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Budget Planning
in
Social Case Work

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Budget Planning in Social Case Work

The human mind, even if well trained, is but rarely able to understand complex problems without dividing them into distinctive parts sufficiently simple to be understood. The determination of the present cost of living in a particular family is usually a difficult and complex problem in social case work, and even more difficult is the determination of the modifications in income and expenditure essential for the maintenance of the living standards desired for a family under a case-work plan.

It is believed by this Committee that the custom of budget planning can be made of marked service in helping case workers to solve such problems of living costs, and greater attention to budget planning in social case work is strongly recommended.

The budget is a detailed estimate of probable income and expenditure during a coming period of time. It analyzes living costs and expresses the result of this analysis in simple concise form for easy study and reference. It uses figures in connection with brief and fairly uniform word descriptions, and figures are the shortest and most accurate form of description. Its preparation requires the collection of essential information concerning a family's living costs during the course of the investigation, and the definite formulation of a practical working plan in the terms of dollars and cents for keeping income and expenditures in the desired adjustment during the budget period. It shows defects in present expenditure tendencies and points the way toward remedial effort. Most important of all, perhaps, it helps family and social worker to plan ahead with reference to necessary expenditures rather than adjusting present expenditures simply to meet present needs.

A household budget is not the same as a household account and may or may not be associated with account keeping. An account is a more or less accurate statement concerning money

received and spent during a past period of time, and often does not function in modifying future expenditures unless considerable time is spent in studying critically the data contained in the account. A budget is a plan for the future. If properly planned and utilized, it is an active dynamic force in improving expenditures and keeping them in the desired relationship to one another and to the total family income.

The keeping of an account has to be done by the person or persons who are actually receiving and spending the money, or some person closely associated with them. The budget may or may not be prepared by the family whose expenditures it is attempting to control, although it should be based, of course, upon accurate budget data concerning the family's income and expenditures as secured in the investigation. The family may or may not understand the full purpose of the budget plan, and effective budget work is often done where the case worker uses the budget plan simply as the basis for financial advice or aid to the family rather than as a means of training the family to adjust its own expenditures.

Budget planning, whether mental or written, acts as a short cut to accurate thinking concerning a family or personal financial situation. It helps to prevent the case worker from expecting the impossible from people living on inadequate incomes—for dark, overcrowded rooms, scanty wardrobes, limited household equipment and furnishings, and a bread and coffee dietary are sometimes all that a family can afford rather than what would be provided if the income were larger.

The planning of a budget also proves of service in case-work sometimes by indicating the need for further investigation with reference to sources of present income. The purchasing power of a certain amount of money is limited, and there is usually reason for suspicion that unknown sources of income exist if a family is found able to maintain without apparent effort a comfortable standard of living on a stated income inadequate in amount to cover known necessary expenditures.

If relief grants are to be made part of the case-work plan, the preparation of a detailed budget is perhaps especially valuable because of its effect in lessening waste of relief funds by keeping aid closely adapted to personal need. Also it puts such

aid on a sound business basis and usually insures a fairer and more equitable use of funds with less danger that extra assistance be given to people who constantly demand it and that insufficient assistance be given to those who prefer to deny themselves to an extreme rather than ask for extra aid.

Ideally, as already indicated, budget planning should also be the basis for any educational work which involves readjustment in expenditure habits, for much harm may come from such advice which is not based on full knowledge of family customs and needs.

Budget planning is not a mere matter of office routine. It requires that the case worker secure essential budget facts during the process of investigation. It also requires that the case worker, the supervisor and the family recognize the budget plan as an important factor in the investigation and in the plan of treatment, and one which requires constant consideration and revision as treatment plans develop or additional budget facts are secured as the result of further investigation.

In order that a budget may be planned for a particular family certain information must have been secured, for there is no surety that a normal expenditure along a given line will prove the desirable one for a particular family. Normal families have fairly normal expenditures, but most families under the care of a case-working agency are removed from normality to a greater or lesser degree and their economic problems as well as their social problems require careful and individual consideration.

The Committee recommends that standards of normal expenditure be used as a guide in planning budgets for particular families, but that main emphasis be placed upon the securing of detailed information during investigation concerning previous and present habits of expenditure in each family, as the basis for a budget plan which will be an expression of desired living standards for that family in the future. Good case work gives us the basis for individualizing family and personal problems, and it would seem that it should also give us the facts necessary for the preparation of an individualized budget plan.

This report discusses first in considerable detail the nature of the information which seems essential as the basis for the budget plan and the reasons why different families of similar composition need to spend different amounts for food, clothing

and other parts of the budget in order to maintain a desired living standard. The report then discusses methods of budget planning under three divisions: first, methods of securing necessary budget information; second, methods of preparing the budget in written form; third, methods of utilizing the budget plan to improve living conditions.

I. NECESSARY INFORMATION FOR BUDGET PLAN

BACKGROUND FACTS

Because past living standards have great influence on present and future living standards, it is essential that they be given consideration in the budget plan.

Did the family ever live according to desirable standards? If so, where? And when? If such standards are no longer maintained, why not? Is it simply that income has been lowered in comparison with the family's living cost? Or has there been a loss in some one or more of the personal, family and community influences which function in connection with income in controlling the maintenance of a desirable living standard?

If the family apparently never lived according to satisfactory standards, why not? Was it because of inherent inability to do so, lack of opportunity, or wasted opportunity? Was the income ever sufficiently adequate to provide suitable living quarters, necessary furnishings, necessary food, clothing, education? Was there a burden of debt payments, heavy expenses for health care, financial aid to relatives or friends, or other necessary outgo which made it impossible for a given income to provide its customary standard of living?

