

Paint On The Walls, New Staff Attitudes

Welfare Director Offering Hope

By MARY E. O'LEARY
Staff Reporter

The city Welfare Department is a study in contrasts.

It's essentially a way station whose purpose is to tide people over — to bridge the gap — to meet the crisis.

It mitigates against long term solutions, a sense of continuity, a positive stepping-stone in one's life.

The level of assistance is low (some levels lost out to inflation five years ago), the lines can be long and during peak periods, the counseling aspects are minimal.

And yet, there's a feeling at the Bassett Street office, adjoining the state welfare agency, that there is at least an effort under way to change that.

The bars are still on the windows but there's new paint on the walls, the social investigators are friendly and a powerful mural in vibrant reds and oranges speaks to the clients of hope.

The verbal equivalent of the smile button hangs in the waiting room, telling



LEOTA TUCKER

Clients should move to self-sufficiency. (Staff Photo by Steve Silk)

people to be nice to each other — "It has a way of coming back to you."

Superficial?
No says Director Leota Tucker.

"The messages that you send people are important. It's not just an admonition. You communicate a certain amount of concern for people's welfare," according to

Mrs. Tucker, who has held the directorship for little more than a year now.

Not as obvious to the casual observer are the staff meetings, in-training service sessions and the planned seminars in alcoholism, drug abuse and advances in social work methodologies.

"Part of my initial concern," said Mrs. Tucker, as she reflected on the last year, "was to get to know the staff, to get their perspective on things."

What she found is that they felt "somewhat isolated from the trends in social work and wanted access to this information."

Mrs. Tucker said the planned seminars would develop the necessary linkages with the social services agencies to which clients are referred.

"It can only help our clients," she observed.

The counselling aspect of the client social worker relationship, is crucial, according to Mrs. Tucker, but it is hampered by case loads as large as 113 people, which can increase during vacation periods.

The aim is to get recipi-

ents to "move towards self-sufficiency. Some do, but not as many as we would like," said the director, who observed that a major part of the problem is the lack of jobs.

she hoped to have one or two staff members address this.

A recent controversy over location of new offices for the state welfare department down the street from the present site, indirectly touches on the city's welfare department.

Mrs. Tucker spoke of the good relationship that has developed between the staffs of the two departments and how convenient it is for the clients of both agencies for them to share a building.

The city's lease at the current site continues for the next three years and there is talk of maintaining a co-location, but nothing beyond that at this point, said Mrs. Tucker.

The objections to the state move were that the neighborhood was not consulted and that somehow the agency stigmatizes the area.

The director said neighbors have never come to her with such complaints and that the present location is convenient to the extent that it sits in the middle of three bus lines.

Mrs. Tucker said a survey to be taken within the year would ask recipients for their opinion of the situation.

The director looks to her management perogatives to bring improvements, "get not only looks to easing a rid of the institutional client's entry to other agencies, but determining if people's needs are met after referral. Mrs. Tucker said within her control.

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2 Artists Battle City Hall To Get Mural Uncovered

By ANGELA D. CHATMAN
Staff Reporter

A year ago, two artists hired by the city under the federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act began a mural for the walls of the Welfare Department's Bassett Street offices.

Ruth Resnick and Terry Lennox worked on the project from March 1978 until early February when the mural — depicting in warm earth tones and bright blues and greens the poor and workers in the office — was unveiled. The artists' goal was to create a positive symbol for the office and its clients.

But just five weeks after its unveiling, the mural is damaged and faces the possibility of being blocked from public view.

A three-window, wood and plaster-board partition installed last week effectively cut off the view of the mural. That partition, built by young people in

an apprenticeship program, stopped midway along the mural and is anchored in a portion of the wall covered by the mural.

The partition was removed by early Monday, the day the artists first saw the new construction. But the matter has not been resolved and won't be until the artists are sure the work always will be protected.

Complaints began as soon as the partition was built. One person asked CETA administrator Thomas S. Corso to stop construction of the partition and give the artists, who were on vacation when the work began, the right to review any construction affecting the 6-by-70-foot mural.

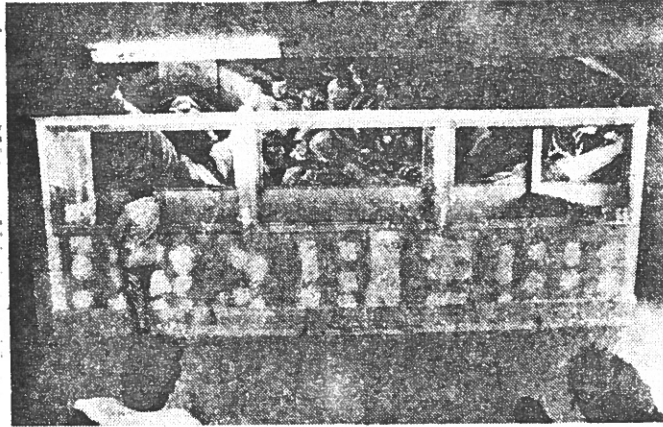
At the same time, welfare administrators last week learned that clients were dissatisfied because the partition obstructed their view of the mural.

Welfare officials made plans to re-

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When artists Ruth Resnick, left, and Terry Lennox entered the Welfare Department's Bassett Street office Monday, they viewed, for the first time, the partition which had been built in front of their mural. The upper portion had already been removed. (Staff Photos by Michael O'Brien)



The construction of this partition blocking the mural in the city Welfare Department office on Bassett Street has angered the artists and upset people in the office. The top of the partition was removed shortly after this photo was taken. (Staff Photo by Gene Gorlick)

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place the top portion of the partition with a plexiglas partition suspended on two-inch-square steel posts through which clients can see the work, according to deputy welfare Director Carlton Boyd. Corso, however, insists that any plans affecting the mural must be approved by the artists, who met at the welfare office Monday with members of the staff and representatives of Ventures, the group constructing the partition.

The artists will meet again Thursday with Welfare Director Leota Tucker and her staff to determine what steps the department will take to protect the mural in the future.

"We are negotiating a lease for protection of the mural," said Ms. Lennox, one of the artists.

"We don't want to infringe on the staff's rights. On the other hand, we do feel insulted and angry that it (the partition) did go up," said Ms. Lennox. She expressed concern that neither she nor Ms. Resnick had been notified about the petition.

"We talked to some workers," she went on. "Some were outraged (by the partition) and some feel more secure."

She said neither she nor her partner favor the use of plexiglas in front of the mural.

"When we first heard about (the partition)," said Ms. Resnick, "we thought it was a slap in the face." She complained that the mural should not have been treated as "just another wall," and questioned why she and her partner were not consulted at first.

She expressed appreciation that the partition would be changed to permit people to see the mural, and said she is pleased about the public outcry in support of it.

Ms. Resnick added she hopes Corso's



The mural, on which the artists worked for a full year, was damaged when screws were used to attach the partition to the wall.

directive giving Ms. Lennox and her a say on anything affecting the mural will become general policy for other works of art in the city.

Boyd said the welfare office also is interested in making sure the mural is in view of everyone who comes into the office.

"We're trying to make this a more people-oriented office," he said. The artists believe the best way to keep the office people-oriented is by not putting up a partition.