

*The Settlement House:
Mediator for the Poor*

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THE SETTLEMENT MOVEMENT emerged around the turn of the century as a response to the rapid influx of rural European immigrants into the major urban centers of this country. The main concept of the early settlements was that of *neighborhood*, with stress on its organization and integration. If the neighborhood could become more democratic, unified, and representative, the individual's relationship with the larger society would grow stronger and more secure. The early settlement workers saw the neighborhood both as a unit of study and as a base for social action:

Begun as friendly households in parts of the city where social problems were greatest, with the idea of dispensing hospitality and collecting factual material about "how the other half lives," they soon found themselves formulating statements of needs—even methods of supplying these needs. The resident workers were not merely reporting to the rest of society as they originally intended, but they were stimulating their neighbors to cooperate in the battle to secure equal privileges for the economically dispossessed, the educationally deprived, the physically handicapped, and those discriminated against because of race, foreign birth, nationality, or religion (7, pp. 2-3).

There was another institution that offered striking resemblances in its approach to the same immigrants: the political machine operated with the same pragmatic style, although its moral perspective was different from that of the settlements. We have discussed these similarities in another paper (3), but Banfield's account of how the ward leader mediated between the neighborhood and city hall is worth noting here:

One or two evenings a week he is available to all comers in his office. People come to him to inquire about welfare payments, to get their relatives into public institutions, to get something done about neighborhood nuisances (the garbage has not been collected from an alley or a policeman is needed at a school crossing) and to make complaints about the police or other city departments (1, p. 119).

In any event, both of these institutions were overtaken by the huge increase and bureaucratization in welfare and government programs in the 1930s. The wardheeler was faced with changes in political organization and an expanding social welfare bureaucracy. The dispensing of services by a person involved in the total life of the neighborhood was replaced by formal and rule-bound agencies, and these "natural mediators" were lost as an organizational force. Similarly, the increasing professionalization of social service caused many of the settlements to concentrate on services for children and youth through group work and recreational programs. Gans (4) has pointed out that this produced a greater emphasis on serving the more "mobile" youth and his family, motivated as they are to take advantage of such "character-building" efforts.

These social changes also created a neighborhood that was different from that formed by the early immigrants. Primarily, the difference lay in the increasing differentiation of the lower class itself; many authors have described the variety of life styles and perspectives of lower-class families, with differences cutting across ethnic lines. Herbert Gans (4) named four types:

Mobiles, Routine Seekers, Action-Oriented, and Maladapted. S. M. Miller (6) identified the various family types as Stable, Consistent Copers, and Inconsistent Copers. Madeline Engle (2) combined these and delineated five categories: Strivers, Consistent Copers, Inconsistent Copers, Relievers, and Hold Overs (Residuals). The basis of all these typologies is the relationship between the lower-class families and the various public and private bureaucracies and organizations of modern society. Thus, the "Mobiles," "Stables," and "Strivers" are those of the lower class who are church-going adults with low-paid but steady jobs, who have "achieving" children, and who know how to use the various "character-building" agencies in the neighborhood. They are, in many respects, similar to the settlement's original clients, the immigrants. On the other hand, the "Maladapted," and the "Inconsistent Copers" are those families who are the most isolated from the bureaucratic structures of education, employment, welfare, and the settlements themselves.

These differences within the lower class isolate the subcultures from each other and create a situation in which the neighborhood no longer functions as a unit. Social action by the "mobiles" will not necessarily benefit the more isolated families; in fact it hardly ever does. And because the mobiles are the most politically active, politicians connected with the neighborhood will most often direct their concerns to the aspirations of this group. Thus, we have a situation in which the best gets better and the worst gets worse. The problems of low-income neighborhoods therefore become increasingly connected to the plight of those families at the very bottom of the lower class. If the settlements are to serve in these neighborhoods, they must develop strategies that will enable them to help alleviate this isolation and its effects. This chapter will describe the efforts to develop such a strategy by one agency in one such community.

