

Affects social services

Breakdown of family costs taxpayers

THE BREAKDOWN in family life in southeastern Michigan during the 1970s has been devastating. The cost is a major reason we must cough up more state income taxes.

Last week Gov. James J. Blanchard unveiled his state budget proposal for 1984. Despite the ballyhoo about increased allocations for education, the governor is asking a record 40 percent for what are euphemistically termed "social services."

You'll recall that a few weeks ago, I charted out how the social services portion of Michigan's operating budget had soared from 12 percent in 1964-5 to the 37 percent mark in recent years. The increase has been steady for nearly two decades and can't be blamed to any great degree on the

"Reagan depression." After years of lawsuits and delays, the 1980 census numbers are dribbling out of the computers, and the picture they draw of family life is terrifying. Let's deal only with the eight-count Detroit Standard Metropolitan Statistical area, although perhaps the picture is much the same nationwide.

THE TOTAL number of families with children under 18 was stable between 1970 and 1980 — 599,000 in both landmark years.

But the number of "one-parent" families (usually the mother) with children under 18 leaped from 77,000 to 143,000 — an increase of nearly 87 percent.

A visitor from Mars, looking at such a phe-

Ranks are growing

Volunteers are a vital force in suburbs

A SUBURBAN elementary school held a service action Friday night. It was designed to raise money to purchase a small computer for students.

Parents and students volunteered their services, and people wanting those services bid. The biggest bid got the service. Examples included a young boy cleaning up a yard, a housewife babysitting for a weekend, a lawyer drawing up a will, an interior designer painting a bedroom and a nurse teaching Lamaze classes to expectant parents.

More than 100 people volunteered to organize the event. They performed such duties as selling advertising for an auction program, finding people to donate services and wares, buying and serving refreshments, selling tickets and writing publicity notices for church bulletins and local newspapers.

As a result of the thousands of volunteer hours, the school raised more than \$3,000. Students soon will have the school's first computer.

VOLUNTEERISM AT one time was associated with the time-on-her-hands, "do gooder" suburban housewife. Many persons predicted volunteerism would suffer as more women entered the work force.

Today's suburban housewife is probably working to help support her family. Nevertheless, volunteerism is doing better than ever. It has become such a part of our lives that we recently celebrated National Volunteers Week.

Look around. Most community services and programs could not exist without volunteers. Volunteers are engaged in activities ranging from planting flowers in local parks, playing musical instruments in community bands, cleaning up roadides, donating blood to the Red Cross and teaching handicapped children.

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Tim Richard

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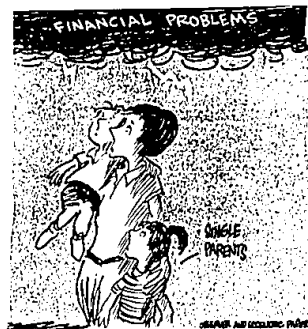
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Nick Sharkey



nomen, might wonder if a major war had resulted in the slaughter of our young men, leaving thousands of weeping widows. No such thing.

The numbers of widows are stable, the numbers of separated women are stable, the numbers of married are down a bit — and the numbers of single and divorced are jumping, jumping, jumping.

In short, the reasons for the great increase in mother-headed households are 1) changes in marriage status and 2) "non-marital births," in the stilted jargon of the bureaucracy.

NOW, THIS BREAKDOWN of the traditional family might be none of your business or mine if that's the way people choose to live.

Indeed, one can argue that it's just as well women get rid of husbands who cheat on, batter or maltreat them. One can say it's a boon they don't have to put up with it any more.

Unfortunately, the taxpayers are picking up the bill.

Consider the kinds of people living in poverty. It used to be that poverty was associated with ages (as in "Over the Hill to the Poor House"). Actually, the percentage of our people age 65 and older living below the poverty level has been dropping.

But the proportion of mother-headed families below the poverty level stands at nearly 44 percent.

DWELL ON that: The number of mother-headed families is up 87 percent, and more than two-fifths are below the poverty level.

The impact on public expenditures is mind-boggling. In 1960, only 24 percent of mother-headed families received public aid; in 1970, 37 percent; in 1980, about 48 percent.

It's not enough to raise income taxes 38 percent to help education. It's a nickel-and-dime solution to talk about lowering welfare benefits to the levels of neighboring states.

In Detroit, the suburbs, Michigan and the nation, we are witnessing a steady breakdown of the family. These fractured families are requiring more and more public assistance. Our legislature is diverting money from our colleges, schools, police departments, fire departments and parks into social services.

It's a long-term social problem that we can't blame on Reagan and Blanchard.

Also, a relatively new category of volunteers is emerging — househusbands. "These men are anxious to get away from the house and become involved in community activities," she said.

EVEN THE Oakland County Volunteer Bureau is run mostly by volunteers. Stoner is a part-time director whose only assistance comes from a 10-hour per week secretary and 12 volunteer staff members.

The agency is looking for volunteers to help with a campaign to encourage parents to buckle up children in an automobile and for families to put plantings in Oakland County parks.

"We always need people to help in the courts as probation aides and to work with probationers," Stoner said.

Although the title is Oakland County Volunteer Bureau, it places volunteers in both Oakland and Wayne County.

Those interested in volunteering should contact a local agency or the Oakland County Volunteer Bureau.

oral quarrel

This week's Oral Quarrel question asked our readers what should be done about the increasing number of persons who have become impoverished. Following are the answers:

• I believe that most poor people are poor because they are irresponsible and I think that we should teach them responsibility. I work in the collection department for a utility and many of the poor people have extremely high utility bills. I emphasize, teach them responsibility.

• As a person who has known unemployment, the best way and the quickest way to eliminate unemployment is to share the jobs. There are a hundred million jobs available that people are working at and they simply should be shared. Almost every job can have someone learn and work at it if only part time. It would eliminate unemployment completely.

• It would be immoral to do anything special for suburban poor. The Department of Social Services provides equal benefits to the poor, regardless of their location. This equality is the American way. The impoverished do not have an implicit right to live in "desirable" suburbs — they should live within their means.

• I believe they should be hired to keep the streets clean and have the grounds and streets free from litter.

• I feel that they should join the services.

• I perhaps don't have an answer except for me. Our Lord tells us to prove to him, give and it will be given to you. How many of these people when they had money gave anything to the Lord's work. I give 10 to 20 percent of gross income every single year to charity of some kind and I feel that is what all people should be doing.

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