

Hut homes mean life with little hope

By JIM MULCAHY

Last week I saw a young bare-footed mother with a three-year-old child balanced on her hip struggling up a steep slope in the Victoria Park housing camp.

It was the hopeless expression on her face — that made me ask myself: "Isn't there anything better for this girl and the mother of young Australians?"

The mother's look was the glazed—and sometimes defensive—look that you can find on some faces in all housing camps.

It must come from the herding together of families with little privacy in accommodation that I would rate sub-standard.

Last week I inspected the Brisbane camps at Victoria Park, Gregory Terrace, Wacol, Holland Park and Kalinga.

And I came away with a lump in my throat — pity for the many children that are getting such a bad start in life.

Should see

Some children, like their parents, were unkempt, and others, also like their parents, appeared to be well cared for.

Whatever their future, the period these youngsters spend in housing camps is not going to do them any good.

The State Government says it is getting rid of the temporary housing camps as quickly as it can—but I strongly advise all members of the State Parliament and Brisbane City Council aldermen to inspect these camps.

Let them take a look at closely-packed Victoria Park camp or the mixed community at Wacol.

I think they would agree we could get rid of the camps more quickly.

Some gardens

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And, like me, they probably would receive a staggering blow to the smugness with which I mainly regarded Brisbane.

Conditions are primitive and some families could be taught elementary hygiene. On the other hand, brave little gardens blooming colour outside some huts are testimony of the occupiers' attempt to improve their lot.

On top of the stony hill at Victoria Park a young migrant woman was doing her washing in an old copper outside a drab hut as she watched golfers playing on the well-kept course below.

I could not help thinking: Why bring these people out if we can't house them adequately? I also wondered whether the old and New Australians in these camps helped themselves enough.

Slums next

I would not like to have the responsibility of the Housing Minister (Mr. Hilton).

For it is his problem to clean out the camps before they become broken down

slums and provide other accommodation.

And somehow he will have to find an answer to the coloured problem. There are some coloured families at Victoria Park and Holland Park, but the majority are at Wacol.

These families could end up in squalor at Wacol.

Some would have to be socially adjusted to be accepted in the general community.

"Life" up

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Life up

The camps, built as emergency troop accommodation during the war, were supposed to have a seven to 10-year life. That's up now.

At the present rate of demolition the housing camps will be with us for many years.

Generally, the camp grounds were clean, as clean as Housing Commission workmen can keep them.

But it is up to the families to keep the huts clean. Many do, a few don't. And it is this few that make life a misery for the others.

Last week about 900 families and 2000 children were living in Kalinga, Victoria Park, Gregory Terrace, Holland Park, and Wacol.

Will not go

In most camps there are long-term families who have refused better accommodation preferring to pay the low rent of about £1 a week.

I was told of one family that had been in one camp for six years.

Last year's report of the Queensland Housing Commission says: "A fair percentage of occupants of these establishments rejected offers of houses made to them."

Camp roads generally are in a shocking condition and appear to have had little maintenance.

Trees risk

This is how I saw the housing camps:—

VICTORIA PARK. — In huts crowded together 285 old and New Australian families with more than 700 children live on steep slopes.

The area is depressing, the huts are showing the signs of rapid deterioration, and some have been condemned

some have been condemned and removed. The worst elements in the community have been evicted, but it's still no place to bring up children. Residents say there is a risk of tree branches falling on huts.

A well-equipped gymnasium helps to keep children and youths out of mischief. But at midday last week toddlers were roaming around in between the huts.

Parking area?

GREGORY TERRACE. — Nestling amongst trees and with a dress circle view of the Victoria Park golf course, its 300 families regard it as the best camp with its closeness to the city.

But this is no reason why it should be there.

If the council does not want it back for a park it should be turned into a parking area. It could be the answer to Brisbane's parking headache with its trolley bus hook-up.

KALINGA. — This camp appears to be in fair shape, but it is ugly and a blot on the surrounding area. It should not be a difficult task to sell these huts for removal and place the 58 families in other accommodation.

Being cleared

HOLLAND PARK. — The number of families has shrunk from 600 to 148 as huts have been removed and houses erected. Between 300

and 500 children are accommodated in a State and a convent school in the camp.

This camp is dilapidated, but probably no worse than Victoria Park and Wacol.

It was a wise decision of the Government to start demolitions.

WACOL. — This is a gloomy camp set on a wooded slope. Many huts appear to be in bad shape. Although many of the 200 families are coloured there is very little colour discrimination, according to residents.