

CHILD WELFARE PROBLEMS IN AN ALASKA NATIVE VILLAGE
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This paper, based on a field investigation of a small, remote Alaskan native community, examines value differences and dilemmas that arise in the course of agency-community interactions. Two case illustrations highlight the anomie resulting from the disruption of traditional community child welfare practices and the alienative effects of certain public agency interventions. Reform proposals, aimed at strengthening the community's ability to manage its child welfare problems, are considered.

The growing concern about the cultural gap between the social work profession and lower-class persons and communities has stimulated several recent investigations of the view from below (6, 9, 13). Each of these studies identified value differences as a source of this hiatus. The research to be reported in this paper found that it is not simply a question of agency-community value differences but also of internal conflicts and dilemmas in both agency and community.

The following personal communication from a resident of a remote Alaskan community illustrates the value differences and dilemmas that arise in the course of agency-community interactions:¹

Simpson [the white mayor] getting rid of all . . . [native] children without parents consent. This woman here [white] won't let father see his own child after coming home from away. She wants to adopt the child. Thats o.k. but

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¹To protect the identity of the community and agency, fictitious names are used for all informants as well as for the village, and the precise location is not given.

yet she didn't yet and is not legal. Just because he is . . . [native] he get treat like that. I can't see it. So the rest of the time he is here he stays drunk, but knowing what he is doing. Then Simpson report and send him back out. I wish I was eyewitness to that. I would say something. I wrote to welfare about the twenty three children they took from here. Why can't our own people take care of them instead of sending them away from home. I want to hear the answer to that.

Based on a study which sought insight into a lower-class, minority community's perceptions of and responses to a set of problems universal to poor communities—work, education, health, aggression, and child welfare—this paper deals only with the latter problem. The research constituted a field study of Iliaka, a small, isolated, coastal native village in Alaska in the summer of 1967. Though Iliaka culture is distinct in many ways from that of other lower-class groups, the Iliakan confronts similar social and economic conditions and therefore exhibits common characteristics. The extent to which the findings of this study can be generalized to other lower-class groups and ethnic minorities is limited, not by the absence of common problems and life-styles, but by the research method, the aim of which was to formulate, not test hypotheses.

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

The culture group to which Iliakans belong has inhabited Alaska since ancient times. Aboriginal social organization sprang from a marine ecology. Living under harsh physical conditions and dependent on a limited supply of marine animals, whose capture was difficult, aboriginal society emphasized individual self-sufficiency, reciprocal aid, and community-wide distribution of food and other materials.

The history of white contact in Iliaka, beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century when the Russians established settlements in the area (7:339), reveals not only a near genocide of the population but also a gradual chipping away of aboriginal institutions and social organizations. It was an insidious process of which the culture group was unaware and therefore it could not collectively organize to resist.

White contact accelerated during and following World War II, and Iliakans developed wants and desires that could no longer be satisfied by a subsistence economy. Concurrently, whites, attracted to the boom conditions accompanying the presence of military stations in Alaska, established residence in Iliaka and engineered the incorporation of the village as a first-class city. This change in local government ultimately destroyed traditional authority structures—the chief, elders, and priest—and therefore the means for organizing traditional subsistence and welfare activities.

The loss of Iliaka control over local conditions received further impetus from a recent boom in the fisheries industry. In the early 1960s, five food-processing plants, processing a single species, opened in Iliaka. Before that time, only one small cannery, providing

work for a minority of the Iliaka labor force during the summer months, had operated. In contrast to the traditional cultural emphasis on skill, daring, mastery, and fortitude, work in the processing plants does not offer challenge, prestige, self-respect, or even a living wage. The work is intermittent,² depending on the productivity and supply of the marine resource. Yet the plants require the Iliakans' full-time presence, thereby preventing participation in traditional activities. Moreover, irregular, unskilled, demeaning factory work fosters family disorganization. To a once vigorous, active, productive people, industrial jobs of this sort mean boredom and idleness, insufficient income, and disorderly lives.

