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PERSONAL NARRATIVE REPORT
of
The Welfare Section
Minidoka Relocation Center
April 13, 1945 to November 1, 1945
By
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Head Counselor
Term of Service

April 13, 1945, and detailed to Los Angeles W.R.A. Office on November 16, 1945

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WELFARE SECTION Minidoka War Relocation Center Hunt, Idaho

April 13, 1945 to November 1, 1945.

Personal Narrative

Looking back upon the checkered history of Welfare Section, now that the Project is actually closed, and with the advantage of knowing how certain activities and efforts succeeded, it seems to me that the history of Minidoka Welfare Section divides itself rather naturally into three separate eras. During the first period there was confusion. There was an immense amount of very hard work to do. Nevertheless it was a time of construction, just as, in the Project as a whole, all efforts were bent toward the building up of a normal community. Within that community, naturally, there must, of necessity, be a welfare agency. It was a period when appointed personnel numbered only one or two and evacuee personnel on the welfare staff were numbered in the dozens. All sorts and conditions of functions and services were handed to the Welfare Section for accomplishment. This in itself was a sort of compliment; but with so many tasks to do and with a new and sometimes unwieldy staff, the Welfare Section was like "the ship that found herself." It was necessary to get these functions aligned according to their importance, and it was necessary, eventually, to determine just where, among divisions and sections of this developing community, those functions might most properly and effectively be performed. That was a task for the second "era." Meantime, it was important to see that the functions were actually performed, for the time being, through the Welfare Office or one of its units.

The period was also characterized by great pressure for special consideration from evacuees upon both appointed personnel and evacuee employees. This was particularly noticeable in the assignment of housing. There were also complaints that the clothing allowance and public assistance programs were not administered as they were in other centers. These things raised repercussions for many months thereafter. They brought Welfare Section into the bad graces of many of the evacuee population and much time elapsed before that feeling was entirely overcome.

The second period, in our opinion, was one during which extraneous functions were transferred one by one to some other section or unit so that the counselors might devote their energies and their professional skills to administering social services, as such, to those families really in need of them. In the months from March 1, 1944 to March 1, 1945, this was accomplished by degrees. In fact, a great share of the realignment of functions had been accomplished by the first of January. More professionally equipped appointed personnel had been added to the counseling staff. There were still a few evacuee Counselor's Aides, but most of the evacuees still employed in the section were engaged in clerical or supervisory clerical activities.

By early 1945, when the decks had been cleared within the Welfare Section so that it might function smoothly, and with great benefit, to families in need of social counseling, the exclusion ban was liften. Need for social services continued, but relocation planning became the end and aim of all activities within and without this one section. Social services were rendered, not only for the benefit of the family, but with a weather-eye cocked as to how they might contribute to the general plan of helping families return to a more normal way of living in a more normal community of their own choosing.

During the second “chapter,” the center community had reached a zenith of development. Beginning American successes in World War II created hostility and some overt opposition to the administration within the Center, but also created some lessening of the great feeling against the Japanese-Americans on the part of the country as a whole. That change of attitude was reflected so some degree within the Center, and relocation, especially of well-equipped, highly-educated evacuees, became fairly common.

The third period was absorbed with the program of relocation and all its attendant problems and satisfactions. It was frustrating to a staff equipped and eager to render social services to people who needed them. It was necessary to orient the thinking of the staff to the greater social service they could render by turning their skills toward the relocation of abruptly transplanted individuals and families who must be rather abruptly transplanted once more within a limited time. It was also a period of recruiting and training staff, both Caucasian and evacuee; but, in the last few months, it became a period of replacing all evacuees with appointed personnel, as relocation really gained momentum.

Finally, it was a time of greater hope, when residents were certain they need not stay within the Center indefinitely, but might go back to their previous or a better way of living. There was, unquestionably, less strain for both administrative and evacuee residents, because the war was obviously in its closing stages. While in some respects this brought worry to evacuees who must seek homes and jobs outside the Project walls, on the whole it made for easier relationships between all groups. It was often necessary to sell the resident evacuees upon the good points of returning to outside communities. This was not just the result of “inertia.” Many and varied reports reached the Center regarding what had happened to evacuees when they sought new homes. This, at times, caused fears of and opposition to relocation, on a large or small scale. That was something definitely to be reckoned with in a period devoted to relocation planning. At the same time, the record of American-Japanese fighting-men, the growing efforts of liberal groups, of friends to the evacuees, whether unrecognized or recognized, and of our own organization on the outside, eased the situation and gave a different aspect to the picture within the Center as well.

