Oral History Interview

With

Kenneth Rhodes

On 09/25/1989

In his home office

deliber out the ?

Interviewer: Elizabeth McBroom

McBroom: This is Elizabeth McBroom, interviewing Mr. Kenneth Rhodes at his home office at 8:18am at Chula Vista, Pasadena on Sep, 25, 1989. I had asked you this question to think about other interviewers you had been involved with and you said some, but entirely unrelated to this. So that copies of them will not be permanent to the archives.

McBrosor: Now maybe you could just start with how you happened to become a board member and board president of some of the social work agencies here in Southern California.

Rhodes: I had been practicing the law since 1937, and in 1948 before that I had the notion that I should give away some of my time, that reason that I should get involved in some kind of the service. I did a lot of enquiring through a good friend of mine who was serving on the board of Los Angeles Family Services. I started with that agency. I think it's fair to say from then on one thing just led to another. From a Family Services Agency, at that time, Blythe Frances who was the executive director and she retired about 6 years

later. When she retired, she had been serving as the trustee of a small agency called

Special Services for Groups. That agency was composed mostly of executive directors of

other agencies and the police department, and representatives from the state and county.

They felt that they should bring along their boards and have community people to come

in. So when Blythe left the community, I took her place as trustee for Special Services for

Groups.

McBroom: When was that?

Rhodes: That was probably about 1954. I-said as you know that agency grew out of some

of the studies we made after the Civil Rights. That was a small agency which tried to deal

-) was with them and took director of that agency. Then

about the time I went off the board of Family Services in Los Angeles, I went on a board

called Family Adult Service Division at Welfare Planning Council. I served on that for a

number of years. While I was doing that, I also went on the board for Hathaway Home

for Children. Later I became the president of that board. Then about the time I got

through doing that, I became a trustee of the Legal Aid Foundation and ended up with

being president of that board for two years. As I said, one thing just led to another.

McBroom: It seems that you always have been the president at the same time.

Rhodes: I think one reason is that a lot of people said no. I was willing to say yes.

it's not the first choice, but I was willing...

McBroom: I think that is what every agency needs is to have some one who is willing to step into the leadership and carry the torch.

Rhodes: I became a member/United Way board as a trustee and served on a number of project communities and also I can't remember the name of that committee but it's a committee on United Wayoto determine priority among programs. I don't know if they still have it or not But we took types of services and determined after getting some research, to see if they fit and scale out the priority. So the United Way will be funding their high priority agency services. That was very interesting activity. And then after the Legal Aid Foundation board, I also overlapping went on the board of Cal-Tech YMCA which I still do it these days. Then I was a trustee of LA County Bar which I put a great deal of time and also local representative/board during the Vietnam War period which I found very difficult kind of job, a volunteer job. Then I really got to educational institutions and went on to $\frac{1}{1}$ form the trustee of Smith College which turned out that I became the chairman of that College Board. Also on University Graduates Senate Board and also on the Bachelor Board, became chairman of that board. So as I said at the beginning, one thing just led to another.

McBroom: You kind of progressed from social agency boards to university/college boards.

Rhodes: The other thing I might mention is that when I was involved with United Way, I chaired a special committee that brought about the merger of the private community centers in Avalance and Westminister centers.

McBroom: Down in South Central?

Rhodes: There were two agencies that were struggling without enough resources. The United Way wanted them to combine and they got great deal of resistance from both agencies because they want to keep their identities. About that was the community working on the merger, which is very interesting to me. Tom Bradley was then the president of one of that agency

McBroom: That's a tremendous number on variety of agencies. Any experience you had became a peak to you, something accomplished. That was really great fun experience.

Rhodes: I think a number of times when I was on board of Hathaway Home with a lot of the referrals to the agencies from court system basically, at that time the county had a formula for reimbursing child care agencies for the cost of providing this service. It's much too low. Hathaway had to gather together with people from the other child social services agencies and presented some facts to the county board supervisors some research and then they succeeded in increasing the amount of public support from the county.