THE SETTING

The Wesley Community Centers were founded in San Antonio, Texas, in 1909 and served the early Mexican immigrants who came to this country during the period of the Mexican revolution. In their poverty these Mexicans were similar in many ways to the European immigrants then moving into other parts of the country. Over the years the neighborhoods served by the Methodist centers began to change and develop the characteristics discussed above. The centers had attempted to reach out to the problem families in various programs, but this was not done systematically until after the unification of the three Methodist centers of San Antonio in 1958. Soon after the unification the Wesley Community Centers began a program designed to reach out to the conflict gangs in the neighborhood. Out of this effort evolved the Wesley Youth Project, financed by the National Institute of Mental Health as a program for working with conflict gangs among low-income Mexican-Americans.

First devised as a delinquency-prevention program, the Wesley Youth Project began to change as it became obvious that we were dealing with the more generalized problems of poverty. There was a staff tendency to resist this new direction, since it seemed so far away from the Project's initial intention, and the concern with "poverty" seemed to involve a commitment too vast and global. However, the new direction grew from the realization that causes as well as symptoms must be addressed by a service agency, even though the "solution" of poverty could not be reached within the foreseeable future. Our own change began when we realized that the hard-core poor were disadvantaged in their efforts to negotiate solutions to the problems that continually affected their lives, either in their own neighborhoods or in the community-at-large. The more "affluent" were relatively successful in negotiating society's institutions; they paid their taxes, contributed to

United Funds, voted, held organizational offices, and supported social causes.

Like the more affluent, the hard-core poor had some definite ideas about what is right and wrong, although these might differ drastically in certain respects; smoking marijuana and having sexual adventures before the age of sixteen might be intolerable to the affluent but commonplace to the poor. The very poor differed, too, in that they were far more likely to distrust agencies, to think that all politicians were crooked, and to be certain that it does absolutely no good to fight city hall. What was common to both the poor and their more organized neighbors was the desire to be somebody and to possess the material things that connote status.

Although it is important to guard against the tendency to generalize too broadly about the "culture" of the poor, our own efforts to understand the lower-class Mexican-American neighborhood brought us to recognize three family types, somewhat similar to the classifications described above. First, there is a "mobile" working class that lives in comfortable houses and owns most of the modern conveniences. There are several motives that keep them in the neighborhood: many of their close relatives live there; living expenses are comparatively low; it is close to their work; and they feel emotionally tied to the neighborhood in which they grew up. The mobiles are generally looked up to by the rest of the neighborhood; if, however, they display their possessions too boldly, or if they hold themselves aloof, they could be unpopular. Other neighborhood families often call the mobile family "Agringado," or "overly-Americanized." Sometimes—but not too often—the mobile family becomes dissatisfied with being a big frog in a small pool, and it then moves to a middle-class neighborhood.

Next, there is a stable, working-class population, composed of the poor-but-honest, whom we saw mowing the lawns and removing the garbage of the more affluent. They are the hard-working, poorly paid, tradition-oriented families, who

maintain extended family ties and move only with great difficulty, if at all, into the next class. Only a few of their children complete high school. This group identifies itself as "La Raza," or "the people."

At the bottom of the lower-class Mexican-American neighborhoods are the hard-core problem families, who fail in almost every family task, whether by middle-class or any other standards: their health is poor; the children are not controlled; the houses are drafty and dirty; work is hard to find and harder to keep. Marriage occurs at an early age and there are many children. In general, the hard-core poor are the fatherless welfare families; the males are loosely connected to the female-headed household and are associated in "action-oriented" peer groups. In these neighborhoods the hard-core poor are the most isolated and the most despised.

We have some general ideas about why these families are so despised by their own people, but these need to be developed in more detail. We know that we meet with strong rejection when we point out the plight of the very poor to the mobiles in the low-income neighborhood. Perhaps they are too close to the problem to deal with it securely. Perhaps we are asking them to be understanding of people who have been family enemies over an extended period. In any event, we found that the poor themselves were most prejudiced toward the very poor—even more rejecting of them than are the affluent of society. The hard-core poor are, of course, rejected by perfect strangers as well—welfare workers, public health nurses, school principals, and other professionals.

