

EVENING RECREATION CENTERS

Boys' club buildings with their many facilities for doing things can be made to hold a very close relation to playgrounds located near at hand. It would be well if in every city where there is a boys' club, a public playground could be established on adjoining land. The building with its gymnasium, game room, and baths would lend itself admirably to the needs of the children during stormy and excessively hot weather. A superintendent who could thus keep in touch with his boys through the summer would, in the case of those with little or no home care, be able to render to them and to the community a far greater service than otherwise would be possible.

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Last winter the Committee on the Extended Use of School Buildings in the Women's Municipal League asked the school board for permission to use the East Boston High School in the evening as a social center, for an experiment. The permission was granted, the school board giving the heat and light, the committee paying the janitor and all expenses. Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Hawley were asked to come from Michigan to take charge of the work. The center opened for registration October 26th. Within three weeks fourteen clubs were organized, which have continued with increasing attendance.

There are two dramatic clubs, one for young men with a membership of forty, and one for young women with a membership of thirty. Both, after some preliminary training, are now getting up a play to be given to their friends in April. There are

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also two glee clubs, the young men's numbering thirty-eight and the girls' numbering forty. These had technical instruction for the first three months, and are now preparing something to be given in public. We have two orchestras, a first orchestra of fourteen members who play rather well already, and have several times played for our entertainments, and a second orchestra of beginners who are working hard, but who cannot yet play together. We have a drum corps of twenty-one lads from fourteen to sixteen, also a band of eighteen brass instruments. The girls' folk dancing class of seventy is very successful. A young men's club of twenty-five members has a regular course in gymnastics and physical development, with a part of each evening spent in dancing lessons or basketball. A club of thirty-five boys from fourteen to sixteen calls itself the athletic association, but the activities are much the same as those of the club for the older fellows. There are two sewing classes for the girls; one of twelve for plain sewing, and one of nineteen for novelty sewing. The latter club has had two sales from which the profit was nine dollars, which was put aside for a summer outing.

The Junior City Council is composed of eighteen young men who are doing serious civic work. They are organized on the pattern of the council at city hall, and they take up practical municipal questions each week. Delegates go from this body to a congress composed of delegates from a number of junior city councils, and in this congress State and national questions are discussed.

High School Girls

We felt very strongly when we began that we wished to give these opportunities to working boys and girls, therefore we made the age over fourteen, and said no one going to school could attend. The high school teachers, however, begged hard that there might be just one club for their girls, and hoped that it might be one which would open the girls' eyes to some other occupation than stenography. Since nearly all the girls wished to become stenographers, there seemed to be a chance of an over-stocked occupation. The games club was therefore organized, twenty-nine joining, and has been most successful. Games, stories and songs for the kindergarten and primary age are given these girls, and they are taught how to use them with children. They are taught also occupational work

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(paper cutting, folding), also basket weaving, rug making, brass work, hammock making. They have a delightfully merry evening and at the same time are learning something which will be a great help to them with their own children, or which may enable them to get places in the summer vacation schools where this knowledge is the chief requisite, and at any rate will certainly open their eyes to another occupation. Some of the girls are already trying to induce their parents to let them take the kindergarten course, so real an interest has been aroused by this club.

Demands Not Met You will be interested to hear also of the demands we have had which we have not been able to meet; for a home-making class, for a young married women's literary club, for a domestic servants' club, for a printing class, for a girls' orchestra and a debating club. We have not been able to organize these clubs this winter for various reasons, but some of them, as well as a civic club of older people, we hope to have next year. Saving could be encouraged by introducing some savings system. I have said nothing of our reading room, which we hope will be more and more useful.

Opportunity Clubs I ought to add in regard to numbers that we have now about four hundred and fifty. The various clubs are called, collectively, The Opportunity Clubs of East Boston. They have chosen for their yell:

Unity, Unity, Opportunity,
Rah, Rah, Rah!

The people of East Boston, professional men and women, business men, working people, all are enthusiastic in favor of the social center. As for the parents of our young people, they cannot tell us enough of their joy in having somewhere to send their boys and girls where they need not worry about them. I could tell you many touching stories of the parents' remarks to us, including that of the mother who said she had always felt somewhat bitter whenever she passed the high school, to think her girls could not go there (they all had had to go to work at fourteen), but now (in a happy voice) she was sending all three to the social center! The young men and women themselves bear witness also. One young man told us how much money he had saved because he could go to the social center, instead of spending it at the money-catching

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places, saloons and pool rooms. Another told us that this was the only place where he had met the right kind of friends since he left school.