The most frequently voiced Iliakan complaint against the introduction of the processing plants, however, concerns the large influx of whites and outsiders. "If the whites would leave, all our problems would be solved" is the common lament. Iliaka history has repeatedly demonstrated the loss of Iliakan control over life conditions accompanying ingress of whites. But, in the past, whites came and left. The processing plants, primarily dependent on outsiders for a labor force (the plants employ roughly 185 workers and the Iliaka work force approximates 76), hold the promise of an endless stream of whites and outsiders. The latter can vote after three months in the community. White bosses, intent on reforming native work habits, expose them to continual exhortations. Dedicated to enhancing community efficiency, whites infiltrate and dominate local decision-

² An owner-manager of an Iliaka food-processing plant estimated that all five plants there operated approximately half the time between the spring of 1967 and the spring of 1968.

making organizations. Determined to "clean up the town," whites also serve as informants to the agencies of the dominant society, for example, the police and welfare agencies. Nearly every native informant connects tension levels with the number of whites and outsiders in the community.

Iliaka is the single village on an island. Other villages in the same culture group are relatively inaccessible, and the closest urban center is hundreds of miles away. In the summer of 1967, Iliaka had a population of 246 (excluding transient workers), 201 of whom were native.³ Most of the latter may be considered poor. Though annual family income levels may be estimated between \$3,000 and \$5,000, families are large and living costs excessive, ranging as high as 75-100 percent more than those in Seattle on many items (17:77). In addition, every Iliakan confronts a poverty of services and facilities: inadequate water and sewage-disposal systems; small, overcrowded, dark, poorly ventilated, rat-infested houses; and no resident health, fire, police,⁴ recreation, and legal services and facilities. Such resource impoverishment causes hardship in any community, let alone a small, isolated one distant from an urban center.⁵

THE SCOPE OF CHILD WELFARE PROBLEMS

Child welfare problems in Iliaka, largely a post-World War II phenomenon, have become acute since the recent boom in the fisheries industry. The

discussion in this paper is limited to the child welfare problems of greatest concern to the Iliaka community—neglected, abused, and homeless children. For purposes of this discussion these terms are legally defined. Abuse refers to willfully inflicted injury, and neglect to willful failure to provide the necessary food, clothing, shelter, and medical attention.⁶ These definitions coincide, in part, with those of the community and the social work profession. The community emphasizes parental neglect, not of professional medical attention, because none is locally available, but of health routines. The social work profession, in addition to physical neglect, stresses emotional neglect (12). There is less consensus in the definition of the homeless child. Alaska law defines an orphan as a court ward when he "has no relatives willing and able to assume custody and care"⁷ (emphasis added). There is no specification of standards for determining ability. The social work profession and the community differ in their conceptions of these standards, as later sections illustrate. The concept of a homeless child was, and to a large extent still is, alien to Iliakans.

Child welfare experts designate parents as the major source of child neglect and abuse, but in Iliaka such problems are directly related to the family disorganization accompanying the disintegration of the traditional culture and the substitution of a marginal status in the dominant society.

Actually, nearly all children in Iliaka are neglected. They are neglected by the community because traditional child-caring practices are disappearing

³ Informal census by investigator.

⁴ Subsequent to the field investigation, the city hired a police officer to enforce municipal ordinances, and a local magistrate was appointed.

⁵ Public transportation in the area is limited to air, and the rates are excessive.

⁶ Alaska Statutes, § 11.67.070.

⁷ Alaska Statutes, § 47.10.010.

and effective alternatives have not evolved. They are neglected by institutions of the dominant society, as subsequent sections of this paper illustrate. They are neglected by their families because the families are poor and demoralized. The conditions of poverty deplete parents' energies, rendering them less able than others to meet the child's social and emotional needs (12:172). There are, however, degrees of neglect and abuse in Iliaka, and this paper focuses on the extreme cases, those activating the community and the agency. The reason for thus limiting the discussion is that actions generated by these cases reveal the norms, values, and dilemmas of both community and agency.

