

MERIDIAN COMMUNITY CENTER

Weekly Report

Week of March 25, 1964

Rita Schwerner

In the sewing classes, which began about ten days ago, I believe that we have found one of the programs which we were searching for - an entrance into the Negro community. This program is one which appeals not to the middle class Negro, whom we already have contact with, but to the poor person who can't afford to buy either ready-made clothing or material. We have had about forty women, of all ages, come up and begin work on garments, in the few days since the program began. Many of these people had never been up before, and we are now able to orient them as to our other programs. I see the sewing classes as serving two specific purposes. The first is to provide new clothing for people who need it, and this the program is doing! Material is free, and those women who already know how to sew may take what they need and sew at home. Those people who are beginners select their material and receive instructions here. The group is so far about half and half. The second function of the program is to provide access for us into the community. We take the name and address of each person who comes for material, and inquire of adults as to whether they are registered voters. We explain our program and ask for their support. Many of these people have already started to use our other facilities, and have brought their friends up to see us. We have received invitations to visit people's homes.

Because the program is expanding far faster than I dreamed it would, we are faced with the problem of needing more material in a hurry. I have written to Elizabeth McFadden and to a personal friend, who both secured our first shipment of goods, explained the situation to them, and requested further shipments. They will not be able to supply us indefinitely, and I will need contacts to secure more material. The other problem resulting from the speed with which the sewing classes caught on has had a good result. I was not able to handle all the people who came up for instruction by myself, and was forced to search for help. Two of the local girls, who have been previously active, offered to help to teach sewing, and as a result are now far more involved with our program than ever before.

Other classes are also picking up. About four children come daily after school for reading help; the children's story hour is running smoothly and singing is done more than story telling. (I am saving scraps of material and we plan to teach the children how to make puppets.) Two nights a week there are classes for people interested in clerk and Civil Service positions. We so dimple math and will in the future have workshops preparing people for the reactions they will receive as first Negro clerks, etc. in the large downtown stores.

Teenagers are beginning to show some interest in canvassing and they use the library and teen room constantly.
WE DO NEED MORE STAFF.