Clubs, Not Classes The most important principle, perhaps, of our particular form of organization is that we have only *clubs*, no classes. These groups which I have been describing, while they meet for a definite purpose, and this seems to me very important (that they *should* meet for a definite purpose and for some form of self-development) are yet all organized into clubs with their own officers and constitution and rules. Each has a business meeting once a week where they learn parliamentary law and self-government. And we feel not only that this form of organization is more educational, but that we shall thereby hold our young people, give them an *esprit de corps*, a greater interest, and a greater individual responsibility.

Self-Government We have moreover a central committee composed of the president and one delegate from each club, and this central committee will, I hope, be an increasingly important feature of the social center. The committee meets to discuss matters of general interest; they have elected ushers for the entertainments (twenty boys and girls take charge), they have decided on a color for badges, and they have discussed freely various activities of the social center. The plan is that the delegates shall report back to their clubs and get instructions, and thus all our four hundred and fifty members can take part by a representative system in the management of the social center. It is our aim that this committee shall make all our members feel that they belong to something larger than a glee club or a gymnastic or dramatic club, or whatever their particular interest may be, shall make them feel that they are part of a living and radiating center of municipal activity, and that *they* are responsible for its success and for its accomplishment of the aims it has set before itself, aims which they *approve* merely at present, but which in the future we expect they will help to initiate, formulate and execute. They will incidentally learn self-government, how to work for larger things than their own self-development, and eventually be helped to any social or civic work for their community for which they show willingness and aptitude.

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When we engaged our director we stipulated that he should live in East Boston, and we consider this a most important part of our whole scheme. He has taken a house nearly opposite the high school, and the real settlement work he has done has added greatly to the success of the social center and to its value to the house and to the neighborhood.

What we hope for the future is that school boards will establish social centers in those parts of their cities where there is likely to be a sufficient response. We believe that the school buildings should be used chiefly for boys and girls over fourteen who do not go to school, for young working men and women. While appreciating fully the great value of social centers as brought out in the Madison Conference, that is, frequent public discussion by adults of civic and national issues, we feel that such a use of school buildings could only occupy them once or twice a week at most, and that we should still have on our hands the problem of how to use the school buildings evenings. While far from excluding adults we hope as time goes on to get the older people more and more; yet we feel, first, that there is a use for which the school buildings are even more needed than for the older people, and secondly, that not enough older people would use the schoolhouses to constitute a very general or regular employment of them.

Organizations Already Formed

It has been proposed that school boards should give permission widely to organizations already formed to use the school buildings. This does not seem to us the wisest method for the following reasons:

First, many organizations would use them who could afford to pay for halls elsewhere.

Second, it would be impossible in many cases to get a satisfactory guarantee for the proper use of the buildings; people would often get into the schoolhouses who would not use the city property properly.

Third, it would, after all, mean only an occasional use of schoolhouses, and what is that compared with the opportunity of employing the school buildings, under a big constructive plan, for thousands of young people at the most critical age in their lives?

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Fourth, the very people who need such places and opportunities most, those, namely, who have not sufficient initiative and knowledge of the world to organize clubs and get guarantees for the proper use of property, would be the ones excluded from the buildings.

Fifth, and most important of all, we want to encourage clubs to be formed *in* the schoolhouses, rather than to let in those formed outside. This in my mind is one of the most vital points of the whole movement of the extended use of school buildings, and I cannot emphasize it too strongly. We know the evils existing in certain self-formed clubs in many neighborhoods; they are often tools of the political machine; their existence is frequently a menace to the morals of the girls in that neighborhood; or at best they are often mere lounging places, forces for disintegration rather than for helpful up-building. Nowadays we have very definite ideas of the best ways of using leisure; we do not want a doing-nothing which shall soften all the physical, mental and moral fibres, we want those activities which shall build up physically, mentally and morally. There is a greater chance of having clubs which shall upbuild if they are organized *in* the school buildings than if they come in from outside, for the very atmosphere of the schoolhouse suggests decent behavior, some sort of *motive*, and some connection with the rest of municipal life. Moreover, under our plan, the city, while encouraging all clubs to be as independent and self-governing as practicable, would offer some form of leadership.

Again, if the evening use of schoolhouses is given chiefly to miscellaneous organizations, in time these public buildings will be used by Hebrew clubs, Irish clubs, Italian clubs, thus giving up one of the fundamental principles of our public school system. But if the school board itself shall organize the groups occupying school buildings, we can have clubs of Americans, no matter where they were born, learning the American language and customs and ideals, and helping to form an American nation.

