

NORMAL COMMUNITY LIFE
For
OUR COMMUNITY.

What is a "community"?
What is "normal community life"?
Does our community maintain this "normal" standard?

"Community," when used in human relationships, signifies "A body of people living together under the same conditions." Used in its specific meaning, "Community" may be applied to a town, a district, a state, a nation, or to a "community of nations."

The primary meaning in "Community Service" is a group of people living in a town, city, or district, with the family as the unit of the group, and the home, the school, and the church as the fundamental institutions of the community life.

A community is formed by combining a number of family units into a group, whether a town or district group. The process of building up a community results in subdivisions of the group into industrial, commercial, educational, and other smaller groups, but all of these are members of the one community and the proper functioning of all together results in community life.

What is "normal community life"?

We can best answer this question by determining the standard of "normal" life for the different units of the community. The simplest method would be to begin with the child as the representation of the family unit and of the primary institutions, the home, the school, the church.

The child has to live 168 hours each week. This time is divided into two distinct periods, namely: conscious education or training, and undirected education or training. The normal division of these periods for a child up to twelve years of age is as follows:

1. Conscious education or training.
 - (A) In the Home:
 - Sleep, 10 hours per day--70 hours.
 - Meals, 3 hours per day--21 hours.
 - Chores, 2 hours per day--14 hours.
 - Total of-----105 hours.
 - (B) Conscious education or training through the Public Schools (combined effort of home, community, state)
5 hours per day (5 days per week)--25 hours.
 - (C) Religious education or training through the church and aided by the home and school.
Too often but one day per week----- 3 hours.
2. Undirected education or training through leisure time activities and recreation.
5 hours per day-----35 hours.
WEEK'S TOTAL -----168 hours.

Does our community measure up to normal?

Let us first determine the normality of the children of this community. How many children sleep ten hours each day off the week, or average that much? How many spend an hour at a meal--the one meeting place of the family in so many homes? How many give two hours a day to helping about the "home chores"? How many receive three hours a week of religious training in the church or Sunday Schools? Are the children of this community up to this standard?

Let us inquire into their leisure time activities. They have thirty-five hours a week, or five hours a day, when they are undirected. In this leisure time, only, they have an opportunity to do the things they want to do. When they are in school or at work or at church, they have to do certain things without choice. But during leisure time they are free to choose. If this free time is filled up with directed recreation, they will be interested, trained in team-play and in character building. If they are left to themselves, with their own initiative, the result may be mere idleness, subject to temptations to delinquency and evil habits. Too often these are the result of leisure time.

Who are more interested in this leisure time of the children than anybody else? Parents? No. Commercialized amusements are most interested in the leisure time of both young people and adults, as well as children. In so far as these are wholesome and character-building, they have a right to our leisure time. The moving picture industry, for example, offers man worth-while features and to this extent merits our support. But some do not merit our patronage, and should not be allowed to use our leisure time to their own profit.

Who should be most interested in the leisure time of the children? Parents, of course. We are all agreed on this. And yet many parents seem indifferent, and are glad to get their children out of the way as much as possible. Some even accompany their children to witness or participate in harmful leisure time amusements. A few disclaim any responsibility toward other children--not realizing that their children are members of a group whose welfare affects every child in the community. An increasing number of parents, we are glad to know, are giving serious attention to their children's leisure time. They must and will save the situation.

But the children's leisure time is the concern of the entire community and this responsibility is gaining recognition. The municipality is showing its interest through schools, libraries, art galleries, parks, playgrounds, and bathing beaches. Some municipalities are conducting neighborhood dances and supervising pool and billiard halls with immediate benefit to both children and youth. The Churches show their interest in many services of highest values. The state is taking part through normal schools, colleges, universities, and agricultural clubs. All of these and their many social, recreational and welfare agencies are seeking to discharge this obligation.

A town or district is not a one hundred per cent community, however, and cannot reach the standard of normal community life until all of the people and all the societies, the clubs, the lodges, the churches, and the municipality or district are all interested in every citizen. When this comes to pass community consciousness is born and each member will strive to bring all the group to the normal standard.

The one interest that is most common to all the community and through which this end may be attained is leisure time activities, or recreation. Some are devoted to music, some to business, but all have leisure time and all normal people are interested to see this leisure time used as an asset to the community instead of a liability. What we do when we are off duty, when we are not under conscious direction, when we are free to do the things we like best, determines what kind of people we are and also will determine the kind of community our town or district will become.

To illustrate, let us consider the "normalities" and the "abnormalities" of leisure time. What should be the by-products of leisure time? We can agree upon the following, at least, as the results which we desire to see.

"Physical Fitness," "Mental Alertness," and "Moral Straightness," or integrity of character. All of these have to do with community recreation, community drama and pageantry, community music, community art, which includes the physical environment, streets, lawns, parks, etc. These are the conscious aims of Municipal Playground Systems, of the National Physical Education Law, as well as of amateur athletic and recreation leagues.

For example, what do our children meet on their way to school, or to church, or to market? Are these the things we are glad to have? The beautiful, the orderly, the true, the noble? Remember the law--"I am a part of all I have met or seen" and that all these by-products of leisure time are resulting in education, in training, in character and in citizenship.

"How?" Through a program of community recreation in which all participate in interest, in neighborliness, in friendliness. Americanization classes find the drama and pageantry and folk dances to be graphic object lessons which the peoples of Europe are quick to grasp. The "Night Shirt Parade" of a college not only puts pep into the football team for the big game, but is an exercise in loyalty. Boy Scouts are doctors, scientists, captains of industry in the making; and the Girl Scouts and Camp Fire Girls are training for homemaking. So the results of leisure time in which all share help to bring all to the normal standard of community life.

Or, shall we allow the abnormal to take possession of the community? What are the "abnormalities" of leisure time?

They are the things which we do not want. The negative results of leisure time--truancy, delinquency, vice, crime, indulgence in those activities which make for physical unfitness, which dull the mentality, which degrade the moral sense. What, for example, will be the crop in the next generation, sown by boot-leggers? What the moral standard in boys and girls who look upon the empty saloons, the gambling dens, the brothel-scenes of this present generation's indulgence? Remember again the law -- "I am a part of all I have met or seen"--and those who look upon these abnormalities, the products of our generation's leisure time indulgences,-- must suffer the sure effect of this law.

Then what is the remedy? How can our community or any other attain the normal standard and minimize the abnormalities?

First of all, by an interested group frankly facing the facts, realizing the seriousness of the situation, and taking urgent action to make this leisure time an asset instead of a liability to the community.

The process involves:

1. A volunteer Community Council, made up of aroused, dependable, representative citizens. A free, volunteer group, not a delegated body.
2. A community program of recreation and of community development that will occupy the leisure time of children, youth, and adults.
3. Community Centers, where this Council may carry out a part of its program and draw all the people together to participate in interesting recreation and develop acquaintance, understanding, neighborliness and friendliness.
4. Parks and playgrounds where the leisure time of children and of adults can be consciously directed into wholesome and constructive recreation.

This Council would not require salaried workers or buildings or equipment, etc. It would require a small fund for incidental expenses. Such expenses could legitimately be charged to a community chest which this council could fill and apportion to the different recreational, social, and welfare agencies of the county through which they would operate.

One great and important function of such a Council would be to bring all the elements and units of the community into conscious cooperation for the common good. To coordinate all units and activities and form one great central unit, the community, and bring it into the enjoyment of normal community life. This is an aim worthy of the best citizenship, and broad enough to fill the vision of the entire community.