Fairly definite information concerning the family's income and expenditures during past periods of time is of distinct service in answering these questions. Especially if this data is presented in budget form will it give a picture, or a succession of pictures, of the economic difficulties which the family has faced, or the economic possibilities of which it did, or did not, take full advantage.

Such data is also a valuable basis for planning present and future budgets for the family, and for guiding the family in any necessary budget adjustments. With families who previously

lived according to desirable standards on an adequate income and who are now living according to less desirable standards on an inadequate income, data concerning past expenditures may be far better as the basis for a relief budget plan than estimates of present expenditures. It must be remembered, however, that living costs have changed rapidly during the last few years, and that the cost of living in a particular family may have changed decidedly because of differences in the size of the family or in certain of its special expenditure requirements. Figures of past income and expenditure are good background facts, but they require interpretation when used as a direct aid in planning a present budget.

PRESENT BUDGET FACTS

In addition to securing facts concerning a family's budget in the past, it is essential that the case worker secure a considerable amount of information concerning the family's present and probable future income and expenditures, and the family's particular needs which will have to be given special attention in preparing a budget plan which will be effective in securing the attainment of desired living standards.

The following suggestions concerning factors which affect family income and expenditures will perhaps prove helpful to the case worker in securing essential budget information and interpreting its value in relation to the budget plan.

Income

What are the various sources of family income? How much is received regularly from each?

Is there likelihood of an increase in income in the immediate future? Or is there chance of a decrease? Will earnings probably be higher soon because of better health? Because of greater industrial efficiency? Because of a busy season in the trade? Or will earnings be lessening because health or other conditions will be interfering with regular employment? Because there will be less work possible during the slack season in the trade? Will friends and relatives soon be able to help the family to a smaller or larger extent? Can assistance from other social agencies be increased if necessary? Or will a smaller amount of aid soon be given to the family?

How regularly is the stated income received? Is the amount underestimated by the family or overestimated? William is said to be earning \$12.00 a week. Does this mean that he ideally earns this sum but actually earns only \$10.00 a week on an average? Or does it mean that he earns at least \$12.00, but usually earns about \$15.00? If relatives or friends are assisting, is the generous giving which is described a frequent act or a rare act? Is there tendency to underestimate the amount which is given fairly regularly in small amounts?

With reference to income even more than with reference to expenditures is accurate data essential as the basis for the budget plan. Without the estimated amount of money, estimated expenditures cannot be made. With more than the expected amount of income, the planned method of expenditure may not use the money to the best advantage.

Housing and Housekeeping Expenditures

What is the rental paid? When is it due? Is it paid to date? Is heat, light or hot water included in rental? If the house is owned, what are the taxes, insurance, and other expenses of house ownership?

Does a low rental for a particular family mean high carfare expense to work, school, church, stores, recreation opportunities, etc.?

Are there enough rooms suitably arranged for healthful living conditions? For moral decency? Are sunshine and fresh air a possibility or an impossibility?

Is an apparently low rental a wise economy or a wasteful extravagance for this family? Is an apparently high rental a needless extravagance for this family or money well invested?

What are the family's expenses for coal? gas? wood? oil? ice? laundry and cleaning supplies?

Could these be lessened by increasing the efficiency of the heating, lighting, cleaning and storage equipment, or by helping the family to use supplies more economically?

Are expenditures necessarily above normal because of housing conditions or because of the family's mode of life? No coal storage space makes a high coal cost. Loosely fitting doors and windows, cracks and crevices in walls and frame, aid ventilation

but increase heating bills. Dark rooms mean high lighting bills, especially if a dark room is a kitchen or other room in frequent use during the day time. Hours of work also affect the fuel and light expenditure. If the adults in the family are at work during the day and the children are in a nursery or at school, the fuel expenditure for the family during the cold weather will be much lower than in a family where the mother is at home all day caring for young children. If housekeeping tasks have to be performed before and after work, or if some member of the family goes to work very early in the morning or returns late at night, the lighting bills will be considerably higher than if regular housekeeping and sleeping hours can be maintained.

Cleaning supplies are expensive, especially if janitress work is done and supplies are not provided by the landlord. The cost of fuel and laundry supplies for home laundry work is considerable, and lessens the net profit by increasing the expenditure figure for this item in the household budget.

Personal cleanliness is fairly expensive as well as difficult in families where the working members are engaged in tasks which soil body and clothing.

The cost of ice is an appreciable item at the present ice prices, but its purchase during hot weather may mean a corresponding saving in lessened food waste and may prevent considerable illness, especially among babies, by keeping milk and other perishable foods from deteriorating quickly into a harmful condition.

The life of household furnishings and equipment is not unlimited, for dishes will break and sheets and pillow cases will wear out even if used with great care. Also, the number and kind of articles necessary for the maintenance of a desirable living standard vary with changes in the size of the family and the size of living quarters.

The expenditures for all household furnishings may be considered as a separate budget item, but usually it proves simpler to estimate as a separate item expenditures for the larger and more expensive articles which represent a real investment, such as beds, stoves, sewing machines, etc., and to allow as a part of the housekeeping expenditures a sufficiently high amount to cover the cost of replacing necessary dishes, towels, sheets, and other articles of less cost and less permanent value.

All these expenditures vary considerably from family to family, and are also affected by other expenditures under the budget plan. It would seem necessary, therefore, to study them carefully in its preparation.

Food Expenditures

Is a large number of calories required for one or more members of the family because of heavy physical work? Active recreational life? Diseased condition?

Is there a pregnant or nursing woman in the family who will require a larger quantity of an especially adequate dietary? Is there an undernourished child in the family or a person convalescing from a serious illness, with consequent need for a generous dietary to make up for past losses?

Is any member of the family suffering from a diseased condition which necessitates the use of a special diet consisting of fairly expensive types of food?

