

vital elements of most anti-poverty efforts and Community Action Program activities. This report consequently considers centers in the context of their CAA relationships and strives to describe the essence of these relationships.

The neighborhood service center concept is variously interpreted in different communities. Even though Washington CAP officials have demonstrated that they adhere to certain general views of the roles and activities of neighborhood service centers, they have attempted to encourage diversity on the theory that local requirements should shape the purposes, organization and operations of centers. Consequently, neighborhood centers differ in name, organization, goals and activities.

In view of the variety and diversity associated with neighborhood service centers, it is appropriate to consider what common characteristics unite them into a group that is worthy and possible of special study. Neighborhood service centers, variously known as centers, outposts, boards and councils, all have a distinct though not necessarily uniform, relationship to the CAA. In almost all cases they are funded by the CAA, report to the CAA, and have some type of integral relationship with the CAA. CAA's are organized to deal with community-wide anti-poverty programs but centers tend to concentrate on a particular geographic area within the total community. The centers are conceived as organizations that relate directly to the people in a neighborhood, that have intimate ties with these people and that represent these people as well as serve them. It is the "grass roots" aspect of the anti-poverty program, and it is fundamental to the philosophy that the poor shall be better served and more effectively represented. It is hazardous to attempt to describe in more detail the common elements of neighborhood service centers because exceptions become too prevalent.

Because centers are the contact points with the poor in most communities and because the centers have been considered as the logical places for the maximum feasible participation of residents and members of groups served, centers have been targets for criticisms of all types. This report is viewed neither as a confirmation nor refutation of the charges of critics. It is written to provide facts and informed judgments on a complex and delicate subject of very central importance to the war on poverty.

II. RESEARCH PROGRAM

CENTERS RESEARCHED

Officials of Washington CAP selected twenty neighborhood service centers in seventeen communities to be considered in this research project. These centers were chosen to be a representative sample of the then approximately 175 centers in operation. The centers were chosen to represent each geographic region of the country and to illustrate also what were considered to be typical examples of the major different types of approaches, organizational arrangements and problems. As the contractor does not have knowledge about the entire "universe" of centers, no judgment can be offered as to the reliability of the sample. Two additional comments may be offered on this subject: first, those centers investigated do represent a great deal of variety in almost every sense; and second, some CAA directors indicated their feelings that the centers being studied in their communities were not typical.

Generalizations about the neighborhood service center program are offered in this report. It must be remembered that these generalizations are based solely on the research carried on at twenty centers as well as less intensive observations of four other centers. Of the centers studied in depth four are located in rural areas, eleven are in metropolitan cities with populations in excess of a million people and five are in medium size communities. Attachment I describes the twenty centers studied and those with knowledge of other centers would be in a position to judge if these centers appear to be a reliable sample of a larger universe. To repeat, the analysis, conclusions and recommendations are based solely on investigations conducted at twenty centers.

STAFFING

This research project was designed and supervised by our central staff. The field work was conducted under central staff direction by eighteen university-associated professionals having intimate knowledge of the areas in which they worked. Most of the data in this report and many of the judgments are based