McBroom: You could do the job more adequately then...

Rhodes: Other occasions which I think have special meetings. Almost every agency I ever served on board, they had a change of their executive directors. So I had been encountered a lot of search for executive committee in both social services agency and educational ones. I found that very interesting and rewarding experience particularly when you found a person who really can make a big difference.

McBroom: Maybe you tell us some of the people you found who are...

Rhodes: Starting with the Family Servicess Los Angeles by Frances, when she retired,

for groups, when Alko Berger retired, we got Josh Nishikato, which is rather interesting because he completely, over period of time changed the type of services the agency was performing.

McBroom: How did he change it?

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Rhodes: When Alko Berger was the chairman, the program for the agency was hiring talented social workers to work with gangs, interface with them and tried to point to them a constructive direction. When Josh came in, he was more interested in getting, helping

minority agencies to get funding for programs. So it was not working with hard to reach gangs at all. That was really providing research and funding information for other agencies. The way he worked was totally different. That taught me that different executive director for period of time can really change the focus of the agency.

McBroom: Did you think that he changed it to provide better services or ...

Rhodes I think he felt, I am putting words in his month, I really don't know. But I think he thought he can do more for the community with this kind of services because working with the gangs requires a lot of funding, if you only work with a few gangs, that problem is so tremendous. He thinks what he did was more sustainable. In another time it can be better utilized.

McBroom: He did something to multiple the efforts of agencies or extends to...

Rhodes: That agency was an agency really not only working with gangs so much as other

agency which tried to improve liability in minority communities.

McBroom: Did they do more preventive services in some way of then?

Rhodes: Yes, I think so. The other piece with Hathaway Home (----) was searched.

Marcie Molly is a good friend of mine and the executive director when I first went on the

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Hathaway Home board. She was very proud of upgrading that agency and expanding the services but she did really went beyond administratively and developed so well that she then really could not control that. So she left and (_____) went on as executive director the west free first f

Legal Aid Foundation; when I just went on that board, it was composed of a good many of judges and people who had been on board and for a serious length of time. And that is about the time when federal legal aid program was getting under its way to public.

Federal money was available to expand legal aid services. The Legal Aid Foundation board felt that it was wrong to accept any public money because they thought it will not get under control and they are not willing to do that. So the board for a long time resisted it to receive any federal money to the point where another legal service program was started in LA with public money, federal funds. So at that time there were two legal aid agencies.

The new one just got on its way and got into trouble. It had some problems with misappropriation of funds. So the federal representative from federal government came to us (I was then the chairman) and wanted us to take over the other agency. They said they would like to have some split role under certain conditions. Some of the conditions were to change the executive director of that agency, with more minority people on the board. We agreed so but there were some top sessions on getting the board to go on with this

which no longer charged the direction. They got a black, a very talented black administrator during this period to take the charge. The program got expanded and went strong. That was nice.

McBroom: Do you think this has been continued to be an issue of identification about accepting federal funds?

Rhodes: I don't think so.

McBroom: You think that has really been resolved. And there's no problem of loss of control by the agency.

Rhodes: I don't think so. The Avalon Carper committee was kind of high point too. We were able to convince two groups which are absolutely resistant to change to go along AMCLCER.

with That's very interesting the way it is. The very committee, Tom Bradley was on it, and a number of other people who had a lot of agency experiences. They started out at a very low key way, just comparing the by-law of the two agencies. At the first meeting we reviewed that and neither side wanted to adopt by-law of the other side. So we drafted a new set patterned on both of them and got them to agree on that, bit by bit, so we got at start an easy way out on certain degree on by laws. Then the toughest one was the choice of an executive director who will be the director for both sides. So we decided to have a

qualifications. But sometimes they can guess who was. Anyway, we went on that route and selected one. Finally we put things together. One thing we argued a good deal about was what the name of the combined agency was. I said I was not willing to spend some time on that. It's like the trouble of naming our children to get two people to agree. I said you can do that after you merged. I stotally agreed on different names. I suggested you to call it as Avalon-Carper community center, It is still on there today.

