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ABSTRACT

The Center of Family Life (CFL) is a private nonprofit agency. Since its creation in 1978 CFL has offered a wide range of services to children and families in Sunset Park, a low-income multi-ethnic Brooklyn, New York neighborhood. All families with children under age 18 and pregnant women living in the neighborhood are eligible for services free of charge. Services are developed in response to the needs of the families who use the Center. Currently, services include: (1) counseling and group therapy; (2) an infant/toddler/parent program; (3) a neighborhood-based foster care program; (4) an emergency food bank and advocacy center; (5) emergency housing assistance; (6) a thrift shop; (7) child care for school age children and after-school recreation programs; (8) summer day camps; (9) an arts program; and (10) an employment program. The Center was founded and remains under the leadership of Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine, both of whom are clinical social workers. The staff consists of full- and part-time workers, as well as volunteers. The organizing principles of the Center are that individuals must be understood within a cultural and environmental context; the unit of analysis is always the family; and the Center itself exists within a community and must intersect with other local groups and organizations. Over the years, the Center has acquired a reputation as an exemplary family service program. (ABL)

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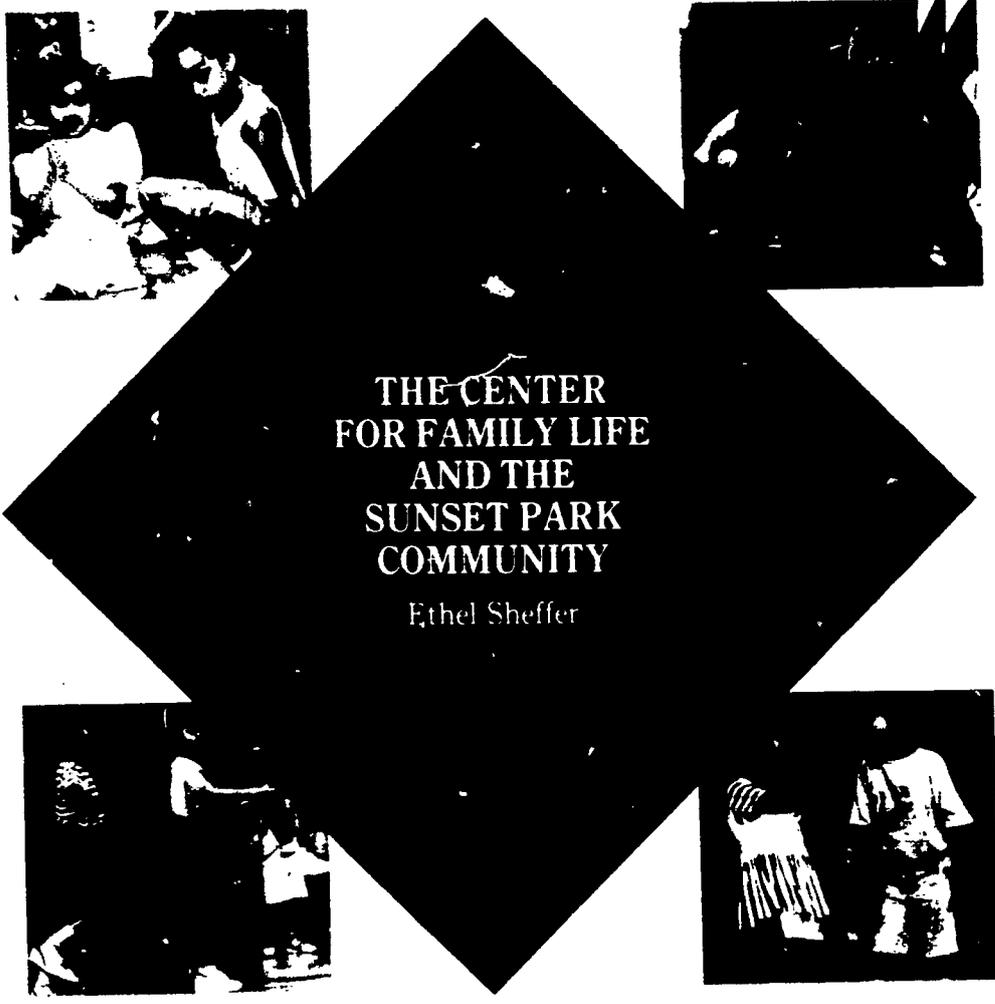
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1992

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**THE CENTER
FOR FAMILY LIFE
AND THE
SUNSET PARK
COMMUNITY**

Ethel Sheffer

**Surdna Foundation
Foundation for Child Development**

1992

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Susan Blank, senior program associate of the Foundation for Child Development, shepherded the manuscript through all its stages with great editorial diligence and precision, as well as with unfailing good humor.

Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine, the directors of the Center for Family Life, were as indefatigable in their assistance and cooperation with this study as they are in their continued commitment to serving the families of Sunset Park. Sister Mary Paul's incisive grasp of all the questions and issues surrounding such a study made her both an excellent critic and a crucial source over the entire course of this study.

Marcie Kesner, AICP, provided significant research in the demographics of Sunset Park and was a valued and perceptive colleague in analyzing its patterns and trends.

In addition to the persons quoted directly in the text of the report, there were dozens of Sunset Park residents, Center for Family Life staff members, community leaders, and agency officials whose help was essential to my research. The community of Sunset Park taught this researcher a great deal about the verve and energy with which a New York City neighborhood can wrestle with its problems.

Above all, it is my hope that this report, in offering a portrait of one highly successful and complex agency, conveys the importance of the community process in securing effective delivery of help to those in need.

Ethel Sheffer

Preface

In the spring of 1990, the Surdna Foundation revised its funding guidelines. After engaging in a strategic planning process, the foundation decided to focus its grantmaking in two primary areas — the environment and community revitalization.

Shortly after revising its guidelines, the foundation funded several projects in community revitalization that sought to answer the question of what makes an effective community-based organization. While the foundation focused much of its energy and funds toward assisting community-based groups active in housing and organizing, it also recognized that there were useful lessons from the fields of social work and economic development. Indeed, the underlying premise of Surdna's philanthropy is that community revitalization can occur only when organizations work comprehensively and holistically to restore neighborhood vitality.

When we looked in New York City for human service institutions providing services in the local community, we could not escape the Center for Family Life (CFL) in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Long known as an innovative and determined service provider grounded in a clinical services approach, CFL's neighborhood foster care and youth programs had already achieved significant attention. No less, the visible presence of Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine throughout the city, relentlessly making their case and their point, was well-known to all informed observers.

What was it that seemed to make this organization an effective deliverer of services at the local level? What effective service and administrative systems — as well as leadership styles — characterized CFL? Given the constantly changing nature of the city's neighborhoods, was any aspect or attribute of CFL potentially or actually replicable?

In the fall of 1990, under a grant from the Surdna Foundation, Ethel Sheffer of Insight Associates began the task of researching and drawing up a profile of the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park. What follows are the results of nearly a year of direct observation, research, analysis, and writing. I believe that this is not only an authoritative profile of one community-serving nonprofit organization, but also a highly suggestive and useful story detailing the operational and philosophical strengths of that agency.

While we should be skeptical about assuming that what works at CFL can

automatically work in many other places. we should also be receptive to the notion that illuminating stories and data can have potentially wide applicability among other social service and community organizations. Accordingly, with the collaboration of the Foundation for Child Development and its president, Barbara Blum, we are publishing and making available this important study to interested parties in the city and elsewhere. We hope it will stimulate discussion and encourage institutions to review and adapt programs and administration when what they find here is relevant to their own organizations.

Edward Skloot
Executive Director
Surdna Foundation, Inc.
April 1992

The Center for Family Life: An Overview

The Center for Family Life (CFL) is a private nonprofit agency operated under the aegis of St. Christopher-Ottilie, a child care agency serving children and families in metropolitan New York and Nassau and Suffolk counties. Since its creation in 1978, the Center has offered a wide range of services to children and families in Sunset Park, a low-income multi-ethnic Brooklyn neighborhood.

All families with children under age 18 and pregnant women living in the neighborhood¹ are eligible for services free of charge. The Center is open to families seven days a week from 8:00 A.M. to 11:00 P.M. Services are developed in response to the needs of the families who use the Center.

Currently, services include:

- counseling and group therapy
- an infant/toddler/parent program, consisting of support groups of parents and a play program for children
- a neighborhood-based foster care program
- an emergency food bank and advocacy center
- emergency housing assistance
- a thrift shop
- child care for school-age children and after-school recreation programs
- summer day camps
- an arts program
- an employment program

The Center's budget to support its services for its 1992-93 fiscal year totaled over \$1.8 million.

The Center was founded by and remains under the leadership of Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine, members of the order of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. Both are clinical social workers, and both live on the premises of the Center. The staff consists of 43 full-time and 49 part-time workers, including 24 social workers distributed among counseling services and employment and school programs.

The Center also draws on the services of numerous volunteers from the community and elsewhere in New York City. Furthermore, since 1980 an important part of the Center's practice has been the extensive use of graduate

students from the Columbia University School of Social Work, Hunter College School of Social Work, and other schools.

The Center defines its mission as follows:

The Center for Family Life's purpose is to provide an integrated and full range of personal and social services for families and children. The Center works to counter the forces of marginalization and disequilibrium which impact on families, to sustain families and children in their own homes, to provide alternatives to foster care or institutionalization, and to stem influences which contribute to delinquency of children and alienation of youth from their parents. In order to fulfill these goals, the Center's activities and foci necessarily become multidimensional. . . . Rather than organizing its methods on any categories such as runaways, the learning disabled child, the neglected or abused, the depressed, the substance abusers, and so on, the Center pursues a *generic* social work practice.²

The organizing principles of the Center are that (1) individuals must be understood within a cultural and environmental context; (2) the unit of analysis is always the family, no matter which member of that family first comes to the Center's attention; and (3) the Center itself exists within a community and must intersect with other local groups and organizations. As stated in the Center's annual progress report, "Our concerns . . . embrace a full continuum of struggles faced by young urban poor families, not necessarily dealing with serious pathology but [caused] by the demands and risks of scarce resources and opportunity. . . ."³ The Center characterizes itself as "a kind of child guidance clinic, or family agency. . . . At the same time, other features of the Center are more reminiscent of the role and functions of settlement houses."⁴

The settlement house movement, established first on the Lower East Side of New York City in the late nineteenth century, aimed its efforts at helping immigrants make the transition to their new city and country, as well as at

improving the lives of poor people in city neighborhoods. Over the years, settlement houses have provided a great number of services ranging from education to health and child care, recreation, housing, and citizenship training. Settlement houses have always operated within the social work tradition, with neighborliness, flexibility, and easy access their hallmark. Typically, they have been open for long hours, and often directors and staff have lived in the community. Although the Center for Family Life does not provide all the programs of a typical settlement house, such as language instruction or citizenship training, it is nevertheless solidly in that tradition.

Over the year., the Center has acquired a citywide and national reputation as an exemplary family service program. A recent study of strong programs for families in New York City⁵ included a discussion of the Center. The principal author of that study has also co-authored a scholarly article on the Center's innovative foster care program.⁶ In 1985, the Center was featured as the subject of a Christmas cover story by *Time* magazine. Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine have received numerous awards. For example, they were honored in 1991 by the Robin Hood Foundation for their distinguished leadership. In 1991, the Center was also featured on a national public broadcasting television program, "Our Children at Risk."



I. Introduction

This is a portrait of a social service agency's work in one Brooklyn community. The Center for Family Life (CFL) has won recognition as a neighborhood-based preventive services provider to families in Brooklyn's Sunset Park. It has been praised as an example of a community agency that offers multiple services in a comprehensive and integrated fashion. Its geographically based pilot foster care program has already been documented, and its family services and counseling studied.

The Center for Family Life is an agency worthy of continuing examination in order to demonstrate and analyze its unusual community ties, the wide range and extent of its counseling and family services, and its particular combination of professional social work practice and direct, practical, everyday help to those in need. What has not been fully presented in earlier studies are the specific ways in which this organization has created and now conducts its programs in interaction with the particular history and changing needs and institutions of the Sunset Park community.

There is great current interest in the proposition that the best service delivery programs are those that serve a local population comprehensively, within the boundaries of a single geographic area. Community leaders and government and service providers alike agree that a social service system should reflect the needs, demographics, and geography of neighborhoods. But how to develop such a system? Which programs offer good examples? What characterizes a "truly" neighborhood-based organization? And what defines "community"? These are some of the questions that arise as efforts intensify to facilitate the implementation of neighborhood-based services.

The recently published *Social Services for Children, Youth and Families: The New York City Study* offers a summary description of community-based services that could be adopted in New York, though it acknowledges that "New York City's long history of efforts at reform suggests the difficulty of the decentralization task."⁷ The report's definition of what ingredients must constitute neighborhood-based services includes the following: a physical decentralization of the citywide system based on a sensitivity to the characteristics of the local clientele; assurance of local citizens' involvement in the governance of the service programs; ideally, a social service delivery

system connected to the community's economic development; and an ability to evolve and change as the community changes.⁸ As a single program, the Center naturally cannot by itself create such a system within a neighborhood. But given its efforts to provide comprehensive services to families, an examination of the Center's work may reveal challenges and opportunities that could inform the development of a broader community-based reform initiative.

