

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

THE RECREATIONAL NEEDS AND WISHES OF RESIDENTS OF  
HOUSING PROJECTS IN METROPOLITAN WINNIPEG

A study of the recreational needs and wishes of elderly people resident in the Canadian Legion Memorial Housing Foundation (Manitoba Branch), in the Cosmopolitan Club Homes, in Anatole Park Development and in St. Andrews United Church Senior Citizens Housing Project.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE RECREATIONAL NEEDS AND WISHES OF RESIDENTS OF HOUSING PROJECTS FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

This study took place in Winnipeg, Manitoba, between October, 1961 and May, 1962. It was focussed on the recreational needs and wishes of older people living in housing projects for senior citizens. The residents of four housing projects served as the population from which a sample of 111 people was chosen and interviewed in order to collect the necessary data.

The objective of the study was to determine if the residents needed additional facilities and services to meet more adequately their leisure time needs and wishes. To ascertain this, the areas pertaining to personal characteristics, use of time including present participation in recreational activities, use of recreational facilities and problems restricting such use, and wishes for more or different types of recreational facilities and services, were studied.

It was concluded that the residents of the housing projects did have a desire and a need for additional recreational facilities and services, particularly for those that would permit them to associate with other people to a greater extent.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This is the report of a research study which dealt with the recreational needs and wishes of old people living in selected housing projects in Metropolitan Winnipeg. The School of Social Work of the University of Manitoba saw the field of the aged as one in which there were problems in need of study, and decided that the students registered in the second year of the Social Work program study one of these as a partial requirement for the degree of Master of Social Work. The general question to be studied, one aspect of which is covered in this report, was worded as follows: "What kind of staffing, and additional or supporting services and projects would make housing and services for old people more adequate to meet their wishes and needs?" It should be noted that the focus was to be on the old people's wishes and feelings about what they needed.

The basic problem which stimulated this study on recreational needs and wishes of old people is that in an urban, industrialized community they are required to retire from work at a definite age. They are then faced with the necessity of developing meaningful activities to fill the time that becomes available to them. Society has failed to provide them with meaningful roles, resulting in old age becoming merely a waiting period when potentially productive

years must be spent in idleness and stagnation.

That there is an increasing concern and recognition of these problems on the part of the community is indicated by the rapid developments in facilities such as day centres, "golden-age" clubs, special housing projects, nursing homes, geriatric centres in hospitals, and the like. If these new facilities and services are to meet the needs of old people there must be an awareness of what the old people themselves feel would contribute to their greater enjoyment of life. Research is necessary to determine what kinds of facilities, staffing and additional services would serve to meet the personal needs and wishes of old people more adequately.

It is apparent that technological improvements, such as household appliances, have made it possible for old people to maintain an independent living status for a longer period of time. At the same time the number of household tasks which must be performed have been reduced. This in turn further increases the amount of leisure time available. Whereas in a rural culture use can be made of an older person's knowledge and experience, this is no longer the case where a family lives in an urban centre where the job of the family head takes him away from his home. This means that the aging parent has no responsibilities or duties which he can perform for the larger family, adding up to a problem of what to do with an increased amount of leisure time. Furthermore, few have the formal education which might otherwise provide them with satisfying interests and hobbies.

All of these factors combine to create a serious problem for the older person. Lack of satisfying activity can produce frustration or apathy. Carried to extremes, it can lead to premature physical and mental deterioration and to such personality changes as withdrawal, irritability, submission or paranoid tendencies. Social work is concerned with preventing such deterioration from taking place and in helping the aging individual to establish an integrity of personality that will enable him to combat the despair, disgust and fear of death that so frequently is the companion of old age.<sup>1</sup>

A number of writers in the field of the social sciences have emphasized the value of leisure time activity as a means of preventing mental and physical deterioration. Levine states emphatically that, "In various studies made of older people it was always found that those who were active and had enough to do to fill their leisure hours were happier and better adjusted than those who did not."<sup>2</sup> Barron corroborates this statement by saying, "Lack of something to do, especially with others, is one of the most serious problems the aged face in urban communities, . . . many still want to lead

