

**Outagamie County Social Services  
1984**



Jones

## *The League of Women Voters of Appleton*

APPLETON, WISCONSIN 54911

### REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE APRIL 1984

At our annual meeting in April 1982, the Appleton League of Women Voters decided to study the funding and organization of the Outagamie County Department of Social Services. The study Committee, under the chairmanship of Jean King, started its inquiries that summer trying to figure out how to approach what seemed to be a monumental task. The Committee fluctuated from five to eleven people from month to month according to time, employment, energy and residency. It put all preconceived notions out of its collective head, set aside hearsay about personalities and gathered information through interviews, observation of the Social Services Board, questions to all and sundry and through reading human services materials. The Social Services Department, at all times, was courteous and very helpful in providing information, particularly some which was not readily available on certain aspects of funding. The Committee perceived that its mandate was to amass enough data to understand the complexities of the Social Services Department and then to convey this information to the rest of the League members.

During the course of the study, the Committee realized that such dissemination of information was, indeed, a very important function; that one reason there is so little constructive public reaction to the Social Services Department is because of general ignorance of how it operates and fear that it is too complex to understand and too rigid to change. There are now, at least, seven League members who understand the structure, funding and politics of the Department to a much better degree than two years ago. We hope that some of this knowledge has been passed on to the membership at large during our two unit meetings and the general meeting with the Director of the Department. We are certainly aware, however, that our understanding is imperfect and that there is much more to be learned.

In order to focus our membership discussion on areas where the Committee felt that public participation could influence policy, the Committee drew up a set of twelve "support" positions for study. These were refined during the unit discussion to the ten statements listed at the end of this narrative.

There are, however, certain aspects of the study that the Committee wished to report on to the membership in a more general way.

The Committee feels that the Department of Social Services is a well-run agency operating efficiently and successfully under government mandates and county fiscal and political restraints. Any observations of the League Committee come

naturally from our particular conviction that an informed citizen can be an asset in the governmental process. Or, to put it another way, government can profit by making sure that the public has adequate access to decision-making and adequate assurance that suggestions will be taken seriously. The League has been working on this problem for over fifty years and is under no illusion about how difficult public participation is to achieve. Democracy is a time-consuming form of government but we think that listening to the public is profitable in the long run.

In light of our conviction, we think that public participation mechanisms in the Department could be enhanced in three ways which might be classified loosely as 1) better public relations between the Department and the general public; 2) closer communications among the Department personnel and administration; and 3) better communication between the Department and clients.

The Department lists public participatory efforts as talks to service clubs, task forces with citizen membership, public hearings, social workers' reports, fifteen minutes available to the public at Social Service Board meetings, etc. The channels are there, but how many people know about them or have the courage to speak up publicly or confront personally "the establishment?" We believe there must be more publicity about these opportunities in newspaper articles, public service announcements, solicitations to interested organizations -- a single advertisement for a public participation opportunity is not enough.

In addition to the normal public access channels, we would like to see another opportunity added. Good ideas can come from social service recipients themselves but sometimes these are the very people who are too inarticulate or fearful to confront the system. We suggest that a person be asked to gather information and suggestions from the needy by going to the Community Clothes Closet, Food Pantry or other places where those in need might congregate. This questioner could be a carefully selected volunteer not associated with the Department of Social Services because, unfortunately, many social workers are regarded with a certain amount of distrust. We do not assume that such a "survey" would bring startling results but do think that it might bring in one or two ideas or attitudes that would prove useful to the operation of the Department.

We also believe that the Department should actively promote awareness in all units of the existing Information and Referral system which provides neutral and non-judgemental access to the entire social system and, conversely, can be used as an excellent source of information.

The Director of the Social Services Department mentioned in our general meeting that he relies on social workers to bring in reactions from clients. The Committee certainly cannot refute this statement but understands, in general, how difficult it can be for the worker in the field to make recommendations to a hierarchy of administrators. We would like to see informal sessions instigated for all social workers and/or all income maintenance workers to discuss procedures which would be reported to the administration by a note-taker selected by the group. Bouncing ideas off of each other can be productive and morale-lifting.

Another suggestion of the Committee is to add a citizen member to the Board of Social Services. The Board is a statutory board appointed by the county executive to supervise the working of the Department and to be a policy-making body. The Board reports to the Human Services Committee, a standing committee of the Board of Supervisors.

The Social Services Board is now made up of five supervisors and two citizens-at-large. Each Board member receives excellent orientation and continuing education from the Director. The five supervisors are in a key position by virtue of their knowledge to see that social service programs are implemented by the county board of supervisors. The League Committee, however, would like to see another citizen member added who might strengthen the interest in human services should it falter in the future. The addition might provide more impetus for the discussion and thoughtful resolution of problems that come up. It also might help to fulfill a responsibility emphasized in the Social Services Handbook, "interpretation of needs and programs to the local citizenry."

We would like to see the Department and the Board take more of a leadership role. Mandates are certainly fulfilled, and, in some case such as transportation, more levy money is spent than in most counties, but perhaps greater effort could be made to go beyond minimum efforts for other mandates such as family planning. It is certainly understandable, given the political climate of the county board, that the Department waits until there is obvious public support for a project before asking the county for financial backing. A case in point is the Domestic Abuse Center which is now fully backed by the Board and Department but which took an immense amount of work by the public to achieve. Perhaps this is as it should be, but the League Committee thinks that the Department and the Board would fulfill their responsibilities better if they used their expertise to plan ahead and give more guidance to the county.

A specific concern is the plight of some of the linguistically handicapped. Many of the Spanish speaking peoples have the United Migrant Opportunities Services to speak for them. The Hmong also have spokespersons but do not have the trained advocates who might be helpful. There are also those whose native tongue is English who need help filling out applications. Is there a need on the part of some of these people for an advocate when they first approach the Social Services Department? Is this something that a volunteer could do under the auspices of the Volunteer Services Coordinator in the Department? We feel that at least there could be more reassuring public relations in the bewildering and humiliating prospect of applying for funds.

In conclusion, the Committee recommends to the Appleton League that a social services Committee be continued to carry on observation of the Board of Social Services, to inform and educate League members and to instigate action from the League when desirable.

(over)

### LOCAL FOCUS OF LWV STATE AND NATIONAL POSITIONS

1. We support adult day care, adult foster care and the concept of the Community Options Program. *- state funded*
2. We support respite care. *- don't have it*
3. We support the concept of maintaining and updating information in a professional manner (Information and Referral mandate). *100% funded way*
4. We support early intervention and restitution programs. *- in trouble youth services - private organization w/ law*
5. We support additional efforts to comply with the Family Planning mandate.
- ➔ 6. We support developing a domestic abuse center.
7. We support giving more publicity to day care options, and more attention to training and standards.
- ➔ 8. We support a teen AODA (Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse) aftercare house. *have 1, planning another*
9. We support more effective publicity of opportunities for public participation in the planning process in the Department of Social Services.
10. We emphasize considering cost effectiveness, transportation needs and the needs of the linguistically handicapped when any services are planned.

### Study Committee Members

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