

Child abuse — too many tragedies

By CAROLYN BLOSSER
Special to The Battalion

Last year in Texas 101 children died as a result of child abuse. This statistic, perhaps the most startling reported by the Brazos County Department of Human Resources, confirms the fear the child abuse and neglect is a serious problem in Texas.

The Department of Human Resources, a division of the Texas Department of Public Welfare, also reported the following:

—In Texas during 1977 there were 162,000 cases of children reported as needing protection.

—Of these, 142,560 were suspected of being abused and neglected.

The Department of Human Resources usually receives between 20 and 25 complaints of children in need of supervision each month. Most reports come from relatives and neighbors of the children, not all of whom are necessarily abused. . . Pat Arbuckle, child placement worker.

—Of these children, 8,700 were placed in permanent adoptive homes.

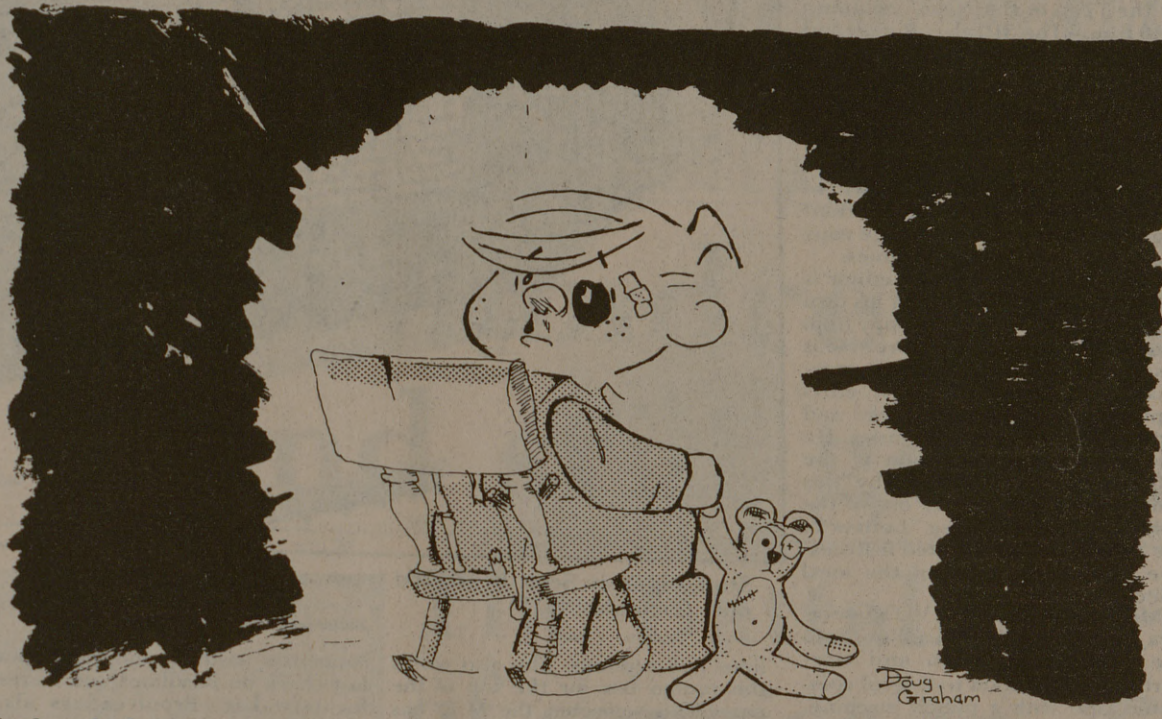
As far as can be determined, no deaths occurred last year in Brazos County as a result of child abuse, said Pat Arbuckle, one of the county's five child placement workers.

Except under severe circumstances, police do not investigate allegations of abuse or neglect, she said. Any reports are referred to the Department of Human Resources.

Arbuckle said the Department usually receives between 20 and 25 complaints of children in need of supervision each month. Most reports come from relatives and neighbors of the children, not all of whom are necessarily abused, she said.

"Most of the families we're dealing with do not harshly abuse their children," she said. "Most of the children are neglected or minimally abused."

She said most child abuse and neglect results from a lack of knowledge of parenting skills, lack of money for proper medical care, or lack of supervision because both parents work. Many families cannot afford to pay for day care, she said. Stress and alcohol also frequently



lead to child abuse, Arbuckle said. Sometimes, however, the problem is a philosophical one.

"Some parents believe harsh physical discipline is the best way to bring up a child," she said.