The neighborhood worker is thus in an ambiguous situation from the beginning as he moves into work with the very poor. The neighborhood is willing to let the settlement deal with these difficult, depressing problems, but as the staff member begins to work the neighborhood resentment mounts as he spends more of his time with "those ungrateful and worthless people." These hostile and bitter reactions were particularly

strong when we showed interest in the "hoodlums"—troublesome youngsters largely from the multiproblem families. We received immediate reactions from neighborhood people and from the agencies and schools as well. A professional said:

These people don't want to help themselves. The only way you can get along with them is to coddle them and what you will probably do is teach them they can get away with anything. However, I don't want anything to do with them; you can help by keeping them out of my hair.

And a local school principal generalized thus, from a specific family to the neighborhood itself:

Juan is bad and it's no wonder with that mother of his. She has had children by half a dozen different men. She's immoral and wouldn't listen to us. I told her: Don't have any more babies. But they don't listen to you—they blame us; we can't do anything for this neighborhood.

FINDING A NEW DIRECTION FOR NEIGHBORHOOD WORK

From the sheer necessities of the work itself, we were forced to move toward the principle that *the integration of neighborhood and community must begin at the point of maximum damage*. Our workers found their attention constantly drawn to the weaker links in the chain; they concluded that the hard-core poor are the essence of the social problems in a slum neighborhood. The problems of the very poor exhibited on a grand and compelling scale the status anxiety and unequal opportunity that were universal handicaps in all such neighborhoods. And they acted as strong negative forces impeding the neighborhood's overall tendency toward acculturation and integration within the larger community. From this it followed that solutions would begin only as the residents, the social agencies, and the educational institutions moved to accept these hard-core problems as their own.

Thus, we found that our work must focus directly not only

on the problems of the poor themselves but also on the task of helping the larger neighborhood and the community to accept these problems as partially the products of their own activity. Our general direction then became one of mediating the relations among individuals, groups, and their society. Neither of the large, popular alternatives made sense in our context: we could neither restructure entire personalities nor place a crowbar at the point of greatest leverage—the base of the whole social structure. But while we could no more affect “total society” than we could “total personalities,” we could get at what was in between—families, gangs, schools, neighborhood organizations, and struggling individuals. Our responsibilities began with people who were unable to express their needs to their neighbors and their community, and extended to the groups who needed to be responsive to those needs.

The mediating function played itself out in specific practice situations, each of which required the greatest skill we could muster: we became involved in crisis events affecting the hard-core families; we worked closely with the institutional representatives involved in the various crisis situations; and we involved neighborhood families in comprehensive neighborhood organizations that could define the issues for the larger community and call attention to the problems of the families at the bottom. Let us describe for you some of the problems that emerged and the practice strategies we employed.

THE CRISIS SITUATION

The neighborhood worker became a significant person in the lives of his families only to the extent that he was able to take on the world view of the poor and was able to prove himself useful to them. It meant finding the pace and direction of individual poor people without becoming totally immersed in their many problems and their expectations of failure. Crisis situations provided excellent vehicles for involvement. Most

of the troubles were silent and hidden: the unwed teen-ager who realized she was pregnant; the drug addict hustling to support his habit; and other similar predicaments. Some of the crises were violent and immediate, such as the neighborhood feud that erupted into a shooting, and the marijuana party that came to an end when a car smashed against a telephone pole. Such situations required an enormous amount of effort by the poor because of their lack of resources to negotiate in their own behalf; and during such moments of agitation and confusion their attitudes of distrust and suspicion were momentarily discarded:

Worker is getting into his car at 6:00 p.m. after visiting with the mother of a young alcoholic. As he prepares to leave he is asked by the mother to “do something” about a distant relative who is “dying” a few houses away. The worker and woman enter a run-down shack where an older woman lies in bed, semiconscious and moaning softly. She is surrounded by neighbors, none of whom wish to take responsibility for doing anything; they cannot realistically assess the situation . . . (her condition turned out to be a diabetic coma). Because of the late hour the usual resources are not available. An hour passes before an ambulance arrives and before Charity Hospital’s staff agrees to accept patient. The next day an older woman who was in attendance during the crisis situation visits the worker and asks him to serve as her parole advisor.