We will look at this agency and its particular orientation in order to discover what is special about it. This report is by no means an attempt to evaluate the programs of the Center for Family Life in quantitative terms. We are, though, trying to describe the way in which this respected agency works within its special community and to describe the particular features of that community's history and recent changes that form the soil in which the Center's work has taken root and blossomed. We are particularly interested in those aspects of the Center's history and relationship to its surrounding neighborhood that may contain useful lessons for attempts elsewhere to parallel CFL's success — even though, as Lisbeth Schorr writes, "Communities and institutions differ sufficiently to require adaptation of the most proven techniques to fit new situations."⁹

The study was primarily conducted from July 1990 to February 1991, although certain follow-up interviews and research continued into early 1992. It is based on observation and interviews with more than 50 people, ranging from the directors of the Center for Family Life and their staff to community residents and leaders, school principals and teachers, police officers, social service providers, and government officials. These were "open-ended" interviews, and took place in offices, homes, schools, and local restaurants and coffee shops.

The author attended meetings of the Human Services Cabinet of Brooklyn Community District 7, as well as many other community meetings on such diverse subjects as local elections, waterfront renewal, health service delivery, and school management. Time was spent observing the actual operation of the Center's programs, including attendance at some of the drama programs in the schools.

The author also examined annual reports, grant reports, field work audits, correspondence, and certain internal staff memos of CFL. Some case records (with clients' names deleted) were supplied as well.

Extensive data were collected on the Sunset Park community: its population, economic and social characteristics, schools, and employment and housing patterns. Considerations of space do not permit inclusion of all this information, but it provided the background for the specific issues and trends treated in the report.

This report offers an account, based on the various information sources just described, of the variety of Center for Family Life programs; a description of how these programs are received and regarded in Sunset Park; a depiction of the nature of CFL's leadership in the persons of Sister Mary Paul Janchill and Sister Geraldine Tobia, and their techniques, procedures, and philosophy; an overview of the populations being served; a picture of some of the tensions surrounding government support for the agency; and suggestions about implications for public policy that can be drawn from the experience of the Center.



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II. Arriving in Sunset Park

Before Sunset Park

The two directors of the Center for Family Life, Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine, members of the order of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, came together to the Sunset Park neighborhood in 1978. They moved from Park Slope, the adjacent community to the west along Fourth Avenue where they had served at the Family Reception Center since 1972. They had worked hand in hand even earlier at the Euphrasian Residence in Manhattan and in other programs connected with the work of their order.

Sister Mary Paul's clinical orientation and philosophy had begun when she earned a Master of Social Work degree in 1955 (and a Doctorate in Social Work in 1975). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, she was clinical director for the Euphrasian, St. Helena's, and Marian Hall residences, all of which still exist in Manhattan. These facilities usually received young girls who were placed as runaways or emotionally troubled by the court system, but who may have achieved this status primarily as a result of conflict with their families.

In the face of what she viewed as an unsatisfactory system of decision-making in the shelter referral system of Euphrasian residences, she managed to formulate a program of rapid evaluation and intense intervention that proved successful in returning most of these young girls to their homes rather than placing them in foster care or in institutions far from their own neighborhoods. In this effort, she gained the support and respect of a city agency, Special Services for Children, and of judges within the Family Court system. Using foundation and government grants, she also created a small-scale day treatment center for children and adolescents. Crucial to her later work was her growing certainty that working with "troubled" children by themselves was much less effective than working with entire families.

"The word 'normalization' took hold of me," she recalls, as she sought to develop a means of providing these children with treatment and help that would allow them to attend their own schools and continue their lives. In order to work with the families of these children, she came to see that they would need a center that would be open seven days a week.

Park Slope in Brooklyn appeared to be an area whose children were underserved and often sent on to foster care elsewhere in the city. A building

was located at Ninth Street and Fourth Avenue in Park Slope and purchased in 1972 through a combination of foundation support and city and state assistance. The Family Reception Center was established, and two years later, in 1974, the next-door building was acquired and named the Barbara Blum Residence, for the head of Special Services for Children, who had been helpful in its creation.

Nine different programs were created by Sister Mary Paul in the years before coming to Sunset Park. Her colleague, Sister Geraldine, was herself a leading figure in the establishment of a mini-school, a network of groups set up to encourage youth participation in Park Slope, as well as the Safe Homes project for battered women.

Looking back on her Park Slope years, Sister Mary Paul reflects that many aspects of her work there would subsequently have an important influence on her efforts in Sunset Park. For example, Children and Youth Development Services, a program the Sisters created under a federal demonstration grant, was designed to encourage youth participation in the political power structure of the community. The idea behind it was "empowerment of young people" rather than primarily social work or counseling. But Sister Mary Paul came to believe that the rhetoric of empowerment — such as the idea that the youthful participants should serve on the boards of participating organizations — without the fuller youth development activities and social work basis that she considers primary was lip service and not true help. "It was a flop; those kids weren't interested."

An important theme during Sister Mary Paul's Park Slope years and later in Sunset Park is the link with the critical neighborhood institution, the public school. She concluded that the school should serve as a focal point for the expansion of preventive services for families. But this fundamental linkage would not be free of inevitable conflicts and tensions about how to help children and about what exactly a community school is and should be.

To illustrate, the John Jay High School in Park Slope was at that time considered to be a "bad school," some of whose students were referred to the Family Reception Center's programs. In order to deal with the high truant population at John Jay and neighborhood elementary schools, the Family

Reception Center, with the encouragement of the Board of Education, which supplied the teachers, created the Park Slope Mini-School, which was both an alternative school and a supportive clinical service.

While Sister Mary Paul thought the mini-school worked, in that it provided an alternative to residential placement, she ultimately concluded that it was "a dead end" as a long-term strategy:

I felt that I could collect more and more children. The Board of Education was shoving children out; they became "push-outs." The children were like little nomads. I knew I had to help and I found space at the Knights of Columbus Hall. I thought that the Board of Education would gladly give us even more children, but we became critical, ambivalent. . . . I looked at the total scene. . . . I felt that I could create an empire for kids that the Board of Education wouldn't serve.

Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine look back on their years in Park Slope with affection as a time of great challenge and creativity. But Sister Mary Paul now believes that her present reluctance to accept funding that is restricted to services to a labeled clientele (for example, children labeled "learning disabled" or "truant") or confined to "a presenting issue" comes from her experience in Park Slope. She says that she would never again accept "categorical" funding, to integrate these children into the community. For this reason she did not apply recently for funds for a program geared to "drop-out prevention" or one for people who have been arrested. For her, these categorizations create new groups of people for purposes of funding, but do not promote services that will help them.

The Call to Sunset Park

By 1977-78, a virtual chorus of providers and government officials seemed to be simultaneously suggesting the Brooklyn neighborhood adjacent to Park Slope — Sunset Park — to Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine as a fertile testing ground for their evolving philosophy of integrating community services

and social work practice. This was demonstrably a community with great needs as well as considerable vitality. From Beverly Sanders, then the director of Special Services for Children, and from Bishop Joseph Sullivan, who noted that Catholic Charities had at that time no services to offer in Sunset Park, came the opinion that the Sisters would be welcome if they moved their enterprise down Fourth Avenue to Sunset Park.

Adding to this chorus, the local community board, the police department, and the District 15 school board, as well as the Community Relations Department of nearby Lutheran Medical Center, also welcomed the new Center for Family Life. Kathryn Wylde, then the director of community relations at the Lutheran Medical Center, noted that Sunset Park had mostly only small and fragmented community efforts in the area of social services. A new organization, with a multiservice approach, was badly needed for families who would not respond to the traditional services of mental health clinics, but who needed recreational programs for their children and help in addressing very serious gang problems.

Sister Geraldine did a great deal of the community outreach, the seeking of support for the Sisters' approach, and the needs assessment that preceded this move to Sunset Park and the establishment of the Center for Family Life. Her notes from that period describe her visits and impressions of community and church leaders and organizations. The Sisters' proposal to serve families was met with enthusiasm by most of the churches affiliated with the then-existing Clergy Association of the area. Some non-Catholic members needed and received assurance about the nonsectarian nature of the plan, and others questioned whether the establishment of a Catholic-supported agency might further threaten other churches whose membership was already dwindling. But the acute need for services to families was recognized as overriding.

Those attempting to deal with the violence and alienation of young gang members, such as Reverend Doug Heilman of the program called Discipleship, saw Sister Geraldine's effort as complementary to their own work, strengthening families and weakening gang affiliation. Reverend Heilman and Sister Geraldine were to become a very important team.

Sister Geraldine's needs assessment notes that although there were many

positive responses from the Hispanic community there might also be potential competitiveness and antagonism from the "poverty programs of the local Community Corporation and from some of the storefront Hispanic-based groups." Sister Geraldine viewed some of these groups as politically based and unprofessional. She believed that they lacked the grounding of social work training and may have been too exclusively based on ethnic identity.

Sister Mary Paul remembers that at the time she and Sister Geraldine were exploring the needs of Sunset Park, there was a political and professional groundswell of support for what was to culminate in the passage of the Child Welfare Act of 1979 in Albany. This growing awareness of the need to revise preventive services so as to reduce the large numbers of children being placed in foster care was part of the atmosphere that led to foundation and other support for the establishment of the Center for Family Life. Thus, government, foundation, and church support began to come together to meet deeply felt community needs.

In the fall of 1978, Catholic Charities located a boarded-up building near St. Michael's Church on Forty-third Street, which could be rented and turned over to the Center for Family Life. In December 1978, the building was dedicated by Bishop Joseph Mugavero and the Center opened for service.

The referrals were there waiting for them. Sister Mary Paul remembers that one of the very first clients was a young girl whose brother had been killed in a gang war and whose family was devastated by the loss and had numerous other troubles. The work with that family led to help for a nephew and a niece, whose mother was involved with drugs. This series of interrelated social services for all members of a family typified the work of the new Center for Family Life.

Sunset Park in the Late 1970s

The Sunset Park community that Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine saw in 1977-78 was a neighborhood that had undergone significant changes in the preceding decades. It appeared to be following a pattern of disinvestment, social problems, and demographic changes characteristic of certain other New York City neighborhoods. In 1978, when the Center for Family Life moved into

its home on Forty-third Street, the scene was a difficult one. There were some abandoned buildings across the street. Nearby Fifth Avenue was considered a rough and even dangerous street. Drug use, youth gangs, and all the concomitants of urban poverty were very much in evidence.

Sunset Park is bounded on the north by the Prospect Expressway and Fifteenth Street, on the south by Sixty-Fifth Street, on the west by the waters of Upper New York Bay, and on the east by Eighth Avenue. It occupies the greater part of Brooklyn Community District 7, though that district also encompasses Windsor Terrace, a small neighborhood of higher socioeconomic status and different ethnicity than Sunset Park.

For many years, a working-class neighborhood whose mostly Polish, Italian, Irish, and Scandinavian population found employment on the busy waterfront and in manufacturing, Sunset Park had begun to change in the post-World War II years. The decline of New York City's role in shipping resulted in a great loss of jobs, as did its decline as an industrial and manufacturing center. Between 1945 and 1965 it is estimated that 30,000 jobs were lost in Sunset Park.¹⁰

Moreover, the construction of the Gowanus Expressway in the 1940s and its expansion in the 1960s had destroyed the commercial and shopping center of Sunset Park, along Third Avenue, leaving it a place where prostitution, bars, and street fights between rival gangs proliferated. Sunset Park's population steadily declined in the 1960s, and in the decade between 1970 and 1980 it fell 18 percent to 69,891.¹¹

During this time, however, the Hispanic (then mostly Puerto Rican) population of Sunset Park began to grow. By 1970, Hispanics became Sunset Park's predominant ethnic group, accounting for more than 40 percent of all its residents; and by 1980, this figure was up to 56 percent. By 1975, Hispanic enrollment in the public schools had grown to 75 percent and by 1980 to nearly 85 percent, while the white school population had fallen to 11 percent.¹² The churches reflected the new migration. Many Pentecostal storefront churches appeared, while other churches absorbed and reflected the Hispanic and Spanish-speaking culture.

The newer immigrants (most of whom came directly from Puerto Rico but

also from other neighborhoods of New York City undergoing urban renewal) were generally workers in low-skilled manufacturing or in goods-handling industries, which were now disappearing from the New York City economy. In 1978, 40 percent of the Puerto Rican population in Sunset Park was unemployed.¹³ By 1980, in Sunset Park, as in all of New York City, more than 43 percent of Puerto Rican families were headed by women compared with 21 percent for all families.¹⁴

In 1978, it was estimated that 23 percent of the Community District 7 population was on public assistance, and by 1980 this figure had reached 26 percent.¹⁵ This community district, which ranked 42nd in population in the city, ranked 15th in its proportion of the population receiving public assistance.¹⁶ In 1980, nearly 30 percent of Sunset Park's families fell below the poverty level. In general, Sunset Park was poorer than the rest of Community District 7, Brooklyn, or the city as a whole, though it was still well above the worst poverty areas in the city, such as Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville-East New York, Bushwick, and most of the South Bronx.¹⁷

On the other hand, the neighborhood demonstrated some vital signs. These included the 1977 relocation of Lutheran Medical Center to a previously abandoned warehouse building in the industrial zone of Sunset Park, a move that created a number of jobs and community investment activities. The Medical Center helped to establish the Sunset Park Family Health Center. It became an important force in the community as it also helped to give birth to a major development organization, the Sunset Park Redevelopment Committee, which worked to stem the tide of housing abandonment and neighborhood decay. The formation of another organization, Sunset Park Restoration Committee, an organization of brownstone owners, was an additional sign of neighborhood survival and renewal, as was the work of neighborhood Hispanic organizations, such as UPROSE (United Puerto Rican and Spanish Organizations of Sunset Park).

Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine, then, saw Sunset Park as a threatened community, and one with major needs, but also as a neighborhood with a history of working-class stability reflected in an infrastructure of some community organizations, churches, and neighborhood and block associations.

This distinguished it from other sorely pressed urban environments such as the South Bronx or Brownsville. There was need here, but there was also a fertile ground, they believed, for their family-oriented community approach. We now turn to a discussion of how that approach manifests itself in CFL's current program. The next chapter begins with a review of the various service domains covered by the program.

III. The Work of The Center for Family Life

THE CENTER'S SERVICES

Counseling Families

One of the Center's most important services is counseling, both individual and group. Over the years, within its family counseling component, the Center has created a variety of workshops, group activities, and therapeutic approaches for parents, infants and toddlers, and adolescents. There are groups for children of every age, as well as support groups for women. For the most part, each group, no matter what the age range of its members, is small — usually fewer than ten participants — and is led by a social worker or a graduate student(s). While the groups focus on the emotional needs of the participants, they also teach concrete social or life skills. Techniques are varied and include such activities as art therapy and lectures on parenting skills, which are recommended as appropriate to families or to individuals after an assessment by the staff. Additional single-session counseling programs and workshops on specific topics are available on an open-enrollment basis to any family members in Sunset Park whether or not they are participating in the Center's structured counseling services.

What does the Center mean by counseling? A skeptical newspaper reporter asked Sister Mary Paul: "Is psychotherapy essentially what your preventive services consist of?" and, if so, "It seems to me that the reason a lot of children go into foster care is simply poverty, and that psychotherapy isn't going to do much to help that." Sister Mary Paul replied, "I believe in therapy. I think it's a precious commodity for people who are so stressed out."¹⁸

The author of this report sought to grasp more clearly just what Sister Mary Paul means by psychotherapy for poor families whose life circumstances may make it difficult to assess the success or failure of the therapy. Sister Mary Paul responded:

... we do not see psychotherapy simply as a mental process separated from how people deal with income, housing, education, employment, or any other concerns about a relationship with family of origin, spouse, children or others. . . . I spoke to the importance of psychotherapy because I think it is unfortunate to think that all

that poor people need is material help, neglecting the latter when it is urgently needed is unfortunate also.¹⁹

The counseling takes place at the Center itself, or in the clients' homes if they are unable to come to the Center, and it may occur evenings and weekends as well as weekdays. A staff member is assigned to each family's case and determines the extent and nature of the services needed. This treatment always involves as many family members as possible. Sister Mary Paul herself does 95 percent of the original intake interviews, calling on another staff member only if Spanish must be spoken. Some referrals come from the Child Welfare Administration, but most appointments are made through the schools, by word of mouth, and on a drop-in or short-notice telephone call basis.

A review of some case records supplied by the Center (with clients' names deleted) illustrates that the counseling process for a family can continue over several months and even years. CFL engages in therapeutic discussion sessions with family members to identify feelings, concerns, and tension that cause difficulties in parenting, household management, and family relationships. The caseworker is also an advocate for the family in its search for housing, food, and clothing. She will intervene in landlord disputes and with local government offices. The caseworkers are usually personally familiar with the schools and their counseling staffs and are an important resource for children who encounter problems in school.

Much of the counseling or therapy work falls under the official rubric of mandated preventive services, intended to avoid placement of children in foster care. The standard or indicator of success is the avoidance of placement, but progress of individuals and families is described by staff in case records with phrases such as "increased self-esteem," "increased self-confidence," "a greater understanding of the children's emotional and developmental needs," and "benefiting from the counseling and group services to improve family interaction and peer interaction."

According to Client Satisfaction Forms, which are distributed by the Center and returned by mail, client families seek services for a variety of reasons, ranging from what might be viewed as problems inherent in many family

relationships to potential and actual sexual abuse, serious mental health problems, AIDS, and drug abuse. In response to the question about their reasons for coming to the Center, the following representative replies were given:

Because when my husband went to pick me up from work, two of my children went to the store to buy something and stole something too. The owner called the police. For this reason I went to the Center.

For help with how to raise my child in a house with a new stepfather.

To help me cope with my son's illness and other family problems as well.

I didn't know what to do. I was desperate. I was reported to CWA [the Child Welfare Administration] and was ordered by it to go to counseling.

I had problems disciplining my adolescent son.

Sister Mary Paul firmly believes that strengthening her clients' self-esteem, confidence, and coping skills will necessarily result in improvement in the community in which they live. This approach is based on the idea of beginning with the individual and the family, and expecting changes at that level to ultimately improve the community, rather than on changing the structures of the community in order to produce individual benefits. This latter task Sister Mary Paul sees as critically important but as more appropriate for coalitions of agencies, in which CFL might participate, than for the Center alone. In any event, Sister Mary Paul believes that the community may be and *has been* affected by the work of the Center for Family Life. In a widely quoted statement, the city's previous Human Resources Administration commissioner, William Grinker, characterized preventive services as "mushy." When asked about this statement and the effectiveness of counseling as a measure for diminishing the need for foster care, Sister Mary

Paul related the Center's work to the development of Sunset Park itself: "If you watch what happens in a community over time, you can perhaps get indicators of major changes. For example, we've been in Sunset Park 12 years, and if one were to look at the delinquency rates, infant-mortality rates, foster-care placement rates, you can trace changes."²⁰

These correlations are actually very difficult to document. However, many advocates believe that comprehensive services to families are in fact the only way that long-range problems can be addressed. For example, according to the Center's philosophy, a pregnant teenager does not simply have the problem of being pregnant but needs counseling in a much broader sense. Furthermore, the philosophy holds that professional counseling should go hand in hand with help in coping with her acute everyday problems. This comprehensive approach is at the heart of the Center's practice.

The Center's philosophy also asserts that "solving institutional and organizational problems within this community is often more feasible than accomplishing any one of them on a citywide basis. The adage 'small is beautiful' does often work."²¹ This approach is rooted in the belief that no "interventions" or citywide policy changes can be effective in the absence of a nurturing community-based process. Providing this process is what the Center sees as its important contribution.

The emphasis on needs of individual families makes it difficult to determine the effectiveness of the intervention, since often the gains can be measured only over the long term. It is almost equally difficult to specify the full range of qualifications for carrying out this kind of work, or to do so using many conventional job descriptions. Certainly, according to Sister Mary Paul, the workers need a knowledge base in the dynamics of human behavior and the therapy process that comes from professional education and ongoing supervision. But above and beyond those qualifications, providing flexible individual services to families requires, as Lisbeth Schorr describes it, a combination of skills that may range from developing personal warmth to helping a mother clean house: "This mix of highly professional skills and a willingness to provide very practical help requires a redefinition of what is considered 'professional,' which is not easy for the professionals themselves

nor for policy analysts, administrators, and policymakers."²² The Center's counseling staff fits the eclectic approach to professional work that Schorr finds both challenging and important.

Helping Families Find Housing

A constant problem facing any service provider trying to help families, and one that is particularly intense in Sunset Park, is the shortage of adequate and affordable housing. Sister Mary Paul knows personally of many mothers who are homeless, or living in extremely substandard housing, or whose welfare allowances do not cover the actual rent of even a modest apartment. The Center's staff has developed an informal network of leads on available apartments that they hear about through local residents or brokers. One staff member described a visit that he made to an apartment in which as many as 22 people — recent immigrants — lived in one four-room apartment.

Some years ago, Sister Mary Paul received an unrestricted award of \$20,000 from the Community Service Society, which she decided to use as a revolving housing fund for security deposits, furniture, and supplements for rent. She has lent money to families who she believes have made enough progress in overcoming their serious problems that she can have confidence in their ability to repay the debt from their new salaries or through other means. It is also clear that the reputation of the Center for Family Life and the persistence of Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine and the Center's staff facilitate negotiations with private real estate brokers and landlords. The Center will even, in many instances, guarantee payment by the family. Sister Mary Paul describes guaranteeing the payment of rent by a welfare mother for as long as a year in order to ensure the apartment.

An interesting example of the complexity of arranging housing is shown by the following situation, the resolution of which was witnessed by the writer: A woman whose three children had been in foster care for well over a year and whose multiple problems had put her in contact with the long-term counseling services of the Center was now considered ready to have her children returned to her. But one major reason for delay in getting her children back was the reluctance of landlords to rent to a woman on public assistance with three

children. Finally, the Center found an available apartment and provided \$1,200 to cover the security deposit and the difference between the rent and the woman's welfare allowance.

The Income Maintenance Center of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) in this case paid the broker's fees, but it disallowed reimbursement for the money paid out by the Center. Sister Mary Paul appealed the decision to the Office of Liaison and Adjustment at the central HRA office, but the office refused to make an exception to its policy of not reimbursing such expenditures. She appealed further to a deputy director of Income Maintenance. By coincidence, a telephone call to a staff member at the Bay Ridge Income Maintenance office, who was being interviewed for this report, conveyed the news that in fact the lower office had been overruled and that almost all of the requested sum was to be reimbursed to the Center. The incident illustrates the extremely individualized nature of the services rendered by the Center to its clients, as well as the tenacity of Sister Mary Paul and her knowledge of the key people within the welfare system who will respond to her letters and grant her exceptions to established rules and policies.

Although the Center is increasingly involved in providing personal help to families who seek housing, it does not itself intend to expand its activities to include the development of housing, as some other New York City social service providers have found it necessary to do. Sister Mary Paul believes that she can help individuals best through tailoring the housing help she can give to their particular situations and through assisting them to purchase housing in the private market.

In the mid 1980s the Center did join with the Sunset Park Redevelopment Committee to develop family housing in two city-owned buildings in the neighborhood. The Center was to provide the social services for the families, while the committee was to be responsible for renovation and management of the buildings. Federal and state funding was applied for, and political support was apparently secured. The city's priorities for the development of low-income housing in other Brooklyn neighborhoods, its plan to relocate families from elsewhere into Sunset Park housing, and the diminished support from

Catholic Charities for permanent housing on this site were all factors that prevented the development of the housing as intended. As a result, the Sisters have been hesitant to pursue other housing development efforts, even though the Center's work with clients makes them keenly aware of the pressing housing needs of Sunset Park.

Offering Emergency Help

A key service organized and operated since 1980 by the Center for Family Life is a thrift shop and emergency food program run out of a storefront on Fifth Avenue and contributed to by a coalition of churches and groups. In the course of the year ending June 1991, the Center's emergency food program served 3,877 adults and 3,816 children. An advocacy clinic, housed in the same storefront, provides services to people in crisis, including help with public assistance and Medicaid problems, landlord-tenant disputes, and citizenship questions.²³

Finding Day Care Providers

While the Center for Family Life does not provide day care, there are close relationships between the Center and the three major day care providers in the neighborhood, St. Andrew's Church Day Care Center, Bay Ridge Day Nursery, and the Sunset Park Children's School. One director of a neighborhood day care center said that as she observes children within her care she regularly refers families to the Center and that the Center refers children to her. She knows that the Center will quickly respond to her referrals and arrange for eligibility for assistance from the Child Welfare Administration. She underscores that the Center "always takes a family," and she notes that it follows up if a family does not show up at appointments, a practice not carried out as consistently by other institutions in the area that offer similar services. These reciprocal referrals and informal close cooperation between two such local agencies have come to be part of the CWA placement process network in Sunset Park.

Sunset Park's day care supply falls far short of the need for services.²⁴ There are waiting lists for all the programs. The obstacles to expansion have

been the difficulty in obtaining adequate space, the low rate of reimbursement from the city's Agency for Child Development, and the small number of providers. Recently, an agreement was attempted to convert unused space in the former courthouse building on Fourth Avenue and Forty-third Street, where the community board has its offices, into a day care facility to be run by Bay Ridge Day Nursery. As of this writing, the project's future is uncertain. But it appears that the Economic Development Corporation will be establishing a full day care center for its employees' children, many of whom are Sunset Park residents, in its new facility at the Brooklyn Army Terminal.

Sister Mary Paul has stated that the Center does not wish to create new programs for preschool day care, preferring to leave this to the current providers who need to be supported in their efforts to expand. But CFL does offer extensive school-age day care programs, which the directors consider one of the Center's central interventions. (See the discussion of school programs in this chapter for a description of these activities.)

Providing Employment Services

The Center's employment program came into being because there was a congruence between its goals of helping the poor of Sunset Park and its ability to seize an opportunity that arose from the private sector. In 1981, the Private Industry Council (PIC) was trying to train people for specific occupations with companies in the waterfront area. Having already heard of the Center for Family Life, a council representative asked it to provide support services for the specific clerical training programs that were to be undertaken. Frances Vargas, then a caseworker at CFL, had already identified the need for employment readiness and training among her clients, and she took over the employment effort, which she still heads, for the Center.

Resisting efforts to provide specific job-skills training (for example, for the food trades industry), the Center wanted instead to engage in a program that would relate more closely to its counseling efforts and would reflect the diversity of its clientele's needs. The PIC located an office for the program on Thirty-seventh Street in Bush Terminal, in the heart of the Industry City waterfront area. Funding for the program was originally available through the

State Department of Labor (via the federally funded CETA employment and training program) and later through the Department of Employment (DOE) and HRA to serve individuals on public assistance as well as others who were unemployed. The program now is funded solely by DOE, although HRA continues to distribute literature about it for CFL.

From July 1989 to June 1991, the employment program served 571 people. They were from Sunset Park and elsewhere as well, because of DOE requirements. (In this respect, the employment program is unlike any other Center activity.) The participants in the employment program are primarily female (61 percent) and Hispanic (76 percent). Almost three quarters (72 percent) read at less than an eighth-grade level, and 48 percent are high school dropouts.²⁵ While the program primarily serves parents, it also accepts clients without children, and in this respect, too, differs from other CFL programs.

