married women) from the pressures of education, the seeming boredom or unequal struggle of work, the real or supposed pressures of the parental home, or from loneliness.

Though we often like to think of this 'escape' route as an irresponsible, stupid way of of wasting 'potential', I wonder if it might not be fairer to understand it as simply reverting to a natural order of events which society, for reasons of culture, values and population control, etc. increasingly regards as deviant or even 'subcultural'. Even unmarried mothers from deprived and institutional backgrounds might be said to be asserting a basic natural need (however unwisely) rather than just selfishly and foolishly demonstrating their deviance from a 'norm'.

Women today (and perhaps even more tomorrow) who choose procreation instead of officially approved further education or work are regarded socially as more problematical than students who become addicted course-takers, and who will be around in their middle or even

late twenties still having contributed very little to society and with no clear idea of what they want to do or where they are going.

A woman has now an unprecedented opportunity for deciding whether or not to have a baby. If too many 'unwanted' pregnancies presented problems in the past, let us not delude ourselves that absolute choice is necessarily going to create a more contented or even a more efficient society.

Anyone who interviews young women for jobs must be aware of the increasing trend in voluntarily stating – and meaning – that they have no intention of having any children. Any such decision is personal and nobody has the right to question any couple's decision (how much friction is caused by grandparents dropping hints about lack of 'little ones'). But I now fairly frequently get summoned by particular women who obviously feel insecure in their views and who want to discuss their attitudes. Only time will tell, but there seems to be a clear difference between a determination to remain childless for well thought out reasons, and remaining reluctantly childless, because you cannot bring yourself to the point of saying you will be a good parent. The woman who chose childlessness because she wanted to pursue her career uninterrupted, the couple who remained childless because of their convictions over population explosion, may in middle years look back and wish they had acted otherwise, but I do not believe they will be bitter because their decisions were made with conviction. But the older woman without children who looks back and wishes she had a family but who could never face coming off the Pill (which is saying to yourself "I am going to be a good parent" with all that now implies in social terms) may grow bitter and present large problems to herself and those surrounding her. This situation is already by no means uncommon and could escalate. One wife I know engineered coming off the Pill by telling her doctor of certain side-effects (which for her didn't exist), became pregnant by 'accident' and then became so guilty about her 'deceit' that she had an abortion. Her husband wanted a child all along (but had conceded to his wife's view as "she would have to give birth") and the total situation has far from helped the relationship. The extreme anxiety felt by many women about their ability to be 'good' mothers is, of course, a factor which (if they produced) might make them 'difficult' mothers. The whole situation is so contrived because of society's ignorance of real values and people's basic needs. The emphasis on parental failure currently prevalent in social work is leading directly to increased failure.

To strike a perfect balance between the need for medical and material progress in relation to the domestic environment society expects us to provide for our children, and the instinctive and natural need of a family (remembering my definition) to evolve its own acceptable practice is very difficult: probably impossible. Wary we should be, however, of the acute conflict which arises in parents and potential parents over an expectation of parental 'performance' based on a stereotyped, theoretical and

unrealistic hypothesis of child care in a family. Inhibited by false feelings of inadequacy and the fear of surveillance, a potential parent may opt to remain childless – with subsequent bitterness – or become an unnecessarily inadequate parent because he or she has been led to believe that their instincts are not to be trusted.

Although natural instinct cannot alone ensure good parenthood, without it as a foundation for the family's relationship there is bound to be trouble. By natural instinct I do not mean the supposed immediate instinctive bond at the time of birth: by instinct in this sense I mean the ability to trust one's own assessment of a close family situation or relationship and to act in accordance with this assessment.

Advice can be heeded or ignored but seen always as an OUTSIDE influence. So many parents no longer listen to their own 'instincts' and their actions toward their children are governed almost entirely by outside pressures. This is dangerous as outside advice often follows no continuous course, but chops and changes according to the current fashion or 'voice', through whom it is expressed.

If single mothers produce babies because they are not inhibited by the restraints felt either in relation to their ability to be mothers, or by the very sophisticated needs (as society now proclaims) of their children, we should understand what is happening and try to disentangle some of the tangled undergrowth surrounding our preconceived ideas of birth. Rather than continuing to examine 'deviation' and to amass more 'help' which creates a greater spiral toward 'deviation' let us suggest to ourselves the possibility that 'deviation' could sometimes be a young person's way (however clumsily) of trying to find a 'normal' and natural set of values. We do not have to emulate the practice of the 'deviant' in his search for normality in order to be normal ourselves. But if we cannot see the urge toward normality which he/she is seeking then the 'deviant' problem will increase, i.e. more people will not conform to 'accepted' standards and even more complicated social systems devised to try to enforce a return to these standards. For this reason, far from there being a significant decrease in births to single mothers in the next decade, for example, I believe we could see another peak which will baffle the advocates of contraception and abortion. People will advise that even younger children get 'proper advice' – but miss the crux of the issue.

Living at The Croft (over a ten and a half year period) under the same roof as 130 young (mostly single) mothers during their ante-natal and post-natal period has proved to me that a situation seen from the outside – as say a research-hungry sociologist might see it – and from being part of it for a significant length of time bear no relation. Superficial responses to particular questions tend to bring forth the answers which tally with traditional thinking or with current discontent.

For example, complaining about finance is usual today, as a rationalisation of discontent. The discontent may have far more basically to do with being regarded as a different sort of person, than with real shortage of

money, but the discontent shows itself by expression over finance. Just as the busy person's excuse to get out of doing something they don't want to do is "shortage of time". Yet they always manage to squeeze in what they want to do.

Lesson one I learned from young mothers at The Croft is that where there is no expectation of weakness after childbirth, no weakness ensues save in the exceptional cases where surgery has been necessary or where the mother's health was poor beforehand.

However problematical her life (vis-a-vis parents, boyfriend, etc.), given a secure 'nest' (i.e. her own flat or even just one room which is personal), security in a group of people which accepts her as the person she is, and providing she can accept the role of mother she will very shortly after the birth be energetic and physically 'strong'. After 7-10 days, she will be back from hospital and fully responsible for her baby and household routine. Usually, after 11 or 12 days she will be going out for quite long walks to the city centre, etc. This physical 'toughness' was very noticeable to me after living in a variety of suburban environments where new mothers usually felt very exhausted and unable to cope well physically so soon. I am not saying that The Croft mothers are 'better' but simply noting that expectations of ourselves in relation to our circumstances can have dramatic physical consequences.

Another interesting lesson was that Croft mothers, if they had any post-natal depression, got it much later than the mothers I had previously known in suburbia or worked with in a high rise Council estate. The latter mothers became depressed – not always but significantly often – fairly soon after childbirth and they tended to assume (as their husbands also did) that this was due mainly to their physical tiredness.

Mothers at The Croft – again by no means always but significantly often – tend to get their period of 'blues' two or three months after childbirth. This seems to have little to do with their physical health, which, in fact, can deteriorate subsequent to depression because of loss of appetite or sleep. This is the period when they become aware that their expectations for themselves and their children do not match up with the reality of the actual situation. Their instinctive mothering wish (and usually their ability) is challenged by the responsibility of being a lone parent and not being able to share their parental responsibility, by the fear of future loneliness and the reality of needing to provide a permanent home. Most mothers overcome their depression and get through to a positive future. Some become apathetic and a familiar pattern of social dependency sets in. But this dependence is not inevitable. Mothers at this stage need to find in themselves the motivation for meeting the challenge of reality which at first depresses them. They need encouragement, accurate information and friendship. What they so easily can get is long-term supplementary benefit, a social worker and an increasing feeling of being a failure.

The single mother who is able or enabled to meet her challenge can

create an excellent lifestyle for herself and her child, either by utilising the opportunity to work and a Day Nursery, or by staying at home at least short-term on supplementary benefit, but doing something creative other than being at home (i.e. some involvement in community work, play-group, etc.), unless home is a creative place and not just a four-walled prison. There are many mothers who stay at home and fret about lack of amenities for their children. If only they had a Day Nursery they could work etc. To all mothers in this situation, I say for goodness sake do not accept a grumbling role, DO something. The main factor which makes the difference between a young lone mother who copes well and one who does not is her motivation. This has little indeed to do with intelligence or background. Handicapped mothers or mothers of handicapped children can, with courage, achieve a great deal and be fulfilled. The mother who thinks THEY should solve all her problems will never be content.

Important in illustrating this point is the experience we had after opening a new Day Nursery in September 1975. Here was the panacea which was to solve those child care problems for mothers who wanted to train, work, etc. The Day Nursery is proving invaluable; but the children and mothers who are benefiting are those with the capacity to make the effort to get there. Some mothers who bemoaned their lot wanted the opportunity: but would not make the effort to walk the length of two roads to get it! Would Social Services lay on a taxi for them? So, yes, we do need far more community amenities like our Day Nursery which runs as part of a Family Centre not only for tenants but neighbours and others: but even when the amenities are there, a society which is led to believe everything is theirs by right without effort will not be able to take advantage of them.

So the single mother tends to get pushed back into her traditional 'deviant' slot once social workers are involved, and this involvement starts or accentuates often at the time when she is depressed. Thus she is restored to her second class self-image, rather than being enabled to 'break through' and meet her challenge from the time she fully recognises that it exists. The predictability of the social system ensuring the cycle of deprivation is frightening: it is not inevitable. We make it seem as if it is. The Rule Chart of a Diocesan Mother and Baby Home is shown (Appendix IV). The Home closed six years ago, though establishments with similar rules do still exist though they are regarded more and more as being outdated. The whole inference and emphasis 'put across' by these types of rules are that the mother has done an irrevocable wrong and there is a punitive streak in the thinking which creates such rules. People who banish the young man because he has fathered a baby assume he is not an interested party (an attitude not designed to promote a concern). If you wanted to sort out your uncertain future with baby's father how could you even meet him if he worked normal hours during the day, and you had to be in by early evening and he was not allowed to visit?

But impossible as these rules may seem, a mother's self-esteem as a

mother was not usually nearly as fundamentally under attack as nowadays – and more so in the future unless we are careful. However harsh 'matrons' might have been, and some were (and still are) very formidable, you and your baby were under attack for what you had DONE and not usually for what you WERE in yourself. Even all the very wrongly 'forced' views, which put pressure on mothers to place their babies for adoption, left a spark of dignity which a mother could muster to help her through the fearful experience. Now more mothers are 'free' to keep their babies. But the 'official' expectation of parenthood can turn what might have been a very positive creative relationship into one constantly under surveillance, threatened, and society's professionals are encouraged to assume the Born to Fail judgements.

The advertising campaign: "Every child a wanted child" implies the erroneous assumption that parents who have unplanned children (or children whom OTHER people regard as 'foolishly' born) are permanently failed people. So judgemental is society's version of good parents becoming that I believe it to be one of the largest underlying reasons why teenagers 'reject' their own parents as a matter of social policy if they do not match up to their current vision of 'perfection'.

Adolescents have always had and always will have views not always in accord with their parents; but what is destructive is the lack of respect for the parental attitude, when disagreed with, and the reasons given often lie in the area of "well, it's my parents' fault" because they did or did not do something. Here lies the damage of deliberately transmitting deprivation. How often are the assumptions of 'broken homes' used as a blanket excuse for lack of personal responsibility in adolescence. Of course, what has happened to us in childhood is of immense importance; but even people of below average intelligence have far more ability to paddle their own canoe than is now accepted.

It was once often said that problems within a family united it: that was sometimes true and sometimes not. The factor which makes the difference between a 'positive' and a 'negative' family is how far individuals accept their role within the unit and how far they abdicate or overlook or twist their own role. Increasingly we receive letters from parents, or have them phone or call and tell us, something to this effect: "The Social Welfare got us all in this mess, so it can get us out of it." Parents of a daughter with a failed marriage blame the social workers for trying to keep the marriage going when it "should have died and saved us all this mess."

The pressures today are worse than yesteryear's moralistic ones exerted by the 'good' over the once 'fallen' or 'unfortunate'. Today to be deemed a failure seems to carry the harsh ring of finality and a pharisaical hypocrisy which makes yesteryear's workers who set out to redeem look like accepting angels!

But whatever the prevailing attitude to 'unwise' birth, I believe it stems not so much from the practicalities of population, or from 'morality' or

from the 'wisdom' often declared, but from our ingrained negative cultural attitudes to birth generally. Even if only a small fraction of the population became parents, the birth situation should always be revered not despised, allowed without the intrusion of false inhibitions and not judged by negative philosophies. To be a mother – and a father – should not mean to be put on trial, to be criticised by a faceless sea of people. Our assumptions should be that parents WILL want to and can do the best for their children, whoever the parents happen to be, just as we assume that if a man enters a career of his choosing he has some confidence that he may succeed. There are times when these assumptions prove wrong and THEN and only then we have a right to any interference if a child is 'at risk' to use the currently highly emotive phrase. If parents felt more confidence in their parental job and the way it was viewed by the specialists (including their own G.P., those at the clinics, hospitals, schools and so on) there would be much less 'failure'.

I have just visited a very stable young mother in a maternity hospital. Already she is beginning to mistrust her own ability to cope, as a direct result of the way the staff are handling her and her baby. She felt she had to send for the social worker who, while trying to help, cast doubt upon her maternal confidence simply by discussing her ability to cope in cold blood. It is difficult to explain how discussion of a person's ability to cope – even when there is every conscious effort not to undermine it – can actually sow the seeds of doubt and then water them. Confidence to cope can only be gained and encouraged in a practical context – when people feel they are achieving. Discussion of their ability by an 'expert' unrelated to any practical context makes most people far less confident – yet society tends to give honours to the articulate who hypothesise about problems rather than to those who can work in a practical context to help overcome those problems.

The growing revulsion against childbirth is a threat to the future happiness of children and future adults. Trying to pretend it is not a basic – even painful – process is the same as conning ourselves that we do not actually die, and we push old people into hospitals so we don't see them die to make the illusion easier. We must not, it seems, acknowledge the existence of pain or suffering: it is for the experts to deal with out of sight. The pressure this in turn puts on the experts is something which few of them lovingly sustain: most have to 'switch off' in order to cope. It has sometimes been asked how some apparently decent citizens could not only condone what was happening at the concentration camps in Germany in the second world war, but often actually be employed in the destruction process. I remember reading a vivid account of a happy family man who spent his day sweeping away corpses. But how can we so readily commit and pay people well for 'caring' jobs which are there simply because as a society we do not care much about being human, except by the sham proclaiming of the often undemonstrated 'normality' of our own existence. Must our family comply with those with two

composed parents, high earnings, expensively dressed, warmly housed, with homes beautifully furnished, fed on all the right foods and travelling abroad for holidays?

There are two children around, problem free, bright, smilingly radiant, especially when going out to play with whiter than white football shorts in the mud. Against this image, not many people stand up. But the image is powerful. We do banish pain and complications which involve us emotionally. We reject having the baby born at home. We con ourselves that it is because it is medically safer. There is no reason why a domiciliary home birth service should not medically be as foolproof for almost all mothers. How much more personal. How much more reassuring at a deep level. If the family and its neighbours accepted birth as a natural event, were prepared (yes) to share in it, did not see a reason for shielding the young from it, how much real learning and sharing could be achieved. Yes, it does involve effort, pain (usually) and grunting and groaning (constructively – much more fun when you are not stuck alone in a clinical labour ward). Yes, it does mean wrapping up the afterbirth and disposing of it and all sorts of very humdrum things. There is something basic in our nature which should be accounted for and respected in its interplay with our fellow beings. I believe that a teenager who experiences birth or death (real birth and real death) at first hand is a more whole person and less likely to seek phoney violence and impersonal contact. Seeing granny die naturally may not be as comfy as watching a violent film: but granny needs you there and you might find a new ability to come to terms with your innermost emotions.

How on earth, I often ask myself, do young women still know so little about childbirth? Whether they are going to have babies or not, it is something which is knowledge as basic as learning one's ABC – boys too should not only know the clinical facts about conception but have a 'feel' for the birth situation. One 16-year-old at The Croft had many 'O' levels early and had extremely bright parents. Yes, she said, she knew what to expect in labour. But after getting to know her, she gradually talked about her fears, which had not subsided right up to the 'bearing down' stage of labour. At this stage she was still trying to convince herself she wasn't having a baby. She believed the baby would be cut out of her tummy without anaesthetic. Yes, in 1975!

Judging by the instruction in schools, many children get the facts but few the 'feel'. And childbirth – like death and being loved – is something which is more than an academic exercise. Long decades of cultural 'feel' are built up, transmitted, inbibed and rationalised into our medical, moral and social systems.

Childbirth needs to be part of a 'tribal' system. I am not suggesting we go into mud huts and adopt pseudo tribalism! But, once again, the 'deviant' young single mother may be able to teach us something about what is needed. Before starting The Croft, I felt it was important to find out what young homeless and potentially homeless mothers felt they

needed in terms of housing at this time. It is not enough simply to provide a service into which people go because they have no alternative. It is not enough to produce a brain child which has no relation to the actual needs and feelings of those purporting to be helped. I like to find out what a young person sees as the 'ideal' solution to their own situation. Young pregnant single mothers came up with their solution: they wanted a place of their own, their own personal responsibility for their child but over the period of the birth and for a while after they wanted others in a similar situation and age around them. They did not want a warden monitoring them, or rigid rules; they did want access to "someone older who knew the ropes." The Croft emerged offering independent flatlets with built in kitchens and a group of 5-8 people. A group large enough to make particular friends but not large enough to be impersonal. Living under the same roof, but in its own flat, was my family – the point of reference. A bell system linked to the side of my bed gives security that when labour – or another emergency – arrives there is someone on hand at night. But the emphasis is that the group is self-sufficient and the bell gets rung on average only three times a year. New arrivals who have been institutionalised may summon help very readily and slowly wean themselves into greater dependency on the group and on themselves.

If a baby cries incessantly at night, the girl next door may well knock up the troubled mother and produce a cup of coffee. Sometimes she will take the baby and give the mother a couple of hours' respite.

Friendships made at The Croft have survived for years after tenants leave. Sometimes TV sets are sent away as tenants realise they prefer companionship. I have often been asked what makes a particular group 'tick over'. It is difficult to be too precise, but in general it is having a mix of abilities and 'problems'. The pressures put on us by Social Services is to take the mothers who often present social workers with the biggest headaches: sometimes the reasons are genuine but sometimes the ones who make the loudest cries for help are those who would find water in the middle of a desert. By and large, medical social workers have a more accurate assessment of those who really need a secure base from which to sort out their future, and those who are well able to cope but are content to muddle on letting everybody else do their work for as long as their luck holds.

In recent years, the post-abortion young woman has presented a new aspect to our work. If she has been convinced that abortion was desirable or inevitable, and then finds – in spite of herself – that she has maternal feelings because the birth process has been incomplete, then she has a problem. Sometimes we are able to help. In the same way as some parents feel failures, so may she. Self-esteem has to be built up. Allowing a chance for involvement in the community and for helping somebody else may help.

Post adoption mums in my experience need far more help than those who keep their babies. How wrong is the assumption that adoption

is a neat ending of a saga. Dogmatic views about what is good for a mother planning adoption can be cruel. So often it has been assumed that a mother has to care for her infant six weeks prior to placing with prospective adopters; sometimes it is assumed that she will want to be parted as soon as possible after the birth. In fact, each mother is a very individual person and needs to be treated in the way best suited to her and her child.

For example, Ann was a maternal girl who would have loved to keep her child but (because she felt a sense of duty to return home to look after younger children after the death of her mother) she steeled herself for adoption. She wanted to keep the child for the initial six weeks (a decision which she subsequently felt was right "or I could never have loved my new children"). I have never been able to prove it but there is, I believe, a predictability about the length of a normal labour in relation to a mother's attitude to having to part with her child. Ann had a three day labour: in part a protest at having to part with a child she loved well? Ann predictably was an excellent mother for six weeks, and indeed gave her child a marvellous start in life, including two weeks at the breast. On the appointed day, Ann took her baby to a town 40 miles away to hand over to the adoption society concerned. While she went in to sign a document, she was asked to put the baby in a cot in an ante-room. The infant was 'wet' after the long journey, and Ann asked if she would be allowed to change the baby's nappy and say goodbye. She was reassured that she would. She never saw her child again. She felt humiliated and very bitter. Her acutely sensitive feelings at that time had been quite overlooked in the interests, as she was afterwards told, of "not leading you on to have a good weep." A fond goodbye and a long weep was just what she needed to complete a whole experience. Just another indication of our (wrong) judgement that things must be smoothed over, quiet and orderly on the surface, emotional attachment and natural turmoil curbed, hurt smoothed over by attitudes which promote false values (i.e. "anything for a quiet life") or tranquillisers. Yes, artificial hurt is induced while real hurt ignored. Ann's 'violent' situation over the method by which her baby was taken away was only healed when luckily she met her future husband who understood.

Of the mothers at The Croft having second babies, two thirds had their first adopted or aborted 'under pressure' or in a manner which they felt had 'cheated' them. A minority went on to have the second adopted under pressure and unresolved feelings continued.

The girl who has to choose between 'never seeing her parents again" and having her child may opt for adoption as the price of continuing a false relationship with parents. Parental pressures for adoption are harshest in families where there has been a marked increase in affluence in the past ten to fifteen years. The daughter's baby becomes a stab in the back – "after all we've done for you." Yet the daughter needs family approval very often and pays a high price to keep it: others fly in the face of their family and accept the consequences. Luckily, families seldom

retain harsh attitudes endlessly: though the likelihood can never be ruled out.

About 20% of the tenants at The Croft came not because they had families who rejected them or because they did not have families but because the step was seen as a positive step within a supportive family situation. Strikingly – but perhaps only coincidentally as the incidence is not wide enough to create a generality – adoptive parents with a 'difficult' pregnant adolescent girl have sometimes sought The Croft as a possible 'solution' in enabling their adoptive daughter to 'find' herself and seek out a future without the tension of the present home situation or the complete rejection of being 'turned out'. One Croft mother spent months tracing her own natural mother, did not like her, became receptive again to her adoptive parents and kept her own child very satisfactorily. Her adoptive parents' attitude was commendable and loving. They cared more for their adopted daughter than for what anyone might think of her going away from home, etc.

Social workers have often said they do not think us justified in taking what they regard as non-urgent 'cases'. The girl just illustrated did, in our view, represent an urgent need. Surely cyclical deprivation can best be prevented by helping when it can do most good – in helping people to help themselves but who need help to do it. That mother without The Croft might well have followed the path of her natural mother and historically it could have been said to be inevitable.

I believe that the circumstances of conception have much to do with a particular mother's (and probably a father's) deep emotional attachment and reactions to a baby or child. For example, if a single mother bears a child of someone for whom she felt real love and affection, even if that relationship ends she will still be likely to continue having a longstanding loving and responsive relationship with the child. If the mother conceives because of an unrealistic fantasy (e.g. 'it couldn't happen to me!" or "I don't mind who the father is") she is more likely to have ambiguous and even hostile feelings toward the child, if her feelings for the father were based purely on a sexual relationship and/or were ambiguous to the extent of precluding real caring affection based on mutual respect.

And if this is true of single parents, must it not also be true of all parents? If relationships between men and women are based on material factors and expendable convenience rather than on mutual respect and the dignity of 'basic' ingredients then, whatever the title given to the relationship, should we be surprised at the outcome of child abuse where a child results from the relationship? Such relationships, because of their shallowness, readily call for 'help' from the helping systems, readily get impersonal help which ensures the vicious cycle of deprivation.

Attitudes to babies and children are also affected by the actual birth situation. At the time of birth, the treatment a mother receives – because of her heightened sensitivity – makes a profound impact. This impact – like labour pains – can quickly be sent from the conscious mind. How

many women can explain labour pains a few hours after the event? Yet the events surrounding birth have a way of rising to the conscious mind years after. Have we been conditioned increasingly to suppress our 'involvement' with the process of birth rather than accepting it for the large experience which involves pain as well as joy? Because birth has become a clinical and materially 'packaged' event, we try to pretend it is just a routine, and often banish it from our minds.

It is sometimes only when subsequent events make the conscious mind 'recall' that we can begin to look at it. What happens at birth cannot be neatly packaged and posted from the mind for ever. The mother who parts with her baby reluctantly soon after birth may be overwhelmed by feelings she cannot explain when several years later – and married – she gives birth again. The mother who apparently had a 'normal' time may appear to react tensely and unexpectedly 'out of character' when her daughter is pregnant. The mother may relive an experience she buried because she never naturally lived through it.

The efficient streamlining of the birth process, the plastic see-through cribs, the detailed attention to all things physical, the increasing medical revulsion with labour pains (and epidurals as a matter of course in some hospitals): the whole synthetic take over of a basic natural and major event leads, I believe, to more personal and social problems than we dare even glance at as it would challenge too many accepted principles of 'care'. Could women lose the ability to give birth naturally – would we deem this progress? And will medical staff get ever more 'efficient' and treat women in labour as pods about to shed peas? In many areas it is getting more difficult to get a home confinement. What a difference attitudes can make – and how difficult to define the results!

Arriving at a maternity department with a mother in labour has been a fairly regular occurrence in my life. A nursing sister who greets a mother at the ward entrance with a frozen voice and brusque manner can go a long way to ensuring that the mother freezes up inside, and so inhibits the birth experience. The sister who welcomes a mother with natural dignity and confidence can convince her that she is about to be a very important person. What happens (or rather the way it happens) at the first internal examination after arrival is of great significance to the subsequent ability to relax. I know one sister who seems to take rather a delight in hurting single mothers: I have found this out by being in the adjacent ante room (not at second or third hand) and it is sickening. Why are people working in the birth situation if they cannot see it as one of dignity and purpose whatever the status of the woman concerned? Nothing degrades more quickly than being treated impersonally and unkindly in a situation which is, essentially, very personal.

One of the necessities surrounding childbirth and the succeeding months while the child is relatively immobile is the need of most mothers to have other women around them. The mothers who planned The Croft recognised this need in themselves – now there are militant groups who

want single mothers always to have their own independent flat away from other mothers as a demonstrative gesture of equality. Fine if they have friends or relatives nearby: if they haven't they may not thank you for the 'freedom' until their child is well and truly 'launched'.

Having other women about can, to certain individuals, prove irksome and clashes of personality occur, and even open hostility. But comparison of birth and 'rearing' situations of mothers with and without very informal access to other women convinces me that those who find any access irksome and who, therefore, provoke hostility by rejecting it may use this as an outlet of their own perhaps more-than-usually aggressive and possessive feelings (which in an isolated situation might have turned in on their child). Clashes within a known community can act as a safety valve. Have we become so befuddled in our attitude to living situations that we cannot recognise the difference between clashes within a known community which are part of the 'natural' fabric of life, and those between different sections of a community which try to build up the power of one group by diminishing the validity of another? In groups artificially created by the social systems (e.g. probation hostels) problems of discipline are created sometimes because 'helpers' assume all clashes of will, personality, etc., demand intervention and explanation in detail. At The Croft on occasions, tenants have had to have rows with each other in order to mature: it is so obvious that (in general) those from institutional backgrounds expect intervention when they themselves lose control. Learning to cope with their 'strong' feelings comes with time: and by intervention only happening when real injustice to another is involved.

I have already said that women (or most of them) need other women about them when bringing up babies and small children. The occasional irksomeness of an older woman interfering is nothing compared to the lonely vacuum of being isolated. I do not mean that mothers need to live in each other's pockets and constantly in an out of the back door discussing babies endlessly: but they need to have other women they know personally in the vicinity whose presence offers an unspoken sense of security.

I have known several mothers who have killed their babies, and more who have battered them. There seems a link between these tragic events and the social isolation of mothers: a social isolation which is not remedied by social workers. Indeed their presence can precipitate the intensity of isolation and of insecurity and self-hate. Natural adult contacts can defuse tensions. The contacts need to be wider than the nuclear family.

In a very tense, isolated situation, a child can 'get' what the mother would like to do to the father. As one mother said, "My baby got what I wanted its father to have but I couldn't get at him." She did not mean to hurt her baby, and was full of remorse after each attack. Something in her mind snapped because the constant (reasonable) demands of the baby reminded her of the constant (unreasonable) demands of her man.

Outside adult contact on a normal neighbourhood basis could certainly have relieved the tension, and helped the mother to distinguish between reasonable and unreasonable demands. Professional 'helpers' can actually diminish a mother's confidence in her mothering skills and precipitate rather than banish the risk of 'abuse'. Young isolated mothers can easily build a defensive exterior which makes it superficially apparent that they are not wanting to be friendly. The barriers tend to go down when children start primary school and mothers have an 'excuse' to meet naturally at school gates, etc. It is a pity that so many of the attempts to provide meeting places for young mothers are in situations which many of them feel they cannot approach. The situation can only be improved naturally at neighbourhood level by neighbours providing friendship and overcoming the barriers of initial shyness, and at planning levels so that communities include 'mixed' types of accommodation. For example, not placing hundreds of young families together – which so often happens.

This need to have other women about I found very obvious when working with mothers on a new high rise estate. They had been removed from their cosy – if physically 'slum' – environment at a time when many families had small children and they found themselves in modern homes which presented, however, a sterile rearing ground.

Planning has often separated older people from young families and the lack of natural conversation between older experienced women and young mothers leaves an emotional void. The mothers, new to each other, were suspicious of each other: fearful of being thought not 'good enough', etc., many became acutely lonely and depressed.

Menfolk who in the old environment had often returned home for lunch mid-day were away for as much as 10-12 hours daily because of the need to travel further. Neighbours were unknown and everyone seemed 'edgy', uncertain, waiting for someone else to act first. Planners saw no reason why the Local Authority should do more than put people into the modern hygienic homes they now had – after all "rearing children was parents' responsibility." But a joiner without tools cannot make a window frame: a parent without friendship of other adults and playspace cannot without great personal resources rear a child as he would wish. Yet it was only when the local primary school headmaster noted that the children coming into school at five from the high rise flats were backward in 'social learning ability' that the need for playspace and/or playgroups was officially recognised – why is not the parental voice authoritative?

The trend in social policy has been to assist mothers with young children to stay at home – hence supplementary benefit allowances for lone mothers (and fathers) and often considerable pressure not to contemplate working. Oddly enough the trend to encourage lone mothers to stay at home is running concurrently with a growing acceptance of 'married' mothers working. The dogmatic approach either way is damaging. Many single mothers would be more fulfilled if they were working and their children would also benefit: motherhood is a qualitative relationship not

necessarily a quantitative time-based one, although many mothers feel a need to be at home and at home therefore they need to be. If I was in the position however of making new legislation which offered children the best opportunity for secure, contented childhood, I would not go on putting up the financial allowance as a matter of 'right' for those able to work but would build up neighbourhood self- help services which enabled parents to be economically independent knowing their children were safe in a caring local community.

Some parents could well be volunteers (while on supplementary benefit) in neighbourhood services as an interim between staying at home all the time and working. Government and Local Authorities would be better providing the tools rather than taking over the role of provider, thinker, planner, etc., which belongs to parents in relation to their children. A child who grows up thinking that 'The Welfare' will do his thinking and pay his bills as it has done his parents' has been cheated of his birthright – an opportunity to think and act for himself.

A child who sees his parent struggling constructively for a future is infinitely better off than the one who only hears moans about what The Welfare should be doing. If, of course, the trend moves toward enabling parents to work (and I include voluntary work) rather than rely passively on state provision of sustenance then it follows that school buildings will be open in the holidays for hobbies (and job opportunities?). If teachers were sufficiently interested in the long term aims of education, they could do so much out in the front line of shaping new creative educative policy designed to help children to get a sense of belonging in the community, a sense of achievement in using initiative and working 'with' their parents in providing for a future. The waste of capital tied up in schools for months in the year unused is a crime.

When The Croft started, all sorts of people gave me advice about what to do – or not to do – about boyfriends. This was seen as a major problem. It taught me much. Because a girl was having a baby was seen by some as a good reason for banning her from all male companionship: why? The thought that I would allow her boyfriend to visit evoked strong protest: "they might make love on the premises" being about the 'worst' that was shot at me. The confusion of attitude to sex and morality was the only lasting picture left in my mind. In spite of our so called permissiveness, we are a puritanical society which likes to be a voyeur rather than a doer. Love and sex seem so totally unattached in the minds of many adults that one cannot wonder at the boom in commercialised de-personalised sex, which I mention in greater length elsewhere.

I had little experience of other people's boyfriends, but instinct led me to the conclusion that if two people were responsible for making a baby, then both should be allowed the opportunity for accepting some constructive part in its future. The only rule about boyfriends which seemed appropriate was one at a time. Boyfriends in fact turned out trumps. We said they were welcome if they helped around the place – and

they did. Only a handful ever caused problems, which were dealt with when they arose. It would have been grossly unfair to ban all because of the actions of a very few. In many instances a young couple were able to get to know each other in a natural domestic setting. Sharing cooking, washing up and changing nappies guarantees a sounder basis for knowing each other than just going out together. Sometimes a putative father or a new boyfriend would vanish after a few weeks of finding out the realities of life: others stayed around and eventually became supportive cohabitees or husbands and fathers in homes of their own.

People often seem curious about the unseen fathers of illegitimate babies: perhaps they have had a shoddy time. Banished from view and then accused of lack of interest! Some are just not interested: fathering children and 'knocking' off girls is part of their immature way of life: however, such men are a minority and this needs stating clearly. Many more have a definite feeling about fatherhood and are sometimes even more confused than the mother. She, by having the child, has matured. He – left on the outside – stays still. If society has traditionally pitied, punished or helped the mother, it has invariably left father out in the cold. At a time when being male, especially in the procreative sense, is to be regarded with suspicion, we should be fair and see there are two sides to the situation. Very occasionally, I have known visiting putative fathers who were far more concerned for their child, than the mother who carried the child. Feeling pity for the mother does not help the father. Many putative fathers are simply not clear about their feelings or their obligations. They may or may not pay some maintenance and in practical terms it makes no difference to the actual income of the young mother if she is on supplementary benefit.

His experience of small children may be very limited and uncreative, he may feel inhibited about showing his depth of feeling for his own child (and his situation is not always made easier by the mother who makes him feel very aware of the fact that she is carrying the main responsibility). But in recent years, I have become increasingly suspicious of the new cultural pattern of the state providing for the lone parent, whilst he or she blames the other parent for not providing yet ensures that the putative parent's identity is not known and therefore deliberately excluded. Whereas finance, of course, is not the measure of care for a child, it is a necessity for the care of the child that he/she has a roof, warmth, and food (which cost money) as well as love (which does not).

State provision without the need for making any personal effort can corrode opportunity for sustained caring between individuals. And both parents have a right to care for their child. There is no way, of course, to legislate justly to stop people from being parasitical, without the risk of hurting the wrong people. Society can however make policy which offers a safety net and which provides incentives and a social climate which encourages responsibility and achievement rather than treating those who try hardest like innocent fools.

Recently, the Playhouse Theatre offered Family First free tickets for a show. These went mostly to new tenants who said they wanted to go because they "never went out": only one actually went. The reason was sheer apathy. The evening was cold admittedly: there were no baby sitting problems. It just meant effort. But to people brainwashed into doing nothing and being conned into believing it is better for their children to do nothing than to make an effort, even the effort of going out at a particular time – in the event – proved too much. If this sounds a harsh attitude, it is not meant to be so.

If you have read all the pages carefully, you will have read the part where I admit to once temporarily being a reluctantly lethargic mother. I am not judging harshly, only realistically. The cure for lethargy is not increasingly being propped up; it is being able to achieve through recognising practical opportunity; it is realising you can succeed and finding a measure of strength in yourself. I have seen so many instances of young people who have broken through the apathy barrier; the common factor is always finding motivation within themselves to achieve what they are able to. Finding this motivation is more difficult if the obvious reasons for managing are taken care of, e.g. income without the necessity of effort. It takes tremendous energy and guts to get up in the morning and go to work if those around you are staying at home supported, probably very much to the level of your earnings, by the State. I must make it clear that I am not talking about genuine unemployment benefit or that paid to people with genuine handicaps, etc.

Young putative fathers visiting The Croft for the first time almost invariably looked scared stiff as if they were waiting to be shouted at and turned out. Given a welcome, they looked astonished! Realisation that being welcome carried the responsibility of taking some interest in the running of The Croft was a challenge many liked and others fled from. A trend which has been noticeable is that West Indian putative fathers do not take as much interest in their babies as they did a few years ago. Although a West Indian father may have had no intention of marrying his child's mother, there seemed to be a warm acceptance of paternity of the child and a willingness to offer emotional if not always financial support. However, times have changed and it seems the young West Indian men have cottoned on to the ideas of the most evasive of the white young putative fathers: that is, you say it was Tom, Dick or Harry. You take an interest perhaps in the mother more for what you can get out of her, than out of interest for the child. This is a great shame. West Indian culture may have been matriarchal and thought to be out of step with white culture here, but I for one would have been happier to see the best of the West Indian culture preserved rather than giving way to the worst in our own in this respect.

West Indian youths seem now more often to delight in their sexual exploits without so much personal care for the consequences. I admired

them more when they turned up genuinely to enjoy their babies and when they felt great pride that their babies had capable mothers.

Children need sensitive, strong males in their lives as well as females. So at the risk of sounding boring, I make a plea for realisation that wherever and whenever birth occurs we cherish real basic interest in children whether they are ours or someone else's. We must value our children if there is to be any future worthy of the name, and children need nurture which includes both male and female caring of a deep personal nature. Children are far more affected by the quality of the caring in their lives than by the paper relationships of those providing it. Families they need: but remember my definition of family. A baby is acutely sensitive to the emotional atmosphere surrounding it: a baby deserves to have love shown and this can only happen when the adults surrounding it have a genuine unselfish concern for each other. The putative father who may never marry the mother but who is genuinely trying to resolve matters constructively offers his baby far more than the selfish putative father who goes on visiting the mother only for physical sex but whose emotional involvement is nil. To the critics who wanted to ban boy-friends because of the 'sex' bogey, I would say loud and clear that sex as discussed by others is irrelevant. The quality of a real relationship between unmarried parents does not necessarily depend on whether they have sex on the premises. It depends very much more on how they care for each other and how they propose to care for their child. And surely that is true for married parents too?

Two increasing extremes of the birth situation are, on the one hand, the growing number of 'intelligent' women who reject the prospect of childbirth and, on the other, the anticipated increase of births to women in 'unsuitable' circumstances. Both extremes are the result of our society's growing revulsion to, or lack of ability in handling, the birth situation.

An increasing spiral toward the revulsion could well result in more inhibitions on the one hand, and more 'subcultural' activity 'demanding' specialist care on the other. Already, I have read medical articles suggesting that 'host' motherhood is possible, so a mother, for example, who had a busy career or who could not be bothered to 'waste' nine months could find a host mother willing to accept her fertilised embryo and nurture it in a strange womb. I have heard intellectual women applaud this idea: others are horrified. How does the idea match up to equality? It makes a superior and inferior type of womanhood. The idea sounds remote, but it could come quite soon. Some intellectuals could convince themselves that the world needed their offspring in spite of over-population and that the world also could not spare them the time to procreate naturally. Heaven help the world! The busybodying interfering in other people's lives done by people disinclined or unable to face up to reality is the greatest risk to our civilisation – I make a plea for solidly placing the birth situation back at the top of our list of priorities. Whether

we want to participate or not is our choice. But whether we do or not, we should accept the birth situation and cherish it and all that should and can stem from it.

The few women who are now declaring their 'right' to maternity without the involvement of a man, are denying a natural basic need for caring. Deliberately to deny a father the opportunity for continuing care of his child is to use him and shut him out of a personal relationship he has helped to create. I believe passionately that one-parent families can be creative and successful, but the acknowledgement of that fact does not diminish the need in adults to share the things which affect them most deeply (which surely includes birth and child rearing). Deliberately to set out to destroy someone's natural right to be involved personally with their child is not the same as managing perfectly well without a parent whose choice it is to relinquish their responsibility. The woman who sets out to prove she can give birth and rear a child without a man about as a matter of principle (she would conceive without one if she could) is trying to prove something only to herself: her child or children will in their turn perhaps shatter her illusions by insisting on a church wedding before any sexual involvement.

