

How Mother, Daughter Live on \$38 Relief a Week: Welfare Rights Leader Hopes Poverty Won't Destroy...

Geller, Lawrence

Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001); Jan 2, 1968;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Philadelphia Tribune (1912-2001)

pg. 3

How Mother, Daughter Live on \$38 Relief a Week

Welfare Rights Leader Hopes Poverty Won't Destroy Child

By LAWRENCE H. GELLER
Mrs. Hazel Leslie doesn't claim to be a mathematics teacher, but she does know that the welfare checks allotted to persons on relief don't add up to meeting today's cost of living.

She should know. She's chairman of the Philadelphia Welfare Rights Organization (WRO) and a welfare recipient, herself.

WRO is an organization of local groups made up of people on welfare, dedicated to achieving a decent standard of living for the thousands of people on welfare in the city.

SPIRITED AND OPTIMISTIC

In her office at 1520 Green st., Mrs. Leslie, a woman with a spirit and optimism that belies her difficult situation, withdrew from the world of politics and poverty and took up a happier subject — her little 9-year-old girl, Hazel.

"Without her I don't know what I would do," she said. "She gives me reason to keep on struggling against the system."

"She knows we don't have much and doesn't make a lot of demands for things which a girl of 9 should have," she continued. "She has a wisdom beyond her years."

With her daughter doing quite well in school, Mrs. Leslie says she knows "she could make it in college when the time comes—that's only 8 years away."

NOT SURE ABOUT COLLEGE

"That's one thing little Hazel does ask me for," she said, "but I don't know how we are going to do it, unless she gets a scholarship. Right now we have \$6.50 put away."

She looked out the window for a moment at the gray sky, and her face took on such a look of dejection it seemed to capture all of the pathos and suffering of the poor wherever they might be in the world—India, Mexico, Vietnam, Nigeria.

Quickly snapping back, she leaned forward and told her guest of the "financial facts of life" for one woman on welfare and her 9-year-old daughter.

\$67 EVERY TWO WEEKS

She gets \$67 every two weeks, plus \$6 for a special diet and \$2.40 for carfare. That amounts to less than \$38 a week.

Out of this she pays \$58 a month in rent for her small apartment at 1233 n. 6th st. She must pay her own gas bills, which "amount to more than the average because the heating system is old and to keep warm I frequently turn on the stove."

Handicapped with a severe case of hypertension and diabetes, she

is under doctor's orders not to work.

"I wish I could work," she said. "Maybe I could have gotten a pair of shoes a lot sooner than I did."

WORE SNEAKERS FOR AWHILE

She was referring to the fact that she had been wearing sneakers for sometime. It was only after money and shoes poured into the WRO office, after a much publicized "blood demonstration" she led, was she able to get a pair of shoes.

Mrs. Leslie led a group of women to a blood center to sell their blood in order to raise money.

The demonstration was held in November to highlight the inadequacy of the State clothing allowance, as well as to point out the failure of the State to meet its own minimum standards for welfare allotments.

But all did not go well at the center for it turned out that most of the women, including Mrs. Leslie, could not even sell their blood because they were suffering from low-iron content due to "inadequate diets."

SHORTAGE OF FRUIT

"It would be nice to buy a dozen oranges or apples when I go shopping, but with the way prices are and with what the State gives us to live on, I can only buy two oranges and, maybe, three apples at a time."

She said one day her daughter went to the refrigerator and got an

apple and offered one to me. It was the last apple in the box and if I had taken it, there wouldn't have been any for her the next day.

"You can't tell this to a little girl, so I just told her I didn't feel like any at the moment."

"Sometimes my heart just breaks to see the type of life youngsters on welfare have to live. People just don't know . . . they just don't know."

DESPAIR OF GHETTO

YOUNGSTERS

"The youngsters in the ghettos across this country watch television, see all the splendor that others have, and then look around at what they and their families have to get by on and they know something's wrong."

"The teenagers see their little brothers and sisters going hungry and their mother trying to get the rent in. It's a bare house . . . like it is a cold feeling even to be there, and then they have to go out on the street and become the subject of the same thing out there. There has to be a breaking point."

"Then when a Newark or a Detroit breaks out people wonder what the trouble is."

It gets so exasperating sometimes, she said, "I wish I could get drunk."

"But that's only for respectable rich folks," she said laughing.

RELUCTANT LEGISLATURE

Mrs. Leslie feels she knows what



DEDICATED to achieving a decent standard of living for persons on welfare, Mrs. Hazel Leslie points to a poster of the National Welfare Rights Movement calling for contributions. She is chairman of the Philadelphia Welfare Rights Organization, 1520 Green st., which held the famous "Blood Demonstration" two months ago.

part of the "trouble is" as far as the State Legislature is concerned, and that is "they don't want to come up with a decent amount of money for the poor."

In between leading pickets and delegations to Harrisburg to petition for a better standard of living, she herself is trying to come up with enough pennies in her cookie jar to take her pride and joy downtown to see "The Happiest Millionaire."

"It may take a few more weeks,"

she said smiling, "but I think I'll come up with that money before the State Legislature comes up with theirs."

"Thanks for coming," she said as her visitor got up to let her go back to work.

Despite her concerns and the big job ahead of her and WRO, she was still smiling as she wished her departing visitor "a Happy New Year."

A remarkable woman, Mrs. Hazel Leslie.

The *Philadelphia Tribune* articles are courtesy of the *Philadelphia Tribune*, America's oldest historically Black newspaper and the Greater Philadelphia region's largest newspaper serving the African-American community. The *Philadelphia Tribune* was founded in 1884 by Christopher James Perry, Sr. and has been the voice for African Americans locally and nationally for 130 years. The *Philadelphia Tribune* extensively covered the Philadelphia Welfare Rights Movement and other similar twentieth century social and political African American movements. The author is deeply grateful to the *Philadelphia Tribune* for its generosity in allowing the selected articles to be reprinted for this publication.

Digital images produced by ProQuest LLC as part of ProQuest® Historical Newspapers. <http://www.proquest.com>. Digital facsimiles of the articles are published with permission of ProQuest LLC. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission.