

Started as one woman's project

Drive to provide food, gifts for needy

By BARBARA UNDERWOOD

The nicest part about Christmas this year for Ellen Cunningham will be that it won't happen in her basement.

It wasn't just the basement but the entire Cunningham house and garage at 1052 N. Gengarry, Bloomfield Township, that contained Mrs. Cunningham's Focus Hope Christmas Project last year.

What began as a one-woman project to provide Christmas cartons of food, clothing and gifts for 100 of Detroit's neediest families brought such a response from all over the country last year that the indefatigable Mrs. Cunningham decided to expand the project this year.

But there are some differences: she has a co-chairman, Donna Borglin, and a large and active steering committee; the list of needy families has grown to 500, and the donations will be stored in the rummage rooms at Christ Church Cranbrook before delivery.

FINDING A PLACE to collect the donations was a prime consideration. "I began to think of that on the

beach this summer," Mrs. Cunningham said. "That's our first super news."

With that accomplished, Focus Hope Christmas Project 1974 was off and running. Before the end of October Mrs. Cunningham already had received two unsolicited checks.

Dozens of letters have been sent to national and local food, toy, clothing and book companies requesting donations or at least discount merchandise.

More than 300 church and synagogue youth groups and 500 schools throughout Oakland County have been contacted with requests for donations.

"MOST OF the women who helped last year said they would do it again," Mrs. Cunningham said, "and several who didn't work last year have said, 'You didn't ask me.'"

Names of the needy families who will benefit from the Focus Hope Christmas Project have been supplied by Father William Cunningham, Focus Hope director who is responsible for the government funding of Detroit's Food Prescription Center.

The center has funding to feed only 35,000 of the estimated 105,000 persons in Detroit who have been certified as starving.

"Most people in the Birmingham-Bloomfield area are totally and honestly unaware of these statistics and cannot believe them," Mrs. Borglin said.

"Father Cunningham is requesting Christmas aid for 5,000 of his most destitute children this year," she added. "We are attempting to meet this quota, not only as an opportunity for true Christmas giving but to promote the community education and involvement; that is so essential."

THROUGH the Christmas project, each family will receive a sufficient quantity of canned ham, fresh apples and oranges and hard candy for all family members.

In addition, numerous other foods are needed from a prepared list, and specific clothing and toys for all ages. All clothing and toys must be new, Mrs. Cunningham stressed.

The hardest age to provide both clothing and toys for is 14 to 18 years, both boys and girls, she said.

While donations of the listed food, clothing and toys are essential, Mrs. Cunningham said there also is a great need for area families to "adopt" families from the list.

"Or two families can adopt a family," she explained. A family usually means a mother and several children. Mrs. Cunningham said. Some families have as many as 10 and 12 children.

THE AVERAGE minimum cost to adopt a family of four (adult and three children) is about \$50, Mrs. Cunningham estimates.

Senior citizens, whom Mrs. Cunningham describes "as tragic as the children," also will be provided with necessities for Christmas.

"A number of area merchants already have donated clothing and other items, but from here on the project becomes a waiting game," Mrs. Cunningham said.

"If we are going to get money we need to know it is coming in advance," she said. Regardless of the number of contributions of merchandise, there are last-minute purchases which have to be made to fill out the needs for all families on the list.

Collections in the schools will be made from Dec. 2-11. Crews to wrap and fill cartons will work at Christ Church Dec. 13-19 and cartons will be delivered from Focus Hope headquarters Dec. 19-21.

AMONG the most rewarding sources of money last year was a group of men who gave up their office Christmas party and donated money to the project instead, Mrs. Cunningham said.

She would like to have a great many more groups do the same this year.

The entire project is "so exciting one minute and so scary the next," Mrs. Borglin said. "We keep wondering what it is going to hit us." Instead of a once-yearly, phenomenal effort, Mrs. Cunningham has vi-

sions of the project becoming a permanent community service agency.

"It could be a year-round thing," she said. "Youth groups and schools could maintain an emergency food pantry at all times."

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Book describes doctor's work

By NATALIE HALPERN

"Shrink-the' Diary of a Psychiatrist" has been sitting on Dr. Theodore Rubin's back burner since he was graduated from school.

Dr. Rubin explained that the book describes his residencies in psychiatry 25 years ago and his experience with medical and administrative personnel of mental institutions.

Conditions were horrible then, and are no better now, he said. Such mental hospitals function as custodial institutions rather than therapeutic hospitals.

"How in the world could they produce a decent effect?" he asked. Obviously enjoying an "Ask Dr. Rubin" format, his audience at the Jewish Community Center peppered him with questions.

"NO ONE is completely normal," Dr. Rubin said. "Everyone uses neurotic defenses in differing degrees, to get along in the world."

The defense pattern may use rationalization, projection or repression, Dr. Rubin believes all people go through at least some short period of a neurotic nature, which may result in phobias and compulsions.

"Everybody is neurotic. No one is exempt from the pressure of the world." The title of this newest book is not intended as a put-down.

"I like the term because it brings psychiatrists down to size."

WHAT DO POOR people do when hospitals are so bad? Rubin admitted they couldn't do much.

The policy in New York, he said, is

to empty the hospitals. "Many of the mentally ill are walking around the streets."

After-care clinics are available in New York. Most, however, have been closed because they can't meet expenses, he said.

"Nixon and Ford have not given priority to health problems in the United States," he said.

"The fact is that it is horrendous for poor people. The only way this can be remedied is if the Federal government gets into the act."

"THE OLD, the poor, orphans, prisoners, the mentally ill, the chronically diseased—these are all hidden populations. Unless the public really bears down, lobbying for funds, we will not see a change."

"The real truth is that the human condition is a cruel one, and we have been anything but kind to the mentally ill."

Anger, Rubin indicated is a much maligned emotion for a human being to experience.

"We usually view anger as pejorative, as a form of going crazy. The worst anger, however, is that which is repressed."

"Anger is a natural human emotion. In a mild form, it erupts as gossip."

"ITS MOST vindictive form is cold anger, as in the parent who thinks 'I should not get angry with my child,' and develops a cold rage which breaks down communication."

"Anger is a warm emotion—it makes communication possible. It cuts off the possibility of feeling. If it is not expressed, it enables tenderness, warmth, and love after the block is removed."

Dr. Rubin talked about the personality profile of the individual attracted to the practice of psychiatry.

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