

The young ones

The Saturday Club's youth project has been a new venture for the Black Sash; one which could prove a valuable step in building up better relationships between Black and White children. Here Mary Raphaely and Judy Cook discuss what has been done and talk of plans for the future.

The Johannesburg youth project first got off the ground as a result of our concern about the youth preparedness programme which was first introduced into Transvaal schools this year, and more particularly the moral preparedness aspect of the Government's scheme.

Up to now very little information has been available, but it appears that the direction which youth preparedness takes depends largely on the teachers put in charge of the subject by the schools.

We know that there is very little contact between the different race groups in this country. Very important too is the lack of communication between English and Afrikaans-speaking people. We want to try to bridge these gaps among young people. On the black front, there are several difficulties as access to the African townships is quite strictly controlled. There is access to the Indian and Coloured townships although distance presents a problem.

We decided to begin with the already existing Saturday Club, a mixed discussion group which has been meeting for a number of years on a monthly basis. We asked our members to bring their children under the age of 14 to a gathering in a private house.

We hoped that pleasant surroundings and equal status contact would form the background for the growth of a better inter-group understanding. We hired a bus to collect the black children and their mothers from town and when they arrived, served a simple lunch. For the first few meetings we planned our activities with the children carefully.

We divided them into groups of roughly the under-fours, the five-to-nines and the older ones. We had a few members organising each group, and the mothers shared the responsibility of supervising them. With the babies we found that integration worked naturally, and that it was impossible to do more with them than produce toys and allow them to

get on with activities, like making dolls out of waste products. With the oldest group we had a painting project and played games calculated to mix them up.

After the first few meetings we decided we needed a freer structure, in order to allow the children to relate more naturally to each other. From then on, to a large extent we left them alone, and when we organised them we used lots of music and singing games. Recently two of us have attended a mixed creative drama course. An idea we learnt here which we hope to implement is to use music to trigger off a chain of mime, drama and painting, all designed to immerse the children to the point where they lose awareness of their colour differences.

We do believe that the most likely situation to reduce inter-group tensions occurs where people have to co-operate with each other in order to achieve a common objective. And *this we hope to achieve through using the training we have had in the drama course.*

At the moment the Junior Saturday Club consists very largely of African children with a few Coloureds, some Whites and no Indians. We have had a request to include children above the age of 14.

There are several breakdown points in the scheme. There is a hiatus over the holidays and the children are not meeting at all except at our meetings which themselves may be too infrequent for young people to maintain a proper contact. Nevertheless we feel that in many cases the Saturday Club has been the first point of contact and that it is much easier to establish it when the children are small than to try to do this artificially later on. Already by the age of five, there is a shyness in both Black and White.

Nevertheless, over the year we have investigated various other activities. We found out about the Natal and Cape programmes and we contacted various people working with mix-

ed groups in an effort to establish a valid course of action. We found that several schemes have failed largely because of a lack of White interest.

We feel that one of our prime targets must be to educate White children and this year we hope to draw children into studying some of the African languages using a cheap basic language laboratory technique. We would like

to establish a group with high school children debating on relevant subjects outside our political situation.

We have started with a small group and we will work towards expanding it. It is our belief that we must work at a level where contact across racial barriers is not artificial and that gradually with growing knowledge of each other a greater respect will develop.

MR. DORFMAN said that while in large crowds it might appear that African traffic officers were dealing with Whites, this was not so. They were in fact dealing only with Africans.

"They will never try to stop the Whites. These are their instructions." The position was apparently different if a White spoke to an African inspector. The inspector could then reply to the White.

Rand Daily Mail. December 15, 1972.

DESCRIBING the problem of overcrowding in Soweto, Mr. Moss said housing was needed for an estimated 84 000 people, including 13 000 families and 19 000 "single" men and women.

Rand Daily Mail. December 11, 1972.

AN AFRICAN family now needs at least R85,15 a month to survive, according to Jo-

hannesburg Chamber of Commerce figures released yesterday . . .

Updating its six-monthly figures for Soweto households, the chamber also finds that there has been a 16 per cent rise in the Poverty Datum Line, making it necessary for a household head to earn a minimum of R76,16 to keep above that level, which includes purely basic budget items . . .

Rand Daily Mail. January 10, 1973.

WHILE mission hospitals in many homeland areas report the "usual" high incidence of near starvation among children, two hospitals report that a staggering 75 to 80 per cent of the children they see are famished.

There has been an acute food shortage and the situation facing families without income is desperate.

Many children have starved to death.

Rand Daily Mail. December 15, 1972.

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