Is the family accustomed to use a large proportion of its food money for the purchase of meat and other foods high in cost in relation to nutritive value? Does it use only the more expensive kinds and cuts of meat, the more costly kinds of fruits, vegetables, cereals, fats, "imported luxuries," etc.?

Differences in food costs in families of different racial groups and different income levels are dependent upon the quantities and types of the various foods used. As the basis for the budget plan, and also as the basis for educational effort towards better food habits, it would seem to be essential for the case worker to secure definite information concerning a family's present dietary needs and local, racial, or religious customs, with reference to kinds of food used and their proportionate consumption. An expensive dietary is not always an adequate one and the mere statement of the total amount spent for food by the family is not always a test of adequacy.

Does the family have easy access to public markets, cash stores, co-operative stores and other agencies with a low selling cost? Or do most purchases have to be made in neighborhood stores run on a credit basis where prices are often necessarily high?

Does the family have time for thrifty food selection and preparation? Or is the main thought and energy spent on work out-

side the home? Is there sufficient knowledge and managing ability so that the maximum of return will come from each expenditure and therefore there will be no money or food waste?

Is there adequate equipment for food preparation and storage? Or is the range in the family dietary limited by the number of cooking utensils and the efficiency of the equipment? How can cereals be properly cooked when the only cooking dish is a frying pan? And how can anything be properly baked in a stove whose oven can be made only luke-warm? Do food purchases have to be made practically on a meal basis because of lack of suitable storage space?

These factors all affect the amount of the necessary food expenditure, and it would seem that their influence should be ascertained and given due consideration in the budget plan and in the development of remedial effort to lessen unfavorable influences.

Clothing Expenditures

Definite data on past, present or future clothing expenditures can usually be secured only with considerable difficulty, for the necessary wardrobe varies greatly according to age, sex, climate, season, occupation, health, recreational customs, personal tastes, etc. Clothing purchases are made at varying intervals according to immediate needs or income possibilities and their total amount during a certain period of time is usually not realized by the individual or by the family, nor will this amount of necessity be the amount required during a coming period of time for the maintenance of the same clothing standard. Hence with clothing even more than with food is it necessary to base the budget estimate upon an individualization of the requirements of the various members of the family and the ways in which these needs can best be met.

As will be seen, the estimating of the amount of necessary clothing expenditures in connection with the budget plan is not a simple matter, but it is believed that it can be made far more so if emphasis is placed upon securing in the investigation fairly detailed information about a family's clothing needs expressed in terms of articles of clothing, and then translating them into costs rather than starting with an average cost and trying to adapt it to the family or the family to it.

What are the family's personal standards with reference to clothing? Does the fact that they cannot be especially well dressed interfere with attendance at church, social gatherings, places of recreation, with willingness to entertain company and visit friends and relatives? Or is the question of dress a matter of comparatively minor importance in the family life? Is it necessary to develop in the family a greater appreciation of the importance of suitable dress at home and outside the home? Or is it a question of helping the family to lessen its dependence upon a false or too costly dress standard which interferes with the richest and fullest development of life?

Are there health conditions which require special attention to the adequacy and type of clothing? An unsuitably clothed body as well as an unsuitably fed body is less resistant to disease, and is less able to withstand its ravages or to convalesce from its effects.

Does the place and nature of employment of working members of the family cause a high clothing expenditure? In certain places and types of employment a rather expensive standard of dress is required; advancement and often the holding of a job is dependent upon the maintenance of this standard as well as upon the quality of work done. Frequently there is necessary extra expenditure for high boots, rubber shoes, aprons, caps, overalls and other articles of working equipment, and there may be unusually heavy wear on these and other garments because of the nature of the tasks performed.

Are the children of the family unusually active and consequently hard on their clothing? Have they been trained to take proper care of their clothing?

Is clothing purchased for cash or on the installment plan? Is it purchased new or second-hand? Is there sufficient time free from other work for the making, re-making and repairing of garments? Is there sufficient knowledge and skill so that clothing is thriftily selected and given use and care which will prolong its period of service to the utmost? Are articles made at home? Or are all articles purchased ready-made? Is there necessary knowledge concerning relative values in clothing selection and use under American living conditions?

What is the present condition of the family wardrobe in rela-

tion to needs during a certain period of time? Is the family supplied with enough articles for suitable dressing and for necessary changes for cleanliness? Are there interested friends, relatives, employers, or relief-giving agencies who will probably give the family a certain amount of assistance in the form of clothing? If so, will this probably be in the form of partly worn articles which may or may not be essential and of immediate use, or in the form of new shoes, stockings, shirts and other essential articles which have to be frequently purchased?

If the budget is being prepared as part of a relief plan, will relief probably be given for a short period of time or for a long period? If the family is soon to be self-supporting, can all clothing purchases be postponed until this time? Or are Johnnie's only shoes already worn out and are other clothing purchases as vitally and immediately necessary? If relief is probably to be given as part of a continued plan, what expenditures are immediately necessary in order that the wardrobe should become adequate? If a considerable expenditure for clothing is necessary, will it prove disastrous to the plan of treatment to provide this clothing rapidly as special aid? Or will it be better to make the wardrobe adequate gradually by means of a succession of special grants or by means of a fairly generous cash allowance until the family has made necessary purchases and the allowance can be reduced to the amount necessary for repair and replacement costs? If the wardrobe is already in an adequate condition, how much expenditure will be necessary during the time for which the budget is being planned in order that the clothing needs of the family will continue to be adequately met?

Other Expenditures

In addition to expenditures for food, rent, housekeeping supplies and clothing, most families have a number of other expenditures concerning which it is advisable to secure definite information as the basis for the budget plan.