The worker is with several addicts at an ice-house, which is located on a busy thoroughfare. One of the addicts, Ruben R., is on the verge of seeking treatment at the Public Health Service Hospital. As the worker talks to Ruben about this, a couple walks up and asks for information. They see the worker and then leave. The girl appears to be in her late teens. She looks frightened and uncomfortable. Ruben explains: “That’s a bad deal. She is one of my sister’s friends. That man gave her her first fix last night. It won’t be long before she’s hooked and is out hustling for the bastard. She’s young, man.” The worker and Ruben exchange looks. The worker feels angry and helpless. After awhile Ruben shrugs and then begins telling the worker why he wants to postpone hospitalization for a few days.

Crisis situations emerged from relationships both within the neighborhood and with the surrounding community. Prime sources of conflict in the neighborhood were family tensions, peer group relations, and misunderstandings between age groups. The most frequent sources of difficulty in the larger community were unemployment, police interventions, and medical emergencies, and school frictions:

Monday, I passed L.'s house and she hollered at me. I asked why she hadn't gone to school. She said she had a cold and a stomach ache. I found out later on she had been suspended. The teacher had told her to move to another chair; she had said "who." The teacher said "your grandmother." L. let loose and started cursing the teacher. She was sent to the Dean. She also had it out with the Dean.

In discussion L. says that it is very difficult to control her temper and that the teachers have labeled her as a trouble maker and she is blamed for everything even though it is not her fault. L. got back into school, but was suspended again for speaking Spanish.

Later the worker conferred with the assistant superintendent of schools, and they effected a transfer to another school at L.'s request. Still later L. fought in the street, left school again, and the worker subsequently worked with her in terms of her perception of what was happening to her.

Frequently the workers moved into crisis situations involving employment and relations with employers. In the following example the client was a former addict who had spent 2 years in prison and had now been fired from his job through an irresponsible act:

I opened the telephone conversation by identifying myself and my relationship to the client. After the preliminaries I asked Mr. T. if M. G. was a good worker. Mr. T. replied, "Yes, he is, he's been quite good, on time, works hard." Then I asked if M. G. liked to work. Mr. T. replied, "Yes." I said, "That's what he tells me; he likes the work there and is very disappointed about leaving."

At this point I tried to focus on the facts of M. G.'s case and why he had taken off to Laredo with his friends, leaving the company in the lurch. Mr. T. responded with a comment about this type of person. "Yes, I've been dealing with them for 40 years. I was in the Military Police." We go on trading arguments about people like M. G. However, in turn I get Mr. T. to talk further about his role as a "psychologist" at the plant, that is, about some of the personnel problems of the employees. He tells many stories about trouble he has had and how he has helped his workers; and about a few failures who really had troubles and whom he has had to fire. . . .

My work centers on individualizing M. G. (Mr. T. constantly refers to him as "those guys") and separating M. from his two friends that worked with him. I also try to show Mr. T. how disappointed I am in myself because I am failing M. G.

Mr. T. slows down some by talking in terms of M., at the same time he bawls me out (in a fatherly kind of way) for protecting M. by assuming responsibility for him. Towards the end we began talking about Mr. T.'s success cases, those who are borderline cases, those that respond and behave differently. Those that give Mr. T. trouble are those who provide much satisfaction to him because "they begin to act like men."

Although crises in the neighborhood occurred frequently and called for continuous intervention, there were also brief, periodic lulls, of what we came to call *pre-crisis situations*. During these periods our workers had the opportunity of cultivating their relationships both within the neighborhood and with representatives of the community-at-large. The work with institutional representatives during the pre-crisis periods was valuable primarily because the worker was not then advocating any specific action for the poor. Within this neutral framework he could develop his service reputation among the school teachers, policemen, work supervisors, medical personnel, welfare workers, judges, and public officials in his area. Workers visited school officials to discuss school and neighborhood problems, contacted potential employers, and kept up a consistent effort to keep their institutional representatives re-

ceptive to the needs of the low-income group. Where such relationships were weak, institutional negotiations were constantly at the crisis level, bearing on whether Juan should be permitted to re-enter school, getting Maria's grades up to par, or getting José's job back. In the following, the worker forms an ongoing relationship with an important neighborhood person:

Mrs. Gonzales is a young school nurse who has operated in the neighborhood for several years. Frustrated by the inconsistency of the residents and the limited time and resources provided by her agency, she tended to reject those who did not immediately respond to treatment plans and follow-up care. Following a casual meeting in the waiting room of the local charity hospital, the worker and school nurse were able to discuss mutual problems with particular families in the neighborhood. Worker used this opportunity to introduce the nurse to his contacts among hospital personnel. Knowing the day of the week that the school nurse is at the hospital, the worker drops by and drinks coffee with her. Most of the conversation is about appropriate goals for particular individuals and how medical problems are related to other social problems. Through such experiences the nurse has learned the value of limited goals and has felt freer to engage herself with the troublesome families of the neighborhood.

NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION

A further focus for staff work was to help establish vehicles through which the poor could take collective action on their problems. Such organizations might not initially, or perhaps even eventually, culminate in militant social action; but they would provide a medium for developing the skills with which the poor could negotiate with the various sectors of the larger community. These groups provided experience in collective action as they brought together the various subgroupings within the neighborhood.

This aspect of our work was designed to attack one of the major handicaps of the poor, namely, their lack of participa-

tion in formal organizations and community activity. Without such participation their interests are either completely ignored, or else they are represented by groups that serve them inadequately. And, since the poor generally do not understand bureaucratic behavior, they are tempted to perceive the institutions of the larger community as conspiring against their interests. These attitudes of distrust and suspicion, however well-founded, have served to isolate our families and discourage them from taking advantage of the social benefits of education, medical care, and consumer information. The feelings also spill over into self-hate, producing recriminations toward each other and toward the most disadvantaged people in their own neighborhoods.

The workers' moves toward neighborhood organization began with their first efforts to involve themselves in neighborhood life and learn its patterns—who was related to whom, which families had the most positive or negative influences, which group perspectives generated which individual acts, and which people were most approved or disapproved of by the various neighborhood groups. In the process the worker established himself (again, like the early wardheeler) as a person to be trusted; he usually became a part of several peer groups, extended families, and "religious" families (compadre systems). From his growing familiarity with these systems and other social, civic, and church associations, he would fashion his first steps in building a local, neighborhood organization. The major strategy was to combine the various family types—the "mobiles," the "poor-but-honest," and the "troublemakers," or hard-core poor. To insure further cross-representativeness within the neighborhood, Wesley workers tried to involve those family members who had communication links to other families and individuals by ties of blood and friendship.

The effort to strengthen and make explicit the solidarity and identity that could bind the neighborhood together was not easy: the mobiles tended to dominate the organization, use it

for their own purposes, and discourage the "troublemakers" from joining; the stable working-class members came to meetings out of a sense of personal loyalty to a neighbor or to the worker; and the worker himself, in his anxiety to succeed, often rejected the hard-core group. What was saddest and most ironic, however, was the sight of hard-core family members discouraging other hard-core members from becoming part of the neighborhood organization:

One neighborhood meeting ends on the note of engaging the older ex-gang boys as group leaders for the neighborhood's third and fourth graders. Two of the possible candidates are mentioned by name. The older sister of Tony J. is at the meeting. As the meeting is adjourned the group drinks coffee together. Then the mother of nine illegitimate children, including three seductive daughters, mutters in a loud voice about how she wouldn't trust Tony J. to walk her dog, because he and his friends raped her oldest daughter 2 years ago. This was peppered with a string of curse words. Tony J.'s sister replies, charging both the girl and her mother with being a bunch of 50-cent prostitutes. Worker separates the two almost immediately, but he is unable to calm either one. As a result both women don't attend further meetings and insist that they will not rejoin the organization until the worker guarantees the other one will not be there.

Nevertheless, the task of making the neighborhood organization representative of the area rather than an expanded peer group of selected individuals had to be faced. The worker's principle concern was to mediate the legitimate interests and social problems of those most unable to represent themselves. Often, the worker had to become closely involved in an extremely difficult family situation, while at the same time considering the larger strategy of helping the family become a part of neighborhood organizational life. Many frustrations had to be overcome before the family was ready to join with others to work on neighborhood issues:

I received a phone call from Rose, the eighteen-year-old wife of a twenty-year-old ex-convict. Rose is an older daughter from a multi-

problem, third-generation welfare family. I have been trying to encourage members of this family to go to the neighborhood organization for weeks.

Rose, with deep anger and force, tells me of the many abuses her husband, Tomás, has put her through lately. The discussion turns to the precipitating crisis, since I know these fights and "picking" behavior are common between Rose and Tomás.

Rose reveals that she called because Tomás's constant yelling and complaints are driving her nuts. It all started 2 days ago when she lent her family 5 dollars from Tomás's small pay check. This leads Rose to talk about leaving Tomás and living with an aunt. This idea is quickly dismissed when I asked her if this is the same aunt who is on dope and who wants Rose to be a prostitute. Rose concludes this by saying: "I don't want to end up with any animal getting on top of me." Then she adds: "Besides, I'll just get over to her house and think." I responded: "You'll just think of Tomás?" She replied "Yes." At that point Rose began to cry softly. "You want to do right, but then you do things that get you into trouble." I asked, "Tomás doesn't understand what really is going on, does he?" She said, "No." "And the big thing he is missing?" I probed further with: "What is it he really doesn't understand?" She answered: "About those kids. My little brothers and sisters. They're the ones I'm trying to help. Not my mother, not my sister. They shouldn't have to suffer because there's not 5 dollars to give them. But no, Tomás just bitches and bitches because there's no money left for him to go to work, so he has to walk and he wouldn't have a lunch." I responded: "So you're on the spot right now because you want to help your people and Tomás acts like you shouldn't do that, but yet it's something you feel you have to do."

The conversation turns to sharing Rose's "side of the story" with Tomás when he gets home from work. Rose's anger has drained itself out by this time and she says the main thing right now is that Tomás should cut out his bitching.

Several hours later Tomás, Rose, and the worker meet. Tomás ventilates his anger and frustration with Rose because she is always goofing off and giving more attention to her family than to him. After 15 minutes of explanation Rose admits Tomás is right about the stack of dirty clothes on the crib and halfway expresses her willingness to wash them.

I quickly supported this, and she promises to do them the next day. At that point both of them admit how boring it is to live in two small rooms and always be scraping along on pennies and nickels. I mention the benefits of getting out as a family and having fun together. I go on and talk about the dance that the neighborhood organization is giving Saturday night. I invite them to be chaperons at the dance.

Tomás and Rose came to the dance and I engaged them in conversation with another young couple who point out the benefits and fun of belonging to the neighborhood group.

As issues arose at the meetings, the neighborhood organization gave the poor a medium in which to express their sense of futility and powerlessness and to try on the contrasting feeling of mastery and control:

After considerable discussion of a frustrating episode about addicts who are stealing the neighborhood blind, the ex-treasurer of the neighborhood organization remarks: "I thought this was why we have meetings like this—to do something about things we are afraid to do alone." There are agreeing comments and glances. I picked up, saying: "There are several things you can do, depending on what you want to do." I outlined some possible courses of group action, told them about the special department of the police that handled drug addicts. . . .

The organization also served to distribute information about the neighborhood and about bureaucratic behavior that they found alarming. In a recent experience, city inspectors checked neighborhood houses—in response to the neighborhood organization's request—to determine whether safety codes were being followed. The red tag left by the inspector indicated that he would be along to check a particular feature, as for example the electrical system. This was interpreted by some residents to mean that the house would be condemned and they would be forced to move. Members of the organization picked up this rumor and, with the worker's help, interpreted to the neighbors the actual significance of the red tag.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

All of the activities described above called for continuous community involvement and ongoing work with institutional representatives—school teachers, principals, police officers, welfare workers, and others. Institutional change actually began in the pre-crisis and crisis situations. The function of mediation thus further implied that such changes would multiply if the low-echelon practitioners most directly involved with the families were given more discretionary power as they moved about the community.

We found that the settlement could not operate from an isolated position within its own neighborhood, for the neighborhood itself was linked to the general community in many ways. By the very nature of its organizational patterns the settlement was tied to the community through its board of directors, advisory committees, volunteer groupings, and other vehicles through which a wide range of citizenry identified with the services of the neighborhood agency. In our work, for example, an advisory committee composed of representatives from various community sectors helped us obtain jobs that would otherwise have been unavailable, and they provided support when the neighborhood people addressed the problem of the slum landlords.

