

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1967 4037

themselves. This section briefly summarizes the changes that appear to have occurred and some of the reasons for them. It is extremely difficult to disassociate the neighborhood center from the entire OEO effort in this regard and to isolate causes and effects. For instance, it is believed that the pervasiveness of the anti-poverty program has created a new awareness of poverty as a problem, and this awareness is a significant change. The extent to which the change is attributable to any particular feature of the anti-poverty program is almost impossible to measure. This section, however, attempts to focus on those changes which appear to relate most directly to the neighborhood centers.

As indicated before, it is believed that certain significant changes have taken place in many public and private social agencies. They are involved with extending their outreach to the poor; they have exhibited some flexibility in redesigning their services to suit the poor, and they evidenced at least some sympathy in some places for the concept that the poor are deserving of the respect appropriate for any human being. It is difficult to ascertain which of these changes are associated with particular causes. It does seem evident that the existence of centers as physical entities with some funds and some staff has involved social agencies with serving an extended and somewhat different clientele. Pressures of many types have probably resulted in changes in the nature of services offered and the way they are offered. The lack of integrated service programs does not generally seem to have been affected by the existence of the centers. Further, this research project was not designed to determine if particular services actually provided are appropriate to the problems being encountered by the poor and if they are assisting with the solution of these problems. The general impression conveyed by our field research associates' reports, however, is somewhat negative.

Political organizations (including political parties and local government officials) appear to be concerned that neighborhood centers are being or can be used for grass roots organization that might be threatening to the established order. In certain cases this has resulted in efforts to suppress and/or control centers with community action interests, and in some cases it has resulted in greater sensitivity to the requirements of poor citizens. These large-city reactions appear to relate directly to the existence of the neighborhood centers that have direct contact with the poor. They also appear to relate to the fact that the centers and their clientele are not completely predictable and thus the established official has to be alert to developments which may injure him.

Economic institutions appear to be least affected by the existence of neighborhood centers. There have been minor instances where local business abuses in poverty neighborhoods have been discovered and corrected but, for instance, the employment practices of businesses remain essentially unchanged and they still militate against the poor.

The research reveals isolated instances in which there is a noticeable change in the environment, but for the most part the conditions in which poor people live remain unchanged. Poor housing, sanitation, transportation, education, etc. continue to be endemic.

The most important possibilities for change are with the poor themselves, and the heart of the CAP concept is that opportunities for the poor to advance will be created and that the desire and capability to advance will be encouraged. With respect to the opportunities, the neighborhood center has created paying and volunteer positions open to poor people, but other opportunities for development and advancement continue to appear very limited, especially for adults. The extent of the opportunities for educational advancement for youngsters have not been studied here.

Some evidence is available about the attitudes of the poor people contacted in their roles as council members, employees and clients of centers. It is clear that it is the employees who appear most changed. They appear to have the spirit, dedication and desire to succeed; they have the feeling they are already doing useful things; and they expect to continue to be able to operate with some degree of effectiveness. Some board members share the enthusiasm and optimism of the staff but others have not yet been reached or are already disillusioned.

The clientele appears to be least affected although not unaffected. Most clients contacted continue to focus on the need for basic services to help get a job or solve some emergency problem such as a fire, injury or eviction. Most, however, do feel that the center has helped them and that someone does care about their plight although they continue to be skeptical that their situations will be really