Is carfare expenditure necessary? If so, how much? Are lunches or other meals purchased regularly away from home? If so, what is their approximate cost? Are the entire earnings of the working members of the family turned into the family fund and necessary refunds made for carfare, lunches and spending

money? Or is only a part of the earnings turned into the family fund and the remainder kept for personal use? If so, is this amount used for the purchase of clothing as well as for other personal expenses? Would any modifications in present practices develop better family relationships or cause a more equable use of the total family income?

Is there expenditure for nursery care for children? Remember that expenditure for lunches or nursery care lessens the amount required for the purchase of food for home use and that these three items in the budget are closely related to one another.

Adequate health care requires a certain expenditure for toilet articles, tooth brushes, dental care, simple household remedies, etc., even if all members of the family are in fairly good physical condition. The cost of hair cuts and shaves is a considerable item in some family budgets. How much will these items cost in this particular family?

With illness there is nearly always extra expense for clinic fees, special medical or nursing care, medicine, carfare to doctors, hospitals or clinics, telephone calls, and other expenses which would not exist except for the condition of illness. With sudden or acute illness money for these expenditures usually has to come from an emergency fund, from a radical readjustment of the budget, or from special assistance from friends, relatives or a relief-giving agency. Often, however, illness, especially the illness which brings the family into continued contact with a case working agency, is of a type which requires a considerable period of regular treatment, and the approximate expense of such treatment should be given proper recognition in the budget plan.

Does the securing of necessary recreation involve expenditures for carfare, club dues, admission to the movies, concerts, theatrical performances, and other forms of amusement? Or is recreation secured with comparatively little expense because of free neighborhood facilities or a considerable amount of personal entertainment at home or in the homes of friends or relatives? In a particular family recreation may or may not require much money outlay and the present expenditure, or lack of expenditure, may or may not be the way in which a desirable recreational standard can be best maintained. Again is there necessity for in-

dividualizing the family's needs and developing the budget plan accordingly?

Is one or more newspapers purchased regularly? Is there payment for other reading material? Are all books, paper and pencils provided free to school children? If not, what is their approximate cost? Is much postage required for letters to members of the family, relatives and friends who are living elsewhere in this country or abroad?

In most churches a contribution of money is considered part of the act of worship and this and other regular giving needs to be planned for in the budget, and also club dues, union dues, insurance premiums, interest on debts, payments on debts or on installment purchases, and other regular obligations which have been assumed.

Is money to be invested in the purchase of household furnishings and equipment of fairly permanent value?

With the self-supporting family attention has also to be given to urging regular savings as part of the budget plan, if there is any margin of income above the amount required for necessary expenditures.

As will be indicated by the discussion which follows, the amount of detail used in grouping this information in the budget plan may differ somewhat from family to family because of the need or lack of need of bringing certain types of expenditure under close budget control. However, in the collection of budget information, it is worth while for the case worker to have in mind as a guide in securing complete budget data the following list of ways in which money may be used in addition to its use for housing, housekeeping expenditures, food and clothing:

Expenses necessitated by employment (carfare, lunches, nursery care for children)

Expenses for health and personal care

Recreational expenditures

Educational expenditures

Payments assumed under definite obligations

(Church contributions, regular aid to relatives, union dues, club dues, interest on debts, payments on debts, installment purchases, insurance premiums, etc.)

Cost of new household equipment and furnishings to be purchased as an investment

Planned savings

The amount of these various items is fairly regular in a particular family and is usually easily obtainable if the family can be made to see the importance of such information in connection with the preparation of the budget plan. In one family the total expenditure for these items may need to be only \$1.00 a week; in another family it may need to be \$5.00 a week or even \$10.00. Because of this wide variation from family to family it would seem especially desirable to think of these various miscellaneous expenditures under enough headings so that an impression may be secured of their relative functionings. It would also seem desirable to secure sufficient data from each family concerning special practices and special needs in this part of the budget so that a suitable budget plan can be prepared which will face facts in all parts of the budget rather than hiding certain facts by the use of a general budget heading entitled sundries, incidentals, or miscellaneous.

II. BUDGET METHODS

There would seem to be in all budget work three distinct steps: first, the securing of necessary information as the basis for the budget plan; second, the preparation of the budget plan in written form; and third, the utilization of the budget plan in securing desired improvements in the family's living standards.

A. SECURING BUDGET INFORMATION

Two types of information are essential as the basis for the budget plan—general information concerning the usual cost of maintaining a desirable living standard under local conditions, and detailed information concerning the special cost of living problems in the family whose budget is planned.

General information concerning the cost of maintaining a desired living standard at a particular time in a particular community will come if the case worker constantly practices individualized budget planning in connection with her case work. Usually, however, it proves helpful to case workers to have a guide for estimating minimum living costs, especially with refer-

ence to food, as an index of the amount below which it is impossible to expect that a desirable living standard can be maintained. Such a guide should not be prepared on the basis of information secured from families who are living at less than a subsistence level; it should be based on accurate data secured from local families who are actually maintaining a fairly desirable living standard, or on detailed estimates prepared by specially qualified social workers with reference to the articles required for the maintenance of such a standard and their cost at the present time in the local community.

Such a guide has been prepared in an excellent way by Miss Florence Nesbitt for the Chicago Council of Social Agencies* and her pamphlet gives many helpful suggestions concerning the methods by which such a guide can be prepared and kept properly revised. A guide for estimating weekly costs of food and clothing is issued from time to time by the Committee on Home Economics of the New York Charity Organization Society, and the Dietetic Bureau of Boston has an excellent and very detailed schedule for estimating food costs. Similar guides have been prepared for the use of social agencies in other cities, and it is recommended that more such schedules be prepared for the joint use of social agencies working in a particular locality.