McBroom: Avalon-Garper. But you have a lot of differences to settle, to negotiate and to arbitrate on that. Do you like that aspect? You are very skilled on that obviously.

Rhodes: I really like Dr. Burden. I think the process can be very constructive. I think the chairman's job is really to protect other board member's time. So you don't have someone to repeat what other people have said. You have reached a satisfying issue, and then move on it to get some kind of consensus. And I think that is very challenging.

McBroom: Tell us something about how you did that?

Rhodes: I think one thing you can do is to be aware who wants to talk Indicates from the chair should be a mixed. You should try not to neglect any of them. When somebody goes on too long, you can say, I think as we want to get as many points as we can, why don't we hold what you said here and let set somebody else to get a chance. If you want to,

you can come in at the end. After we've spent on some discussion, you can say, I think we have discussed this issue pretty fully, are you ready for a vote? If somebody has more to say, be free to do it here. Then this makes it move along. When someone comes in late, that were one kind of my favorite approaches, though it's not original from me. Eve seen other people do it. When we were discussing something and it got too long, then someone comes in, you can say, Mr. Jones, sorry you missed part of the discussion, let me bring you updates to where we are. This is the thing we have discussed and things we are in favor or apposed, now we are about to reach a consensus on such and such. By doing this, you can push the whole discussion ahead.

McBroom: By doing so, not only Mr. Jones hears it, everybody in the room got the message. Have you even given any seminar on board leadership or this kind of things? (Rhodes: No.) But you should have. It is pretty thought through in that formula.

Rhodes: In the fact it is fun to get a lot of people interested in it and get different ideas. I think the board itself can be very constructive unless you really have someone who can talk too much.

McBroom: How do you think the function of board in relation to social service agency?

Rhodes: It sets policies mainly, it ensures that the program with high quality, finances, to provide adequate financial support, if you don't, where you have to cut. I think in

different areas, there are different minds to call upon among administration. It's not easy to hold a mind.

McBroom: Would you say this was a problem for some board members?

Rhodes: I think it is more in educational situation than in a social service agency because in education usually most often some of their concerns were that some of the trustees had children in school particularly at lower level. They can't get involved in any faculty, like you have trouble with some faculty who is either too strict. The trustee can't try to get involved in whatever is said, truly in an administrative job. The superintendent and principle's fire and hire, and dealing with faculty are not the trustee's responsibility. This happened very often in school.

McBroom: How do you think how the board can recognize and observe the frontline between administration and policy?

Rhodes: Sometimes we talked about it. You know this is an interesting problem. But it is our responsibility, I am sure that the executive director is interested to know what we have to say, but you got to realize that it is his or her decision to make the judgment.

McBroom: Do you know any board/depart from that? Or went into trouble with that?

Rhodes: I don't think so.

McBroom: Can you tell us some of the obstacles you have encountered as a board leader?

Rhodes: I don't know. I am not sure if some of these can be put into the category of obstacles. One of the things I went strongly is the trustee's angulations, which are not only overseeing the overall quality of the programs, adequacy but also the agency's reputation. I've been through some agencies where rumors had become either about program or personality, which were absolutely fault. And I think that is the kind of obstacles to the agency's successful operation, which I always deal with it immediately.

McBroom: Deal immediately? How come you can have a quick grip of it?

Rhodes: As an illustration, in some social service agency or educational institution, where trumors are like, the headmaster has mental problem. Absolutely fault. How it was started and why it was started? Nobody knows. But in every silly report it kept coming back. So I went directly to the headmaster and told him that we just can't have this kind of rumor going around without dealing with it right now. I want to talk to your head faculty people without your presence. Then I set it up and went there the next day, satisfied myself and found out that this was not true in anyway and it was a rumor. Then I got on the phone and called every 20- trustees and talked to them on the phone. I told them where the rumors were started and what I have done. That was absolutely false. Our responsibility

McBroom: What changes do you see in the social themes now from the time you were?

