

2011

COFO
1017 Lynch St.
Jackson, Miss.

July 10 Report on Summer Community Centers

I. At present there are 13 community center projects moving with some degree of progress--some functioning very well, some functioning fairly well (part-time, partially staffed), some functioning at a psychological disadvantage (having found it necessary (?) to leave their planned sites, as in Greenwood and Meridian, in order to accommodate administrative and/or communications personnel whose needs for space are apparently more pressing); others are presently preparing their buildings for use, some are sharing their places with Freedom Schools, and others are in initial stages of interpretation, recruiting and organizing.

The community center staff has agreed that each center should present these basic programs: 1. literacy, 2. art, music, recreation, dance, etc.--day care, 3. library, and 4. health. Each center staff should have one spokesman who serves as a convener-coordinator for the staff at each project. The other basic program is the Citizenship Program.

Generally we can say that the program has been received enthusiastically and the staff workers are working very hard and on the whole enjoying it. The need for permanent buildings and for major equipment and supplies still remains urgent.

Specifically we can report the following for each center project.

II.

1. Greenville: Staff is Vicky Halper, spokesman, Tom Dolgoff, Barbara Mutnick and Virginia Steele. The center is based in the old City Community Center, along with the Freedom School. The land and building are apparently owned by Negroes, but the library was donated by the City. There is only one big room we can use, and that only on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Also there is no storage space; the center workers and Freedom School teachers have to take everything to the building every day they use it. However, plans are shaping up rapidly for a permanent building. One staff worker who is an architect is designing a building which can be built relatively cheaply by people in the community. The staff has started a Herbert Lee Memorial Center fund, and they are soliciting contributions for the center.

The center and Freedom School staff work as a unit. In the mornings they work with the children; in the afternoon they have art classes and Freedom School. They have tried to start two committees to carry on these programs when they leave--one of adults and one of teenagers--but the response has been poor so far. The next program they hope to start is a music group; they have records, a record player, a piano and guitars, etc. The whole center program needs adults very badly at this point.

2. Clarksdale: The staff had some minor harassment--the police came and asked them if they had a permit to run a center or school. They didn't take it seriously. The staff is David Batzka, spokesman, Margaret Hazleton, Zoya Zemon, and Rev. Pendleton of the NCC staff.

The center will have its Grand Opening on Tuesday, July 11. They will

register people for the programs then. They have been fixing up their building and recruiting people. They anticipate that there will be most demand among adults for literacy training. They need a person for recreation.

3. Greenwood: The facilities are very skimpy now, although after the summer the center will again have the COFO building. Right now they have one room in that office, 2 rooms in a house in another part of town and a big yard nearby. The staff is functioning, but the space problem bothers them. The staff is Monroe Sharpe, spokesman, Bambi Brown, Ray and Rita Rohrbaugh, Sally Belfrage, and Evelyn Ellis. The library is operating, and the staff juggles health and literacy classes among their locations.

4. Holly Springs: Staff is Gene Hunn, spokesman (apparently), Mike Clurman, Sandy Hard, Gitta Perl, Mary Jennings, Cathy Dahl, Ruth Koenig. They have two major programs. The day care program includes all ages up to Freedom School age. The program offers, arts and crafts, recreation and reading. The other program is the health program. Three people work on this along with some work on other federal programs. An outgoing program of health service to the community is in the planning stages. One registered nurse is applying for a Mississippi license.

5. Batesville: Staff is Mrs. Martha Tranquilli, Betty Allen and Claire O'Connor. They're three nurses, so their first program has been in the health program. They're organizing a training class in home nursing among high school young people. The program will teach basic information for lay people on personal hygiene, home care of invalids, infant care, etc. Since Mrs. Tranquilli and Mrs. Allen are leaving Monday, they need more staff rather badly. The center is an old, closed college--one building all on the first floor. It's a good facility, but it has a school program opening on Monday. After Monday they will have the place after 2 p.m. and will be able to store their equipment and keep their library in it. In September the building will be available permanently. However, it seems probable that they can get a new center in the area. There is land available, and the staff has started to raise money from Quaker contacts in Illinois. They are also trying to raise equipment and supplies for a children's day care and recreation program. Tomorrow they are planning a "Library Day" to sort out and shelve their books.

6. Ruleville: Staff is Fred Miller, spokesman, Ellen Siegal, L. Davis, and Heidi Dole. The center is very well established, according to their latest reports. More people come to the center than they can handle easily. The Freedom School and community center staffs work as a unit. Since the school children are in regular school until 1 p. m., and since the same place serves as both community center and Freedom School, the schedule has been broken according to age group. In the morning, the center offers day care for children and the following programs for adults: typing (the staff collected 12 or 13 typewriters, so their typing class can accommodate that many people at a time), sewing, citizenship and Negro history, health, including first aid and biology and remedial reading, writing and math (both mornings and evenings). In the afternoons after 2:00 the staff has Freedom School.