However, absolute dependence upon such general budget estimates is believed by this Committee to be a dangerous practice, and it is strongly recommended that they be prepared and used simply as a guide and that any budget for a family be planned mainly upon the basis of data secured during the investigation concerning the cost of maintaining the living standard desired for *this family*—not for an *average* family.

As indicated in an earlier section, there is a wide range of information concerning the particular family situation which has a direct bearing upon the budget plan. Most of this information is secured from the family, but much important budget information is also secured from relatives, friends, employers, neighbors, schools, churches, social agencies, health agencies and other sources of information used in the course of an investigation.

*Bulletin No. 5, April, 1919. The Chicago Standard Budget for Dependent Families. The Chicago Council of Social Agencies, 165 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. Price, 25 cents.

Much of the essential budget information is secured normally in the process of investigation, but it is well for the case worker to have in mind the various factors which probably affect expenditures in this particular family and to secure in her investigation the data essential for the preparation of the budget plan. For instance, information concerning present employment usually helps us to judge of the probable amount and regularity of income, but it should also give us fairly definite data about expenditures for carfare, clothing, food and other items affected by employment. Investigation concerning health conditions should give definite information with reference to any probable extra expense for health care, and also with reference to any modifications in present expenditures as necessitated by health conditions. Information concerning recreational, educational and religious customs should give necessary data with reference to the amount of expenditures at present required and also any changes in expenditure advocated in the treatment plan.

As already stated, the budget plan is not an isolated factor in case work. It should profit by all the information which is collected during the process of investigation. Its preparation should help to crystallize into usable form the various financial facts secured in the investigation, and the worker who prepares it must not lose sight of the value of the more general aspects of the investigation in interpreting the underlying reasons for the various detailed budget practices revealed.

In her contacts with the family the visitor can secure much valuable information by the practice of accurate observation concerning family and personal customs, housing conditions, dietary habits, clothing sufficiency or deficiency, the adequacy of house furnishings and working equipment, the amount of thriftiness in the use of money and articles purchased, etc.

If possible, however, it usually proves far more satisfactory, as well as more accurate, to take the necessary time to talk over in considerable detail the amount and nature of customary expenditures in addition to talking over with the family the amount and source of customary income.

Information about expenditures is most easily secured with reference to fixed items like rent, insurance, carfare, lunch money, church contributions, union or other dues, debt or installment

payments, etc. The amount paid for other items in the budget is also fairly easily obtainable, especially if you make inquiries definite and concrete. For instance, a question concerning the price now being paid for milk, eggs, butter, cheese, stew meat, sugar, potatoes, coal, oil, wood, shoes, stockings, or other items frequently purchased, brings a ready response in these days of changing prices.

A quick and a fairly accurate reply usually comes also to questions concerning the quantity of articles usually purchased and the frequency of such purchases. Questions concerning comparative expenditures now and previously are also good means of securing information. "Are food prices higher in this neighborhood than the one from which you just moved?" "Does John have to pay more for carfare, lunches and clothing in his new job?" "Do you find that it costs more to light and heat these rooms than it did the last ones you lived in?" "How much milk do you buy a day?" "How long do Johnnie's shoes wear before having to be repaired," etc.

Quantities and prices and the nature of various expenditures are matters of considerable interest to most women, especially if the income is small and the woman is trying to make every penny count to the utmost. A small amount of interested and tactful questioning is usually all that is necessary to start the conversational ball rolling along the desired track and the necessary information is secured accompanied by the explanations which are so essential in determining the value of the family's present expenditures and the modifications in them which should be made eventually if possible.

Preferably no attempt should be made in this part of the budget work to make any recommendations concerning budget adjustments. This is part of investigational work and hints concerning what the visitor considers desirable may influence decidedly what information is given by the family. Also, premature recommendations concerning changes in expenditures may interfere decidedly with any large and more important recommendations based on a more thorough knowledge of the situation. Money is not created by any amount of budget advising and the worker who tells the family to buy four quarts of milk a day without also suggesting where economies can be practiced most wisely in other

parts of the budget often finds that her advice is not followed unless she gives the family money for it, or she may find that in order to buy the milk the family has made certain adjustments which may later cause serious budget difficulties.

In addition to securing information by observation and by the guiding of conversation, it is often desirable to secure a larger amount of detailed information as the basis for the budget plan by asking some member of the family to keep a record of all income and expenditures during a period of a week or longer.

If the family has not been in the habit previously of keeping accounts, it is better not to ask the family to use a special form for the keeping of this record but to let them write down day by day on a blank piece of paper the source and amount of all income and the nature and amount of all expenditures.

With people of more education than is customary among many families under the care of a case-working agency, the use of a special blank for the recording of desired information often aids in the accuracy of its collection. However, if reading and writing is done only with considerable difficulty, a record form is usually rather appalling when first used, even if the form has been ruled and worded in the simplest way. Experience in having families keep accounts for the first time seems to indicate that a far more accurate record is more easily secured if the person who is keeping the account is left free to write it at first according to the way which seems easiest to him or to her.

Later on, if the keeping of accounts is to be a part of budget supervision, the use of a simple account form is of value in holding interest and in helping the family to learn how to use their money to better advantage.

The purpose of having the family keep any kind of a record during a period of investigation or re-investigation is to provide accurate information for the social worker. It would seem therefore that the simplest possible method should be used, even if it has but little educational value to the family in comparison with a slightly more elaborate form of record-keeping which might be utilized.

If the budget discussion has indicated need for detailed information concerning recreational, educational, health, food, fuel or other expenditures, the family may be asked to keep a record

of only these expenditures rather than for all expenditures. Much can also be learned by having a record kept of the kinds of food used at different meals by the family group, or the approximate amount of different kinds of food used by some member of the family whose health indicates a need for special dietary supervision.