At the time of this investigation there were 84 native children sixteen years of age and younger in Iliaka. One third, or 28, from four families, were classified as presenting severe child welfare problems. Nine were homeless, 6 neglected, and 13 neglected and abused. Of these 28 children, 19 were removed from the community, and only 6 of the latter have been returned. Thus, agency interventions in these cases reduced the native population of children under sixteen years of age by 15 per cent.

AGENCY STRUCTURES AND PRACTICES

Before the reform era of the 1930s Indian child welfare was the responsibility of the United States Office of Education (16:44). It was handled on an informal and haphazard basis, usually by the local school teacher, the single government representative in the village. The Territory of Alaska had no formal child welfare services until 1929, when it established a Board of Children's Guardians to arrange placements for white dependent children (16:110).

Government child welfare services for white and native children were expanded with the establishment of the Department of Public Welfare in 1937, following passage of the Social Security Act. In 1959, in the administrative reorganization after statehood, the department became the Division of Public Welfare under the umbrella Department of Health and Welfare (3:1). Aside from three Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) programs affecting children—general relief, health, foster homes, and youth authority cases—the Division of Public Welfare carries the total responsibility for child welfare services (1:10).

Organization of the division includes a central office at Juneau and three regional offices, which supervise a total of twelve district offices (1:12). The district office serving Iliaka is located at such a great distance that the child welfare worker usually visits the village only once annually. The major communication link between the district office and the community is the fee, or lay, agent, who is employed by the division to process and review applications in the village. Usually hired by mail, the agent receives little or no training other than an agent's handbook (2:2-3). The role of the agent is ambiguous and time-consuming. As the single public welfare representative in the community, he is called on for handling most welfare matters—applications for division assistance, BIA assistance, social insurance benefits, child welfare problems, requests for interpretations of agency procedures, and complaints against social workers. While the division acknowledges the generalized nature of the role, it recompenses the agent only for division cases—\$5.00 per application and \$3.00 per review (2:2-3).

Division child welfare services are carried out primarily through two programs: aid to families with dependent children (AFDC) and supervision of dependent, abused, and neglected children (3:2). These programs, of course, are related because the granting of AFDC gives the agency the right to supervise the children. The majority of child welfare cases come under the jurisdiction of the welfare division through court action. In 1964, 77 percent of division cases were those of court wards assigned to the custody of the division (1:13). According to juvenile custody procedure, a court-appointed agent investigates complaints and, if he finds supporting evidence, brings the child to the child welfare worker. The latter places the child in a temporary receiving home pending court action and permanent agency planning.⁸

A number of obstacles impede the delivery of agency services to Iliaka and similar villages. Restricted budgets, time pressures, and staff shortages prevent the social worker from spending sufficient time in the village to obtain detailed information about the people, the community, or the culture. In addition to vast distances and excessive air rates, weather conditions impose frequent delays, rendering travel time-consuming and disagreeable. Housing is frequently unavailable in the village, and the child welfare worker may have to sleep on the schoolroom floor. Furthermore, the villagers may be hostile and uncommunicative.

Even if these obstacles were removed, however, the agency emphasis in cases of abused, neglected, and homeless children is placement. Of the total division

child welfare cases in 1964, excluding those receiving day-care services, the majority (62 percent) were placed in institutions and foster homes, and the trend is toward increasing reliance on foster-home placements, with concomitant attrition in maintaining children in their own homes (1:13).

The reliance on placement is not unique to Alaska. Elizabeth Meier, a child welfare expert, pointed out in 1964 that child welfare in the United States had become synonymous with child placement (12:180). What is unique to Alaska is placing children far away from their villages, in unfamiliar and culturally alien environments. The child welfare agency responsible for supervising and licensing homes has easier access to those near the district offices; thus foster and adoptive homes and institutions are usually located far from the villages. Consequently children placed from the villages (the majority of Division cases are from small villages)⁹ face breaking ties not only with parents and siblings, but also with friends, relatives, community, culture, and everything familiar. Moreover, under these conditions, working toward reunion of the family becomes unrealistic.

Given these organizational structures and practices, it is clearly not possible for the division to achieve its stated goal of strengthening families and keeping them intact. "Whenever possible, the best place for the child is in his own home and no child should ever be removed from the home of his parents until every attempt has been made to help the parent . . . improve the care of the children," stated a 1964 report

⁸ Alaska Statutes, § 47.10.030.

⁹ Available data for 1966 suggest that about 80 percent of Division cases were from native villages (4).

by the welfare division (3:2). The disparity between organizational goals and means poses an insuperable bind for the agency and restricts it to half-measures, frustrations, and despair about the possibility of solving the problems it addresses.

COMMUNITY ORIENTATIONS TO CHILD WELFARE PROBLEMS

The Iliaka community also fails to solve child welfare problems effectively. Traditionally, the villages in this culture group assumed responsibility for the welfare of their children. Children were welcome in all homes. Household arrangements were flexible, and children frequently changed living quarters. They might live with parents, godparents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, or anyone else; thus there were no homeless children. Historical data do not reveal the existence of child neglect and abuse, and the traditional village emphasis on cohesion and cooperation suggests that there were few such problems. If a problem arose, it is probable that the child simply moved to another household. After the Russian occupation, Iliakans adapted Russian-introduced church organizations to serve needy families. The church sisterhood and brotherhood assumed responsibility for securing food for the hungry and homes for the homeless (11:136).¹⁰ Ultimately, however, these organizations and practices also disappeared. But traditional values die less slowly than traditional organizations.¹¹ To this day, the Iliakan places high value on community responsibility for the welfare of children. He feels degraded

when the community fails to provide homes for orphans or when members mistreat their children. His cultural image and personal esteem are based on realizing a value for which the community no longer has organizational means.

THE LAY-AGENT SITUATION

The lay agent is the major link between community and agency. A description of the current lay-agent situation in Iliaka will serve to illustrate some of the obstacles to effective performance of this role.

In 1967, after four years as lay agent, Jim Nezarof resigned. In contrast to the agency's conception of his role as application processor, Jim viewed his job as that of representative of both community and agency. He interpreted agency practices to the community, as well as helping with all welfare problems, including those of neglected, abused, and homeless children. A deeply sensitive and responsive person, Jim Nezarof became intimately involved in the family and social problems of members of the community. However, his involvement did not lead to solution, only to frustration for Jim. People he had tried to help, when drunk, abused Jim and blamed him for all the inadequacies in the welfare system. Jim also attempted to inform the agency about community problems—unmet needs and the effects of agency interventions—but the agency turned a deaf ear. He also tried to convince the agency to provide status and structure to his role by paying a small salary. The agency ignored the request.¹² Caught between

¹⁰ See also Mary Winchell (former Iliaka missionary teacher) to author, November 11, 1967.

¹¹ For a discussion of this issue see Firth (8:31-32).

¹² This description is based on accounts by Iliaka fee agents. Agency records and staff recollections do not correspond, in some respects, to those of the fee agents; for example, the agency has no

an unresponsive agency and resentment from members of the community, Jim resigned as lay agent and persuaded a white teacher to replace him. Dorothy Peshen, the teacher, like Jim, received no training as lay agent, but, unlike Jim, she was ignorant about the ins and outs of the welfare system. In addition, like most whites in Iliaka, she assumed the superiority of white institutions and held Iliakan values and customs in low regard. Consequently, members of the community distrusted Dorothy Peshen and continued to rely on Jim Nezarof.

These, then, are the structures and orientations relating to child welfare problems in Iliaka.