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<sup>1</sup>Erik H. Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle. New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1959, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup>Harry A. Levine, "Community Programs for the Elderly", Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences. Vol. 279, January, 1952, p. 168.

constructive, meaningful lives. They want their activity to be stimulating, informative, even creative."<sup>1</sup>

The Committee on Services for the Aged of the Community Planning Council of Winnipeg studied the problems of Winnipeg's older citizens in 1956. Their report, "Age and Opportunity", suggests that the particular needs of the aged in regard to recreation be studied. The present project was an attempt to study one aspect of those needs, namely the recreational needs of those old people who reside in housing projects.

Leisure time activities, as used in this report, will include any activity which can not be described as work. It is the intention of this research to examine only those needs and wishes of old people which fall within the area of recreation, which will be understood to exclude all activity not pleasurable to the participant.

The object of the study was to discover in which activities the residents of the housing projects participated with the view to finding out which activities were most popular and thus most suitable to the particular age or the particular physical or mental ability of the people studied. A further important part of the study was to look at the desires of the old people in the area of recreation, as

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<sup>1</sup>Milton F. Barron, The Aging American. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1961, p. 50.

determined from the answers they gave to questions around this matter. No value judgment was to be placed on the various types of activities, with the emphasis being on what they did, rather than on why they did certain things and on what they would like to do, rather than on why they would like to engage in certain other activities.

In order to narrow the field still further, the study was restricted to old people living in special housing projects, designed and created for the use of old people. There have been a number of these built in Greater Winnipeg in the past few years, and more are being planned. It was felt that they seemed to present certain peculiar problems around the provision of adequate recreation facilities, and it was hoped that the findings of this study would have useful application to existing and future housing projects. Our main concern was whether old people in these housing projects felt a need for additional facilities and services for recreation.

One of the recommendations of the White House Conference on Aging states:

It is recommended that: Existing public and private facilities be made more available for the leisure activities of the aged and that, where necessary and practicable, these facilities be adapted for the special needs of senior citizens.

Communities be encouraged to provide wherever necessary and feasible, special facilities for exclusive use of older citizens.

Special needs of the aged be considered in the planning and construction of all future private and public facilities for recreation.

Suitable legislation be enacted to insure that licensing requirements for multiple living arrangements for older people provide indoor and outdoor recreation facilities.<sup>1</sup>

From the above we developed the hypothesis that old people living in housing projects needed additional recreational services and facilities to meet adequately their leisure time needs and wishes. There were certain questions that had to be answered to test this hypothesis. These were:

1. What are the personal characteristics of the residents of the four housing projects?
2. What do the residents do in their leisure time?
3. What facilities do they now use?
4. What are the problems which affect the use of these facilities?
5. What are their needs and wishes concerning use of leisure time?
6. Do respondents wish to have further recreational facilities provided?

There are several terms used frequently throughout this report, which, for purposes of clarification will be defined here.

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<sup>1</sup>The Nation and Its Older People: Report of the White House Conference on Aging. U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington 25, D.C., January, 1961, p. 232.

Old People: for the purposes of this study will refer to male and female residents of one of the four housing projects. In almost all cases, they are ambulatory and self-reliant, since the very nature of the housing in which they live requires this.

Housing Projects: are housing developments containing low rental self-contained housing units designed specifically to meet the needs of independent old people in the low income bracket.

Services: are facilities or commodities required or demanded for use of leisure time.

Leisure: is a condition of having one's time free from the demands of work or duty.

Recreation: is any wholesome free time activity chosen voluntarily, that provides satisfaction through participation. An interested spectator is considered to be a participant. Excluded from the study is any activity engaged in for pay or any activity which is not in itself pleasurable to the participant.

Needs: those things which are basically necessary for the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of an individual.

Wishes: distinct conscious mental inclination towards the doing, obtaining, attaining, of something.