A written inventory of clothing and household furnishing and equipment is often of service in providing data concerning necessary expenditures in the future, and it also removes the need for detailed questioning which may seem "over personal" to both visitor and family.

Such written records are a valuable part of budget investigation, but it is recommended that too much dependence be not placed upon them as the sole source of information concerning the family's expenditure habits. For instance, during the period for which a household account was kept the income may have been more or less than it will be during the time for which the budget is being planned, and the expenditures correspondingly different. Or some special expenditures may have been made—an unusual amount of clothing may have been purchased, or some special article of household furnishings or equipment, or it may have been necessary to pay a full month's rent out of a week's salary, or six week's arrears in insurance premiums, or perhaps a considerable sum for health care or for some special recreational outing.

Also, the data in the account may be inaccurate or incomplete because of carelessness in recording all items or in recording a single item more than once, as often happens if children are keeping the account because of parent's inability to read and write in English. For the sake of accuracy, therefore, it is usually better to have the man or woman in the family keep this investigation record in a foreign language, if they can do so, rather than to use children for the keeping of the account in English unless they are old enough to feel responsible for its accuracy.

With some few families, too, the keeping of an account provides an opportunity for the use of the imagination with reference to the expenditures which they would like to make, or the income which they would like to have the visitor think they receive and the expenditures which they think it would please her to know

they made. To the trained case-worker, however, such planned inaccuracies are usually fairly obvious, because of the minor disagreements between oral and written statements which nearly always creep in unless both are founded on the truth.

Even the most accurate account gives no information concerning the reasons for present budget practices, although it gives much valuable information about past income and expenditures. Its data supplements other information secured in the course of the investigation, but it would seem a dangerous practice to base a budget plan upon the data from such an account unless its limitations were fully understood. The successful budget plan is based upon the maximum of knowledge concerning the family's present budget practices in comparison with desirable practices, and the account provides the finishing touches to such knowledge rather than its main support. It may or may not be essential for the successful planning of a budget, and it would seem that the social worker who feels that she cannot plan a budget for a family simply because the family cannot keep an accurate account, or are unwilling to do so, has a limited appreciation of the function of budget planning and the way in which it can be utilized in case-work.

B. METHODS OF BUDGET PREPARATION

One of the most important things in promoting efficient budget planning in social case work is a special budget form suitable for use as part of the case record. This allows the entrance of budget facts in a uniform and systematic way and removes need for constant writing of budget headings. It makes budget plans more easily available for reference and comparison than if they were scattered through the case history, and has the added advantage of helping to shorten the case record by removing budget facts and plans from the body of the record.

Certain points have been proven by experience to be essential factors in making a budget record form of the maximum service. There should be several parallel columns in which can be entered successive budgets as planned, for but rarely does the family's budget plan stay stationary in these days of changing wages and prices. If there is only a single column there is much less likelihood that budgets will be kept constantly revised and up to date

because extra work is involved in starting a new budget sheet in comparison with simply filling a new column on a sheet that is already started. Also there is much of significance in the figures in successive budget plans and these are most easily compared if placed side by side.

Another point that is important is the use of a sufficient number of budget headings to give necessary detail concerning the amount and nature of the various expenditures. In statistical studies of living costs it is usually customary to use a comparatively small number of headings, and to include under the heading Miscellaneous and Sundries, many items of small importance in comparison with total expenditures, but of distinct importance to the case worker who is interested in developing better standards of health care, recreation, or education in a certain family under her care.

The primary purpose of budget planning in social case work is the rendering of service to the individual family, and any statistical use of the budget information is of secondary importance. The primary purpose of statistical studies of living costs is the determination of general tendencies in income and expenditures in particular localities or particular community groups, rather than an effort to render service to an individual family.

The information secured by the social worker with reference to actual family expenditures is often of considerable value when grouped statistically. If budget data is provided in sufficient detail in all instances, it can be combined under the general headings selected by the statistician, and there is usually but little difficulty in using such material statistically even if identically the same budget headings are not used for all families. However, it would seem preferable to consider the budget in case work as a means of family service rather than as a source of general information, and to use sufficient flexibility in budget headings so that any desired expenditure may be placed under budget control no matter how small it may be in comparison with the family's total living costs.

Also it is worth while to remember that the budget divisions vary considerably in different communities. For instance, in some places expenditures for carfare and lunches is comparatively rare because of the close proximity of residential and em-

ployment districts. In a rural or semi-rural section the budget divisions are usually quite different from those in a large city. It is therefore worth while to use in the budget record form the headings which best describe the purpose of the various expenditures most frequently made by the families under the care of the case-working agency, and to supplement these general headings as necessary to meet the needs of a particular case.

On the following page will be found a reproduction of the budget record form used by the New York Charity Organization Society, which shows the way in which the various budget columns are arranged and the budget headings which seem most serviceable under New York conditions. In the Chicago Standard Budget for Dependent Families, to which reference has already been made, slightly different budget headings are used, and there is very full discussion of the items of expenditure customarily included under the various headings.

As will be seen by the budget sheet here reproduced, it has been found desirable to include at the top of each budget column a place where may be entered the number of adults and children whose expenses are to be met during the period for which the particular budget is planned. As every case worker knows, the size of the family actually at home varies considerably from time to time. Tony may be in the country for the summer, Mary may be in the hospital for special treatment, the father of the family may be temporarily in a tuberculosis sanatorium, a new baby may have arrived, or the size of the family may have been decreased by death. This information is, of course, in the body of the case record, but it is also essential to have it presented for easy reference in connection with the budget plan. Otherwise there is danger that increase or decrease in income or expenditures will not be fairly interpreted because of lack of knowledge of the temporary or permanent change in the size of the family for whom the budget is planned.

