

# HOUSING CONFUSION AT NOME



**NOT QUALIFIED**—Mrs. Gertrude Foster of Nome is looking out of the door of her shack with several of her seven children. She has no husband. Although living in the worst housing conditions, Mrs. Foster does not qualify to live in Nome's new low income housing project.

She does not earn enough money to qualify. She is on welfare. Instead, housing authorities want better class poor than Mrs. Foster to occupy the new homes.

—Photo by LAEL MORGAN

## Low Income Families Not Qualifying But 'Better Class of Poor' Do

By LAEL MORGAN  
Staff Writer

**NOME**—On the 30th of this month the Nome Housing Committee will stage a ribbon cutting to open their 50 unit low income housing project.

The Governor, congressional delegation, officials from Alaska State Housing Authority, Housing and Urban Development and other government agencies have been invited. Now the question is, will they have guts enough to attend?

After two years of planning for low income families, the Housing Committee has just been informed that eligibility criteria for their project must be changed. That the low income families they have chosen to occupy the homes don't have enough income to qualify.

As Eugene R. Leavans, director of ASHA Housing Development, explained to Robert Butler, his executive director, "Our most pressing problem with respect to occupancy actually con-

cerns finding low-income families that have high enough incomes to make the project economically feasible because the latest thinking by HUD is that family income should be great enough so that monthly payments plus utility costs can be made by the tenant without recourse to other than a minor subsidy."

Law states that no low income family in public housing should be required to pay more than 25% of their adjusted income for housing and utility costs. Further, the law states that federal subsidies will be made to local authorities to make up the difference.

"To date, Congress has apparently not appropriated adequate monies with which to subsidize the effects of the Brooke Amendment (basis for the current law.)" Leavens notes.

Money has been appropriated for housing projects in other states and ASHA has no explanation as to why Alaska is an exception. The agency readily concedes it has been left holding the bag and its solution is to cashier the lower income families from the program.

"Why were we not advised in advance that only \$6,000 incomes and up would qualify for the houses?" demanded Harry Koozaata, housing committee member, of Dave Roderick,

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# Housing Confusion...

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ASHA trouble shooter dispatched to the scene Friday.

"Your point is well taken," Roderick answered.

"If it's going to become white, middle class housing, ASHA is going to have to take the responsibility," Father James Poole, spokesman for the committee warned. "We're committed as an advocate of low income people!"

Roderick, who's been a consultant to ASHA only a month, was about the 12th government official the committee has heard in as many months. They grilled him, got no new answers but noted, at least, he was the first government official who had had courage to visit Nome alone.

"Usually they come in twos, promise to call us back with more information and we never hear from them again." Father Poole shrugged.

According to a HUD study, the low income families in Nome are desperately in need of adequate housing but can only afford to pay an average of \$40 a month.

HUD has also determined the actual average monthly tenant cost required to amortize the project, pay for administration and utilities, is \$157 a month. They have indicated they could provide an average subsidy of \$37 per month per unit but that still leaves \$80 per unit unpaid.

"ASHA can't put people into the homes if we're going to lose nearly \$50,000," Roderick said. "We cannot open the doors until there is some understanding of how the cost is going to be met."

But the housing committee is dead set against kicking out the people who need the homes but don't have \$6,000. Nor do they want them to sign a contract they can't meet on the hopes the subsidy may come through, only to end up in court for non-payment of rent.

Mrs. Gertrude Foster, a typical prospective tenant, does not understand the battle and is

calmly preparing to move to the development at the end of the month.

She has seven children to worry about and no husband. Her family lives in a one room shack on the edge of town and they've had about enough of it. They're on welfare.

"How come we live in such a cracky house?" asked Bobbie, her five-year-old, last winter when snow blew through their thin walls.

Next year, she told him then, it will be different.

The Fosters picked out their new house long ago and have been anticipating the move since the structure was completed in Oct. 1970. The Housing Committee decided no one should move in until sewer and water were completed and that will be within the week.

In a telegram sent Aug. 11 to the Governor, congressional delegation, ASHA and HUD, Alfred Nakak, director of the Nome Housing warned, "Nome Turnkey III housing project near completion within two weeks. Nome Housing Committee ready, at completion to move 50 families into same. Committee will find solution of its own if none is found by completion."

Friday they followed with another wire stating their reluctance to replace low income Eskimos with middle income whites." This time they added the names of George Romney Sen. Edmund Brooke and Sen. Edward Kennedy to the list.

Replies have been slow in coming, but Nakak notes he has the keys to the project in his office, ready for the occupants originally picked by his committee. And he may not wait for the red tape to be cleared to move them in, he hints.

"With Gov. Egan cutting the ribbon I think it's going to be a pretty dumb thing," Harry Koozaata observed.

Unless the problem is resolved.