A description of two recent child welfare cases will illustrate the nature of agency-community interactions.

AGENCY-COMMUNITY-INTERACTIONS

The first case, the Mochikof family, involved child abuse and neglect. The long-term marriage problems of Ivan and Erna Mochikof intensified after Ivan's parents were drowned in 1966. Ivan literally drowned his grief in alcohol and, for the first time, joined the league of excessive drinkers in Iliaka. Marital conflict increased, and in the summer of 1967 Erna left Ivan and her four youngest children (ages two to ten) and took her three oldest youngsters to her new home (a shanty on the beach) and a new mate. Ivan and the younger children lived in a one-room shack. Ivan was gone all day, either working or drinking, and the children were left without food. They wandered the streets, dirty, ragged, hungry,

and ill. Their matted hair suggested, and examinations revealed, nits and lice. The faces and hands of some of the children were covered with sores and scabs. When drunk, Ivan was physically abusive, and, it is said, he sexually molested the older girls when they visited.

The community was profoundly upset. The children's old and impoverished grandparents stretched their meager social security budget to feed them. Others gave clothing, but it was found scattered dirty around the shack. Everyone discussed possible actions to "make the parents take care of the kids." In the old days the chief or priest would have intervened, and their authority was unquestioned and effective. The old chief now was insignificant. No one listened to him.

Jim Nezarof importuned Father Kiskof, the Russian-Orthodox priest, a native, to intercede, but Father Kiskof refused because the Mochikofs did not attend church or seek his counsel. Jim considered calling the welfare agency into the picture. He hesitated. The agency would probably remove all the Mochikof children from the community. What was needed, he thought, was counsel and pressure on the parents to furnish proper child care. Jim, knowing Dorothy Peshen would not act without direction from the welfare agency, told her that members of the community had informed the district office of the Mochikof problem. He implied that the welfare division would expect Dorothy Peshen to have knowledge of the case, and, to this end, suggested that she visit the Mochikofs to effect suitable plans for child care. Dorothy Peshen, apprehensive lest she offend the community or the agency, relied on Jim's advice. Uneasy about calling on Ivan, she vis-

record of the fee agent's requesting a salary, and the agency's file on Iliaka does not reveal many reports or requests concerning the problems referred to by the fee agents (Alaska Division of Public Welfare to author, January 17, 1969).

ited Erna, who told her she planned to resume care of the younger children after enlarging her dwelling.

Nothing happened until October, 1967, when the white mayor, determined to "clean up the town," herded six Mochikof children onto the airplane, tagged for the district welfare office. The district office, stunned by the unexpected arrival of the children, could think of nothing to do other than secure a temporary court order and place the children. Several months later, when the district child welfare worker visited Iliaka (without the Mochikof children), she administered a resounding reproach to the mayor for his illegal act. Her concern was not with the illegal violation of parental rights, but with the awkward position in which this act placed the agency. The social worker and Erna Mochikof evolved a plan for stabilizing the family. Erna was to legally marry her mate and enlarge her house. Several months later the Mochikof children were returned to their mother. This was the second time these children had been removed and returned. Subsequent to the field investigation, Erna Mochikof again changed mates, the children were again divided between the parents, and the situation remained essentially unchanged.

The community was rent by counterpressures in this case. They felt damned if they acted and damned if they failed to act. They wanted the children protected, not only from their parents, but also from the agency practice of removal from the community. Moreover, they feared that an investigation by the social worker might result in the removal of other children from the community, as in fact it did. Without effective local authority or organization, members of

the community felt compelled to rely on the agency, even in the indirect manner of Jim Nezarof, yet each instance of calling on the agency served to remind the Iliakan of the failure of his own institutions, and consequently of his inadequacy.