Purposeful Work Needed

It seems to me that the movement is suffering at the present moment from the fact that we have perhaps approached it in the wrong way. We talk frequently as if we wanted to get the school buildings used irrespective of what they are to be used for. We form committees on extended use of school buildings (the very name

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emphasizes the secondary and not the primary object of our effort) and we say how sad it is that the school buildings are empty after four o'clock, and there is not an adequate return from the capital invested. Now, unless there is some urgent need for using the school buildings, it doesn't matter if they *are* dark and empty after four o'clock, there is no virtue in simply getting them used. Of course you know as well as I do that that is not what any of us have meant; we were all alive to certain vital, pressing needs in our cities, and therefore thought of using the school buildings to meet some of these needs. But the way the matter has been presented has been a little unfortunate, I think, and I believe we are going to suffer now, unless we are careful, from this little twist in our approach to the subject. Our attitude, simple as it is, is not apparently wholly understood. I am speaking to you today as chairman of a committee on the extended use of school buildings. The name is misleading because I have no interest in the extended use of school buildings *in itself*. I stand for a great unmet need in our community, and I believe we can meet that need with our schoolhouses. The title of my committee might rather be The Educational Recreation of Young Workers from fourteen to twenty-one. I am pleading for an extension of our educational system, rather than for the extended use of school buildings.

We are sometimes asked, "How great do you think the demand is?" We who know the boys and girls of the streets and of the tenements, of the factories and of the stores, know that they are eager for what we might offer them, but they are not all able to organize (are those the ones who should be left out?) and even if they were, the very thing we want is to guide their organization, not to leave it to them but to use our school buildings for that quiet, unobtrusive leadership which our children (for what are they more?) of fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen and eighteen, need at that critical period of their lives.

Moreover, we have at the present moment a somewhat recently recognized need which could, I believe, find its fullest and completest satisfaction in the school building. A department of vocational guidance is to be established in our schools. In any plan for vocational guidance there should be three parts, the advice, the placing and the follow-up. I believe that the follow-up part is of the

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utmost importance, and can be done in the school buildings evenings in a natural and logical way in connection with the social centers.

A Pressing Need of Industrial Life

It remains for school boards to plan for social centers as carefully as it has planned for all other departments of our educational system. I am not advocating a new thing, but an extension of our own educational system; I do not consider my plan even *supplementary* to, but literally a *continuation* of our present system. Up to fourteen our children follow the same road to the same goal, that is, they are all in the same classes together. After fourteen the different needs of different lives make it necessary that these children take different roads although the goal is still the same; some follow the road that leads through the high school; others, those who must work in the daytime, might, if our hopes were realized, follow one which should lead through the social center. I insist, however, that the goal is still the same, and that consequently it is incumbent upon our school boards to provide the second road for those who cannot take the first. The question is not, therefore, let me say once more, of school boards using empty schoolhouses in some way or other for this organization, or that association or club, it is the question of filling a real gap in our educational system by taking in the working boy and girl from fourteen to twenty-one. We ought not to go to our school boards and say, "Will you not use the school buildings evenings?" but we ought to go to them and say, "Will you not make a plan for our working *children* between fourteen and twenty-one?"

Free Expression of Communal Life

The plan I am advocating does not exclude outside initiative, nor older people, it simply insists that a secondary need should take a secondary place. We do, however, look forward to the time when a social center shall mean more than activities planned by the school board for the ages between fourteen and twenty-one or twenty-five. We confidently expect that social centers will in time be the free, spontaneous, and natural expression of the communal life of each locality, that each neighborhood by its own initiative shall work out the solution of its own problem in its own way. But we feel if this is all put on a right basis by the school board from the first, that *within* the school social center, I mean the social center organ-

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ized under some leadership provided by the school board, adults will find a place. A men's club might apply to the social center for one night a week, then having been given a night, the club would not be under the control of the director, but would be an independent, self-governing body, conforming to certain general regulations, and sending delegates to a central committee which makes these regulations. So the attendants will be in every sense on a democratic basis, organized by their own initiative, and following only rules made by themselves, but made by themselves in conjunction with others, and all within a certain atmosphere which should be obtainable, under wise guidance, in every municipal center,—an atmosphere of high if unformulated ideals, and real, if intangible influence. It must always be remembered in any discussion of this subject that *leadership* is not incompatible with democratic organization.

And this is the way things have begun to work out in East Boston a little. Several groups have applied to Mr. Hawley as groups, but note a certain point which is all-important: they are not clubs which are trying to save rent; they are groups which have caught the spirit of the social center, and wish to come there for some educational or social purpose, and are willing to conform to certain general requirements. My great point, however, is that they themselves are going to be allowed eventually to make those requirements. Yet this is utterly different from letting in existing outside organizations not in sympathy with the purposes for which the school buildings have been opened to the public, but who come simply to save rent.

I must add that while I believe a wide neighborhood use of the schoolhouses might thus be arranged for *within* the social center, yet I do not think an isolated and occasional use entirely out of the question. I only feel strongly that such miscellaneous and occasional use should not be allowed to *stand in the way* of a much needed regular use.

Let us be neither hasty nor careless in our advocacy of the extended use of school buildings, but let us endeavor first to find the true principles upon which such an extended use should rest, and then let us use every effort of which we are capable to secure a public acceptance of these principles.