Rhodes: I think the community has changed. We are in a multi-social and racial society now. There are a lot of whole new programs which have been created to deal with problems like drug problem and AIDS, which not many we know about it. I think different racial minority groups want their own services in certain sense. So it means to me that a lot of frontline services have been changed. This must be a big drain on social service funding.

McBroom: Do you think it is sound for any different ethnic group to have its own social service agency?

Rhodes: I think it would better not in terms of... I am not close enough to the pacific community: I got a sense that someone might feel more comfortably working with people from their own ethnic group instead of on its own. But I would think it will be better to just have one.

McBroom: It would lead to a lot of proliferation. Do you see during your time much change in staff composition in terms of ethnic representation?

Rhodes: I do see gradual increase in having ethnic staff. It took upon recently since I've been involved.

as trustees is to spike the rumors ever came up without any question and realized that it is dangerous, and it is false. Let's move on. That kind of thing really works. It can do well-to an agency.

Another obstacle I think is financial, without enough money for t know what to do.

McBroom: How did you deal with that?

Rhodes: We tried to raise it or be more persuasive toward United Way.

McBroom: Have you even been identified with any large scale social movements in your board as president?

Rhodes: Not really. I think the answer will be no. When I was serving on Family Services of SERVED GO Agency, I have gone on to the Family Services National Association. I spoke for them a number of times. You can call it national board in this way, but I think no.

McBroom: Do you see this more from the association as achieving its goal or affect what it is doing?

Rhodes: I think so. I've going through giving advice from time to time.

McBroom: Have you known minority worker who was executive and you thought who was making particular contribution?

Rhodes: Yes, Charles Jones I would consider in this way. He is black and he made great contributions in the foundation as executive director. One of the problems I didn't tell you is that searching for a Mexican American executive director. They are willing to vote for someone who is a black. They finally elected a black executive director but it was a hard stroke.

McBroom: How did you bring it all?

Rhodes: I think in a way at one point I heard the chairmen who succeeded me saying, we are not using Robert Rhodes' word. They came about it and everybody was happy.

McBroom: You got a person though he may not be in their ethnic group. They will accept it and be happy with it. Do you think some of the good strategies which can be used are guide by other people in the field now?

Rhodes: I really can't. I think the concept is much or less the same. It is important to put up a fair and throughout search, a fair one. It comes to be a problem with Legal Aid Foundation. I think someone have to deal with it.

McBroom: You have been involved in executive research over/expanded years. Do you notice the difference among applicants which are available?

Rhodes: Unfortunately we always had some not so good applicants to make it undesirable.

Sometime it will be very difficult if you are looking for a woman, to find a woman who wasn't spoken for other jobs. I think it is easier now.

McBroom: The supply of able women has been increased.

Rhodes: There is a great of possibility now.

McBroom: Now there are agencies which are devoted to executive search. Do you think that can really become common?

Rhodes: It is very helpful. It can save you a lot of time. At educational level, the professional search people were helpful, citing us information, suggesting names also checking out people who were interested in it. I think it is very helpful and shortens the process. Though it is expensive and costs money, it is worthwhile for it.

McBroom: Do you think it is sound for agency fund be fair to subscribe such services?

Rhodes: It depends how much you want the services to do.

Could you

McBroom: Do you mind to describe how this is negotiated?

Rhodes: At educational level, we decided which expert we wanted. Then we told them what we wanted. They told us what they could do. The type of services they provided and then we told them what we wanted. What we wanted from the services is normally that we want people who did not apply for the job but who are good for this job. Or even don't know if they are interested in moving. But they are experts who are excellent to fulfill these positions. By their contact, we can find out if they are interested in it. In addition to that, when it comes down to the file work, the four or five of us will ask the expert/anonymously to go through the whole area of each candidate and found out what the person was thought of in the community, his reputation.

McBroom: There are enormous investment to go into this process of finding the executive, isn't it?

Rhodes: There is a lot of luck in it.

