

Social Planning in Houston: The Council of Social Agencies, 1928-1976

John Davidson and Robert Fisher

Houston has long held a reputation for its deliberate lack of planning and for valuing private initiative over public control. This reputation would lead many people to believe that social planning and public intervention on behalf of the poor is anathema here. But social planning actually has had a long, if neglected, history in the Bayou City. Under various names, a social planning agency that was organized by and affiliated with the Community Chest operated from 1928 until 1976, when it was absorbed by its successor, the United Fund, and thus ceased to be a separate planning entity. The agency conducted research on social conditions in Houston, was an advocate for the city's poor and powerless, and was instrumental in the implementation of many new services during its 48-year lifespan. Originally called the Council of Social Agencies, the organization was subsequently renamed the Community Council of Houston and Harris County, and then the Community Welfare Planning Association. Under all its names, the agency had a lasting impact on the city, playing a role in the formation of such institutions as Children's Protective Services, the juvenile court system, the Harris County Hospital District, the Child Care Council of Greater Houston, Crisis Hotline, the city's Emergency Medical Services, and even the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Houston.

From its inception through the early 1960s, the Council gained legitimacy and respect, eventually operating nearly autonomously from its parent fundraising organization. Ironically, it appears that this near-

John Davidson, a social worker in practice with Walker Counseling Associates, researched and wrote the original draft of this article while completing his MSW degree at the University of Houston. Robert Fisher, Professor of Social Work at the University of Houston, helped with the rewrite.

autonomy, coupled with the Council's progressive activities during the reactionary 1950s and turbulent 1960s, led to its demise as a separate entity. While opinions and memories often differ sharply, that demise appears to be as much an example of a power struggle between the Council and the United Fund—between so-called progressive planners and the city's business establishment—as it was a result of the changing times that gave birth to new independent agencies that assumed their own planning responsibilities.

Council of Social Agencies

In the prosperity of 1928, Community Chest trustees followed a national Chest trend and established a local voluntary Council of Social Agencies. The rationale was

that the moment has arrived for a general advance in Houston's social work. This is so distinctly the case that [the Community Chest trustees] regard the next campaign and year of operation as critical...It is the experience of similar organizations of long standing elsewhere that after a period of years on the same general plane, the moment comes when the Chest and all its agencies have to be lifted to a new level, else demoralization and decay result. Houston has grown to the point where requirements are entirely out of proportion to facilities.¹

The Council of Social Agencies included not only representatives of Chest-supported agencies but also representatives from public welfare and health organizations, as well as representatives of private organizations not receiving Community Chest funding. "It thus becomes a group representative of the whole community in the field of welfare, which by concerted study and deliberation will assist in the planning and promotion of future activities in the department of civic effort."²

The purpose of the Council of Social Agencies was to serve as "an instrument of common study and thought leading to a program of common endeavor." By 1930, sections were established to deal with the problems of case work, health, and leisure time activities. The Council initiated studies to clarify the needs of the city's underprivileged, in order to make recommendations "for the guidance of the Chest, of public departments and voluntary associations. This method of stimulating thought and of focusing many points of view can be expected to make a contribution of the highest importance to the soundness, comprehensiveness and future effectiveness of the social work program."

As the Community Chest noted in 1930:

Houston is far behind most cities of its class in the equalization of the social work burden as between tax support and support by voluntary contributors. There are areas of social work which general practice

has placed in the jurisdiction of public authorities dependent for support upon taxation. In general, the field of remedial dependency is best occupied by the voluntary agency, while permanent dependency, preservation and care of health, and the provision of recreational facilities fall upon taxation and become the responsibility of the public administration.³

As the Council became more of a research and policy arm of the Community Chest, it also became semi-autonomous. On May 24, 1938, the Community Chest filed a new constitution and by-laws, making the Council of Social Agencies a separate entity from the Chest but operating under the same constitution and by-laws. This action formalized the previously informal relationship between the two entities.⁴ The Council had hired its first staff in 1937, operating on an allocation of \$1,887 from the Community Chest.⁵ Throughout the 1940s the Council's influence grew, so that by 1947 it was producing all of the Community Chest's agency budget analyses and allocation recommendations, along with social research and community planning. Council funding from the Chest leaped from \$13,627 in 1942 to \$45,169 in 1945.⁶ Membership in the council included 75 private and tax-supported agencies and 27 "cooperating" agencies. Three hundred fifty-eight persons served on Council committees.⁷

By this time, the Council was heavily involved in social planning research. It had developed from the need of local private and public agencies to have "a voluntary association...to study community conditions, to compile material to be used in social planning, and to help to define and to clarify inter-agency relations."⁸ Council studies in the 1940s focused on issues the Council would deal with repeatedly throughout its existence—services for African Americans, juvenile delinquency, child welfare, and day care. Major studies and actions conducted during the decade included:

