

It wanted to make sure they meant it when they said they seek to help the area's children break the cycle of poverty's pervasive pathology—lack of self-respect and lack of hope for the future.

The NTC recruits and their leaders were warned they would be rejected, and that the Caucasians among them were suspected of being "blue-eyed devils."

Given warnings

They were warned that any showing of middle-class disgust with the raw life of the district would mean failure. So would any aloof pupil-teacher-parent relationship.

And to succeed they would have to get out into the community, into the homes and live and suffer and work with the people—long, long hours.

"That's the only way," said one speaker, "you can help show these children that the fast-buck hustler, with his flashy car and women really isn't a hero. And the real heroes are the boys and girls and parents themselves, when they invest in education and responsibility, not only for today but tomorrow."

Another speaker flatly stated: "No matter what you do, the children of this area are going to reject you."

Rough at first

"Hustle education if you want to succeed in the ghetto, baby," the recruits were challenged.

And that's what they are doing today.

"They were rough on us," admits Dr. Donald Wilson, NTC director here, referring to that Watts meeting on a hot August day, just a year after the community blazed with gunfire and Molotov cocktails.

"But we didn't lose a volunteer. And no one quit when they had to work for two months without pay."

Aim of the Corps, Dr. Wilson explains, is to give teachers and college graduates who want to go into the profession work-study experience in the spirit, skills and ghetto savvy to be successful in poverty area schools.

Scattered throughout the nation are 1227 men and women Corpsmen. Of these 262 are veteran teachers and 965 recent college graduates. But all want professional careers in teaching disadvantaged children.

The Corpsmen are in work-study programs in 275 schools and 111 school systems throughout the nation which cooperate with 50 university training centers.

USC is the university training center for the NTC project in this area. Working with the university are four school districts.

Two of these are in the Watts area, at the virtually all-Negro Willowbrook and Enterprise school districts. The others are in the predominantly Mexican-American Garvey district in East Los Angeles, and Jurupa in Riverside County.

New friends

Although the Teachers Corps is relatively new, what's going on in Willowbrook and Enterprise indicates the volunteers are "hustling education" as admonished.

It also indicates that many parents and pupils in these communities, who for years have looked on the teacher as a sort of "policeman," are eagerly grasping for the helping hand of a new schoolhouse friend.

Frank Spite, principal of Pioneer School in the Enterprise District, a Negro, debunks the idea that the community rejects "blue-eyed devils" coming to teach in its schools.

Spite noted that the 36 Corps "interns" and 8 leaders in his and other school districts involved are making an impact. The other districts are Willowbrook in the Watts area, Garvey in East Los Angeles and Jurupa in Riverside County. For one thing, they have been able to ease the class burden of other teachers.

Thus children are receiving more individualized instruction and showing improvement. Not only that, the Corpsmen have set up education and information programs for parents, and visited many homes, not as a policeman, but as a friend from the school.

The parents, he said, are no different from those anywhere. They want their children to succeed, "and they expect to do this from education. They look on teachers as teachers."

Out vandalism

W. H. Betton, principal at Mark Twain School, also a Negro, says the Corpsmen are helping him "to send home happy children." And when this happens "the word gets around."