Is there a blueprint for birth? Surely not. Only guidelines perhaps which need to be adapted to individual circumstances. We must learn to accept the inevitability of birth (e.g. no children = no future), rather than pushing it into intellectual limbo as the realm of the hospital specialists. Birth must not just be a necessary practice for the self-chosen elite who regard themselves as good enough to breed; for those who accept it as a 'last ditch' (like a school teacher I know seeking an escape from the classroom) or for those who assert their basic need to involve themselves in the life process without thought or plan as to the consequences. We MUST urgently reassert our belief in parenthood not just for those who are 'elite' or those who need 'social support'. Birth can become more normal if it is integrated into the rest of life. I believe more babies need to be born at home – even with the risk of a few crises (after all crises do occur in hospital, even severe infection). Whereas a good case could be made for first babies of mothers living at distance from a hospital being born in one, I can see no reason for putting pressure on mothers to have hospital births as a matter of principle. The domiciliary midwifery service has, at best, a lot to offer the community not only with the personal skill of its service but also in relating birth to its basic importance in society. I get a shudder every time I visit our city's new maternity unit where babies in see through cribs in identical wards meet the new world looking like conveyor belt citizens. I cannot accept that these conditions have no effect on the warmth and care which needs to build up spontaneously. Let's involve our neighbourhood in its childbirth situations. One of the most hair-raising but challenging days of my life was being unexpectedly summoned by a woman on her doorstep to help deliver her baby. It was a neighbourhood event; one neighbour looked after the older child,

another went to ring her husband at work, another went for newspapers to put on the bed and to summon the midwife. I set about the legendary hot water and pans, helped the mother to relax in between contractions, and encouraged her during them. The midwife arrived just in time and congratulated all concerned. It was better than passing any exam! A lot of friendships were cemented and made that day over the birth of a baby. The mother herself was truly radiant: she had dreaded the thought of another birth like her first.

This is the stuff of life – it's what gives people common bonds and roots and a point of growth within themselves. We relegate that kind of experience and freeze it to nought in a hospital at an immense price. I'm not suggesting enforced home confinements (there are women who much prefer to be in hospital or who have to be for medical reasons) but hospitals should never be assumed to be the only 'normal' place for birth. At present, if my daughter had a child she would almost certainly have to have the birth in hospital because no alternative is offered. That is wrong.

Children at risk and battered babies are a particular current social phenomenon. Even over the relatively short period of a decade, it is interesting to note change of emphasis in, say, students' project studies. Far fewer requests now come for information for students who are 'doing' unmarried mothers. Now it is battered children or battered wives. To a large extent information gleaned is self-perpetuating as students follow the same books, courses and paths of study (i.e. visit the same projects). In fact, it is alarming how views about other people's lives become fact on very slender evidence. Many times have I been asked to submit details which, if produced, are then used as foolproof evidence. How misleading this can be! Although other people can teach us a lot, I do not believe this is best done in the way often expected. For example, I could easily do a statistical analysis of mothers who have stayed at The Croft in terms of family background, attitudes, development, etc., etc. But how valid would this be? The section of the community at The Croft is representative? What would one compare it with? The information would just help to build up a history of facts isolated from other facts. The mothers at The Croft are noteworthy because they were NOT isolated – but statistics cannot show this or prove it. There is a danger, for example, in assuming battering is prevalent in groups already most documented, e.g. single parents. Could it be that it is because they are most documented that the assumptions are made? Battering (and not just physical battering) occurs, I believe, more because of a person's total lifestyle than because of their status or income. The less real quality in a parent's life (i.e. respect for basic ingredients), the greater the risks of violence.

When students have wanted to study the way Family First works, we have always said "If you want cold blooded facts, this is no place for you." If they were prepared to work, to contribute something of a practical nature to the life of Family First, then they were welcome. This has led to

the involvement of many over the years who have contributed much, like the trainee ex-merchant-navy NSPCC inspector, who did joinery maintenance work for several weeks. By doing this he did maintenance work in the homes of several mothers and said he discovered more than he ever dreamed was possible. He had met people on equal practical terms, not as a professional 'helper', and the benefit to both sides was enormous. Significantly, students on longish placements and members of staff say they could not afterwards work for or return into a service where helpers and helped were kept as two distinct entities.

Our present-day obsession with statistics and 'facts' (which are not often facts at all) leads to all sorts of situations where personal abuse is likely. For example, when a case of baby battering or child abuse is reported in the Press, people clamour for 'facts' and so the outward shows of trying to establish them proceed, people are blamed and found as scapegoats, other people 'exonerate' themselves directly or by remote control by merely alluding to the need for more trained social workers, sometimes a particular case leads to specific legal or organisational changes in respect of handling children at risk. If children have been perhaps too little protected at times in the past from their close relations (especially their parents) if these people abuse them, then it must be said that increasingly there are as many – if not more – risks in the greater power being given to impersonal people in the children's lives. We are reaching a new peak of 'let's remove the child' in social work thinking: and it will not solve any problems.

The efforts to provide central information banks of names of families where baby or child abuse might be suspected or even anticipated could be proven statistically to have a basis of usefulness. But I wonder if our society really wants to increase the monitoring of its members as a method of controlling them? Or whether it is not time for ordinary people in ordinary neighbourhoods to assert influence in running their own lives (including a non-nosy interest in the people next door)?

A blind woman becomes pregnant. She is intelligent, runs her own home, holds down a well-paid job and has a guide dog whom she manages well. Her social worker rings up and asks us to intervene and take her into accommodation where she can be watched over. We say but is that wise? Can the woman be consulted? Why cannot she manage at home? Why not first examine the strengths in the situation rather than assume the weaknesses? The social worker is afraid that something will happen to the child and, of course, the Social Services Department would be criticised. But here is the danger of categorising and statistics. This particular woman is probably far less likely to present problems either to her child or the Social Services than a mother less motivated and less self-educative. The blind mother needs only practical and friendly support for a week or so after birth. Remove her to a situation where her physical surroundings were strange and where she felt under surveillance, then she would have genuine difficulty in re-establishing her domestic routine

while 'on trial'. What would be gained except a social report which could claim that something had been done (back to statistics again)? Another family not known to a social worker could seriously be damaging a child in the loneliness of a respectable suburban estate: if and when a neighbour found out and was brave enough to ring someone up, it may take days before anything is done because the family had not already been 'registered' as one 'at risk'. In my experience, for every anticipated 'at risk' situation, there are many which nobody knows about until a particular signal is given out. The person to whom the signal is given is just as likely to be the woman in the local post office who is handing out Family Allowance, the dustbin man who is regular and chatty or the milkman when calling for payment on Friday. Whether anyone picks up the signal depends on the sensitivity of their eyes and ears and the willingness of their personality. It also depends on whether they have courage to see themselves as a good neighbour or whether they are too scared of getting involved. Involvement, they may feel, is for trained professionals only.

Because of the fears that social workers, courts and police may work together, families may contrive to obscure their problems because, rightly or wrongly, they fear that if they seek help they will be interfered with. So they hide their real problems. I cannot stress too much the anxiety of being watched felt by some parents. They feel they will be judged as parents by a stereotyped standard of parenthood, which they know they cannot aspire to. They lack confidence: it is the one thing no parent can afford to be without. Unless professional workers and the public see themselves as being part of one humanity, I can foresee increasing problems with regard to procedure over 'abuse'. People keep quiet because they are afraid to speak, afraid to get involved. When they do, they may well get the snub they feared from the professionals, whose responses only react to certain stimuli and procedure.

Tragedy and crises never happen to procedural convenience. Reverting to the blind mother-to-be again: one of our staff suggested (when her social worker was asking if we could house her) that the blind social worker in the Department might perhaps be able to assist. To which came the curt reply that he worked in the next area (two miles away) and that would never be heard of. To every such story, cannot one ask the question who works for whom? Do social workers exist to help people? Or are people fodder for social workers?

Shortage of time is given as an excuse for inaction at the appropriate time over and over again. Yet hours, days and weeks are being wasted setting up procedures, and at meetings to make sure statutory requirements are being met: meetings that go on for hours and hours. The organisational 'helping' structures grow and grow: the chain of command gets longer and ever more remote from actual live need. When someone cries for help with a small genuine voice, it may well not be heard because it is not the voice that the 'helpers' have been tuned to hear.

ii. LIVING

a. Love

Without love and anger/aggression we simply would not be alive. They are the forces which lead us to want to survive and to strive. It is when both are absent that people give up. Suicide is the ultimate anger at life itself: an inability to see a reason for living. We often think that survival depends initially on material sustenance: I would argue that the striving for material sustenance (food, etc.) is the result of a deep instinct to want to get involved in life, to want to express our basic need for love and aggression. I have occasionally met individuals who, having lost the last semblance of concern to express either, simply wait for death, denying themselves food, shelter and resisting any form of 'help'. This apathy and dislike of existence can afflict both young and old.

I would also argue that because we miss the point about our very personal need for expression of love and aggression, we bypass the corrective measures needed when life 'turns sour', and invent substitute 'loving' situations. A civilised society may be one in which loving and caring relate not only to those known to us personally, but also to others whose needs cannot be met on the basis of help from their personal 'loving' contacts. This wider definition of love is a mainspring of organised social responsibility. Love, in the caring sense, can be shown in many ways: for people who have been hit by disaster thousands of miles away who rely on urgent supplies: nursing someone in hospital or shopping for an old lady round the corner. What is 'sick' is the massive upsurge of pseudo 'personal' love or caring, which is not based on any practical help at all.

This 'loving' of personalised strangers is the invention of social work. As all trainee social workers know, 'involvement' is decried! The cult of being detached, the move toward isolation of needs from the 'unskilled' in the neighbourhood community, the growth of the 'caring' professionals is working against the basic need for personal warmth and affection. The "don't get involved" approach assumes that involvement obscures reality and blurs vision: nothing is farther from the truth.

Detached 'loving', for example, gives in to blackmail: "If I don't get this I'll report you." Real personal loving does not answer so tactfully and does not mind calling a spade a spade! Of course, you may say, that is all very well if you live in a loving family or caring neighbourhood. What if your parents maltreat you? I am fully aware of the risks of being alive, and those of people who are genuinely trapped by their unhappy personal situations: but the best way of helping them is not to set up systems which trap even more people. We need to distinguish between cart and horse, not to saddle ourselves with such a massive immovable cart that the horse cannot move an inch. Getting a tractor in to haul the unnecessarily large cart will not help the horse to relate to a normal 'load'.

A case conference is called about the future of a young child with his natural mother. Does is not seem incredible that of twelve professional people sitting round the table deciding her future, under half have ever met her? The mother is summoned before the gathering AFTER the decisions have been made, an ordeal which few of us would like to face in a freely sought job interview situation, let alone a situation where we knew we were under personal threat. The impersonal body corporate can assign away freedom in a variety of ways, perhaps none of which are fully comprehended.

There is a growing unwritten rule that the professionals can cope with personal crises in our own and our family's life better than we can ourselves. It is plain contrary to the facts. I remember a very apt strip cartoon illustrating an article (about families in need) in which the harassed mother of a large family went to various agencies seeking help and was given only high-powered psychological explanations of her condition. In the last 'balloon' coming from the mouth in her tired body were words to the effect, "I only needed a pram for the baby."

The need to give and receive love – in all its aspects – is universal. In the context of family life and upbringing of the young, there is an irreplaceable need for love which shows itself through a balance of physical and emotional care. This, ideally, allows the young one to grow within the safe, but even widening circumference of his or her budding maturity until eventual full independence is possible and desired. People who enter into close personal relationships before being fully independent may do so to hide from their own weaknesses, or in an attempt to heal them (or those of their loved ones). Such relationships are sure of a rough passage and sometimes complete failure. Reaching mature emotional independence for someone whose support-systems in childhood and youth have been lacking is far more difficult than for someone whose family environment is robust.

The 'cheat' of the helping systems is the mere theoretical explaining away of anti-social and faulty behaviour on 'upbringing': while the substitute advice or upbringing which the helping systems have invented for those unable to be at home, or those in 'deprived' homes, is usually catastrophic.

One wonders if society's priorities in taking away children and young people into 'a place of safety' result, on average, in situations better than those which they might have encountered without such interference. This question of when to interrupt a childhood is most difficult. In some cases (e.g. where cruelty is existing), the child is obviously safer – but in many cases the child suffers as much – or more – after removal from its own home. Taking the long view, the more that personal responsibility for children is off-loaded, the more the adults involved will feel insecure and threatened.

When a perfectly 'normal' mother fears that a bruise genuinely caused by a fall while playing may be interpreted as the result of a too-hard

parental thump – and therefore does not take her child to the clinic until it is better – that mother is one step nearer being likely to harm her child because her confidence is under attack.

In each decade, children are removed from their own homes for reasons which fade in and out of fashion, but the effect on the children does not alter. Sheila was removed from her mother because she was a prostitute. The child was under five at the time. Her life undoubtedly had been somewhat bizarre with her mother: but what happened after was more so. She absconded from several foster homes, remand homes, a special hospital, and two detention centres, etc. She appeared in court on many occasions: all her 'offences' were associated with absconding, or causing damage to property or people while trying to. From a young age she travelled the length of the country, sleeping rough with or without a male companion. She was assessed as having a remarkably high I.Q.

There was a 'point of return' for this young woman which I cannot relate as the circumstances became very personal to her, and could cause her to be identified. Her previous history is similar to others. Her 'point of return' demanded both a degree of loving involvement coupled with sheer tenacity and toughness which, at the risk of repeating it too often, is what young people need. Either aspect without the other is useless. The risks taken in giving Sheila an opportunity for a 'point of return' were great – and personal to one person. Until then, Sheila was always running away – it became a habit – until she was able to discover that she was a valuable person in her own right.

As a child she had always wanted to go back to the accepting physical warmth and safety which her mother gave (as well as the 'neglect' of leaving her alone for short periods while mother 'worked'). But society decreed that her mother represented a risk to the child, but did it manage to do any better? Sheila at a very young age felt obliged to follow in her mother's footsteps as a means of 'getting at' the system for parting them.

I have known too many instances where substitute care – or the availability or threat of it – undermined a family situation which, while being far from the ideal, was REAL: children can cope with reality far better than they can with the pretending 'care', which sees them as pieces in a jig-saw. They either fit in passively or resist being slotted in and rebel. The higher the intelligence often the greater the rebelliousness. It is not tamed by sentimental pseudo 'loving' nor by impersonal punishing.

Among the several hundred young lone mothers I have known well, I only see one generalised factor in common. They usually failed to make a realistic choice of partner, or chose too young, because of the over-riding need to 'feel loved'.

A young woman may feel this because she has been in an institution or, at the other extreme, because she has well-off parents, too busy with their own lives to make her feel loved and accepted. It can also happen in families where parents have genuinely tried to do everything for the best and it would be useless, and very cruel, to 'blame' them. The clue, which

could help in making a better future, is the need not only for security, both physical and emotional, but for expressed love. Small babies and growing children need physical contact with those they love.

Where there is a robust and spontaneous physical as well as emotional 'wavelength' between children and the regular adult or adults in their lives, they are far less likely to have relationship difficulties in adolescence and maturity. Having said that, I would add that artificially creating physical contact is more dangerous than none. It must be 'normal' (i.e. spontaneous) or it will not work, because children can perceive what is phoney very quickly. Many parents suppress their spontaneous physical warmth because it is felt to be wrong or sissy. The feeling can be reinforced when the ward sister tells father off for picking up his own baby at visiting times in the maternity ward.

We need to understand the basic need for love at all ages, gear our social systems toward the fulfilment of 'normal' basic need rather than create special systems for deviation because of 'early experiences'. There is such pressure at present to regard deviation as 'normal' that systems are being constructed to prove it. It makes social work an expanding profession. People who genuinely deviate (homosexuals, for example) should be accepted in normal society. But the increasing pattern is of thinking that people are barely interesting unless they wear some 'deviant' hat, with an induced culture to make it fit.

The creation of special needs is a galloping business: so is the staffing of increasing establishments to cater for them.

We may look back with horror at institutions of the past where people were sometimes locked away for social reasons as well as for their own or society's real protection. But go along to your local Social Services Department and ask to see a list of 'special' establishments. Find out in your area, how many children's homes, old people's homes, geriatric wards in hospitals, homes for physically handicapped (deaf, dumb, blind, crippled, etc.), those for mentally handicapped, those for chronic sick, battered wives, alcoholics, drug dependents or those now cured, those who have offended (e.g. Probation Hostels, remand centres, borstal and prisons, etc.), those who are homeless, mother and baby homes, hostels for 'down and outs' and night shelters – the list could go on. And we make it even longer. As soon as a need becomes news it creates a speciality.

Trying to reverse the process and to help people who have been isolated toward the attainment of their potential 'living' ability in the 'normal' community is much more difficult in our social climate than the observer might believe. It is easier to separate people like caged animals in a zoo, with the pursuant role-playing of administrators, social workers and clients. It is easy, but where is the point of growth in it? How do people's lives improve qualitatively? The loneliness of those 'in the system' coupled with the remote detachment of those running it is not likely to increase our society's ability to live qualitatively. It is only when

loving and aggression are expressed personally and constructively that real quality becomes possible, (e.g. Sheila).

Normal life as it is presented by the experts and as it really exists creates for us a dilemma which needs intelligent examination. Normal life involves the processes of being born and dying, and the living part in between. If the living part avoids embracing life's basic needs, then it is castrating itself. Love, in a personal sense, takes effort: using our aggression constructively for our own and the good of others takes effort. If we do not use these potentials, constructively, we will still have their energy inside us.

Going to work and earning good money and spending it on consumer durables does not burn it up; dashing around in fast cars with a blonde at one's side may create an image of 'love' but it is not in itself anything but a veneer. Having a brilliant academic education proves we have brains. It does not, of itself, prove we can cope with our basic energies. If these energies are pent up they can eventually explode in on ourselves or outwards on others in a very sour way.

The current form of 'love' escapism is the commercialisation of sex. The avidly-read sex exploits of others; the superficial 'loving' sold via films, clubs and parlours, etc.; the "she could keep it up for a week" talk which goes around the office; these are noisy, blatant excuses for hiding away from the hurtful truth that sexual love in the personal sense is at very low ebb in spite of all the talk, debate and joking. There is more copulation to try to prove a point, to try to overcome 'hang-ups' or to do what is thought to be expected, than there is because two people, who genuinely have a deep relationship with each other, want to express it.

Sexuality as a basis of human warmth and caring has many facets: many of which can and should be expressed by people who never choose to have a 'full' sexual relationship and by those who are not able to. Instead of regarding such people as freaks, they should be accepted for the strengths they have. Are we not actually enticing people toward sexual perversion by our highly artificial outlook toward human relationships? The media would have young people believe that 'sex' can only be achieved if you look and smell the right way, i.e. if you use the right hair shampoo and deodorant.

Sex in itself is put across as being the ability to get 'satisfaction' – a kind of clinical, technical approach, i.e. if you put in such and such you will get 'x' out of it. This is a total violation of the real nature of loving. I have heard it seriously suggested that contraceptive education be given to seven-year-olds. Have we a right to violate our children's rights to grow up able to enjoy their sexuality in the fullest sense of the word? Or do we just teach about intercourse and how not to have babies in a clinical way? I discuss childbirth with mothers-to-be and a surprising number still do not have the least idea of how their baby will be born.

Children are ready to understand many broad and some personal emotional aspects of caring long before they are able to understand the

purely clinical medical facts about conception and contraception. The latter should surely always come pursuant to an understanding of the former. Children need affection and to be loved, then can usually be motivated to care in very practical humane ways (e.g. for the sick and elderly): they have a natural instinct for creativity about the quality of life. We are vandalising this creativity at many levels: then we expect young people to accept clinical aspects of responsibility (e.g. contraceptives).

Sexual love is not just sexual intercourse and knowing the techniques. It is all the fun, glances, touches, shared living, it is understanding without being told, it is being adventurous with someone within the security of a safe relationship. The sexual act, unrelated to a loving relationship, does not induce security, acceptance or personality growth. Yet we are conned into believing there is a way of improving life *starting* with 'successful' sex. I've yet to meet the person whose 'successful' sex – if that was the only starting point – led to anything but disillusion.

It is sad how in many marriages, sexuality gets lost in a sea of excuses, including lack of time, not being important, each partner making some statement like, "well, she loves me in her way – but we can't talk about it," etc., etc. Differences over most things come to the surface and are aired amicably – or not so amicably. Most unresolved sexuality gets lost under a heap of smouldering inhibitions. Expression of unresolved sexuality affects much of the lives of those concerned, even to the extent that they get anxious in a social situation which does not involve any overt sexual behaviour.

Women who think they can turn love on simply by wearing a certain dress or by refraining from a usual subject of criticism, and men who think that sexual success is just to do with 'performance' may sound like caricatures but they are not. Sexual love cannot be 'turned on' – and off – sexual impulses may, but not *love*. The person for whom a close relationship lacks the love part of sexuality may well seek 'satisfaction' by trying to switch on their impulses elsewhere.

However, without the love, they are back to superficial 'commercial' sex – it quickly burns itself out, needs new stimulation and – as with drugs – there is never a fulfilled haven which lasts. It is the lasting quality which our need for love and acceptance craves; shown most obviously and acutely in the need of small children for continuous loving.

In a lasting, deep relationship, sex can be of immense importance. But it is not just intercourse in bed once a week (as many married couples believe); it is not reading other people's exploits and then thanking God we are not like other men and women; it is not something for the beautiful and young only as the advertisements portray; it is the lasting dynamism which through the creation of male and female makes each need the other in a million different ways. It *is* being masculine or feminine (not to be confused with being superior or inferior!) – equally masculine and equally

feminine: matching brains, ability and everything else but still masculine and feminine!

Sex – at its best – defies looks, age and inhibitions. It is the pseudo attitudes which have built up the hang-ups. That men and women have different sexual needs should be understood from an early age and cherished as one key to maturity.

Children grow up knowing that rain makes wet ground: yet adults bleep feverishly at the passing on of information just as basic and just as easily perceptible if only the fog (deliberately made) was cleared away. Parents have genuine difficulty in telling children about sex.

I can remember my eldest child asking (when number three was imminent) how the seed got from Daddy into Mummy. He was three at the time and spoke eloquently of the process as he visualised it. The seed dropped on the floor, rolled over and jumped into Mum! It was so easy to explain the truth, yet parents increase children's fantasies. Ten-year-olds can get a garbled idea of sex which relies for its source on things read, things picked up at school, and parental fairy tales. Parents of teenagers increasingly rely on the 'experts' to tell their children.

Children then may find it difficult to relate sex to anything as personal as their parents or other adults whom they know well. Therein lies one of the largest causes of a depersonalised view of sex. It is something other people 'do'; not something which is enjoyed by people we know who profess to love each other.

False values in sexual love are, alas, reinforced by the 'helping' systems. The escape clause in explaining away 'policy' is that "it is in the best interests of the children." But this is not true much of the time. In the supposed interests of children state money is paid out to allow adults to continue fragile relationships for selfish reasons while other adults, genuinely concerned that their relationship should also enhance the lives of any children involved, get penalised. It is incredibly difficult to create just legislation, but our systems could be vastly improved if they were based on incentives for self-help and independence rather than dependence and personal apathy.

I do not accept that the latter attitudes assist children, for if they are reared in the environment which assumes 'The Welfare' will answer all questions and provide all manna, their future will be bleak and impersonal unless they rebel (and luckily many do). Jane and her baby live in a sheltered housing scheme for one-parent families and are supported by a weekly benefit payment from the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS). Her boyfriend is not the baby's father, but she tells him that he is. He visits regularly, enjoys copulation, gives no financial support, does very few of the domestic tasks, and goes home to wife and family. He sees no reason for the situation to change. Her care of the child is only just adequate; she cannot be bothered and "never has time."

Social workers argue that in her child's interests, the status quo is

desirable. Ten years ago, I would probably have said the same. On better acquaintance with the reality of such situations, I would say that ultimately her child stands to lose by its unreality. All Jane's immediate wants are met without any necessity for her active participation in any part of them.

She has so little to do, she becomes bored; she doesn't even have to cook her man an evening meal, she has no reason to go out to work. Her man always promises her he will find a flat and they will start life together: he tells me he wants her to find a flat as he couldn't afford to run two homes. He would rather hers was paid for by Supplementary Benefit. Is the State encouraging him to use Jane just 'for sex' and to make her an object rather than a person for whom he has to make some kind of personal commitment if he wants the relationship to continue? And will her child be any less likely to suffer if the 'unreal' situation continues than if she had to accept some responsibility?

Then take Jill, left with a family to bring up single handed. She too was dependent on supplementary benefit until the youngest started school. She immediately took a part-time job and had her allowance cut back, making the effort financially fruitless. She met a man, a low wage earner, with whom she developed a steady relationship and he was a very good friend to all her children. He moved in, so, as 'cohabitee', was seen by DHSS as having financial responsibility for all her children so the remainder of her allowance was taken away. So he moved out as his finances just did not stretch. The children missed his influence and company, so did Jill. So he moved back – as 'lodger' to enable Jill's allowance to continue as long as it was needed.

These two illustrations show that what is best for children is not a financial policy based on a narrow morality (which might have been wrongly deduced from the first illustration), but a policy based on giving those with the continuing care of the children encouragement and incentive toward the creation of a stable background by self-help and responsibility.

Children thrive far better emotionally in an atmosphere where effort is related to their material needs than in one in which 'rights' are. The young lone mother who makes an effort to do paid or voluntary work – or to train while on a grant – may be no better off financially than the one who sits about and does nothing. The standard of mothering has far more to do with her ability for loving and involvement and the overall environment she creates than with just being about the place all the time.

Although there should be provision to safeguard the material needs of all children, the eventual success of the children of one-parent families will depend far more on the resourcefulness of their lone parents than on the parents' willingness to accept their 'difference' as automatically gaining 'rights'. Recent public interviews with lone parents have been geared to bring about the very false public sympathy which will in the end do damage to the real equality of children from one-parent families.

The danger of the blanket approach to a categorised problem is very far reaching. If there is a 'policy,' the individuals operating the policy do not have to work out for themselves any element of discretion or understanding in relation to a particular person. The person who demands most, gets most. How often I have listened to discussions about 'clients' and have heard assessments based purely on the circumstantial evidence of who squeals loudest.

When interviewing women whose marriages have broken up or gone wrong, or single mothers, one certainly does not get the impression (still, alas, largely shared by the public – especially about single mothers) that they are women with unusual sexual appetites. When discussing the work of Family First, it is incredible how questions of morality, in the narrow sense of sex, still crop up, i.e. "good" people are those who are not sexually involved. "Bad" ones are those who are.

Promiscuity happens, it is true, and it brings in its wake almost invariably disaster and misery; but promiscuity happens right across the social scene, both inside and outside marriage. It is no respecter of class, status, colour or anything else. The facts about promiscuity would never lead anyone in their right mind to emulate it unless they wanted to bring on themselves – and possibly others – an emotional isolation which almost inevitably follows shallow relationships.

In our strange and very impracticable assessments of 'love' and morality, we seem to take the worst of the puritan outlook and the worst of the permissive doctrine, mix them up, superimpose an almost sadistic commercially orientated 'sex' and then hope that the next generation will grow up normally!

People still think unmarried mothers either have an unrivalled sexiness which makes them fantasy figures (and therefore punishable as people do not like sex to be enjoyed), or that they are poor little things who have been taken advantage of – or more recently that they are stupid because they have neither practised successful contraception nor had an abortion. The facts are that very many unmarried mothers have sought a wholly satisfying human relationship. Many, in fact, have had bad sexual experiences because the reality – and their anticipation – of a relationship were poles apart. This had far more to do with an inability to select a suitable partner than with any unusual sexual urges.

There are a minority of unmarried mothers who get involved sexually as the only method they know of trying to get close to someone. These are the young women who often come to the attention of 'helping' organisations simply because they have been reared in institutions, make faulty personal involvements and find themselves back in a 'helped' situation. Society's crime is in not having recognised their true need in childhood.

Alarmingly few people enjoy their sexuality and increasingly inhibitions, which once were worn with a misplaced sense of virtue, are now worn with an equally fruitless sense of guilt. One reason why sexual

loving is so often denigrated and confused with the satisfaction of sexual impulses is our greed in always wanting what we think others have.

Lonely people are made far more desolate if they are encouraged to resent the fulfilment of others. We are encouraged to believe that we should have everything. Or, if we do not, then we have a right to moan. We need today to express our belief in what is desirable, whether or not we can obtain it personally. How many adults, seeing a happy relationship, are filled with jealousy or envy? It is our unwillingness to accept that the half loaf we can all aspire to is better by far, if a whole loaf eludes us, than none or a mouldy one.

Because caring love has got all mixed up with the notion that caring is for the professionals, personal caring is getting far less tolerant about imperfection, and readier to see reward as a right. If sexual love is suffering from commercialisation, caring love is suffering from professional pseudo caring. For example, people seem loath to care unless they are paid for it. When children will only shop for old Mrs. Jones when she pays, the children lose more than Mrs. Jones. Parents of handicapped children can suffer greatly because they are made to feel emotionally imbecilic by paid professional 'helpers' who undermine their best efforts.

Parental confidence is shattered and therefore parental effectiveness reduced. Another factor which militates against people helping out in a personal way is the "fear of being taken advantage of". The helpful person is certainly likely to have more calls on his/her time than can successfully be coped with. The answer to this, of course, is not to stop caring, but to have more people doing it.

Not everyone can 'live out' their love in a family situation so something needs to be said about the validity of their loving. The 'loner', the individual with abnormal sexuality, the one who has been left alone because their family is no more; there are many people who live as fairly isolated beings for at least part of their lives and sometimes for all of it. Because two friends live a solitary life together should not make them the subject of ribald or silly jokes: because old Harry chooses to live alone should not bring about the band of 'helpers' with the prime intention of 'getting him settled safely into a Home'. Eccentricity, of the genuine kind, adds nothing but flavour to neighbourhoods: I make a strong plea for allowing eccentricity with loving tolerance and acceptance of its strengths.

To be ostracised because of eccentricity is to have all natural loving and aggressive outlets suppressed, It is then people become a risk to themselves and to others. As long as eccentrics are known PERSONALLY and accepted, they can be valuable. A rather withdrawn young maiden aunt in one generation (invaluable to baby sit for her sister's children round the corner) could in the next generation (isolated from kith and kin) be a baby snatcher.

A young deserted mother, needing the security of other adults to hand while rearing her family, could be part of extended family activity in one

generation, a child murderer known to nobody in the next. Two middle-aged female school teachers in the bungalow up the hill could be the pillar of strength in emergencies in their neighbourhood in one generation, or ostracised (though much discussed!) as lesbians who like to keep themselves to themselves in the next. For all our talk of permissiveness, we are strangely intolerant.

A young handicapped lone mother in one generation might have no 'official' help in rearing her child: today she has help but it is haunted with hidden threats. The home help organiser exceeds her job and keeps watch via the daily home help and is waiting to pounce to prove the mother is incapable: after all, if safely hidden in an institution, if anything goes wrong, nobody is going to be made the scapegoat. The mother knows she is 'on trial' – a handicap far greater than her tangible congenital disabilities. What ARE we all afraid of? People, whatever their 'status', should be allowed to express their strengths, and not be known just for their weaknesses. The potential success of the scheme for community service by offenders as an alternative to prison is that individuals get opportunity to build on their strengths rather than having reinforcement of their weaknesses.

The assumption that people are unloving and out for all they can get creates the scene for an induced unloving and selfish society. We cannot bear a 'loving' situation which works if it is different from our own, can we? We feel threatened. So we build defences which 'prove' our own prejudices to be true. A magistrate visiting a project, where several young offenders doing community service were enjoying a coffee break, very gleefully announced that she knew they would not work and would regard it all as a joke! She wanted them to be miserable? The fact that they were enjoying their work indicated the success of the scheme and their 'normality'. And that was hard to take because it can be comfier to see people as 'different'.

So much revolves around what we regard as 'normal'. In order for our society to work in overall unity for the common good, we must first, at the personal level, accept a far wider range of contributions as 'normal'. Or we will become too obsessed with trying to produce blueprint citizens so that individual love and aggression will become geared to the system rather than to people's own particular responsibilities.

Each week, I see many illustrations of people who are attempting very real, practical personal solutions to their particular set of circumstances only to be disheartened instead of encouraged.

For example, one lone working father I know lets his young son stay up to all hours in the evening. People criticise because the child is not in bed at the 'accepted' time and seem all set to make the father feel irresponsible. And to 'report' him. In fact, he is doing what comes naturally: using the time available in the best possible way mutually. When the child is tired he simply falls asleep wherever he is, often in his father's arms. There is a quality in that relationship which has a real spark. If the child was made to conform to a text book, he would be denied the stimulation

and warmth of his father's company. We should be far more ready to accept a wide range of variations in family pattern as 'normal'. The main consideration should be the building up of workable, confident and loving relationships within such framework as is necessary to live and work without putting strain on others. It would not be fair to have noisy playtimes in the middle of the night if the next door neighbour needed to sleep! But we should, within the limits of being fair to other people, feel able to exercise far more personal discretion about the way we live our lives, particularly in respect to the upbringing of children.

I have been criticised many times for "allowing' mothers at The Croft to have their babies up at the oddest times, and for not enforcing 'good' habits. 'Good' habits relate usually to feeds being at precisely timed intervals, being bathed at the same time daily, being put out in the pram to sleep and being put to bed early in the evening.

The majority of babies at The Croft have spent longer periods with their mothers than babies living, say, on suburban estates. The reasons are obvious. A single mother usually has a very great need to establish a relationship with a child: most find it natural and easy. A minority do not, and then it becomes possible to help where it is needed.

Giving confidence to a mother who has made the difficult decision that adoption is best after all, is as important as reassurance may be to another that she is the most important person for her child: her own inadequate feelings about herself can make this difficult for her to accept. I have sometimes accepted new tenants from traditional Mother and Baby Homes: like a fifteen-year-old who had decided to keep her child and yet who, in six weeks, had never fed him at night, washed any of his nappies or even made up a feed. She had done plenty of work, but none which was personal to her baby. Another mother from a Mother and Baby Home had been punished for getting up in the night and making her baby a feed when she cried. It was not allowed. They just cried. Does this encourage responsible attitudes and personal caring? I can think of nothing happier than the realisation by a young woman that she has the ability for a sustained relationship: there are many young wives whose lives are still being made a misery because they are trying desperately to cling to some 'universal' idea of ideal parenthood. Why do we never learn? Dr. Spock has recanted his teachings, but rituals designed for professional pride go on. Maternity hospitals are hygienic: most are sterile emotionally. Pick your own baby up at the wrong time and you can bring forth quite fierce condemnation. Yes, it is easier to run institutions than places where humans matter.

One of the most frightening emotions I have yet encountered has been on rare occasions when I wished The Croft was run on institutional lines just to give me a rest! This has happened luckily only rarely and always when, by coincidence, a number of new tenants arrived at about the same time. A group, used to institutionalised rules, and still demanding that you take on the role of Warden telling them when to get up, wash, eat, go

out, breathe, is quite exhausting when you do none of these things by decree!

When people are left with having to decide such basics, they flounder at first and react impulsively. If their hair dryer doesn't have a plug, the instant they want to use it, well take off a plug from something else!

The settling-in period which is a prelude to individual personality growth can be very fraught, and when feeling low myself, I have sometimes longed for everything smelling of Dettol by 9.00 a.m. It would have been so much easier! At the other extreme, it is easier to allow total freedom and to hell with who hurts whom. I've yet to hear of a society where the egocentricity and aggression of youth runs riot without any guidelines to good effect. Involved loving is not overlooking and not noticing – that is laziness and cowardice toward the next generation which we, after all, created.

People are becoming afraid to get involved in sorting out their own family troubles, and increasingly abdicate to the specialists. They are ashamed of admitting that something less than ideal has occurred until it is officially 'sanctioned'. Officialdom takes away the 'guilt'? But officialdom put the guilt there in the first place. Our confusion over accepting a 'failed' personal situation has much to do with equating love and 'goodness' which can be so destructive. Ironically, the child who is reared believing he is loved only when he is good is far more likely to do something really wrong than the child whose parents lovingly tolerate (but firmly react to) 'wrong-doings'. 'Goodness' is something which is often sought by enticement so that 'wrong-doing' does not occur, or the event which causes problems is mentally banished by a material 'solution' or abdication to the specialists. And it is all nonsense!

Parents being interviewed because their teenage daughter is pregnant are often genuinely confused and seek reasons why it happened when 'she had everything she needed' – one parent offered TV in their daughter's bedroom as an incentive to the 'straight and narrow'. A poodle offered if a baby was aborted: a sports car for an adoption: these are offers genuinely made but how they miss the point! The level of priorities which lie behind such offers tells us much about how we create social problems and then try to invent 'cures'.

Nobody would pretend that having a baby at fifteen – or perhaps even sixteen or seventeen – is ideal: but neither need it be the catastrophe that it is often turned into. We recognise in all sorts of ways that children mature more quickly than yesteryear. We expect them to mature and yet if they do something basic we yell for help. Now come the demands for 'special units' for schoolgirl mothers.

I spent a considerable amount of time last year trying to convince a fifteen-year-old expectant mother that having a baby was not the worst thing she could be doing. She had been made to feel that she was virtually unworthy to exist. My point was especially valid at that time as her school had encountered a run of difficult incidents, including events of much

more unnatural content, e.g. a youth attacking and robbing an elderly person who was seriously injured. This fifteen year-old had been in charge of younger children at home since the desertion of her mother: her father was often away from home. She had managed in a very creditable way. In theory she was in 'voluntary care' but no social worker had visited for months. She had assumed a mature role – or rather had it thrust upon her – and accepted it well. Then she became pregnant by her steady boy-friend whom she had intended to marry when legally able. Suddenly she became the centre of controversy between all sorts of 'helping' agencies. All she needed was to be left alone to manage as she had before. She wanted to be a normal mother. But oh no! She was threatened with a Mother and Baby Home so she could have proper 'care'. This girl would be the first to say that having a baby at fifteen was not a good idea. But she ended up feeling it was unnatural to want a baby at all – and that was a direct result of the way her 'case' was handled. Doubts about her own competence were over-played and, by the time she reached us, there was the task of convincing her that even if she might have waited a bit longer, she was not committing an unnatural act by having a child. The 'help' offered when her pregnancy first came to light brought about a temporary rift between her and her young man – a mature hard-working nineteen-year-old who had been painted in the villain role by the social worker.

This girl's case demonstrated how interpretation of 'love' in superficial terms can destroy the ability for love in real terms. Her 'helpers' did mental sums which said fifteen-year-old 'indulging' in sex = undesirable man = definitely unwanted child = potential child at risk, etc., etc. The undermining of this girl's self esteem could have resulted in something like that had there been no other path for her but to listen to the 'helpers'. The facts were fifteen-year-old girl with grown up responsibilities (i.e. younger family, home to run) = need for adult affection (which was not forthcoming from parents or anyone else) = boyfriend (luckily responsible but she was a sensible mature fifteen-year-old) = baby unplanned but not unwelcome = need for confidence in ability to cope NOT interference of false 'help', which categorised her as unstable, incompetent, etc.

Of course, not all very young mothers are mature. Prevention of this type of situation is by loving at the necessary time, not over-reacting after someone else has. "Young women reared in children's homes become single mothers as a matter of course," I was once told. It is true that many do in spite of contraceptive availability. It is true that their 'reasons' often have much in common although they seldom realise the full depth of this until years after. "I want someone of my own" is a phrase I've heard many times. The tragedy is that this is one of those devastatingly unloving situations in which 'deprivation' is very likely to become cyclical. Reared in institutions means almost invariably being reared without a sense of family as there is never for long one caring person, but a succession.

How many children from institutions have become unable to show deep affection because whenever they did as children the 'loved one'

moved on? Becoming pregnant can be a visible sign of 'being loved' – unfortunately the poverty of the emotional experience in childhood does not always lead to a satisfactory choice of partner. A girl starved of real love as a child is a sitting target for a man whose urges are more physical than all-round loving. "But he says he loves me" can for some intelligent but emotionally starved girls be a promise of everlasting fidelity. Their sad disillusion endorses previous hurts of being rejected ('unlovable'). So the institutionalised girl has her child more often than others in Mother and Baby Homes where personal initiative and individuality is repressed rather than encouraged.

