FAMILY MATTERS: CASEWORK, MANHOOD AND THE BUREAU FOR HOMELESS MEN, ST. LOUIS, 1925-1940

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the transformation of the system for relief for homeless men in St. Louis between 1925 and 1940 by a private welfare organization, the Bureau for Homeless Men. The transformations wrought by the Bureau for Homeless Men illuminate key aspects of welfare policy and state development, especially as they pertain to homeless men. First, the Bureau, a private casework agency, played the most important role in transforming the way homeless men received relief. The Bureau consolidated the relief network for homeless men and assumed responsibility for them, instituting a professionalized, casework program centered at its headquarters. When the cost of relief for the homeless shifted to the federal government with the creation of the New Deal's Federal Transient Program in 1933, the Bureau continued to play a prominent role. The Bureau was tapped to construct the infrastructure for the operations in Missouri as well as administer much of the program. Second, gender, in particular the Bureau's vision of manhood, mattered immensely to the structure of the policies the Bureau created, both as a private agency and when it worked for the federal government. Taken together, these two points suggest that social workers attempted to define and solve more problems in the 1920s and 1930s than previously understood by historians.