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HOMELESS MEN:
Summary of Activities &
Selected Materials
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I. Introduction

The following material summarizes the key activities performed by the Vera Institute under a contract with Family and Adult Services of the Department of Social Services. The contract called for Vera to analyze the care of homeless men served by the Men's Shelter, the Keener Building, and Camp LaGuardia, and to recommend changes aimed at improving the quality of service delivery at these facilities. In addition, Vera was asked to advise FAS on means of reducing the number of men reliant on these services. The period of performance included the six months from May through October 1980 at a cost not to exceed \$47,669.

A project director and a planning specialist on the Vera Institute's staff performed the majority of work under this contract. In addition, a planning intern worked on the project for ten weeks during the summer months. Vera also enlisted the services of consultants -- most significantly Mitchell/Giurgola Architects -- to handle specific tasks.

The major work products are summarized below. It is important to note, in addition to these products, the operational method adopted by the Vera Institute for work under this contract. Informed by previous work with Family and Adult Services and by familiarity (through its own projects, such as the Manhattan Bowery Project) with the central problems of delivering services to homeless men, Vera and FAS concurred that a formal evaluation of each service facility culminating in a comprehensive report and set of recommendations was not what FAS most needed. While such an approach can be helpful in some situations, it appeared to FAS and Vera that recommendations emerging from the work would be more likely to be considered feasible by staff and thus more easily implemented if administration and line staff at each facility worked together with Vera to analyze more fully the most pressing problems; to develop, explore, and evaluate various and often competing responses to these problems; and to work with facility staff to implement the chosen plan of action. Vera staff has followed this collaborative process

in most of its work at both the Men's Shelter and Camp LaGuardia.

II. Shelter Service System

The first task taken on under the contract was to explore some of the issues regarding the kind of service system which could best meet the myriad needs of homeless men in New York City. With the addition of the Keener Building on Wards Island as an auxiliary shelter, FAS was operating three major facilities: the Men's Shelter, Keener, and Camp LaGuardia. FAS thus had an opportunity to consider how each facility might -- independently and as part of a more integrated system -- serve the needs of homeless men. Accordingly, Vera staff met over the course of several weeks with most of the key FAS staff involved with shelter services, and through these meetings elicited the range of attitudes toward critical service problems and possible programmatic responses.

The summary report (see Attachment A) attempted to synthesize basic observations about the men, the characteristics and limitations of the particular facilities, the necessary services, and how these could be organized into an efficient system. The report examined two fundamental planning alternatives: an undifferentiated system and one in which each of the three facilities would serve a specialized sub-group -- alcoholic, mentally ill, aged, etc. -- of the homeless population. Each alternative was considered with regard to maximizing resources; freedom of choice; target populations; and facility characteristics in terms of location, staffing, physical plant, program potential, and overall ambience.

While maintaining a neutral stance, the report concluded with a summary review of the undifferentiated and specialized systems. This material was used by FAS administration to shape its formal discussion of the type of contract to be developed for the Keener operation and to explore the program potential of Camp LaGuardia. That decision called in the main for the extension of an undifferentiated service system in which

some more specialized services would be offered but in a manner that would not require more strict criteria for admission to Camp LaGuardia or Keener. With the exception of meeting with FAS staff to review drafts of the Keener service contract -- at which time Vera successfully sought more financial support of recreational programming and supported work opportunities -- the project had little further involvement with the Keener shelter.

III. Camp LaGuardia

Vera's activities at Camp LaGuardia -- a residential facility for as many as 950 homeless men located 90 minutes from New York City in Chester, New York -- aimed at improving the Camp's services so that it would be more attractive and beneficial to homeless men who otherwise would be dependent on the Men's Shelter. This would help to reduce pressures on the Shelter and the Bowery neighborhood, while maintaining men in a more protective environment. Vera staff undertook a range of inter-related tasks, each with the full cooperation of Camp staff. To develop a better understanding of Camp operations, Vera planners spent many days and several nights at Camp to observe and talk with both residents and staff. From this extended period of observation and analysis Vera began to prepare a comprehensive overview of Camp services and procedures, which in turn identified several problem areas warranting further project activity. These problems included the functioning of the Camp's work detail program, the need for improved security, and the provision of social services and daily program activities at Camp.

The work detail (or voluntary resident labor) program is integral to Camp in that the residents are responsible for performing many of the tasks essential to Camp operations: all laundry and food preparation, for example, are handled by residents under the direction of a handful of professional staff. In addition, work on detail assignments constitutes

most of the purposeful activity available to men at Camp and accordingly serves as the basic component of any attempt at rehabilitation. While all men are encouraged to participate in work details, the most demanding positions -- in terms of skill, effort, and time -- also offer men monthly stipends of \$10 or \$20. Although the number of men filling stipended positions fluctuates during the year as the Camp's census rises and falls, on the average 35 men receive \$20 stipends and 240 men receive \$10 stipends. Another 250 men, on the average, work at undemanding detail tasks for which they receive no stipend.

In recent years, Camp administration has had increasing difficulty filling the stipended detail assignments; it asked Vera to study the problem and recommend a programmatic response. Vera staff reviewed the complete "work" histories of more than 150 stipended workers and interviewed the key detail supervisors as well as more than 25 detail workers. From the information developed, Vera concluded that an increase in stipend amounts was necessary and described five different ways increases could be effected (Attachment B). In discussing these options with Camp administration, Vera recommended a combination of an immediate across-the-board increase to \$14 and \$28 stipends, the creation of 75 intermediate (\$20) positions, and the introduction of small step increases tied to job continuity. This recommendation was endorsed by Camp administration and is to be introduced in the Fall of 1980. Vera also described a range of non-financial rewards which could help to refortify the detail program by encouraging men at Camp to take on the more important and demanding detail assignments. These suggestions -- like the recommendation for increased stipends -- were sensitive to the need to strengthen the detail program without making Camp too attractive to men who could, with help, attempt to return to the world of regular employment.

Camp administration also asked Vera to explore and evaluate different responses to a growing concern with inadequate security at Camp. The problem centered on contraband and alcoholic beverages brought into Camp by local "bootleggers," and Camp administration had developed the rudiments of a plan for building and staffing security posts to intercept unauthorized traffic and thus eliminate bootlegging. Vera analyzed the problem with the advice and assistance of experienced New York Police Department personnel and prepared a report describing and evaluating different approaches to improving security at Camp (Attachment C). Vera argued against a guard system which would cost a great deal and could be easily breached. The introduction of a scrip system (which replaces regular currency with Camp "paper"), it was argued, would more effectively control the purchase of contraband items by removing the Camp's residents' ability to do business with local liquor stores or other merchants. Such an approach also not only would cost a minimal amount but did not appear to be as institutional in tone as would an elaborate security system.

Camp administration endorsed a scrip system as the most promising response, but decided to delay implementing such a measure. A decline in security-related incidents coupled with the assignment of more security staff to Camp prompted FAS and Camp administration to attempt to control contraband first by reformulating and publicizing Camp's rules and disciplinary code and using the larger security force to obtain better compliance. In the event that a more concerted enforcement effort should not prove adequate, Camp has decided to complete the planning of the scrip system so that, if necessary, it could be quickly implemented.

Vera staff subsequently assisted Camp administration in reorganizing the plan for delivery of social and other support services. Because this effort required a better understanding of how men use Camp as a service

facility, especially with regard to length of stay, Vera developed a profile of the Camp's residents. Using Camp records of a sample of 243 residents, Vera developed data on the men's race, age, length of stay at Camp, and reliance on Camp as a residence (see Attachment D). This analysis found greater minority representation at Camp than was presumed and surprisingly long stays at Camp by most men. Half (50%) of the sample residents remained continuously at Camp for more than a year and a quarter (26%) remained three or more years. Data also showed whites more likely than blacks to stay longer than a year, 62 percent and 37 percent, respectively. When examining reliance on Camp as a service facility, Vera found that somewhat less than half (41%) of the residents had spent more than 80 percent of their time during the past four years at Camp, with fully 23 percent having spent all of their recent time at Camp. Both race and age related directly to reliance on Camp with whites and older men showing significantly higher levels of reliance.

Informed by these data and an understanding of how Camp functions as a residential institution, Vera staff proposed in the course of several meetings with Camp and FAS administration a plan to reconstitute the social service and institutional aide staff. In sum, the plan called for creating teams of caseworkers and aides which would be assigned responsibility for specific residential areas at Camp (see Attachment E). This, it is expected, will facilitate improved casework activity, more outreach, and greater accountability. The plan has been endorsed by Camp administration and is to be implemented this Fall.

As part of the social service reorganization, Vera underscored the pressing need for enriching the program of activities available to men at Camp. While one Camp staff member is to be assigned responsibility for this task, it is expected that all caseworkers will contribute to program

development. Assisting Camp administration to implement the plan for reorganization and to begin work of program development are two significant tasks in which Vera hopes to play a continuing role.

IV. Men's Shelter

Project activities at the Men's Shelter have concentrated on two issues: improving the delivery of needed services at the Shelter itself and facilitating the movement of men away from dependence on the Shelter, primarily by assisting them to obtain Home Relief or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.

Vera staff began its work at the Shelter at the same place that men new to Shelter first learn what services the Shelter provides and how these are obtained: at the Intake and Service Authorization Unit (known as the 5x8 Unit). Located on the main floor, staff of the 5x8 Unit interview upwards of 250 men daily, authorizing lodging, meals, clothing, and referrals to other services. Concerned with the criteria and procedures for service authorization, Vera staff monitored 5x8 Unit activities for several full days (8 a.m. - 2 a.m.) and interviewed staff and supervisors as to how decisions were made. As a result of this exercise the Shelter administration revised several criteria and procedures, especially those concerning the allocation of clothing supplies and lodging tickets.