DOE stipulates that at least half of the program's clients be on public assistance. Participants enter the program through walk in, referrals from CFL's other programs or from outside, HRA flyers, or word of mouth among community residents. The program is staffed with both caseworkers and employment counselors who work with clients to help them define their skills and areas of work interest and assist them in looking for jobs.

The employment program also tries to identify jobs particularly suited to the skills of specific clients. This very difficult task is accomplished through persistent cultivation of a variety of companies, local service agencies, and not-for-profit agencies, and networking with members of CFL's advisory board and the borough-wide Brooklyn Economic Development Corporation. The jobs developed have been in manufacturing and wholesale distribution on the Sunset Park waterfront, and, more recently, in Brooklyn-based social service and child care agencies. They tend to be jobs that do not rely heavily on English language skills. Approximately 40 to 50 percent of the positions are from Sunset Park and nearby areas; the rest are from various parts of the city. The Center has made 413 placements in the last two years, 395 of these above the minimum wage.²⁶

In addition to the CFL program, two other programs in Sunset Park focus on employment — Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow, which serves 16- to

21-year-olds, and South West Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation (SWBIDC), which services the employers in the industrial area. Despite their frequent contacts at community meetings and Human Services Cabinet meetings, there appears to be little coordination or positive collaboration among these programs. What distinguishes the CFL program from the other two is that it provides a social work approach, using group and individual sessions, to enable usually unskilled clients to begin to seek and hold jobs. It does not do specific job training. Characteristically, as in all CFL operations, the program is assiduous in follow-ups with clients, making certain that they keep appointments and that the right client is matched to the right job. "Principles of motivation/employability training are integrated into every aspect of the Center's employment program."²⁷

Sister Mary Paul's determination to maximize the resources available in Sunset Park, and to enhance the employment program's reputation, has led her to bypass neighborhood officials to make direct contact with the head of Public Development Corporation (PDC) — now the Economic Development Corporation — which is developing the Brooklyn Army Terminal on the waterfront. Sister Mary Paul arranged an interview (which is probably more than the local development corporation could do) with the president and vice president of PDC to obtain direct introductions to the personnel offices of companies coming into the Brooklyn Army Terminal.

Sister Mary Paul makes two key points about employment. The first is that CFL's aim is to place people in jobs paying *above* the minimum wage and the second is that placing women with small children in dead-end jobs may be counterproductive to improved family life. Recently, the Center has received a grant from the Foundation for Child Development to support the project's efforts to assess participants' family needs and to link them to family services in CFL and elsewhere. A study will document these efforts, possibly shedding light on the needs of women and families as they try to make a transition from welfare to work. The grant is also to be used to enable staff to try out new ways of recruiting Sunset Park residents into the program, thereby strengthening the community focus of the only CFL program that is not at present limited to Sunset Park.

CFL and the other employment programs in Sunset Park and elsewhere consider the DOE paperwork and bureaucratic requirements to be exceptionally onerous. Sister Mary Paul and the employment program staff describe being required to pick up letters or deposit reports in person, rather than by mail, wasting a worker's whole day. The job developer is not permitted to send confirmations of employment by FAX or mail.

Sister Mary Paul says that the Center will use some private money to provide services to needy unemployed persons who do not fit into what she views as DOE's restricted groupings. She also criticizes what she views as DOE's overly narrow definition of services. "DOE does not care much whether an applicant got child care or solved a personal/family problem related to employability, etc.; they credit only the number of placements and 'negotiated wage'. . . . By using our private funding in a more relevant way I can look forward to giving them a report next year that will possibly be influential."

Helping Young People: School Programs

The schools in Sunset Park are among the most overcrowded in the city, with enrollments ranging from 99 to 133 percent of capacity. Most Sunset Park schools have enrollments of nearly 1,500 students.

The school population parallels the poverty levels of the surrounding community. More Sunset Park students fall within the Poverty Index than do students in the city as a whole. The school population averages 83 percent Hispanic, compared with a citywide average of 37 percent. (See Appendix, Tables 1 and 2.) The Asian population has increased in the five Sunset Park schools from 20 percent in 1986 to 29 percent in 1990. For the most part, these schools exceed the citywide average in the percentage of enrolled students with limited English proficiency. (See Appendix, Table 3.) Reading level scores reveal that fewer than half read at or above grade level.²⁸ Since all of the schools meet the minimum Board of Education standards in mathematics, however, students' reading shortcomings are probably related more to questions of language than to developmental deficiencies.

From its earliest years, the Center for Family Life and its founders intended to establish free neighborhood centers in the local public schools. At the same

time, the neighborhood gang problem led the Center, and especially Sister Geraldine, to become deeply involved in teenage social activities programs. These first goals and experiences have remained at the core of the Center's work with the children and young people of Sunset Park.

In the early years, Sister Geraldine and staff member Tom Randall, together with Reverend Doug Heilman of Discipleship, were chaperons of teen dances that they helped to sponsor, first in the Center's own building, and later at St. Michael's Church. They tell stories of teens arriving at the dances with weapons, police being present, and tensions underscoring the music. These social events were some of the many activities aimed at dispersing the gangs in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The dances continue to take place today, though the organized gangs were dispersed in the early 1980s through attrition, law enforcement, and the work of such agencies as Discipleship.

Sister Geraldine and Tom Randall also established the first after-school program and teen center at P.S. 1, at Forty-seventh Street and Third Avenue. This location was targeted because it was the newest school at the time and had the facilities most suitable for a number of different kinds of activities, such as after-school recreational and tutoring programs, evening programs, parent workshops, and others. The school-age programs of the Center have by now expanded to three other schools in Sunset Park, including, most recently, Charles Dewey Junior High School. According to the Center, during 1990-91, 2,225 youngsters and 337 parents took part in its summer and school activities.²⁹

The rationale for the Center's after-school programs is twofold: that parents need a safe place for their school-age children; there is a practical, economic reason for school care until at least 6 P.M.; and that such a program should not be merely an extension of the academic school day, but should be a means to expand the horizons of children, encourage group activity, and bring the life of the community into the school.

From their beginnings at P.S. 1, the range and size of the school programs have grown enormously. "The variety is almost endless," says Tom Randall. "The programs are like an amoeba which reaches out and interacts with this school or that. . . . We bring outside resources . . . we'll grab those resources

and find a way to use them." Starting with after-school programs at P.S. 1 on two afternoons a week and, a few months later, at P.S. 172 on two afternoons,³⁰ the school programs have expanded over the years to other schools, and with almost full-week programs. CFL offerings now include peer tutoring sessions; youth leadership programs; performing arts activities for all age groups; the Family Life Theater, which emphasizes group experiences to foster expressive skills; parents' groups, whose activities range from sewing to exercise to discussions with invited lecturers; publication of newsletters; and summer day camps.

What characterizes these diverse programs is that they are not supplemental academic study, but group-oriented, socializing activities. Thus, during one staff meeting observed by the writer, questions were raised about the Center's program being called upon to be responsible for the completion of homework or carrying out teachers' assignments. Although CFL staff members do run reading programs and facilitate tutoring programs, they are reluctant to be seen as agents of the teachers. They prefer to help create a family atmosphere in which *parents*, not CFL, are helping children with homework. To accomplish this, CFL establishes informal groups for parents to learn how to help their children with particular subjects. The Center supplies books and encourages reading through these family group mechanisms. Recently, the Center has hired a specialist to advise its own staff in the techniques of encouraging reading and language skills.

According to the Center's philosophy, the goals of learning are not only the acquisition of facts but also the fostering of feelings of self-acceptance, self-confidence, and habits of mind that are conducive to new learning, and the school must recognize that it must work with the community to further such ends:

. . . it is all too common in our experience to find major interference with effective education of children, if the school alone is left "in charge. . . ." There is a widely found tendency to ignore family and community unless they are factored in negatively. . . . We find ourselves urging strongly that schools be allowed to become new

neighborhood settlement houses where neighborhood family-focused agencies and parents develop a lively, socially healthy and stimulating resource array for families.³¹

As noted, the Center came into the schools to serve immediate needs. Generally it was welcomed. But sometimes the welcome has been strained. For example, although CFL has been at P.S. 1 for almost 12 years, there has been some degree of continuing conflict over the presence and appropriateness of community-based programs, operated by an outside, nonschool agency in the school building.

In September 1990, just as the new school year was starting, it appeared that the after-school programs at P.S. 1 were in jeopardy. The principal tried to confine the Center's activity to the cafeteria and to assert that she and the school's teachers were in control of after-school activity, as part of the Board of Education's newly announced school-based management initiative.

Sister Geraldine's political skill and assertiveness are seen in her letter to Superintendent Casey:

We question . . . [the school-based management and shared decisionmaking team] . . . as consistent with the Chancellor's intent for community services to become part of a school's relationship to parents and children. We were assured yesterday in a phone conversation with Deputy Chancellor Amina Abdur-Rahman that it is not the intent, and that ten years of service which we have been providing to children, teens and parents at this school, with minimal public funding and much effort by us to obtain foundation and private support, are not to be devalued.

We would like to avoid media confrontations, etc., if possible [italics added], and rely on the shared, authentic concern for the children and parents of this school and the immediate community.

Shortly after writing the letter, Sister Geraldine organized the parents and called the superintendent and higher officials at the Board of Education, and

the programs now continue without restriction at P.S. 1.

In New York City, the control of all school buildings, and hence programs, by custodians or principals has often come into conflict with other definitions of "community" schools. From its earliest days, the Center for Family Life sought to serve its community by creating youth programs in school buildings that the Center itself did not control. The Center won this struggle at P.S. 1 by building upon the numbers of parents who need the after-school programs and on its staff's own energy in appealing when necessary to higher officials.

What may also be reflected here is different perceptions of "effectiveness" of programs, which result from the clash between a social work and "neighborhood" outlook, on the one hand, and an educational/administrative viewpoint, on the other. Questions arise as to just what a community school should be, whom it should serve, how late it should stay open, what services it should provide, and, most difficult, who should be in charge of the space and its uses.

In contrast to its history at P.S. 1, the Center for Family Life has an excellent relationship with some other schools. The principal of P.S. 314 describes an "exceptional" relationship with CFL, which has operated in this school for nine years. He had favorable views of the after-school programs in drama, recreation, and tutoring, which make use of parents and teenage counselors. The CFL workshops, which included such topics as "Parents as Partners in Schools," "Parenting Skills," or "Parents Re-entering the Job Market," were developed in conjunction with the PTA.

What is also critical at P.S. 314 is the direct family assistance that CFL provides to those referred to it by the school guidance counselors. One counselor said that she speaks to Sister Mary Paul at least once or twice a week, referring cases that she, the counselor, cannot handle, where the problem is "too deep." She calls CFL for all emergency needs and says that Sister Mary Paul "never turns anyone away." This counselor describes the list of family problems she has seen at the school: drugs in the neighborhood, language problems, single mothers abused by boyfriends, learning problems, and children left alone for long hours because their parents are at work.

The Center was asked in 1990 to expand its activities to Charles Dewey

Junior High School. Planning discussions included the district superintendent, the school principal, and Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine, who in this case were considered *part* of, rather than outside, the new citywide school-based management initiative. As a result, CFL helped to create an arts program, called Lifelines, which runs four days a week and includes improvisational theater, dance, arts and crafts, singing, and creative writing. It has two purposes: to work with classes previously identified by teachers as ones with ethnic tensions (among Hispanics, Asians, and Arabs) and to promote the adolescents' self-expression.

The guidance counselor at Dewey Junior High School says that it is helpful that CFL is located just around the corner from the school, because families who won't get on a bus or a train are willing to attend when the facility is in their more immediate neighborhood. She also says that she and the CFL social workers remain in close touch about the families she has sent to the Center.

It is clear that the Center's programs in the local schools provide badly needed services for children and teenagers in a supervised and safe environment. These programs also clearly have a developmental and social basis, in accordance with the Center's philosophy and mission. In addition, the Center has established links with some teachers and counselors so that children and families in trouble can be identified by the schools and quickly referred to a neighborhood facility.

What cannot be easily evaluated is whether the children in these school programs do better academically, have more self-esteem, or have a higher degree of stability in their families than those who are not in the programs. As with many aspects of the Center's work, outcomes are hard to measure; controlled experiments are nearly impossible to undertake.

Helping Young People: Youth Programs

The Center for Family Life operates summer day camps, teen camps, and counselor training for the school-age child program; it also participates in Camp Liberty. This New York State program near Albany provides summer activities for disadvantaged minority children from grade 4 onward aiming toward enrollment in a New York state university.

In connection with these extensive programs for youths, CFL has recently

taken over the citywide Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) for Community District 7. This program had been run for a number of years by the community board office. Facing increasing difficulties staffing the administration of the program and coping with its extensive paperwork, the community board in the spring of 1990 asked CFL to step in.

To some critics, CFL's assumption of responsibility for SYEP exemplifies a tendency toward "empire building." Some members of the community have said privately that CFL took over SYEP primarily because staff feared that the loss of SYEP would jeopardize its own counselor and camp programs, in which the summer youth enrollees work. Another more favorable explanation is that CFL saw this opportunity as related to its overall mission and was able to act quickly and improvise. CFL estimates that it placed 416 young people in the summer of 1991 in its own camp programs as counselors and in other community agencies.³²

Many of the youth programs of the Center for Family Life are funded by the city's Department of Youth Services and by private money. A portion of the Youth Services funds has been disbursed in Sunset Park through the community board. CFL has in the past received more than half of this available amount, with smaller sums distributed to Discipleship and other organizations. This allocation has been explained by the Center's extensive programs in this area, its experience and skill in writing grant proposals, and the Sisters' political organizing capability. (They have brought parents to community board meetings to support their requests.)