The testing of the hypothesis required that information be obtained directly from residents of housing projects. Therefore, an interview schedule, or questionnaire, composed of questions designed to provide the needed information, was drawn up and presented to residents of the following four projects: Anatole Park Development, Canadian

Legion Memorial Gardens (Manitoba Branch), St. Andrews United Church Senior Citizens Housing Project and Cosmopolitan Club Homes. To facilitate the interviewing, a sample of the residents was chosen, and interviewed between January 7th, 1962 and March 7th, 1962.

The following kinds of data were collected: personal characteristics including age, sex, marital status, income, physical disability, amount of time spent in employment and household tasks, use of leisure time facilities, transportation problems, kind and degree of recreational participation, and wishes concerning recreation. All this information represented factors which were felt to have a direct influence upon what use was made of leisure time, what recreational needs and wishes existed, and what additional services and facilities were required to meet those needs and wishes.

The method adopted, and the nature of the material collected, imposed certain limitations upon the research. The time at which it was conducted, winter, meant that the information would likely tend to be more applicable to that season than to any other. Winter for old people is usually a time of greater hardship, enforced inactivity, and increased sickness, and the depression resulting from this situation may have affected the responses. The time available for the completion of the study prohibited taking into consideration many factors that might influence recreational needs and wishes, such as: cultural background, occupation prior to retirement, income prior to retirement, and state of health other than existing physical disabilities. It was found difficult to frame questions on needs and

wishes that would elicit meaningful responses. Needs and wishes are difficult to determine in any case, because people are frequently not consciously aware of them or of ways in which they can be satisfied. Further, response to questions about needs and wishes required the time for forethought that could not be provided in a single interview. This might have allayed some of their suspicion and allowed them some time to reflect on their needs and wishes. In addition, in some cases, there seemed to be a reluctance to respond in any way that could be construed as being critical of the housing project or its management.

The data collected was tabulated in a way calculated to facilitate relating the recreational activities of old people and the facilities they used to the time they had available, to problems preventing their use of facilities, and to their wishes concerning recreational use of leisure time. Testing of the hypothesis depended upon how well the recreational needs and wishes of the residents were being met. Because of differences between the various housing projects, data was recorded separately for each one.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND LITERATURE

In this chapter an effort is made to develop a deeper understanding of leisure time problems of old people.

Their problems do not stem only from being too old to work and having nothing to do, but also from beliefs and attitudes in the community regarding old age, which affect the lives of old people.

The importance of leisure time and recreation, especially for old people, has been more and more recognized. As will be seen, the literature on old age sheds light on these factors and helps to show the problems in a wider and more meaningful context.

Two American research studies on old age are also mentioned in this chapter because they offer material with which the present study can be compared in a meaningful way.

Aging may be defined briefly as that element in life pertaining to the passage of time. Aging is part of living. It can never be arrested without ending life. Aging is a continuing process which, beginning with the onset of a new organism, proceeds throughout the lifespan at a varying rate of change. As aging begins with conception, it involves two essentially antagonistic processes: growth or evolution, and atrophy or involution. These two phenomena take place simultaneously throughout life. An ultimate understanding of aging must wait upon such time as we comprehend fully the forces which

accelerate and/or retard growth in contrast to atrophy.<sup>1</sup>

The nature of aging is difficult to describe or measure with any degree of confidence. It is a process involving numerous inter-related elements: biological, psychological and sociological in nature. It is complicated by diseases on the one hand, and by cultural restrictions on the other. Situationally it has its onset during the forties or fifties when offspring begin to fend for themselves and more leisure time becomes available. Sociological and psychological aging advances further with retirement from work and when infirmity reduces mobility. At this time needs for useful activity and social participation assert themselves along with problems of financial security, medical care and suitable living arrangements.