At The Croft I take on the voluntary responsibility of someone who is available to help in emergencies, advise when asked and – on occasions – to discipline when an individual behaves in an anti-social way. I am not prepared to assume the Authoritarian Warden role that institutionalised young people expect. Weaning someone of sixteen – eighteen into the realism of accepting that life holds something in store, and that they may be able to take some positive action and show responsibility, is difficult because it means waiting and standing by while maturing goes on. The pregnant sixteen-year-old from a Children's Home where all cleaning and domestic routine, etc., has been done 'by the book', or without personal involvement, will have no clue about ordering her life without the assumption that someone else is around to make the decisions. The awakening of her own resources may come in many different ways – by patient waiting for confidence to grow from within, while she is in a 'safe' situation yet one which involves her in making her own way (e.g. shopping, cooking, budgeting, etc.) or by the more stormy process of allowing her to make mistakes, to turn and blame the rest of the world in general and anybody in particular until it dawns that the buck rests with her. On very rare occasions the only 'breakthrough' point toward personal care and responsibility is in showing anger – not feeling angry. The expression of anger gives security if previous conditioning has been a violent one, providing the expression of anger is used positively.

This progression from 'institutionalised' person to a mature one, does, I believe, reflect the processes of maturing which ideally should happen within a loving family as a child grows up. Unfortunately, it must be said that the later the 'growing up' process is undertaken, the less are its chances of success. At The Croft, it has been so obvious that the 'success' of a young person to become 'themselves' is usually made harder by every year after sixteen. But at no age does it become impossible.

An eighteen-year-old with the social maturity of a 'normal' thirteen-year-old has, of course, got problems, not least because he or she looks eighteen or possibly older and therefore people's expectations are not fulfilled and a sense of inadequacy recurs.

I remember vividly talking to sixteen-year-old Ann. In my customary way I was using my hands and lower arms fairly freely to illustrate something I was saying. As I lifted my right hand, Ann cowered away and

a frightened look came over her. I said "Why on earth?" and she said "I thought you were going to hit me." But we were sharing a joke and not even being controversial. "No matter," said Ann, "the nuns used to hit me without any reason." Until that moment I had regarded Ann as being fairly self-assured but saw that under the defence was a very frightened human being who could not discern between positive, friendly situations and hostile ones. We gradually got to understand each other better but I still could not fathom why, for no apparent reason, she burst into tears – not when anything was upsetting her. In time, I perceived a clue – she couldn't read or write and felt herself to be thoroughly ignorant. When I asked her outright if she could read, she confessed with the frightened look again. She feared her expected child would grow up without her understanding what the child would learn. She agreed to go to literacy classes, which takes considerable guts, and she made good progress. But in the evolving of Ann's inherent character there was her need to understand the nature of anger. Her own aggressive feelings and fears scared her – she had feared onslaughts of the nuns' anger without cause so far as she could see. Ann taught me a hard lesson: that I had to appear cross, really cross, with her when she did something wrong in order to make her secure and help her learn that anger should only be related to certain situations; not used indiscriminately at whim.

How do you decide what is wrong? I tried to evolve an unwritten 'rule-score' of the "doing unto others as you would have them do unto you." When Ann criticised another girl's 'dirty flat' when hers was worse – that was the time. When one girl was trying to make out she was better than the next who had had an abortion – **that** was the time because she was going steady with a still married man.

Not my role to play moral judge but certainly to comment firmly in passing that pots calling kettles black was a mug's game. I could say that a third party might deem abortion or married man involvement equally awful or equally unimportant. Not for us to judge others but to accept full responsibility for ourselves.

An institutionalised mother can feel very guilty at her feelings when her much longed for human object screams all night, uses all her energy by day and soon presents a threat rather than much needed security. Brave is the mother who can recognise her immaturity and accept that she is not ready for motherhood. In the past the method of 'helping' has tended often to increase a sense of inadequacy. When an immature girl-mother feels inadequate and can recognise the fact, she needs moral support not condemnation. When accompanying a mother (her choice) on a visit to an adoption officer, I can still feel the smart at the implied criticism of deciding two months after her baby's birth that she wanted the child to be adopted. The assumption was the mother had acted irresponsibly throughout and was now asking to be got out of a mess. The truth was that, for the first time in her life, she was acting thoroughly responsibly by realising that she was not yet grown up enough to be able to meet the

demands of a child: that in her best interests she would seek a definite solution rather than prolonging the 'baby toy' situation.

The traditional assumptions about 'cyclical deprivation' need not be true, but the growing up process cannot be cheated. People have to go through various stages on the path to maturity.

Some miss out important steps at the right time: they have to retrace them at a later date. Not in the same way. You cannot expect a sexually experienced fourteen-year-old to respond to a school-orientated situation; nor can she have the maturity of a nineteen-year-old. She must be treated for what she IS, not for what people might have liked her to be.

Punish her by rigid rules and you may have a long-term delinquent about; expect her to have the wisdom and knowledge which she might LIKE to have and again you're misfiring. Find out her strengths, build on them, assume she will co-operate on a reasonable basis but not that *she* is a PROBLEM. Her behaviour on occasions may well be.

I can well remember the evening when a fifteen-year-old mother-to-be called for my aid urgently; she had gashed her knee and the glass was still protruding for proof: she had been playing hide-and-seek! She was scatty, disorganised, but an individual who grew up. Now she is in her early twenties, meets her family responsibilities with the care and skill many would envy: she has even acquired a mortgage on her own home. She came to The Croft because nobody quite knew what to do with her: too young to be entirely independent, not wanted at that time at home, resistant (rightly) to institutional care. Her own flat within a lively small community with independence yet security and friendship and breadth to grow was all she needed. Many girls like her are being dealt with in idiotic ways which are bound to fail: then judgements are made that it was, of course, the fault of the mothers and new 'methods' are concocted for 'dealing' with them. Parallel situations occur in all branches of 'care'.

If personal love (affection, acceptance, sexuality and caring) is what is needed, why cannot more people work towards its fulfilment? Many influences interrupt and pressurise relationships. The very processes we may enforce to try to protect our loved ones are often those which destroy our best chances of fulfilment of our basic need for giving and receiving love. In the name of progress, for example, we sometimes break up personal groups more easily and with less time than it takes to consider and make arrangements to purchase a new car.

Let me end this section with a story which illustrates both the need for and the practical sustaining quality of love, and also the ease with which it can be quite deliberately destroyed – in the name of 'good' planning.

Family First has undertaken a rehabilitation scheme in a once-elegant Victorian area. After years of being allowed to deteriorate the area has become a Conservation Area. The potential environment, with pedestrian tree lined walks between two crescents and vehicular access at the rear, is good.

In the confusion over the area's future came the usual decay and

apathy. Who, after all, spends on properties which are likely to come down? Over multi-occupation, and use of the empty properties by prostitutes and people of 'no fixed abode' became familiar sights. So were people who popped in and out taking bits and pieces. Good window frames walked into nearby lived-in dwellings. Systematic thieves went in under cover of dark. One day a house had floor boards intact: the next day they were up over the pipe-runs and the piping had flown.

The properties were purchased in a block. It would have been so much easier not only to plan an overall scheme, but also to implement the plan at one time. All "sitting" tenants could have been rehoused by the Local Authority, or at least moved while improvement work went on. But there was a problem. A small number of long-standing tenants, most of them enterprising and stalwart elderly ladies, wanted to stay put in their flats, not all of which were even self-contained. They lived mostly on their own, and had survived a decade of rapid decay around them, maintaining their flats with the care and individuality which is lacking from almost every new Council estate the length of the land.

Imagine the difficulties of letting them have their way! Carrying coal to the second floor, refusing central heating and the rest? What would happen when one tenant eventually wanted to leave or died when her flat – not being self-contained – then had to be re-let to someone who would almost certainly want to be self-contained? What happened when the buildings really needed 'doing up'? Some would say they did already, i.e. very large rooms without 'adequate' heating, square stone sinks, etc., etc. What happened if someone fell because the design did not make for the same level of safety as a newly converted flat?

The problems of financing and doing 'essential repairs only' are always far more of a headache than a full-scale conversion project. But tenants did not want to go away or to see their place changed. And large elegant Victorian furniture would not fit into smaller rooms. But should people use more space than they actually need: smaller furniture could replace the large? But one's home and its trappings are a lifetime of memories – they can sustain one. By now, we all know what happens to elderly people who move away from their roots unwillingly. And there are pets – Councils do not allow them in most flats. And if we let the tenants stay, would they later on want to move to one of the modern, warm, easy to run flats after all? They might or might not. Administrative loose ends and untidiness – yes, all the way. With eyes wide open, and knowing that if someone should trip and not be found for a while we would be made the public scapegoat ("fancy allowing old people to carry coal upstairs," etc.), we decided to let these tenants stay. Good luck to them.

They offer each other in practice what we are told in theory is needed today – a real involvement in each other's welfare: not nosy; just helpful caring (loving). There is a tolerance which if the same group were in an old people's home would be lacking. They would then be pulling each

other to shreds: how else could such diverse mental and physical energy be utilised?

The sheer everyday job of making for themselves and their immediate neighbours, a life which achieves quality through the urge to be independent, co-operative and creative in their own environment is the stuff of life which keeps body and mind active. How many older people, who received sums as tiny as £50 for homes 'like little palaces' which they owned and who were forced to move to an area not of their choosing, when the bulldozers or builders moved in (with the banner of redevelopment or rehabilitation) might envy this group?

It is time people's basic needs were respected and their choice to live independently and responsibly, even if the physical risks are rather greater, should be counted as of more importance than conforming to an impersonal textbook which destroys initiative. To safeguard the body, we too often kill the spirit; we go on building institutions and killing individual personality. We wilfully destroy the neighbourhoods which allow people to thrive. Wherever pockets of caring people exist in a neighbourhood, they should be regarded by adminstrators as the prime asset in their plans, not as a darned nuisance because they will not just shut up and fade from sight. Good neighbourliness is infectious if there is a nucleus from which to extend: with all its personal outlets for love – and creative aggression – it is the hardest asset to create from cold. Without it, the best technical plans and good intentions of those who control development are as useless as a map to a blind man.

ii. LIVING

b. Aggression

If anyone doubts that aggression is a basic instinct, let them observe toddlers at play. A normal toddler will respond lovingly or aggressively according to the circumstances surrounding him and the two responses will be 'balanced'. A child who is emotionally disturbed (or perhaps who is a budding genius) will show unusual proportions of either affection or aggression. One who is mentally unbalanced or excessively emotionally disturbed will be almost totally apathetic or excessively 'clingy' or excessively aggressive. Parents can be acutely worried when their toddlers develop a phase of clingyness or aggressiveness which does not respond to their 'control' methods. The balance of affection and aggression is delicate. Very few children consistently show the balance at all stages of their development. If only more parents could be reassured that phases of clingyness and aggression are unavoidable because growing up is a painful, but nevertheless natural, process.

The fact that the child has to come to terms with a personal situation (e.g. a new brother or sister) and shows the 'out of balance' clingyness or excessive aggression for a phase does not mean he will be maladjusted for life. It means he is learning that life is real and earnest. He is discovering his survival tactics. Parents need to relax to cope with these situations, realising they are 'part of life's rich pattern' and not to be made over-sensitive to them by the specialists who do not have to cope with them seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. There are children whose problems do not resolve and who need specialists' help but there are people who get run over by cars. We do not assume we are going to get run over every time we go out. Some children's 'out of balance' phases become longer term problems because their families are too preoccupied with watching for signs of abnormality rather than assuming normality.

In the early 1960's I ran a registered playgroup at home. One of the three-year-olds attending was the 'afterthought' child of a well-off, sensible family. The older children had had nannies. The parents decided they would rear this lad themselves. Their love was indisputable and their good intentions without reproach. But little Alan did not talk and was very withdrawn and his parents worried and worried and worried. They took him for assessments, to doctors and started him at a formal private nursery school "to encourage talking". He sat at a desk and became more withdrawn. They read my advertisement in the local paper when I started the playgroup and, as a last resort, he came. For weeks he observed the others but never joined in. He was not a nuisance, just excessively withdrawn. We avoided deliberately 'making' him join in but gave him the opportunity by remembering he was there (easier with the other noisy ones to forget!) After weeks of apparently no progress he one day got hold of the large metal model double-decker bus and thrust it through one of the rubber car tyres in the garden. It would not go through easily so he shoved, pushed, grunted, warded off potential rivals for this mammoth task, kicked and eventually succeeded. Then he went quiet again. The next day his very excited father arrived with him at the normal time and gleefully announced that Alan had said something to them. He asked how we had managed it! Alan had simply summoned up the courage to use his aggression – he had coped with himself and this had released in him latent skills including the beginnings of speech. Alan had been too protected – from the highest motives, because his parents were not selfish, but trying too hard to fulfil the textbook image of parenthood.

Excessive aggression in teenagers and young adults is just as likely to be caused by suppression of natural aggression in childhood as it is because of 'repeating' the pattern of observed and experienced aggression. Either extreme is due to not being able to control normal aggressive instincts through positive channels. How many families aspiring to improved housing and material standards are now afraid to have their 'normal' sparring sessions, "for fear of what the neighbours might think." Even smacking a child on the bottom has sometimes become synony-

mous with 'child abuse' and teachers and parents alike are afraid or forbidden to 'express' displeasure in a physical way.

Young people 'with nothing to lose' and with nobody willing or able to control their aggression can be a danger to themselves and to others. If they get hurt, it gives them attention. If they hurt, they do not really care or feel remorse. Because love has never had any deep meaning in their lives, neither does aggression.

The tremendous tragedy is that if and when they eventually mature emotionally they are still sometimes left with physical reminders which make progress very tough going. The tattooed breasts, and the internal physical damage done by an unsuccessful overdose, stay with the girl who at fifteen slept rough on beaches with Hells Angels and who regarded physical violence as a status symbol. Her parents thought it good that she had total freedom and 'experience'. She grew to hate her parents for their wishy-washy lack of control: when she had a family of her own she set out to be fiercely authoritarian. So the pendulum swings from extreme to extreme. I maintain that if we stripped off the facades of our emotions and needs and had a deep look at the substance of love and aggression, we could get the balance better.

If we got the balance better, we could run our 'helping systems' more realistically and to much better effect. How many residential establishments within the helping system offer a balanced view on love and aggression? If they did, people within and 'contained' by institutions, would show greater evidence of maturing than they do currently.

Making 'physical punishment' a dreaded unspoken-of bogey does not prevent the excessively aggressive or disturbed adult or the psychopath from doing real physical injury. But normal people are put 'at risk' because they are bottling up natural aggression which needs to be expressed in 'small appropriate doses' – if pent up I believe it is far more likely to explode destructively. I have known sensible mothers so frustrated at their children's naughtiness but fearful of showing any anger 'publicly'.

What happens if an unhibited mother scolds a child on a bus – she gets accusing glances. "So you're one of those cruel mothers." But many children are being 'scolded' behind closed doors, or when other people cannot hear, to relieve parental tension – at times quite inappropriate as they have no relation to the behaviour which evoked the crossness.

In the previous section on Love, I suggested that children needed *expressed* love – in the same way they need to experience our reaction to their 'misdoings'. Only then can they feel secure. The problem arises as to what is a 'wrong doing'. Our society built up such unnatural attitudes to sexuality and natural body functions that in the past children suffered at the hands of parents who, for example, equated 'goodness' with early bladder and bowel control. Their parents suffered the same unnatural preoccupation with adhering to 'standards' of upbringing as do parents today. Babies and very small children are not naturally conscious of

'right' from 'wrong' though they can sense 'love' and 'aggression'. Aggression to a small child can be felt as a withdrawal of love – more acutely than a slap on the bottom (when he is naughty) within the context of a loving, secure relationship. To punish a child for 'slowness' in learning natural functions (bladder and bowel control and 'messy' eating) is not likely to produce any results except build up of hostility. Crossness must relate to situations which can be understood.

Most parents of first children tend to expect too much too soon, and tremendous store is laid on cutting of first teeth, weight, age of walking, speaking, etc. To regard these natural developments as so prestigious is surely to regard our offspring as possessions rather than people in their own right?

Comparisons can bear such similarity to conversations about washing machines or cars. Does it really matter if Jane cuts teeth before John? The child who is genuinely retarded is, ironically, neglected in 'friendly' conversation with tremendous hurt to the parents. The love felt for the handicapped child by his/her parents can be just as real as that for a 'normal' child.

Yet friends can talk as if the child does not exist. A young mother with a severely mentally handicapped child whom she chose to rear at home for as long as possible, found friends would talk to her and about their children. Hers did not exist. People just did not know how to react so they pretended the child did not exist. So while parents fretted over trivia, the real support and help which they could have offered this mother went neglected. She was on her own and never went out. It speaks volumes for her personal resources that she kept a well balanced sense of values and never became bitter and never reacted aggressively to her child.

So we often over-react to things which should be accepted as normal without fuss and yet ignore others which are important. Adults are becoming very inhibited and even scared of controlling children – and thereby leaving aggressive instincts to run wild.

If a four-year-old throws a stone at his friends, he needs scolding. If he wets his nappy at night he certainly does not. Right and wrong related to social behaviour – in relation to other people – is something children soon learn to understand. You don't swipe someone else's toy because you don't like yours being swiped soon makes sense if pointed out firmly but justly (with alternative diversions for the very young).

The growth of accepting personal responsibility for one's actions starts at an early age not by punitive treatment of a child's emotions, which are part of him: tamable, but only destroyed at a cost. Showing anger at the anti-social *results* of an emotion does not destroy the emotion but helps to channel it. How many young people become afraid to attempt anything because they are told they will never succeed? Or while they are trying, someone comes along and aggressively shows them what to do.

Their aggression in wanting to try has been destroyed. Had they been

encouraged (or discouraged constructively) *after* they had tried, the motivation would be left intact and channelled. How many children come out of primary and nursery school with a prized painting or collage which is taken perfunctorily away by a cold adult and it disappears never to be seen. Other children get their efforts displayed at home. They learn that some of their efforts get more praise than others and different remarks are made by various people – here are the beginnings of seeing themselves as worthy of attention on the one hand: open to humour, criticism and comment on the other. Their efforts are 'accepted', included in the total family situation.

The young mother who has been institutionally reared may want to be a 'good' mother. She may well be able to be one. But first she often has to unlearn her previous experience in relation to aggression and love. She may find it painfully difficult to accept that the baby she wants to love can scream and not 'respond' to her love. She can be so cut up inside by the conflict in herself as she has never been allowed to discover that love includes constructive aggression. She often reacts to any threat of 'aggression' in a demonstrably angered way. She may smack her baby to "make him good" and genuinely believe she is doing right by him. She wants him to be happier in childhood than she was, and is punishing him for not appreciating the fact that she is there to love him. This is a sad situation because it is potentially 'cyclical' deprivation, but it need not be. Social workers seem almost invariably to excuse and pamper the mother "because of her past" or to put on pressure and threats, "If you can't cope well you don't have to." This means, "We know you are incompetent and will see that you either improve or else baby will be taken away." This fear of a child being taken away is very real and by no means unusual. What the mother needs is a strong, but uncritical approach which offers her opportunity for learning about her child's growing needs in an atmosphere where she feels accepted as a valuable person who needs to learn, but who is not a misfit on trial.

Pompous talk at conferences about mothers having opportunity to attend ante-natal classes, clinics, etc., quite overlooks one salient point. Ante-natal classes tend to be geared to 'normal' two-parent family situations which means that only those who are contented in their marriage usually attend. The strain for other women can be unbearable. Clinics, too, are not always places welcoming to the insecure mother. The 'guidance' given can confuse those lacking in confidence even further.

Clinics suit the temperament of some women but by no means all. A colleague who made an appointment at one to see the doctor and was kept waiting over an hour asked if she would be seen soon. She was concerned because she had to meet other children from primary school. She was curtly told she should not complain and that the clinic afternoon gave her a chance to get out, and wasn't she lucky?

There is no way in which insecure mothers who do not live in a friendly neighbourhood can get the knowledge they need unless they are able to

find a suitable book. But that is a lonely learning process and some very silly as well as sensible things have been written. Parents, isolated from or without kith and kin, can face the loneliest and most demanding job on earth. It is the most important job yet there is almost no real help to enable it to be done properly. Such advice and services as are available usually limit themselves to physical care and, because 'normal' physical development is seen as the end result, the dormant raging turmoil of emotions is left to sort itself out as best it can. Only when the emotions take a turn to evoke physical care will anyone act. Nowadays, mothers are learning that if they phone up Social Services Departments and say they are likely to batter their child, they will get listened to. But this may be only because the Departments are scared of publicity if one such mother did batter her child and had not been visited. The blackmail aggressiveness all round is alarming and unproductive. What parents need is acceptance of their important role, help with understanding the basic needs of growing children – not in terms only of what to clothe baby in, when to get injections done, nor the high powered often useless psychological stuff which self-motivated academic parents learn. But simple, basic information about how a baby develops in order to use various parts of himself, how communication can be developed between child and adult, what play materials assist (not a formal demonstration of expensive toys), how parents can help each other. The 'professional' approach to child rearing militates against a child's chance to have his basic needs understood. Even the Playgroup Movement, which has achieved much for children through their parents' efforts has not broken into the human territory where it is most needed. The reasons are not hard to find.

Concerned parents are still seen as being those who can be articulate about themselves and their children. Less articulate parents and those who are seen as different because they are alone or handicapped, etc., tend to withdraw and assume passively that the experts know best. "We are not going to spend our time running a Playgroup," may mean just what it says or it may equally cover up an ingrained insecurity: "We are not thought to be any good so we won't expose ourselves to criticism by trying. Let those who are qualified do it themselves for us if they think they know best."

This attitude, which stems from our unnatural attitude to life's basic ingredients, is self perpetuating. Specialists assume the attitude is ingrained and thus they equally fail to notice the travesty of justice. How many teachers condemning a parent for not attending his child's 'open day' realise that he may be too scared to attend – although his defence mechanism (aggression) will cover up with an apparent nonchalant or apathetic stance. Talking to today's experts about one's child can be daunting for the most articulate – those unequal to the challenge should not be assumed uncaring.

Personal violence of a destructive kind is certainly on the increase. The

apparently uncaring attitude of some teenagers – and increasingly including girls – has to be witnessed before it is barely understood. Hurting someone on purpose is brutish. I believe that much of the hurt done by teenagers is to assert a deep need for contact: that the need explodes and develops destructively and often apparently goes unchecked is disastrous. Those unco-operative in behaviour often do not care about getting a reputation and may even thrive upon it short-term. It identifies them. Some parents abdicate responsibility remarkably easily and hand over to the experts or assume their child is old enough to manage and make his own way. Children of eleven to fourteen are left in charge at home while all grown-ups are away for as long as a week: their parents include those of professional status and in detached homes. They would criticise a parent of a 'latch-key' seven-year-old returning to a terrace with close neighbours who tacitly 'kept an eye'.

In Solihull, I know of three families living in the same area, whose adult members went to Majorca together for a week leaving young teenagers without an adult 'reference point'. While welcoming all the freedom verbally, the young people felt quite frightened – but would not dare to admit it. All of the families met substantial problems in the twelve months following and nobody could prove a 'cause and effect'. I am certain though that the rejection felt led to over-reaction of assertiveness: there is surely a difference between allowing independence to develop naturally and in pressurising (aggressively) young people to assume adult roles which they have not the experience to maintain. Parents may indeed need a week on their own once in a while, but children also need 'adult reference points' however much they refute the need at the time.

Unwillingness of adults to provide enough security leads to blatant exhibitionism of 'independence'. A person who *is* independent does not need to prove it. A person who had been aggressively 'forced' into independence (by abdicating parents or by being institutionalised, etc.) has the need to prove to him/herself that they are important and so they tend to 'play' at life. Assaulting a teacher can misguidedly be one outlet. A person who matures into independence and is at home in himself can use his energies positively because he is not out to score a quick point. The child whose upbringing has involved a tough approach to life because circumstances demanded it (e.g. a latch key child whose parent/s *had* to be absent) but where the quality of life at home was real, warm and accepted him, will mature (as a generalisation) with less strain than the young latch key child whose mode of life revolves purely around selfish parental convenience, and for whom the time spent with parents is purely functional and without that 'vital spark'.

I spend part of my working time in schools, mostly comprehensives, running discussion groups or talking about the work of Family First. A session either begins or ends (or both) in the staff room over coffee and chat. In a relatively short space of time (ten years) there has been a dramatic change in staff attitude to children.

Nowadays quite often a teacher introduces me in front of the class with some such remark, "This class doesn't usually ask any questions," or "This lot don't take much interest." In the staff room attitudes can be stronger still and I have known a graduate teacher say to me in the corridor at break time that a third of the children passing us he regarded "as scum".

These weird undercurrents and tensions are frightening and I am not in the least surprised that pupils and teachers are ganging up on each other. Large classes and huge impersonal schools can be blamed. But it is equally apparent that any remedy has to come from the adults concerned. But will it? They are without proper authority of any kind in the field of discipline and when the children run amok the teachers react with tactics which are worse in effect than a hearty thump in the right place at the right time. An awkward child is subtly 'got at' perhaps in one class after another – no teacher is with her long enough to establish a working relationship. Each views the other with hostility and resentment. Life being what it is, it is likely to be a 'fair' teacher who in the end receives the worst abuse from a child whose aggression has run wild – the fair teacher will not be so protected and the contact will be easy. 'Getting at' an unfair teacher is much more difficult as each side knows the rallying signals and spars sarcastically.

On entry to secondary schools, many children quickly show a resistance to learning even when they did well at primary school (in co-operation if not in being academically 'bright'). The reasons are surely not hard to find if we perceive the importance of our basic ingredients? The blight that so many young teenage children feel about their own unimportance cannot all be co-incidental?

The uncontrolled aggressiveness of a thirteen-year-old girl who does not care whether she is disfigured or killed in a fight with an older girl may be hard to understand if that is the only part of the girl you know. The other part is scared sick by violence and hides behind a mask. There is in her life not one adult for whom she is really special. At puberty with her growing awareness of herself, she demonstrated her growing up by getting awkward at home. Parents took the line that she was old enough to look after herself, expected nothing of her and she came and went like a lodger. From outward appearances her home looked normal enough. She was given adult status by parents who abdicated their responsibility at the first hint of danger and sheltered behind precedent.

Her teachers regarded her as boisterous and a bad influence on others: she managed to lead but never had close friends. Her inner unresolved 'love' and 'aggression' were at war. Inevitable conflict followed. She went through a series of fights, and eventually ended up on probation and had a never ending series of probation officers who left for promotion. If there had been one teacher who could have taken a real interest in her work and controlled her when she grew aggressive, I believe she would have discovered earlier what she learned a very hard and long way later. I hope

what I say here will not be misrepresented and taken out of context – if teachers were able to exercise more 'just' control over pupils at the appropriate time there would be far less violence in schools and far less emotional damage done by teachers for whom sarcasm, etc., becomes their defence with a downward spiral of aggression on emotions all round.

Verbal hostility can hit a child where he cannot afford to be hit, i.e. it can destroy his budding, very fragile, self respect. I am not advocating a large scale return to corporal punishment: that very often gave more satisfaction to the doers than deterrent to those being punished. Cold blooded punitive treatment increases aggression. I am talking about physical intervention 'at the appropriate time' – not intervention dealt out in anger but intervention which has positive value for the recipient.

If a teacher is allowed to constrain a twelve-year-old child the first time he sets about bullying, and demonstrates his superior strength not by beating, twisting an ear, etc., but by being there to take hold of him and back his advice with ability to hold him, that child will have more respect than if the teacher (unable to do anything practical) just chats to him or rallies into weeks of sarcasm and verbal bullying. The policeman who was allowed to check the perennial activities of energetic growing boys with tactics they understood (like physically making them 'hand over' rather than having to be at the mercy of asking nicely and then getting the booty saucily thrown down for the policeman to pick up) was an asset to the boys.

When the adult is prevented from doing the normal, sensible thing, the aggression which 'stores up' on both sides is much more dangerous than the risk of someone 'over-stepping' their authority when meting out the initial 'controlling'.

Aggression does not go away by pretending it does not exist. On the contrary, instead of being channelled and used for positive personal benefit it gets stored and used in destructive twisted ways.

At a recent careers advice evening in a school, four members of staff in turn tried to convince us that the prize for intelligence (i.e. passing five 'O' levels, three 'A' levels and getting a degree) was the promise of a highly paid mid-management job by the age of thirty. Salary comparisons were quoted to back up the point. Not one of the speakers mentioned anything about quality of life, doing a worthwhile job or relating work to other aspects of life. Stress was laid on how difficult it was to acquire qualifications later in life (which is not nearly so true as it once was). The assumption was that 'bright' children only fulfilled themselves by earning more than everyone else. Training for a perverted sense of aggression?

A Local Authority Chief Officer told me that his situation could only be reached by someone wanting power over others and he believed Local Authority services in our 'Service Orientated Society' would always expand because the people in control wanted it that way. Aggression used constructively? Public servants? Do we assume it is all organised for our benefit? Where is democracy?

It is hardly surprising that young people get involved in 'pair bonding' early when they are insecure and lonely. They are looking for the fulfillment of basic ingredients. Yet ill-equipped and unable to be independent they rely heavily on the other partner emotionally. The stresses and strains can be enormous. And the violence likewise, either in physical terms – or equally often in emotional ways.

It is worth noting that, in my experience, women whose husbands have physically battered them return voluntarily to their husbands (even if they have a safe, secure, untroubled alternative) far more often than women who have been emotionally battered. Either can be extremely degrading, but the point needs making. Physical damage seems more easily forgotten and forgiven for many people. On many occasions we have housed a severely physically battered wife who said she would never return – over 50% have returned of their own free will within two weeks. The pressure and publicity about battering is making battered wives a 'fashionable cause' and some are prevented from returning because their pride will not let them. Having asked for help and being held up as a group to the glare of publicity, some are afraid they are being disloyal to the others if they return. The old case of being 'categorised'. Battered wives are individuals – and so are battered men. It is not just men who aggress though their methods may usually be different. When a lot of time and effort has gone into housing a battered wife (sometimes involving collection of her possessions from the matrimonial home while a husband went round the corner to the bookmaker) the 'helpers' can feel shattered when she announces calmly after a few days that she is going home.

My first real close experience of battering came when as a late teenager I had a flat at the top of the landlord's house. A friend of his wife's arrived one evening with broken ribs, having been hurled downstairs by a furious husband. Getting appropriate medical help was engineered without revealing the actual cause and in three days after release she very cheerfully went home. I was shaken!

That woman never suffered again at her husband's hands and she (and he) said it was largely because at last the problem had been shared. When she was seriously injured (she had been abused before) they went to someone close to her for help. It would have been better perhaps if the safety valve had been used before, but they were afraid to admit to the problem.

Making violence 'news' does not help to get it into perspective: it can succeed in promoting interest by the wrong people for the wrong reasons. Battered wives became 'news' in 1972/73 and although Family First has been housing and helping battered women since it began we had never regarded them as a separate group or an isolated problem. Suddenly we were asked to produce statistics, case studies, etc., and to support the campaigns for opening refuges. Because we had helped battered women led to an assumption that our name could be added to causes working for refuges. We still feel that the presence of separate refuges will – long term

– do more harm than good. Only a small number of women who are battered leave home because of a specific, unusually bad 'attack' or crisis. Most who want to leave want to plan it so as to minimise harm to the children. But in the extreme circumstances leading to an immediate departure, the battered wife may be turned away from homeless family accommodation by a Local Authority which does not accept her need "as she has a home to go to". But the fact that Local Authorities have been slow to incorporate the needs of these women as valid is not a case for making ghettos of battered women, but a reason for altering public attitudes.

What the more militant exponents of the battered wives cause seem to choose to overlook is that so many battered women voluntarily opt to return to their menfolk even when given a fair alternative. The institutionalising effect of refuges, like other hostels, may mean more opt to stay in the institutional place because their own personality hems them in. Could it be that this inability of some women to face themselves and their lives (and for whom a refuge becomes a long term haven) is a contributing factor which led to such large problems in a close relationship?

We have come reluctantly to the conclusion that as many as one-third of the women whom we know who have been battered are people who, in fact, evoke violence (whether on purpose or not is irrelevant to the outcome and often unconnected with her decision as to whether or not to return). Their presence in hostels will not solve their problem – and indeed their children's lives may suffer acutely from institutionalisation. It could be said that they have substituted one form of violence for another instead of being helped to find a cure for it.

Violence, as a means of personal contact, will increase, unless or until more natural methods for dealing with our basic instincts assert or reassert themselves. The public interest in battered wives whilst well-intentioned is largely misfiring, and using energy which would be better used in making neighbourhoods self-helping.

Every battered wife Family First has housed will have been adamant about her intention never to return. Even when having a safe, 'dignified life', as an alternative, they will return (even when incurably sick). One wife had suffered a broken collar bone, ribs, legs and one arm, and was left facially disfigured. We housed her and she was happy in her new life. But she voluntarily returned to her man, not under threat or pressure, but because she wanted to. She said she had badly needed to know she had an alternative and that the knowledge would sustain her.

It would be irresponsible to assume that all battered wives wanted to stay in their situation – an alternative *must* be available. But social workers can feel very affronted and baffled by the apparent wasted time in 'helping' people who apparently reject what is good for them!

There is no simple answer to "The Battered Wife". They are a diverse section of the community – like the rest of us. Solutions to diverse people's problems need diverse answers. Making people into 'Categories'

can only do harm because it prevents spontaneous and flexible alternatives. Real solutions are not neatly wrapped up in a list of procedures to be followed.

A severely battered wife (of a middle class church going family) arrived at Family First early one Monday morning. The only immediately available person able to help and accompany her to the doctor was a young single mother. The battered wife decided after she had cooled down to return home. But she stayed in touch with the young mother and the two became friends and offered a great deal of support to each other. Eventually the young mother and her baby moved into a flat at the top of the couple's house and the husband said that having someone else around acted as a safety valve.

Some of the most difficult circumstances occur when the violence is due to deep psychological factors. For example, a young tenant whose common law husband was schizophrenic left him twice and returned and left again. He pursued her and snatched the child, who – with quick police intervention – was soon found and returned. The mother still felt she could help the man and had deep concern and feeling for him. Yet she became convinced there was no future hope in that direction. She was a bright girl who felt the bottom had fallen out of life. Family First could only stand by and help her to regain confidence in herself.

Sometimes the fact that a woman has an alternative is what makes a relationship turn from a one-sided one to a more equal one. A young mother who worked all night to support herself and two children, while her husband worked all day to support only himself, had a miserable life, was constantly over-tired and afraid of his temper. The Probation Department recommended that we housed her – we offered to do so. The offer alone provoked her husband into accepting responsibility for his family and for treating her with more dignity. He had needed to know she had an alternative.

The alternative ideally should be within the normal community and not 'labelled' – otherwise it is not truly an alternative but possibly only one more stick with which to feel guilty or threatened or on trial.

A family or individual may actually contrive to hide their problems because of fears of being ostracised or labelled (and perhaps those, as I said earlier, with leaning personalities will come forward for being looked after in 'special' schemes). The risk of problems exploding behind closed doors, or causing lasting damage to those concerned, becomes greater as the fear to communicate real situations grows.

It is only when we can acknowledge our true way of life within our neighbourhood without fear of being 'judged', ostracised or reported that any problems we have have the best chance of a sound solution. The neighbourhood around The Croft includes a diversity of people, some tenants and some owner occupiers, some single young people or OAP's, some families with one to seven children. It has been interesting to live there long enough to discover that the neighbours' families had no less

problems than those of Family First tenants, particularly with regard to their growing teenage children. It is only when we can all admit to our imperfections as human beings that problems, far from being the cause of division and antagonism, can create a point of shared concern, a challenge and an eventual quality of life emerges built on this shared concern, growing understanding and successful coping.

The biggest single factor in prevention of serious physical and emotional injury is the accessibility outside the immediate family home but very near at hand of relatives, friends and neighbours who are 'accepting'. To pop in and 'cool' off or 'let off steam' by stretching someone's listening ear is what we all need on occasions and what we should be prepared to offer.

Alas we are insensitive to the need and our neighbourhoods can be concrete jungles. They can be respectable deserts by day and smug dormitories by night, they can be anything but friendly. Where they are friendly and 'accepting' there will be much more real caring going on. Tensions will be eased before they reach a level likely to do damage. I'm not advocating neighbours who endlessly listen to each other's moans.

Individuals who feel secure (whatever their problem) will cope much better: security has much to do with not needing to keep up a false facade. The enuretic old lady whose next door neighbour "knows all about her" and is still good friends can joke about her difficulties, when they could otherwise prove an acute embarrasment and a reason for isolation.

The wife whose partner is regularly away on business will not suffer the same tension in an 'accepting' neighbourhood as a cold one. No amount of organised care can take the place of personal contact. When visiting in psychiatric hospitals I wonder how on earth some people ever manage to get better because the care is often so mechanical and impersonal. People are calmed at any price – psychiatry often artificially banishes aggression temporarily by mechanical or chemical means rather than helping people to come to terms with it. A father whose child was murdered in circumstances which left some stigma on him (he should have been with her, etc.) immediately was given drugs to take the edges off the mental agony. He became addicted to the drug and for years suffered a prolonged torment. Why at such tragic times (including normal death) cannot people be helped to live through their ordeal as a reality which is then emerged from, and life goes on. By immediately "taking away the reaction" (aggression) psychiatry is acquiring an unnecessary number of longer term depressives who could, with a little real human personal understanding, have overcome their grief in a normal way at the time of crisis.

Expressed grief is an essential emotion. When a child is truly upset and told "to be grown up and not cry" (e.g. when mother leaves at the end of hospital visiting time) he is being deceived twice over. He is being taught that to express anxiety in a natural way is regarded as wrong and he is

being taught that grown-ups are different sorts of people who do not have emotions.

Grief of a child seeing a loved one go is real enough even when he is sure she will return. He would not be able to express his anger if he was not sure of the love in the situation. So apathetic children who sit in wards and conform are 'good' – yet they are the ones who suffer most. They are being gnawed away inside.

Why cannot we bear to acknowledge grief as normal?

iii. DEATH

Individual tenants came to The Croft basically for the same reason yet each was unique, though each had similarities with some of the others. Classification of people by their 'obvious' need is a job-making waste of time. If the mothers were varied, they also had a multitude of different attitudes to me. Their preconceived ideas also took a beating, and slowly real relationships formed, some of which still thrive and will probably be intact for the next thirty years or more. What on earth, you may say, has this got to do with death? A lot! Sitting with someone who is going to give birth to her first child, when you have got to know that person well, is a most valuable experience. Barriers are down. In a previous Chapter I have discussed birth (partly from this personally involved viewpoint). But death is also very close to the front of the mind. It is extraordinary how many young women, when apparently fully occupied with the process of giving birth, also find time – and have the need – to discuss death.

The need to talk to somebody you know when you are in labour also needs restating, for it is still bypassed too often with clinical efficiency. It is one of the few times in life when one's defences are down. Giving birth, when you are in the process (unless you have been doped or injected so you cannot recognise the experience), is a matter of life and death urgency. The life part is within you: the death part is in the mind but it can seem no less real.

Often, people are loath to discuss or recognise death. We banish it from the conscious whenever possible. For example, some American magazines which publish poetry never, as a matter of policy, include a poem which refers to death. We banish our elderly to die in hospitals, just as we increasingly banish our pregnant mothers to give birth in them. Children can go through periods of questioning about death: they are lucky if they do not get answers like, "Well, don't let's talk about that now."

A very elderly lady had a heart attack: it happens every day. She was not rushed to hospital: which usually happens. Her daughter was Matron of a hospital and told me they could keep her alive for months or years, but she would never live again. She was not prepared to subject her mother to enforced life.