Over the years, as the Center for Family Life has grown in the breadth of its activities and in the degree of respect with which it is held in the neighborhood, it has nevertheless come into occasional competition or conflict with organizations that assert a greater affiliation with the Hispanic community or that may in other ways justify a need for ethnic political empowerment. In the spring of 1991, CFL's share of Youth Services funds was reduced by \$25,000. Reflecting the political assertions of diverse ethnic segments of the Sunset Park population, at least one Hispanic organization received the reallocated CFL money. The Sisters appealed this cutback to the community board and to higher city officials, and in so doing reasserted what they believe is the nonpartisan, more experienced, and professional nature of

their services. This allocation was later restored. Other substantial threats to funding for school and youth programs were countered by the organizing of parent groups at the neighborhood schools and by careful, persistent lobbying by Sister Geraldine and Sister Mary Paul of the Chancellor's Office at the Board of Education and the Commissioner of Youth Services.

Arranging for Foster Care

The Center's community-based foster care program has received considerable publicity and scrutiny.³³ In 1988, Sister Mary Paul established a program in which children who must be taken from their troubled family situations are placed with foster parents *within* the Sunset Park community. The insensitivities and bureaucratic tangle of the city's foster care system have often resulted in children being taken from their homes, separated from their siblings, and sent to distant parts of the city. To combat this separation, CFL developed a small group of "satellite foster homes," which are administered by the Center itself. The biological parents and the foster parents are involved in a partnership in which the natural mother may, for example, still see her child frequently or even every day, take the child to school, and maintain similar contacts.

When this program started, the Center advertised in local newspapers and elsewhere for potential foster parents. This approach did not produce results, so printed flyers were left in supermarkets, laundrettes, and beauty parlors. In a short time, six or seven responses were received from prospective foster parents, and from that time on foster parents have been found through word of mouth. Sister Mary Paul claims that the Center has been able to meet all the requests for foster families that have thus far been received. Although this informal recruitment method has worked well, Sister Mary Paul now sees a growing need for foster parents who will take more than one child, or siblings, or children who have behavioral or psychological problems.

The program is still small; in three years it has admitted 73 children; of this number, 42 have been discharged as of June 1991 and returned to their original homes or to homes of caretaker relatives, a discharge rate of 57 percent. In 1991, the average length of stay in citywide foster care was 2.6 years,³⁴

whereas the length of stay in CFL foster care has ranged from less than two weeks to over two years.³⁵ It appears that the Center's small program does in fact achieve a speedier discharge rate than the one registered by the city as a whole.

The Center's use of the neighborhood as a key criterion for admission into its foster care program has been widely cited as the kind of practice that the city should be aiming toward in its larger programs. However, the Center's referrals for foster care tend to come from a central Child Welfare Administration (CWA) office at 80 Lafayette Street (the office informally known as "Allocation"). And recent court decisions require that all placements be made on a centralized "first come, first served" basis. That is, geographical considerations or family location are not supposed to be major criteria, as they are in the CFL program. What Sister Mary Paul and the deputy director of the local zone of CWA have worked out, however, is that preferential referrals *will* in fact be made to CFL in cases where children and parents are residents of Sunset Park. This arrangement does not always hold, however, since in many cases of neglect, abuse, and middle-of-the-night emergencies, social workers place children wherever they can, without regard to family location. And although Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine live at the Center, and hence are available at all times, not every caseworker in the city knows this.

When Sister Mary Paul first received approval for this satellite program from CWA in 1988, she was encouraged to proceed on the grounds of the potential replicability of the program, decreased cost, and increased ease of foster care placement. But, as it turns out, this model has not yet been transferred elsewhere on a major scale because of the tension between the central bureaucracy and any such attempt to localize placement. (United Neighborhood Houses, however, is sponsoring a replication of the CFL model in at least one settlement house in the Bronx.)

Another citywide issue has arisen in relation to foster care. Questions have been raised about giving priority to keeping children with parents or blood relatives at a time when drug addiction in the household may present danger to the children and when foster care may be the safer and therefore more appropriate alternative. Reflecting on these questions, Sister Mary Paul says

that the risks have to be weighed in the light of one's clinical experience. "There are symptoms . . . if appointments are missed, or a client disappears for weeks, it raises anxiety, and we have to use our judgment." A staff member also added that "community people will tell us that they saw a mother in a certain place where she shouldn't be" and that this neighborhood network serves to increase the Center's knowledge of a possible problem. CFL's use of this kind of information network highlights the importance of its community roots.

The small foster care program of the Center for Family Life has not yet received a formal evaluation, although professionals have consistently called it "promising"³⁶ and say that it demonstrates the feasibility of linking foster care and community-based services in a form of shared parenting. What seems to make the program work in Sunset Park is the long-term clinical expertise and philosophy of Sister Mary Paul; the fact that the Center itself has related programs and resources to help the parents whose children are taken into foster care; the hope and belief that even many very troubled families can ultimately be reunited; and the very clear, day-to-day knowledge of where the children are, what neighborhood institutions they are attending, and how they are faring. Any adaptation elsewhere of the kind of successful core-satellite program created by CFL in Sunset Park would have to be based on a careful assessment of the extent to which it would be possible to replicate these elements in the new neighborhood and within its provider agency.

THE CENTER'S INFRASTRUCTURE

The Center's institutional identity rests not only on the nature of the individual services just reviewed but also on broader organizational factors — how it is managed and staffed, how it relates to other institutions, and what decisions are made on whether and how to expand. Some of these factors have been noted in the overview; this section provides additional observations on these issues.

Oversight and Management

The Center has a critical relation to its parent organization, St. Christopher-

Ottilie, a large, multifunction voluntary agency based in Sea Cliff, Long Island, that serves children and families from Nassau and Suffolk counties as well as New York City. In her early years at the Family Reception Center in Park Slope, when her philosophy of community satellite programs was evolving, Sister Mary Paul had become acquainted with Robert McMahon of St. Christopher's Home. This was to lead to the long-term, crucial sponsorship by St. Christopher-Ottilie of their satellite program that would become the Center for Family Life.

As a program of St. Christopher-Ottilie, CFL develops all of its activities on its own and is free to hire all staff. It also does its own program-related fundraising. But St. Christopher-Ottilie provides the critical administrative support, billing, disbursement, audit, purchasing, and accounting procedures connected with the programs of CFL. The Center's almost \$2 million annual budget, therefore, excludes for the most part these administrative costs. While Robert McMahon, now executive director of St. Christopher-Ottilie, would not place a dollar amount on these annual administrative costs, we may speculate that they could range from 5 to 20 percent of a budget this size. HRA's Child Welfare Administration, the major source of funding for CFL's preventive services, includes a 5 percent administrative overhead charge in its budget.

St. Christopher-Ottilie negotiated the lease for CFL's building on Forty-third Street. The current rent is \$27,721 a year. The Department of Employment reimburses the Center for the rent charges of \$12,600 per year for the Employment Program offices on Thirty-seventh Street in the Bush Terminal. The rent of \$11,523 per year for the storefront housing the thrift shop and emergency food program is raised by CFL from private sources. All the salaries and associated costs of programs sponsored by CFL, whatever their funding source, are administered by St. Christopher-Ottilie.

This administrative responsibility includes licensing of foster homes and payments for foster children and parents. St. Christopher is itself a foster care agency, and the New York State Department of Social Services treats the foster care programs of the parent agency and the satellite agency as one program, although the geographically based CFL program has been viewed as an innovation in the provision of such services. CFL, as noted previously,

selects the parents, makes all the decisions, and does the actual reporting to the city and to the courts.

Robert McMahon believes that this administrative relationship enables Sister Mary Paul "to have her own platform," "to be an advocate and not worry about the rest of the agency." McMahon believes that St. Christopher-Ottolie and CFL's organizational model of parent and satellite is worthy of emulation, and he tries to encourage it within his own agency and elsewhere, though, as he maintains, "no one is of the caliber" of the Sisters. He characterizes Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine as extraordinary both as program visionaries and as administrators. They have earned his complete confidence because they are "impeccable," "have the highest standards in the world," and "can make a dollar stretch more than anyone I know." Another criterion for McMahon of CFL's administrative competence or stability over the last 14 years is the virtual absence of disputes regarding compensation, unemployment, billing, and the like.

McMahon is in close weekly touch with the directors by telephone and visits the Center occasionally. His visits serve to assure him of the deep involvement of the directors in the life of Sunset Park as he notes the way Sister Geraldine and Sister Mary Paul are greeted by members of the community. He believes that CFL has been a positive force in Sunset Park, even going so far as to say that the neighborhood in 1978 was on the brink of serious decline and without the Sisters would have "gone."

McMahon also believes that the philosophy guiding the work of the Center is "pure and simple"; that is, the family is the unit of attention. He observes that many agencies have office hours and deal with problems, but that CFL is always accessible, supporting children where they live, in a direct and comprehensive fashion.

As to expansion, McMahon has always had confidence in the choices of the directors of CFL, most recently in their efforts to expand their arts and school activities. In addition, he recognizes and supports their reluctance to expand into day care or into "mental health" services.

Given its relationship to St. Christopher-Ottolie, the Center for Family Life, unlike many not-for-profit agencies, does not have its own board of directors,

but instead works with an advisory board. This board is not administrative but provides the Center with advice and help with policy directions and access to funding sources, and sometimes to government agencies. The advisory board includes members of the community, heads of local social service agencies, and members of agencies that have a relationship with CFL programs, such as the Brooklyn Economic Development Corporation and the guidance services program in the school district. "For both of us," says Sister Mary Paul, "the most valuable service our advisory board members give us is the intelligence of their observations and perspectives. We gain a great deal from their observations and comments." The observer interviewed several members of the advisory board. All expressed confidence in the clinical and professional basis of CFL's programs, and several offered insightful comments on the Sisters' complex personal style and some of their directions in community politics.

Staffing

As noted in the overview, CFL's staff includes 24 social workers within a total staff of 92 full-time and part-time workers. The average caseload of each social worker is 18 to 20 families, while the average caseload of HRA Preventive Services field workers is 14.1 families.³⁷ Of the CFL staff members, 11 are bilingual. Of the current professional staff, 11 live in Sunset Park and 6 in the adjacent communities of Park Slope and Bay Ridge. Minorities are quite well represented on the staff. For example, 38 of the 49 part-time staff members are Hispanic. There are numerous volunteers from the community and from citywide programs. Recently, CFL has hired specialists in dance and art and created a new position of educational specialist to provide additional professional help in the school programs.

No attempt was made to systematically compare turnover and salaries at CFL with those of other agencies. According to information supplied by CFL, in the last year seven social workers have left the agency. In most of these cases, salary level was a factor in the decisions.

There is evidence of long-term staff commitment. Two of the head social workers in the school programs have been with CFL for twelve and eight

years, respectively, and the director of the Employment Program has been there since the inception of the program in 1982. There have been only three job developers in the almost ten years of the Employment Program.

Human Services Networking and Cooperating with Providers

Basic services in Sunset Park are quite concentrated. All the neighborhood providers attend monthly meetings of Community District 7's Human Services Cabinet, an information-exchange mechanism. The meetings serve to identify community problems, such as the shortage of day care; they do not appear, for the most part, to serve as a vehicle for the development of any politically coordinated neighborhood strategy for addressing problems.

However, the cabinet does facilitate informal networking of referrals among the various agencies. Many of the representatives on the cabinet have been attending its meetings for years, and they are easily able to exchange information or "pick up a phone" to their colleagues who also participate in these meetings. The Center for Family Life does not have formal, written collaboration agreements with other agencies, but in assisting its clients it does make important use of these extensive local connections.

As the staff of the Center and others have reported — and as this writer has observed — people in Sunset Park meet each other in the local deli, on neighborhood streets, or in local restaurants; in this way providers do exchange **ideas** and information, while the Center's staff and directors have an opportunity to observe former clients informally and monitor how they are doing.

Nevertheless, the center of the Sunset Park community, which in many respects is the area between Fortieth and Forty-ninth streets along Fourth Avenue, where St. Michael's Church, the community board office, and the Center for Family Life are located, is felt by many to be rather distant from some other parts of the neighborhood. Several interviewees observed that people living beyond Forty-ninth Street and along Sixth Avenue will not venture into the Thirties or Forties. Every neighborhood has its subsectors, but this feeling of separation may be especially intense in Sunset Park, where diverse new immigrant groups, speaking many different languages, may have unusual difficulty in determining the availability and location of services.

Decisions About Expansion

The Sisters clearly prefer close control over the content and funding of their programs, which is one reason why they refuse to take on every program offered to them. As they put it, they fear that the Center would become too big and unwieldy; while they do want to continue to expand their help to the families of Sunset Park through their coordinated sets of family services, they do not want to expand into entirely different kinds of separate programs.

This cautious attitude toward expansion of the scope of the Center's work has not, however, prevented the Center from recently adding arts components to its menu of therapeutic and community programs. The Sisters believe that visual and performing arts can become important expressions of the individual and are good ways of building community spirit. The Center has sponsored in the schools an improvisational theater group for young people and has worked on establishing community arts collaboratives with other area arts organizations. As this new area of activity demonstrates, the Center does grow and change. Still, as illustrated by the Center's decisions on day care and housing, there is no automatic assumption that the Center will assume a new role just because Sunset Park has a need for more services of a particular nature.

