

It is suggested here that the role of the neighborhood center is to afford local residents a meaningful opportunity for participation and self development. It is to provide the poor person with the power that most other citizens have and through this means to alter the relationship of the poor person to his environment. It is to make legitimate and effective the claims of the poor on society.

Either by design or by happenstance, neighborhood centers have not generally become organizations to enhance the status of the poor. In some cases the establishment has controlled CAA's and centers and, fearful that the poor might disturb the status quo, has manipulated the organization to preclude participation by the poor. In other cases social or political activists have gained control of centers and, to protect the poor from making costly blunders, they too have not encouraged effective development and participation by the poor. In those few cases where there has been real concern with this goal, a lack of training for all involved, the difficulties of formal mechanisms, large size and the absence of attainable programs have all militated against effective participation.

Previous discussions have focused on the service role and the community action role of centers. It is suggested that neither of these roles has any new meaning unless the poor residents of the neighborhood have some legitimate power to change services or to act in concert. It must also be realized that the power of the poor may not be exercised at all or may be exercised imprudently. However, the mere fact of this power, whether latent or dynamic, has already proven to be effective in bringing changes in service arrangements of advantage to the poor.

The confusions that attend neighborhood centers appear to result from providing lip service to the idea of legitimizing the power of the poor and at the same time compromising this idea by efforts to improve services and/or attain political goals. If the centers cannot be designed and operated to support the experimental notion of enabling the poor to participate in a meaningful way in solving their own problems, then there is little reason for such centers. Other less troublesome arrangements can also attack poverty effectively. This is not to say that improved service programs should not be promoted at centers. Quite the contrary. It is expected that in many cases they will result naturally from a new type of relationship between the poor and service agencies.

It is recognized that there are differences from neighborhood to neighborhood in the ways that the poor can and will participate in center affairs. There are also differences in tactics appropriate at the different stages of development of centers. Both of these types of differences are important if one does not lose sight of the principal strategy which has been set forth above. The subsequent recommendations are means of making neighborhood centers work more effectively as organizations to enhance the power of the poor to help themselves. This is the unique role of the neighborhood center. All programs and organizational arrangements should support this role.

#### TRAINING

If the poor are to function more effectively, they must be offered training programs in a variety of fields. The power of the poor will be hollow if it is not exercised with the knowledge, judgment and insight that training can provide. The notable lack of intensive training for the poor who are employees or board members is extremely damaging to the center activities in particular and the entire CAP in general.

Training for nonprofessional neighborhood staff members should be intensive, and it should be continuing. It should be geared to provide the staff members with specific technical information needed in jobs as well as fundamental skills and attitudes necessary in most organizational efforts.

It is recognized that little is known about training in general and training poor people in particular. Nevertheless, some important knowledge has resulted from training programs in business and government. More recently important innovative concepts have resulted from Peace Corps and VISTA programs. Unquestionably there is a need and basis for developing a wide variety of training programs for center employees. It is suggested that a major investment in the development and use of such programs is essential to the success of all aspects of the neighborhood center concept. No other investment appears to offer such great possibilities for significant rewards.

In addition to devising and utilizing staff training programs, it is necessary to devise training programs for the many residents who participate in center affairs as board or council members. These people are presently at a marked disadvantage in fulfilling their responsibilities because they lack the experience,