

some more or less respectable bookkeeping procedures, the results are rarely comparable between centers. The reasons for this are only partially attributable to the disorder, incompetence, and inefficiency that usually accompany the early development stages of new enterprises. Of equal or greater significance in explaining this lacuna is the sheer difficulty encountered in trying to set up a workable, useful scheme of record-keeping for neighborhood centers. So much of the client contact (and meaningful contact) is casual and tangential that trying to capture and preserve it for the record is an almost impossible task. This is not to suggest that no records of value can be kept. Rather, it means that certain important activities of the centers defy easy tabulation and classification.

OUTREACH TECHNIQUES

One feature of the outreach effort which we have been able to investigate relates to the question of techniques employed. In this regard, it is clear that the neighborhood survey involving door-to-door contacts is the most frequently listed technique for getting in touch with the clientele. All of the centers studied used it. However, the variable of community size seems to bear significantly on what supplementary techniques are used. For example, the small communities and rural areas seem to rely almost exclusively on the survey and on referrals from non-OEO agencies. The intermediate size communities use in addition to the survey a rather miscellaneous assortment of techniques including mail and leaflets, telephone, and center-sponsored activities like meetings, parties, elections, etc. The large communities employ the greatest variety of techniques. In these communities the survey approach is followed in order of decreasing frequency by such techniques as mail and leaflets, billboards and newspapers, referrals from clients and area residents, television and radio, referrals from other agencies—both OEO and non-OEO, and center-sponsored activities like parties, meetings, and similar events.

Keeping in mind the caveat expressed at the beginning of this chapter about the lack of comprehensive, reliable data on the outreach effort, one might still have an interest in the kinds of figures that are available. In this regard we were able to secure for ten of our centers (just one-half of the total sample) figures that appear to be roughly comparable. These indicate that the target area population of the ten centers is 361,500 persons. Although this averages out to about 36,000 persons per center, the actual population range is quite great—from 3,000 to 125,000. Projecting from data reporting client contacts in March, April, and May of 1966, it appears that 65,420 persons from the target area were involved in a recorded relationship with centers over a twelve-month period. This represents about 18 percent of the target population.

CLIENT CHARACTERISTICS AND VIEWPOINTS

Unfortunately, we have no reliable descriptive data on what kinds of people these 18 percent really are. We do have, however, some information from interviews with approximately 200 clients secured by our field researchers in connection with their investigation of our twenty neighborhood centers. Although this was not a systematic sample, the interviews do give some picture of clientele characteristics and response to the center operation. For example, these clients were predominantly female. This was especially true in the small communities and rural areas. They also were concentrated in the young adult and mature adult age groups—i.e., between 20 and 65 years of age. The clientele in the small communities and rural areas seemed to be somewhat older than those from large and medium-size communities. With respect to race, Negroes clearly predominated in the large and medium-size places while whites were in the clear majority in the small communities and rural areas. In addition, the clients tended to be married, have families of six or more members, and be unemployed.¹

With these descriptive facts in mind let us now examine rather systematically the responses of these clients to a series of questions about their experiences with the neighborhood center. First, over 70 percent of the clients heard of the center through house-to-house surveys, referrals from other residents, or referrals from non-OEO agencies. The surveys were mentioned most prominently in the small and medium-size communities while resident and agency referrals were most frequently mentioned in the large communities.²

¹ See Appendix IV.

² See Appendix V, Table 1.