If relief grants are made to families under the budget system, it is also desirable to have a place on the budget sheet to enter the total amount of relief given during a certain period of time in comparison with needed relief as estimated. An emergency situation may create a need for extra relief in a particular case, or extra income may make possible a decided reduction in relief

BUDGET FOR JONES

District BRONX Case No. 15932

	Oct. 1 1918	Jan. 1 1919	Feb. 8 1919	April 1 1919	July 1 1919
Adults supported by budget	1	1	1	1	1
Children " " "	4	4	4	2	4
WEEKLY INCOME					
Family:					
Man					
Woman	4.00	5.00		6.00	6.00
Child					7.00
Lodger					
Other sources:					
Relatives	1.50	1.50	2.00	1.00	1.00
Friends					
Employer					
Church	2.00	2.00	3.00	2.00	1.50
C. O. S.	12.00	11.25	16.00	6.00	6.00
TOTAL	19.50	19.75	21.00	15.00	21.50
WEEKLY EXPENDITURES					
Rent	4.30	4.30	4.30	4.30	4.30
Fuel, light, household supplies	1.75	2.00	2.00	1.50	1.00
Clothing	3.00	2.75	2.75	1.50	3.30
Food	9.50	9.75	10.50	7.00	9.50
Nursery care					
Lunch money					1.50
Carfare					.60
Insurance, dues	.30	.30	.30	.30	.30
Health care	.20	.30	.80	.20	.30
Church, education, recreation	.45	.35	.35	.20	.70
TOTAL	19.50	19.75	21.00	15.00	21.50
QUARTERLY SUMMARY					
	Oct. 1 1918	Jan 1 1919		April 1 1919	July 1 1919
Estimate of C. O. S. aid during coming quarter	156.00	146.25		78.00	78.00
Amount spent during preceding quarter	149.50	156.00		185.19	78.00

Note: Blank spaces for extra budget headings omitted in reproduction of budget form

grants below the amount estimated. In most cases, however, the amount of relief indicated by a carefully planned budget should agree closely with the amount actually spent from relief funds. If much less is used it shows either that insufficient relief is being provided for the maintenance of the desired living standard, or, if the family seems to be managing satisfactorily, that the budget has been incorrectly estimated. If much more relief than estimated has been given without any emergency situation having existed, it may show unnecessary relief has been provided, or that the income from earnings and other sources was over-estimated or the amount of necessary expenditures under-estimated. Such information is important from the case work standpoint as well as from the budget standpoint and a place for its entrance on the budget sheet goes far in preventing the budget becoming a "paper budget" without direct influence on the relief grant, if such a grant is included in the budget plan.

The time when the budget shall be planned is another point in connection with budget preparation and also the length of time for which the budget shall be planned.

Usually it is worth while to enter definite information concerning income or expenditures on the budget sheet as soon as it is determined that such income or expenditures will probably continue approximately the same for quite a period of time. If Tony is earning \$14 a week in a regular position, if the church has promised to give the family \$2.00 a week, if the rent is \$18 a month and the insurance fifty cents a week, there is no reason why there should be delay in entering these and other similar facts on the budget sheet and every reason why such information should be made easily available for reference during the final preparation of the budget plan.

It is doubtful, however, if the case worker should attempt to prepare a complete budget plan until the investigation is sufficiently completed and the treatment plan sufficiently formulated so that it is possible to judge very accurately what will be the family's average income and expenditures per week or per month during a certain coming period of time.

Even with considerable knowledge concerning the family situation there is difficulty in making an estimate of average income and expenditures over a long period of time. It is much easier

to judge of their approximate amount during a coming week or month than during a coming six months or year. However, planning a budget for too short a period requires a considerable amount of extra office work, and it seems to be most satisfactory to plan budgets on a three-months basis, unless there is reason to expect that there is going to be a radical change in income or expenditures within a shorter period than three months.

It also simplifies the budget work in a social agency to have budgets for continuing cases planned for a three-month period beginning at definite dates during the year, and to have new budgets or revised budgets prepared to represent average income and expenditures during any intervening period before the regular budget planning date.

In a well organized agency it would seem that it would be unnecessary to have budgets of cases under active care reviewed four times a year, but in actual practice this is not the case. Earnings increase or decrease, and a change of employment may mean a marked difference in expenditure. Expenditures for fuel and light are different at different seasons of the year, and increases in rent, food, fuel and clothing costs may make a fairly adequate budget an inadequate budget within a comparatively short period of time. A family may need at a particular time to make extra expenditures for clothing, for household furnishings or equipment, for health care, education or recreation. If the case worker is utilizing the budget as a real aid in her case work radical changes in income or expenditure are usually followed fairly quickly by a corresponding budget revision. The minor budget changes, however, are frequently not entered on the budget sheet under the pressure of other work unless there is a regular time for budget review by the case worker and the supervisor.

Whether the budget figures are average figures per week or per month depends upon whether the family income is mainly on a weekly or a monthly basis. Usually small income families are more accustomed to think of their expenditures on a weekly basis, and it is easier to secure from them estimates or records of weekly income and expenditures. Rent is most frequently a monthly expenditure, but this one item can be changed to a weekly amount more easily than can the various other weekly estimates be changed to monthly. Also the weekly budget is usually of

greater service in helping families to make budget adjustments because the figures are smaller and the actual and estimated amounts more easily compared by people with comparatively little education. If the family is trying to manage a monthly income, especially if the income has previously been weekly, it may prove advisable to plan a monthly budget, but the weekly budget in most cases proves simpler and more effective.

As already stated, the budget figures are average figures as estimated by the case worker on the foundation of the facts secured in her investigation and her knowledge of the situation which she expects will exist during the budget period under the plan of treatment. If a woman earns \$6.00 one week, and \$3.00 the next week, and perhaps none the next week, her average earnings are \$3.00 a week and this is the amount to be entered on the budget sheet, providing the case-worker expects that the present irregular employment will continue during the budget period. If, however, she expects that the woman will be working more regularly in the near future, or working none at all, a proportionately higher or lower budget figure should be used.