- "Health and Welfare Resources for Negroes in Houston (1942)." The study said that African Americans comprised 22 percent of the Houston population. Tuberculosis was 3.7 times higher for African Americans than for whites, and the infant mortality rate among African Americans was 8.6 percent. There was no provision for delinquent African-American girls in Houston, and there was a serious need for community centers in African-American sections of the city. Recommendations included establishment of an institution for delinquent African-American girls, the establishment of play spaces in congested city neighborhoods, increased recreational services, establishment of community centers and settlement houses in African-American neigh-

borhoods (a frequent Council recommendation throughout the years), and the provision of day care for working African-American mothers.⁹

- "Aid to Dependent Children (1943)." The Council noted that an Aid to Dependent Children program had been established by the 1937 state legislature with no allocation to fund the program. The Council recommended a \$1.5 million state allocation for the program in Harris County, and \$169,000 annually to administer the program.¹⁰

- "The Houston Delinquent in His Community Setting (1945)." The study detailed the interrelatedness of delinquency with poverty, divorce, "sexy and crime-filled movies," broken homes, working mothers, alcoholism, lax law enforcement, bad housing, automobiles, heredity, and neuroses. The Council recommended individual treatment for juvenile delinquents, along with social measures related to a person's "rights to a healthy body, a sound mind, and an undamaged personality."¹¹ The Council also lobbied the state legislature for funds to build a Training School for Delinquent Negro Girls.¹²

- The Council conducted a comprehensive study of the community's day care shortage and brought the Julia C. Hester House into the Community Chest for day care "for colored children." The Council also funded a day care program at Ripley House. A comprehensive child welfare study was conducted as well, and one of the Council's recommendations was for the community to provide tax-supported agencies to deal with child welfare, rather than subsidizing private agencies with tax funds.¹³ The Council worked with health agencies to compile statistics on all persons who had contracted a venereal disease in Harris County in 1944.¹⁴

Non-Chest participating agencies that were members of the Council of Social Agencies in 1945 and which provided expertise for Council studies included Bayland Home for Boys (an orphanage), Bureau of Old Age and Survivor's Insurance (the state Social Security agency), Mary Burnett School for Girls (an orphanage), Catholic Action League, Harris County Home for the Aged, Harris County Probation Department, Hermann Hospital, Houston-Harris County Board of Public Welfare, Houston Health Department, Houston Housing Authority, Houston Parks and Recreation Department, Houston Police Department's Crime Prevention Division (the juvenile delinquency division), Jefferson Davis Hospital, Jewish Community Council, Junior League, Maternal Health Center (Planned Parenthood's forerunner), M.D. Anderson Hospital, Methodist Hospital, State Board of Public Welfare, and Wesley Community House, among others.¹⁵

Community Council

The Council of Social Agencies was renamed the Community Council of Houston and Harris County on January 30, 1947. It was a year of change, as William Ryan, chairman of the board, died and Irene Farnham Conrad, executive secretary for nine years, resigned.¹⁶ Its emphases remained largely the same, however. The Community Council began to publish a newsletter called *Facts*, which reported statistics on such issues as economic assistance to families in Harris County, camping facilities in the county, adoption, growing social needs outstripping resources (an issue that was raised in Community Chest/United Fund/United Way publications from the 1920s to the 1990s), and the problems of aging. Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, the Community Council continued conducting community social planning, maintaining its emphasis on child welfare, poverty, African-American programs, and problems of the elderly, gaining acceptance and stature in the community.

The Council's involvement in day care won it national recognition, as it was nominated for the Lane Bryant Award for volunteer service in 1956 for training volunteers to perform precicensing investigations of day care applicants for the Texas Department of Public Welfare, a program the Council had conducted for two years.¹⁷ Child care was such a longtime focus of Council involvement and influence that it was conducting precicensing needs assessments for child care facilities for the Texas Department of Public Welfare through the 1960s.¹⁸

Between 1950 and 1952, the Council conducted a three-year "Blueprint for Health" study, finding a capacity of 1,595 beds for the mentally ill in Harris County medical facilities, with an estimated 3,500 people needing hospitalized psychiatric care. The study cited "meager" outpatient services and no mental health facilities for the aged. The Council recommended the creation of a city-county-state unit for mental health at the Texas Medical Center and encouraged the establishment of additional mental health clinics. The study also contended that hospitals should establish outpatient clinics for mental health services.¹⁹ A mental health facility at the Texas Medical Center eventually opened under the name TRIMS (Texas Research Institute for Mental Sciences) and functioned as the city's primary drug abuse treatment clinic, then methadone clinic, eventually replaced by Quentin Mease Hospital on North MacGregor.²⁰

