

MEMORANDUM

TO: COMMUNITY CENTER STAFF

FROM: ANNELL PONDER

RE: ADULT PROGRAM

Because of the urgency of involving local adults in the program of the community centers and in order to get the necessary support which will enable the centers to continue in the fall, I am sending you this special memorandum.

I hope the following suggestions on recruiting adults will be helpful to you.

1. Go where they are: advertise and recruit at meetings or places where adults gather: church, lodge, social and civic club meetings. Try to cover other places, outside this "middle class" orbit as well, though.
2. Let local people speak for and with you. Whenever possible get some good, strong local person (and there are many around) sold on your program and ask him or her to tell others about it. You may need to do all of the arranging and contacting for setting up the opportunity in some cases (often spelling out or rehearsing with the local person what he should get over, or going along with him), but if people see one of their neighbors either alone or with one of the volunteers making a bold step forward, they are more likely to see such action as possible for themselves. When possible, let local individuals or groups participate or sponsor socials, tea parties, block parties, church socials, group singing, film showings, raffles, dances, community surveys, etc. at which you may present suggested activities for their consideration, take names of interested persons and make plans for follow-up meetings by subject. Talk with parents of your young participants, ministers, adult and other volunteers about your need to reach adults and seek their help organizing initial center programs. If you need help in locating local leaders, work with your project directors or call us in Jackson.
3. Talk to them with confidence, with the sense of "expectation" which commanded so much of Bayard Rustin's attention in his exhortation at orientation. Remember that they are adult, though many of them will be overly dependent because of this repressive culture. You must encourage and support strength, guiding it toward fruitful and profitable ends. You have very probably been surprised by the strength that you do find when you meet some people. As you work you must somehow resist the temptation to do things for the people, but share the work, the planning and the decision-making with them, so that they realize that if the center is to continue after the summer, they will have to do it. **THEY NEED TO START NOW**, in order that at the end they won't be overwhelmed by the responsibility.
4. Show as much respect and appreciation as you honestly can to matters and institutions traditionally held important. By and large Mississippians are highly provincial and conventional about manners, dress, religion and church. For example, It may not be the best thing to go to a church service, (or a big city mass meeting) where all the members are scrubbed clean and dressed in their best wearing dirty overalls or dungarees with shirttail or blouse hanging out, or with hair hanging long and unkempt. With youngsters who are rebelling against "restraints" of one kind or another, this "freedom" may be very attractive, but to adults (many of whom may be unconsciously seeking an excuse not to cooperate with

the program), such appearance only gives them reason for being wary and watchful. They are subjected to the news stories and articles which describe us as outside agitators, dirty (also smelly) beatniks, trouble makers and other derogatory terms. Clean overalls, jeans, denim shirts and skirts, etc. should be all right. Girls should wear dresses and skirts, as was suggested at orientation. The appearance of the office, community center or freedom house also may often make a difference.

5. Show great concern and interest in their welfare, putting them in touch with all resources now available in the state--doctors, lawyers, federal programs workers, etc.; do not fail to follow up on problems when you find them. For instance, you can organize work corps among teenagers and do community service projects. Follow-up is crucial, often defining the reliability and sincerity of the project in the eyes of the community. They have been "taken" by many people and organizations over the years. If, for example, you borrow money from someone or secure credit with their help, be sure to repay the loan or pay the bill as soon as possible.

I would suggest the following as subjects which may be of interest to the adults in your community and you may want to suggest these as you discuss programs to them.

1. block or area captains' clubs devoted to voter registration work
2. nonviolence workshops and study sessions
3. leadership techniques, such as leading a meeting, organizing group action, etc.
4. nutrition and meal planning
5. law and the legal rights of citizens
6. government and American history
7. Negro history*
8. child care
9. film programs on prejudice, race relations, the civil rights struggle
10. welfare and relief committees
11. formation and/or support of local civic groups

We have materials and information which may be useful to you on each of the items suggested. A suggested prospectus on the citizen and the law is being worked out in cooperation with the legal staff.

When you are in Jackson you may want to check at the supply office for toys, games, books and other supplies which you can use. It cannot be too strongly suggested that local people should be used in conducting this kind of effort. A good example is that of literacy. A literate adult in the community can, with very little training, be as competent a teacher of literacy, using the Laubach materials and whatever others we can scrounge, as nine-tenths of the summer volunteers. (Do you remember how much your training amounted to in Oxford? The material is designed to be taught by almost anyone.) Therefore there is no reason why an interested local adult could not be recruited for this responsibility.

We hope to be able to visit you more in the next couple of weeks. And we will keep in touch by telephone if we can.

* Tom Rowe, 2905 Harrison Avenue, Gulfport, Mississippi, has a number of slides made last summer with the "Cross-roads, Africa" project which he is willing to share with groups. People interested in having him show them should contact us right away in order that we may arrange a schedule. Tom will be here through August 21.