

improved. A smaller number of center clients appears to feel that they can influence the society in which they live and that the center can be a helpful agent in this activity. Apparently, a significant minority of those having some contact with the center have this view. Thus, one can say of the target population that most have not yet been reached in a meaningful way at all; that some have become clients for services and perceive the centers as givers of services and themselves as recipients of services; and that a still smaller number regard themselves as active members of society with the right and ability to influence it. To the extent that these feelings represent shifts from apathetic, helpless attitudes they are significant and appear to relate to some involvement with the center.

Evaluation

Neighborhood centers appear to be influencing the significant changes that are taking place in some social service agencies, some political and governmental bodies, and among some of the poor people. With regard to the poor, there is evidence that at least a significant minority of those in contact with the center have an enhanced view of their own possibilities and roles in society. There do not appear to be basic organizational or operational arrangements which preclude significant changes from occurring if the CAA and center concur on the need for and nature of the changes.

REASONABLE COST

Discussion

To determine if the neighborhood center program is carried on at reasonable cost it is appropriate to review the nature of the costs involved, the magnitude of the expenditures, the purposes of the centers and the alternative ways of achieving similar goals.

A previous section of this report has indicated almost all of the funds devoted to neighborhood centers are for the payment of staff salaries and that most of the staff employed are poor people from local poverty areas. These people generally have not been able to obtain other employment opportunities and their association with the center, if nothing more, does provide decent work and incomes for them and their families. This research and other inquiries also reveal that these poor employees are developing positive attitudes about their own roles in society and are gaining some competence to cope successfully with their environment. Thus, the center experience is a training program for these workers and, as such, may not be more costly than other forms of training.

Centers serve three different principal functions: outreach, service and community action. The outreach function is difficult because it requires personal contact with potential clients—an expensive process. The experiences of well-established social service agencies indicate that they have not been able to perform this function at a lesser cost. Indeed, for the most part, such agencies have been able to perform it only in a very limited way. The centers' outreach to the poor has enabled them to extend their services substantially. Thus, it is suggested that this aspect is performed at reasonable cost and the marginal returns on the expenditures for outreach are great.

In some of the larger centers, service programs are operated by center personnel, but in most cases services are provided by the agencies that have traditionally provided them. Thus, the reasonableness of the costs involved is a question of whether these agencies and their personnel are performing worthwhile functions in a responsible and efficient manner. This question cannot be answered with accuracy unless these agencies, their programs and the results are studied in detail. It must be presumed, however, that these agencies operate with at least a modicum of competence and that their cooperation with the CAP and center programs is a desirable feature. It is suggested that their association with centers is increasing their efficiency by putting them in touch with more clients and making them more responsive to client requirements. This increase of effectiveness is a benefit to society, and the cost of achieving this benefit appears to be relatively low. Most center personnel are involved with services principally as referral agents. They appear to perform this task with reasonable economy. When center staff members are engaged directly in providing services, their activities appear to be characterized by disorganization and inefficiency. On balance, however, it happens that the cost of providing services utilizing the neighborhood center is as reasonable as utilizing alternative traditional methods.