If the probable clothing expenditure during the quarter is \$40 the weekly budget item for clothing is \$3.10, although not exactly this amount may be spent in any one week. With reference to the other budget items effort should also be made to use figures which will be "safe averages."

Absolute accuracy in budget figures is not essential, as is the case with the household account, and speed in adding the budget columns is most certainly essential in relieving the labor of budget planning; therefore it is usually best to use no figures for cents in the budget plans except five and zero. For instance, if the food expenditure is usually \$12.48 a week, use the amount of \$12.50 in the budget. If the rent is \$16.50 a month call it \$3.80 a week instead of \$3.81, the exact three-thirteenths of the monthly expenditure.

In the budget plan for the self-supporting family the total expenditures agree absolutely with total earnings if the budget is properly planned. The expenditure items in the budget may or may not agree with actual present expenditures according to whether or not adjustments are judged by the case worker to be desirable and practicable during the budget period; and they may

or may not be the same as the ones recommended in the guide for estimating the cost of desirable living standards in the local community. However, if any of the items are remarkably below such standards and no larger amount can be secured by budget readjustments, the item or items should be marked low or very low and the total income inadequate, unless there is some reason why a low expenditure for these items is all that is necessary in this particular family.

In the budget plan for the family whose present income is to be supplemented by a relief grant the total income from all sources should also be in absolute agreement with total necessary expenditures as estimated. The amount of these expenditures is far more difficult to estimate, however, than is the case with self-supporting families, for the death, illness or other cause which has created the condition of dependence often brings changes in family composition and necessary expenditures so that family as well as social worker has but little data based on actual experience as a guide in estimating living costs under the new conditions.

The present income is often inadequate and data concerning present living costs may give a false impression concerning the family's living costs under more favorable conditions. If a family has only \$8.00 to spend for food that is all that is spent for food, but not of necessity will this amount keep the family properly nourished or be the amount which should be entered in the budget plan.

In preparing budget estimates for dependent families it is therefore especially necessary to secure considerable data about the following factors: the family's budget when the income was fairly adequate (if such a condition ever existed!), the amount of change necessitated by changes in family composition or expenditure needs, the adequacy or inadequacy of present practices, and the probable living costs during the budget period as indicated by information from the family and other sources and by the worker's knowledge of normal living costs under local conditions. Even then it is usually worth while to give relief under a tentative budget plan until there can be more information at hand about the family's necessary living costs under present conditions.

In some social agencies the custom is followed of estimating the cost of maintaining a desirable living standard for dependent

families according to figures of normal living costs and then giving relief so that the total income is above or below this standard as deemed desirable by the needs of the particular situation. Such budget planning is far simpler than the method here advocated, but it would seem that it had a far more limited value in social case work.

It is believed by this Committee that a budget should be as true a statement of fact as can be expected in a prophetic statement. A budget which estimates that a family needs \$20.00 a week to cover necessary expenditures, and provides further information that the total income as known is \$16.00 or \$25.00, is not presenting a true picture of what it is expected that the family will spend for the various budget items. A smaller or larger income may be the amount actually required by the family to maintain a desired living standard, and there would seem to be no advantage in entering as part of the budget plan figures of normal living costs unless these were to be approximately the amount used by the family and with their total constantly maintained by relief grants.

The figures used in a budget plan should give an impression of adequacy, inadequacy, or over-adequacy to the experienced case worker because they will represent to her a definite amount of purchasing power. However, the final test of the adequacy of a budget is the living standard which the family is actually able to maintain, and contact with the family determines this rather than any budget figures.

The budget is a means to an end rather than an end in itself, and it is believed that it can be made of the maximum service in case-work if kept an honest, definite statement of expected income and expenditures during a comparatively short period of time.

C. UTILIZING THE BUDGET PLAN

Budget planning is of comparatively little value in social case work unless it is utilized by the case worker in helping her to understand the problems of living costs in the families under her care and assisting her in adjusting their income and expenditures to the advantage of both the family and the community.

The preparation of the budget plan may show that a family is already able to use its income to the best possible advantage

and that comparatively little attention to budget supervision is necessary beyond that required to see that adequate relief is provided, if such assistance is being granted under the budget plan.

In certain families, however, the preparation of the budget shows that there is need for changing certain expenditure habits if the income is to be used to secure the attainment of the desired living standard. Such budget adjustments do not come simply from the planning of a budget in written form, but require definite, concrete educational guidance to remedy any defects in present expenditure tendencies as indicated by the facts revealed in the budget investigation.

Expenditure habits are well fixed habits and are changed usually only with considerable difficulty because they are rooted in personal likes and dislikes and also in racial and community customs. Much can be accomplished in helping families to adjust their expenditures by having them keep household accounts regularly and using these accounts as the basis for educational advising. However, satisfactory budget adjustments will come mainly from the development of a well organized plan of treatment which will bring the family into contact with the various educational resources of the community which will be of service to them in creating new ideals of life and providing necessary information about the way in which such ideals can be put into practice.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Budget planning in social case work requires the utilization of all the information concerning past and present budget practices in a particular family which can possibly be secured in the investigation. It requires a knowledge of what it will cost this family to maintain a desired living standard during the period for which the budget is planned, and the various resources in the community which can be utilized in developing and maintaining such a standard. It requires a well organized system of budget work which is part of the routine work of the case working agency. Most of all, perhaps, it requires a fuller understanding by the case worker of the various ways in which the custom of budget planning can be made of definite service in her work. This, it is believed by the Committee, can be attained if the budget methods here advocated are followed.

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