

Welfare For Children: One Santa Cruz Case

(Sixth of a series)

By WALLY TRABING

More than \$3 million in welfare were spent last year helping to support children whose fathers are absent because of divorce or abandonment.

There are close to 3000 of these cases in Santa Cruz County, many of them seemingly hopelessly entangled in human misery.

A mild case concerns Mrs. Amy Foster (not her real name) who lives in the City of Santa Cruz.

She is 24 and has two children, aged 2 and She lives in a drab, two-bedroom apartment paying \$125 a month, but will be moving into a better one at \$135.

The Fosters arrived in Santa Cruz a year and a half ago. They had been married four-and-a-half years. She met her husband when he was in the Army.

He had nearly two years of college. She is a high school graduate with a "B-plus" average and had been accepted for nurses training. Marriage put an end to those plans.

"Our second child died," said Amy, "and rather than this drawing us closer together, we drifted apart."

She had worked as a cashier and a waitress and as a baby sitter.

"I'd bring home \$150 a month from baby sitting and he'd spend it on his car," she complained.

The marriage gradually fell apart and at one point her husband announced that he didn't want to be married—"didn't want the responsibility," she said, and so he moved out.

"He always had to have security. We both came from domineering parents, but he didn't like responsibility. I had to manage the budget for the house."

He walked out nine months ago, and is now going to night school to improve his earning power.

Mrs. Foster said he had paid support for a time of about \$200 a month.

For awhile he paid the rent, groceries and utilities and continued to pay off other bills.

"But then it fell off. I was making \$10 to \$15 a month baby sitting and sewing, but I haven't really worked in four years and with the children I wasn't making it.

"What little I made extra

went for special things for the kids.

"Some neighbors of mine encouraged me to go on welfare. We were eating mostly beans and macaroni. A pound of meat had to last three main meals."

In this welfare category, there is no limit to what a mother can earn beyond her welfare check. In fact, the agency encourages a mother to earn as much as she can, the idea being that it allows her to gradually become self-supporting.

In some cases this becomes controversial, for a mother on welfare may be earning more than another mother or family struggling without it.

The vast majority, of course, do not reach this plateau.

And for the most part any significant extra income a mother may earn is adjusted to the welfare grant, and the grant is reduced, according to the number of children and need.

"I applied for welfare in November of 1970 and received my first grant Dec. 18.

"It came to \$170. My husband was sending me \$125 at the time and this came to a total of \$295.

"Then this January he told me that he was to be laid off work, but had been able to keep his job at \$100 less a month and said he could only send me \$90 a month."

Divorce papers were filed in February. She asked Legal Aid to set child support at \$110 and this was granted.

Since April, she said he has paid regularly this amount.

Her total income with her husband's allotment comes to \$276 a month now.

Mrs. Foster is also eligible for surplus foods and makes use of it, receiving beans, rice, powdered milk and eggs, oatmeal, cornmeal and canned meats such as pork, spam, boned chicken and turkey.

She is also eligible for Medi-Cal.

Before welfare she remembered that when her daughter was ill with mumps, she had to save pennies to buy pain killer.

There seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel for Mrs. Foster.

She is moving to an apartment which has grass around the building. The present place is grassless and treeless and she

told of taking her child to a park where the girl expressed fright at so much greenery.

She plans to enroll at Cabrillo to study accounting.

"I hope to eventually do bookwork at home so that I can be with the children.

"The plan is to take morning classes, spend afternoons with the kids and study at night," she said.

Welfare will pay for a baby sitter and about \$50 toward the purchase of a car if she decided to get one.

"My problem is the down payment. I got the new apartment to be close to the college and I think I will get around by bicycle."

She has about \$5 left over at the end of the month, not budgeted for specific expenses.

Mrs. Foster said that her mother, who lives back east, is also on welfare.

"My mother was divorced when I was 17. She left my father," she said.

"I was reluctant to go on welfare at first. I am embarrassed sometimes, especially when I try to get credit at a store.

"One store turned me down. But it gets me by if I juggle the money.

"I'll be glad to get off. It will be as soon as possible.

Tomorrow: Bull session with welfare workers.

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