

grams to improve performance skills and motivation, and efforts to promote "maximum feasible participation" of the poor. From such general cues as these we find the entire neighborhood center program developing.

Although one would expect program and organizational variety to characterize community responses to this vague and general mandate, the picture becomes even more kaleidoscopic when the different kinds of environmental setting are contemplated.¹ For example, the twenty centers investigated in this study are scattered from east to west and north to south. They are found in the largest metropolitan areas as well as in intermediate size cities, small towns and rural areas. This means that the size range of their target populations is enormous—from a few thousand to over two hundred thousand. In terms of population composition over two-thirds of the centers have substantial Negro majorities. A few centers also have large proportions of Spanish-speaking minority group people. Yet, important as they are, such differences are likely to mask another, and perhaps more important, kind of diversity—namely, the diversity found among the poor themselves in each locale.

The simple fact is that poor people are not a homogeneous group any more than are rich people or those with moderate means. There are great differences which can affect how the centers relate to this poverty "market." For simplicity's sake one might think of the poor as comprising three more or less distinguishable subgroups. First are what might be called the "respectable poor." These are the easy-to-reach poor. They have skills or genuine skill potentials and are motivated to improve their lot. All they need are opportunities, and they will pull themselves out of their dependent, poverty status. Second are what might be called the "problematic poor." These are the poor who may or may not be motivated to improve their lot but who suffer disabilities that keep them in a poverty status. Their disabilities may be physical, psychological, intellectual, vocational, social or a combination of these. Whatever the situation, they require more service attention than the "respectables." Third are the "disreputable poor." These are the so-called hard-to-reach poor—the "sociological basket cases." These are people suffering demoralization. They have few if any skills and no motivation to try to develop any. Without intensive treatment (the success of which cannot be assured) these people are probably unsalvageable and will require service of a custodial character. Needless to say, neighborhood centers must mount different programs to serve the clientele represented by these three distinctive poverty subgroups.

In spite of this picture of real and potential diversity sketched above there are some common elements that serve to identify neighborhood centers as members of a distinctive class of phenomena. One of these is the simple fact of their existence as a *local* neighborhood enterprise. Indeed, it has been said that the one really innovative feature of the whole war on poverty is the effort to involve the poor in a participative role through the neighborhood center kind of organization. Another element common to all centers is that they are of quite recent origin. None of them had been operating more than a year and a half at most when investigated in this study. With such a brief history behind them none of the centers can be expected to exhibit much sign of organizational maturity. A third element common to all centers is that they are engaged in service and/or community action functions. Perhaps a few words to clarify these functions would be in order here.

As used in this report service activity refers to client contact by a more or less specialized functionary who tries to meet some need of the client. It suggests the idea of an individual with particular problems who need help. This concept of service is distinguished from that of community action which involves efforts to mobilize people in the community (like the poor) to engage in collective action aimed at resolving some problem or issue. In short, service has an individualized focus; community action has a collective focus. It is, of course, realized that there are marginal cases where this distinction becomes a bit hazy, as, for example, when a community action effort is mounted to force improvement of a service facility. However, most neighborhood center activities can be unambiguously classified in one or the other of these two categories. Let us now turn directly to an examination of the general patterns of activities exhibited by these centers.

THE SERVICE ROLE

The first observation to be made about the twenty centers examined in this study is that they all are engaged in providing service type help to the poor, but

¹ See Appendix I for community data and Attachment 1.