

SUMMARY STATEMENT ON NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

The Task Force is concerned over what appears to be a tendency to look at neighborhood centers through the wrong end of the telescope.

The question is not how many centers we need, nor whether they should be pure information centers, diagnosis centers, one-stop multi-purpose centers, or other combinations.

The question is how to take the bewildering maze of present social services (broadly defined) and develop a system for delivering those services in a manner that makes sense from the standpoint of the men, women, and children who need help the most.

Neighborhood centers can serve as the delivery arm for the city's system of social services.

They can serve effectively, however, only if the city's system is rationally organized to provide coordinated and mutually reinforcing services in a manner that genuinely meets the consumer's needs.

They cannot -- and should not -- become small replicas that simply mirror and seek to compete with the larger institutions that make up the present disorganized system. In the long run that would only add one more twist to an already tortuous maze.

Unless there is reorganization at the federal, state, and local level to develop a system that is tailored from the viewpoint of the individual's needs, the establishment of neighborhood centers in every ghetto of America will have little lasting value.

Recommendations: The Task Force therefore recommends:

1. That the proposed inter-agency demonstration in 14 cities negotiate only with cities willing to develop plans and mechanisms for the coordination and rational delivery of its service system.

2. That, to the extent possible, this inter-agency demonstration be carried out in cities participating in the Model Cities Program.

3. That the inter-agency steering committee be directed to study and make recommendations for revision of federal statutory and administrative regulations that would contribute to the development of a coordinated system

4. That, to provide greater funding flexibility, legislation should be sought to enable HUD to use present funds for services as well as physical facilities.

5. That any neighborhood centers established be equipped with the mandate and resources to serve as an effective catalyst, influence and advocate for making the total system more responsive to individual's needs.

6. That the program be carried out with maximum participation and involvement of the people to be served.

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