Opposition to administration on the part of evacuee groups as a matter of principle gradually disappeared. In the end, all groups and all activities, whether evacuee or administrative, were working for the same end, almost

without exception. When I arrived on April 13, 1945, my service as Counselor in Minidoka Welfare Section was in the blind "era." The Welfare Section had been without a Head Counselor for a period of six weeks. During this time one of the four Junior Counselors was Acting Head Counselor. Another was acting as Case Supervisor or Assistant Counselor. The two other Junior Counselors and a Counseling Aide had been given no particular responsibilities, but one of the Junior Counselors had acted as Head Counselor several times when the Acting Counselor was absent, owing to illness in her family.

Everyone on the staff during this six week interim, had been doing some counseling, some supervising, and some administration. The Acting Counselor attended cabinet meetings and other meetings of the administrative personnel. All but one of the staff had been doing some speaking at community meetings. It had been, apparently, an informal, homey, and satisfying working arrangement.

This aligning of chief responsibilities had come about during a visit from the Field Consultant of the Welfare Section who had spent two or three weeks during February and March on the Project. During the same visit, he had removed some bottle-necks which apparently had been very irritating to the Relocation Division and to Welfare Section as well. There were from 1200 to 1500 cards on file in the Welfare Section, indicating those families where there seemed to be dependency factors present and who would need help from the Welfare Section and the Field Offices in making their relocation plans. The names of these families were registered in Relocation Division, and the Relocation Interviewers had been attempting to leave the responsibility for these families entirely with the Welfare Section until Welfare Section could determine whether or not a dependency summary needed to be written to the Field Offices upon each individual case. This was becoming a cumbersome and unwieldy plan. The Field Consultant arranged that the Welfare Section should send a blue card to Relocation Division flagging those families upon which Welfare Section was actually planning to write a summary. The Relocation Interviewers were then free to make contacts with all families and discuss relocation with them with the exception of that small number who had been flagged by means of blue cards.

The second bottle-neck was connected with the relocation of unattached children. In the past, it had been felt wise for Welfare Section to write a summary on every child under 18 who relocated, unless he went out of the Center with his family. This, too, had proved a cumbersome arrangement. With the consent of the Field Consultant, it was decided that Welfare Section should not write any summaries on those children who were going out to join relatives or who were accompanied by relatives or responsible people, with the consent of their parents. This arrangement was welcomed by the Relocation Division with open arms.

Another visitor to the Project, in early April, was the Area Adjustment Advisor from the Seattle W.R.A. Office. He had stressed summary writing, giving valuable suggestions as to content, form, and brevity, so that the whole process might be speeded up and that there might be fewer rejections. He had brought summaries to be revised and re-sent.

These visits from field staff were in line with the increased emphasis in the Welfare program upon making relocation plans for families, and the de-emphasis upon other functions which the Welfare Section Counselors had normally performed in previous years. It was mentioned to me several times that the cooperation between the Relocation Office and the Welfare Section had been improving. The Relocation Office liked particularly the conferring between individual workers of the two sections without "interference" of supervisors.

I arrived at Minidoka during a weekend. I was warned by the first staff member whom I encountered, that the staff was preparing to resign almost as a whole. No explanation was asked or volunteered. On the evening of my first day, two Junior Counselors handed in resignations. The reasons given were that promised promotions had not been made in their individual cases. Information which trickled into me during later days and weeks and months, seemed to indicate that the Welfare counseling staff, as well as the Project Director and Assistant Project Director in Charge of Community Management, had been led to believe that the Acting Head Counselor would be advanced to the position of Head Counselor, and the Acting Assistant Counselor

would be advanced to Assistant Counselor. According to the information offered, this arrangement had the recommendation of the Field Consultant and officials at Minidoka expected an approval of that set-up from the Washington Office. Resentment that the plan did not materialize is supposed to have played some part in the submission of resignations by the two Junior Counselors. On the other hand, the Personnel Officer and the Acting Assistant Project Director in Charge of Community Management mentioned to me that these resignations had been threatened off and on for several months.

I felt that a wet, snowy, muddy spring, cramped dormitory life and camp food, to say nothing of the isolation which these very active staff members had experienced throughout the winter months, were also contributing factors. In addition, certain workers intimated that friction between departments had given them a sort of inferiority complex at times, which was not too pleasant.