When a complaint is received, the case worker must first decide if it is an emergency situation that needs immediate action, Arbuckle explained. The worker tries to find a relative or responsible neighbor to provide supervision for the child. If that can't be found, the children's shelter is the next consideration.

The only children's protective shelter in Brazos County is operated by Twin City Mission Inc. in Bryan. Children who are picked up by the Department of Human Resources are sent to this shelter, which is run by the Rev. and Mrs. Warren Barnes. Here the children are evaluated to find proper care, and are usually placed in foster homes.

Twin City Mission's shelter can hold only 13 children at one time and they can stay no longer than 30 days, Barnes said. Last year 38 children were placed in the shelter. Since Sept. 1, it has housed 15 children.

The shelter houses children from the seven counties in Region 6: Brazos, Leon, Washington, Grimes,

Madison, Burleson and Robertson. The child may range in age from infancy to 17, but Barnes said the majority placed in the shelter are teenagers.

Barnes said some of the children placed in the shelter have suffered

Some of the children placed in the shelter have suffered from malnutrition as a result of neglect, some have been physically abused, and others have been sexually molested by fathers and stepfathers. . . Rev. Warren Barnes

from malnutrition as a result of neglect, some have been physically abused, and others have been sexually molested by fathers and stepfathers.

However, it is the emotional trauma, not the physical abuse, that is most difficult to remedy, Barnes said. Because of this many of the children have trouble staying in their foster homes, he said.

For example, two brother, 8 and 10, were placed in the shelter after

being picked up for passing bad checks. One 16-year-old who has been sexually molested by her stepfather is back in the shelter after being in and out of three foster homes.

The Twin City Mission shelter is funded partially by the Department of Human Resources and partially by private donations. Barnes said the government funding of \$2,400 a month is soon to be cut back to \$1,400 a month. He said this will force the shelter to rely almost completely on private donations.

After taking a child out of his home, the Department of Human Resources acts as a temporary managing conservator, Arbuckle said. The Department has custody of the kids while the parents go through counseling until it's felt the children can return to their homes.

Brazos County has not state or community supported counseling service for parents, such as Parents Anonymous. The Bluebonnet Psychiatric Center does offer private counseling, but many parents can't afford the fee, Arbuckle said.

She said that the Department of Human Resources only has time for counseling on a very limited basis.

"We don't have the time to give any therapeutic counseling," Arbuckle said. "We do try to teach parenting skills and serve as a sounding board for the parents."

"We have become an urban community, but we still have rural resources," she added. "Urban problems are here, but the help is not."

A one-hour counseling session at the Bluebonnet Psychiatric Center costs \$35 if it's with a social worker, and \$45 if with a psychologist, said Felice Klein, director of social services at the Center.

She said the fees are scaled for income. Patients pay only a percentage of the fee, and the Brazos Valley Mental Health and Mental Retardation Center pays the rest.

Klein said the Center's counseling focuses not so much on the abuse itself, but rather on symptoms of deeper problems.

"Abuse is not an isolated thing by itself," she said. "Parents usually feel other stresses and tensions. When we find a way to deal with the multiple problems of life, the abuse takes care of itself."

"Abuse is usually impulsive," Klein added. "I think all of us take our frustrations out on our families at times. The parents don't intend to hurt the child. They feel extremely guilty and sorry for it. We try to help the parents to gain some impulse control."

Parents Anonymous is a national self-help organization for parents who have a tendency to abuse their children. It was established in 1970 under the original name of "Mothers Anonymous" by Jolly K., a 29-year-old mother who herself was a child abuser. Currently there are more than 90 Parents Anonymous chapters in the United States and Canada.

Parents Anonymous describes itself as a "crisis intervention program whose primary objective is to help prevent damaging relationships between parents and their children."

Parents Anonymous offers its members two basic forms of help: 1) weekly group meeting at which par-

ents troubled about "losing their cool with their children" can share experiences and feelings and learn to support as well as challenge each other; and 2) personal contact among members during periods of crisis.

The nearest Parents Anonymous chapter is located in Houston. A toll-free number for Parents Anonymous is California is 800-421-1353.

According to "Child Abuse and Neglect: Legislation, Reporting and Prevention, Texas law mandates any person who has reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect to report to the county welfare unit (Department of Human Resources), or any local or state law enforcement agency. However, there are no penalties for failure to report.

The central registry is the Texas

Department of Public Welfare in Austin.

In Austin there is a 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline (800-252-5400). A hotline spokesman said they receive about 1,200 calls each month. He estimated that between 30 and 40 percent of the calls report child abuse and neglect.

Receiving calls 24 hours a day is the most important aspect of the hotline, the spokesman said. In emergency situations during the middle of the night the hotline can contact welfare workers at home to help an abused child who has been admitted to a hospital or taken to a police station.