There also were a number of existing community groups—civic clubs, church groups, professional organizations, and social clubs—in which staff members involved themselves as participants. One such group was interested in the public image of Mexican-Americans, as projected in the communications media. Many Mexican-American leaders were involved in this work, and they have been instrumental in helping our workers develop a wide array of community contacts. San Antonio is fairly pluralistic, and such group activity created linkages with a range of organizations and subgroups. Such

ties became highly relevant for issues that were of crucial concern to neighborhood groups.

As these issues were raised—by neighborhood organizations, individuals, or groups outside the neighborhood but concerned about it—our mediating stance was not one of attacking for the sake of attacking but of raising the issues to a level where dialogue and negotiation could proceed. Some of these issues were highly controversial; others were not. The problems ranged over a wide spectrum: organizing a delinquency-prevention program, sponsoring a new service, taking action on neighborhood improvements such as street lights, housing, and street repair, and organizing a cleanup campaign or a block party. The experience with local issues often stimulated interest in wider ones, such as voter registration, slum clearance, minimum-wage laws, and other social legislation.

As workers involved themselves in the community, they came face to face with the polarizations of power among the various community groups. This frequently took the form of struggles for control rather than attempts to solve problems. Furthermore, as the settlement organized the poor it found that their new power was interpreted in the context of traditional power alignments; the question was repeatedly raised as to which side we were on. We found that this polarization process created states of risk for the agency; we came to classify these risks as "high," "low," or "medium." The high-risk issues were those that threatened the very support and resources of the agency itself, as when we came to grips with problems in the school system and the possibility was raised that our funds might be cut. In this situation it was necessary to lean heavily on the agency's moral and ideological commitments: when board members raised the issue of staff being used by certain political elements, the director reminded them of Jesus's involvement with all kinds of people, even publicans and prostitutes. Ultimately the line was held, and the agency was able to effect marked changes in some school regulations

and in the working relationship between the agency and the school.

A low-risk issue was one in which the agency's status could not easily be affected, as when the staff raised questions about the functioning of a local poverty program that had become as rigid and bureaucratic as any traditional welfare or educational setting. In this case no one connected with the program had the power to affect Wesley, and negotiations were considerably less precarious as the work proceeded on the crucial issues.

An example of a medium-risk issue emerged from the concern of a neighborhood organization about enforcement of the housing code and the future of an urban renewal area. In this situation the agency courted little danger from the landlords, who were connected with the political segment that could not hurt the agency; but there were elements of risk in our negotiations with the city administration. In the process our role was fortified by joint meetings between neighborhood people, city councilmen, and housing inspectors, as well as by the clear evidence that the neighborhood was willing and able to do something about its problems.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AGENCY STRUCTURE

The mediating function described here requires a generalist and flexible organization that is structured to seek out the bottom layer of the lower class, establish relationships with these families, and work with their most difficult problems. The workers' dual focus on both community and client puts them into different power relationships with their employing agency; simple and direct lines of authority are not very appropriate; non-bureaucratic forms of administration have to be created. The outreaching nature of the workers' activities involves them with both those who have a direct voice in agency policy and the clients for whom the workers literally create eligibility as they go along. The open-endedness of the

service calls for a continuous process of decision-making in the field on questions of eligibility and direction. Furthermore, the ongoing evaluation of worker expertise and efficiency is based on a quick succession of events in the field. It is hard for administration and supervision to keep itself informed and make necessary judgments unless there is a very open and direct system of communications within the agency. Such requirements preclude the traditional, hierarchical lines of accountability.

Several types of administrative strategy were developed at Wesley to meet these requirements. Most important among these was the flexibility of authority roles among staff members with specific functional tasks. Even the agency's Director was responsible in some of his program roles to an area coordinator or the administrator of a service—as, for example, the Neighborhood Youth Corps. Another important strategy was to maintain a process of open and direct staff confrontation on all important administrative rules and decisions.

