



Settlement House History

The settlement house, an approach to social reform with roots in the late 19th century, was a method for assisting low-income people in urban areas by living among them and serving them directly. Typical settlement house programs included day nurseries for children, after school programs, clubs for young working women, lectures and cultural programs, and meeting space for neighborhood political groups. The term "neighborhood center" (or in British English, Neighbourhood Centre) is often used today for similar institutions, as the early tradition of "residents" settling in the neighborhood has given way to professionalized social work.

The first settlement house was Toynbee Hall in London, founded in 1883. The first American settlement house was The Neighborhood Guild (later the University Settlement), founded by Stanton Coit, begun in 1886. The best-known settlement house is perhaps Hull House in Chicago, founded in 1889 by Jane Addams with her friend Ellen Starr. As Addams and Starr observed the structural elements of poverty they began to create a specific agenda of services and reform. Exploitation of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, poor employment conditions and inadequate wages, lack of educational opportunities, substandard housing, and inefficient city government were the factors that contributed greatly to the poverty of the area and called for specific responses.

Friendly House came to the settlement house movement relatively late. The First Presbyterian Church founded the Marshall Street Community Center in 1926. In 1930 it was renamed Friendly House and moved to its current location at NW 26th and Savier in Portland, OR. Its first director was Amelia Anderson. While originally dedicated to a spiritual mission, social concerns arising with the Great Depression quickly became the focus.

"Miss Anderson recalled a night in the 1930's when she was awakened by a commotion outside the manse and found a man at the door who called out that the Eastern Western Lumber Company mill at Linnton was shut down that night. 'Lots of family men will be out of work. They'd like you to come down and talk to them,' he added. She did, and from then on there was a steady increase in activities oriented to helping low-income people in the northwest neighborhood of Portland." [-- source: Friendly House History, 1926 - 1986]

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