The second case, that of the Dolmatofs, concerned homeless children, also considered neglected when their mother was alive. Vera Dolmatof, widowed mother of twelve children (ages three to twenty), had been an AFDC recipient for five years before her death from cancer in November, 1966. For several years, despite pressure from public health service physicians and nurses, she had refused hospitalization in the Alaska Native Service Hospital, located hundreds of miles away, for fear that the welfare agency would separate her children and place them in distant cities. When Vera died, members of the community were not only profoundly grieved but also riddled by guilt. Six years before, when the welfare agency had removed ten children orphaned by their parents' deaths from drinking wood alcohol, the community, determined to retain and care for its children, renovated an old church building as an orphanage for subsequent emergencies. Shortly thereafter, fire destroyed the building and it was not replaced. The recrudescence of a similar emergency, especially when the mother had sacrificed her life to prevent the separation and removal of her children from the community, engendered feelings of self-blame and self-contempt, but also a resolve to take care of the Dolmatof children.

After the mother's death, the agency dispatched a social worker to Iliaka to assume management of the case. The worker found the Dolmatof children

distributed among various families. Four of these families, as well as an aunt in a neighboring village, wanted to adopt one or two of the younger children, and foster homes were available for the remainder.

The social worker proceeded to evaluate the potential adoptive and foster homes by standards of doubtful relevance in Iliaka¹³—the size of the home (nearly all homes are small and overcrowded), the financial potential of the breadwinner (for most, work is only intermittently available), plans for the children's futures (most Iliakan natives do not perceive the future as an asset), and the parent's verbal ability to demonstrate interest in the child (Iliakan natives tend to be taciturn and reserved). On nearly every count she found all the homes unsuitable. She ruled out the Livingstons, a potential adoptive family, with whom two of the younger children were living. The reason was insufficient interest in the children. The evidence was clear: the Livingstons did not know the ages of the children, they had not considered plans for the children's futures, and they made no effort to get in touch with the social worker after her first and only visit to them. Subsequent discussions with this family revealed that they had no idea what was expected of them, or the basis for the social worker's evaluations and decisions. They simply answered questions and waited.

The home of Maria Dolmatof, the twenty-year-old daughter, with whom two of the teen-agers and two of the younger children were living, received a similar negative evaluation. Maria, more keenly than anyone else, felt re-

sponsible for implementing her mother's wish to keep the family intact. She pleaded with the social worker for the children, but the social worker was skeptical. She thought the bond between Maria and her mate equivocal and unstable, and she thought Maria spent money foolishly, as evidenced by a phonograph and records purchased with AFDC funds.

The social worker also queried other members of the community about the potential adoptive and foster homes. Most natives were firm in the conviction the children should not be removed. "It was a raw deal. There were plenty of good homes for them here," said a potential foster parent. "They just leave. That's it. We might never see them again. Why can't we keep them?" asked a potential adoptive parent.

Most Iliakan natives objected to the children's removal because it meant severing ties with friends, relatives, and community. The native community, however, was not united. Some thought the children would have a better chance living outside. This lack of consensus was less apparent to the native community than to whites. A covert process operated. The dissenting minority concealed its opinions from other natives, fostering the illusion of unity, while confiding them to the social worker and other whites. "The natives are hypocrites," said one white. "They say one thing and mean another. They say the Dolmatof children should be taken away. But just take one. Then they're furious. They don't know what they want. So we have to decide."

Whites also manifested divisions. The majority, who perceive Iliakan natives as childlike and irresponsible, favored removal of the children. But sev-

¹³ These standards are not unique to Alaska public welfare, but are generally accepted in the social work profession (see Meier [12:174-75]).

eral dissented from this view, and one, with whom the social worker had frequent contact, urged her to place the children in their home community. So the information the social worker received from secondary sources increased her uncertainty. She wavered and vacillated, but finally sought counsel from Father Kiskov.