This was the keg of dynamite into which I stepped. Knowing almost nothing of the undercurrents in the situation, it seemed best to mark time for about a week until the arrival of the Field Consultant. Within a few days the situation was resolved to some extent by a decision to detail the former Acting Head Counselor to another division. She was given the choice of staying with the Welfare Section, if she preferred. I, of course, offered to leave at any time, but the Project Administration felt that that was no solution.

My first tasks, then, turned out to be the building up of staff morale, the clarifying of responsibility for administrative functions within the Welfare Section, the recruiting and training of new staff members, and the improvement of working relationships with other divisions and sections. The first aim was approached by consulting the staff members on any and all matters, and giving weight to their advice. The second aim was approached by gradually relieving counselors of all but one or two administrative duties so that they might concentrate upon the writing of dependency summaries or upon supervision of other workers, according to their position.

The two Junior Counselors who resigned on the first day were, within a month, on May 16, advanced to the rank of Assistant Counselors, and therefore began supervising other staff members. Arrangements were made for taking on a new Assistant Counselor with rich supervisory and administrative experience, for the period between June 1 and September 15. One new Counseling Aide was taken on for the same period from without the Project. The problem of securing other additions to staff within the Project itself, turned out to be no problem at all, because there were so very many folk who wished to be detailed or transferred to the Welfare Section from other sections, as other activities were curtailed. This addition of staff proved a tonic to morale as well.

The fourth objective, the training of new staff, did not get well under way until early in June, but the clearing up of administrative lines did give supervisors, even in April and May, more chance to supervise adequately those staff members who were already on the job.

A conference was held in Seattle and Portland during one week early in May, which was attended by State Welfare Officials of Washington and Oregon, by Welfare Section Heads from Washington, D.C., by Field Office personnel from Seattle and Portland, and by one Assistant Counselor, Miss Ruth Carper, and I, from the Minidoka Welfare section. This proved a tonic also to the whole staff.

The fifth task, that of improving working relationships with other divisions and sections, was greatly facilitated by the fine backing given to the new Counselor by the Project Director and Assistant Project Directors. Cordial relationships on a lower level had to be accomplished gradually in the course of time. I stressed to the staff that case-work skill was demonstrated, not only in dealing with Welfare clients, but also in relationships with Project personnel and community agencies on the outside. It was emphasized that no one person's judgment is infallible, and that, in determining plans for human beings, the points of view of many people are desirable and valid. It was stressed that personalities could not safely be allowed to enter into the working out of plans for the benefit of dependent individuals, and that this danger must be guarded against in a community where

one lives with the individuals with whom one is working, and those for whom one is working, 24 hours a day. Constant exchange of information and frequent consultation with workers and supervisors of various sections was encouraged. It was necessary to get across to the whole staff that Welfare Section, with all its professional skill, was not wise enough to have the final answer or last word on any individual situation. In short, it was a process of urging staff members to confer and consult with other departments rather than to thrust certain social work principles upon them in a condescending way, without regard for timing and without consideration of the degree of information the other individuals or other sections might have about the proper handling of social problems.

Before I had been at Minidoka very many weeks, it became apparent that there was a sixth objective to be considered. That was the gaining of greater confidence for the Welfare Section from the evacuees of Minidoka Project. Faulty administration of certain activities in the past had bred some distrust.

This seemed to stem largely from pressure which had been put upon evacuee and appointed staff members for favoritism in connection with administration of housing and clothing activities. Some distrust had arisen from alleged lack of courteous consideration on the part of members of the counseling staff. Some had been bred more recently by concrete evidence that the confidence of applicants had been consciously or unconsciously violated. The physical set-up of the office, with partial partitions between small interviewing booths, accounted for some of this. Some of it was traceable to the very interesting nature of the problems presented to the Welfare Section, which enticed some of the many young, interested, evacuee employees to discuss such situations with other evacuees during or outside of office hours. Some of the distrust may have arisen from a situation which had existed in past years, according to a reliable authority, during which time some Caucasians had promoted their own interests by stirring up evacuee groups against other Caucasians.

