

With respect to their understanding of the purpose of the centers, the great majority of clients in all the community size classes reported that the centers were to provide services for the poor.¹ As we noted earlier in another section of this report, the idea of community action in which the poor organize to deal with their problems themselves is not very prominent in their thoughts about the neighborhood centers. The poor, however, do understand the idea of services. In this regard our field workers make an interesting observation. They report that most of the clients know about the centers in a very limited fashion. That is to say, their acquaintance with the center is likely to be for the purpose of securing a particular service. Accordingly, they associate the center with that function and nothing else. Thus, the center is known as the place where you can get help with your late AFDC check, or where Mr. X can get a job for eighteen-year-old Johnny, or where you can leave the pre-schoolers when you take on a job as a cleaning woman Thursday mornings, etc.

When asked what the center had done for them or their families between one-quarter and one-third of the clients reported "nothing." This is interesting because most of the clients were contacted either at the center or through center records which indicated that they had received attention from center personnel. Approximately one-third of the clients indicated that they had received service other than employment help at the center. However, employment service was mentioned fairly often especially in the small communities and rural areas.²

When the question mentioned above was turned around, and the clients were asked what they had done for the center, the majority (57%) of the responses indicated "nothing."³ This was particularly true in the small communities and rural areas where two-thirds of the clients reported they had done nothing for the center. Among those who indicated they had done something, volunteer work figured most prominently in their answers.

In an effort to find out what sorts of "facts" about the center were in the minds of the clients, two questions were asked. One asked about who pays for the center. The other inquired about who runs the center and decides what is to be done. Approximately 40 percent of the clients answered the first question by indicating the Federal Government. However, nearly the same proportion replied to the question with a "Don't know" answer.⁴ As for the second question, 47 percent of the clients indicated that they did not know who runs the center. This proportion ran well over 50 percent in the medium and large-size communities and something less than 25 percent in the small communities and rural areas.⁵ Generally speaking, the center director was selected most frequently by those who believed they knew who runs the center. There was also a substantial response in the large communities indicating neighborhood people as the ones who run the center.

Finally, a general evaluation question was asked of the clients—namely, did they feel they were any better off as a result of the center. About 90 percent of the total client group answered this question in the affirmative. However, the range of response was quite broad. For example, nearly all (98 percent) of the small town and rural area clients felt they were "much better off" as a result of the center. This percentage declined to 75 percent among the medium size community chests and dropped to 61 percent for the large community clients.⁶ One gets the distinct impression in reviewing these materials that success of the centers (as measured by expressions of client satisfaction) is rather more noticeable in the small communities and rural areas than elsewhere. These small community centers are almost purely service-oriented operations. Furthermore, their modest size and relatively simple organization make for a much less forbidding and more receptive atmosphere than one is likely to encounter in the large, bureaucratically organized centers in large cities.

So far our treatment of outreach has focused almost exclusively on the client and client-related phenomena like outreach techniques. It should be recognized, however, that the poor can be involved with the center in other ways. For example, we have already noted that the poor are represented on policy-making boards, advisory councils, and the employed staffs of the centers. Indeed, the

¹ See Appendix V, Table 2.

² See Appendix V, Table 3.

³ See Appendix V, Table 4.

⁴ See Appendix V, Table 5.

⁵ See Appendix V, Table 6.

⁶ See Appendix V, Table 7.