Father Kiskov's report of the interview differed from the social worker's. He said he had tried to convince her to place the children in Iliaka. He even asked to adopt one of the children, but when he realized her decision for removal was firm, he suggested a Russian-Orthodox orphanage in Pennsylvania. The social worker related only that Father Kiskov had advised the orphanage. In any event, the suggestion furnished a plan, and, after confirmation from the district office, the social worker removed the seven youngest Dolmatof children (ages three to twelve) from the community without advance warning to Maria, who was under the impression that she could keep the children. Two of the youngest children have since been adopted, and the other five have been distributed in various foster homes. The two older teen-agers live with Maria, and the younger teen-agers are with an aunt in Iliaka. Maria Dolmatof still dreams of reuniting her family, but has no idea how to proceed. The other adoptive and foster parents have resigned themselves to the finality of the agency decision. But the anger festers.

This case demonstrates not only agency-community value conflicts and community value ambivalence, but also agency practices that ignore or violate legal rights. Iliakan natives, though relatively uninformed about legal rights, are harmed, nonetheless, because such

violations increase the Iliakan's sense of impotence in solving his problems and in dealing with the larger society.¹⁴ "There's nothing we can do. The social worker decides. . . . I don't know how. Then it's settled," said a potential adoptive parent. When Maria's siblings were removed, without forewarning, without notification of a hearing or the right to appear,¹⁵ the community was indignant. "One day she told Maria she could keep the children and the next day she whisked them away," protested one informant. "The social worker was high-handed. And how could a court act that fast and get an order here all in a few days time?" wondered Jim Nezarof. No one raised questions about discrimination against welfare recipients. Yet it is apparent that extra-legal sanctions were imposed. If the Dolmatof family had not been recipients of public aid, the agency would not likely have been involved in placing the children.

This investigation did not obtain data on the effects of placement on the children, but other research findings demonstrate (a) the difficulty in finding adoptive homes for minority children, especially if they are over four years of age and in poor health (5, 10); and (b) the host of incertitudes accompanying foster-home placement, especially for older children (14). Granted these uncertainties, one might argue, however, that nearly any environment is preferable to homes such

¹⁴ Scott Briar's study of welfare recipients revealed that the low visibility of agency decision-making processes and appeal opportunities and procedures, among other factors, reinforces the client's conception of himself as suppliant rather than rights-bearing citizen, and therefore defeats one of the aims of public welfare—to help recipients become responsible citizens (6:384).

¹⁵ Alaska Statutes, § 47.10.030.

as the Mochikof's. The implications of such an orientation, however, are far-reaching. First, it fails to consider the effects—on parents and siblings or on the community—of removing children. Second, and more significant, it would require a policy of genocide because most whites in Iliaka think all native children would be better off elsewhere. "The solution," said an Alaska public welfare official, referring to the problems of Alaska natives, "is to let the old ones die out and get the young ones out of there as fast as possible."

CONCLUSIONS

The cases presented in this paper demonstrate value conflicts between a professional child welfare agency and a lower-class, minority community, the alienative effects of certain agency practices, and the dilemmas confronting both agency and community.

The majority of Alaska child welfare cases are in small, isolated, native villages with distinct cultures. The relatively small state public welfare budget prohibits consideration of resident social work services in these places. Even if such services were possible, native communities are not likely to utilize them. When queried about the introduction of a resident social worker, Iliakan natives replied: "We would put her on and have some fun at her expense. But confide in her? No!" "They [social workers] don't understand us or the conditions here." Parents of abused and neglected children are among the most difficult to reach by social agencies (12:187). If these parents are also culturally alienated, they are beyond reach by conventional social work methods.

In Alaska, however, public welfare officials tend to ignore the evidence of

cultural and class value conflicts. Despite the growing awareness in social welfare and allied fields of the futility of imposing middle-class standards and expectations on lower-class persons, the Alaska public welfare agency persists in doing so. The application of such standards in places like Iliaka results in agency preoccupation with removing children from home and community, and diverts attention from the problems underlying family disorganization. The agency's conviction of the validity of these standards renders it oblivious to the Iliakan's distinct traditions, values, and life-styles.

