

EAST LONDON ADVICE OFFICE REPORT - 1974

From mid-January, 1974 to August 24th, 1974 we operated one morning a week only - a Saturday - in the offices of the S.A.I.R.R. A roster of eight women, not all Sashers, worked with the help of Mrs. Christine Tele, a paid interpreter, and handled 75 interviews.

A Saturday was not a convenient day. All Bantu Affairs Departments and most other offices are closed, so that 'phone calls to them could only be made the following week. For housewives, especially those with small children, the day became a burden.

Other premises that could be used during the week had to be found. At last a scout hall became available for a nominal rental of R2-00 a month. We decided to try a Thursday morning as well as the Saturday, with Mr. Prince Ngxolwana as the interpreter on that day and Mrs. Tele on the Saturday. (She worked midweek). It was an immediate success with more cases coming on the weekday.

After two months we decided to ask the Scout Hall Committee if we could operate on two week mornings a week and if they agreed, to stop the Saturday sessions. Unfortunately we asked for a few more privileges - a share of their telephone and postbox and a permanent notice board. This was not acceptable and they started to charge R2-00 per session so we continued as before - Saturdays at the S.A.I.R.R. offices and Thursdays with them, until mid-December when we closed for a month.

In the meantime we were looking for a new home and eventually were offered the use of the Trinity Methodist Church foyer - at the upper end of our main street, Oxford Street, near a Kupugani shop which is well patronised by Africans, and not far from their main entrance to the centre of the city. Here we opened on the 16th January, 1975 on Mondays and Thursdays from 9.00 to 12.00 with Mr. Prince Ngxolwana as the interpreter at R3-00 a session. The Trinity Methodist Church Council have been generous. We are not being charged rent - so we have decided to donate at least R10-00 every six months, are given tea each morning and can use their 'phone for which we pay per call and we can use their address - 159 Oxford Street, on our letterheads. The original Church foyer offered us was too public and too noisy, so very quickly we found ourselves two tiny little back rooms and a cellar which house the church vases, frig, extra chairs, etc. and there we operate in somewhat cramped and dingy conditions, but we are so lucky and so happy to have this den. Recently Rev. Harrison himself nailed up the smart noticeboard made by one of our members and which points conspicuously from the street down the alleyway to our offices. We own a cupboard and have been given a typewriter and we hope soon to make ourselves a little more comfortable.

While we worked only one morning a week we could just come out on the R200-00 a year given us by Headquarters from the Bantu Welfare Trust. For the 3½ months at the Scout Hall we had to find a further R60-00. Headquarters had told us that if we planned to work extra days we would have to find the necessary extra cash ourselves. A very lucky grant of R500-00 from the now defunct Penal Reform League via Mrs. Marjorie Britten of the S.A.I.R.R. will keep us going in 1975 and give us leeway to build up a fund for future years. Our estimated budget for the year is now approximately R300-00.

The analysis of our interviews during 1974 is as follows :-

Working hours	186
(This does not include the many hours spent during the week following up cases, accompanying people to various offices or writing letters, etc.)	
Cases	242
Average No. of interviews per session	4

Unfortunately we did not have the time to sift through all the cases in order to record how many were successful, hopeless or pending. An easier system for doing this in future has been established.

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It is significant that from the 15th January, 1975 to 20th February, 1975 (11 sessions) we have already dealt with 70 cases - which means our work has doubled which seems to indicate our new working days and venue are popular and that we are getting known. Most months we submit a report to be published in Indaba - a weekly East London newspaper for Africans.

Successful cases are rare. The work is depressing because so many problems are utterly hopeless but the variety is a never-ending source of fascination. We do not have endorsed-out problems like Cape Western and Johannesburg. We are the place to where people are endorsed. Our main recurring hopeless problem is housing. We keep telling cases and advertising and intend to stick up a large notice in our little office that we cannot arrange or supply housing - but they come nevertheless to complain of unfair treatment or eviction. We think there are about 4,000 families on waiting lists for houses at Mdantsane. We cannot verify this. We cannot see the situation ever improving and the position is serious. There are nine Units or Zones in Mdantsane and each unit is controlled by African Superintendants and Councillors who are in complete control of housing. The more we listen to housing problems the more sickening it is to hear of the intrigue and bribery that goes on. We do write letters to the Unit Superintendants, but without much hope of their efficacy. The biggest problem here is that if a person is neither a house-owner nor on anyone's lodging permit he or she cannot obtain a precious pink or white work-seekers card. There are many who work illegally but most reputable employers will not accept anyone whose papers are not in order. Mdantsane is a Ciskeian homeland and the houses are for Ciskeians. A Transkeian can come freely to visit, but he can never own a house or get onto anyone's housing permit. To change his citizenship (which many would like to do) is virtually impossible.

Constant cases are those who come to us after having lost their employment and complain that they either were not given pay in lieu of notice, or leave pay or sick pay and here we tread on extremely thin ice. Our Labour Office who handle these complicated legal problems have a reputation of being extremely fair and will always right a worker's wrongs if they can, so where possible we refer these cases to them.

For pauper's rations, disability grants, hire-purchase problems, pensions and for the infirm we can usually help. We write letters for some, we listen patiently to them all and hope that if we cannot help in any other way that by listening sympathetically we can offer some solace.

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