VISTA volunteer: most Nebraskans don't admit state has poverty problem

By Mary Jo Howe

In Lincoln, the majority of them live downtown, along . O St. and above some of the best stores in town.

They are the elderly, the disabled, single mothers with children, uneducated-people whose incomes fall below the poverty line.

It's convenient to forget about these people; in fact, few middle-class or upper-class people in Nebraska admit there is a poverty problem here, Glen Murray said Sunday at the Wesley House.

But Murray knows the problem of poverty in Nebraska first-hand. The 1976 UNL Law College graduate and former Residence Hall Association president is a VISTA volunteer with Grand Island Legal Aid in Grand

The 1970 Nebraska census shows that 13 percent of the population lives below the poverty level, Murray said. The poverty level is a \$5500 income or below for a family of four. There are about 4500 people below that level in Hall county where Murray works.

The Legal Aid service in Grand Island began as an idea by the local Bar Association applied to VISTA, a federal anti-poverty program, for a volunteer to run the project.

Murray said he found out about the project through a VISTA representative visiting the Law College and has now worked there one and a half years.

The Legal Aid service works exclusively with low income people in Hall and Howard counties, dealing with domestic, government agency, housing and consumer problems.

By far the greatest amount of problems come from the domestic area, including divorces, adoptions, and enforcing child support, Murray said.

The project will be taken over by the Legal Service Corporation in January and Murray said he hopes to stay on as a paid staff member.

Murray said that volunteering has been a rewarding experience for him, even though the government allowance for living expenses is low.

One philosophy of VISTA is that the volunteers should experience the same problems the poor have, Murray said, but his living conditions aren't much different than when he was in college, he said.

The volunteer is only in a community to mobilize its resources and help it solve it's own problems, Murray said.

There are 30 to 40 VISTA programs in Nebraska dealing with problems of Indians, alcoholism and winterization of homes, to name a few.

Students interested in volunteer programs can apply at the student volunteer bureau at the Nebraska Union.

Willingness is about the only requirement to become a volunteer, Murray said.

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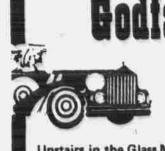
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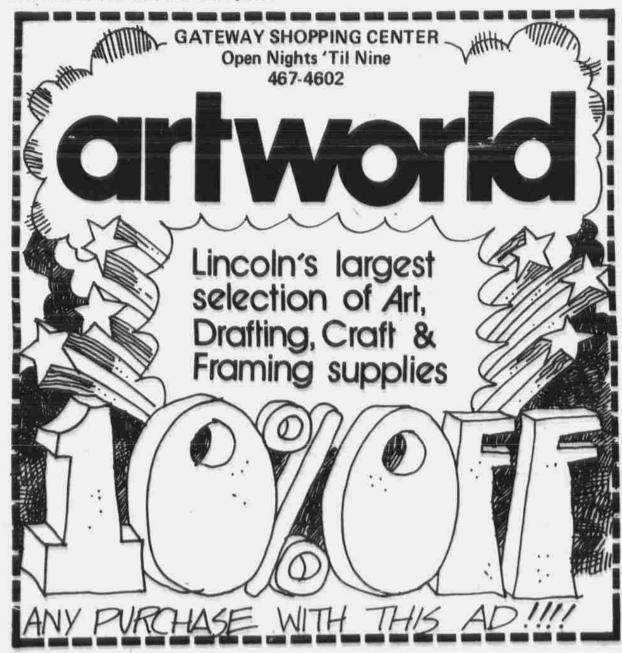
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