The Center's Clients

While the Center serves all of Sunset Park, most client families come from the area west of Seventh Avenue, from streets in the high Thirties to the middle Fifties. The densest concentration lives west of Fifth Avenue, closest to the location of the Center itself.

The census tracts that contain the largest number of CFL clients had in 1980 an average median income a little lower than that of Brooklyn Community District 7 as a whole and of Brooklyn as a whole. In each of the tracts there is also a higher percentage of households below the poverty level than in the district or the borough as a whole. Preliminary 1990 census data show that overall Sunset Park's population is 51 percent Hispanic, but these tracts, in general, are much more heavily Hispanic. (See Appendix, Table 4.)

Staff members of the Center have said that they have been seeing greater numbers of Arab, mostly Palestinian, families in the last two or three years.

This new immigrant group is connected to few support services. The mothers, in particular, according to the caseworkers, are burdened with large families and a tradition of female passivity. The workers try especially to connect the families with day care services.

The growing Asian population of Sunset Park, concentrated primarily along Eighth Avenue and west to Sixth Avenue in the Fifties and Sixties, does not avail itself of the Center's services, for the most part, except for the children in the school programs. There has been a recent effort on the part of the Center and other community institutions to reach out to Chinese residents. The Center is seeking funding for a Chinese-speaking social worker.

Since a key characteristic of the Center's operation is that families are meant to be integrated into *several* activities within the Center's scope of services, an attempt was made to obtain data on numbers of families who are actually enrolled in a variety of programs such as basic family counseling, employment programs, school programs, and arts programs. This was not possible, however, because the Center does not cross reference that information. Individual workers record such information in their case records for client families, and the linking of services is partially reflected in the monthly statistical report each clinical social worker gives for his or her caseload. The individual family records may contain information about client families who are helped through the emergency food program or who are referred to the employment program or other programs. These monthly reports and individual reports are reviewed by CWA by means of a standard form called the Uniform Case Record, or UCR, which reports on each case within 30 days, 90 days, and six months of the time of referral to the Center. The Center has only in the last months acquired a computer and begun to develop a computerized recordkeeping system, and presumably more cross-referenced data will be available when it is in operation.

The total number of families that the Center for Family Life was obligated to treat under its CWA contract from July 1990 to the end of June 1991 was 456. In that period, CFL actually served a total of 509 families, thus exceeding its obligation. This higher number includes families who were referred for short-term help or emergency intervention. By contract with CWA, the Center must be serving at least 216 families in any given month, but this figure is

often exceeded.³⁸ In addition, there are families in the emergency food program or in the school programs who are not counted in the CWA tabulations. In recent years the annual budget allocated for these preventive services by CWA has averaged about \$900,000.



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IV. Sunset Park and Its Residents: 1991

The Center for Family Life located itself in a community with acute problems in the late 1970s. How does that community stand in the 1990s? What follows is a brief overview of the neighborhood today: some of its major community issues, problems, and decisions and their relation to the role and functioning of the Center.

Growth and Changing Ethnicity

Sunset Park continues to grow, primarily because of the extraordinary influx of new immigrants and undocumented residents. The 1991 population is 102,253, a 4 percent increase over 1980. (See Appendix, Tables 5 and 6.) That rate may be higher still because of the number of undocumented immigrants living in Sunset Park. In any event, the estimated rate of growth in Sunset Park is higher than that of Brooklyn as a whole or of New York City.

The new residents have come from Asia, especially China and Hong Kong, and from South and Central America. As noted, the neighborhood also has a significant Palestinian population. Thus, Sunset Park is home to an ever more diverse immigrant population, although, unlike much of Brooklyn, there are few residents from the Caribbean. There are also relatively few African-Americans, an absence characteristic of southwest Brooklyn in general.

Poverty and Income Level

Over the years, the total public assistance population of Community District 7 has hovered around 25 percent. More recent official estimates figure the population on public assistance at 15 percent,³⁹ placing it ninth among community districts in Brooklyn and 21st among the 59 community districts in New York City. But these more recent calculations exclude those who receive Medicaid only, a group that has itself increased both in Sunset Park and in Brooklyn as a whole. The Community District Needs Statement for Fiscal Year 1993 shows that the total welfare population of Community District 7 stands at 25 percent of the whole. (See Appendix, Table 7.) Sunset Park's median household income is still below that of Brooklyn and New York City.⁴⁰

The teen birth rate is higher in Sunset Park than in Brooklyn or New York City as a whole, while the out-of-wedlock rate is a little lower. With this

generally high birth rate, the infant mortality rate is still lower than in the borough or the city.⁴¹ It may be that this comparatively lower infant mortality rate in Sunset Park can be attributed to the presence and the programs of the Lutheran Medical Center and its Family Health Center.

Housing Trends

Housing in Sunset Park was always lower priced than in nearby Brooklyn neighborhoods such as Park Slope. Most of the housing was constructed in the early decades of the century. After the extraordinary and largely successful effort of housing advocacy and organization in the late 1970s and early 1980s, many of the weakest parts of Sunset Park, east of the highway, were stabilized. By the mid 1980s, all of the formerly vacant buildings had been rehabilitated. This public and private investment in housing helped to encourage residents of various ethnic backgrounds to remain and attracted middle-class purchasers who were priced out of Park Slope and Cobble Hill. There has, however, been some more recent housing abandonment on Second and Third Avenues, which is an area zoned for manufacturing and adjacent to the Gowanus Parkway; and there are examples of some vacant, deteriorated, and, in some cases, newly built but not yet occupied condominiums and small apartment buildings.

Sunset Park has not experienced gentrification on a scale similar to that of adjacent Park Slope. A tour of the neighborhood continues to show the extraordinary variety of white professional families, working-class and middle-class Puerto Rican families, and a diverse representation of families from South and Central America, China, the Middle East, and India. The fast growing Chinese population includes middle-income families who pool their savings for the purchase of brownstones and occasionally displace Hispanic rental tenants.

There has been practically no new construction in Sunset Park in the past decade. Overcrowding in apartments, especially in the lowest income areas, is widely acknowledged to be a major — even overwhelming — problem in the neighborhood and deeply affects the work of the Center for Family Life and all other social service agencies.

The Drug Problem

For most New Yorkers, drugs and crime are among the city's paramount problems. And in Sunset Park, many of the interviewees for this report, whether professionals or members of the working class, long-time residents of comparative newcomers, also see drugs (especially as related to youths) as the overriding and persistent problem of a community they value.

It is through the individual testimony of people living and working in Sunset Park that the outsider receives a sense of the pervasiveness of this problem. A police officer who has worked in the community for 13 years characterizes Sunset Park as an "established market place" for people seeking drugs from elsewhere in Brooklyn and from Staten Island, via the Verrazano Bridge and Gowanus Expressway. The area has had this reputation for many years for the outsider seeking to buy drugs, but the officer also describes the extensive street corner trade among residents themselves. Several long-time residents described their growing disquiet about drug activity on their streets: one who was also a staff member at the Center for Family Life had just moved out of the neighborhood, in part because of persistent drug activity on her block. Another resident described his block's long legal battle to remove drug activity from a neighboring brownstone.

The evidence of this pervasive street corner drug trade was also described in a 1988 study sponsored by New York State Division of Substance Abuse Services. Trained observers identified 20 locations of street drug activity in the streets of the Forties and Fifties. The study concluded:

. . . the Sunset Park section of Brooklyn has a serious drug problem. Almost every major drug type including heroin, crack and cocaine was found to be available in the general area under study . . . field workers observed a substantial number of drug-selling locations. . . . The number of drug dealing locations where were involved in the selling of heroin serves to suggest the presence of a substantial user population in and around the Sunset Park community.⁴²

The 72nd Police Precinct, in Sunset Park, is part of a citywide initiative to

encourage community policing to deal with drug activity and other crimes. The precinct works closely with all the neighborhood agencies to organize blocks against drug dealing. Discipleship, a group that was formed to combat the youth gangs of earlier decades, now works with the police precinct to fight prostitution and drug addiction, as well as to find drug treatment facilities for hundreds of young people.

Despite the severity of Sunset Park's substance abuse problem, the community has no drug treatment centers, except at Lutheran Medical Center (which also has an alcoholism program). The Center for Family Life also refers Sunset Park residents in need of such treatment to Methodist and Coney Island hospitals, outside the district. It has had to treat families now decimated by addiction and drug-related AIDS. In keeping with her general views on service integration, Sister Mary Paul is critical of programs that are directed solely to drug-addicted clients and believes that many city initiatives are grandiose, overly expensive, and too remote from this community problem. As Sister Mary Paul puts it:

For example . . . we don't take money designated for "drug abuse prevention," . . . because the totality of what we do can be considered preventive and because we don't think "outcome measurement" can be attached to this kind of money. On the other hand, we use specialized drug programs extensively, by collaboration, joint referrals, etc. . . ."43

Youth Issues

From local elected officials to police commanders to the youth coordinator at the community board to individual parents, there is agreement that the lack of recreation and sports programs for Sunset Park's large youth population is a very serious matter. The neighborhood has a swimming pool and Parks Department-sponsored recreation programs, but these do not begin to fill the needs. Baseball teams sponsored by the church and the Police Athletic League play in Prospect Park, since there is not even sandlot space for baseball in Sunset Park.

Echoing a frequently expressed opinion in Sunset Park, the human services coordinator of Community District 7 says that the many churches should join together and open up their own facilities to better serve all the youths of the community. The Center for Family Life serves 2,000 teenagers and young people in its three centers and summer camp programs. But a serious theme that emerges in many discussions is the overriding need for the establishment of a *real* recreation center or "Y" in Sunset Park. Young people in Sunset Park are often caught between the dearth of local programs and their lack of awareness of or difficulty in reaching cultural and recreational opportunities elsewhere in the city. The youth officer of the Police Department, the Center for Family Life, and others seek and depend upon private donations for youngsters' trips and tickets to events outside the neighborhood.

Many of the professionals who were interviewed for this report and who live in the neighborhood send their children either to private schools out of the neighborhood or to public schools in the district or adjacent districts that have special programs not offered in Sunset Park schools. Even those of this group who are most dedicated to Sunset Park share the widespread view that the overcrowding of the public schools and lack of recreational and cultural resources hamper the quality of teaching and the level of curricula.

In the late 1980s efforts were made to establish a parent coalition of Sunset Park's newly arrived professional families and local middle-class Hispanic families. The Sunset Park Educational Coalition (SPEC) was a small lobbying group advocating the construction of new schools and the creation of a revised curriculum that SPEC members saw as less traditional and less reliant on strict order in the classroom. Sister Geraldine and the Center for Family Life became an important part of this organizing work. In Sister Geraldine's eyes, at least, this effort was one that cut across ethnic and economic lines.

There are many versions of what happened next, and some still-remaining scars. What certainly did happen was that the overriding need for at least two new schools, a need which everyone involved agreed about, became bitter controversy over their location. Alternative sites were suggested, but each became the focus of opposition that may have been related more to assertions of ethnic identity and localism than to the practical advantages of any

particular site. The result was a certain weakening of potential community-wide coalitions. Sister Geraldine herself has said that the controversy and her key parent-organizing role in it may have aroused criticism as being inappropriate. Although she believes her actions to be consistent with her role as social worker, she concluded from the experience that she had to refrain from this kind of public organizing. However, as indicated by the discussion of the Center's school programs, she has not renounced her efforts to organize parents. Indeed, parent organizing around budget cuts and other issues continues under CFL's leadership.⁴⁴

Economic Development and Employment

Sunset Park's waterfront and industrial area has been critical to the development of the neighborhood and of the entire city. The area's decline has mirrored the city's maritime and industrial decline. The future of the area — for new industrial development, for needed housing, for recreation — is now the subject of considerable speculation. The city's own confusions about policy for the waterfront continue to beset Sunset Park. How to promote and provide incentives for manufacturing and distribution uses? What can be preserved of the remaining maritime uses? And should any part of the vast tracts of industrial land be converted to recreational and residential purposes? A recently completed planning study sponsored by the Sunset Park Restoration Committee recommended a combination of all three approaches as the best outcome.⁴⁵

Although the South West Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation (SWBIDC), the community board, and some other local groups have all participated in the planning study to some degree, there is no coalition or organized economic development entity in Sunset Park to begin to address this challenge. While the waterfront area has become the focus for many community groups' wishes and hopes for more housing, more recreation space, more schools, and more community services, there is little integration of community planning and economic development.

As for employment, Ann Spiegel, head of the Brooklyn Economic Development Corporation, former head of SWBIDC, and member of CFL's

advisory board, says that there are fewer job placement and training programs in Sunset Park than in many other low-income areas in New York City. In addition, Sunset Park is surrounded by communities with few training or placement programs of their own. According to Spiegel, Borough Park has a couple of mostly clerical programs; there is only one employment program in Park Slope (operated by Good Shepherd Services on Ninth Street); and Bay Ridge has no training programs at all.

Spiegel makes two broader points: the need for training and job readiness is greater than the need for placement services in Sunset Park and, indeed, all over the city. Many residents lack basic literacy and problem-solving skills, and in Sunset Park especially, language problems are an additional obstacle. Many DOE training programs are not effective because New York City's unemployed population requires more intensive and longer-term training programs. While Spiegel believes that the CFL's employment programs do very well in strengthening job readiness, ideally she would like to see a two-year, one-stop program, in which clients receive GED (high school equivalency) preparation, clerical training, and development in "self-esteem."