A neighbour's elderly mother was taken ill in the night. The emergency doctor said he would call the ambulance. When asked directly whether her mother was dying, he confirmed that she was. "Then she must die at home." The doctor was surprised and enquired if she were really prepared to cope. He was more surprised when she assured him she had been prepared for it.

Visiting an old people's home, I saw a woman dying. The staff of two went on dealing with the routine jobs. She went on dying. "It may take a long while," I was told as if it was an order for a spare car part. She had no family left, she was conscious and she died with cold detachment without a hand to hold. It happens all the time. Yet at the same time in the same city must have been hundreds of other lonely people, at least one might have been a good friend, but it did not happen.

Death is increasingly something which is not acknowledged, except in fantasy, news and on TV. Personal death is dealt with by specialists, as are all the arrangements surrounding it. Grief too can be banished, or suppressed. I believe that we urgently need to bring death back where it belongs: as one of the focal points of life. After all, it is inescapable, however hard our society may try to cheat us of the reality. The fantasy of violent death on the screen bears little relation to the natural dying process through illness or old age. Death can be a traumatic experience for those surrounding the one who is dying: but it is a real experience involving real feelings and the necessity for real actions and practical help.

At best, death is very peaceful, quick; at worst, long protracted and accompanied by illness, pain and suffering. But it is happening to a PERSON and that person matters. The neighbourhood needs – for its own health – to help its members in death and not pass them on to impersonal 'helpers'. In this kind of discussion, some people are always quick to say they know someone whose life 'was ruined' because of 'having to' care for an elderly person for whom they did not feel any particular affection. To have to appear to care for someone purely out of a sense of duty is never easy and can even be injurious to all concerned: yet this is exactly the way our social systems are designed. Perhaps we have never bothered sufficiently to recognise the immense difference between pseudo personal care and affectionate personal care? Maybe it is the people who have been 'saddled' with 'caring' they did not really care for who have precipitated the increase of the same blight within the formal social helping systems? The people who quietly get on with their affectionate personal care accept it and, hard work though it may be, are enhanced.

It is these people who quietly get on with life who need to assert their values before they get bulldozed out of existence by the growing strength of the 'helping systems'.

When a tragedy with ugly consequences occurs, people flock around: if an airliner crashes, the crowds cannot wait to see the wreck (especially if it is accessible from the comfort of their car), the dying and the dead.

They can actually impede rescue of the injured. We have given death this artificial place in our priorities: it is a picture which always has strangers on the canvas. I would venture the suggestion that some of the young people who play with violence are only seeking a substitute for a suppressed and unrealised natural need to be involved in the whole process of life. We protect them (and ourselves) from real death, which is, thereby, devastatingly lonely for the dying.

Perhaps we actually need the inclusion of dying in our lives to use up energies which otherwise can pop up as actual or fantasised aggression? Children, given natural opportunity, are less disturbed by seeing Grandpa dead in his bed, than by seeing (or imagining) a nailed up coffin, in which they believe is Grandpa, whom they can only visualise as alive. Children's imagination about coffins in the ground, or disappearing into the flames, can precipitate weird worries which often they dare not discuss. Being a part of the dying of a loved relative or friend makes life more livable and death a reality. The more we push it into the back of our minds, the more it will bounce back to haunt us with substituting fantasies and impersonal aggression.

It is only by becoming deeply personally involved with family, friends and/or neighbours, that we can demonstrate that they mean something to us: thereby we become more at home in ourselves. If we feel 'whole' we can more easily see ourselves as being someone for whom others could care deeply: we can see ourselves as having some personal relevance beyond the usefulness and expediency of our immediate visible actions. We can see ourselves as having a niche in the continuing affections of others: beyond our own death. Life certainly becomes more tenable once we accept some personal responsibility for death.

PART III

ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL 'HELPER'

Directly or indirectly, much of this book has dealt with the role of the 'professional'. More particularly, the profession of Social Work but also touching upon the wider role of 'helpers' who purport to help and govern us. In spite of what may be interpreted as a flow of criticism of the way some 'professionals' deport themselves through their jobs, I am never saying there is not a role for professional helpers. But we need to clarify our minds on what we mean by 'professional'. Surely a professional is one who does a job professionally rather than necessarily one who belongs to a particular protected profession? It therefore follows, and experience reinforces the point, that some jobs can be done professionally without membership of a defined 'professional' body. In order to enhance the mystique of their profession, 'professionals' can invent methods of surrounding their jobs with an aura and array of frills and furbelows, fetishes and fancies that quite obscure the basic simplicity (albeit necessity) of their job. It seems degrading to the necessity of the job that it should be so obscured, and this is done presumably to make the 'professional' feel more successful and secure. It certainly does nobody else any good.

There is confusion about the straightforward need to acquire specific knowledge for jobs and the aura of mystique built up around that knowledge. Of course, specific knowledge is needed to do many skilled jobs: there is no mystique about it unless the acquisition of knowledge is used as a weapon. Knowledge should be a unifying force, something we acquire in order to enhance the quality of our own lives and those whose lives we touch domestically and at work. Social work is a growth 'profession' which is surrounding itself with a mass of false undergrowth and superstructure, wrapping itself into tight cocoons of 'professional' processes and procedures which far from 'helping' anybody may, I believe, actually create more harm than if the 'professional' had not intervened in the first place.

By this I am not for one moment suggesting that there may not be times in our lives when we need 'help', or that there may not be a minority of people who because of their particular handicaps need some form of help for much or all of their lives. But the practicalities of helping in a true and active sense often seem to be obscured and rendered more difficult and sometimes even impossible by the creation of a solid force of social work professional practice.

Have you noticed how, when an event hits the headlines (like a child battered), the lack of trained social workers, or not enough social workers, is used as an excuse? There are many subtle errors in these easy, 'profession-building' explanations. Firstly, if society had all the 'professional' trained social workers it said it required, humans would still behave badly toward each other on occasions. I believe the incidence of the harm that humans do to each other might actually escalate because they increasingly felt no personal responsibility, but leaned on the 'professionals'. Secondly, the more helping 'professionals' there are, the more often those you know individually change because of promotion and change of town, training courses, conferences, etc. So the continuity of care by a helping 'professional' can seldom be personally assured and this in turn leads to the 'cared for' person feeling rejected, and presenting more problems which they feel to be the responsibility of the 'professionals'. Thirdly, but by no means least, in the real sense of 'caring', except where specific technical knowledge is required – and do not confuse knowledge with acting professionally – I have yet to find that 'untrained' social workers are any less effective than their 'trained' colleagues. Training – in the sense of imparting knowledge – can (if it keeps to the imparting of knowledge and not the undermining of attitudes) enhance a person's ability to care effectively; it can never, however, create a caring person. On the contrary, knowledge to someone without the native ability is a mighty dangerous weapon. Untrained social workers are, of course, a convenient scapegoat, of the trained 'professionals' when they want to excuse something which has gone wrong.

The mistakes attributed to the unqualified make fodder for the 'professionals' anxious to strengthen their own status in a profession, to create training procedures and techniques, jargon and counter jargon which keeps them and their growing army of administrators happy. One has only to think of two doctors with the same amount of technical training, but with very differing 'professional' standards to see that being professional is not simply a matter of having the requisite amount of knowledge. Knowledge is vital as a tool, but it IS only a tool to do a job. How the job is actually done depends on the individual's ability to be professional. The need to establish professions with protective fangs is surely the sign of an erroneous assessment of 'success', 'Success' goes therefore to a title rather than to a job well done. Why should an architect, a solicitor, or a social worker, etc., be protected by belonging to a profession if they do not behave professionally? Why should a teacher not be accountable for real progress in his/her job? Why should civil servants be protected by an incremental advancement system from any personal accountability of their real success? It is possible you may say for professionals to 'fail' – but only in extreme instances. By and large belonging to a profession is a safe way to protect oneself even when offering an inferior standard of work. Frequently have I known and seen

'experts' (e.g. management consultants, senior managers or senior and middle-status civil servants) 'learn' a subject literally for the first time on the train or in the back of the car on the way to address a conference or a seminar where their superior knowledge and experience is awaited on a subject. What a con! What a very expensive con! We seem content to get into our 'in group' and surround ourselves with all the protection of that group without the feeling that it depends on our own efforts in the field. And I am not advocating the survival only of the fittest. Only that effort, talent and achievement are recognised as such.

But there is too much emphasis on getting the maximum out of the minimum put in. This is particularly despicable in an area like social work where, in theory, people work in order to help others. I would prefer the flagrant, honest, outward-showing egocentric loud-mouthed adventurer full of his own importance for all the world to judge him as he is, than to have the same psychological mix in someone dressed up in the guise of 'caring professional', hiding his self-seeking behind the facade of those he subtly manipulates for his own esteem.

In Family First, the criterion for doing a job has been a person's ability to do it, and I would find it impossible to say which members of staff 'do' social work – for what after all is social work, or what should it be more than the ability to be a good practical and perceptive neighbour and friend who enhances and encourages a person's confidence in their own intrinsic value as a fellow human being? If you find a young woman with a stomach full of drugs at 2 a.m. you do not hide behind a job title or a manual on procedures for dealing with maladjusted young women. You simply keep her awake, try to make her sick and summon an ambulance and go with her to the hospital. It is strange how seldom the trained professionals are ever around when there is a practical job to be done, but always show up afterwards. They may debate what needs doing to, say, a youngster in hospital, post overdose, and have no access to any source of practical help for that youngster. I have seen young people discharged to geriatric convalescent units because social workers have not had any 'alternative available'. So social workers 'concerned' with this sort of problem may call a meeting to discuss a night shelter for women. The overdosed youngster can then so easily become a pawn in someone else's game.

So often, in this kind of situation, social workers rely on their statistical case-load as an excuse for non-involvement and divert their attention (and incidentally time) to setting up procedures by which others might provide them with a solution. In other words, the night shelter can be promoted to assist the social workers in the short-term more than it is promoted because it is really going to help young people, taking the broad long-term view and not the narrow short-term expediency. The long-term view demands an awareness of the inter-relationship of various aspects of society's problems and needs; a wide understanding of neighbourhood

and individual needs; the inter-play of various practical 'solutions' (e.g. housing and employment.)

So often 'help' is based on a narrow professional reflex response to an obvious crisis situation, Urging other people to provide a night shelter may temporarily alleviate a few immediate problems, but it may well (if the thinking has been too narrow) cause more in its wake. Not least because of the increase in administration and 'liaison' which follows every new isolated project.

Social workers are in the front-line to know what the crises are, but the solutions still pressed for are too often institutional crisis-making ones. They are the ones which are paternalistic and which make more jobs for professionals instead of providing people with problems with a fair self-help opportunity.

The case-load excuse is currently acceptable in society as an excuse for social work failure. I suggest that we have got our perception of the problem upside-down, and are relying on growing case-loads as a reason for finding excuses to escape the real issues. It *is* true that if you are supposed to be visiting ninety families you are busy – but in fact many social workers spend a disproportionate time not on case-loads at all but on administrative matters in the office of the "Who should be doing what today" order. Today can be half gone before anything positive is attempted let alone achieved.

A G.P. I now hold in great esteem, phoned Family First up some years ago because he could not bear to see a particular young woman rot away in a psychiatric hospital, subjected to 'controlling' drugs, following a road accident in which she suffered some brain damage. He suggested Family First might be able to offer accommodation and some community 'back-up'. It did. She will never be able to hold down a paid job because her powers of concentration are insufficient. But instead of rotting away cabbage-like in a hospital ward till kingdom come, this young woman is actively working (i.e. making an effort) in the community and is a person liked and accepted in her own right.

Her care of the local elderly who need a friendly helping hand is what they need; their friendship and acceptance and the feeling of being important to someone and able to achieve something is what she needs. Is this so very wrong simply because it is done by someone unable to 'succeed' by current criteria?

A society must have a structure, but should this be based on law or on some other code? The code accepted within professional social work is becoming very obscure, neither adhering to the Law (nor breaking the Law in the defiant but deliberate expression of interest of a client). The code is becoming one of survival of the social worker. When a young man on Probation breaks into meters, the probation officer may prefer to overlook the event because it suits his own paternalistic feelings of keeping his client beholden to him. This may comfort the probation officer, but does he realise the young man (whom we got to know well) only play acts at

'gratitude' in order to con the probation officer into his self-satisfied 'success' in his 'helping' role. As long as his probation officer feels 'success' he, the client, can go on conning other people too for his own greedy ends. In a sense he is offered an example of greed (false 'success') by his 'professional' social worker. Who is helping whom?

Social workers, who, having completed their little slot in a person's plans, sit back and are not in the least concerned when things go wrong because they are 'not involved' can surely have little understanding of the intended role of their job. A Probation Officer recommends that we house a young mother with several children, and gives a glowing account of her mothering ability. We house her in a flat in an independent environment. When there is repeated evidence of her uncaring and careless attitude to her children, the Probation Officer says coolly, "Yes, we suspected it, but never could prove it." Who can we trust if not the professional worker's views of a referred mother? Someone who needed greater community support would not be housed in a very independent environment.

We try hard to fit housing to people and not just to slot people into housing willy-nilly. If honesty is not to be found amongst professional workers, how dare they criticise 'clients' for lack of it!

Of the social work students who have done 'placements' with Family First, a significant number felt their training was misfiring, and a strong minority were intensely unhappy about it. The latter, once able to work in a practical helping agency, could not accept a social work role on any other terms. Some of the mature students had worked in social work which allowed them to 'meddle' without ever being able to offer the practical solutions which might enable clients to work toward self-help. This role, in the light of an alternative which allowed self-esteem to flourish, was regarded as an obscenity.

It is perhaps hardly surprising that Family First staff have developed a reluctant suspicion of 'professional' social work, having seen its effects so repeatedly at first hand. It is also hardly surprising that the staff have, as a team which works closely together, formulated views which, far from being my own inflicted on them, are very much their own. At this point, therefore, I asked Anna Block, Manager of Personal Services, to give her views on Social Work Training. In common with thousands of 'mature' students, she felt compelled a few years ago to seek 'qualifications'.

In asking Anna to contribute on the subject of social work training, I did not first show her my MSS, nor discuss it in any detail with her.

Anna writes:

"Perhaps, almost by definition, social work is impossible to train for, at least in any systematic way. Ideally, 'social work', free of the associations of the label, should perhaps not be a separate 'professional' service at all, but rather the everyday mutual self-help which members of a community, given the right circumstances, can and do offer to each other.

"Professional social work, as a public service, did not evolve until comparatively recent years, and then only as a compensation for the

decline in this natural 'good-neighbouring', so sadly evident in the increasingly rootless society of our times.

"Since the basis on which professional social work is founded is thus, in my opinion, inescapably an artificial one, conflicts of aim and motivation are bound to arise: how can an official agency, acting on behalf of a remiss society, implement legal and social requirements and, at the same time, 'befriend' (in any genuine sense) those people whose behaviour it sets out to modify, as the Probation Department, for instance, is enjoined to do?

"People sense instinctively when friendship is genuine, as distinct from a paid professional duty, and respond accordingly. It can be alienating for a social worker, and hurtful to the person in his care, when 'concern' is merely dutiful. We surely all have an inbuilt yearning for real affection, to matter genuinely to another human being, and any lesser substitute for a response of such depth becomes a parody.

"This, of course, is the emotive aspect of social work, and the one where my misgivings are chiefly centred. Social Services Departments also offer a range of practical help, such as providing aids for the handicapped, and the Home Help service, which often provide welcome amelioration of difficult physical conditions, and so help to preserve the independence of the individual.

"I tend to feel that some of the 'casework' relationships initiated by social workers, on the other hand, all too easily have the opposite effect of increasing, or prolonging, dependence, because it can be so demoralising for people to have to think of themselves as 'cases', with all the loss of personal privacy this status inevitably entails. The casework relationship, although constructive in concept, can then be positively threatening in impact, especially as there must always be a certain degree of manipulation involved, implicit in the underlying purpose of the social worker to influence attitudes and create new (improved) behaviour patterns. This raises the whole complex issue of whose values are right anyway. Society sets its own standards of acceptable behaviour, which may not always be synonymous with ethical behaviour, and then applies considerable pressure on the non-conformer to fit in. This pressure, of course, is very differentially applied: the influential in society dictate the terms to the less privileged – and the architects of policy don't usually accuse themselves of low moral standards!

"Social workers, in a sense, are fighting a losing battle anyway, in that their brief is usually to try and help a given individual who has been overwhelmed by circumstances, whereas those circumstances are often, in fact, symptomatic of a general social malaise which is far too deep-rooted and complex to be touched by any social worker's efforts with its individual victims. It is recognition of this situation which has led to the recent development of group – and community – work, an approach which seems potentially hopeful, though the problem still remains of the outsider trying to work from the inside. All forms of social work, it seems

to me, are limited in their effectiveness by their terms of reference. Most social workers are available only during office hours, which is not always when crises occur, and are organised in formal agencies, which tends to inhibit spontaneous approaches to them on the part of the people they set out to help. Some Local Authorities are now recruiting skilled paid volunteers from within the community for this very reason: since they do not represent 'authority' they are seen as less daunting, while living locally makes them readily and informally accessible.

"I have tried here to indicate the inconsistencies and difficulties implicit in organised social work, and would suggest that this uncertainty of aim is reflected in the current confusion in social work training.

"The standard CQSW course sets out to provide a balance between theoretical work and supervised practical experience. The latter is potentially of great value, since it enables the student to test himself against reality, without yet having to carry too great a burden of personal responsibility. However, some of the implications are uneasy: real people, often with acute problems, serve as guinea-pigs (sometimes knowingly, sometimes not) for set-piece exercises, such as process recordings and case studues, and I can't help wondering whether any benefit which might be derived from this exercise justifies the intrusion of personal privacy involved. Obviously the student must develop a disciplined approach to his own work, and be able to assess how adequately he has managed to respond to the needs presented to him, but I doubt whether the medium of the written case study is a relevant criterion anyway. It may well reflect nothing more than the student's ability to produce well-constructed prose.

"The real essentials – the capacity to achieve rapport, and offer constructive help, defy categorised theoretical analysis. Much importance thus attaches to the supervisor's assessment of a student's qualities, but this is probably inevitably coloured by subjective considerations.

"I feel that the most which can be imparted by the theoretical approach to social work is technique, which of course can be a valuable extra asset to the student who has a good natural ability to relate to people anyway, but, as a substitute for real feeling, is chilling. There is the danger that real feeling can be analysed out of existence. Social work students are subjected to constant self-analysis, with the reasonable enough initial motive of enhancing self-awareness, but where does self-awareness end and introspection or, worse, self-doubt, set in, inhibiting rather than developing confidence?

"The other academic elements of the course, mainly aspects of psychology and sociology, at least have the merit of providing a framework of relevant background knowledge, although so much is covered so superficially that it does tend to produce rather smug pseudo-experts!

"The theory and practice of social work content of the course, on the other hand, is more actively disturbing, and, at worst, even damaging. Here the outcome is not just pretentiousness, which is merely irritating,

but an actual belittling of spontaneous natural instinct, in favour of learnt interview/intervention patterns. Why are we apparently so afraid of natural reactions? Because they are unpredictable, or uncontrollable? Because they reveal genuine emotions? But people in distress are left unsatisfied if they are fobbed off with 'controlled emotional involvement', it comes over as so inhumanly detached and patronising. I suspect there is another motive behind the mystique of social work theory, the rather unworthy one of desire for professional recognition.

"Social workers are eager for acceptance as professionals, and any profession seeks to protect its status by resorting to a subtle range of rituals and jargon, designed to exclude the layman. In a more neutral profession, such as the Law, this perhaps does not have such a harmful effect, but social workers, I feel, deny their very purpose for existence, if they retreat into professionalism. They surely should make themselves genuinely accessible to the people they claim to help, even if this does sometimes mean exposing their own feelings in the process.

"There seems to me to be an inbuilt contradiction between the demands of 'career success' in a hierarchically-organised agency structure, and serving the needs of the individuals who justify the agency's existence.

"This, then, is another conflict adversely affecting the coherence of social work training. How can there be clarity of purpose in a training programme, when the role of the end product is confused? This problem, I would think, has been exacerbated by the recent edict that Social Services departments must adopt a generic approach, i.e. that each individual social worker must be prepared to take on any kind of problem that may present itself.

"As is so often the case, the theoretical reasoning is sound enough: less fragmentation, and a more unified service for the recipient. But, ufortunately, human nature doesn't work that way: individual social workers tend to have individual strengths and weaknesses, and the social worker who might, perhaps, have an unerring flair for, say, mental health work, may quite possibly be thoroughly ill at ease and uncertain of his own competence in another field, such as child care. Trying to fit all social workers, regardless of such individual differences, to one Procrustean bed of social work theory, seems to me to frustrate any hope of their being able to exercise the skills they do possess to maximum benefit. The training curriculum does take account of this dilemma a little, in that it offers a certain choice of options through which the student is free to develop his own particular interests, but that unfortunately doesn't alter the long-term requirement that, ultimately, as a Local Authority social worker, he will be expected to be all things to all people.

"To prepare him for this daunting responsibility, he is taught a stereotyped range of social work 'models'; how often, though, does a real-life 'case' obligingly match the 'model' and, if it doesn't, isn't the risk obvious

that the social worker, mindful of his theoretical training, may let the nearest superficial correlation mislead him into facile categorisation, simply because a category is easier to cope with than a person?

These, then, are the aspects of official social work training which make me profoundly uneasy. What alternative is there? Since society does, unfortunately, seem to have developed a dependence on 'professional' helpers, if only to sort out problems of its own making, some kind of preparation for this work is essential. The most basic requirement, of course, is sensitivity, but this is not something which training can ever inculcate, whatever form it might take.

"Where training is useful is in providing experience, which, I would think, is the only real way of developing judgement and self-confidence. How can an eminently practical job ever be learnt theoretically? I don't think large student units are the answer, as the 'experience' gained there tends to be out of context (the odd 'one-off' case, with no continuity of commitment), and therefore of its nature artificial. Perhaps an apprenticeship approach would be more appropriate; direct confrontation with reality would soon sort out the suitable from the unsuitable, and the student would be around long enough to have to cope with the outcome of his decisions, which is the one sure way of acquiring a sense of responsibility."

While taking a course in social work training, a friend had to spend a few days looking after an elderly uncle, who had recently had an operation. Her tutor sought for an explanation of the event and, at last, hit on one that satisfied her. "YOU are the caring adult in his life." Do all our spontaneous and affectionate actions have to be thus analytically turned into contrived situations?

The unreality of 'training' for social work and the creation of social work as a mighty 'profession' – with all the implications of withdrawal of normal, ordinary citizens from accepting responsibility for those in their number who need a helping hand – cannot fail to implant its influence. Take Mrs. T., a deserted wife with two children, who had no less than fifteen different 'professionals' dealing with her 'case' at one time. Her problem was that she needed a home and that one of her children was partially physically handicapped (the array of fifteen professionals did not, by the way, include any of the specialists she was seeing at hospitals in connection with her child). Her actual needs were: 1) housing (Family First let her a self-contained flat); 2) some practical help with the handicapped child, e.g. nursery; 3) some means of getting the child to nursery; and 4) some continuing medical care for the child.

As so often happens, it was at the point of providing the actual practical help that all the professionals tripped over each other. Once housed, it became more apparent what duplication of effort and meddling was going on to very little practical effect.

Then there is another 'professional' stand: if a mother looks and sounds competent, you are made to feel a heel if you offer her a home. The

assumption is that people in genuine need must look and sound like the TV, kitchen sink social work training course version of 'need'. A young mother who made a big impression on several social workers as needing a home for herself and child, looked at a flat we offered in a pleasant residential area. She sniffed disdainfully at it and pondered on whether we might have 'something better'. The flat, with all mod cons would have suited anyone really wanting a home rather than to demand attention. Social workers are a perpetual haven for those who prefer endless attention to accepting any self-responsibility.

The vested interest and professional pride of officialdom can swamp the true interests of the individual. The 'ideal' client is the passive recipient of anything which is going. Passive recipients learn more and more about what they may expect as of right, and so they hold considerable power in the community, especially when 'professional' manipulators of their supposed causes find themselves jobs which are increasingly well paid.

The articulate, demanding recipients of help who avidly learn about and campaign for their rights could achieve very often so much more in society by using the same amount of time, energy and brain-power for some positive achievement. Such achievement would not only give them what they much needed, but also integrate the achievement into life in such a way that it would not be their 'need' which was the focal point of their own and everyone else's attention but their achievement and action. Thus respect could build up, not bitterness, division and paternalism.

We have had social workers urge the cases of young people who needed accommodation even for political reasons because the social workers were too scared as individuals to say "this person is in no genuine need." We have sometimes taken tenants on recommendations from social workers and who then turned out deliberately to be manipulating one set of 'helpers' against another. Is this something a 'helping' agency should put up with? Yes, give everyone the benefit of a doubt and a real chance. But why should 24-year-old D have an army of social workers answering all her whines and moans because she knows how to 'put it over' when 22-year-old Y, who (with less intelligence but more guts) is willing to help herself and is told she is not an urgent 'case'? By what criteria is anyone judged needy?

It is often assumed that a 'helper' or a 'helping' organisation will sit on one side of the fence and back all those on one side right or wrong. This seems unjust and undemocratic.

Why should we expect the Department of Health and Social Security to play fair and offer justifiable funds to someone like Y while she needs support, and not expect the Department to 'be taken for a ride' by a tenant who wants us to back a 'special needs claim', which is a way of getting goods for her mother and not just her own immediate family?

Honesty must be the basis of social work skills or there can be no workable way of life. But how is it possible to be honest and fair to agreed

principles while not being judgemental? Helping organisations are faced with the problem of 'helping' people, some of whom have acquired social skills which increasingly are manipulative. Should 'help' be given as of right or do 'helping' systems have a right to lay down criteria so there is an understood basis for co-operation or non-co-operation?

There has been a remarkable change in the last three – five years in that a significant minority of people needing housing help from Family First now think the housing is a right to use as they want and without paying rent if they choose. Because the work of an organisation which tries in its housing work to help a significant number of one-parent families (in a 'normal' community context) is always unfortunately vulnerable to narrow moralistic public attitudes, staff have needed carefully to examine what demands we would tolerate and what manipulation we would not.

Because of the urgent need for taking action in favour of honest dealing rather than expediency, Family First is having to put pressure on a minority of people who came for help with plausible reasons, only to abuse that help when their trickery succeeded. Social workers are often all too willing to be tricked and to recommend that their clients get the 'help' they demand. I am sure at personal level social workers would not stand such injustice from their friends! As long as the State is paying for their clients to be kept happy and quiet, their own roles remain relatively uncomplicated. Because it seems to us a gross injustice to people who are honest and needy to take a back seat out of preference to those who are manipulative for self-greed and laziness, Family First has gradually developed a corporate thinking about 'rights' and 'needs'.

Because of the pressures placed on us by those demanding our help or demanding that we help their clients, we know that our outlook is often deliberately misrepresented. Emotive words like "You wouldn't consider giving notice to quit to a young mother," of course bring a lump into anyone's throat if they did not know the full facts of a particular instance. Is it fair to go on housing in a flat which is available to help one-parent families someone whose child is deliberately dispensed with as soon as she gets her flat?

She moves in rowdy friends, disturbs people in the neighbourhood, lives off State finance although perfectly able to work and with a job available, doesn't pay her rent, and yet can look angelic when a new social worker calls to see 'how she is doing'. The child comes back into the situation at the critical moments to suit her plans. When the tenant eventually goes, she takes possessions which do not belong to her and a social worker's response is, "Well, what can you expect" (that is, "You asked her to leave so of course she took things."). Not for us to tell people how to live, but surely we have a responsibility to ensure that effort and resources should not be made available to people who use other people's efforts and resources under false pretences? Let the go-getting young intelligent lady go-get by her own efforts!

Appendix V is a Policy Statement on use of tenancies devised to clarify

the Family First standpoint. There will come a time when we may have to stand in court and justify such a policy, for the law increasingly protects not only the innocent but the cleverly manipulative. People who are that clever have the ability to make a positive contribution to society: it is a pity they cannot use their social skills to that effect. All we are asking for in this Policy Statement is for fair use of social skills and not their manipulation and abuse. Unless people intend to communicate and act fairly, it is hard to make real progress which can be sustained. It is not hard to understand why people develop defensive, dishonest and manipulative skills because our social systems (and sometimes our economic and legal systems) encourage and even reward them.

"Surely you don't regard B as a peer?" came the critical social worker's question at a weekly hospital case-conference to a refusal by a member of Family First's staff to regurgitate private conversations between a tenant and herself. It was felt that if the tenant was to believe in anyone, confidentiality of private conversations and ordinary, rather than 'spying' friendship, was essential. But the official social work line could not see the point. A client is a client.

Concerned with the effect a particular tenant undergoing psychiatric treatment was having on other members of the neighbourhood, a member of staff wrote asking for advice from the psychiatrist concerned as we feared the tenant would have a complete breakdown. His answer, with professional washing of hands and passing the responsibility for anything wrong, said, "I should come along to be present at a meeting between yourself and ..... at which you could confront him with your accusations and he can make an answer on his own behalf." No accusations had been made – the professional simply interpreted a practical problem as a theoretical personality one – but he wasn't living in the neighbourhood! Nor did he have to deal with the neighbours. His share of the 'problem' was remote and he wasn't prepared to get involved at the level which day to day life necessitates.

How often have we found that because we work in a practical situation in which human needs can be seen for what they are, when we see something which really does need professional help, that help is seldom on hand. 'Professional' helpers will often only 'help' on their own terms with regard to their own status. This means often making the other parties seem small. In the instance just referred to, the person we were so concerned about did, in fact, have a major breakdown before the psychiatrist got back from holiday to have the meeting he referred to.

If the role of the 'professional' social worker is to help, why must they always be so concerned about being in the right and never admitting an error? Even where a grave error has occurred (though no intended hardship) and where a simple apology would make all the difference, it does not come. For example, through an error of Social Services Department tactics, a tenant suffered a great deal of unnecessary emotional and physical stress. She was a highly intelligent girl, whose life had tem-

porarily got into a mess and who was trying to get onto an even keel. She gave birth to a child, after a very difficult labour, and arrangements were made for the child to be fostered while the mother decided whether to place it for adoption. When the social worker went to fetch the mother from hospital the social worker and the ward sister were so concerned for the mother's health that they agreed she should come straight back to The Croft, while the social worker made the longish journey with the baby to to foster home.

Whatever the inaccuracies in terms of social work practice about this action, it was done with the very best of human intentions. The mother was certainly very unwell when she returned. Later on it was agreed that she should go to her parental home for a few days' convalescence and a taxi was ordered.

The taxi had already arrived when a senior social worker phoned the mother and told her rather harshly that she had been most remiss not to hand over the child herself. She was told she must go immediately and put matters right. The mother felt deeply resentful at being told it was her fault when she (as the others involved) had acted in good faith. The taxi was sent away and the first social worker returned. Seeing the poor physical and mental state the mother was in, she offered to return the following day, but it was agreed to get it over. Knowing how hard this particular young mother was trying to cope well and with very genuine concern for her baby's future, I felt infuriated that a mistake (genuinely made) should be blamed on her irresponsibility and I wrote asking the Social Services Department to put the matter right with the mother. It never happened. That omission is conduct unbecoming to a professional.

The need for 'conferences' and meetings between social workers obviously grows as their numbers increase. The more they increase, the greater the number of liaison jobs done by people who never meet a live 'case'. One of the most enjoyable aspects of working at Family First is that, by keeping all administration in the same place as some practical aspect of the work, e.g. housing, Family Centre or shops, one never gets the chance to remain in an ivory tower. My office at the front of the building is both very visible and very accessible. It makes life fun. Like the occasion when a serious business meeting with architects and other technical people was barged into, without a knock on the door, by a very fraught and very direct young mother, whose rage was apparent as she waved a packet of baby milk powder in our midst, to the tune of "There's a bloody beetle in it!" Meetings are interrupted for babies who decide to be born, battered wives who need immediate attention or the elderly neighbour whose urgent need for a doctor assumes the attention of whoever happens to be nearest.

If something needs doing, does it matter if it is done by a member of staff, a tenant, or neighbour or a visitor? Suffice that it gets done. In this atmosphere of real professionalism, I find people (because they feel accepted and confident) know when they are getting out of their depth

and they are not afraid to ask a question of someone they know will give them the right answer without making them feel small. Of course, this does not work perfectly all the time, but I prefer its character to the increasing "hiding behind professionalism" approach. For example the inward-looking 'conferences' in Departments which get further and further away from where people really live and matter. And artificially placing a Department's offices in a local community will not automatically mean that the community feels part of it or vice versa.

Case 'conferences' can occasionally be useful, but they often can be farcical. So farcical that if they appeared unadulterated on your TV screen you would not believe it possible. I try therefore briefly to depict an 'average' one: one at which the worst excesses of 'in-fighting' are avoided, one which occupies the best part of two hours for all concerned, and one which – like most – achieves nothing but a measure of 'protection' for the action which ensues.

The Conference room was in a basement – converted from two rooms, painted green and furnished incongruously with highly polished tables and official looking chairs. I arrived early. Gradually the others arrived: two probation officers, a representative from Social Services, a student from Social Services, a psychiatrist and psychiatric social worker, a health visitor, a girl to take the minutes, then the Area Social Services Director who was going to 'lead' the Conference on Miss T. I felt a rank outsider, but was there because Family First was housing Miss T and it could be said we were the only party represented who knew her as an all round person. It was just because of this, that the event seemed an intrusion, but she wanted us there. Each of the others (apart from the Area Director) knew a little about her.

The question to be answered was whether to take Miss T's child into care – she had asked that this should happen because she wanted to go into a psychiatric hospital. The latter seemed the last place likely long-term to assist her but, in view of the frantic fear of publicity over 'child abuse' cases, it seems that at present anyone can be sure of attention if they threaten to misuse their child. I have known a mother, purely for effect, yell at her two young children that she would murder them if we did not immediately house her. Her need for housing was not nearly as acute as many, which subsequent events proved.

One of the Probation Officers reported factually that he knew little of Miss T except that she had been placed on Probation for stealing two years previously. She wasn't really his 'case', but he had inherited her from a colleague who had left and was about to pass her onto his colleague who sat beside him. His very charming, hippy thirtyish colleague smiled shyly, quickly drew a handkerchief to blow his nose, and said he would help in any way he could.

The Chairman asked if the Probation Order had proceeded satisfactorily. The Probation Officer said he had no information to the contrary. He himself had only seen Miss T twice, once when she called in

at his office and once when he called to see her. She had then been in a hurry to go out but he got the impression that the flat was fairly tidy and she was going out with the baby.

I'm not sure why people speak differently at case conferences than they do usually – it is rather like listening to proceedings in a Magistrates Court. There is the impression that someone is on trial, although that someone (unlike in the Magistrates Court) is usually not present nor directly represented. Yet the power wielded by the 'professionals' at the Case Conferences is, in many circumstances, far greater than that of the Magistrates. I could illustrate a number of Case Conferences which resulted in drastic consequences to the 'client's' life – I cannot recount them because they are each unique rather than representative and, therefore, the identity of the person concerned could be revealed.

Case Conferences are theoretically for the client's good; yet quite frequently they are well rehearsed events to protect the professionals (when baffled by their own situation or incompetence) from public criticism. "We have decided to hold a Conference over so-and-so," can mean, "We are in a confused muddle and want to air our 'role' so we can safeguard our standpoints."

Miss T's social worker said the case was currently being dealt with by a student and indicated the young lady by her side. Did they want to invite the student to speak or should she herself? The Chairman said she should – it was her client even though the student was standing in (the dialogue was quite lengthy at this point – very similar to procedural tactics between solicitors in a court room).

The social worker then said she did not know Miss T as the case had only been given to her just before the student arrived. As she had more pressing cases, it was felt by her senior to be appropriate that the student should handle this case. The Chairman made enquiries about the senior which were irrelevant to Miss T and in bad taste in a semi-public situation. The pyschiatrist said he had seen Miss T twice already. He did not feel hospitalisation was, strictly speaking, called for but said Miss T quite obviously refused to accept the fact that her problems could be dealt with in any other way. Her health visitor agreed that Miss T was determined to get away from her problems – as she saw them – but failed to realise that they would still be there to return to. The Chairman inquired how far Probation or Social Services could help. Not much, it seemed.

We were asked why we felt Miss T was taking her line. The answer was that she sought a series of 'cures' to her problems and the latest about going to hospital had started after a friend of hers had been in for electric shock treatment, after which, to use Miss T's words, "She didn't seem to care about anything." So Miss T went into hospital and had electric shock treatment, and drugs and occupational therapy. She came out and her life went on much as before. The ghastly thing about it was that it was predictable.

I felt Miss T would continue running away from herself as long as she

lived in a society which so readily allowed her to do so. She threatened suicide whenever and however often anybody dared to say she could not have her way. Nobody dared to stop playing the game her way, and so they all joined in. Miss T is still running away, her child has been in and out of care; Miss T herself moves on. No, she is not from an under-privileged family, no, there is no 'pat' explanation. For her, and many like her, she will never probably find out her own strengths because she never had to. Her skills are used to milk the system. After many months her G.P. did an unusual thing – he struck her off his list for persistently wasting his valuable time but, promptly, more 'helpers' came running to her whines.

By labelling and insisting that social workers are a separate professional species, there is a pursuant inhibiting action on anyone in the community who thinks they could help but who holds back for fear of 'not being qualified' or of 'doing the wrong thing'. There are times when doing the wrong thing is better than doing nothing because it at least demonstrates an awareness to life itself. Although there is currently a trend toward the controlled involvement of volunteers in many statutory social work agencies, the trend tends to veer toward making the volunteer accept the 'professional' hat rather than the 'aware neighbour' one. I would prefer to see social workers getting off their high horse and becoming involved in reality and not just in theory. It is quite possible for any ordinary person to act professionally in relation to another and often a person's 'need' is healed at the point where that person is given the opportunity to get involved. The most damaging aspect of 'professional' social work is that it tends to set the client apart. After all, a client cannot be a peer! But if a person with a need or a problem cannot be spoken to as an equal, and if he is not expected to respond as an equal, how can any lasting help be achieved?

Among volunteer workers at Family First have been 'well' educated people who have lost confidence (e.g. the University lecturer's wife who found it difficult to go out and about as she had lost confidence during the years at home bringing up her family) and who benefit from a work involvement which does not offer too much immediate pressure. The young woman who murdered her baby needs to work to prove she can contribute (that she is not a person born to wreck everything she encounters) – the work helps her to deal with the guilt for the unhappiest event in her life from which she can never escape, but with which she can come to terms. Sometimes the biggest single factor in helping a "categorised" person back on their feet is to offer them the opportunity for involvement in a work situation. It makes for the building up of common rather than separate ground. I can well remember going to a discussion at a psychiatry centre following a film about a small child who had suffered as a result of separation from his parents while he was in hospital. The woman next to me was asked for her opinion 'as a social worker'. She was at the time a Family First tenant. That question spelt

out to her something she needed to hear. She did not 'show' as being different. She could be accepted as a 'work' person.

In Appendix VI is a report by the Nottinghamshire Social Services Director to his committee on the Need to Determine Priorities for Social Workers. I would urge readers to look at this carefully. I produce this document not because the Department which produced it is a poor example of contemporary Social Services Department, nor because its staff are fools. On the contrary, the fact that the Department has even bothered to assess itself and to put its ideas in a form which went out for discussion to non-statutory as well as statutory workers, puts it ahead in its thinking. The reason I feel it is of importance is because throughout the document there is the unwritten acceptance of the fact that 'clients' are people for whom social workers should provide a service and there is no thought that there could be self-help methods to provide solutions to problems.

The problems are seen in terms of management and resources within departments in order always to PROVIDE. Paragraph 3 of the introduction states there is "far greater awareness of Social Services than existed five years ago, with consequent greater and frequently unrealistic expectations by the general public. The expectations are unrealistic as the resources lag behind the expectations."

I would challenge the last sentence. Do we find more and more resources for people whose expectations grow, or do we encourage effort and work within the community to solve its own dilemmas?

The document on Priorities very ably outlines the best current thinking within the Social Services field – but is it the thinking we believe in? Do we accept it as inevitable?