7. Mileston: No report. Telephone communication is very difficult.

8. Shaw: Staff: Fred Winn, spokesman, Lynell Barrett, Cathy Logan, Bonnie Guy, Judy York. After much fooling around from the telephone company, the center finally got their telephone. The center is ready to open Monday. The community center and Freedom School staffs work as a unit, as in Ruleville, and for the same reasons. The center has three rooms (really two rooms and a hallway where they have the voter registration office) and a large backyard. The library is sorted and put on shelves. The staff plans to devote three people for literacy training because they anticipate much demand and because the literacy training demands individual tutoring. In the morning they will have classes for adults and day care for children, and in the afternoon they will have Freedom School (from 2 to 5). They're checking on the possibility of a center in Mound Bayou.

9. Canton: Staff is Tom Manoff, Ann Bodk, M. Benes, Marion Forer, S. Shideler, Mrs. Robinson and other local people. The center is in the St. Paul AME Zion Church. The first problem has been to serve a huge number of kids. They have arts and crafts and recreation programs going, and need more staff to relieve the burden on the day care people and to widen their program.

10. Leake County: The staff is Clarke Gardner, spokesman, Carol Gross, Rev. Teeters of the NCC ministers project and Harold Aranoff. The center got off to a bad start when the County threw them out of their original location. They moved to a nearby church basement, however and proceeded with the community center and Freedom School. The staff works as one program, focused on the Freedom School. The health worker teaches a class on health and biology in the Freedom School and the day care people handle all the children under 6th grade (about 30). The Freedom School and center children have played one game with a nearby Choctaw Indian team and would like to play more. The federal programs workers are trying to start an ARA program. There has been some planning for literacy training for adults, but there has been no response so far. The staff is starting to raise money and plan for a permanent center. It seems likely that a very good piece of land will be donated, and the money can be raised. The greatest problem is mobility in an isolated community where the distances are great and the roads bad.

11. Meridian: Staff: Lenora Thurmond, Lucien Kabat, Diane Horwitz, Ruth Gallo. The staff can't do much in the COFO community center building. There's too little room (they're restricted to one room) and too much chaos. They've partly solved the problem in their day care program by having the children in the center for stories, etc. in the morning and taking them to the park in the afternoon. The park has a swimming pool offering free lessons. It's very nice for the children. The health program is an evening class in the Freedom School. Hopefully the center staff can get more space and time at the Freedom School. The main problem centers around the fact that two of the people are leaving after a month and they feel the day care program is just a stopgap measure with little permanent value unless they can find replacements in the local community. Community contacts are a problem, however, because the permanent staff members are gone.

12. Vicksburg: Staff is John Hunter, spokesman, Frances O'Brien, Holly van Horne, Ann Popkin, J. Handke. In the mornings, the center has use of the YMCA. There they have dancing classes and gymnasium class.

From noon to three p.m. they all work on voter registration. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday they have story-telling from 3 to 4, and chorus practice from 4 to 5. Tuesday and Thursday they have a drama workshop from 3 to 5. They have three rooms in the community center and Freedom School building; also there's a big playing field next door. They plan to devote the evenings to literacy and other adult programs, but there hasn't been any response as yet.

13. Hattiesburg: The staff is Lorne Kress, spokesman, M. Davidson, Mary Gellatly, and Martin Mullvain. The greatest problem is the library. They do not have a regular library worker yet, and the others work a little bit on the library as they find time from their other commitments. Consequently the library is not serving the community yet. Besides a librarian they would like a typing and sewing teacher, and they need another health worker.

These reports represent the first reactions to the projects, so on the whole they are extremely optimistic. As the programs settle into shape, however, some evaluation will be possible. For the time being, however, most of the centers are off to a good start. The major need in additional resources seems to be the necessity to provide for the plans of several of the centers to build permanent buildings. The major programming need seems to be in citizenship training. Additional materials on Negro history and citizenship have been sent to the Freedom Schools and community centers, and more will be coming as we get it.

TO RECAPITULATE:

Problems are facilities and equipment.

How can present resources - skilled staff at Greenville (the architect-builder), land donated by local citizens in Batesville, Ruleville, Itta Bena, Greenwood, Greenville, Mileston, etc. be coordinated with National Council of Churches plans for the Delta? Can work be started now?

Is there any money in the budget at all for supplies or should we rely solely on what staff, volunteers and community are able to secure through appeals, solicitations, etc? I am especially concerned about funds for renting and/or purchasing films.

Any suggestions will be appreciated.

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