McBroom: Did you apparently find very good executive for agency that you were affiliated with, that you were very satisfied with it or they were very pleased at the turn-out. You mentioned Josh Nishinaka. You mentioned Jash Lag. (Rhodes: in Legal Aid

Foundation, Charles Jones) Charles Jones.

Rhodes: I am also involved in college president searches.

McBroom: These three are people who are quite family, really local people. They are

before the quite elaborate search.

Rhodes: Charles Jones is not local people. He is from mid-west. Charles Jones is from

Northern California. Jash Lag, I don't know-where he comes from.

McBroom I think one of them is USC people? Do you keep in touch with these agencies

currently?

Rhodes: Some yes. But I am not really acting on any of them anymore. I've been

involved in it so much and for so long. But I gave them slight support.

McBroom: Do they come to you as kind of male statement.

Rhodes: They did for a while.

McBroom: What kind of help do they look for?

Rhodes: I think usually it can be related to fund-raising or it can be connected to researches, or some program.

McBroom: When you were succeeded by some else as president, do they turn to you as to ask how to handle certain thing?

Rhodes: They got to make their own decisions. Usually it is pretty clear cut-off.

McBroom: Have you as you look back to see much difference in the way as Family Services Agency for example operates?

Rhodes: I think it is pretty much the same.

McBroom: It operates pretty much the same as when you were there? Would you say it's the same for agency like Castaway pretty much the same as when you were there?

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Rhodes: One of the differences is that now they have a lot of patient services which they didn't have

McBroom: Where are those out-patient services?

Rhodes: I think it is people with emotion problems can come in, not necessarily just serve

the residents.

McBroom: They work with children in their own homes.

Rhodes: Well they worked with them when they can afford. I really should not be talking about it because I was absent from that out-patient services.

McBroom. Because at beginning there's only institutional programs. Things have been changed. You mentioned some of the things which are important like search committees, get adequate funding, can you think of any other things which stand out? What kind of triumphs? Can you give an example of that?

Rhodes: Hathaway Home, when they started the children's village, which used to be here at Avenue 64, but they got to move to a new area. At that point, it is important to look ahead for the next five years, to determine which you needed, what will be cost and how you are going to raise it.

McBroom: You had a \$ year plan?

Rhodes: I think it is a good thing for most agencies to look ahead. I think 10 years will be scary too much; 5 years. I is worksle.

McBroom: Do have any this kind of year plan in other agencies in addition to Hathaway?

Rhodes: Yes, but I can't remember.

McBroom: But you gave such succinct statement about what the plan was, what the program would be, what it would cost and how you will omit the cost, What staff you will need. And this is really kind of blueprint for the immediate future?

Rhodes: Our plans are very often not followed. That is ok too. You can't have maintenance in command. One problem with this was when you start with cost, you can get this kind of frightened as in business 5 year plan. Somehow what you can manage is to cut services.

McBroom: Recently there is such an escalation of cost, the redeemed cost for care of a child.

Rhodes: Recently this is the subject we've been talking about. Just the other day we had some litigation at college level, a minority professor who didn't get tenure and who wanted to mitigate the problem. The litigation was settled without going to court. The end would be to charge the college 250,000 dollars; that's a tremendous escalation of cost.

McBroom: One thing that interests me when you tell me how many agencies you affiliated with and serve as board president, that's an enormous drain on your personal time. And I know you were active in your profession as well. Can you tell us something about how you accommodated it?

Rhodes: I was lucky in some way. When my father died, I enquired some financial independence. At that point I decided I would donate 1/3 of my time into services.

McBroom: That's remarkable. I know/a lot of people can't do that.

Rhodes: That's what I wanted to do. It's my decision. Sometimes it's more than 1/3.

McBroom: Did you have that on certain schedule?

Rhodes: The legal part keeps timesheets; I didn't keep timesheets...for the volunteer

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McBroom: You limited your legal time to be 2/3 of your working time.

Rhodes: Sometimes as volunteer, I just got so interested in that and I spent more time on it.

McBroom: Just can't get over.

Rhodes: That's the kind of experience You can't get enough to do.

(END)