There also was a deliberate attempt to recruit a staff with a variety of work-styles and professional allegiances. Our assortment of personnel could be characterized as including representatives of a variety of orientations: clinical, political, religious, welfare-supportive, indigenous lower class, matronly, educational, student-radical, and student-square. A further ecumenism, as well as some spirited engagements on certain moral issues, was created by our effort to build in a humanist environment made up of staff members with Catholic, Jewish, and a variety of Protestant orientations. Finally, it was important to involve clerical and maintenance staff as closely as possible in decisions dealing with agency program and policy. Elliot Studt has discussed a similar arrangement in her concept of the "staff-work group" (10).

With such a wide assortment of backgrounds, interests, approaches, and assignments the Director found it necessary to

use a number of *ad hoc* group approaches to facilitate communication and the flow of decision-making. When there was a serious split between the VISTA group and the regular staff, a series of meetings between the volunteers and the administration restored the balance; a similar mode of confrontation has been used from time to time since then. Temporary groupings have been created with other staff clusters as these have become necessary.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the impact of the hard-core poor on the social resources of a low-income neighborhood has forced us at the Wesley Community Centers to address ourselves to the needs of the most deprived families as well as to the formation of vigorous neighborhood organizations composed of a wide range of family types. Since these needs have been neglected for decades, we think of what we are doing at Wesley as a revolutionary process—a conception shared to some extent by the more able neighborhood residents and those in the larger community whose ignorance and neglect of these problems we are constantly pointing out.

We suggest that these priorities are basic to the function of any settlement house working in a slum neighborhood. We maintain that the traditional settlement groups should take a lower priority or should be conceptualized as stepping stones to the building of neighborhood organizations. The so-called "character-building" activities can be important as a technique in what we have come to call "career deflection," where people from the different family types can combine to create an influence toward responsible and legitimate activity. One of our strongest neighborhood organizations grew out of our Golden Gloves boxing team; it is staffed almost entirely by volunteers and includes ex-gang boys and squares, pre-adolescents and young married adults, school dropouts and steady

job holders. This organization crosses many boundaries and is now in the process of raising funds not only for its own activities but for those of the agency as well.

We have projected here a methodology that we have termed *mediation*; and we would suggest that this applies as well to the overall role of the social worker. Siporin (9) has called this the "community role," as distinct from various "situational roles"; our concept is similar also to Schwartz's (8) description of the function of the social worker. In our conception, the social worker stands between his individual client or group and other individuals and groups in an effort to create or restore "reciprocity" among the various actors, with reciprocity defined as mutual action, exchange, or support.

Further study is needed of the various roles required of the worker as he carries out the agency's mediating function. For example, the movement toward reciprocity cannot assume a relationship of equality between the client and his systems; one of the first mediating tasks may then be to find a role designed to equalize the relationships involved. For this reason we have described certain "situational roles" that have tended to be partisan to the poor and we have entertained similar considerations with regard to "advocacy" and "actionist" roles (5) on certain community issues. We have also explored the "double agent" role, in the sense that this puts the worker into close communication with both sides of an important community issue and brings him knowledge and insight into the perspectives and operational strategies of both sides. Still another role seems to be that of "catalyst," in which certain experiences are created that will serve to initiate a process of problem-solving by the residents. And the worker may act as "organizer" when it is necessary to maintain the pace of collective functioning at the neighborhood level.

All of these roles may be necessary to set the framework of mediation between equals, and they call attention to the importance of social change and modification of certain institu-

tional behaviors. At the same time, however, other roles—"group leader," "compadre," "family counselor," and more—imply influence and control with regard to client behavior. Here the worker serves as a professional technician trying to enable the poor to determine and work out alternative courses of action. Thus, the mediator stands at the point of *conflict* (a lack of reciprocal relations) and can be an agent both of client control and of social change; in fact, to be effective he usually *must* be both.*

This range of roles is now being studied, and we are looking forward to providing a more detailed description of the worker behaviors required to carry out the mediating function. Using such chronological accounts of practice and devices as the "Problem-Solving Interaction Sequences,"** we are trying to develop some typologies that will be useful to the field. We hope in this way to develop a deeper understanding of, and a broader agency interest in, the strategies that will strengthen the work of the settlement with a population in great need of its help.

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* For a fuller description of the implications of this point, see: White, Farris, and Brymer (11).

** The P.S.I.S. is the nexus of several lines of behavior by several different persons, each operating according to a particular role set, in the context of his past relationships.