The whole basis of Family First's endeavour has been geared to self-help. This endeavour is not always understood nor tolerated in the current climate of accepting 'no effort' as a normal way of life from those who have problems. Rightly or wrongly (and we obviously believe rightly) it is our premise that in order to help people with problems, they must be helped in 'normal' – or as normal as possible – circumstances. When creating housing and day care practical amenities to assist one-parent families, we make sure these amenities are situated as part of a normal community. For example, the Family Centre at The Croft is available for everyone in the neighbourhood and not just Family First tenants. The new extension to the Family Centre was opened by Mrs. Margaret Bramall, Director of the National Council for One Parent Families, in 1975, and she felt the concept would provide a "model and inspiration for Local Authorities and voluntary agencies."

So though the Centre existed to help one-parent families, that help could only be achieved by having it existent for everybody else too. We can only offer true equality to one-parent families if we say the Day Nursery can only be used by solo parents who are using their own time constructively while their child/ren are at Nursery. The economic cost of

a child in the nursery is high – a parent on a low income contributes very little of the cost. The input of State money into day care is well worth it if the time released for the adult is not frittered away. Life is too precious to fritter. To insist that parents had to do paid work, at a time when paid work is difficult to come by would be unrealistic. But 'effort' in something is not an unreasonable concept. One young mother who was depressed and who needed to have her child part-time at the nursery so the child could benefit from more space and stimulation, agreed she would make the effort to get involved in some community work. For a very shy withdrawn person this meant a considerable effort and she needed quite a lot of support. But she did it – she chose to help in one of the Family First clothing shops – and she enjoyed it, coming home a much more confident Mum to her child. I do not believe she will ever look back; she has gained the confidence without which she would have hidden away (like thousands do) in a small flat on her own at personal cost to herself and her child (the very situation which can lead a naturally loving person to become an unreasonably possessive or demanding one to her child).

For several decades all the troubles in our lives have been neatly blamed on our environment and/or our antecedents: free will conveniently gets forgotten. Understanding the causes of a particular person's problem or problems may necessitate a bold, clear, critical look at his past – but ultimately progress can only be made when we utilise free will in changing a situation. I doubt the ability of social work as a profession to bring about this drastic change in people from apathetic blamers of the past to self-motivating individuals. There is such a backlog of self-fulfilling prophecy about problem families creating problem families and so on. Yet it does not have to happen. The professionals have a vested interest in making it. Take Judy. She sat calmly and said, "I'm a misfit, therefore I've a right to be looked after." I reckon that anyone as bright as that is at least partly a misfit by choice and not necessity. She spent years of her life living off friends, on a DHSS allowance, falling out with her relatives, losing jobs, starting and finishing courses because "they were not suitable." The whole world had to make allowances for her: she made none for the rest of the world.

She played at life like a spoilt little girl with dolls in a toy house. She hurt people, not because she was psychopathic, but because she found it was a way she could have power. One day she arrived in my office, another trip in a round of visitations to helping agencies. She clawed for help but never got what she needed: a metaphoric smacked bottom. Her motives were certainly mixed – her life had become so unreal that I doubt if she knew – at that time – what was real and what was fantasy. She said she would really prefer to help people than to be asking for help. I have always tried to work from the hypothesis that if people offer to help they should be taken at their word – so she was given a job. It was helping to move a quite severely physically handicapped mother and her child into a

flat. It proved to be hard work, time consuming and did not bring any glory – or, as it turned out, any thanks either.

The handicapped mother was of the same school of thought and assumed her right to Judy's help. This vexed Judy beyond all reason. She came back and voiced her distaste for "being taken for a ride." The biter bit!

I discussed with Judy that perhaps her own attitudes were not so very different from those of the other person's she was so vehemently criticising? She almost spewed up at the thought! But she still went back to see the mother and a relationship developed which proved a watershed for both. Judy, after six months, moved from the area and made a new start. She calls in whenever she returns to the area. She discovered that life is for living and that it goes on if you let it. She's in control of her own now and not whining for attention. She can now make stable relationships. The person who helped her was not a social worker, but a fellow passenger. This is only one story to demonstrate a point which needs stressing. As long as social workers go on their way without being anything definite to anyone, we shall increasingly encourage a parasitical class. Those belonging to the parasitical class come from all sectors of society and are respecters of none. Many people have been led into a parasitical role not realising that they have potential for real life (back to my 'basic ingredients') – this loss of potential is a 'professional' sin.

Judy's story also indicates the basic principle behind the need for an increase of community involvement or 'voluntary work'. No longer is voluntary work the domain of the gracious lady with time on her hands and money in her pocket (though many of those actually did good without the need for personal glory). Unfortunately, the do-gooding image remains and I fear may be taken over if 'voluntary work' becomes a respectable adjunct to 'professional' social workers. It became apparent very early on in Family First's life that support for its work within the community would never come from many of the 'traditional' supporters of voluntary bodies.

The support comes at neighbourhood level, from people who need involvement to work out their own problems, and from those whose problems have been overcome but who can help others in a practical way to overcome theirs. I believe the role of the paid staff increasingly therefore becomes one of catalyst in allowing this interaction to happen and being there to fill in the gaps rather than making for itself some huge definable professional role. They say the proof of the pudding is in the eating, so it was an immense pleasure that when I said I intended to leave The Croft after over ten years' work, and the 'job' of resident family became one to fill, that a former Croft tenant, now securely married with her own family, came forward to volunteer. I don't think anything else has given me as much satisfaction in leaving a situation. As Resident Family, Kathy and Peter Clay's role, of course, will be truly professional by reason of the fact they do it and have no procedural structures or

'professional status' to protect them from their errors. They stand as humans in relation to other humans. Kathy and Peter are willing to invest their own lives and to take risks in a learning process which will offer them and their children immense 'basic ingredients' satisfaction and therefore enable them to offer much to those who come to The Croft at a crisis time in their lives. There is no easy formula which can 'help' someone: whether help is there or not depends not on making everything appear smooth from the outside, but allowing real growth of personal potential and responsibility (which can be a much stormier road than traditional institutionalising of people admits!).

There must be a sense of purpose behind any venture, but formal training of people to run The Croft would not ensure its success unless those people had the quality to make it work: in which case they will learn the job anyway.

And it is not until someone is actually 'in' a situation like The Croft – where involvement has to be real and not academic – that they can test themselves. If they find they are not, at the present time, able to cope, this need not be 'failure' (unless they pass quickly over to a lecturing position telling others how to cope!). There are many sides of 'professionalism' in the helping professions, especially social work, which militate against natural neighbourhood caring. But there is one which I want particularly to mention here as it seems appropriate to 'air' it. If, as a society, we divest ourselves of responsibility for caring in our neighbourhood and indeed in our families for those with 'special' needs and hand this responsibility to the 'professionals', we doubly alienate those concerned. Let me explain. First we take someone from their community or the community makes it obvious that they ought to go. Then a special need is proclaimed – the categories, as we have mentioned before, get longer. Thus separated from the 'home' community there becomes this apparent necessity to start thinking about special provision for special needs. The next step is for the professionals to think about a specific scheme for a specific need.

Then what happens? Suggest putting a Probation Hostel, a Home for the mentally retarded, etc., etc., into most 'normal' neighbourhoods and your ordinary, nice neighbours become campaigning zealots. Not here, they cry. It is never quite that they admit they do not like the people concerned: there are polite reasons for washing their hands like "being out of character with the residential nature of the area." Not far from my home at present has been a massive petition protesting against having a Probation Hostel in the area.

To try and get one-parent families integrated into 'normal' communities has brought its share of protests and alarms. Much pressure was put on Family First in the early days only to house one parent families in the most needy areas of the city where, no doubt, they would have had the greatest expectation of failing (and thus fulfilling prophecies of non-competence). We have had to fight for planning consents to establish the right of one-parent families to live in 'normal' mixed communities. In

one area, where a scheme to convert two dilapidated houses into six modern self-contained flats was turned down because it was "out of keeping with the residential area", we had to do a survey to prove that, far from 'lowering the tone' of the neighbourhood, we would be improving it. Many of the other houses were multi-occupied without any conversion: one house with seventeen new pints of milk on the step purported to be only owner-occupied. The Local Authority's head in the sand attitude assisted social isolation.

There have been a militant minority of neighbours who seem to delight in making a new tenant to the area suffer. This highlights the basic undesirability of any sort of special provision. The best we can do, in the current social climate, is to try to offer those society rejects the dignity of living in the 'normal' community. But, of course, it is only contriving a situation which should happen spontaneously. When a neighbour of a house owned by Family First Trust turns up on my doorstep, ranting and raving about a baby crying next door, what she is probably saying is, "How dare you put an unmarried mother next door to me – I'm respectable." (Though her own past makes the accused tenant's look like a staunch puritan, I cannot express myself to her as a representative of an organisation with quite the same gusto or volume as I might if only representing myself! An organisation is a sitting target for the spite aimed at those it helps).

It is easy to send Local Authority Planning Departments into the administrative delights of making enquiries about complaints which may be made just for spite. But mud sticks. Family First stands firm to protect the rights of its tenants to have 'undisturbed enjoyment' of their home. Very occasionally this is difficult to achieve against a degree of personal venom which I still find difficult to comprehend: the very people who banish those with special needs and shout loudest about the responsibilities of organisations to look after them turn up as those who protest loudest if those very organisations happen to work in their home area. One can only therefore assume that they think Hitler-type views and action over minority groups are justified. There are, of course, also occasions when tenants may annoy neighbours (noise of record players, too often, too late, etc.). In these human situations a professional stand is essential. It is not tenants or neighbours right or wrong, but each event judged on its merits.

I will never forget the seriousness with which a councillor told me that it was OK for owner occupiers to have all-night parties but not for tenants. He made derogatory comments about Family First tenants at a meeting of the Council, based on information from a neighbour about an all-night party. He started door to door enquiries about the neighbourhood's view of Family First tenants without even visiting us or taking the trouble to mention he was doing this. We were particularly infuriated, as the house causing the disturbance with all-night parties had nothing whatsoever to do with Family First Trust. And I dared to suggest

that surely people either were causing a nuisance by making a noise in the neighbourhood at 3 a.m. or they were not. The issue was surely clear, irrespective of whether they owned or rented their homes. But he stuck to his view.

One of the most interesting ways to integrate into a neighbourhood is the Trust's evolving of the role of 'resident family'. Wherever there are three or more self-contained, independent flats/maisonettes in close proximity, a couple go into one on a long-term basis to provide continuity. They have no warden-type or supervisory duties in relation to tenants: but are there simply as the 'good neighbour' to collect rents, make sure the garden is tidy, bins cleared up after the dust lorry has called, etc. The resident family itself has a housing need (quite often they are students) and they pay rent. It has been interesting to see how young people see this as a way of both helping themselves and also making a useful contribution to the life of a neighbourhood. When necessary, the family acts as a 'buffer' with an awkward neighbour. New tenants are sometimes anxious after a long period of strain. The resident family makes the atmosphere relaxed and introduces friends in the neighbourhood. As far as possible, when relating tenants to particular flats/-maisonettes, Family First tries to mix ages (and as far as possible sexes) so that there is as little possibility as circumstances allow for identification of 'difference'. In larger schemes – e.g. Waterloo Crescent, which has already been mentioned – tenanting will cover a complete cross-section in the community who need housing, but still including one-parent families.

Too often, young people are growing up accepting, as a matter of course, that people who become ill/old/handicapped, etc., automatically get handed to the professionals. The same young people ironically may be taught in school to accept an impersonal responsibility for those 'less fortunate' through schools projects, etc. The damage done to the 'normal' community by rejecting those of its community who, while needing some help, could – if given the opportunity – add much to its colour, emotional health and vitality is as fundamental as the damage done to the individuals who are thus relegated – sometimes for ever – into second class citizens unable to live except as extensions of their needs (which may, in reality, only be a small part of their total propensities).

One sign of the alarming result of the increasing reliance of potentially capable people on social workers is that new tenants with Family First can take a considerable time adjusting to the 'normal' acceptance of responsibility for their own lives as tenants. After becoming acclimatised to having one or more social workers hovering over them (or at least on call to use as scapegoats when the going gets tough) the reality of personal accountability in a home of their own can prove a tough challenge. When a failure is felt, there is a tendency and sometimes a demand that Family First staff assume the familiar social worker role which would protect them from themselves and thus from the real growth situation inevitable in maturing.

Maturing is not ever easy. There is confusion over people's need to have their basic ingredients respected and accepted (so they can mature responsibly), and 'caring' for people in such a phoney way that we destroy the creativity of their basic ingredients.

Maggie was not a social worker but a nurse and I felt her contribution might help the discussion of the professionalism of 'helping'. Social work 'helping' has grown up as a separate profession based, I believe, on false standards. Maggie's view of an allied form of 'helping' is valid for many reasons, not least for its self-honesty.

Maggie Davis writes:

"There is a fairly well-worn cliché that doctors and nurses make the worst patients. I never suspected that one day it might be applied to me – at least, not in any serious sense. But one learns life is like that: perhaps when you least expect it, it brings its most shattering surprises.

"Thus, one day I was carrying out my duties as a nurse, in quite the ordinary course of events – the next I was totally paralysed and in a hospital bed. What happened in between was a mystery. In the absence of a clear diagnosis, I was eventually shipped off to a hospital which specialises in spinal injuries.

"So there it was: one day I was a professional nurse, sound in mind and limb, and the next I was a paralysed patient on the receiving end of many of my own values and practices. The fact that I was not on the receiving end of *all* my own values and practices reveals one of the sources of the cliché.

"Throughout eighteen months of hospitalisation, I observed many examples of the help that was given to me not matching up to my own standards. Some of the practices also clearly transgressed the standards of nursing care generally accepted by the profession. On the other hand, I observed many examples of good practice – after all, I was in a good position to observe! But the differences in the standards of nursing care existing between practitioners in the same profession showed very clearly. There are, of course, many reasons for this. However hard a profession might try to realise uniformly good practice, individual disparities in training, temperament, pressure of work and so on, are bound to result in differences of performance.

"No doubt when a nurse is suddenly confronted with a colleague for a patient, she becomes aware of all the potential that exists for her own standards to be measured and compared. Faced with the potential of receiving an adverse assessment from her colleague/patient, the defensive nature of the cliché begins to reveal itself.

"Indeed this defence was used against me on several occasions. For instance, a request by me for a clean sheet on my bed in exchange for a soiled one, resulted in me being charged with being too 'fussy', followed up by a dose of, "Oh well – nurses always make the worst patients!" This was supposed effectively to counter any suggestion of malpractice implicit in my request.

"At the same time, the cliché was supposed to operate as a control, by putting me firmly in my place. Patients are supposed to be the passive and undemanding recipients of care.

"Such examples of what treatment could be like on the other side of the fence, made me wonder to what extent I was tasting my own medicine. It is, of course, far less demanding simply to get on with the work in hand on a busy ward, without analysing what you are doing and why. Indeed, as a student nurse, I was never encouraged to question the values and assumptions underlying our training. For example, we were told never to allow ourselves to get too involved with our patients. We did not at the same time examine how far this dictum of non-involvement constituted a professional defence against anxiety, a method of controlling patients, or an attempt to maintain objectivity. Nor was it discussed how far such a policy might impede recovery of the patient, or how far it was harmful to the nurses: to deliberately maintain a social, psychological and emotional distance from a person with whom you are in direct physical contact can be very stressful.

"As a patient myself, I was clearly aware that I was being kept at a distance by the nurses looking after me. As someone newly paralysed, I had to go through the typically long and agonising process of adjustment to a very different set of circumstances. The problems are not merely those of physical dependence. Although my physical needs loomed large, I had a need of genuine understanding, counsel and encouragement throughout this process of coming to terms with a body which was now paralysed. As a nurse myself, I was not blissfully ignorant of the prognosis: I knew I would very likely always be dependent on people for even simple personal tasks such as toilet, bathing and dressing. And I knew that my career as a nurse had come to an end: and I could to some extent foresee the social limitations of life from a wheelchair. Such insights exacerbated difficult aspects of my psychological re-adjustment. And the professional detachment of the medical staff of the hospital, which in any event fell short of supporting the whole person, tended to help me even less.

"Coming back to the cliché again at this point, nurses would seem to make the worst patients inasmuch as they are failed more profoundly by their own profession during psychological crises.

"Perhaps the majority of people who find themselves hospitalised for long periods find also that the help received falls short in some respects of their real needs. Where this occurs because of a nurse's individual approach to the patient, it may be of concern to the nursing administration as much as to the patient. Certainly, to touch yet again on the implications of the cliché, I found it impossible to accept the practices of individual nurses on certain occasions, and said so. This led to some particularly abrasive scenes, during which I began to learn something of the vulnerability and powerlessness of the patient in the face of the medical profession. But the important point here is not the actual or

potential harm done by individual nurses falling short of their professional standards – but where that professionalism itself fails the patient.

"Some of the things I have already mentioned in passing constitute what might be called a 'proper professional attitude' general to nursing. Maintenance of the patient as a passive recipient of care, for instance, is managed by a variety of dehumanising and infantilising devices. The uniform established beyond visual doubt the "them and us" nature of the relationship. The individuality of patients is undermined by, for example, removal of clothes and all but the bare minimum of personal effects on admission to hospital. Ward routines ensure continual interruption of nurse/patient relationship. The patient is regarded as being incapable of handling factual details of his condition and so on. Nurses grow up with such devices right from the start of their training – which are supplemented by such demands, either explicitly or unconsciously imparted, as to always control their own emotions as well as their reactions to the emotions of their patients.

"Having created such a framework of manageability for the patient, it is then but a short step to articulate such other tenets as always accepting the patient as someone in need, irrespective of condition, status etc. – or always using nursing skills to the patient's best advantage. It is clearly less easy to profess always to uphold such credenda where the balance of power is tilted towards the patient, for instance when he is paying the piper. And anyone who is wise to the workings of the profession will be aware that considerations of wealth, status or power can profoundly modify the dehumanising effects of the system. This comes very clear when one has nursed in a system which operates on the lines of a railway company. The metaphor may be interesting to all except the third class patients in (say) a Lebanese hospital. It is less clear in a system such as our own NHS which, in the last resort – and despite its failure to level off the effect of social and economic factors on professional standards – can proclaim that a strict professional attitude should be maintained at all times.

"This notion that it is possible to proclaim such a thing as a 'proper professional' attitude lurks behind the nursing textbooks as much as the TV hospitals schmaltz. It suggests that the right act can be performed in the right way, presumably on the right patient at the right time. It implies that each act in the daily interchange between nurse and patient has its roots in an agglomeration of the current state of medical knowledge, social mores and corporate experience – and can be justified by reference to it. And one supposes that nurses who win gold medals exemplify the way the notion works in practice: professionalsim personified.

"It may be that most nurses, as I did, accept that such professionalism can be brought to their work, even though they have never been required to analyse or describe what it consists of. In my own case, it took a long spell on the receiving end of it to make me wake up to its failings. It is not that I ever thought that one shouldn't aim for high standards – it is to say

that I now realise that such standards should not be developed and imparted to others in the absence of trying to understand what they represent. It is just not good enough for pupil nurses to be told by their ward sisters, "You do not ask questions, you do as you are told", something which happened to me on two separate occasions. It may or may not make sense in this way to give bottom-rung pupils a glimpse of the authoritarian, hierarchical structure which looms over them. But such brusqueness conceals far too much.

"I have suggested that my eighteen months as a patient gave me a unique chance – through the nurses who looked after me – to see my erstwhile self in action. The differences in standards I observed were sometimes irksome, sometimes thought-provoking, but usually humanly understandable. The failure of our professionalism, as it is transmitted through nurses to patients, is not so easily explained. One is tempted to find a handy model to turn to, but one is hard put to find one which does justice to the profession and the people in it. It is not sufficient to suggest that the system operates to provide socially estimable career opportunities for the educated middle class, with patients serving as a faintly irritating appendage to the central purpose of socio-economic advancement. It is not enough to hypothesise the system operating as a means of reducing stress in those impelled by fellow-feeling to care for the sick. Nor is it sufficient to describe the system in terms of power relationships or as an example of enlightened self-interest operating in a world of ubiquitous and undiscriminating disease. Any such reductionist approach can throw only a limited light on the complexities of the nursing service, and belongs more to sociology than me.

"I can only try and describe the realities concomitant on that elusive 'proper professional attitude' as it affects both nurse and patient. I have experienced the reality of life in both camps and their mutually exclusive nature. To find oneself in either category is to experience a confining set of professional expectations about one's behaviour which are evasive and, in my opinion, harmful.

"Referring again to the saying that doctors and nurses make the worst patients, I find that it encapsulates the very essence of the tension and anxiety which permeates the profession and the evasive techniques it employs in its attempts to cope. I remember on my arrival at the specialist hospital, the ward sister greeting me with the instant remonstration, "Just because you're a nurse, don't expect any special attention here!" The tone was familiar enough: brisk, brooking no nonsense and loud enough to remind the rest of the world at the same time of their patient's status. She used the occasion of my arrival as an excuse to articulate the official professional attitude, that all patients should be treated the same irrespective of status. Her immediate reason for saying this may have been relatively simple, but the implications profound. Her reminder struck home the fact that we were all effectively depersonalised: that we could expect no individual attention. It was just as effective a

display of authority and her power over us: a superiority manufactured and conferred on her by the profession. And of course this implied the converse professional view of patients as the passive recipients of care.

"What was the reason for using the opportunity of my arrival in this way? She clearly thought attack was the best defence – but defence against what? I had given no reason to suppose that, as a nurse, I expected special attention – quite apart from the fact that I agree with equality of treatment, I had not been on the ward long enough to express a thought about anything. She had evidently known in advance that her new patient was to be a nurse – but what was she afraid of? I was not well enough to give it serious thought at the time but subsequently it seemed that she was afraid I might criticise her in front of a patient or possibly behind her back by sharing with my fellow patients the insights afforded me by my own nursing experience. Either way I would have been undermining her authority and power – indeed I might have been in the process of chipping away at a necessary prop to her own self-esteem. But this is the prop given to sisters by the profession, so if I had been disposed to criticise and undermine, it would have been an attack on the profession itself; the us and them nature of professionalism and the devices it employs to keep them, the patients, in a manageable position.

"This sister's almost instinctive reaction to shore up her own authority at my expense was at the same time a defence of the system which had given her the power. Little wonder doctors and nurses make the worst patients – their own professional insights constitute a potential threat to the system itself.

"But at any one time, the vast bulk of professionals do not have to taste their own medicine. If it were otherwise the system might well undergo radical change. As it is, the emphasis tends against substantial alterations on the frontier between nurse and patient. There have, perhaps, always been elements who have taught that the patient should be regarded as a person, whose psychological and emotional needs are as important as his physical ones. Even standard textbooks on nursing carry the same message. But the idea is too heavy with implications to be put into practice. At the heart of the professional act is a conviction that it is the *right* act. All the institutionalised elements of the profession follow from it. The authority of this central statement of professionalism is reflected in the authoritarian structure through which it finds expression.

"And the agents of that expression, the nurses, are trapped in a system which paradoxically denies the reality of genuine contact at the very point where contact matters most. All the barriers which are placed between the patient and nurses, such as the uniforms, the symbols of rank, the clinical efficiency, the emotional discipline: all the divisions of responsibility for the care of the patient, the task-lists, the techniques of detachment – the interchangeability between working situations – all these things reduce the impact of person on person and ensure that nurse-patient contact is short and tenuous. Little wonder many nurses, as I did

myself, deplore such a system and try to engineer some real contact and warmth in their contacts with patients. But in doing so they are inhibited by the fear of being disciplined by senior staff. And many patients who may deplore being referred to by bed numbers, or being called 'chests' or 'discs' or some other condition, or who dislike being discussed publicly by practitioners during ward rounds refrain from complaining because of their vulnerability. For the most part, both nurses and patients fall into their decreed roles, and the system proceeds unhindered. De-personalisation has become accepted: dignity is required to be set aside. All patients are the same and nurses are interchangeable angels.

"Stock explanations of this situation, such as it has to be this way to satisfy bureaucratic needs for efficient organisation, do not satisfy. I think there is truth in the notion that the barriers between and detachment from patients have evolved so as to alleviate the stress. For there is much stress existing in the contacts between nurse and patient. I have felt the anxieties from both sides of the fence. But structuring a system so as to avoid these anxieties is a dangerous evasion. One has to face up to the reality of painful feelings, and help the patient to face similar realities in order to develop the capacity to cope with stressful situations.

"When I did my own training, ward routines were organised on a patient allocation basis, and as nurses we experienced the satisfaction which can flow from regular contact with patients and the opportunities to get to know them as persons. When the system was changed and we were interchanging between wards or parts of wards, these satisfactions tended to disappear. I found far more tension where personal contact was reduced.

"I feel no doubt, from my own experience, that there has to be a re-structuring of the work situation based on the necessity for honest inter-personal relationships. This will involve many changes, but right at the core, it has to involve a re-definition of the professional act itself. Rightness has to be tempered with reality, not only of the relative and changing nature of what is 'right', but of the need for this truth to be expressed as part of a genuine dialogue between the medical profession and their clients."

Our Governments in recent years have been like the archetypal repressive Victorian father. He plans with doctrinaire mind and heavy hand the roles he expects his children to play in life and how they should play them. As a nation we play the dominated child's role with diminished personal chance to decide anything. More and more is 'progress' laid down by way of strict formulae by reigning bureaucrats who leave us the option of accepting their modus vivendi without question and following their 'wise' precepts, being completely apathetic and planned for, or rebelliously breaking out and defying their rules. Those who assert themselves (like the children in the family) either do very well as entrepreneural adventurers or they become anti-social 'out-casts'. The more legislation tries to hem us in to cover every eventuality

for supposed inequality or malpractice, the more the intelligent rebel will use their brains to find detours around the legislation. While writing this, I have read of the possible moves to allow the Inland Revenue the right to search premises in order to try to reduce tax 'fiddles'. How much legislation in recent years has set out to reduce fiddles: vast new armies of civil servants march in. Individual rogues just get cleverer. The spiral of irresponsibility goes downwards all round. You cannot legislate for people's motivation. You can, however, do quite a lot to legislate for an environment in which people feel they matter as individuals worthy of making a positive effort: as whole people (with respected 'basic ingredients') who are held in esteem by the Government of the day instead of with contempt.

You may think it relatively superfluous to spend so much time discussing and regarding as so important the helping systems in our society. You may say there are more pressing problems, like world food shortage, pollution and energy control. But I believe there is sense in examining our first priorities for survival in relation to each other before attempting the supposedly larger issues.

These priorities affect the way we live with our families, the way we organise our society in general and the 'helping systems' in particular. They also affect our expectations in a local Government, National Government and in a world sense. If we get our priorities wrong at the outset of domestic and community planning, what hope is there of getting anything right? Society's systems work very much in the same way as individual people. Our increasingly dogmatic "everybody must be equal" approach makes for equality only of non-opportunity and apathetic resignation to the will of those in control (or it makes for rebelliousness – back to our Victorian severe father). Rebelliousness in society at present is becoming a major 'problem' and there is every sign that it could get worse. Certainly, at present, there is no reason why it should get better. Often the past is conveniently blamed for 'anti-social' rebellious individuals.

Psychological blaming of parental attitudes and upbringing, political and sociological blaming of environment and lack of opportunity, all let the individual 'off the hook'. Free will as mentioned earlier, as a factor in improving either one's own life or that of society seems unfashionable. Governments in a mess invariably blame past governments and show a mindless oblivion of the need for purposeful examination of their own first principles. And it all makes more jobs for 'meddling' professionals who neither make decisions nor understand their true role.

I am not saying that free will can, by itself, solve the world, nor am I advocating a completely 'free economy' and survival of the fittest. I am painfully aware of the tightrope of walking between dogmatists who want total control or total freedom. In Family First we have often been criticised for not doing enough for people who are thought to need more 'propping up'. We have been condemned for spending time and money

'giving a chance to those who got themselves in a mess' (especially one-parent families). The latter attitude assumes that miseries, like homelessness or family crises are always self-inflicted or, whether they are or not, that they can automatically be solved without any assistance and co-operation. The growth and work of Family First represents in many ways a microcosm of life and attitudes.

Heaven forbid that we should extol hardship, poverty and unemployment as the saviours of our souls. We all know the diehards who only see a change of heart coming in our society with the prospect of "another war to bring us all together." Those who make these wild statements perhaps yearn for the 'pulling together' which comes in times of real crisis: that is when the crisis is a clear rallying call. People can put the common aim before selfish greed or apathy. There is nothing particularly ennobling about poverty: and poverty means different things to different people. There is not just the kind when money, food and shelter are hard to come by. There are emotionally starved people with material affluence abounding: their suffering is no less real for being relatively physically invisible and therefore difficult to 'organise'.

Poverty eradication does not demand banishment of personal care; it does not necessitate dependence upon 'helpers'; material sustenance does not need to be handed over as 'of right' without any involvement or effort by the recipients. Minding the 'under-privileged' so they look like a credit to the minders, keeps them as sub-human beings. Because we have confused the real purpose in offering 'help' to each other when in need with the Political purposes of gaining control of each other in a rather sinister way, as a society we probably do not realise where the boundaries of 'caring' lie.

We can join a militant protest group on behalf of people with special needs to try to give ourselves Political influence or extra courage, and thereby if we are not very careful we can ensure that particular group's prolonged 'difference' or 'stigma' in the public mind. What kind of 'caring' is that?

We can realise too late the servility involved in belonging to such a group for which 'special provision' becomes a 'right'. And then, if we do not watch it, there may come an enforced loss of freedom and no real opportunity for normality.

We may realise too late that as organised 'helpers' we find a security and status and sense of power which we enjoy and have no intention of relinquishing as long as there are the mass of 'needy' who need us (or do we need them?).

Being needy can, in turn, bring power to those jointly involved: they can milk the system. It accepts that they have this 'right' because then everyone knows their place. The system is very sensitive to threats based on denial of 'rights' and the law too can protect ingenuity in using 'rights' for selfish ends. But what a colossal waste of talent! What a twist of justice!

A solicitor at a London Legal Aid Group told me they only ever acted

for tenants, because if they sometimes took up a case of a landlord (however just the case might be) they would lose face with the tenants in the area. It is fair to say he was operating in an area where there were more genuinely aggrieved tenants than landlords: but he admitted there were good landlords (though successive legislation has driven and is driving them out of business) who sometimes had just grievances. Then why should a system which represents justice be afraid to admit that justice does not go with the title tenant or landlord but with the way each or both act toward each other? Must we continue this injustice of being all on the side of the bosses right or wrong or workers right or wrong; must 'helpers' never be peers of their 'clients', and must clients always be assumed to stay as such?

If more people in administrative positions had a wider (more truly professional) view of their job than the necessity to fulfil procedural techniques, and if they exercised decisions rather than passing the buck or always taking sides, what a difference it would make. I would like to tell the following story, not because it is about a grand scheme which necessitated high finance or a momentous new direction on the part of any Local Authority Department, but because what was needed was very simple, and would help a community scheme which: a) had already proved that it was needed, and: b) helped many people whose needs might otherwise have demanded much more time, attention and expense of the Local Authority.

Like some of the best community work, based on practical need and a practical approach to meeting it, the Family First Trust's Furniture Service evolved. Family First let its flats furnished, because most tenants arrived with only the possessions they could carry in cases or boxes. People who knew of the work of the Trust donated furniture for flats: in fact we found there was an excellent supply of very good furniture which was gladly given away so people could feel useful (and sometimes justify expense of a new 'unnecessary' piece of furniture). When people died sometimes there were whole houses or flats to clear.

As soon as we started collecting furniture for Family First flats, social workers and others heard the news on the grapevine. Hence the requests came rolling in: please could you find a commode for this old lady, a bed-settee for another, a pram for an expectant mother ready for her baby, a houseful of furniture for somebody's family 'burnt out' the previous night, etc., etc. Very quickly we learned that various agencies had tried to run furniture services in the city and the schemes had started and folded up almost as quickly, due to lack of a van, someone to drive it, storage space and a neat and practical and simple administrative system for co-ordinating supply and demand.

Viewed objectively, it should be easy to run such a service, making sufficient charge to cover costs, and re-cycling consumer durables with life left in them for people who urgently needed them.

We were coping with a very tiny store behind a shop. In July 1967, we

wrote to the Local Authority with details of the volume of work we had been asked to undertake in excess of our own immediate requirements and asked if it could assist with suitable premises to rent for storage purposes. After exchange of letters and telephone calls, we were taken to view premises which were let before we had opportunity to take the matter any further. The rent, in any case, would have been too high. After more months' delays, we were offered a dilapidated warehouse, soon to be pulled down as part of a demolition scheme. But by then, we had found a warehouse (also dilapidated) rented to us by a Church. The building was far from suitable, and we still pursued the possibility of getting a more suitable one. We found an excellent building with warehouse behind: the building would convert into flats, and the warehouse cope with the furniture service. The Local Authority turned down our application for a mortgage loan in order to purchase (£5,000). Said the Town Clerk, "In reaching this decision, the Committee were, of course, aware and appreciative of the good work which is carried out by the Trust and the Committee are anxious to assist wherever they possibly can; in fact, the Committee has instructed the Estates Surveyor to try to find suitable alternative premises in the City which can be used by the Trust." The Estates Surveyor never did find any.

In March 1968, the Nottingham Council of Social Service called a meeting of the main organisations, statutory and voluntary, in the city who had an interest in a Furniture Service. Family First was appointed as agent for the scheme and the following letter went out:

COMMUNITY HOUSEHOLD EQUIPMENT SERVICE
(PROVISIONAL TITLE)

C/o 31a Mansfield Road,
NOTTINGHAM.
NG1 3FB

MARCH 1968

Dear

FURNITURE FOR THOSE IN NEED

There is a constant turnover of furniture. Those with rising income and those who inherit legacies or win the pools throw out the old and buy new. Those with falling incomes or those who lose everything through disasters rely on old furniture to keep going or make a fresh start. 3 Examples – A family's home is burnt down, and there is no insurance – another family suffers a catastrophic drop in income as a result of a road accident – a third family at short notice is rehoused from 1 room to a 3 bedroomed house.

Provided the right machinery exists, this is a fine field for community help.

Birmingham has its voluntary scheme: so have some other areas. In Nottingham, the Family First Trust is developing a business-like scheme for receiving good second hand furniture and making it available to those in need.

A group of people representing major statutory and voluntary bodies has decided to recommend that a co-operative scheme be developed and that Family First be appointed the agents for such a scheme.

This they are willing to do and so efficient are the arrangements for payment that the scheme can be largely self supporting. If it is to expand, however, it needs some financial help at the beginning, that is now, to cover the time lag until additional income from the business comes in.

The Rotary Club of Nottingham is making a donation of £10 and I appeal to you – or the Governors of your Charity – to make a grant of a similar or if possible a larger sum. We are aiming at a total of £200.

Volunteers are also needed to help with driving, clerical work and sorting of goods.

Note: This is something different from the Family First General Fund to which you may already be contributing.

Your sincerely,

J.S. Dargavel
Chairman of Steering Committee

The Rotary Club kept its word with a donation of £10: that was the sum total of support! We were on our own: the service was in great demand – the basics needed to make it work properly still sorely lacking. At this time, a team of part-time drivers and volunteers sweated to make the service first class. The warehouse was on a first floor and it WAS hard work. Pigeons, damp and mice did not make the task easier: but it still offered a practical service in the city which was both necessary and a real piece of team work within Family First. Yes, the city liked the service, but it accepted no responsibility for it.

By June 1970, the increasing volume of work led to a further initiative to try to get a co-operative approach. Family First called a meeting of 'interested' organisations and said that it could no longer operate officially as a city service in conditions that it was doing the work but not

getting any help to make the job possible. Family First said it would continue to try to assist other agencies and individuals as and when it could, but there would be no obligations, unless some help were forthcoming with finance toward initial administrative costs and with the provision of dry, ground floor warehousing. It was agreed that the Local Authority should be approached to see if it would prefer to run the Service.

Came the reply on July 24th, 1970, from the Town Clerk: "I am sorry not to have let you have a fuller reply before now to your letter to me of 11th June. Your letter and enclosures, in which you request financial support for the furniture warehouse service, or alternatively, that the Corporation take the Service over themselves, have been carefuly considered by the Corporation.

"The position is that at the present time members of the Corporation are discussing with representatives of the Nottingham Council of Social Service in a comprehensive way the Urban Aid programme, the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, and the provision of particular services, including the Furniture Service.

"The Nottingham Council of Social Service are aware of your recent approach to the Corporation, and the operation of a furniture service will, I am sure, be one of the matters that will be discussed at a further meeting which is due to take place between members of the Corporation and of the Council of Social Service on 6th August. As you state, one of the difficulties in providing such a service is to find suitable warehouse accommodation, and in view of the land situation in the city, this matter is not easily solved.

"I regret that at this stage, therefore, I cannot be more definite in any reply to you, but I shall keep you informed of any material development." There were no developments.

So Family First, anxious still to keep the service going, sought other ways of making it possible. A national Charity donated £2,000 toward the cost of a warehouse at the back of a house and shop Family First purchased. The warehouse was small but dry and easily accessible. And the service grew, was financially self-supporting and met hundreds of urgent requests each year.

In 1972, the Council of Social Service did an extensive survey of furniture requirements of agencies in the city with a view to promoting the idea of operating a community transport scheme. The report says enquiries were not made from Family First as to whether it felt a new, more comprehensive furniture service would be desirable. Various meetings were held to try to launch a scheme: a scheme was never launched.

In the meantime, the demands made on our furniture service were increasing, not least because of the needs of families and individuals being rehoused by the Local Authority after leaving their due-for-demolition homes.

On March 27th 1973, a letter from the Social Services Department asked if we could fill in a questionnaire about the demand for the Furniture Service. Fifteen other organisations were circulated for information about their need for or provision of furniture. In the six-month period relevant to the questionnaire, Family First had received 256 applications for furniture (outside provision of furniture with Family First itself). Of the 256 applications, 219 had been helped with a total of 473 articles including 151 beds. The Trust received between 75 and 100 offers of furniture per week – 75% of which had to be turned down for lack of storage space.

The difficulty in relating supply to demand is obvious with a moment's thought. One week you can get ten offers of three piece suites and need only one: the small warehouse could be full of the wrong items. Turning down offers is a very diplomatic job. Trying to put across to the public that you are not a free dumping service (the Corporation charge after all for collecting and dumping) but a public service is difficult, and you can get some ugly shocks. When a senior civil servant offers you two clean mattresses to help your 'good work' and you arrive to find two, dirty straw palliasses, you feel like turning Communist! When you deliver a very good dining suite to a family for whom DHSS are footing the bill and they turn it out in the rain because it is not good enough, you feel like becoming an enraged capitalist! Yes, it is a difficult, delicate service to run; but nevertheless one which 80% of the time meets real needs, and makes good use of items which might otherwise have gone to waste. The arthritic pensioner who is delighted because he can now sleep in the warm room downstairs illustrates the point.

The result of the Social Services' Department survey was a position of status quo. And so the Furniture Service went on – and grew to the point that somehow or other it would have to end or get premises which could, long-term, secure its future without the extreme pressures of trying to put a quart into a pint pot.

In 1975/76, the Trust set about finding a sizable warehouse, not only to ensure the future of the Furniture Service but also as a base for its maintenance work which is increasingly done by a small, skilled work force backed by volunteers including young men doing community service as an alternative to being sent to prison.

In April 1976, ten years after it started, the Family First Furniture Service moved into a warehouse, adequate for the job – by courtesy of a Bank overdraft (Family First now had local "standing"!) and monies from two properties sold because they were no longer suitable for the Trust's housing work. Many Departments in the City, both statutory and voluntary, of course still use the scheme: in fact, demands grow still!