The tradition of professional services and casework treatment is so firmly entrenched that the Alaska welfare agency apparently fails to consider the organizational implications of life in village Alaska. The agency seemingly interprets these conditions as rationalizations for the ineffectiveness of its services, rather than as premises upon which programs should be based. This orientation prevents the design of programs that are either relevant or acceptable in Iliaka.

If the agency were to be reoriented to community values, however, which side of the community's ambivalence would it address? Would it organize services in terms of the Iliakan native's ideal of community responsibility for child welfare, when the community itself doubts its ability to implement this goal? The answer lies in understanding the source of this ambivalence. It stems from the disparity between cultural goals and organizational means for achieving them. Clearly, the resolution of this dilemma requires opportunities to integrate means and ends. Such integration is contingent on opportunities for natives to articulate

their needs and to shape and implement policies and programs to meet those needs.

The agency also confronts a means-ends disparity, one source of which may lie beyond the agency's control. It arises from the fragmented organization of services for the poor. Agency jurisdictions are delimited by higher authorities to a mere segment of the problems of the poor, and consequently the agency is forced to rely on programs it knows in advance are doomed.

It is not the purpose here to outline detailed reform proposals, but three, suggested by the evidence of this study, will be mentioned.

The Alaska public welfare agency considers its reliance on the lay agent a desperate rather than a constructive measure. If the agency were to reconceptualize the role from that of application processor to that of indigenous nonprofessional worker who receives training, salary, necessary funds, and authority to act in welfare cases, the role of the agent might serve several important purposes. It could enable the agency to provide services in perhaps the only way possible in village Alaska. It could provide the agency information about cultural values and community need. It could strengthen the community's ability to manage its child welfare problems. And it could, because of the indigenous agent's intimate knowledge of his community, furnish alternatives to alienative agency practices.

A second reform concerns the urgent need for legal advice and protection for the Iliakan native. Though a small legal-aid program under the Office of Economic Opportunity operates in Alaska, it does not reach down to the

village level, at least in the region in which Iliaka is located. The legal structure of the recently organized Alaska Federation of Natives might constitute a source for such a service.¹⁶ Though primarily concerned with the native land-claims issue, this legal structure might be expanded to include training programs for indigenous legal aids in the villages and the establishment of urban legal-aid centers. The trained aids could not only advise parents and relatives of their custody rights but also alert the urban centers when assertion and defense of such rights becomes necessary. The very existence of a system for exposing discriminatory laws and practices might stimulate legal reforms and deter abuses.

A third proposal refers to the need for transitional programs aimed at strengthening the community's organizational means for dealing with the problems of children. One possibility is a children's home serving Iliaka and the surrounding area. The home could furnish temporary placements, such as those needed for the Mochikof children; permanent placements, if necessary; homemaker services; and health foster care, such as that needed for the Dolmatof children. The health foster-care program in Alaska, limited to the cities of Fairbanks and Anchorage (3), discourages hospitalization for patients who would rather forego it than place their children in strange environments. Such a service might be financed, in part or wholly, by the savings realized from a reduction in placement costs and travel expenses.

¹⁶ Recently the Alaska Federation of Natives has been granted a \$100,000 Ford Foundation grant to strengthen native organization (*Tundra Times*, December 20, 1968).

Though these proposals are directed specifically to Alaska, the principles on which they are based—strengthening community organization and autonomy—are applicable to all communities of the poor and ethnic minorities.

In sum, this paper describes agency-community interactions in child welfare problems in Iliaka. It demonstrates the interplay between the breakdown in community organization and unrespon-

sive and uninformed agency practices. The community responds to its organizational failures with a growing dependency on an agency it distrusts, and thereby intensifies its dilemma. The agency responds to a demoralized, poorly organized community by "getting the kids out . . . as fast as possible." Neither community nor agency directs its efforts to the sources of the problem.

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