Whatever the cause, I sought to overcome this feeling, first of all, by determing actual instances which led to actual distrust. Evacuee staff members as well as appointed staff members were urged not to discuss case records or case situations at any time outside of office hours, and to discuss them only with staff members within office hours. Questions about situations were to be referred to the actual worker handling the case or to the Counselor, whether the question came from evacuees or appointed personnel. The greatest single aid to combating this feeling was the addition of new counseling staff in late May and early June, who had the almost complete confidence of the evacuee community. They had lived in the Project almost since the beginning, and had demonstrated their real interest in evacuees themselves by taking a great part in their activities. The Acting Assistant Project Director in Charge of Community Management and I made an effort to discuss these problems with evacuee leaders in Community Council or elsewhere. The Community Analyst, the Priest, and members of our own staff who had been most successful in dealing with Japanese people, were asked to talk to the staff and help to alleviate this problem. An attempt was made by me to promote evacuee advisory committees. Most telling of all, in the end, were personal contacts by individual staff members with evacuees, in their day-by-day handling of case situations, or simple encounters. The value of these personal contacts were stressed repeatedly in staff meetings. Other tasks which developed from time to time, were minor in comparison with these six outstanding ones.

In summary, the first month of this period was devoted to getting acquainted with procedure, with counseling staff, with other departments, and with working relationships with outside social agencies. Improvement of staff morale was important during this month, and in lesser degree thereafter. At the same time, the realigning of administrative funotions within the welfare group kept pace with other efforts. In late May, the recruiting of new staff was paramount. In June, the training of staff and the process of learning how to carry out the new temporary assistance program absorbed a great portion of the time of all staff members; but there was still some leisure, or at least some over-time, to be used in summary writing in connection with many applications of unattached minors to go to other localities. July and August and September were months of dependency summary writing and more dependency summary writing, interrupted constantly by numerous requests for

temporary assistance from non-dependency groups. When the pressure for scheduling of departure dates came to every resident within the Center from the middle of August on, Welfare Counselors were driven to make ever more frequent contacts with Field Offices by letter, by teletype, or by telephone so that acceptances or rejections might be speedily returned, and so that the families might have some reassurance before their departure to new homes. While many families actually did depart before acceptances were received, the fear on the part of counselors that forced relocation of dependency families might occur, materialized only in one or two instances. In both cases, approval for public assistance had been received a long time before the departure date. After the last dependency families had left the Center, on October 24, 1945, the activities of the Welfare Section were mostly "clean-up-work," unfinished business, or answering of hurry-up requests for information from Field Offices about families who had not applied and often had never been known to the Welfare Section before they left the Center.

Organization

Relocation Division and Welfare Section might have been combined at the first of the year if there had been certainty that the Welfare Section Head would have been given as much backing in the handling of her part of the work as was given to me when I arrived.

It would have been important, of course, to find a head or co-ordinator for the combined division with sufficient ability and experience to handle the job effectively.

Personnel

A request was put in for at least two more Counselors, possibly three, in the middle of the summer to fill unused positions so that when the three students who were scheduled to leave the staff, finally should make their departure in September, there would be people with some experience in the work to carry on without a break. This plan would have given extra personnel at the time we needed it most and would have obviated the necessity of taking on new people in September who had to have much training and supervision. It is true we did use these new people to advantage by letting them handle merely temporary assistance applications, but they required much more oversight than would have been necessary had two or three new personnel been taken on a little earlier when we had three supervisors to help train them. This handicapped us most when the five Outpost Offices were opened. We did not have enough dependency summary workers and enough resettlement assistance workers to man each office. Three of these very green workers had to be put in Outpost Offices to handle resettlement assistance when they knew almost nothing about it. They took applications from families obviously ineligible, and were necessarily slow in working up all their cases.

When it was clear that all but one of the evacuee help would be relocated by the end of September, a request was put in for appointed personnel to learn the file room job, which was one of our heaviest clerical tasks and one which required training. No workers were given us to learn the job before the two evacuees left, who had been handling the work in the file room. It was necessary to put two workers in there who, we knew, could not stay there permanently, so it was really lost motion and lost time to train them for the job. When new workers were finally sent us, they also had to be trained and made familiar with the very varied tasks in the file room. All this process slowed up our work a very great deal because the files are in constant use both for folders, the basic family cards, and the index cards. Certainly this slowed up record clearance plans as well, and probably slowed up the record clearance program of other sections, too.

Office Facilities

Welfare Section might well have had two barracks instead of one if this could have been arranged. I believe the combination Relocation-Welfare Outpost Offices should have been opened considerably earlier, if at all,

rather than in September when Welfare Counselors had organized their work excellently, and were turning out a record number of summaries. The adjustment to a new system at that point was bound to slow up the workers — and did do just that in the production of summaries. At an earlier period, the change could have been arranged without so much disruption.