All that had ever been needed was a simple piece of co-operation to allow Family First to rent a warehouse or to buy one with a mortgage. The Furniture Service has been through three vans, and has helped thousands of people at no expense to the ratepayer. If the Local Authority

had taken it on, there would be no prize for guessing that it would have cost a substantial out-of-pocket sum to run each year. But how much easier, and with a feeling of co-operation worthy of the name, might the Service have evolved with just that little bit of practical and imaginative help by the right people at the right time. But nobody had the sense of personal destiny which enabled them to see their job – or the problem – historically and without narrow departmental constraints. Issues of much greater significance are doomed for the same factors. Offering real co-operation is, I believe, one of the flowers of our being able to accept a sense of destiny. It is a sense of destiny which helps to bring dignity into our lives and to the lives of those we touch domestically and at work. When we have too narrow a view of our own destiny, we hug ourselves tightly and give nothing of ourselves except the absolute minimum. It is a waste of our own potential and it thwarts practical spontaneous co-operation so sorely needed at all levels in society. It is a travesty of the word 'professional'.

Risks in new sound ventures are aggravated by the present tense, suspicion and status orientated social systems: risks which should be welcomed. Could not those who purport to handle justice and public affairs take situations on their merits, oblivious of who is involved and which side of the fence they happen to be on. Can there be any real justice apart from this approach? Could people who purport to 'help' people be less concerned about the taking up of 'rights' whether they are appropriate to the situation or not, and more concerned with linking people with needs to the practical opportunities which might actually allow them to help themselves overcome them? To allow this to happen (and thank goodness it IS done but not often enough) 'helpers' have to be personally committed to the principles of equality and not mouthpieces for Political or sociological verbal balderdash. There are now excellent teachers in schools and nurses in hospitals who came to Family First when their lives showed all the historic and continuing evidence of 'long-term problems'. Some people find it unnerving to contemplate having an ex-probation single mother nursing them in hospital: but – if we believe in equality of opportunity – why?

Experience at Family First has taught me that almost everybody has the potential for a 'point of return' – however hard and harsh the difficulties they are in. The older the person the more difficult it is to surface long-term from problems which have become ingrained (or is it society's attitude to the problems which causes the lessening of the chances?). Yet it can be done. Young people can – and do – break clear of the vicious cycle of 'deprivation': that is, if they want to and if they have a real opportunity. Finding this 'point of return' and allowing it to happen when you are near to the person concerned as a 'helper' is the real challenge: after all they might turn out to be something you had not reckoned on! This can topple a progression of events which come to be expected in the 'helping' situations. But it makes life much more fulfilling and fun, and

the job more interesting: it certainly demands a greater degree of maturity on the part of the 'helper' than the well defined client/social worker relationship.

It means clients are peers – very definitely. It means clients can, should and will jump out of their stereotyped roles and land cheerfully on the other side of the fence, or at least with a leg dangling each side. I cannot see why 'professional' helpers find this such a difficulty to accept.

If the choice at the trenches in wartime is to see someone wounded and solely dependent for any chance of survival on whether we risk our life to get him out, what do we do? On the spur of the moment, most people would make the attempt however great the cost to themselves. It is almost instinctive. That very instinct is conditioned out of us, and trained from us. Why must we be presented with an unusually dramatic test to see if we still function like humans with basic personal caring? Most people in need of help, because their lives have taken a sudden turn for the worse, or because of handicap, etc., only need to be given a fair chance (not a pampered cell) to try again. Why keep them wounded? Why increase the size of the wound?

What gives an individual his or her 'point of return' is not necessarily an ever greater DHSS allowance, a new social worker, or even just a better home: it is the will and the motive to believe in oneself as a human being who (even in the face of the other millions of humans milling around) really matters. To say that man is a spiritual being as well as a material one gives fodder not only for those who share this practical philosophy but for those who try to turn it into dogmatic propaganda for their own brand of spiritual life. This is as dangerous to the person seeking a 'point of return' as the material dogmas of the politicians and bureaucrats, and they are bad enough. But man has a tremendously creative spirit. He is not just a body. That creativity is not harboured only in those whose jobs bear society's label of 'creative'. It dwells in almost everyone and can exist quite happily (given the opportunity) in someone, who judged by our topsy-turvy values is humdrum.

Reiteration of the 'Born to Fail' outlook will never help to bring the 'point of return' nearer for those whose teachers, social workers, government officials and the like view them as failures: unless they belong to that exceptional self-starting minority who, phoenix-like, rise up in each generation against all odds. The helping systems should be geared wholeheartedly toward enabling people in need or with problems to reach through effort their individual 'point of return' – not set them on a rutted path toward 'comfortable' dependency.

As long as striving is limited to material values and affluence, then as a society we are doomed and we can only continue down the rutted track. We insist that – in order to be 'helped' – everyone in need needs more of anything which is going. When they get it we wonder why they are not all doing as well as predicted. (Look at new housing estates?). Then we rally around getting more people trained to look after them to show them how

to get and use their 'rights'. And this in turn encourages more to assume the 'right' to be looked after. It is a sordid merry-go-round.

I recently examined a housing scheme at planning stage conjured up by a Local Authority which had become aware that it should do more to house one-parent families. The result was a purpose-built block of flats (for six tenants) each with their own self-contained all-mod-cons flat – which was reasonable – but there was also a palatial entrance with internal garden à-la 5 star hotel, a full-scale automaic laundry just for the six tenants and also a lounge and gardens. Since the tenants would mostly be very young, the standards were absurd and likely to increase problems. This is the point where planning for 'special needs' goes berserk in not seeing the people with the needs as 'normal' people with 'normal' aspirations and standards. Present any six very young tenants with palatial lounge, laundry, gardens, etc., and the chances are they will be misused: or, more likely, not used because young people prefer to meet in each other's flats and do not usually have enough experience to initiate and manage community living of the type prescribed by this project's design. So the Authority will risk getting into the position of criticising the tenants for abuse and blaming the fact that they are one-parent families. Such situations are so predictable, yet they are perpetuated. Such schemes also get criticised as the public may point the accusing finger and say that in order to get such palatial standards you have to 'be in trouble'. We must learn to see people who need help as ones who have 'normal' aspirations, rather than creating 'special provision' which presupposes that if you need help you are not, or cannot be expected to be, normal.

If we could break the clamp-hold grip of negative social system philosophies, I believe a strong impetus could come from groups on the brink of forming or being organised into even more 'minority' need groups: cliques devised for preservation of their own negative differences or built specifically for protest at these differences without any outward-looking positive goal or aim, will flounder and drown in their own sweat. One such potential group are the increasing numbers of coloured English adolescents who cannot find work. Undoubtedly, they have a very genuine need. The question is whether this need will be turned for political reasons into a vendetta of greed and mistrust which can never put the wrongs of the past right; whether this need becomes an intellectualised new source of fascination for sociologists and professional 'helpers', or whether somewhere there are in this country at present, sufficient people who can provide the practical leadership to turn this need into a 'point of return'. These young people have energy, immense energy: they have a need to do something positive and creative; they have the ability. But where is the leadership which can allow it to flow into channels which point to a future worth striving for? Do leaders only exist to harness negative impulses? Does the real need within the group get harnessed into creativity within the wider community; or does it get

harnessed into introspective destruction? I believe the creativity has to come from within the group and it cannot be imposed. The challenge for the group is to be as pioneering as those who set sail into uncharted oceans. The same degree of spirit and adventure is needed. Success will not come in the wake of reliance on State and 'helping' systems or in endless debate about lack of opportunity. The opportunity must be sought out, created out of nothing and made good. The solutions will not drop, ready-made, into anyone's lap. There are a few exciting initiatives afoot, and hopefully in the next few years there will be more of them.

Old age is becoming an 'in group' activity. Old people are super as individuals. En masse (like most groups) they are not so attractive, as many 'helpers' feel. It is degrading to be separated from the mainstream of life simply because of one's age. I hope that, if and when I get to sixty, seventy or even eighty, there will be some niche which accepts me for what I am, rather than the age I happen to be, and in which I can still make some kind of practical contribution according to capability. I dread seeing Homes full and geriatric wards packed with those who feel no thrill of a new day. What a blight on our society.

When I planned this book I intended to include statistics of expenditure on the helping systems and to present a contrast of expenditure between different sorts of help for identical 'needs'. But I changed my mind, as I felt it would only provide fodder for intellectual indigestion because comparisons are odious and can be taken quite out of context. It is possible, for example, to state how much per head it costs to keep a child in care in various sorts of circumstances, but the figures will not tell you whether the child should be there at all in the first place. What is indisputable is that the more 'special provision' is passed to the professionals, the more the social helping systems will take a big bite of the national budget. And who decides how much of the overhead costs of any Government Department relates directly or indirectly to the helping systems, widely interpreted? No doubt clever economists would come up with widely varying sums depending on their point of view.

Although cost should never be the sole factor in determination of helping systems, it must be a factor. Wealth which is not created cannot be distributed to an ever increasing number of people in 'need' and an ever increasing number involved in its distribution (rather than its production). My work has taken me into many Government and Local Authority Departments. One can only be flabbergasted at the sheer bumbling inefficiencies which are the rule rather than the exception by people whose salaries are very significant. Unconnected as they are personally from any end product, clear aims or objects or personal accountability, life consists of piles of papers, referrals, delaying of decisions, committee reports, and waiting for new procedures to be announced. Months can go by waiting for one single little decision that any self-respecting manager in a small company would have to make in

two minutes, and he would stand to be personally accountable for it if it happened to be the wrong decision.

The greater the proliferation of 'help' and the less our personal involvement with those around us, the greater the increase will be of the kind of 'needs' we are already beginning to add to the more traditional list: there are the social diseases of the affluent but personally uncaring society (e.g. a new wave of child battering: emotional as well as physical). We will see more loneliness, more mental illness, more psychosomatic illness, more relationships torn apart because there was nothing but material convenience holding them together, more greed (stealing) – not the poor man's petty stealing to feed his children – but the affluent man's greed for big hauls, more 'escape' need – the young who opt out to drugs, sleeping rough, booze and promiscuity – more vandalism. Poor well-provided for granny will be more likely to die by being mugged or as a superficial, well-tended cabbage in a sterile Home. The fit will comfort themselves with the thought that those less fortunate are well looked after by the system. "After all, we pay enough for it" and nothing and nobody is anybody's specific responsibility any more for longer than it is convenient and expedient. And when troubles hit us? Will it seem different then? It may seem different, but we will have to sip the medicine we have contrived. In the long-term, I believe, there is a fundamental principle that what is truly (i.e. not just selfishly) good for the individual is also good for society and vice versa. If we condone an impersonal society and deny others their basic dignity – sooner or later our own stands totally at risk.

Only if we become courageous enough to stop looking over our shoulder (either voluntarily or under pressure) to see if the next person is 'better off' and only if we are confident enough to place our faith in a personal future by working for real quality of life by correctly using our 'basic ingredients' shall we contribute something of value to those we love, those we meet, to ourselves and to society.

All yearn for that contribution. If we work hard, maybe without thanks or recognition, and get tired in the process, the ache at the end of the day will hurt less than the rattling void of gaining 'success' and 'having everything' and yet feeling singularly unsatisfied, and perhaps feverishly seeking new materialistic 'toys' as artificial stimuli to try to prove we are real. Reality lies within and cannot be acquired without personal cost. The personal involvement of each and every one of us will be different – but never say there is no opportunity, or that you could do something IF ONLY others would do more for you first. Look at those around you, look at the vandalised environment, look at the way we are being governed, look at our priorities, look at the 'helping' systems with eyes wide open. We could start in a very small way quite simply picking up the litter outside our own front door – or at least stop dropping it outside other people's! We insult our capacity for life and living too often. Because we do not value our own life enough, we degrade others,

especially when they need help. We hand them to the 'system' which we operate at and for our convenience. They become cogs in a machine. Unless we deliberately switch that machine off, it will one day throttle too many – and us. It is already nearly out of control as it devours the freedom and dignity of those who succumb to its seductive exterior; those it intimidates or lures by labelling; those it can organise by 'helping' and those it can control by employing with tidy status and incremental salaries.

The saddest thing about the damaging influence of our present helping systems is that they were initiated for high ideals: the belief that if man had ample, he would automatically be happier, healthier and know what to do with it. Then there is the error of equating the chance to have ample of everything with no expectation of effort in return. Take Jenny, nineteen and with a baby. Her parents refused to have her at home – she became homeless. Certainly, on the face of it, she desperately needed a home of her own. So Family First offered her a self-contained modern flat in a house in the 'normal' community. She immediately moved in her baby's father who, like herself, lived on Supplementary Benefit. He then went to prison for stealing. So she swapped him for his very much younger brother. He was on Probation and also getting Supplementary Benefit. As the flat was earmarked for a one-parent family (because of their genuine need very often for a 'normal' home in a 'normal' community), Jenny was asked about her future intentions. She made it quite clear she intended to cohabit and equally clear that she could not see why either her man or herself should either move out to find a home of their own, or indeed do anything to earn their own living although, in their locality, they could have done both or either. She was quite content in fact for social workers to do all her thinking – as long as it suited her – and she cleverly told different ones what she knew would make them respond in the way she desired. She and her new young man were enjoying life, thank you very much, so leave them alone. It is a free country after all. Free? To do what we like without the effort of making it possible? We asked the young man's Probation Officer to take steps to try to bring some sense of responsibility to bear in respect of the young man. The Officer did nothing. He was, in fact, also quite pleased at the situation as it presented him with no immediate problems in respect of his client who "seemed very happy." The Officer was pleased his client "had formed a relationship." He had formed many before on exactly the same basis of seeing what side his bread was buttered without having to shop for, pay, or spread the butter.

We discussed this happening and decided that we would have to take action if this couple were going to take any steps in self-dependency. Jenny was flagrantly contravening her tenancy agreement. After many weeks in which she had opportunity to try to decide some reasonable course of action, she was given notice to quit so the flat could be used for someone unable to find housing. The young man's

Probation Officer then woke up and realised something had to be done. Perhaps he could find the young man some digs. Then, surely, we would not turn out an innocent mother and baby, would we? He tugged at our heartstrings with one breath and mentioned publicity being unfortunate in the next. We said we were not afraid of taking whatever action might be needed in the interests of safeguarding the true 'rights' of those who were in genuine need. Oh, he sighed, and said he would have to talk to his senior.

Jenny's reaction was "nobody helps me." But you were given a flat. "Oh yes," she said, "It is comfortable and I don't want to leave." She said her social worker said we would "climb down" when told she would not leave before Court proceedings had taken place. When Jenny was told fairly and squarely that we would not change our minds, she, in fact, changed from her parrot voice to her own. The Social Worker had 'put her up to it'. Since referrals for accommodation for one-parent families largely come from Social Services (and when Jenny leaves her successor will most likely be a referral from Social Services) it surely makes nonsense of the idea of trying to help people according to their need if social workers use clients as a means of doing battle with other agencies. We made an appointment to see the social workers concerned to try to sort out the practicalities of action. Jenny did not dispute the fact that she had been treated fairly – she really needed to know that someone said what they meant and meant what they said. That meant manipulation was not fair. She said she had no intention of living as a one-parent family (fair enough – her choice) – it follows that the 'helping' system prevented her logical next step of ensuring that either she or her partner (or both) found their joint home. Jenny will accomplish that and can stop wasting other people's time and dissipating her own talents.

Now the purpose of recounting this story – and I could tell dozens in the same vein – is simply this. Who benefits by allowing people to have money, a home and 24-hour leisure for no personal effort on their part, when they are intelligent and able-bodied enough to own and run a car, work 'on the side' for short spells when it is expedient in their own interests, and to know exactly how the system works so they can manipulate it to maximum benefit? Jenny is a member of the growing 'leisured class' – with State finance for basic keep, unspecified and undeclared part-time work for her 'sugar' and no effort in relating herself to the community at all. The community exists for her: after all she is underprivileged. Why are the helping professionals (now increasingly backed by the Law) so afraid to act over people like Jenny? Or is there a subtle vested interest in keeping a pattern of cyclical deprivation, even though there is no reason for it if people were treated truly equally? What a paternalistic society we are in a sour way.

I pity the children of the parents I know who use their brains to 'milk the system'. To be reared in the knowledge of being categorised as

deprived is a status in itself; to accept THEM as your slaves by affecting the artificial role of serfdom yourself: what a waste.

If we do not go back to first principles as a matter of urgency, and examine the reasons why we should help each other personally when help is actually needed, then we may live to see the day when real need goes more unnoticed than the cruelty to children who went down the pits once did. Society is contriving to appear 'caring'; it can produce voluminous evidence of expenditure on 'caring'. But it is turning stone cold.

I have sat up until all hours with young mothers at The Croft, discussing life and death. I have learned a great deal by seeing who matured to make a fulfilling way of life and who remained passive and dependent or aggressively 'anti' everything.

Those who find a 'point of return' are those who manage to grasp the reality that life is for living and not just for taking from others. Intelligence has very little to do with the capacity for maturity in terms of quality of living, but motivation and encouragement rate high as determining factors.

Sitting in an ambulance rushing through city streets on its way to hospital in an effort to save a miscarriage following an overdose attempt of a tenant you are just beginning to get to know (and who afterwards stays for some months) teaches you a lot not just about the particular situation but about the whole question of life and death and the innumerable experiences, attitudes and background which make up one particular person who – in a crisis – feels the need to tell someone things which before had seemed too painful to mention. Having learned much about real need simply because I was there has made me very wary – and indeed frightened – of the 'helping' professionals who are seldom around at the time they are needed yet who have much power to influence and interfere. I have also learned the hard way that the very administration, which sets itself up as public service, serves itself first for most of the time and the public – just plain you and me – second, if at all.

If you want backing support, then you must produce a label – like 'battered wives' – because it is satisfying Politically to be seen to be 'doing something' for a newsy 'need' as a public service. It gets votes, I suppose.

An old lady can experience more difficulty in getting her Social Services Department to install an alarm bell so she can stay safely in her own home – independently where she manages well in spite of infirmity – than she would have if she demanded a place in a local Home for the Elderly. Many people only want a chance to be 'normal' – but their needs go unrecognised while categorised and contrived needs are booming business.

Is it too late for a new spirit of adventure to be nurtured which sees 'problems' simply as threads which need some attention in order for the fabric of life to be wholly normal (or as normal as possible)?

So if you think you need help, think again. If you get what you think you want, will it do you more harm than good long-term? Do your 'basic

ingredients" and best instincts guide you, or the desire to take advantage of available Services or 'rights' whether you need them or not? If you are a 'helper' take a break and examine the first principles of your job. Does it exist for you or for those you are trying to 'help'? Are you merely sitting on the sidelines of life commentating upon others, liaising, advising and getting promotion in a non-job? Are you, in fact, just a voyeur? If you are an administrator, planner, teacher, are the people you 'help' real individuals or just commodities to make the job exist? Do you put on a professional face and use professional jargon to separate yourself? Do you, in fact, even have a hostility to the people you 'serve'?

There are too many monsters waving fairy godmother wands which promise goodies, but which sparkle only long enough to seduce into their self-deluding clutches anyone who is vulnerable. The true fairy does not offer an easy path out of any difficulty, but simply encourages you along it, and points you in the right direction with your eyes wide open looking at the practical goal in the distance.

If you find the going genuinely tough, she will quietly have travelled to the first hurdle and have bothered to make you a hot brew and offer a change of boots: whereas the monster merely sits pompously on the fence and watches you slip tired into the mud while expounding theories about your downfall and how it might have been prevented with more 'help'.

Disguised monsters are all around us. Their contrived concern violates human dignity. We must look afresh at the meaning of violence, at our 'basic ingredients' and the methods by which we compete for success. If we do not like what we are confronted with, we must change it. It does not necessitate training or wealth, but sustained courage, intelligent use of initiative, and effort.

Man is not just an animal who will respond long-term to stimuli presented if, after time and a period of disillusion, a better and fairer alternative emerges. Perhaps even the promise of greater affluence, more possessions and more notes in our wallets, is beginning to wear thin. Man seeks, oft-times in fumbling, perplexed and subconscious ways, for a growing awareness of his immense need for the dignity of allowing his 'basic ingredients' to develop and flourish. If he can enable his own to flourish (not to be confused with flaunted), it must follow that he can encourage and allow the same opportunity to his family, his colleagues and his friends. He will want the opportunity for the rest of the world. According to his real ability, he will perceive goals, make decisions and warm to a sense of destiny. That destiny can be as well perceived whether he is a dustman, doctor or disc jockey.

APPENDIX I

DIRECTOR'S PROGRESS AND LEAVING REPORT JUNE 1976

FAMILY FIRST TRUST

THE CROFT, ALEXANDRA PARK, NOTTINGHAM NG3 4JD

This document is a Progress Report to June 11th 1976 and is combined with a considerable amount of detail about staff responsibilities within Family First. This offers a picture of what is happening in Family First at the time of handover to its new Director.

INTRODUCTION

The optimum size of any organisation is dependent on the priorities of those whose responsibility it is to run it. The measurement of its success depends a great deal on their ability to limit effort and activities to those which can be achieved qualitatively, while relating such effort and activities to the world around and not seeing them in isolation.

It is mistaken policy on the part of some helping organisations to believe they can be all things to all people: criteria have to be set and adhered to. Only then can true flexibility of approach within a situation prove possible. Without any criteria, staff flounder and seek administrative procedures as their security: their security should be working creatively toward agreed goals. For example, by limiting itself initially to housing mostly one-parent families, Family First was not saying that these families were the only ones needing housing, nor that they needed housing in isolation as a special category. It simply said that it could only do a certain amount of housing work and do it well: for the time being anyway, its efforts would be geared mainly to one-parent families as these families certainly needed opportunity to be treated 'normally' within the community.

Family First's Management Committee has persistently adhered to its "Small is Beautiful" policy whether it was the fashionable line to take or not. Appendix III is a copy of the Management Committee's agreed Aims and Objects. Some years ago, considerable pressure was put on Family First to grow large quickly – by SHELTER for example – and there were financial incentives to do so. Family First maintained it was better to achieve a little qualitatively and personally, than a lot quickly with the inevitable depersonalising and increase of bureaucratic management and administrative expense.

Local groups in other areas have wanted to become part of Family First, but it has consistently rejected the idea of becoming National, and given help whenever possible to assist local community groups to be autonomous in their area. It is possible to work co-operatively with other groups without the need for administrative amalgamation. Such amalgamation would mean more administrative jobs for people farthest away from the practicalities of the end product or service offered and this would inevitably lessen the chances of real success of a community venture.

Family First's prime job is that of providing homes, by conversion and rehabilitation or by building. But because homes are not just the provision of stereotyped units of accommodation which meet the standard cost and technical yardsticks of the Department of the Environment, the Housing Corporation and the Local Authority, Family First has become involved with the whole purpose of having a home. Even ideal units of accommodation do not lead to fulfilled lives if the environment is chilling, if people feel isolated, apathetic and threatened, or if they have no opportunity to utilise their potential strengths. A homeless family does not only need a roof – it needs a real opportunity to belong in a community. Even if the opportunity is not used, it should be there as a dignified choice.

Family First has laid much importance on the provision of opportunity for self-help rather than following the current social trends in propping people up and cossetting them from real life and opportunity (and therefore preventing them from acting responsibly). If opportunity for full involvement in life is there and not taken, then it is not the job of social workers or others artificially to 'prop' people up: what is tragic is when the opportunity is not there, and there is no way of knowing who would benefit from it and who would still moan and expect everything for no effort. For exampe, when the Day Nursery opened at The Croft, it provided the practical opportunity which many lone parents and others needed in order to manage life more constructively: but came the request from one parent, who had said she could work if there were a Day Nursery place for her child, for a taxi to bring the child because the distance of two roads was too far to walk!

Recently, Family First staff produced a policy statement on the use of tenancies – a statement which sought to clarify the situation over how far tenants had a right to use or abuse the opportunity of housing. This statement is available. Appendix V.

Management

It has always been Family First Policy that all members of its Management Committee had a direct interest in the work of the Trust (no 'big' names just for names). Its Management Committee are: Mr. W. Block (Chairman), Mrs. M. Allington, Mr. C.E. Akeroyd, Mrs. M. Clark, Canon A. Inglis, Mr. M.J. Thomas, Mr. P. Paskell, Mr. M. Appleby, Mrs. S. Santos.

Appendix VII shows the management development of Family First. At Stage 1 the embryonic Family First was run by two of us, Mrs. Muriel Sutherland working part-time for almost no wage and myself working voluntarily. It is fascinating to look back and to see how the 'shape' emerged. Within the embryo even at that stage were the seeds of most of the future ideas. The Day Nursery, for example, was a clear idea on paper: how we struggled to turn it to reality! The shops were a pile of clothes in the back of the one damp office! Right from the start came the need for furniture to furnish flats and the practical jobs like maintenance of property.

The work involved a growing number of hard working staff and volunteers and the ideas turned into practicalities by finding the necessary finance. Houses in the early days could not be purchased by mortgage as it took some years before the Local Authority would make available the necessary loans. Houses were rented and Family First acted as agents.

The problems were many as the accommodation was seldom to the standard we would have wished yet we could not undertake improvements. Since the availability of mortgages, full scale rehabilitation and conversion has been possible.

It took some years before the Local Authority recognised Family First at policy level; though its social workers always used its amenities.

An early management decision was to ensure that any auxiliary activity undertaken by the Trust, in addition to its Housing work, should be self-supporting and never drain resources from housing. The shops, furniture service, holiday play schemes, elderly people's luncheon club, job creation projects, involvement of community service offenders, recreational and educational courses, schools projects, etc. etc. all have to 'stand on their own financial feet'.

It is policy that work started satisfactorily can be offloaded when management within the community enables independence. For example, the initiative started at Southwell (an area 16 miles away much needing rented accommodation as an alternative for families who cannot purchase) is now developing into Southwell's own Housing Association, First Hand. Family First assets in Southwell will shortly go to the local self-managed scheme.

Family First can be the catalyst: it should never empire build. The Waterloo Crescent scheme hopefully one day will be self-managed. But self-management must come from the real community and not from activist political groups purporting to work for the community. There is a correct timing for hand-over, at a time when the local community really is participating.

Family First, since the 1974 Housing Act is subject to the rules of the Housing Corporation and this has added to the administrative work load especially in relation to housing finance and subsidy. Every new piece of legislation which hypothetically is supposed to clarify seems, in fact, to make it harder for effective and quick community action. The Waterloo Crescent Scheme could have started in September 1975 – at the time of writing we still await final consent! People's tempers get frayed and the longer the scheme waits, the harder it will be to effect it with good relationships (for example, sitting tenants now feel Family First *should* be doing things in the area which we are legally still not empowered to do). Sluggish bureaucracy brings chaos in its wake; the chaos is then seen as the reason for creating more bureaucracy.

Appendix VII illustrates the cellular type of management which Family First uses. As jobs get too big for one person, we do not bring in extra clerical helpers to back up people doing the jobs: we take a portion of the job and create an interesting new job with direct responsibility for its success going into one pair of hands. This means that the central administration remains small and in touch with the various cellular developments. The diagrams show clearly, I think, the merit of this approach (rather than a linear system of management) which keeps all aspects of Family First's work closely in touch with the public. The same cellular job development occurs within each Department. It leads to realistic attitudes and policies. Jobs tend to alter as cellular development continues, evolves, splits off, and interlinks. There is always a strong sense of direction coupled with immense flexibility and reliance on personal initiative and integrity. It leads to a better understanding of the role of other people's jobs than is obvious in linear type management.

The degree of flexibility of job role within Family First exerts a strain on individual staff which makes it imperative that staff relationships are good. Where communication and understanding and humour are present, staff offer each other an enviable work environment, for each has the opportunity to develop their skills to the hilt. At the time of writing, there are many young members of staff whose talents are still fast developing and for whom Family First can, hopefully, offer scope to their full potential. It follows that the benefit that Family First offers the community by allowing use of potential is greater than if it held people in fixed roles.

Most members of staff in any week have to cope with several very unexpected situations from which they cannot 'pass the buck' although, in other management circumstances, they

might have said "sorry the job is nothing to do with me". There is a sense of corporate as well as individual responsibility which has evolved over a decade and which I believe is Family First's soundest asset.

The initiative and energy required in jobs within Family First exacts personal demands which are well beyond that expected in many jobs of similar status elsewhere. This strain would prove too great if the scale of Family First grew so large that it became impersonal. Staff need the 'refreshment' of regular rapport with colleagues; they need to know tenants, 'clients', helpers and all involved as individuals. Against this backcloth of knowledge, crises can be taken well in their stride. The same challenges in a larger or less personal organisation I am certain could not be coped with in such a creative, practical and successful way. A less secure staff would fall back on procedural techniques and administrative precedents – the dynamic would be lost.

Regular monthly general staff meetings are held, and are attended by staff from all Departments.

It is sound management practice that those who run the administration of the Trust have done or can do (if the situation temporarily demands it) almost all the jobs for which, overall, they have responsibility. I am not suggesting that the new Director dons a pink overall and works in the baby nursery! I am saying that he knows how to hold a baby in a crisis and that his office is accessible and not stuck away in an ivory tower where sticky juvenile fingers cannot reach. Effective administration is a necessity to make things happen smoothly and effectively: administration can only do this if the people running it are fully aware that their management techniques and financial control methods are a means to a practical end and not an end in themselves.

A condition of employment is that Family First staff do not sit on 'representative' committees of other bodies except short-term in circumstances where some positive action may result. This policy has led Family First to be criticised by some organisations who set up representative committees. It would be easy, in fact, to spend all ones working life on committees talking about problems and deciding what action is needed without ever attempting to put that action into practice. Over the last decade, there has been a boom in advisory and talk-type organisations: it is amazing how many have been set up around the housing scene. When asked how they can help people, they say 'to advise'. That advice often sends them to Family First! Why do not more people who profess a concern, DO something?

Family First spends time meeting representatives of other organisations to co-operate at a practical level and to pursue a planned future programme. Time spent doing this is effective, and increases purposeful rather than parasitical communication.

The cellular growth divides work into several main areas and these areas will be discussed under individual headings to give a clear idea of what is done, and who does what. As long as the Managers of these areas (or teams) continue to think laterally, the management development of the Trust will remain firm and healthy. If management in any area became isolated, and failed to see its relevance in the wider framework of Family First, progress could be impaired. The demands made on team managers are therefore twofold:

a) To see that those working in the team meet the objectives of their particular jobs

b) Constantly to be alert to the need to dove-tail with the other teams and to be willing to see the good of the 'whole' as greater than the status quo of the team's existing role. The evolutionary progress exerted by this flexibility is clearly shown by the number of staff who suggest possible developments. If this dynamic should ever become clouded by insecure team managers who sought personal security in a narrow definition of their job, then Family First would suffer.

HOUSING

Eighty-six housing units are owned and vary in size from self-contained bed-sits to large family maisonettes/flats/houses. There is one hostel scheme which is run as self-catering bed-sits with a tenant resident family in place of a "warden". Four habitable properties (fourteen housing units) await full conversion into modern homes. One property (five units) awaits transfer to another Housing Association: one property will be handed as an asset to First Hand, the Southwell Housing Association which has grown out of Family First's initiative in the area.

Eight purpose built one/two person flats will be built 1976/77 at 846 Woodborough Road. The old house has just been demolished by young people working for Family First under the Job Creation Programme.

The Waterloo Crescent scheme should commence Summer 1976. It will be in three phases, the first being for conversion of 11 properties. Two will be converted into accommodation for single homeless people and Family First is linking with the Macedon Christian Centre over its management. The overall scheme will provide some 150 housing units, and include a Family Centre with space for meetings, chat and coffee, playgroups, youth activities, etc. The Centre will be available for all who live in the area, not just Family First tenants (who will represent a mixed community). The Sociable Theatre, a group of young actors who use drama as a base for community work, will work from the Family Centre. Family First regards this as a big step in the right direction of getting away from community work with a Welfare bias. The Centre will have easy access for the elderly and the handicapped living in the area.

Where Family First has three or more flats in close proximity, it likes to house a 'resident family' in one flat. The resident family accept responsibility for collecting rent, keep gardens tidy and act as a 'good neighbour' thus providing continuity as tenants come and go. Family First houses most tenants from the time they are homeless or in 'crisis' until they are eligible for Local Authority Housing. Hopefully in the future, the Trust would like to find ways in which tenants could purchase their homes (theoretically this is possible at less cost than current fair rent). Resident families are often mature students, themselves with a housing problem, who like the two-way help of getting a home linked with a real initiative in their local community. They pay rent with a small reduction in lieu of services.

Housing maintenance is now almost entirely done by the Trust's direct labour team (see Practical Services).

Staff Housing Manager: Cliff Lewis, responsible for all properties other than Waterloo Crescent.

Waterloo Crescent Worker: Bridget Farrand
Caretaker at The Croft: Arnold Edgeworth
Voluntary Resident Families:
Barry and Caroline Bowker
Phillip and Pauline Nichols
David and Penny Hilditch
Tim and Lynn Bell
Brian McColl
Peter and Kathy Clay (and family) who replace me at The Croft from July 1976.
Brenda Jackson
There is one vacancy in place of a tenant who has just left.

People often ask what is involved in managing property. Over the years, the public at large and tenants in particular have been brainwashed into believing that all property manage-

ment was a dirty word conjured up by landlords who wanted a lot for nothing. But there is a tremendous amount of work to be done in managing property, IF it is to be done well. Family First, of course, does not operate for profit. Its Housing work is subject to financial structures of the Housing Corporation and Fair Rent legislation.

Cliff Lewis' job covers overall management of the Trust's properties, excluding Waterloo Crescent. All tenancies are furnished except a minority let to elderly people. Management also includes the Trust's non residential buildings, e.g. Croft Family Centre and shops.

The overall management includes rent collection and banking of monies (£539.32p per week at current level). Some properties have meters, phone boxes to be emptied, and sundry income comes from sale of bedding and pots and pans supplied at very modest cost to cover expenses.

Tenants call and sundry inquiries are dealt with involving liaison with Family First's Personal Services, Probation Officers, Social Workers, etc.

Where new projects are concerned (or rehabilitation of existing ones) there is responsibility for inspection, negotiations with estate agents, solicitors, etc; nogotiations with architects, builder, attending regular site meetings; negotiations with FF direct labour team where appropriate; oversight of furnishing arrangements; insurance; arrangements for rent officer to determine fair rent; tenancy agreements, rates, gas and electricity, etc. etc.

From the time a housing unit becomes available, there is another involvement which includes interviewing prospective tenants, visiting the property with a prospective tenant, discussion and signing of tenancy agreement, issue of keys, making arrangements re bedding etc. if prospective tenant has none, liaison with DHSS and other relevant departments both within and outside Family First, making sure tenants understand fire precautions and escape procedures, inventories of furniture to be agreed, etc. etc. Because of the relatively short-term nature of lettings, this aspect of the job is perpetual.

Once occupied, properties need regular inspection for maintenance and this is done in liaison with our direct labour team. Often repairs get done within two days of notification. The Housing Manager is responsible for the overall housing programme re rates, fire inspections, housing law, etc. There is a lot of detail in the job which would cause chaos if not done patiently and thoroughly: e.g. keeping keys in methodical order. There are also the occasional crises, e.g. storms (like January 2nd 1976) and the resultant damage to roofs, and boundary walls which collapse and have to be paid for by joint negotiations with neighbours.

Bridget Farrand: While waiting for the Waterloo Crescent Scheme to get fully launched Bridget has been assisting Cliff Lewis – and doing many other useful 'fill in' jobs.

Bridget first worked for Family First voluntarily when in a short space of time she compiled the facts about what the local residents in Cromwell Street/Portland Road wanted for their area.

Family First did a feasibility study for the rehabilitation of the area and it was rejected by the Corporation who then offered the Trust Waterloo Crescent (which it turned down when Family First wanted an interest in it in 1972). On the basis of the feasibility study, the local residents and tenants association appealed: and months later many of the properties were given an official reprieve. Although Family First could not undertake a second major scheme concurrent with Waterloo Crescent, it retains an interest in Cromwell Street, and may act as a catalyst to enable local action to be quick. Bridget has been involved since January in meetings of Public and Residents' Action Committees, in

background work in respect of possible avenues of progress for rehabilitation of the area, and at present avenues are being explored whereby individual families can be encouraged to purchase making use of financial incentives to establish their own self-supporting independent home.

For the Waterloo Crescent scheme, Bridget has spent time seeing existing tenants and outlining plans and assessing their requirements. Detailed discussions have taken place with the Architects, (James McArtney Partnership), Quantity Surveyors (Carter Glover and Partners), Housing Corporation, representatives of the Local Authority, Macedon Christian Centre, Sociable Theatre, etc. A Diary of Events has been kept (fascinating!) and we hope the delays will soon be over. We now realise the scheme would have been approved more quickly if, instead of doing thorough work on costings at the start, we had submitted 'yardstick figures' which would have been approved before revealing the true costs (expensive because the area – now a conservation area – has been left to rot for so long), which would then have been passed as a matter of course we have been told. However, in spite of the high cost of rehabilitation of the area, the cost per housing unit will be around the £5,000 average, which still represents excellent value for money.

Bridget's job will evolve rapidly – and in time she will need assistance. It is hoped that the Waterloo Crescent Scheme may eventually be self-managed. But a lot of water has to go under the bridge first.

Arnold Edgeworth: Caretaking at The Croft needs a flexible person and diverse skills. Arnold's day starts at 7.50 a.m. by unlocking the Family Centre for the early shift running the Day Nursery, and ends at 10 p.m. with locking up that part of the Centre relating to use of the Launderette (which is also open for certain hours at weekends). Since the new Family Centre was completed in September, Arnold has laid out the vegetable gardens at the back of The Croft (using pavings, etc. from 846 Woodborough Road), erected a garden shed and greenhouse and there is a bumper crop of vegetables on the way. These will be used by the Day Nursery, and hopefully we will acquire a deep freeze to take full advantage of stocks.

Arnold's job includes servicing the shared entrances of the 14 new maisonettes, keeping the grounds in good order and doing minor maintenance and windows, etc. He is the 'good neighbour' for elderly tenants and is much appreciated for this. Other specific jobs relate to periodic needs, e.g. putting out equipment for the youth club one evening per week in the Winter. Keeping an eye on the boilers in the Family Centre and The Croft old building and a myriad other jobs which get done to make The Croft complex 'tick' over happily and efficiently.

PERSONAL SERVICES

Responsible for interviewing people who need help and for 'back up' for tenants, employment of volunteers and student placements.

Staff Personal Services Manager: Anna Block
Community Worker: Maria Dabrowska

This area of work is the one from which 'vibrations' of what is needed to be done often start. Liaison with the other Departments is very close, particularly with the Family Centre staff and Housing Manager. One area of work now being actively explored is the setting up of a volunteers' workshop behind one of the shops so that people in the area, and especially patients from Mapperley Hospital who frequent the shop because it offers them a 'normal' place of contact in the community, can make useful items for the shops while enjoying social togetherness and a cuppa.

Anna Block's and Maria Dabrowska's work can best be explained by the report for the Department for the year ending 31.8.75.

"Applications for help of one sort of another continued to flow in during the course of this past year, at the rate of about four or five new contacts a day. With some of these, it became immediately obvious after the first few comments that they were not going to come into our general sphere of competence by any stretch of the imagination so these particular approaches (mainly telephone enquiries) have not even been recorded, although they were numerous and proportionately time-consuming. However, out of the 400 odd remaining applications for accommodation and for advice, there were 351 with whom we had continued contact, including some whose situation necessitated intensive work.

The nature of the individual referrals is itemised in detail below:

APPLICATIONS DEALT WITH

Referrals 351

Social Services	96		
Personal Contacts	154		
Peoples Centre	3		
Probation & After Care	19		
Radford Care Group	2		
Health Visitors	12		
Others incl. ex-tenants and staff	65		
Single :			
Pregnant	16		
(Teenage)	16		
with children	94		
without children	14		
		male (single) applicants:	7
		TOTAL:	147
Married :			
Pregnant	3		
with child/ren	158		
without child/ren	15		
		(incl. 8 with husbands in prison	
Family Applications :	6		
		male (married) applicants :	4
Housekeeping Requests :	13		
		TOTAL :	199
Accommodation :			
Offered :	59		
Accepted :	41		

Introduction for independent accommodation :	10
L.A. accommodation found :	7
Practical help and for advice only :	98

It is difficult to convey critical nuances through figures, so I would like to amplify the statistics noted above with some explanatory observations.