The concept of aging has changed. Previously, aging was assumed to be a physical, psychological and functional deterioration beginning in middle life. Consistent with this belief, little or nothing was expected of older people, and many of them did little or nothing. The origin of this attitude was the industrialization of society, which needed young, strong bodies made available by an increasing birth rate, and urbanization leading to the two-generation

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<sup>1</sup>A. J. Carlson and E. J. Stieglitz, "Physiological Changes in Aging", Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, CCLXXIX (January, 1952), pp. 18-19.

conjugal group in which grandparents had no positive role. This again led to the separation of the adult generation and an accent on children and their care, while the grandparents' care was left to the community. Old people were set aside as no longer useful. To a degree, old people accepted the concept of limited usefulness, but they were not satisfied. There was, in fact, evidence of a good deal of dissatisfaction, bewilderment, and a feeling of insecurity in a fast-moving world that failed to provide assurance of income and opportunity for obtaining normal satisfactions and for making continuing contributions to community life.

Now the validity of earlier assumptions, and the attitudes and practices into which they led, are beginning to be questioned. A new concept which gives recognition to the positive as well as the negative aspects of maturation is more and more accepted. The positive aspect is that middle and old age can be viewed as bringing one to a new phase of life than can represent growth, maturity and social contribution. Another positive aspect is that sociological aging can be slowed down, as can biological and psychological aging. The challenge presented by the new concept of aging is to make functional citizens of the aging and place responsibility for provision of appropriate environment and services on the entire community. Acceptance of the new approach to aging means that the existing attitudes and culture are in a stage of transition.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>C. Tibbits, and H. D. Sheldon, "A Philosophy of Aging", Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, CCLXXIX (January, 1952), p. 10.

The social and psychological needs of aging may be considered in the light of this new concept of aging. Old people have needs which are common to all people. These needs are not only for adequate food, clothing, shelter and health, but also emotional security, social recognition (status), sense of worth and self respect. It is well, too, to realize that old age insults the person and that this leads to special needs. There is loss of physical attractiveness, lessening of physical health and vigor, loss of supporting persons and loss of useful and respected roles. These losses create special developmental needs for old people, such as adjustment to death of spouse, to loss of employment and reduced income, and to decrease of physical vigor; combined with a need for making satisfactory physical living arrangements and a need for affiliation with the age group of elders.

Old people have group needs which ask for social recognition, self respect and satisfactory social roles. Other group needs are the chance to earn a living, health services and social and recreational facilities, the latter being in the focus of our research project. Just as the community provides recreational facilities and leadership to meet the needs of youth, so it should meet the needs of old people with analogous facilities through municipal recreation departments, churches, schools and clubs. At a minimum, old people require meeting places, equipment for games, leadership for group recreation and instruction in arts and crafts.

Besides the group needs, old people have personal needs which should be met. These are: new friends, interests in civic and community affairs, new leisure time activities and hobbies such as travel, arts, crafts, gardening, reading, collecting and other pursuits, meeting children on a grown-up basis, and avoidance of reminiscence.

In conclusion we can say that the individual, if he wants to be happy, must find rational and practical ways of meeting his needs. No one else can do it for him. One's old age is what one makes it. But the community must carry responsibility for creating conditions that make it possible for the great majority of older people to lead an independent and emotionally satisfying life. Recreation is one aspect of the activity needs of the old person.<sup>1</sup>

### Leisure

"The best test of the quality of civilization is the quality of its leisure. Not what the citizens of a commonwealth do when they are obliged to do something by necessity, but what they do when they can do anything by choice, is the criterion of a people's life."<sup>2</sup> Leisure is such an important part of life that it is claimed

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<sup>1</sup>R. J. Havighurst, "Social and Psychological Needs of Aging", Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, CCLXXIX (January, 1952), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>I. Edman, "On American Leisure," Aging in Today's Society, eds. C. Tibbits and W. Donahue, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), p. 208.

that the worth of a nation can be determined by its leisure activities. In our society the amount of time needed for earning a livelihood has shrunk to such a small proportion of the total week that use of time free from duty or obligation has become a serious problem about which much is being written. For those in retirement the problem is much greater, because the time formerly spent in work becomes part of bulk time, interrupted only by eating and sleeping, that must be spent in some way. Success or failure in old age is mainly determined by how this time is used.<sup>1</sup>