An additional persistent problem is that of job retention. The SWBIDC's job retention figures for 1989-90 show that of the 881 people placed in companies located at the Sunset Park waterfront, 62 percent stayed in their jobs for less than 90 days, and only 13 percent were in their jobs at the end of six months.⁴⁶ The Center's employment program, in the period from July 1989 through June 1991, saw only 45 percent of its job placements still at work after 90 days.⁴⁷ Furthermore, with the current downturn in the city and national economy, job placements have become more difficult, and there is an increase in part-time and temporary work, rather than in full-time employment.

Sunset Park: Uniting the Community

In 1988, a citywide telephone survey of residents' feelings about their communities conducted by the United Way showed that in Sunset Park 77 percent of the survey respondents ranked their neighborhood as "good" or "excellent," making it the tenth most positively regarded, behind well-known neighborhoods like Riverdale, Carnarsie, or Manhattan's Upper West Side,

whose amenities and stability have been widely acknowledged.⁴⁸

“This is really like a small town,” say many residents of Sunset Park, “everybody knows each other.” Just as CFL staff workers, as observed earlier, describe how they can keep a watch on their placements or recruit prospective foster parents while carrying out their own neighborhood chores, or shopping at the local deli, others speak of the neighborhood’s hospitality and friendliness — its family atmosphere that still welcomes single residents who are priced out of more fashionable areas of the city.

Unlike most small towns, however, Sunset Park is not culturally cohesive or homogeneous. In fact, it is a neighborhood whose diversity has made it a case study in assimilation and immigrant adaptation for most of its history. Lou Winnick, an expert on New York City neighborhoods, says that the term “community” as applied to Sunset Park is a “superficial courtesy title. In actuality, Sunset Park is a loose conglomeration of numerous communities, differentiated by race, ethnicity, religion, social class, and values. . . . It is no wrench with its past to suggest that Sunset Park is not likely ever to be anything but a community of communities.”⁴⁹

The many diverse immigrant groups who have come to Sunset Park over the years, it is often observed, have found a place for themselves to settle, but in so doing have created “enclaves,” rather than a truly integrated, functioning social arrangement. This heterogeneity helps to explain why the many organizations trying to accomplish worthwhile goals in Sunset Park have all too often had difficulty in making truly united efforts, even in the face of agreed-upon common problems.

In the 1960s and 1970s, when the community’s fortunes looked bleak, with high rates of housing abandonment and the plague of drugs and gang warfare, there *were* some examples of unified efforts, such as those of the Sunset Park Redevelopment Committee and the anchoring function of Lutheran Medical Center, as well as the extraordinary efforts of Discipleship, the police precinct, and, as the period was coming to a close, the newly arrived Center for Family Life.

For example, SPRC sought to provide an organizing impetus to the community as a whole, to save it from what seemed to be imminent further

deterioration and abandonment. Another group, Sunset Park Restoration, was established in the early 1980s by new homeowners who, in the words of one of its founders, "wanted to connect with other people like ourselves. We probably had selfish motives at first, to find out who's best to contact for renovation work, and to get more people into the neighborhood in terms of improving the quality of life." Restoration's issues were home improvement and protecting financial investments made by young people who had moved from Manhattan and elsewhere and wanted to raise families in Sunset Park. In a classic example of the first stage of what has been called gentrification, Restoration members created the house tour, which attracted potential purchasers and new neighbors from more expensive neighborhoods in the city and succeeded in obtaining National Register status for hundreds of buildings in Sunset Park (though they failed to obtain the more difficult New York City Landmarks designation). More recently, Restoration has been riven by factionalism, although it continues the house tour and many community activities and sponsored the important waterfront study published in 1991.

Despite the various unification efforts, many residents believe that Sunset Park remains factionalized, that even within the dominant Hispanic community there are antagonistic factions, frequent rivalries, and only short-lived attempts at united action. Some leaders feel that the lack of unity hampers efforts to find solutions:

Sunset Park has a lot of organizations, but they operate in a vacuum with little connection to each other. . . . The churches are not as involved as they should be. . . . A lot of people don't know what is available. That is why there should be a Civic Council. There is a lot of competitiveness and rivalry in the organizations in Sunset Park.⁵⁰

Political efforts to more adequately represent the Hispanic majority in Sunset Park have focused on the redrawing of electoral districts. But because the Hispanic population of the neighborhood is not large enough to have its own city and state legislators, linking up with other Hispanic communities is

necessary. Despite such efforts at political organization, in an eight-candidate race for the city council under the new city charter in 1991, a non-Hispanic candidate was elected.

Lou Winnick is struck by the potential vitality that can be brought to Sunset Park by the waves of new immigrants who settle there.⁵¹ But these new immigrant waves have also brought into being a range of new problems, including potential displacement from rental housing of the older Puerto Rican residents and the complaints of school officials about the lack of participation in school affairs by Asian parents.⁵² New immigrant groups bring new energies, but also the need for new and additional services, which sometimes can compete with the service needs of other, earlier settlers. And new immigrant populations may also bring with them old problems such as the proliferation of nonunion storefront garment manufacturing sweatshops, staffed by Asian immigrant workers, which now exist throughout Sunset Park.

While the Center for Family Life does not proclaim itself or wish to be a mediator between all the economic, social, and political forces in Sunset Park, it is nevertheless a unifying force because in serving the poorest segment of the community, it does attempt to cut across all ethnic groupings. The Center has also been a link between diverse community agencies and institutions, most notably the schools and the wider surrounding neighborhood. Its recent leadership in forming arts collaborations in the schools and in the community are another of its ways of expressing and fostering the community's oneness.

Clearly CFL cannot be the only force for greater unity in Sunset Park. What other new efforts would be useful? Some advocate the creation of a number of storefront one-stop service centers, so that residents can be told what services are available to them. Others highlight the need to merge economic development initiatives for jobs and housing with adequate social services, in a new local development corporation or in a kind of broadly conceived settlement house or community center. Lutheran Medical Center has played a key development role in Sunset Park and continues to support subsidiary community organizations, but perhaps it might consider taking on a renewed leadership role in a new era. Whatever possible strategies for greater

coordination might be tried, clearly CFL's participation would be important to their success.

Sunset Park's Perceptions of the Center for Family Life

How well has the Center served Sunset Park, according to its residents? Throughout its 14-year history residents have praised the Center. Interviewees for this report characterized it as "a Godsend," "an organization that filled gaps by serving entire families," and one whose work in the schools and with youths has been invaluable.

Many acknowledge with a mixture of respect and occasional envy the Center's success and aggressiveness in creating programs and securing funding, especially compared with other organizations in the community. Some long-time supporters say that Sunset Park has had a history of community-based organizations that forgot their original goal and became self-serving, mismanaging their funds and seeking only to perpetuate themselves; but that this is very much *not* the case with Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine and their Center. Staff members, residents, and sympathetic government officials describe the Sisters' strong sense of their own mission and goals, their great ability to improvise, innovate, and develop new programs, and their capacity to respond to the needs of a changing but consistently poor population.

The Sisters and staff members claim that the Center is not "political" and certainly does not take sides in partisan conflicts. They have, however, participated in voter registration drives; they have their decided opinions about elected officials and are effective lobbyists on every level of government and community life. Elected officials interviewed for this report do not regard the Sisters as political either, which may in fact be the greatest tribute to their real but subtle political efficacy — their ability to use their influence to bring about changes that they think are important.

Many of those who appreciate and welcome the services to families in the Sunset Park community are aware of the Sisters' unusual combination of personalities, commitments, and skills. Sister Geraldine has been characterized by a community leader as "one of the best politicians we have";

her direct style has been characterized as "domineering" but "effective"; and her organizing skills among Hispanic parents, and those of her staff, have been called prodigious.

Sister Mary Paul's "more silken" style, as local official characterized it, has been admired and even regarded with awe by HRA officials, other social service providers, and community activists. "They are both so very gifted, very bright, astute; they know how to maximize every resource. Look at how they have maximized their physical facility, their use of staff, and the way they manage cases."⁵³ Sister Mary Paul's lengthy letters to commissioners and her cultivation of funders and visitors to the Center all contribute to the city's awareness of the Center and to her own impressive reputation.

There is widespread agreement that the Center does superb work and is a most urgently needed organization in its community. But bearing out Sister Geraldine's original prediction that there might be opposition from more overtly political or ethnically based competing organizations, some of this kind of feeling does in fact exist 14 years later, even after the Center has become solidly based in the community. When the feeling arises, it tends indeed to revolve around occasional differences of ethnic viewpoints as well as considerations of turf and competition for funds. One observer declared that "those after-school programs [of the Center's] are disorderly and incoherent"; another critic protested that "the services are not meeting the true needs of our people."

Sister Mary Paul answers some of these criticisms by citing the Center's careful mixture of professionalism and community service, and she dismisses many of these critics as *non*professional. She relates how another professional social service administrator asked her, somewhat disparagingly, "What are you doing besides running a kibbutz?" Answering this kind of skepticism, Sister Mary Paul says that although the analogy is somewhat inaccurate since Sunset Park is not designed to be a self-sufficient economic unit, she nevertheless does not feel apologetic about the comparison. Instead, she reasserts the continuing validity of local services and activities, on a controlled scale, as the solid theoretical and practical basis for her work. The exchange highlights the continuing tension between different ideas of professionalism,

and it underscores the problem of integrating a variety of community services with clinical practices in ways that can become significant and recognizable to the outside world.



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V. The Center for Family Life: Learning from Its Success

The Center for Family Life, in its years in the Brooklyn community of Sunset Park, has offered services to many hundreds of families and to thousands of children. While Sister Mary Paul knows that the Center's work cannot solve all problems, she continues to believe that if you assist one individual and one family you can see the results and that collectively the good results among individuals and families cannot help but improve the community.

Sympathetic fellow professionals also confirm that the Center's focus on the family, not on tasks or problems, must necessarily contribute to the health of its surrounding Sunset Park community. When asked how she can *know* that the Center is contributing to the good health of the community, Carmen Belle, deputy director of the local district of the city's Child Welfare Administration, replies:

It is a gut feeling. You know someone who cares. They care, they obviously care. I know that I will get assistance from that agency . . . a professionally appropriate response. Some agencies are more forbidding than others. This one isn't.⁵⁴

And the commissioner of the city's Human Resources Administration has recently written:

The Center for Family Life personifies the goals of Mayor Dinkins' neighborhood-based services strategy, and if I could have one wish granted it would be to clone your center in neighborhoods throughout our city!⁵⁵

We cannot easily list in systematic fashion the precise outcomes of the Center's work, since, as the McGowan report puts it, "Careful longitudinal research is required to assess the true impact on families and children of a program such as the Center for Family Life." Whether and how such research could be conducted on a program model as complex as the Center's is an open question. At a minimum, it would be helpful to be able to gather from the Center's case records more precise data on the actual numbers of families served by overlapping programs, on any relationships between the Center's after-school programs and academic achievement and children's behavior, and

on costs of the Center's programs. At least some of these kinds of information will be easier to gather once the Center begins to use its new computerized tracking system. Absent such evidence, however, the McGowan report does observe that, "the anecdotal evidence presented is quite compelling."⁵⁶

The directors of CFL are consistent in their assertions that long-range, developmental preventive services in a community, combined with many different kinds of informal practical assistance, are the best prescription for the long-term health of the community. Their resistance to "categorical" funding and specialized programs is explained also by their skepticism about the effectiveness of such efforts in the absence of a community process.

The work of the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, as we have shown, must be seen as a *process* rather than as a series of statistically verifiable outcomes. CFL has been rooted in its community, helping to shape the community's key institutions such as its schools, and has changed as the community has changed.

Sister Mary Paul and Sister Geraldine, who continue to lead and personify the work of the Center, are dedicated professionals who clearly have adhered to their original vision of what they wished to do in the community they joined in 1978. This vision has been transmitted to their staff members, although naturally not every staff member has had the staying power of its two remarkable leaders.

Would the Center continue to function as it does in the absence of the Sisters? While it is almost unthinkable to imagine CFL without its creators and leaders, the *idea* of this mixture of localism, community process, and clinical social work transcends its Sunset Park inventors and does offer a significant model.

What would have happened if the Sisters had tried to implement this model in a locale that was less congenial to their attempt than Sunset Park? Might the model have failed elsewhere? To put the same question another way: What factors are needed in a community environment to make possible the kind of success that the Sisters have implemented through the Center? A CFL staff member answered this question by saying that this kind of model works well in a congested, transient immigrant neighborhood like Sunset Park, where

there are few resources, but where people do know each other, are neighborly, and value the continuity of family life.

Another possible answer is that the Center's particular combination of clinical insight and practical and flexible willingness to help people in the most direct fashion works best in communities that are neither already so devastated and alienated that it is too late, nor so populous and organized that the informal, intensely personal character of the Center's approach can no longer be sustained.

Can the CFL model be replicated? An effort to produce an exact copy of the Center is probably infeasible as well as unwise. But it is almost certainly possible to create service agencies or modify the practices of existing agencies so that they resemble the Center in overall style and orientation. There is, of course, no "cookbook" method for producing these results. However, the following aspects of the Center's approach, all of which seem to reinforce one another, appear to be the most critical elements in forging the Center's identity:

1. Integrated Family Services: A distinctive aspect of the Center is that it provides a broad spectrum of services in a family and community context. Treatment at CFL is individualized, flexible, and practical. It rests upon a sound, professional, clinical basis that it adapts to its own clientele's practical needs. What is offered is an unusual combination of clinical social work and what Sister Mary Paul calls "social provision" — practical assistance ranging from emergency help to employment programs. Integrating services requires expertise and clarity of purpose and scope, as well as a highly trained staff. While it may not be easily duplicated, it is this specific amalgam that deserves greater support in the field of community human services.