Standards of the Welfare Program

If possible, the temporary assistance program should have been handled in the counties through a well-controlled program under county welfare agencies or under W.R.A. Field Offices. Then the help given to the families relocating would have been better geared to their actual needs in particular communities. If that were not possible, the program might have been less rigid within the Centers and more generous.

There should have been more funds for meeting clothing needs in these final days. Possibly the clothing allowance program should have been more generous in earlier days.

I believe some funds should have been allocated to the hospital or to Welfare Section to fill the needs for dentures, for glasses, and for emergency operations which had been definitely recommended by the Health Section as immediate needs. Dentures and glasses were particular problems. Evacuees had been examined and found in real need; then months later, the needs had not been met. When relocation plans were in the making, they asked for permission to keep some of their resources to meet these needs or asked for grants for the same purpose. Welfare Section could help out in some instances, but not in all.

In connection with relocation counseling, there should have been more visiting back and forth between supervisors of Relocation and Welfare departments. The Counselor made it a point to go over to Relocation office every day for a short period to offer the utmost in cooperation, but became discouraged when the desire for exchange of information and of ideas did not seem to be reciprocated, and when supervisors there did not seem so eager to contact our supervisors to get the facts upon cases which came up in their own division.

It is too bad that the child welfare committee was abandoned.

All the welfare services would have been more effectual if more evacuee advisory committees could have been organized for consultation about evacuee customs, attitudes, etcetera, and to help work out the solution in certain individual cases.

Relationships With Other Sections and Divisions

Even in this last period, or especially in this period, there should have been far more consultations with the Community Analyst and the Reports Officer. There should have been almost daily contacts with the Community Analyst on various subjects. Unless my conception of the Community Analyst's job is in error, it seems to me that from the beginning there should have been free exchange of information, even if by a go-between, so that the Welfare Section might have the benefit of general information at least, in the possession of the Community Analyst and so that both the Community Analyst and Welfare Section might endeavor to draw the administration and the evacuee population closer together.

As for the Reports Division, it seems to me that the one evacuee leader's comment is a telling one: namely, that far more information about Welfare services and the work of Welfare organizations on the outside, could have been transmitted to each individual family of the Project, somewhat earlier in the game, through hand-bills or pamphlets translated into Japanese.

I would like to add also that I feel the Welfare Section was kept pretty much out of touch with what was going on in connection with scheduling of departures during the final weeks. The Welfare Counselor was not at cabinet meetings and was seldom consulted on plans for forced evictions, etcetera. It does seem to me that

when Mess Halls were to be closed and utilities were to be cut off, Welfare Counselors might have been used to notify individual families, particularly if they were receiving no individual notice from any other workers on the Project. Written notices are often ignored or over-looked, so that a personal notice of such a drastic action does seem to be advisable. Likewise, I believe the Counselors could have been used to advantage in personal interviews before any forced evictions took place.

Relationships With Evacuee Groups

This subject has been touched on two or three times above. Certainly the relationship could have been stimulated a great deal by using evacuee committees and by better publicity methods.

I also think some arrangement should have been made to have one of our Counselors at the railroad station each day during the last weeks when so many evacuees were leaving the Project. We did arrange to have one there each day during the last week or ten days, but this should have been initiated much sooner, and was suggested earlier by our Section

Closing Operations of the Section

My only comment is that there was far too much responsibility to be handled by one supervisor in the last weeks before closing. It is true there were two supervisors until one week before the closure date, but one was so busy getting ready to leave the Project that she could be of little help in the office during very strenuous days. Perhaps the need was greater in Minidoka than other Projects for two supervisors, because we had so many summaries going to the field in the last two months and therefore, more acceptances being received and more final planning to be done. By a supreme effort, one Counselor could handle the supervision of workers and their cases, but it left her no time for report writing and other tasks which were to be completed at that time, and necessitated her remaining for much longer after the closing date.

In this connection, I believe that some notice should have come to the Center as to just what sorts of problems could be handled by Welfare Section after the closure date. We had several requests for summaries from Field Offices when persons who had never been known to us as potentially dependent people, relocated and then came to the Field Offices asking for help. Quite a few were not even in their own states of legal residence. It was difficult to find information about these families when the records in all sections were in the process of destruction or record clearance. Requests also came in for furniture grants when evacuees found their belongings had been destroyed or decided that they wished to take unfurnished instead of furnished houses, on the outside. We handled these situations as best we could, but a statement from National Headquarters as to just how long and under what circumstances we should try to provide information and services, would have been helpful.

Constance B. Kimmerling, Counselor
November 15, 1945.