The use of leisure time is determined by three factors: the group of which we are members and whose values we adopt, the culture into which we are born and which gives us our beliefs and attitudes, particularly toward leisure time, and the capabilities of our body and mind.<sup>2</sup> Within these limitations, use of leisure time is decided. But, whatever is chosen, it is the common consensus of all authorities that herein lies the key to successful adjustment in old age. No longer able to play the roles to which they have been accustomed, old people must find new ones in which they can give vent to self expression, ". . . and from which they can derive self-respect,

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<sup>1</sup>A. Williams, Recreation for the Aging, (New York: Association Press, 1953), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>M. Kaplan, Leisure in America, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1960), p. 5.

recognition and a sense of contribution."<sup>1</sup>

In search of these new roles, old people are turning to senior citizens' clubs, adult day centres, community centres, church clubs, and other forms of organized recreational activity. Through these means they are seeking out and learning new ways to satisfy their need for social interaction and physical and mental activity. The official statement of policy of the 1961 White House Conference on Aging states that recreation, along with work, education and religion, is one of the basic human needs.<sup>2</sup> Recreation is so important for old people because activities which formerly were peripheral now become the principal part of life. Whereas leisure constituted an escape from the demands of work or duty, it must now replace work as a stimulating and motivating force. In a successful adjustment, leisure time activities become a substitute for work.<sup>3</sup> Recreation becomes the major part of the framework upon which a meaningful life can be built. It ". . . is an extremely important aid to growing old

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<sup>1</sup>J. W. Doorn, "A Sense of Contribution", Recreation, (May, 1960), p. 197.

<sup>2</sup>U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, The Nation and Its Older People, Report on the White House Conference on Aging, (Washington, D.C., January, 1961), section 12.

<sup>3</sup>L. C. Michelon, "Value Changes in Leisure in Old Age", American Journal of Sociology, LIX, 1953-4, p. 374.

gracefully. People who do stay young despite their years do so because of an active interest that provides satisfaction through participation."<sup>1</sup>

The theory behind the importance of recreation in the life of all people, and particularly in old people for whom it is the major part of life, is well developed by S. R. Slavson in his book, "Recreation and the Total Personality".<sup>2</sup> Recreation provides a means of compensation for the loss of a meaningful place in the working world and the resultant feelings of uselessness, inadequacy, inferiority and despair. It also provides compensation for the experiences and stimuli that are denied old people to a greater degree than for younger members of the community. Through recreational activity there is a discharge of aggressive drives such as the hostility toward youth and toward the world that has passed them by, that is often experienced by old people. Any games of rivalry and competition provide an outlet for such feelings. Recreation provides an outlet for the infantile needs, expressed in collecting hobbies, that most people retain from childhood. Fiction, television, travel and other

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<sup>1</sup>F. E. Schulman, "Spotlight on Seniors", Recreation, LII, No. 5, (May, 1959), p. 181.

<sup>2</sup>S. R. Slavson, Recreation and the Total Personality, (New York: Association Press, 1948).

activities allow people to escape from the frustration, anxieties, and monotony of real life.

Association with other people satisfies social hunger and gives a feeling of belonging. Recreation is a medium through which people can relate to each other with ease and pleasure, thus contributing to the well-being and pleasure of the individual. In order to meet all these needs, recreation must be designed to include activities and skills in which the old person can succeed.<sup>1</sup> Recreational activity that is going to meet the needs of old people must have certain characteristics. It must be meaningful so that it is not a mere putting-in of time. To sustain status, self respect and energy, some of the activity must result in real contribution to the community. Since needs and skills vary greatly, activity must allow for such differences if the individual is to have a continuing interest and is going to be able to succeed well enough to win recognition from persons whose opinions he values.<sup>2</sup>

#### Relevant Studies

Two prior studies seem to have pertinence to the present study.

Personal Adjustment in Old Age.<sup>3</sup> - The authors of this research

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 9-15.

<sup>2</sup>M. L. Barron, The Aging American, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1961), p. 201.

<sup>3</sup>R. S. Cavan, E. W. Burgess, R. J. Havighurst and H. Goldhamer, Personal Adjustment in Old Age, (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1949).