

Lincoln Indians have trouble with housing, steady work

by Connie Winkler
Nebraska Staff Writer

Like other poor people in Lincoln the 300-400 Indians live in poor housing have trouble finding steady work and are trying to find their place in the American middle class jungle.

Like their middle class counterparts, the Indians are concerned about their children, their families and their future — but there isn't enough money.

Yet, the situation for the Indians in Lincoln is getting better. They are adjusting to the American middle class culture. Lincoln Action Program, Head Start, the Salvation Army, churches and missions and Lincoln citizens — all are concerned about and working with the Indians.

Mrs. Hulda Roper, a Lincoln policewoman, began working with the Indians 15 years ago. Indian children were not attending school and the Indians were getting in trouble with the police, Mrs. Roper said. She and the school attendance co-ordinator felt the Indians should be sent back to the reservation. But upon checking conditions at the reservation, they decided to help the Indians here in Lincoln.

WORKING WITH the Lincoln churches Mrs. Roper started collecting clothing and holding family parties for the Indians at the recreation center in the Belmont area. She also started home nursing and cooking classes for Indian women. Now, the Indians are maintaining their own activities, but when they do need something they still come to Mrs. Roper. "People like the Indians here and are willing to help. The Indians, in turn, feel they have friends here," she said.

There is a real need for alcohol education among the Indians said the recipient of the Good Neighbor and Distinguished Citizen awards. "I think we should have an alcohol education center in Lincoln where Indians can go to learn about handling alcohol in their lives."

Mrs. Roper feels that Indians start drinking because of their early childhood experiences and the frustrations of living on a reservation.

"I WOULD like to see more on-the-job apprenticeship training and a greater variety of government training programs for young Indians," she said. "Government programs such as Manpower are helpful but nothing is available now until July," she added.

The Indians also need good housing — there aren't many low cost houses in Lincoln in good repair, she said. Indians usually have large families and it is hard to find low rent houses large enough for them. "We should have passed the Minimum Housing Ordinance last year to bring Lincoln housing up to better standards," she added.

"When we do move an Indian family into a nicer home, in two or three days another family has moved in," she continued. "They share whatever they have and usually it isn't very much." Even when an Indian leaves jail he can find a place to stay at any Indian's home, she said.

Roger Welsch, a teacher at Nebraska Wesleyan, is an adopted member of the Omaha tribe in Lincoln and considers himself a friend of the Indians. "Folklore is my first love and I first became interested in the Indians professionally," said the author of two books on Nebraska folklore.

WELSCH IS acquainted with the two Indian clubs in Lincoln — the Little Warriors and the Lincoln Indian Club. These are made up of members of the Omaha tribe. There are also Winnebagoes, Pawnee, Oglalla and Rosebud Sioux in Lincoln, although these have no formal groups, he said.

Indians in Lincoln don't differ from other poor peoples, their problems are not just a matter of being Indians but also a matter of being poor, he said. "Because they are discriminated against they tend to be poor and suffer the problems of the poor."

Most people's first reaction to the Indians is one of paternalism and this has to be avoided, Welsch said. "Indians are human beings and can be humiliated by paternalism and condescending charity," he warned.

Indians in Lincoln are helping themselves and developing within the white culture, but they are maintaining significant features of their own culture, he said. They have a great treasury of music, customs, stories, costumes and religious ceremonies and they are trying

to keep these while adjusting to our culture. "It is disgusting that we should try to change the Indians."

HE FEELS that too often the white community isn't aware of the outstanding Indian citizens in town. He cited Clyde Sheridan, who was awarded an outstanding civil service award while working at Veterans Hospital and is now the recreation director at the Salvation Army center.

Too often whites hear about the drunk Indians; alcohol does have an effect on Indians, but often the white man encourages the problem, Welsch said. For example, at Pine Ridge reservation in northwest Nebraska, the Indians have laws against drinking on the reservation, but the white man builds bars and pawn shops on the edge of the reservation.

Indians drink because they have so much more



to seek release from, he said. They can experience a cultural shock just trying to adjust to a new culture. Such a minor problem as adjusting to the white man's eye contact makes the cultural adjustment more difficult, he said. The Indians' drinking problem is also a matter of visibility — Indians don't have anyone to take them home when they are drunk, he added.

In the area of employment, Welsch feels programs are needed to help individuals help themselves. "The programs will cost money, but whatever it costs it is worth it. Once the Indian is trained he can find a job, get off the welfare rolls, start paying taxes and set an example for other Indians."

THE FOLKLORIST disagrees that the reservations should be done away with. The reservations are important pieces of real estate and a cultural anchor for the Indians. "For many the reservation is also a retreat, but many of us need a retreat now and then," he added.

The white man must be patient, he continued. It took hundreds of years of deliberate planning to reduce the Indians to dependency on the government. He feels Indians are regaining stability. History courses in Nebraska are no longer looking at the Indians as "noble savages," he said. In the courts Indians are clearing up old iniquities with a battery of lawyers.

"I think the Indians are progressing very nicely — they shouldn't try to become white men." There is already too much exposure to the white world in the schools, he said.

The major factor in the Indian problem is the white man, Welsch concluded. The white man needs to be educated that Indians have a rich culture that is valid and should not be erased even though it is different.

Mrs. Dixie Dakota, whose husband is a Sioux, works with the Indians as a planning aid for Lincoln Action program (LAP). "Indians have been given the worst shake of all the minorities," she said. Their numbers

are smaller, but they are the most prejudiced against in the labor force and given some of the worst housing for their typically large families.

INDIANS, AS WELL as being nonverbal, are proud and are not going to humiliate themselves by asking for better housing or whatever they need, she said. "Indians haven't made a move as a united group to demand and ask for what they want and whites should be encouraging them to unite as a group," she continued.

They have trouble getting welfare because they are not residents because some move back and forth between

Continued on page 7

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