

Local

Abused children have local help

Agencies keep trying to find, help mistreated youngsters

By BETH YOUNG
Battalion Reporter

A little girl was in her mother's way. The mother stuck her under a shower of scalding water.

A little boy kept missing the toilet seat. His parents got a chain and hung him from the ceiling.

Another child wouldn't get out of the kitchen. He had a pot of hot grease thrown on him.

All true-to-life cases of child abuse, a more commonplace problem than most care to admit.

Jerry J. Foster, pediatrician and chief of the pediatric clinic at Wilford Hall at Lackland Air Force Base, describes child abuse as the mistreatment or neglect of a child by parents or others resulting in injury to the child.

In 1977, the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare estimated that 1 million children are abused or neglected annually, with some 2,000 dying.

Brazos County has its share of child abuse cases as well. Glynda Franklin, child placement worker for the Department of Human Resources in Bryan, said each worker at DHR has between 30 and 40 abused child cases, with about 275 total cases in August 1980. According to Franklin, the DHR is the main service center for child abuse in the Brazos Valley.

"Usually we get the calls or referrals directly or through the hotline in Austin," she said. "Police, sheriffs, local doctors, neighbors, relatives or any concerned citizen in the community will call and report child abuse." According to the Child Abuse Fact Sheet from the Texas Department of Public Welfare, Texas law makes it a misdemeanor to report child abuse.

"People talk and you find things out," Franklin said. "Your best friend might not be your best friend when it come to your kids."

When someone calls to report

abuse, Franklin said she tries to pinpoint all she can.

"We ask what they're concerned about and why they called," she said. "It could be because of an argument or out of spite. We try to get as many names of witnesses as we can to determine the validity of the report."

Franklin said guardians often deny any child abuse so all callers must name three other persons who see the living conditions and are familiar with the family.

The varying degrees of physical (whipping, drowning, starving, beating, shocking), sexual (castration, molestation) and emotional (stemming from the other two) abuse determine how the DHR decides how to handle cases.

"If the situation is life-endangering, we check on it within 24 hours," explained Franklin. "In other cases, depending on the severity, we take from seven to 30 days to try and solve the problem."

Even though most reports of abuse come to DHR, a number of places in Bryan and College Station such as churches, the Twin City Mission, Brazos Valley Mental Health-Retardation Center, Bridge House, police departments and the child abuse hotline all investigate complaints.

"Counseling gets to the root of the problem," Franklin said. "Most counseling is with the parents because that's where the problem originates, and it helps the kids too."

"Other ways we help are by setting up day care for the younger children, getting doctor's help for the seriously hurt or sexually abused and arranging for a possible stay in a foster home."

Franklin said that parents don't always realize that they are abusing their children.

"One man actually thought he should take another wife — his daughter," she explained. "It took five years in prison for him to see that he was wrong."

Children in Danger, another pamphlet the Texas Department of Public Welfare distributes, said that child abusers are often people who were abused as children.

"Child abuse occurs in every racial, social and economic background," Franklin said. "They are just people with problems. There is no typical child or typical parent."

Sue McBeth, who works in the infant department at the mental

health and retardation center, said that the mental health staff at MH-MR does most of the counseling of older children and parents. They usually try to give the parent some

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kind of training at home and instruct them on daily scheduling so that they can spend more time with their kids.

"We help them get a more positive relationship with the child and steer them away from the negative thoughts they might have," she said.

Franklin added that cases of this type usually involve neglect on behalf of the parents.

Joan Sebesta from Twin City Mission said DHR often sends children to Twin City Mission for lodging. DHR has six beds reserved for referrals. Sebesta said that the beds are filled about three-fourths of the year.

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According to Foster, the goal of all

people involved in child abuse is to provide the best possible circumstances for the child to develop normally.

According to the Social Services Handbook, a set of bylaws for DHR, the department's goal is to protect children from harm by their parents or others responsible for their care.

Success motivates the abuse workers. As Franklin said, "I have had a lot of successes, or I wouldn't still be here."

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