

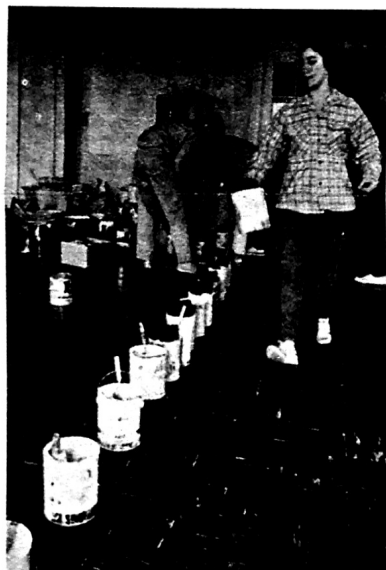
Weekend War on Poverty

Text: HANS KNIGHT

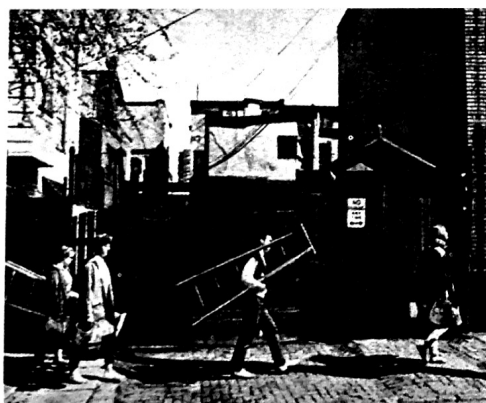
Photographs: MATT HERRON



Prayer, led by David Richie, starts off work campers' day.



Paint buckets are ready for action...



...and so are the students.

EVERY WEEKEND during the school year, a group of 12 to 16 Philadelphia college and high school students goes slumming—with a noble purpose.

They visit the city's blighted sections, where people crowd in dilapidated houses, where sinks are clogged with rust, where paint flakes and wallpaper peels.

They don't go to the slums as curiosity seekers. They are not residents of one planet observing the quaint inhabitants of another. Nor are they Ladies Bountiful scattering goodies among the urchins.

The students come as friends helping neighbors help themselves.

They work with brooms and paint brushes. They mix plaster and repair crumbling walls. They clean up and fix up, and they make a start at turning hovels into homes.

They don't work for the people in the slums—they work with them.

They are the volunteers of the Weekend Work Camp, a small-scale, interdenominational "domestic peace corps" project sponsored by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends.

The project isn't new. It was begun 25 years ago by David S. Richie, executive director of the Quakers' Social Order Committee. A teacher of social science at Moorestown, N.J., Friends

School in 1940, Richie wanted to give his students a practical knowledge of working and living with people in difficulty. His work camp concept met such enthusiasm among the young people that—with the help of the Quakers in Philadelphia—it gradually spread to more than a dozen cities in the United States and many European cities, too.

Richie is realistic about the camps.

"We don't pretend that we can make those homes anything like as adequate as they should be. We are not solving housing problems. But we can encourage tired and frustrated parents, some of them in poor health, in their efforts to make a decent home for their children. And we can encourage kids, often starved for friendship, to believe that the whole world is not against them. The work camps are primarily an adventure in friendship."

Like Peace Corpsmen, the work campers go only where they are welcome. Sometimes church and community organizations act as go-betweens, but sometimes adult camp leaders just knock on doors and explain the campers' mission.

With a new group of young people participating each week, a typical work camp begins Friday evening with a get-acquainted supper in a settlement house, a church basement or a community center. There, the neighborhood's specific needs are discussed and work assignments handed out.



Residents match elbow grease with students, turning a rubbish dump into a play lot for kids.

In a Domestic 'Peace Corps' Program 25 Years Old and Going Strong, Students Go into the Slums with Paint, Plaster and Good Will

Saturday, after breakfast and silent meditation, the group goes off in teams of two, to work in homes. The campers carry buckets of paint and plaster. To save time, they take sandwiches for lunch.

At the end of the day, back at the neighborhood center, the weary campers sing, play games and discuss their experiences before retiring in simple makeshift dormitories.

Sunday offers two sharply contrasting experiences—a morning visit to magistrate's court and afternoon services at neighborhood churches.

FOR MOST of the students, the court is an eye opener. Here, listening to men and women being charged with crimes often bred as much by slum conditions as by human failing, the young people come face to face with a world they had known only from hearsay. The church services illustrate for them how organized religion seeks to deal with overwhelming social problems.

Says pretty, dark-haired Lauren Elder, 18-year-old freshman at Swarthmore College: "Perhaps the most gratifying aspect is the warm, human relationships we find. At first the people we work with are curious, if not suspicious. But once they see that we are really trying to do a job of work, they accept us. We learn to see each other as people." ■



Working together is the keynote, as campers and dwellers fix up yard.



Not all the results of the weekend work are tangible. There's friendship and respect, too.



Determination in Lauren Elder's face symbolizes work camp spirit.



Lunch break helps in restoring energies—and getting to know one another.



At the end of camp, a visit to Magistrate's Court offers firsthand sociological insights.