

MOVE: help for unwed mothers

MOVE is an organization attempting to facilitate the total needs of the unwed mother. Those of us on the MOVE staff have grown in awareness, understanding and knowledge of the four areas of girls we work with, these being: girls before and after an abortion, girls who are pregnant, girls who have surrendered their child and girls who have kept their child.

We share a very real feeling of accomplishment with the unwed mothers we have been in contact with to this date, to overcome social and emotional obstacles in order to establish a good self-image and to accept the responsibility of their future decisions.

Working on a friendship, information, referral basis, we establish trust, give moral support, assist girls in making use of the facilities available to them, and in turn, correct misinformation and fear of direct help, always making sure never to sway a girl's decision to keep or surrender her child.

We understand and respect the need for confidentiality. Information given by a girl making an inquiry or in need of actual help is strictly between her and one of the MOVE staff.

MOVE also assists the unwed father who is an intricate part of the unwed mothers situation.

Some of the areas MOVE gives information and referral in are:

1. counselling
2. abortion information
3. medical
4. mental health
5. care for child
6. financial assistance
7. education
8. employment
9. accomodation
10. legal advice
- 11 recreation

An unwed mother is defined as a girl who becomes pregnant without marriage. The average of all the girls we work with is 17½ but ranging from 12 to 24 years old. They come from all socio-economic classes, barring none.

Why do single girls get pregnant?

No one has come up with a theory that is 100% right in all cases. MOVE has found that:



10% of the girls (16-18 year olds) become pregnant to hold on to the father of the child (which usually doesn't work)

12% of the girls (12-16 year olds) become pregnant to get back at their parents or as some form of self-punishment.

8% of the girls (20-24 year olds) become pregnant because they planned it

70% of the girls (all ages) become pregnant by accident

Two possible reasons why girls who are having pre-marital intercourse don't take precautions:

1. because first they must admit to themselves that they are having pre-marital sex. This can be devastating especially since most girls are brought up to believe that only "bad" girls do such things. If she does admit to herself she is having pre-marital sex, she then has to find a doctor who will help her without giving her a moral lecture, which is rather difficult for a 15 or 16 year old.

2. There is a lot of misinformation among the younger girls as to what actually causes pregnancy, what time of the menstrual cycle is fertile and about birth control methods in general. MOVE feels that females and males should be taught about themselves as sexual human beings.

60 to 70% of the unwed mothers are keeping their children possibly because:

1. society is slowly beginning to accept illegitimacy (or at least tolerate it)

2. today's generation believes in "doing your own thing"

Each unwed mother's situation is different but at best she is a mother in a special set of circumstances.

Heather Johnson,
Coordinator, MOVE

Ed. note: MOVE is located in TRUST house at 9917-116 St. and operates a 24 hour phone service: 452-2335

Information, Friends, A Place to Sleep

As I came upon the address which had been given to me I merely stared. Before me stood a very old house which looked terribly sad and just ready to fall down. I went up the creaking stairs and knocked. A shy girl came to the door and told me politely to come in. I asked if Mrs. White was there; as it turned out she was sick. Quickly I said I'd phone her at her home, said my good-byes, and left. Thinking to myself as I left that place "people actually stay there." Why, I wondered. I must have looked back at the house several times.

The next day I made another appointment to visit the house. Maureen met me at the door. She had a warm English accent. Told me to take off my boots and come sit down. The first thing I asked was where did all the Christmas decorations go that had been hanging the day before. They'd just been taken down that day. Being as uncomfortable as I was I started to fire questions right away. As I was shown around I began to feel a warmth in the place. The girls in the shelter were close to each other and I felt like a stranger. There were several rooms with many beds. The shelter can house anywhere from sixteen to twenty-five girls. The girls are given a place to sleep. It provides a listener, a friend, an information center, a referral service, emergency set-up accommodations.

The Women's Shelter started after the

Massman Report. This report looked into needs of women coming into the city trying to find residence. One of its mottos was "Action be taken to establish a point of contact well advertised and operated round the clock where girls coming in the city can secure information." Such a resource should include especially a registry of suitable housing and a referral capability to a wide range of social services. The first Shelter was opened under the sponsorship of the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

The first Shelter was a Store Front which had many cots on the floor. It catered to those girls who wanted a place to stay for one night. The drunks off the street, transients moving on the next day. The new shelter on 108 Street is a house that gives a homey atmosphere. These girls can stay one two or many nights. It caters to a different kind of girl. Since it is far from town it has its disadvantages in that many who would come to the Store Front wouldn't bother coming to the Shelter. It is hoped that another Store Front will be started to provide a place for those who need the one-night stay.

The girls who come to the shelter are asked no questions. They can be criminals, runaways or girls just coming to the city who need a place to stay. This may seem shocking but the principle under which the shelter is run "is to offer shelter and provide for the needs of a girl

or woman in need." This doesn't mean the shelter has no rules or regulations.

The girls are not allowed to drink in the shelter. However, this does not mean it does not occur. When it is found out it is dealt with immediately. The girls are not allowed to take drugs which are not professionally prescribed. When a girl under sixteen has runaway from home, the police are contacted. If the girl is older she is asked whether or not she would rather have her parents phoned.

A girl has come to the shelter to sleep. Does her attention stop here? No way! The counsellors at the shelter probably know more about any of the agencies in Edmonton because they have to so very often refer girls there. None of these girls are pushed into having professional help, they must want it. I wondered about the girls who stay for long periods of time not trying to find help for themselves. It was pointed out if you had come from an environment that didn't show you how to get out, to have initiative would you try to go out and find a job?

The girls in the shelter become very close. Those on welfare buy groceries for the others. They wear each others clothes, shampoo or little extras. When I was there I found they could feel I was an outsider, however the more I stayed there the more the warm atmosphere, the closeness of everyone was felt. The

shelter has been successful in helping girls. They've helped girls to find jobs, referred alcoholics to places where they can be helped. At times they fail but we can't all be a success. The girls who have found themselves often return to say hello.

The shelter is receiving money from the Provincial Governemtn, U.C.F. and donations from Church groups and people from the community. Every Sunday an elderly couple bring a loaf on sandwiches and a dozen doughnuts. Great, huh? On Christmas someone donated a turkey, a box of oranges, and some extras. The girls had a great Christmas. The Shelter needs new curtains, shampoo, pans, etc. If you have some extras they sure would be appreciated.

Going to the shelter really opened my eyes. I have all I need. Of course I go through my ups and downs. But what happens when you come into the big city - where to go? - it's cold. Ask any policemen, or someone at a Tavern - they'll tell you about the Women's Shelter. You go there. Its warm and friendly and it's a place to stay. I think the shelter is a stepping stone in providing for the needs of these kind of women in need. We need more.

by Maureen Hart