One or two individual tenants were with us for a very short time only: sometimes just a matter of days. In practically every such case the tenant concerned has been a battered wife who has decided, after a brief respite, to return to her husband in spite of everything. Although this might, at first sight, seem to have been a pointless sequence of events, in fact much has often been achieved in this way. The very fact that the wife has been able to demonstrate her independence and freedom of choice by leaving has sometimes served to break a deadlocked situation and make it possible for her to return to her husband on a new basis.

The encouraging trend continues that people who have once been our tenants frequently choose to stay in touch afterwards as helpers. Many discover new strengths in themselves, once the anxiety and stress of insecurity have been overcome.

In contrast, I am disappointed to note that there is always a certain proportion among our applicants of life's "takers", offering little themselves, but expecting society to fulfill all their demands as of right. Such people, unfortunately, seem to be limited in their capacity for personal development, even when offered the opportunity, because of their basically parasitic attitude. I've also noted the inevitable small minority of politically motivated applications, people whose one motive is to destroy, without having any positive alternative to offer.

However, I must emphasise that such malcontents are fortunately very much in the minority, although I feel their existence should be acknowledged, and the vast majority are looking for an opportunity to rebuild lives temporarily shattered by adverse circumstances of various kinds.

Providing a roof for someone in desparate need of one admittedly solves their immediate problem, but only at the material level. Once the first feeling of relief at new-found security has waned, other, more intangible worries sometimes come to the surface: loneliness, depression, awareness of a lack of sense of direction.

All tenants are visited by Community Worker, Maria Dabrowska. For some tenants, she is a welcome mediator with official agencies, such as DHSS, which can often seem very daunting to people who have had no previous dealings with them. She offers practical advice on a wide range of queries about such subjects as nursery places and new training opportunities, and gives moral support and a sympathetic hearing to those who perhaps mainly need just a friendly listener.

Some tenants, of course, are perfectly happy to lead their own lives in their own way once their housing needs have been met. Privacy is always respected.

For some, it is enough simply to know that help is available if needed, and Maria's informal approachability encourages them to drop in and see her when they are feeling low, which can be a safety-valve in itself!

Maria always makes a point of introducing new tenants to existing ones, so that nobody need feel strange or isolated moving into a new flat in a perhaps unfamiliar district.

Obviously beyond that the way friendships may or may not develop must necessarily be left to the individual.

On the same lines, Maria arranges a programme of activities centered on The Croft, so that tenants have an opportunity to get together informally, on the basis of a mutual interest. There is a Mother's Group which meets on a Monday afternoon; a Crafts Course on a Tuesday; a series of WEA lectures and a Yoga class on a Thursday evening. In all of these, neighbours as well as tenants participate with equal enthusiasm and interest; a trend we are particularly happy to see develop".

Anna Block

Since the period relating to this report, Maria has been responsible for starting the Thursday luncheon club for pensioners (meal cooked in the Family Centre), a Youth Club one evening per week in the Winter, a Holiday Play Scheme for two weeks at Easter at Elliott Durham Comprehensive School – and a four week holiday play scheme planned for this summer.

Maria's job is highly unpredictable. Her job closely relates to Anna's and both work very much as a team within which each has specific, yet very integrated, roles. One or both, for example, may have to spend half a day at a case conference set up by Social Services Department to discuss a particular family: but work has to go on and be woven in around 'fixtures'. There is no knowing often how much time a new tenant will need: until she is housed nobody knows what problems are caused by lack of housing and what would be there anyway. Sometimes a lot of the time is spent encouraging a young tenant to have a go at some involvement in the community rather than shyly hiding away. Linking up talent to useful ways of using that talent is a highly demanding job. It does not matter whether volunteers are 'helpers' or 'helped': in practice, we are often reminded that there literally is no difference. It is the helping systems which have created the rift. This Department has responsibility for placing new volunteers.

At the time of writing the Department has two students on placements:

Margaret Davidge: Student at Trent Polytechnic, is in her first year of a 2 year C.Q.S.W. Course. She attends Family First each Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

Sally Huckle: Student at Trent Polytechnic, is doing a 1 year child care residential course. She attends Family First on Thursday afternoon and will do a block placement here for 3 weeks in July.

FAMILY CENTRE

When the Family Centre was opened on September 13th 1975, (built at a cost of £55,650.00 under the Urban Aid Scheme), it was a tremendous hurdle achieved. The Day Nursery was to run as an integral part of the Centre with a Manager whose responsibilities were not only to the Nursery. The Family Centre itself was a new building extension to the old Croft which had always included a lounge and general purpose room for community and tenant activities. Over the years the activities have included social events and folk dances, the formation of a Red Cross Group by tenants, schools projects, soft toy making evenings, courses on a variety of topics run by outside speakers and sometimes internal courses (e.g. speakers course, etc.).

The Family Centre Manager has responsibility to integrate the Centre with other aspects of the Trust's work. It has been an achievement to get the Centre launched with so few headaches with a completely new staff and building.

Initially there were headaches over financing of the Day Nursery, which is funded through the Urban Aid Programme for five years. The economic cost of a child in the Nursery is £21.40p per week. (This is well below the Local Authority's economic cost). Family First

feels that a parent whose child attends should utilise the free time constructively even if paid work is not possible in view of the current job situation. Sometimes, availability of a Nursery place can enable a parent to take a course to prepare for the future.

The Manager acts as the Trust's training advisor to tenants and others who need to find out prospects and to pursue possibilities. When the Family Centre in the Waterloo Crescent Scheme comes to fruition, though it will be different in many ways, it would be sensible if the skills and experience acquired through the Croft Centre were administratively linked for at least a launching period. It could well be that The Croft Centre would on occasions serve as a venue for some events not possible in the Waterloo Crescent Centre and vice versa.

The Croft Centre has a multi-purpose hall (used by the Day Nursery during weekdays); the kitchen acts as a staff canteen, provides meals for the pensioners luncheon club and for social events, etc.; the launderette is open evenings and weekends for neighbourhood use, etc.

Staff Manager: Ann Stephenson
Nursery Supervisor: Susan Morris
Senior Nursery Nurse: Patricia Dobb
Nursery Nurses: Alicja Szczesna
Julie Moor
Jayne Pearson
Penny Voller
Cook: Interviewing
Assnt. Cook: Interviewing (part-time)
Kitchen Assnt: Gwen Sibley (part-time)
Domestic Assnt: Patricia Turner (part-time)
Virginia Hyde (voluntary, part-time)
Sandra Buck (" ")
Sue Wells (" ")
Celia Mehigan (" ")
Sharon Ellis (" ")

Ann Stephenson: Responsible for integration of Family Centre into the overall work of Family First. Integration happens at many levels, including linking with Personal Services re the attendance of a particular child (possibly where the family circumstances are needing support initially in varied ways), with arrangements for use of the Centre for a wide variety of occasions, including the regular ones (playgroups, luncheon club, etc.) and the occasional ones (annual Garden Fete, Christmas Fayre, etc.).

Responsible for all Family Centre staff, training, absences, recruitment, etc. Holding of internal staff meetings.

Responsible for the administrative running of the Day Nursery (assessment of nursery charges on DHSS scales, receiving nursery fees, register, records for doctor's visits, etc.) and for the kitchen. Stock control and ordering for the Day Nursery, Kitchen and cleaning requirements, cash and carry buying, checking accounts, weekly menus for the nursery children, fire precautions, arrangements for the security of the building at all times, etc. etc.

Selecting of children, interviews, liaison with social workers and follow up where necessary.

Ann does some outside visits and talks, has already had students and will have more after the initial year's working, and herself is attending a Playgroup Supervisors Course one day per week for a year.

The initial months of the Centre have, alas, included the usual toll in terms of time due to new machinery which will not function properly, water supply problems and liaising with the specialists to make sure that guarantees are honoured so that all runs smoothly.

The full potential of the Centre has still to be reached, but the build up is promising and owes much to thorough management.

It is hoped to introduce more opportunities for parent participation at the nursery and in playgroups/mothers groups.

The Nursery now works a three shift system so each member of its staff works either 8.00 a.m. – 4.00 p.m., 9.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m. or 10.00 a.m. – 6.00 p.m. This gives maximum staff at 'peak' times.

Susan Morris: The job of Nursery Supervisor demands constant alertness and adaptability. Her main task is the day to day oversight of the care, play and meals for twenty-four children in the large nursery (with individual 'family' rooms leading off) and six in the baby nursery, and to encourage the nursery staff toward a happy and easy running establishment.

Recording the children's weight and height and being present when the doctor calls once a fortnight, discussing menus with kitchen staff and nursery nurses, being available to parents when they bring children and collect them, standing in for staff who are away or taking lunch breaks, acting in the absence of the Manager on necessary administrative matters, taking particular interest in any aspect of the running of the nursery (e.g. a handicapped child) which needs special attention, guiding the newly qualified members of the team: it all adds up to quite a job. Making toys and mending them and a host of other skills may not be included on the job specification for the post but they are skillfully done.

Patricia Dobb is in charge of the baby nursery. Here is an average day's programme:

8.00 a.m.	Sort out washing, make up napisan, open windows, put out toys for babies. Welcome and change babies. Wash own nappies.
8.30 a.m.	Give Breakfast
9.00 a.m.	Prepare both the feeds in kitchen and change Milton.
9.15–10.15 a.m.	Play with babies. Any babies which need a morning sleep are put to sleep outside in prams if weather is fine or in cots if bad weather.
10.15–10.30 a.m.	Break
10.30–11.00 a.m.	Bottle Feed
11.00 a.m.	Change all babies for dinner and pack away toys.
11.15–11.45 a.m.	Feed dinners to babies
11.45 a.m.	Wash babies faces and change nappies. Put on outside clothes. Put in prams for sleep.
12.10 p.m.	Tidy nursery, wash high chairs, sweep floor. Tidy sluice room. Put washing on.

12.30–1.30 p.m.	Dinner break.
1.30–2.45 p.m.	Get babies up from prams and change nappies. Bring in blankets from prams. Put prams in porch. Put out toys and play with babies. Fold washing. Bottle feed babies.
2.45–3.00 p.m.	Break
3.00–3.15 p.m.	Change nappies. Get babies ready for tea.
3.15–3.45 p.m.	Give babies tea.
3.45–4.00 p.m.	Change babies (into own nappies and clothes) who go home early.
4.00–4.15 p.m.	Clean sluice room and potties. Put in washing.
4.15–4.45 p.m.	Play with babies.
4.45–5.00 p.m.	Change nappies to own things on babies who go home around 5 o'clock.
5.00–6.00 p.m.	Play with babies. Fold washing. Tidy up toys and nursery in general. Lock up.

Things which are done weekly or periodically or as the need arises are as follows: Airing cupboard tidied (when necessary); play pen scrubbed and tidied (as necessary); cots washed and changed (once a fortnight); prams washed and covers changed (once a fortnight alternating with cots); high chairs scrubbed (when necessary); toys (soft, squeaky and larger toys) scrubbed (every week); damp dusting (every day); babies bathed, nails, ears cleaned, clothes washed; heads treated for head lice or shampooed (as need arises); displays and posters changed (about once a month or when necessary).

In the main nursery, children of mixed age range (from newly mobile till school age) belong to family groups. The scale of the nursery allows much individuality. Parents are welcome to join in whenever they wish to. It is also possible to let the occasional 'volunteer' assist a particular member of staff or to do a particular activity in the nursery. This can be of immense help to, say, a young expectant mother who has had no experience of children and who will shortly be faced with the decision on whether or not to have her baby adopted. While always putting the interests of the nursery children first, it is possible to be flexible in the role of the nursery so that wider aspects of child care can be spread through useful, practical experience. It is hoped increasingly to encourage parents to feel they can join in activities which allow them opportunity to learn about the development and play requirements of their children.

The Nursery Nurses enjoy the fact that they know the children more as individuals than is possible in some of the nurseries where they have had experience. Understanding the child is a long way to getting his co-operation! An average day in the large nursery (with its small 'family' rooms leading off) is:

Early Shift:

8.00 a.m.	Open nursery. Set out tables in main area with play equipment. Change young children as they arrive.
8.30 a.m.	Breakfast

Middle Shift:

9.00 a.m.	If fine put outdoor equipment out and take out children.
9.45 a.m.	Pack away for orange drink.

Late Shift:

10.00 a.m.	Children again play either out or inside.
10.15–10.30 a.m.	First break. (3 staff members)
10.30–10.45 a.m.	Second break (3 staff members)
10.45 a.m.	Pack away all indoor toys.
11.00 a.m.	All children to own rooms for quiet-time before dinner, each group in turn using bathroom.
11.30 a.m.	Children's lunch.
11.45 a.m.	Clear away. Wash children. Put out toys for larger children. Younger children into beds for rest.
12.30–1.30 p.m.	1st Dinner (3 staff members)
1.00–2.00 p.m.	2nd Dinner (1 staff member)
1.30–2.30 p.m.	3rd Dinner (2 staff members)
2.00 p.m. +	Children taken from beds as they wake. Play either outside or in.
2.30–2.45 p.m.	1st Break (3 staff members)
2.45–3.00 p.m.	2nd Break (3 staff members)
3.00 p.m.	Children to own groups and prepared for tea.
3.30 p.m.	Tea
3.45 p.m.	Children washed, younger children changed to own clothes.

Early Shift off 4.00 p.m.:
Toys to play with inside; outside equipment packed away.

Middle Shift off 5.00 p.m.:
Begin packing away big nursery. Closing windows; sweeping and leave everywhere tidy.

Late Shift off 6.00 p.m.:
All children should have gone, so lock up.

Kitchen: Here routine is of the utmost importance, yet so is integration into the rest of the Trust's work. In this particular area we have not yet reached our standards and new appointments will hopefully set the scene. It is at the serving hatch that people meet each other. It is important that the children in the nursery know the kitchen staff as individuals. Most of the

vegetables needed by the nursery will soon be being produced on our own land. Hopefully the children will share the cycle of growing, picking, cooking and eating with the relevant members of staff.

Cook's routine includes: Preparation of breakfast for nursery; preparation of main meal of the day; serve main meal of the day, including staff and visitors (e.g. luncheon club each Thursday); receive and check supplies (milk, etc.); supervise assnt. cook and kitchen assnt. in their duties; count and check all monies (tokens) for food and enter these on sheet for daily balance for Manager; check stock levels and stock records and prepare weekly cost breakdown; menu planning with Manager; order supplies of meat, veg. and dry foods from suppliers; check all kitchen equipment for defects and good standard of cleanliness; defrost fridges; clean all extracts and check no blockages; prepare meals for special visitors and groups; prepare and cook for special functions (i.e. Xmas Dinner; Day Nursery Birthday parties; etc.).

Assistant Cook's routine includes: Clean down bench; complete sweet dish; make custard; help chef to serve up meals; serve at hatch if necessary with teas, coffee, etc.; help wash pots; clear down bench; prepare sweet dish for next day; help wash up; serve teas, etc. at hatch; clean down bench; plate up; set trolley with milk drinks, cups, dishes, cutlery, sandwiches, cakes, etc. ready to take away; clean down bench; help wash floor; wash up all pots from childrens teas; clear away; wash any spills on floor; turn off electric appliances; lock up.

Gwen Sibley: clear breakfast things away; prepare hatch for service; put plates and dishes in hot cupboard; prepare trays for children and make the fruit juice; wash the trays and trolley (several times a day); help prepare vegetables; washing up; serve snacks, make coffee and tea; take trolley with dinner to main nursery with first course and later with sweet course; prepare dining room for lunch and clear away afterwards; empty dish-washing machine, wash out and refill; wash tea towels; wash surfaces; try to keep kitchen clean at all times; take order to butcher on Friday; collect meat on Wednesday; bring in other shopping occasionally; wipe fridges out; tidy store; wash table mats; clean out cupboards, when time.

Patricia Turner: Pat's job depends on the weather and other unforeseen circumstances. The Nursery Supervisor tries to plan the nursery so cleaning can be done in a straightforward way; but the combination of weather and children means that the Domestic Assistant's job demands adaptability as well as agility. Patricia Turner brings zest to the job and the whole Centre is better for it. If anyone thinks it is straightforward, let them try the following average routine: (D = daily, W = weekly; 0 = occasionally).

9.15 – Toddlers Nursery – 4 Nursery Units: remove furniture from all units; sweep floors; wash to remove any dried on food from previous afternoon; polish floors and return furniture. (D)

10.15 – Main Floor: remove toys and apparatus from floor; sweep, wash to remove dried on stains; polish. (D).

10.50: Coffee Break

11.00 : Toddlers Bathroom: clean toilets and wash basin; sweep floor and wash. (D).

11.15 – Water Trough Area: wash out trough; sweep floor and wash; sweep and wash floor in adjoining office. (D).

Toy Room: sweep and wash floor **(W).**

11.30 – Launderette: clean washing machines, working tops and sinks; **sweep floor and** wash. (D).

11.45 – Ladies Toilets: clean toilets and wash basins; sweep and wash floor. (D).

12.00 Pram Port and Adjoining Entrance to Croft Lounge and Gents Toilet: sweep and wash all floors; clean toilet and wash basin. (D).

12.20 – Baby Nursery: remove furniture and sweep floor; mop any dried food from floor; polish floor. (D).

Sluice Room: clean toilet and sinks; sweep and wash floor; empty waste bin. (D).

1.10 – Ann Stephenson's Office: empty waste bin; dust furniture; sweep and polish floor (D); clean sink and polish mirror (W).

1.30 – Lunch

2.00 – Entrance Hall: dust furniture; empty ash-trays and waste bins; sweep floor and polish (D).

All Windows: (O).

2.45 – empty wastebins in toddlers nursery; wash out dusters, dustpan and brush. polishing pads; clean polishing machine; wash out and refill polish sprayer (D)

3.15 – Finished.

PRACTICAL SERVICES

The evolving of a range of "practical services" is the oil very often which makes Family First ideas reality. It is no good talking about housing, unemployment, useful work in the community, unless somewhere along the line people can do the nitty gritty.

The Furniture Service continues to furnish Family First flats, and still meets many other requests from other agencies and individuals. The greatest demand is still for items like good, clean beds, wardrobes, dining tables, and carpeting, and chests of drawers. The furniture van is on the road five days a week.

After a difficult history of warehousing, the Practical Services Department has acquired its own base in Kilbourn Street, off Huntingdon Street. There is room for storing furniture, an office and a workshop where a range of repairs and maintenance can be achieved. The premises have been purchased by the Trust for £13,500, with monies from the sale of two properties which were unsuitable for the Trust's housing work.

Since Family First started to involve Community Service Offenders in its practical work, 111 offenders have been 'employed' through this Department on a variety of work, including helping on the furniture van and on property alterations and maintenance. Community Service Orders average 100 hours, which means approximately 11,100 hours have been worked in Family First by people who would otherwise have been in prison. 100 hours is equal to a six months' prison sentence at £2,000 per sentence, which means in round terms a £222,000 saving of public money. Family First receives £1,500 per annum from the Home Office toward the administrative costs incurred in involving Community Service Offenders.

The Department finished its second conversion project, a self-contained flat by one of the shops, this year, and now copes with almost all the Trust's maintenance work.

In recent months, negotiations with the Manpower Services Commission have resulted in a Job Creation Programme for three months – and hopefully another three months scheme will run consecutively from mid July. So far, the school leavers who were unemployed have done some demolition work (salvaging all good materials), decorating, stripping out properties pending conversion and some gardening and property maintenance. One of the initial team has found employment and two others have hopeful opportunities in view.

Negotiations with the Construction Industry Training Board are leading to involvement by unemployed college trained young people on a property conversion in the near future. Supervision will be provided.

Hopefully, Family First will eventually add an apprenticeship training scheme to its direct labour team and explore further ways to renovate properties at modest cost. The aim is to add to the total housing stock renovated, rather than competing against contractors already in the field. There is no shortage of work in the housing field: only resources and imagination to link the work to limited resources in the most productive way.

Staff: Manager: John Jarvis
Secretary (part-time): Anne Baxter
Maintenance Supervisor: Doug Fletcher
Van Driver: Eric Messom
Driver's Mate (part-time): Cyril Bartles

Job Creation Programme:

Supervisor: Bill Kerry
Supervisor: Arthur Shooter
Trainee: Abraham Dinn
" Peter Ferris
" Patrick Bell
" Carlos Bernard
" Michael Pritchard
" Paul Kershaw
Clerical: Nina Anthony

Adrian Thompson (voluntary) and other volunteers part-time.

John Jarvis: Responsible for planning and work of all aspects of the Department and liaising with other Family First teams. From July 1st, John will act for the Director in his absence when on leave.

The job is approximately 40% administrative and 60% practical. The inevitability of the growth in this area of work is that John's role will probably become rather more administrative, but never entirely. A Department which has so much involvement from Community Service and other volunteers needs all of its staff to know how to do the jobs being supervised.

Allocating work of staff and volunteers, completing weekly time sheets for Community Service Offenders, progress reports on CSO's, liaison with Probation Department re-existing and new CSO's, meetings and reports re the future of Community Service, meetings with bodies like CITB, running Schools Project (temporarily suspended).

Preparation of drawings and estimates for small conversions and alterations, planning the maintenance programme with the Housing Manager, and doing some of the practical work, correspondence and representing the Trust on occasions: all

come within the job. John is a versatile character who turns up in smart attire to escort a party of Dutch officials finding out about community service, and soon after appears equally cheerfully showing the well worn builders jeans.

Anne Baxter: During the course of the job, there are many problems to hear: the provision of furniture, washers, prams, etc. can often help. A modest charge is made and met by DHSS where an individual cannot meet the charge. It is difficult to get equal supply and demand for furniture and turning down offers tactfully can be tough. Most people understand, but not all. Occasionally, someone gets stroppy. But if ten three piece suites get offered and you have room only to store two, you have a problem. Anne talks her way through and explains over and over again what we are trying to do and why.

Systematic records are kept on the maintenance of each property and costs for each monitored. Anne's job list is something like this: deal with messages left on the Ansafone; enter in any cheques or giros that have come in the post and file relative correspondence; handle the sale of furniture to anyone who may come in, arrange payment and delivery of same; answering the telephone until 1.30 p.m.; liaison with social workers, probation officers, home helps, teachers, etc. in cases where furniture, clothing, prams or whatever may be required; liaison with DHSS offices where grants are made for payment of above items. In such cases, invoices are made out and sent to DHSS direct for payment when the furniture has been delivered to client; handle the petty cash and all furniture sales money; pay out expenses to any community service men we may have attend; handle any correspondence, typing, filing, etc. that JJ may have; also keeping lists of invoice prices for items incurred on special projects such as the new flat at Leslie Road. Also for any new tools, etc. we may possibly buy; keeping a list of items required and either telephoning or writing to them when these are in stock; balancing the petty cash for week and sending sheets to The Croft; balancing and banking furniture sales cash and cheques and sending sheets to The Croft; at the end of each month reminder letters are sent to any offices with outstanding accounts whether it be DHSS, Social Services, Probation, etc.; entering of all job sheets from JJ and DF and filing them.

Doug Fletcher: Hopefully a member of the team to whom we will attach an apprentice before long. Over a two week period Doug's maintenance list covered: Pointing brickwork; concreting; painting; repair brickwork to wall; fit step; painting; collect hardboard and tiles from merchants; unstop and repair waste pipe; floor tiling; floor tiling; cleaning flat; fit letter box; inspect water heater; clean out front gutter; unstop r.w.p.; repair roof; clean algae from fire escape and creosote; wax floor; drain and remove radiator for repair – valve leak; fit letter plate/number plate; tidy up; fit new lock; fit number plate; temp. repair to clothes rail;fit wardrobes rail; fit door stop; fit gulley grate; fit supports to clothes rail; unstop waste pipes; take out sash window for repair; board up; collect materials; make top for football machine; unstop drains; fit hinges to wendy houses; second coat varnish to football machine; tack carpet to corners; take off and cut down doors to fit over carpet; clear drains; fit fire extinguisher; collect furniture Southwell/Burton Joyce; clear away rubbish from yard; supply dustbin, etc.

The job entails the day to day repairs, the planned maintenance and more recently conversion work on the Trust's properties. It is difficult to record which jobs are done daily, weekly, etc. but the most recurrent work is the unstopping and repairs of waste pipes and drains, followed by changing door locks and also some supervision of CSO's.

He is involved on conversion work on the Trust's properties often from the planning stage right through to furnishing of flats. A large proportion of repair work is small

jobs requiring only one person so on these no supervision is needed, but it does give the opportunity to work on one's own initiative. He is occasionally called upon to give technical advice on building problems.

The future could hold great possibilities with the introduction of a bigger direct labour department.

The maintenance work is now helped by the acquisition of a small van for handling materials and equipment.

Eric Messom: Collection of furniture from donors and delivery to customers inclusive of dismantling specific items, e.g. large wardrobes and re-assembling when delivering where people are infirm, disabled or otherwise unable to cope. Collection, disposal and replacement of furniture from Family First flats when necessary. Vehicle maintenance, disposal of rubbish, taking saleable scrap to merchants.

Cyril Bartles helps Eric as Driver's Mate, part-time.

SHOPS

The shops are: Miscellany, 848 Woodborough Road
Scoop, 116 Leslie Road
Odds & Ends, 95 Ilkeston Road

Each shop has residential accommodation above it, following the Trust's liking for keeping administrative, service and housing work closely linked. The shops' manageress is responsible for collecting rent for the accommodation attached to the shops.

The link between the shops and the adjoining accommodation was demonstrated when recently Barbara "moved in" to a flat for a few days to look after four children evenings and during the night to enable their mother to visit her dying mother.

The shops just pay their way and run as service shops for low income individuals and families. People come in to chat as well as to buy. During the year, all shops were given a face lift, and much attention is paid to dressing the windows attractively to make the shops look welcoming and not tatty.

Bedding bales and sets of pots, pans, crockery and cutlery are made up and 'sold' to new tenants who need them at a cost to cover handling. Those items then belong to the tenant and go with them when they leave for permanent housing. It is a useful routine service which pays its way.

Staff: Manageress: Edna Sharpe
Scoop: Barbara Beasley (part-time)
Rita Mallard (part-time)
Odds & Ends: Brenda Smalley (part-time)
Miscellany: Ruth Alton (part-time)
Ann Shorrock
Odds & Ends: Betty Peach (part-time–voluntary)
Sylvia Ashford " "
Scoop: Mary Randall (part-time–voluntary)
Joan Elliott " "
Market Stall: Elaine Parkinson (part-time–voluntary)
Margaret Roberts (part-time–voluntary)

Edna Sharpe's office is behind Odds and Ends. On the way to work, she calls at the other two shops and collects money. Each week the sales sheets are brought up to The Croft. Money has to be banked. Edna is responsible for dressing the shop windows weekly, seeing that each shop has sufficient stock, planning future 'out of season' stock. Much time is spent collecting clothes and other small items from the public: some stock is delivered to the shops direct by the public or to The Croft. Over the years, a number of regular donors have emerged and like a call and a chat.

The shops supply stock for selling at fund raising and social events. Recently they have supplied stock for a stall at Victoria Open Market on Fridays and Edna delivers this early in the day.

Shop staff are responsible for keeping the shops clean and tidy: both are easier said than done when an influx of customers plus small children search through the shelves. All staff agree that their role is not only to sell clothes, etc. which people need, but also to be a listening ear for those whose lives are troublesome or lonely. Some people pop in regularly for a chat in passing. Pricing clothes and ironing them, entering the cash sheets are among regular parts of the job.

Mostly customers are local people, but sometimes they come a distance once a week. Particularly the elderly customers welcome a sit down and a warm up in the Winter. Staff pay a lot of attention to meeting individual needs (e.g. for an outsize lady who is going on holiday for the first time in years). The Miscellany Shop has an increasing number of callers from Mapperley Hospital and the back room will be turned into a workshop for volunteers who can do something useful while having a cuppa. Ann Shorrock, who started as a volunteer, and is now a member of staff divides her time between this shop, and assisting the Personal Services Department. She will get the workshop 'off the ground' in the near future: this is yet another illustration of how much easier it is to assist people when there is a practical reason for them being somewhere. Theoretical 'helping' without a practical base just does not work except for people who want to be parasites. People need to be wanted and to feel useful.

ADMINISTRATION

It will, I hope, be clear from this report that each area of work is administratively self-sufficient within its cellular management and each area relates closely with the others. The nerve centre of Family First is The Croft and the central administration is small, in touch and available.

Staff: Director from July 1st. Formerly Accountant and Deputy Director: Angus Walker
Office Manageress: Susan Pearson
Part-time Receptionist & Secretary: Penny Hilditch
Appeals Organiser: Phil Moody
Domestic Helper: Amy Singleton

Angus Walker: The clearest way to 'put over' the breadth of this job is to include the new Director's Job Specification.

1. He must make sure that the Trust is financially sound and observe the Management Policy (agreed 29.1.75) which clearly states that each "aspect" of Family First work should aim to be self-financing.

2. He is responsible for negotiating, liaison and informing those bodies which provide financial and practical support of Family First's work; those bodies include:
   local authority departments

Housing Corporation
Department of the Environment
Home Office
National Charitable Trusts

3. He must make sure that all agreed work is carried through effectively by staff, that there is co-ordination between departments and that lines of communication are good, preventing duplication of effort.

4. He is responsible for liaison with the Management Committee submitting reports and information to them as requested (e.g. monthly report to Committee Chairman and Ruth Johns).

5. He is responsible for interviewing and approving the selection of new staff and dealing with queries on conditions of work, training and advancement.

6. He should supervise the liaison with agencies with whom the Trust co-operates and the representation of the Trust on committees, bearing in mind the Trust's policy which prefers co-operation and participation over specified action in preference to sending representative to long-standing 'representatives' committees.

7. He should view prospective properties, agree plans for conversion and inspect properties owned by the Trust annually.

8. He should supervise the research and development of specialised projects such as the Family Centre built at The Croft in 1975.

Accounting/Financial

1. He must ensure that proper financial records are maintained for all the Trust's activities.

2. He must advise on the development of new accounting systems whilst at all times ensuring sound methods of financial control.

3. He should present finances ready for annual audit and for such other bodies/-departments which may require financial information.

Forward Planning

1. He should keep in touch with growing needs, current social work and housing policies, etc. and evolve the future practical role of Family First in the light of its philosophies and constitution.

2. He should liaise and negotiate with 'bodies' in pursuance of a relevant future policy and ensure their acceptance of responsibilities for co-operation and financial support of Family First.

3. He should ensure that staff are involved in future planning and presenting schemes to the Management Committee.

Public Relations

1. He should ensure that a team of 6–8 speakers are available to speak to organisations when requested and that they are kept fully informed of Family First's activities.

2. He should deal with Press, TV and Radio enquiries and arrange interviews and press handouts. He should also deal with advertising and prepare copy.

3. He should write and 'edit' the quarterly Newsletter, articles and leaflets.

4. He should ensure that 'archive' material is available, e.g. photographs of the Trust's work, for displays, exhibitions, etc.

5. He should attend some events put on in aid of Family First to encourage participation and to answer questions.

Research and Education

1. He should deal with queries from individuals and organisations seeking information about Family First and receive visitors – particularly organisations planning similar work.

2. He should organise enquiries of research into specific areas of work where Family First needs more facts before planning ahead.

3. He should provide evidence to Government Committees when required and represent the Trust at conferences.

4. He should supervise projects for schools, CSO's, student placements, etc.

Clients

"It is important that tenants and clients have access to the Director and that he is not purely seen as an administrator. Indeed it is considered necessary to adequately run this type of organisation to maintain regular contact with the needs it is seeking to alleviate.

The Director's role is to support staff and sometimes guide them toward a more flexible appraoch to their job (under pressure of work it is so easy to reach for stereotype solutions rather than to explore individual situations). Staff need support to enable them to operate flexibly with confidence (they get pressure not only from the volume of people seeking help but often from Local Authority Departments and Social Workers wanting Family First to effect a quick 'solution' which may well be far from a real remedy). In order to offer staff the backing and support they need, the Director must be really aware of current needs and allow time for a fair degree of informal contact with tenants and clients". (RIJ 22.11.73)

Emergencies

"When in contact with people in crisis situations – anything can happen – and sometimes it does. Whoever is available copes!". (RIJ 22.11.73)

To give an overall picture on finance Angus writes "The current cost of our properties less mortgage outstanding is about £200,000; this includes the Family Centre at The Croft completed in September 1975 for £55,650. The gross value of our properties is considerably higher and they are currently insured for over £425,000.

It is estimated that the first phase of the Waterloo Crescent project – the acquisition and improvement of eleven properties – will cost over £250,000. This may seem high but approximately 50 units of accommodation will be provided, ranging from 3 bedroom maisonettes to single person flatlets. For 1975/76 the budgeted income and expenditure of the Trust's activities is as follows:

	Income	Expenditure	Surplus/ Deficit
Properties	35,000	35,000	–
Practical Services	7,500	7,000	500
Shops	6,000	6,000	–
Family Centre	30,500	30,500	–
Personal Services and Administration	10,000	19,000	(9,000)
	89,000	97,500	(8,500)

Although the above deficit is likely the actual effect on the Trust's cash resources is greatly dependent on the timing of receipts and payments".

Audited accounts are available for inspection at The Croft by appointment.

Susan Pearson: The job of Office Manageress is one of the key jobs in linking various aspects of the Trust's work. **Penny Hilditch** assists Susan part-time. What happens in the 'front office' would – in many public departments – be responsible for employment of at least six separate staff! The 'front office' services the Director, Housing Manager, Personal Services Department, for shorthand and letters. It takes incoming mail and 'phone calls for all these plus the Family Centre, and liaises closely with Practical Services (John Jarvis calls in at least once daily) and shops.

When staff are out and about, Susan takes rent for the Housing Manager, interviews unexpected callers needing accommodation (or 'phoning in). All callers to The Croft are received and personally directed to the appropriate person. Tenants who are feeling a bit 'low' – and staff similarly! – tend to drop in at the front office to 'cool off' or calm down.

There is petty cash to deal with, tokens for meals/coffees, etc. for the Family Centre kitchen, duplicating for all the Trust's Departments, keeping mailing lists in order, thanking people for donations and help, filing, typing envelopes for the quarterly Newsletter, typing and duplicating the Newsletter, ordering stationery and checking stocks, liaising between groups who want a speaker and one of the Trust's team of speakers, sending out publicity and information, advertising, etc., letters for annual appeal to industry, etc., purchasing postage stamps, chasing up ordered goods not received, maintenance of office machines, taking minutes at the monthly staff meeting and other meetings, 'employing' occasional voluntary help in the office, keeping a library of documents relevant to Family First's work, (e.g. Housing Acts, etc.).

There is also involvement in sorting out clothes left at The Croft for the shops, and providing transport on occasions in emergencies or to collect things. There is liaison with other organisations like the City Housing Deparment, Salvation Army, Gingerbread, DHSS, Social Services Department, Probation Department, schools, Health Visitors, Police, Family Planning, Information Bureau, and the Press.

Occasionally, Susan will 'fill-in' for the Housing Manager or Personal Services Department and take a prospective tenant to see a new flat, or visit someone in hospital. She gets roped in to help sort out Christmas parcels, helping tenants to prepare application forms or letters for jobs. On top of all this, in her spare time (can she have any!) she helps with preparations and cooking, etc. for social events.

It has always been one of my management tactics to see that jobs do not exist which purely service other members of staff. This is particularly relevant in the secretarial sphere where a

lot of talent and initiative is misused. Susan has been able to develop initiative and now probably knows as much about all aspects of the Trust as anyone, which is why enquiries and callers are dealt with more efficiently than by the too often experienced "I don't know" approach that one gets when visiting enquiry offices. If the relevant person is not available, Susan is increasingly able to deputise which saves time and tempers.

Phil Moody: This job includes encouraging groups in the community to support Family First. Schools, church groups, youth groups, groups of business and professional people, etc. have done a great deal to support the Trust financially through personal effort and in kind. There is an ongoing need for all.

Following up the Annual Appeal to Industry, arranging some social events (in liaison with the Family Centre, etc.), organising staff social occasions, etc. The two 'big' social cum fund raising events for which staff are responsible each year are the Christmas Fayre (Family Centre staff) and the Annual Garden Fete (other staff) with Phil co-ordinating.

Phil will be responsible for co-ordinating a 'What's On' sheet each month so all staff know what the sum total of recreational, educational, social and fund raising activities are ahead. The sheet will go to staff, helpers, tenants and anyone who is interested.

Amy Singleton: Keeping staff offices at The Croft, Croft entrance, main lounge and play-group room/canteen spic and span twice weekly.

VOLUNTEERS

It is funny how often when asked about volunteers, staff look mystified and seem to question who they are! This is because volunteers are so much part of the way of Family First's life that nobody actually puts them into a category. The overlap between volunteers, tenants, neighbours and staff is so great that at any one time a person may be all, or any combination of the four.

There must always be a clear sense of management direction which is gained from a real understanding of the issues involved: that direction must be the responsibility of the Management Committee and staff. But within that overall sense of direction and backed by the expertise of specific members of staff, there is room for immense flexibility and versatility. When a job needs doing, does it matter whether it is done by a member of staff, tenant, neighbour or volunteer? What matters is that it gets done. Neighbours are involved with the Family Centre and initiate particular events and courses, for example. Tenants will join in and staff will have some overall responsibiity to see that such events and courses are integrated into the overall sense of direction.

Over the past decade, many hundreds of volunteers have worked for the Trust short-term while they had time to spare, or long-term as a regular commitment. Quite a few staff came in through becoming acquainted with Family First through offering a voluntary commitment. Some volunteers have spent months working full-time between jobs to find out how they slotted into a new way of life, some have come as young people wanting to offer time voluntarily before taking paid work. Some work through their own groups who support Family First for a period of time. So although we may find it hard to memorise narrowly who is or who is not a volunteer, the hard fact is that Family First would not be where it is without this tremendous effort on the part of many. Like the University students who year after year supported Family First through the Karnival – one year actually buying a house. Listed with the staff in this report are a few names of volunteers who offer regular long-term commitment: these are given more to make the point than because the list is exhaustive. Their efforts and the efforts of all the others have amounted to a considerable achievement. Often, getting involved helps the volunteer as well as those he/she helps. For example, the shy mother who is scared of meeting people after years of being at home rearing her family

usefully bridges the transition back into paid employment via two half days a week voluntary work.

A group of volunteers have recently been convened, specifically for the purpose of raising funds for Family First, by Barbara Parrish. You will hear more of them in future.

The voluntary resident families have declared they will organise an Annual Progressive Dinner in aid of Family First in their homes starting this Autumn.

PERSONAL

Could I warmly thank Mrs. Lily Bailey who will be retiring from the staff when I leave. She has worked part-time for the Trust since it began as domestic helper at The Croft. If I have achieved anything, it is only because she has kept my life more organised and tidy than it might have been! Mrs. Bailey has looked after The Croft as caretaker when my family have been on holiday. We wish her a very happy retirement.

My thanks to everyone who has helped, advised, supported and criticised.

Good luck to Angus. He will direct the Trust not only efficiently, but with the humour and imagination which makes efficiency sparkle. He does not mind intelligent criticism, and he is not daunted by procedural obstacles which loom in red tape costume along the path to true community action and self-help. Let nobody regard his style of management as worse because it may differ from mine.

The Management Committee has asked me to act as advisor for twelve months and this I shall be happy to do.

Ruth I. Johns
June 1976

P.S. Angus has just persuaded Mrs. Bailey to continue coming in one morning a week. Cheers!

APPENDIX II

What is FAMILY FIRST?

FAMILY FIRST is a new Trust which aims to bring new hope and fresh purpose to families who do not need charity but practical help to enable them to help themselves.

FAMILY FIRST seeks to prevent the destructive cycle of events in which family problems create problem families who in turn rear problem children. The Trust may offer help to a family in time of stress in such a way that its future may be one of a constructive, self-enabling unit and not an increasingly disruptive one.

FAMILY FIRST recognises that some family problems cannot be cured but they *can* be prevented. For example, a father who tries (after the death, incapacity or desertion of his wife) to keep his young family intact may meet overwhelming difficulties and experience the break-up of the family unless he has some help with the practical problems such as providing good care for the children while he is at work.

