

Memorandum

COFO
1017 Lynch St.
Jackson, Mississippi

TO: MISSISSIPPI COMMUNITY CENTER WORKERS
FROM: Miss. Summer Project Staff
SUBJECT: Overview of the Community Centers

The community centers are conceived as a permanent institution rather than a summer "crash" program. The centers will ultimately provide a structure for a wide range of educational and recreational programs. In doing this, they will not only serve basic needs of Negro communities now virtually ignored by the social services provided by the State, but they will form a dynamic focus for developing community organization.

For the summer project, we hope to start community centers in 17 locations, spread over 16 counties. The arrangements are still not final in some of these locations, but most of them are assured (as of May 25). Community centers will start out in houses, old schoolhouses, and church basements, for the most part. One is in an old Day Care Center; another occupies the second story of a downtown business building. We hope that the community centers will eventually occupy permanent buildings, and two centers already have plans for such new buildings. Until the program is actually serving the community, however, we cannot attract the money for nice buildings.

The community centers are planned as a base for a battery of programs. Briefly, these programs are:

1. Library--a small lending library, averaging 10,000 volumes for each center.
2. Recreation--films and discussion groups for adults, dancing and sports (ping-pong, etc. inside, and outdoor sports such as baseball where there is a playing field) for teenagers.
3. Day care--singing, games and stories for small children. Refreshments where we can afford them.
4. Literacy and basic education--tutorial study for adults, and remedial study for students.
5. Citizenship--in four areas: voting regulations, duties of citizens, Negro history and American history.
6. Health--informal classes in the general areas of prenatal care, infant care, sanitation and public health services.
7. Drama, dancing, arts and crafts, music, etc.--depending upon the talents of the staff and interested local people.
8. Federal programs--educational service to inform Mississippians of the help that is available to them if they apply for it.
9. Home improvement--home repair, sewing, etc.
10. Vocational training--probably will have to be deferred until the centers are well-established in the communities; and the employment situation is somewhat more open, but still a very large part of our conception of the community center programs.

The community centers positions should be regarded as jobs of initiating and training. Each center will start with a staff of 6-10 summer volunteers. During the summer, the staff will have the responsibility of organizing as many of these programs as there is need and resource for, so that there can be a good start. A second part of the job for community center personnel is to get out into the community and find local people who are interested and willing to carry on the program after the summer. In most cases, it will be necessary to teach these people for the job, since some specific knowledge and skill is required. If possible, these people should be recruited early and help all summer.