It must be recognized that an even fuller integration of community services could include linkages of economic development and housing development, as well as health care and social services. In this sense, CFL is not a comprehensive "intermediary institution" in its community, but it is a major fulcrum for community development. In Sunset Park, as in many communities, a greater integration of all these efforts would no doubt be beneficial.

2. The "Settlement House" Character of the Center: Being open seven days a week, with the directors living on site, gives a special vitality and effectiveness to the organization. The leaders' full-time dedication, a characteristic of early settlement houses, need not require that they be members of a religious order. And just as these early settlement houses proved so effective with new immigrants and in poor communities in the first years of this century, many aspects of the model are worthy of support and replication now.

3. Community Connections: The Center's work is based on its continuing close cultivation of ties with neighborhood agencies and groups. It serves as the hub of a wheel of information, referral, and services for poor people. Many of its clients live within walking distance, and its services are closely promoted through word of mouth and highly personal networking within the community. This function is informal, continuing, and incremental.

What is especially distinctive is CFL's extensive collaboration with a key local institution, the public schools, a tie that, despite its problems, gives specific meaning to the idea of community schools and is worthy of imitation.

4. Size: The Center is a nonbureaucratic service organization whose growth is both dictated and limited by a determination to remain consistent to its basic mission. CFL offers a broad range of linked in-house services for families and children, while resisting expansion into areas covered by other agencies, such as housing or economic development. CFL's growth has been centered on its basic social work orientation, and it responds to community needs only within this specific framework. It is one of the largest organizations in Sunset Park, but from a citywide perspective it remains a middle-sized service provider.

5. Easy Admission for Clients: The combination of free, variously scheduled, open-enrollment programs and flexible criteria for services employed by the Center is an approach worthy of additional public and private support.

6. Funding Policy: The Center's continuing effort to balance its need for public funding with its unwillingness to accept labels for its clients is worthy of careful further debate. The Center and its directors have been successful in maintaining public support, respect, and accountability and, at the same time,

their independence. Government provision of uncategorized funding streams to agencies that meet performance standards, rather than apportioning funding by problem category, may offer superior results.

7. Staff Character and Training: There appears to be a relatively low turnover rate among CFL staff, and it is worth noting that a high proportion of the professional staff live in the neighborhood or nearby. Despite what seems to be a higher than average caseload, the Center's caseworkers, with their comprehensive overview of a family's needs and program enrollments, know where to find what is needed both within CFL and within the community. The overview also enables them to see the progress and results of their efforts even in the case of the most troubled families.

The long-term linkages that the Center maintains with graduate students in social work schools have proven fruitful in developing staff. The CFL professional staff assignment method, which places caseworkers in continuing contact with their multiproblem client families and which requires these staff members to be able to cut across the spectrum of problems and services and to tailor specific help as needed, is very demanding, requiring intensive training and support, but the method appears to be extremely useful.

8. Administrative Structure: The administrative support offered by St. Christopher-Ottolie to CFL, in which the parent organization supplies essential administrative services but permits the independence and flexibility of the agency in its local setting is unusual and may serve as a model. The implication may be that large existing organizations should seek to establish independent, community-based satellite programs that benefit from the lessons of the Center for Family Life.

As the Center continues to evolve, and as the need grows more urgent for genuine neighborhood-based social service initiatives in New York City, ways must be found to realize the often-cited goal of offering comprehensive integrated services in diverse ways to differing communities. The combination of professionalism and practicality manifested over the last 14 years in the accomplishments and the leadership of the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, may point the way.

Endnotes

1. Technically, the Center serves all of Community District 7, which comprises primarily Sunset Park and another smaller neighborhood, Windsor Terrace. In practice, virtually all families served by the Center — except for those served by the CFL Employment Program, which accepts clients from all parts of Brooklyn — are from Sunset Park.
2. Center for Family Life, New York State Homeless Housing Assistance Program Grant Application, 1983.
3. Center for Family Life "Progress Report," July 1991, p. 3.
4. Center for Family Life "Progress Report," July 1991, p. 5.
5. Brenda G. McGowan, with Alfred J. Kahn and Sheila B. Kameron, *Social Services for Children, Youth and Families: The New York City Study* (New York: Columbia University School of Social Work, June 1990).
6. Brenda G. McGowan and Emily Stutz, "Children in Foster Care," in Alex Gitterman, ed., *Handbook of Social Services for Vulnerable Populations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
7. McGowan, 1990, p. 195.
8. McGowan, 1990, pp. 216-17.
9. *Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage*, (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 276.
10. Robert J. Walsh, "Creating a Unique Identity for a Community Hospital: A Community-Relations Case Study." unpublished paper, September 1987, p. 4.
11. Toby Sanchez, "The Sunset Park Profile," Brooklyn in Touch Information Center, 1989, p. 30. The population of Community District 7 in 1980 (including Windsor Terrace) was 98,600.
12. Louis Winnick, *New People in Old Neighborhoods* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990), pp. 93-94.
13. *New York Times*, December 8, 1978.
14. Winnick, 1990, p. 96.
15. Sanchez, 1989, p. 55.
16. New York City Department of City Planning, "Community District Statistics: A Portrait of New York City from the 1980 Census," 1984.
17. Winnick, 1990, p. 115.
18. *Newsday* interview, December 24, 1990.
19. Sister Mary Paul, letter to the author, January 5, 1991.
20. *Newsday* interview, December 24, 1990.
21. Center for Family Life "Progress Report," July 1991, p. 5.
22. Schorr, 1988, p. 178.
23. Center for Family Life "Progress Report," July 1991, p. 49.
24. See the discussion of Project Giant Step facilities and day care in Sunset Park in Agenda for Children Tomorrow (ACT), "Three Public Policy Issues in Perspective: A Report to the

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- Mayor," January 1990.
25. Center for Family Life "Progress Report," July 1991, p. 89.
 26. Center for Family Life "Progress Report," July 1991, p. 89.
 27. Center for Family Life, form letter for prospective employers, May 1990.
 28. All data about Sunset Park schools are drawn from the Fall 1990 New York City Board of Education citywide profile and from District 15 individual school profiles, and for P.S. 314, from the Fall 1990 District 20 school profile.
 29. Center for Family Life "Progress Report," July 1991, p. 56.
 30. Later transferred to P.S. 169 because of lack of space and facilities at P.S. 172.
 31. Center for Family Life "Progress Report," July 1990, pp. 47-48.
 32. Center for Family Life "Progress Report," July 1991, p. 99.
 33. Steve Lerner, *The Geography of Foster Care: Keeping the Children in the Neighborhood* (New York: February 1990) Foundation for Child Development; McGowan and Stutz, 1990, pp. 382-413; McGowan, 1990, pp. 112-28.
 34. "The Mayor's Management Report," February 1992, p. 453.
 35. Sister Mary Paul, memorandum, January 1991.
 36. See, for example, McGowan, 1990, p. 19.
 37. "The Mayor's Management Report," February 1992. The caseload figure of 14.1 families is the actual average for 1991. HRA would like to increase the caseload to 16 families per worker for FY 1993.
 38. Center for Family Life "Progress Report," July 1991, pp. 17-18.
 39. New York City Department of City Planning. "Annual Report on Social Indicators," 1990.
 40. Michael Stegman, "Housing and Vacancy Report: New York City, 1987," Department of Housing, Preservation and Development, 1988, pp. 156-157; and Buckhurst Fish Hutton Katz, "Sunset Park Waterfront," Sunset Park Restoration Committee, October 1991, p. 5. 1990 U.S. Census data, as reported in *New York Newsday*, May 10, 1992, show some differences: Community District 7 has a 1989 median household income of \$26,877, slightly higher than Brooklyn's at \$25,684, and lower than New York City's at \$29,823. The 1989 percentage of people living in poverty in Community District 7 is 23.4 percent, slightly above Brooklyn's 22.7 percent level and well above the city's level of 19.3 percent.
 41. New York City Department of Health, "Community Board Vital Statistics," 1990. In 1989, the Community District 7 infant mortality rate was 11.9 per 1,000 live births. For Brooklyn, it was 14.8 and for New York City 13.3.
 42. Raymond J. Toledo, "Substance Abuse Activity in the Sunset Park Region of Brooklyn: An Observational Study," New York State Division of Substance Abuse Services, 1988, p. 11.
 43. Letter to the author, May 14, 1991.
 44. No new school construction has started in Sunset Park. Each year the city's capital budget

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- lists designated funds for a new school in the neighborhood, but there is still no definite starting date and no final agreement on a site.
45. Buckhurst Fish Hutton Katz, 1991.
 46. South West Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation, memorandum on monthly statistical reports, 1989-90. .
 47. Center for Family Life "Progress Report," July 1991. p. 89.
 48. "Assessing Community Problems: A United Way of New York City Survey," draft report, 1988.
 49. Winnick, 1990. pp. 170-71.
 50. Interview with Jose Vega, executive director. Fifth Avenue Merchants Association. April 1991.
 51. Winnick, 1990, p. 16, 191.
 52. Discussions at Human Services Cabinet, Community District 7.
 53. Interview with Carmen Belle, January 1991.
 54. Interview, January 1991.
 55. Letter from Commissioner Barbara J. Sabol, August 22, 1991.
 56. McGowan, 1990. pp. 126-27.

Table 1

Poverty Indicators:
Sunset Park Elementary Schools and New York City
(As percentage of total number of students enrolled) 1989-1990 School Year

	Family Incomes Below Poverty Line	Eligible For Chapter 1 Services	Eligible for Free Reduced Cost Lunch
P.S. 1	66	53	97
P.S. 94	57	43	90
P.S. 169	63	52	84
P.S. 172	89	26	89
P.S. 314	66	61	84
Citywide	45	41	72

Source: New York City Board of Education, Citywide Profile, Fall 1990

Note: All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 2

Ethnic Distribution of Students
 Sunset Park Elementary Schools and New York City
 Percentage of Total Number of Students Enrolled 1989-1990 School Year

	SCHOOLS					
	P.S. 1	P.S. 94	P.S. 169	P.S. 172	P.S. 314	Citywide
Asian	2.5	6.3	8.5	3.3	8.7	7.3
Hispanic	92.7	82.2	79.0	77.0	85.6	36.7
Black	3.0	2.9	2.2	2.8	2.8	36.6
White	1.8	8.5	10.3	16.9	2.9	19.3
Native American	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1
Total Enrollment	1184	1592	1606	675	1478	478,783

Source: New York City Board of Education, Citywide Profile, Fall 1990

Note: All percentages have been rounded to the nearest tenth.

Table 3

Students with Limited English Proficiency
Sunset Park Elementary Schools and New York City
(As percentage of total number of students enrolled)

1986-1990

	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90
P.S. 1	25	22	23	19
P.S. 94	17	20	17	20
P.S. 169	13	19	22	24
P.S. 172	13	12	12	16
P.S. 314	50	45	40	36
Citywide	13	13	13	13

Source: New York City Board of Education, Citywide Profile, Fall 1990

Note: All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 4**Race and Ethnicity of Sunset Park Residents in Selected Census Tracts
Percentage of Total Population**

	CENSUS TRACT					
	74	76	78	82	92	98
White	12.6	15.2	9.7	14.6	24.1	14.5
Black	2.6	2.7	4.8	2.7	6.7	3.6
Hispanic	69.4	72.9	79.2	76.6	48	71.2
Asian	15.2	8.2	5.8	5.7	20.5	9.3
Total Population	4,178	3,596	4,948	3,563	4,190	4,996

Source: 1990 Census, New York City Department of City Planning, June 10, 1991

Note: All percentages have been rounded to the nearest tenth.

Table 5

Population by Race and Hispanic Origin:
 New York City, Brooklyn, and Community District 7 1990

	New York City		Brooklyn		Community District 7	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Population	7,322,564	100	2,300,664	100	102,253	100
White Non-Hispanic	3,163,125	43.1	923,229	40.1	34,416	33.5
Black Non-Hispanic	1,847,049	25.2	797,802	34.6	4,082	3.9
Hispanic Origin	1,783,511	24.3	462,411	20	52,734	51.4
Asian, Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic	489,851	6.6	106,022	4.6	10,691	10.4
Other	39,028	.5	11,200	.5	630	.6

Source: 1990 Census, Department of City Planning, June 10, 1991
 Note: All percentages have been rounded to the nearest tenth.

Table 6

Population Change by Race and Hispanic Origin
Brooklyn Community District 7

1980-1990

	1980	1990	Number Change	Percent Change
Total Population	98,564	102,253	3,989	4.0
White Non-Hispanic	46,218	34,416	-11,802	-25.5
Black Non-Hispanic	2,377	4,082	1,705	41.7
Hispanic	45,868	52,734	6,866	14.9
Asian, Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic	3,601	10,691	7,090	196.9
Other	500	630	130	116.9

Source: 1990 Census, Department of City Planning, June 10, 1991

Note: All percentages have been rounded to the nearest tenth.

Table 7

Percentage of Population Receiving Income Support
Community District 7 and Brooklyn 1990

	Community District 7	Brooklyn
Public Assistance (AFDC, Home Relief)	17,302	314,398
Supplemental Security Income	3,429	79,561
Medicaid Only	4,864	106,078
Total Persons Assisted	25,595	500,037
Percentage of Population	25	21.7

Source: *Community District Needs: 1993*. City of New York, 1991.

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