FAMILY FIRST's initial scheme is to assist unsupported mothers by offering independent flatlets at an economic but non-profit-making rent. The Trust has purchased a property in Nottingham and will build an extension which will include a nursery where children will be well cared for while their mothers work. Each mother will have the full responsibility for her child and the running of her home. In a secure environment, she will have opportunity to develop her initiative and skills in caring for both.

FAMILY FIRST counts an expectant unmarried mother as a family unit. For many women, especially the unmarried, the months before giving birth to their first child are critical ones which affect their future attitude to family life. An unmarried mother is a person with a future, who will probably marry and bear children of the marriage. The security and wellbeing of these children will largely depend on their mother. Family First will offer accommodation to unmarried mothers who need it, not only for the few weeks before and after giving birth to theirchild, but for several months before and as long as is needed after.

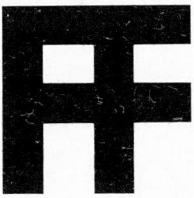
FAMILY FIRST hopes to encourage intelligent interest and informed discussion amongst young parents and teenagers about family life. Secure and enjoyable family life is closely interlinked with community and neighbourhood life and even employment: teachers and youth leaders, as well as parents, have a responsibility for seeing that today's youth are not denied the knowledge that there is more to the creation of stable adult life and marriage than biological sex which is unrelated to other aspects of close relationships.

FAMILY FIRST is working and will continue to work in co-operation with any organisation, statutory or voluntary, which is concerned with family welfare. Family First is non-denominational and non-racial. It welcomes support from anyone willing to assist prevention of long-term physical, mental and social problems within families and, therefore, within society.

FAMILY FIRST believes that family life is worth working for – do you?

APPENDIX III

FAMILY FIRST TRUST
AIMS
AND
OBJECTS



FAMILY FIRST TRUST (ALEXANDRA PARK HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD.)
THE CROFT, ALEXANDRA PARK, NOTTINGHAM.

Family First Trust's legal status as a registered Voluntary Housing Association and a Charity enables it to provide housing and other practical help (except financial) for families and individuals who are in need.

The Management Committee of the Trust (formed in 1966) states the following as its policy:-

Family First should remain a local and community based organisation. It attaches much importance to enabling self-help.

Family First works for people of any race, colour or creed, and accepts that everyone belongs to a family. It aims to prevent crises developing into long-term problems.

Family First's only long-term material aim is to own a substantial number of housing units available for rent to meet urgent housing need. The number owned must be no greater than that which can effectively be managed in a direct, personal and non-bureaucratic way.

Family First should evolve ways of enabling tenants/neighbours/helpers to live full, creative lives and should encourage participation in management of its community work (e.g. Croft Family Centre).

Family First should not necessarily aim to retain control of any venture it pioneers. Sometimes it can work as a catalyst in a new situation until the usefulness of a venture is established and can be run without its help. In the housing field, Family First can help create far more homes than those for which it retains ownership and direct management.

Family First supports its staff and volunteers in their role of workers with definite aims, and discourages use of time spent on "representative" committees without clear objectives.

Family First recognises the value of informed opinion and accepts responsibility for documenting experimental work so that its successes and failures can help others.

Family First sets itself a high standard of management efficiency and an economical use of resources. All members of the Management Committee have an active interest in the work of Family First. The Committee should regularly re-assess the value and direction of the work of Family First in the light of changing needs and changing resources.

Family First respects the right of all people to a home, privacy, peace and a place in their local neighbourhood or community. Family First tenants have a right to these things on equal, but not special, terms. To treat any group, or individual, as basically "different" simply because they are in some kind of need or have a particular problem or handicap is to degrade them, to use them and ultimately to destroy their self-respect. All work done by Family First should enable people to make their own decisions whenever possible, and to accept responsibility for those decisions.

These aims and objects, formally approved by the Trust's Management Committee on 29/1/75, are designed as a guideline to all involved with the work of Family First.

APPENDIX IV

RULES OF A DIOCESAN MOTHER AND BABY HOME

TO BE GIVEN TO APPLICANT

. . . . . is a Church of England pre- and post-natal hostel with a resident Warden, accommodating seven girls and three babies. It is near the city centre and also close to a main 'bus route.

The fee covers full board and accommodation. There are two three-bedded rooms and one single room; a large sitting room with television, and a pleasant garden at the front of the house.

Most of the expectant mothers will still be working, but if they are unable to do so, they will be eligible for a Ministry of Social Security grant.

For the easy running of the hostel, residents are expected to observe the following rules:

1) Residents are not allowed to sleep away from the hostel.

2) All residents are expected to be in for their evening meal, after which, with the Warden's approval they will be free to go out until 9 p.m.

   Mothers must be in by 5.30 p.m.

3) Visitors will be welcome between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, or by arrangement with the Warden.

   Male visitors are not allowed, except the resident's own father.

4) Residents will be expected to take their share of household duties.

5) Any valuables or savings may be given to the Warden for safe keeping, otherwise no responsibility can be accepted for any loss.

6) Alcoholic drinks are not allowed to be brought into the hostel.

7) Smoking is not allowed in bedrooms, bathrooms, or nursery.

APPENDIX V

FAMILY FIRST TRUST
USE OF TENANCIES
POLICY STATEMENT

Family First Trust's Management Committee at its meeting on 28.10.75 gave a clear directive to its staff not to allow the resources available through the Trust to be abused by people who use the title "need" as an excuse to be parasitical.

In its Aims and Objects, formally approved on 29.1.75, the Management Committee stated: "Family First respects the right of all people to a home, privacy, peace and a place in their local neighbourhood or community. Family First tenants have a right to these things on equal, but not special, terms. To treat any group, or individual, as basically "different" simply because they are in some kind of need or have a particular problem or handicap is to degrade them, to use them and ultimately to destroy their self-respect. All work done by Family First should enable people to make their own decisions whenever possible, and to accept responsibility for those decisions".

Staff felt that this policy needed "spelling out" so misunderstandings could be avoided as particular situations presented a need for action. The following statement has been approved by staff in the Housing and Personal Services Departments, by the Managers of the Practical Services, Office and Croft Family Centre and Deputy Director. It therefore represents a clear agreed approach by Management and staff. It is perhaps worth noting that although staff may, as individuals, have differing personal views on what morality is in the narrow "sex and sin" context, they have a unanimous voice over the wider and fundamental meaning of morality, which necessitates that fair play and honesty is a two-way process. Whether people are "helpers" or those being "helped", they should accept full responsibility for adhering to mutually agreed arrangements and agreements. Neither "helpers" nor those "helped" have the right to think that they can break faith with each other, and expect the situation to be regarded as permissible because of their status. Justice cannot present different faces for the sake of personal expediency or convenience.

If tenants (housed by Family First Trust at a time when they were homeless or without a dignified home of their own) build up their lives and make new lasting relationships, this is good providing they are also prepared to accept responsibility for their new life and go forward by their own efforts, thereby allowing Family First to offer an opportunity to someone else who urgently needs it. This evolving of self-help has been the strength of Family First. We are not prepared to jeopardise this strength for the majority for the sake of a greedy minority who, having been given the chance they genuinely needed, then want their ever-enlarging cake at other people's expense and effort rather than their own.

The staff statement:

"Although Family First is not constitutionally limited to helping one-parent families – and indeed counts couples, pensioners and single lone people among its tenants – it has to date specialised in helping one-parent families because of their acute need to be treated equally.

Family First has housed nearly 1,000 one-parent families in 10 years. It has witnessed pronounced changes in attitude to housing policy and "housing need" during this period. The change in the attitude of those in housing need has also changed. Because of traditional and "new" outlooks on sexual morality, one-parent families have always been a group which the public at large and public bodies in particular find difficulty in assessing fairly. This is because practical needs get muddled by moral judgements of the "sex and sin" order. So changing attitudes have affected this group (for better and/or worse) more than most people who are in some kind of known and recognised "conventional" need.

There is a growing trend toward a service orientated society. Government Departments with myriad civil servants proliferate (at other people's expense); social work is a boom profession. Clients demand more and more – and get it (if they know how to present their case in a manner which will fit into one of bureaucracy's acknowledged "categories"). People genuinely needing help suffer the indignity of being labelled, but perhaps find it impossible to comprehend the proliferation of sources of potential help, each offering advice and the promise that the next source will help. The buck is passed endlessly. For every person actively engaged in doing something positive to try to improve life, there will be at least ten talking about how it should be done (by someone else!). For every piece of practical work done in the community to help, there will be armies of sociologists, researchers and analysts creating a nuisance by their presence (unless those running the scheme put their foot down at the risk of being told they are denying progress!).

Family First set itself the task of being a very practical organisation. It aims to offer housing and back up amenities to enable one-parent families to gain or keep their independence and dignity in a "normal" community.

In providing housing for this group, inevitably public attitudes on "morality" had to be recognised and lived with. The single mother with a boyfriend 10 years ago had to be championed in the face of opinion which denied her the right of normal social contact (for example, the rigid rules then enforced by Mother and Baby Homes endorsed society's view that because she had had a child she was no longer a fit person to decide who her friends were. "No male visitors" was more common than not).

When The Croft opened and welcomed a tenant's boyfriend we were thought to be crazy. But it has worked. A minority of visiting males (and also a minority of visiting females!) caused nuisance and were dealt with individually. The majority added a great deal to their girlfriends support and the life of the local community in a constructive way.

It is conditional upon a one-parent family as part of the tenancy undertaking with Family First that if they cohabit, marry or remarry they find alternative accommodation. Only in this way can the special housing need of one-parent families be met. If a girlfriend with a child seeks a flat because she is a lone mother but with a view to bringing her boyfriend in to stay permanently, the situation is unrealistic and dishonest. Nobody can be all things to all people and criteria for any industry, business or helping body have to be established and an agreed form of working pursued. Family First has never sought to influence its tenants over their private views or mode of life beyond the reasonable limits of expecting tenants not to cause nuisance to neighbours (or neighbours to tenants) and expecting them to play fair in adhering to the terms of tenancy, i.e. if a lone mother and her two children take a flat (with a Health Department maximum occupancy of 2 NB. children under 11 count as ½ person), she is not only in contravention of the terms of her tenancy but also responsible for "over-crowding" if she allows a cohabitee, girlfriend or mother, etc. to move in. It makes nonsense of helping to solve the housing need of lone parents if the circumstance is contrived to obtain something under false pretences.

Five years ago, tenants (with very rare exceptions) honoured their side of the agreement with Family First. Many still do but there is a growing tendency for men to latch on to tenants for convenience and for tenants to assume this can happen as of "right". What then is the policy of Family First?

It would be against Family First philosophy to prejudice any genuine opportunity for a tenant to build a worthwhile relationship. But the issues raised are very complex and need to be properly understood. If the relevant Local Authority or the public call Family First methods or policy to account, we must account for our policy and be prepared to stand for it. At present, however, the issues are not clear cut – dealing with people as individuals rather than as categories makes our job more difficult.

Pressure on social workers in statutory agencies by clients demanding that they, the social workers, help them in turn means these social workers pressurise us to help clients. Our initial job (which we maintain should be done by social workers) is often to assess the genuine need. Social workers are increasingly "passing on" the clued-up spongers. There is a hidden undercurrent of "you must help – it is what you are here for. Do as I say, or I'll scream, threaten, (suicide, battering), etc."

So we have to decide who really needs the available housing most. We cannot ask for references because people in genuine need cannot always provide them. We need to have an honest appraisal of need from the referring social work agency – we cannot rely on getting it. Social workers can take the easiest course open and like to off load the people who press hardest. We have therefore to rely on our own judgement on the basis of very little acquaintance. This is the "break" that so many in genuine need actually need: they have abortively "gone the rounds" (or "gone to ground") before plucking up courage to seek help.

The positive response which offers a practical opportunity to help themselves is their life-line – with their home and their hope, they are all set for creating their own future. They play fair with Family First. If their circumstances change – they let us know in the normal course of dignified business-like behaviour and a solution can be worked out in accordance with their future plans, whether these include co-habitation, marriage or whatever. However, in giving people a chance we need to take risks – sometimes (and increasingly often) we now find that a plausible enough story about needing help as a one-parent family turns out to be a way to try and get good inexpensive and safe accommodation into which a cohabitee moves or a "business" operates. Occasionally a child is used as bait to get the address and then sent to a foster home. Usually such a tenant is in receipt of a DHSS allowance and her man is literally being housed and kept by her (or rather the State and us). It is relevant to state that it is not only members of the opposite sex who "move in". It may be a relative or friend of the same sex, and the issues are still very much the same.

Does Family First condone such a malevolent abuse of the helping systems for parasitical use? No it does not. Has it the right to set moral judgement? It depends what is meant by moral judgement. It has no right to inflict its views invited or otherwise or to try to alter a person's beliefs – it has every right to expect that Agreements are honoured. Nobody is housed by Family First under duress but of their own free will and choice, and Tenancy Agreements are discussed before they are signed.

Is there a difference between a regular boyfriend or relative who occasionally "stops over" as part of a growing relationship and one who moves in? Yes. The one who moves in should move out and together they should all find a home for them all. In the Nottingham situation it is still much easier for a "normal" family to find a home. A significant number of men who use a girl's address disappear from view if presented with the reality of having to look for a joint home. Ther prefer the parasitical role. Are we saying that Family First has a right to differentiate between a supportive and a parasitic boyfriend? Yes. If we succumb to pressures of "helping" everyone who demands help, or who simply attach themselves to us literally with no effort, we are guilty of increasing the trend towards personal irresponsibility.

We are *not* making judgements based on narrow morality of "sex and sin" but on the wider very essential morality of being fair and taking responsibility for one's life and a share of responsibility in the life of the community. Therefore, we feel at the present stage of growth of Family First and in the current moral climate we must take "each case on its merits". The alternatives are:

1. Not to keep accommodation especially for one-parent families. This may or may not be desirable at some future time. At present there is still urgent special need for one-parent families to have equal housing opportunities in the community. Family First is able to provide this as long as those supporting Family First (L.A., Government and public) play fair and as long as tenants play fair.

2. Closing our eyes and minds to abuses of accommodation. This is unfair on people who genuinely need the accommodation for the reasons it exists and it undermines the real interests of one-parent families by causing justified public grievance that Family First helps spongers.

Doesn't this make Family First take value judgements on people? Nobody can solve all of society's problems. Family First can only achieve a limited amount but aims to do it well. Family First works hard to provide equal opportunity for one-parent families.

In protecting their right for equal opportunity in life, Family First not only must, but we believe should, be brave enough to speak out against abuse and not fear the threat of "court action" or "publicity". The majority of tenants, with whom Family First is willing to discuss policy, agree with this approach and have largely been responsible for its creation. The minority of dissenters are not interested in anything but their own selfish maximum short-term gain. But the voice of dissent makes more news and nuisance in society at present than the voice of reason and tested experience.

Social workers make value judgements about people every day, often on little knowledge or evidence. Family First offers, through housing, the opportunity which many one-parent families say they need. If they agree to terms of tenancy under false pretences, they are cheating. If they take a tenancy and then their circumstances change, we will listen if they are honest and communicative. Without trust and honesty on both sides what happens? We either give up trying to run Family First independently and offer it to the very bureaucratic state helping system which helps those who fight hardest for themselves (or who are totally apathetic) and we cease to bother about individual genuine need; or we have to operate a "policing" system of enforcement of Agreements. Both alternatives we find untenable.

It is the responsibility of staff without fear to stand firm on the principles they agree as outlined here. Where a tenant is persistently unwilling to co-operate in a relationship of trust with Family First then Family First must act and be seen to act. It is evident that abuses are infectious, and degenerative behaviour in terms of lack of responsiblity for personal action follows a wishy-washy policy. In the past, Family First has proved that a policy of flexibility based on individual situations is not only desirable but also possible and practicable given the conditions of trust referred to.

We believe that to relinquish the concept of trust would be to accept defeat in the face of what we admit is a growing prevalence of using "need" as an excuse for being greedy and abdicating personal responsibility for one's own life. We will take strong action to protect the availability of real opportunity for those genuinely needing it: it follows that this will on occasions mean taking firm action with tenants who deliberately abuse their Agreements. If some people craftily interpret this action as Family First setting itself up as a judgement body then they must have their say for whatever political or personal reasons they utter.

Ask them in, invite them to get involved and to do some work. Let them sample the realities of day to day situations – criticism mostly comes from people who are a safe distance from a working involvement personally. "Studying" other peoples needs from afar and telling other people what to do is a current sickness in our midst. This sickness must be recognised with clear action which does not need to please everyone (variety of help offered is as vital to a healthy community as a variety of food to the body) and it should not try. It is better to achieve a little well, than to "achieve" a lot badly in a race to "please" everyone. Everyone will never be pleased".

Ruth I. Johns
Director
April 1976

APPENDIX VI

report

meeting	SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE		
date	28th October, 1975	agenda item number	1

THE NEED TO DETERMINE PRIORITIES FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

Introduction

Since Social Services Departments were established in 1971 there has been an increasing volume of work falling upon these Departments and in particular upon Social Workers. The four major factors giving rise to this situation are:–

1. Increased social legislation laying further duties on Social Services Departments (e.g. Children and Young Persons Act 1969, Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 and the impending Children Act).

2. The very situation which the Seebohm Report predicted – that with one large unified Department embracing all previous client groups and others beside, with the concept of one departmental door on which all can knock, there would be an increase not only in variety of public demands but also in net volume of these demands.

3. Far greater public awareness of Social Services than existed five years ago, with consequent greater and frequently unrealistic expectations by the general public. The expectations are unrealistic as the resources lag behind the expectations.

4. A general increase in social problems (e.g. an increase in the number of mentally disturbed people needing admission to psychiatric hospital, an increase in juvenile crime, an increase in the rate of marital breakdown, an increase in the number of people rendered homeless and an increase in the numbers of very elderly people).

The impact of this greatly increased volume of work came at a time when Social Workers were still in the process of adjusting to working in a new, larger and generic department. They were still trying to learn the variety of skills and knowledge expected of them in their new setting. Clearly, the resources, both capital and revenue, to meet this increased demand had not been adequately forthcoming. Moreover, it seems likely that this situation will continue for some years ahead particularly in the light of the current economic situation of the country.

The combination of increased demand, increased volume of work, problems of adjustment to a new department and a lag in resources to meet the demand has produced not only problems in terms of the quality of service offered to clients, but also problems in the morale of Social Workers who are in the front line of the conflict between demand and resources.

It would be unrealistic, however, to interpret these facts merely as a strong case for increasing departmental resources. For the Department must also look at the use it is making of its

existing resources and make some evaluation of the effectiveness of this deployment. Some crucial issues have been examined in depth; control of work; management of Social Workers; priorities for social work activities; realistic expectations in terms of standard of work and size of workload. To continue to expand in terms of resources without having first examined and consolidated what we already have could be a recipe for infinite demands without infinite return. The contention in what follows is that if the issues which have been examined can be resolved in terms of integrated, progressive and realistic policy, we shall be in the position not only to offer a more effective service to the clients whom we do serve, but also to evaluate what further resources are needed in order to meet the demands of the clients whom we do not serve.

This report then is the result of an examination in depth of present policies and practices, an examination in depth of the reality of the situation, and the conclusions and recommendations come from that examination.

This report is based on suggestions made by a small working party which I set up in December 1974 representing all levels of the Department on the field work side both to examine the volume of enquiries, referrals and current work loads of areas and to recommend departmental priorities within this having regard to legal and statutory responsibilities, reasonable work loads for staff and appropriateness of the task for the worker allocated to deal with it; to consider also methods of meeting client needs.

Effect of an Increased Volume of Work

The increased volume of work referred to above is apparent wherever one looks for it. The multiple bombardment which Social Workers receive as a result of the increased work load had both a psychological and a practical effect. In psychological terms, the Research Unit of the old City Department in late 1973 specified the problem when it commented "case loads may not be an accurate measure of actual work load, but it is felt that certain psychological as well as actual work pressures were exerted by the widely differing average case load size." The old County Department discovered that in Mansfield referrals increased by 25% over a period of one year. In Newark referrals doubled over a four year period. The increase in expenditure on the homeless (a large proportion of which is spent on Hotel accommodation for them) speaks for itself. An over 100% occupancy rate in Childrens Homes is yet a further indication. But the practical impact of this increased volume in work load is greater than that. The increase in volume has escalated beyond anyone's expectations, and has resulted, quite clearly, in clients receiving a less effective service, so that service has been diluted in order to present it to larger numbers of clients. The project concerning children in care and related issues commented, "in discussing preventive work with field workers and their managers we were at some pains to form impressions of the level and effectiveness of what preventive work was going on. We learn that there was a large gap between the number of cases where preventive work was needed and the number of cases actually receiving any help, MOREOVER IN CASES WHERE SOME WORK WAS BEING DONE IT WAS FREQUENTLY AT SUCH A POOR LEVEL OF FREQUENCY AS TO HAVE LITTLE CHANCE OF SUCCESS". I support the conclusion of that project group: that the continued dilution of service in order to appear to meet increased needs reaches a "break-point" where the service is so diluted as to be ineffective.

In certain Area Offices in the Authority, attempts at local level have been made to overcome these problems, with encouraging results. In Mansfield and Newark, and in studies in the City Division, a different pattern of area organisation, aimed at a more careful and stringent appraisal of cases at referral stage appears to have resulted in a more effective service being offered to clients, albeit the number of clients is less. In that these organisational experiments appear to have been successful, I recommend later in this report they be extended to cover all areas in the Authority.

I believe that the only alternative to the continued dilution of our service, with resultant ineffectiveness, lies in structural changes within the Area Office, such as have been tried in some areas to which I refer, the control of case load size, and the definition of priorities for Areas. For, with limited resources, I believe that the only way to ensure effective service is to define priorities, and thereby to do some things well rather than all things poorly.

The Definition of Priorities

In order to set priorities for Social Workers it is essential to recognise that the very many referrals made to the Department cover all client groups within which different levels of support and help are required. Many can be adequately helped by Social Work Assistants and a variety of Domiciliary Workers but others can only be assisted by the more experienced and skilled Social Worker. It is this latter heavy burden of demand which tends to render Social Workers ineffective by the sheer weight of numbers. Therefore, it becomes crucial to attempt to exercise control in order to give a better service to these clients.

For Social Workers, the "top" priorities are clear to us all, and can be described as "inescapable commitment". I feel that the highest priority must be given to problems generated by clients, falling into two major categories: those requiring immediate action because the situation involves risk to life and those requiring quick action because there is a high physical risk situation involved. Thus I recommend

Priority 1

(a) Life or death situations where immediate investigation and action is required. (In other words where the client's behaviour is an actual potential danger to others or to himself, clients who are in danger as a result of the behaviour of others). (e.g. allegations of non-accidental injury to children, allegations of neglect to children, referrals to attempted or threatened attempted suicide, self neglect with fatal potential, elderly confused clients and clients displaying active depression psychosis, parents who indicate they are frightened they will hurt their children).

(b) High risk situations where action is to be taken within 72 hours of the referral being received. (High risk is interpreted either there is high risk of the client falling into category (a) above or that there is a high risk of the client needing immediate care or care within seven days).

Having established that our top priority must be life and death situations, or situations which approximate to that, I suggest that our second priority must be that which is required of us by law, or by Departmental interpretation of that law. I thus recommend

Priority 2

Work with a specific time span laid down by law or by the Department.

(a) Work concerned with the courts: either work initiated by the court but carried out by the Department or initiated by the Department and leading to court work or initiated by the client leading to court work. (e.g. Guardian ad Litem, social enquiry report, applications for care orders, Section 60 and 65 of the Mental Health Act 1959, application for discharge of care order, appeals against orders under Section 27 of the National Assistance Act, appeals against guardianship).

(b) Work with a specific time span laid down by the law or by Departmental interpretation of the law (e.g. work associated with place of safety orders, compulsory admission to mental hospital, resolutions under Section 2 of the Children Act, 1948, visits to boarded out children, work arising from tribunals and other quasi judicial bodies, adoption welfare supervision, foster parent application, visits to children in childrens homes, children on supervision orders, visits to children home on trial, adoption agency

work, private fostering, admissions to Homes for the Elderly under Section 47 of the National Assistance Act, "regradings" of patients in mental hospital, guardianship applications in respect of the mentally handicapped).

I suggest that my second priority is also an inescapable commitment for the Department in that it reflects legal duties laid upon us.

Having accepted the inevitability of the first two priorities I am aware that hereon Departmental choice of priorities is not a matter imposed upon us entirely by outside forces, but is a matter in which we should exercise and can exercise responsible choice. In order to make responsible choices in a situation in which we can indeed make decisions as to our priorities, we need to define a philosophical base for the Department which we could use as a yardstick by which to judge our further priority definition.

Further Priority Rankings

At the beginning of this report, I pointed out that, nationally, Social Services Departments are receiving an ever increasing number of referrals. Whilst this is true, it must also be true that Social Services Departments cannot expect to receive an ever increasing amount of resources. In this situation, once we have met our inescapable obligations (defined as priorities 1 and 2) I feel that we must base our decision as to further priorities upon an earnest desire to tackle the "root cause" of our present ever increasing work load. This is a painful and difficult choice to make, even though its consequences are to some extent cushioned by the fact that the priorities I am suggesting are for Social Workers only, and thus do not preclude other groups of clients from receiving a service from other groups of field work staff. When I examine the "root causes" of our ever increasing work load, I am driven to the conclusion that our situation is typified by the expression, "too little and too late".

I refer to inescapable commitments as being both legal requirements and a form of "casualty service". These inescapable commitments are typified in client terms as problems in an advanced state, presenting already a high degree of deterioration and distress. The battered child, the attempted suicide, the child in care, the divided family are all situations where the client has ALREADY suffered considerable negative experience, thereby sustaining a significant degree of damage. Problems presented in such an advanced state are more difficult for the Social Worker, or indeed for anyone, to deal with. Not only has the damage to the client already occurred but also the damage has frequently been so great as to be realistically irreparable. Nationally, there is an awareness that the number of such "advanced" problems is consistently increasing. The number of children involved in criminal behaviour, the amount of truancy, the frequency of marital breakdown, the number of people admitted to hospital suffering from mental disorder, all are increasing, presenting inescapable demands on Social Workers to provide a 'casualty service". If this trend continues, rather than the root causes of the trend tackled, it is clear that, after a time, provision of a "casualty service" will occupy ALL the time of the Department, and after further time the Department will be overwhelmed by that demand, and unable to respond even in "casualty service" terms.

My belief is that this gloomy progression is not inevitable, in that it is possible gradually and effectively to work on the early root causes of problems which present themselves, thus ultimately preventing their further progression to the "crisis" level.

The root causes of a large proportion of our client problems which present themselves in an advanced, often hopelessly advanced stage are summed up in the term "social malaise". Poor housing, poor community facilities, lack of play and leisure facilities, lack of pre-school facilities, lack of adequate family income, all create a quality of environment conductive to social ill health. The combating of this social malaise is, of course, the task of the whole County Council, of the District Council and of Central Government, and the Social Services Department has a part to play in this primary prevention.

Even so, this primary prevention, this attacking root causes, whilst it can produce highly significant results, cannot be expected to completely eradicate social problems. A proportion of families and individuals will remain at risk. These families can frequently be identified at an early stage of deterioration or distress, and experience indicates that, in the majority of cases, appropriate help to them at this early stage can prevent further deterioration, and avoid later crisis.

I believe that the only realistic way to order priorities beyond our "inescapable commitments" is on the basis of tackling the root causes of the problems which present themselves to us. When we talk about tackling root causes, we realistically talk of activities which will bear fruit not in this generation, but in the next generation. For it would be, in my view, unrealistic to imagine that root causes can be effectively dealt with overnight. I believe that setting our sights on combating the social problems of the next generation and acting on the root causes which present themselves in this generation is a realistic and feasible goal for Social Workers.

I would wish to make it clear, whilst talking about the next generation, I am in no way suggesting that priority be given to what is traditionally seen as the "child care services". Whilst acknowledging that, because I am talking in terms of the next generation, I am thinking in terms of this generation's children and young people who will be next generation's parents, the priorities which I suggest cut right across the client groupings identified in previous specialist departments, and expose all client groups, for Social Workers, to similar criteria.

I believe the Department should concentrate its Social Worker energies upon the situations with the greatest long term potential; in economic terms, expenditure where the benefit of social work might substantially exceed the cost of not doing so. I believe that Social Workers should concentrate upon those situations where there is a prospect that unless action is taken now, problems would be reproduced and increased for the next generation. I therefore, recommend

Priority 3
Preventive work with both families and individuals where there is a prospect of their problems being repeated in the next generation. This includes not only preventive and rehabilitative work with homeless families with children, preventive work with children at risk of coming into care or before the Court but also preventive work, for exactly the same reasons, with the mentally ill, the elderly or the physically handicapped, where the effects of that disability invade the family to the point where that family's next generation is liable to be disadvantaged because of the handicaps of its present generation. It includes work with mentally and physically ill and handicapped people who are likely to produce children who will be at risk because of the adjustment problems of their handicapped or ill parents. The criterion which I am employing is not that of the client group, but of viewing the consequences of client problems in terms of its likely effect on the next generation.

Finally, I would recommend the following further priorities for Social Workers.

Priority 4
Work with clients with a risk of their needing residential care or where there is a prospect of rehabilitation from residential care. (e.g. the unsupported and isolated elderly, the mentally handicapped in a similar situation, the physically and mentally disturbed at high risk and isolated).

Priority 5
Work with clients who do not come into any category or meet any criteria outlined above, e.g. clients in residential care with no rehabilitative prospects, families without children, work with isolated individuals, work with drug addicts and alcoholics etc.

Organisational Implications

If one defines priorities for Social Workers, two important organisational consequences follow. The first, which I would wish to stress, is that clients who received a low priority of ranking as far as Social Worker activity is concerned will not thereby cease to receive a service from the Department. For the Department has other field work operatives such as Social Work Assistants, Home Helps, Occupation Officers, Social Workers for the blind, and a whole host of voluntary resources which can appropriately and effectively help these people. Indeed, in areas in the Authority where some sort of priority ranking system similar to what I am suggesting is already in operation, it is claimed that clients who rank low in terms of Social Worker priorities are nonetheless receiving an adequate and indeed often improved service by our attempts to find alternative provision for them which does not involve Social Worker acitivty. The Committee is already well aware of the ability of voluntary organisations, community care groups and others to make first class provision for clients who do not so much require a skilled Social Worker to help them, as more simple, practical but nonetheless important services to give them material help, practical aid and relieve their isolation.

The other organisational consequence of ordering priorities for Social Workers is that, in order that the implementation of such priorities is a practical possibility, an area office needs to build in mechanisms for assessing client needs at referral stage, diagnosing client need, suggesting appropriate provision, and categorising client need in terms of the priority ranking established. To my knowledge, the only successful way to do this is by creating in each Area Office an intake team structure which approaches initial referrals in the way which I have described. In the Newark and Mansfield areas, in terms of practical experiments, and the west area of the city in terms of detailed study, staff have come to the conclusion that the establishment of intake systems in area offices is not only practical but desirable. My contention is that it is also a sine qua non to the effective implementation of decisions with regards to priorities for Social Workers.

An Effective Level of Service

I referred at the beginning of this report to the danger, and indeed to some degree present reality, of attempting to provide service to an ever increasing number of clients by producing a diluted level of service to the point where it ceases to be effective. It seems clear, therefore, that any ordering of priorities must go hand in hand with decisions as to the size of case load which a Social Worker can realistically and effectively undertake. For unless we place a maximum size on Social Worker case loads, our order of priorities become meaningless. Moreover, unless we do this there will be no value in ordering priorities, for it is surely of no consequence to establish priorities, to identify a philosophy for the Department and goals for the Department to work towards unless we also give to our Social Workers the tools with which to do the job. I believe that if we are to offer an effective social work service, we must limit the size of case loads of Social Workers. I am convinced, as I believe are most people, that case loads of 60, 70, 80, 90, 100 and over are impossible for any Social Worker to adequately handle. I am convinced that they would be impossible to handle even given a whole range of first class supporting services, such as secretarial help, supervisory help, high class accommodation and so on. I believe there comes a point when any Social Worker, however well qualified and experienced, becomes ineffective simply because of the size of his work load.

Having regard to the definition of priorities I have suggested and having regard to the level of work necessary to ensure an effective return from such definition of priorities, I believe that a figure of an average maximum case load of 35 is reasonable, realistic and workable. The project concerning children in care and related issues commented "to do effective work with the seriously disturbed situation may well demand three or more lengthy visits per week plus a considerable amount of liaison and enabling activity. To give an hour or so a fortnight to such a family cannot be called preventive, in that it is unlikely to prevent anything but merely to provide a running commentary on a deteriorating situation." I believe such a

sentiment to be applicable to the majority of cases which I suggest should be accepted as "higher" priority. These cases, of course, are to cover not only "child care" cases, but extend right across client groups on the criteria of priorities which I have suggested. It must be recognised, however, that Social Workers as other human beings, differ in terms of their individual capacity and ability to cope with work load size. I would, therefore, suggest that, rather than make an arbitrary decision that a Social Worker should carry no more that 35 cases, that areas be instructed that the Social Worker case load in the area should not exceed 35 times the number of Social Workers in post. Without such specification of work load, I do not feel that the Department will be able to offer an effective level of service to its clients, or a satisfying and rewarding job to its Social Workers.

Recommendations

The Working Party which I set up, and this report to the Committee, is in response to an ever increasing volume of work referred to the Department.

I have attempted to set out clearly and frankly both the problems as I see them and the solutions as I see them. The solutions which I suggest are the result of careful thought and study by staff in the Department. I support their viewpoint not only because it seems to be reasonable, but also because I can find no viable alternative. I believe that the only alternative to the ordering of priorities for Social Workers, specifying of maximum case loads for Social Workers and acceptance of the organisational implications of these two things is to allow a development of the present situation. In my view, the present situation is becoming rapidly untenable, and I feel it would be unrealistic to suggest that we would be able to cope with its further development.

The recommendations which I make do not relate to client groups as seen by the previous specialist Departments, but relate instead to an overall philosophy which, whilst accepting that there are for the Department inescapable commitments of legal and humanitarian nature, places emphasis on genuine preventive work aimed at the root causes of social problems, and thus with the ultimate goal of reducing the numbers of social casualties which present themselves to Social Services Departments. Moreover, I am not suggesting that the priorities established for Social Workers should result in the withdrawal of service by the Department to other clients, but rather that the needs of those other clients can be met realistically by alternative methods of service provision such as I have described above.

This may require more resources than are at present available in either the Department or the community but that is exactly the situation which faces us now. What will become clearer is that if social workers are concentrating on the priorities I have outlined, then other staff or community resources will be needed for clients not mentioned in the priorities, e.g. the elderly person living with a family without children.

The application of the recommendations which I suggest below will take time and will vary from area to area. I believe that to fully implement the changes will take up to nine months and that it will be in the late part of 1976 before the full consequences and benefits will begin to be felt. I am satisfied having studied a pilot experiment at Mansfield that the changes I suggest are for the benefit of clients, staff and other agencies.

Members may wish to know that I have discussed the proposals in this report with representatives from N.A.L.G.O. and B.A.S.W. at two separate meetings.

In making my draft report available to the representatives attending the meetings, I requested that they treat the contents as confidential. This has meant that the representatives from both organisations have not been able to discuss the report as widely as they would have wanted and they wished you to be aware of this.

Both N.A.L.G.O. and B.A.S.W. generally welcomed the proposals but explained the need for both managerial and Committee support if they were accepted and applied. Many

important details remain to be worked upon and both organisations reserved their position until these were known. N.A.L.G.O. and B.A.S.W. were anxious that the proposals should not be seen as the only means of giving social work to people and communities and were anxious that alternative methods of helping and also organising resources should be developed so that the Department did not over-emphasise the one-to-one relationship aspect of social work.

Both organisations were keen to see full discussion on the proposals within the Department and in particular with other agencies who are likely to be affected by the proposals. They were also anxious that the results be monitored and that the application of intake team structures should have regard to the needs and problems of individual areas.

I have found this general support and intent helpful and would certainly accept the comments made by both B.A.S.W. and N.A.L.G.O.

I recommend-

1) That Social Workers in areas operate priorities as set out in this paper.

2) That an intake team structure is introduced at each area office.

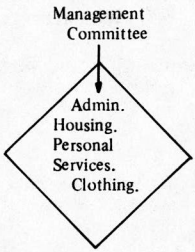
3) That the Department accept an average maximum case load of 35 for Social Workers in long term teams.

E.G. CULHAM
Director of Social Services.

APPENDIX VII

DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY FIRST 1966 – 76

1.



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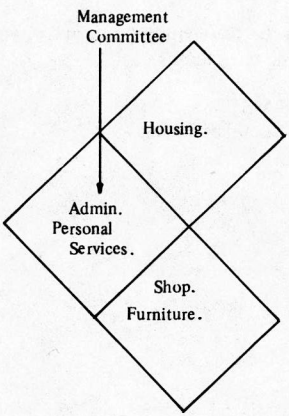

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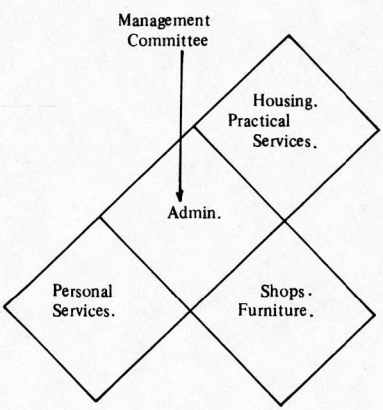

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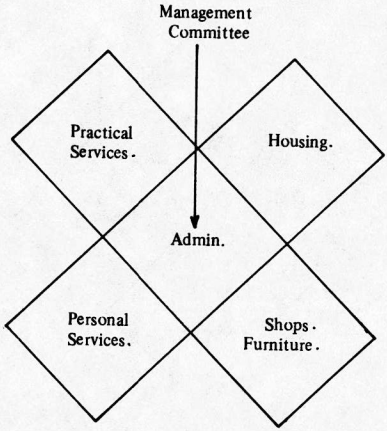
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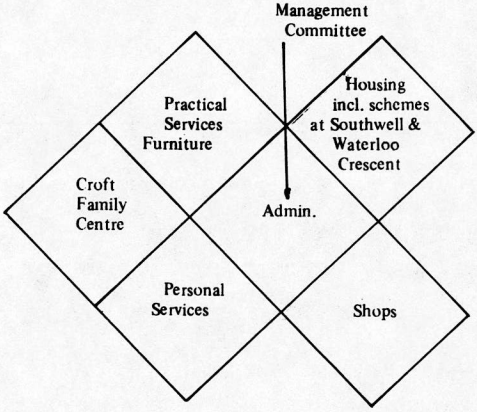
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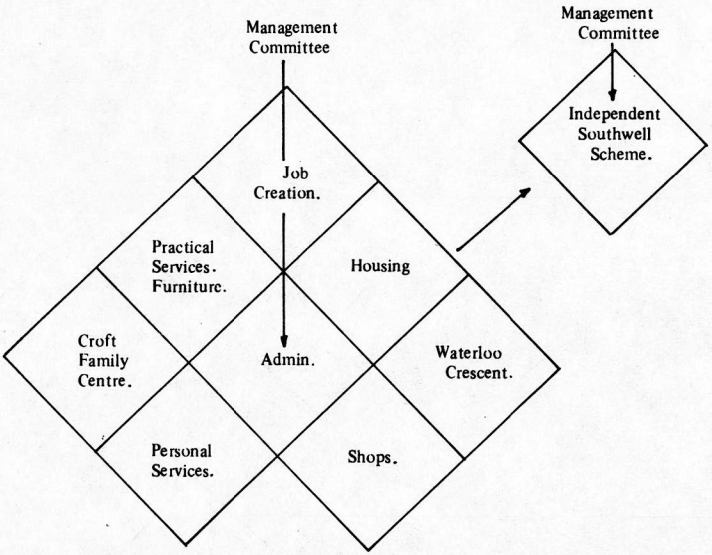

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