The analysis of 5x8 Unit operations helped to prepare Vera staff to assist the Shelter administration reorganize its casework staff to meet a growing need for service. Because a client's assignment to a caseworker depends on his length of stay at the Shelter and to a lesser extent apparent disability, any reorganization plan required an understanding of how long men stay at the Shelter. At the same time, Vera and FAS staff were concerned with the backgrounds of the men coming to the Shelter, especially the referral source. Accordingly, Vera staff undertook an analysis of

first time users of Shelter services aimed at better understanding client backgrounds and patterns of service use (see Attachment F). A study of 200 "first-timers," who arrived at the Shelter in January and June 1979, revealed that almost half (48%) leave the Shelter within a week of arrival, three-quarters (75%) leave within three weeks, and only 11 percent remain continuously dependent on Shelter services for more than three months. These findings, as well as data describing men's backgrounds and likelihood of returning to the Shelter, have been and are being used by Shelter administration in devising its staff reorganization plan.

The 5x8 Unit study also exposed Vera staff to some of the difficulties of trying to deliver services in an extremely poorly designed work space. In addition, discussions with Shelter administration identified their desire to use the "Big Room" on the main floor as a primary recreational space (as opposed to the present 5th floor which generates excessive traffic through the building). These two basic concerns -- supplemented by others regarding security, seating, meal lines, and general ambience -- led Vera to propose a comprehensive and professional redesign of the Shelter's main floor. Aided by Shelter staff, Vera staff described the problems with the current use of the floor and defined the goals of a design effort (see Attachment G). The services of Mitchell/Giurgola Architects were obtained under the Vera contract, and the architectural consultants collaborated effectively with Vera, Shelter, and FAS staff in devising a master plan to redesign and refurbish the main floor (see Attachment H).

The plan addresses the conditions adversely affecting 5x8 Unit operations, transforms the "Big Room" into a flexible, multi-purpose recreation space, offers security improvements, and provides for improved seating and toilet facilities. The Deputy Administrator of FAS has obtained the support of HRA's Office of Plant Management and its Security Division, and the proposed plan has been forwarded to the HRA Administrator for action.

With respect to the goal of helping destitute and homeless men move away from dependence on the services delivered through the Men's Shelter, Vera staff concentrated on making fuller use of two resource alternatives: Home Relief and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). By helping men to apply for these public assistance benefits, Shelter staff facilitate movement to housing away from the Shelter and reliance on transfer income rather than the Shelter's in-kind services. Preliminary discussions with Shelter staff, however, indicated that it was inadequately informed about how to deal with Income Maintenance and the Social Security Administration. It also was evident that Shelter procedures for processing applications needed to be upgraded and revised.

To gain a better understanding of how homeless men are referred by Income Maintenance staff to the Shelter, which would in turn shape the Shelter's response to Income Maintenance policy and practice, Vera staff met with staff of and observed operations at several Employment Eligibility Centers, the Emergency Assistance Unit, the Rikers Island Service Center, and the Yorkville IM Center. From this effort Vera produced for use by Shelter staff an overview and analysis of how Income Maintenance processes applications, with special emphasis on the handling of undomiciled applicants. This material is being used by Shelter staff to assist and explain to clients how to apply for Home Relief benefits.

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Vera staff also worked with the Shelter administration to strengthen and clarify a special process through which casework staff at the Shelter screen and refer to the Yorkville IM Center each day up to two men who: are judged to be able to satisfy the regular eligibility criteria and processing requirements for Home Relief; are granted presumptive eligibility status by Yorkville IMC which provides for 30 days of emergency assistance, during which they should comply with regular HR application steps; and are, to the

extent feasible, rehoused north of 59th Street. Vera conducted analyses of the procedures in use at the Shelter and the Yorkville IMC and found a need to revise these procedures and develop a capability to monitor Shelter processing. Working closely with Shelter administration, Vera staff designed the new procedures (see Attachment I) which when implemented in the Fall of 1980 should help men capable of managing a public assistance cash grant to move away from dependence on Shelter services.

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Vera conducted a similar exercise with respect to the effectiveness of applications from Shelter clients for SSI benefits. An inadequate understanding of SSI rules and practices undermined the ability of Shelter caseworkers to assist clients apply for SSI. Inefficient in-house processing procedures further limited the Shelter's ability to tap SSI resources. Accordingly, Vera staff prepared materials, keyed to the special needs and interests of clients and caseworkers, that explained the SSI application process. In addition, Vera organized an SSI training workshop which brought to the Shelter (under the Vera contract) an expert in the field who conducted a training session for all casework staff. To support the more effective preparation of SSI applications at the Shelter, Vera worked closely with the Shelter administration to design an SSI application procedure which should facilitate more — and more successful — applications for SSI benefits. (see Attachment J).