The spokesman said most of the calls come from neighbors and relatives of the suspected abused child. The hotline then refers the calls to the child welfare agency in the county where the call originates.



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Abused children find home in local shelter

By CAROLYN BLOSSER
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Wednesday afternoon. The back-porch screen door of the two-story, wooden-frame house bangs shut. A young, blonde-haired girl in a red jumpsuit and sandals enters the den. She has big brown eyes and a smooth, fair complexion.

Jane (not her real name) looks like any typical 8-year-old schoolgirl. But there is one difference — she is an abused child. She and her 8-year-old sister, who is not abused, are staying at the Twin City Mission children's shelter in Bryan while they wait for placement in a foster home.

Kathryn Barnes, who along with her husband runs the shelter, knows Jane's background well.

"She's been orally molested by her stepfather and uncle since she was 5 years old. Her parents are alcoholics. Her mother is now drying out. Jane goes upstairs to put up her books. Sitting on top of the yellow chest of drawers in her room is a small, framed picture of her mother. On the wall above her bed is a prayer:

"Now I wake to see the light
As God has kept me through the night,
And now I lift my voice to pray
That He will keep me through the day."

"When she first came here she had two black eyes. Her body was black and blue all over. She's been undergoing psychiatric treatment." Jane returns to the den and sits on the couch. Playing on the floor amid scattered toys are two sisters, 10 months and 2 years old. Their parents are separated and the children are staying at the shelter until their mother finds a job.

Jane picks up the older child and sets her in her lap. She bounces the girl up and down on her knees while gently patting her back. The younger sister wets her pants and Jane appeals to Mrs. Barnes to let her change the diapers.

"She's too grown up. She doesn't know how to play. She gets emotionally upset and then hysterical when things don't go her way. You have to handle her with kid gloves."

Jane picks up the baby and carries her into the adjoining bedroom. She carefully lays her down on the bed and begins changing her diapers.

"One night she wanted to wash her hair with an empty bottle of trial shampoo that had been thrown away. She became very upset and started crying when she couldn't use it. My husband picked her up out of the tub, wrapped her in a towel, sat her down on the bed and talked with her for an hour. She came down later just as happy as a lark."

"I think a lot of it was anxiety. She wanted that trial bottle of shampoo,

but anything would have set it off. One minute she'd be that way and the next minute she'd be perfectly calm."

A few minutes later the screen door bangs shut again. Jane's sister is home from school. The girls eat some vanilla pudding for their afternoon snack. Jane tells her sister, "Did you know that if you eat vanilla pudding, you'll grow up and marry a handsome prince?"

"She needs somebody she feels secure with — somebody to sit down and love her and talk to her. One afternoon she climbed in the chair with me and we slept there all afternoon."

Pouring rain prevents the children from playing on the swing set or in the playhouse in the backyard. Instead, the girls settle in front of the television set in the den.

"Mrs. Barnes, may I change the channel please?" Jane asks. "I don't like 'Sesame Street.' They only teach a bunch of different letters and stuff like that. I know all of that already."

She flips the channel and stops. Her face lights up.

"Oh, I love 'Leave It to Beaver.' This is so funny."

Mrs. Barnes is optimistic that Jane can lead a normal, well-adjusted life in the future.

"If she gets in the right environment and stays in it, I think she'll eventually outgrow her emotional problems. If people understand that those aren't temper tantrums, but rather the effects of emotional trauma, I think she'll be O.K. But it's going to take a long, long time."

Jane and her sister were recently placed in a foster home together. They are staying there indefinitely.

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JESUS
A MYTH? A REAL HISTORICAL FIGURE?
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Either Jesus Christ is the Son of God or He is not. There is no middle ground. Eventually every person has to make a decision regarding Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God, and if a person arrives at that conclusion, then there is a heaven to be gained and an eternal hell to be avoided. On the other hand, if Jesus Christ is not the Son of God, there are a lot of people in the world who are sincerely deluded. Christianity becomes little more than just another "religious system" among many, and the folks who are "playing" Christian have little reason to ask that others around them investigate the Christian system.

What is the answer? A neutral position is impossible, since any attempt to remain neutral becomes automatically synonymous with unbelief. Is Jesus the Son of God, or isn't He? Some say yes. Some say no. If you're a person who has been wondering about what to do with Jesus Christ; if you are a person who has considered becoming a Christian; if you're a person who is violently opposed to Christianity; if you're a person who would just like to see evidences for and against Jesus' Sonship presented objectively — then perhaps this is for you.

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