The Council was also moving into new and more controversial areas. It created its own internal air and water pollution committee, the

goal of which was to encourage industry to deal voluntarily with its own pollution problems. Testimony to the audacity of establishing such a committee is found in the fact that a few years later, in the late 1950s, the Houston Chamber of Commerce sponsored an air pollution study that found that "Houston had no air pollution problems that either affected the entire community or that persisted in specific areas over prolonged periods of time." The Chamber had thereby whitewashed the serious air pollution problem.²¹

Even more controversial was a recommendation made by the Council in 1959 that reignited a very public disagreement with the Houston school board. Council recommended that the Houston Independent School District take over operation of the free school lunch program, expanding it by utilizing newly available federal funds. The United Fund (the new name of the Community Chest as of 1952) and the school board opposed the move, but the issue was in the public domain, and it haunted the Council for the next eight years. The disagreement was actually 11 years old by 1959. The Council had pulled Community Chest funding from the free school lunch program in 1948, believing the program could be run more effectively by utilizing federal money available through the National School Lunch Act. The school board rejected that proposal though, fearing desegregation and attacking federal aid to education as a creator of "decayed societies." The school board said that accepting federal money threatened "home rule of schools" and would mean that the federal government would be running the school cafeterias first and then the schools completely. Rather than have indigent children going without school lunches, the Council relented and reinstated Community Chest funding for free school lunches.²²

Child welfare issues were prominent in the Council's work throughout the 1950s. The Council was credited with creating a "children's" (juvenile) court in Harris County, the establishment of a Court of Domestic Relations, and the Houston Speech and Hearing Clinic. The latter two developments stemmed from the Council's comprehensive child welfare study begun in 1958, financed by a \$20,000 grant from the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health and a \$10,000 grant from the Walter Benona Sharp Memorial Foundation of Houston. The Council sponsored an annual Child Welfare Week in Houston to draw attention to child welfare issues. By 1962, the Council's study was completed, and the Council found that the most prevalent problem facing children was that of familial poverty. The study found that adequate services were provided by agencies in only 15 to 40 percent of the esti-

mated 50,000 child welfare cases being handled annually in Harris County. Basic inadequacies existed in the lack of appropriate diagnoses, treatment for behavioral problems, day care, and inter-agency cooperation. The Council said the child welfare system was suffering from insufficient funding, insufficient staffs, and inadequate physical facilities (contentions still being made today by child welfare advocates). The Council urged the creation of a comprehensive state-local agency for child welfare separate from Juvenile Probation, and over the following four years Children's Protective Services was split off and established as a separate entity.²³

The Council turned its attention to the elderly in 1961, when the Council received a \$52,900 grant from the Ford Foundation as one of five community agencies in the nation chosen to study the problems of aging in America. The Council felt that the 67,000 elderly in Harris County should receive help locally before turning to the state or federal government for assistance—a philosophical stance contradictory to Council actions in succeeding years. The Council urged local churches, social agencies, service clubs, and other organizations to review their programs and add services for the elderly. Specifically, the Council advocated legislation to require sons and daughters to contribute to the support of aged parents, increasing the state old age assistance grants from the current level of \$67 per month, the consideration of higher retirement ages by industry, involvement of the Texas Employment Commission with the problems of the elderly, the establishment of homemaker and Meals on Wheels services, and legislation to enact higher standards for nursing homes.²⁴

Foundations were not the only source of outside grant monies for the Council. In 1962, the Community Council and the University of Houston Psychology Department shared a \$260,582 federal grant to study juvenile delinquency as part of the Youth Crime, Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Offenders Control Act of 1961.²⁵ This study set the stage for the Council to become active in pursuing federal funds for impoverished areas of the city. Buoyed by its success with obtaining independent funding, which granted the agency a certain autonomy, the Council took local funding entities to task in 1963. The Council studied the 23 most populous urban areas in the country, compiling statistics on the amount of money each area allocated for health, welfare, and recreational services. It found that Houston ranked twenty-second among the 23 most populous U.S. cities. "The per capita expenditure here in 1960, the year studied by the Community Council of Houston and Harris County, was \$58, compared with an average ex-

penditure of \$90.80 among the cities studied." The study found Houston inadequate in aid to dependent children, aid to the permanently disabled, care of the elderly, domestic relations, day care, institutions for delinquent children, hospitals for the chronically ill, and mental hospitals. Houston lacked day care facilities for mentally retarded children as well as a residential center for emotionally disturbed children, facilities that the other 22 cities all had.²⁶ The Council wanted action—and federal funds could boost services to an appropriate level.

Growing Federal Involvement

The 1960s would be turbulent and controversial times, for the Community Council as well as for the nation as a whole. Under President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, the federal government began pumping tax money into local service agencies around the country, becoming deeply involved in education and race relations. The Council seized the opportunity and strengthened itself in the process. It formed a committee to help local agencies apply for federal money and to lead the local War on Poverty. The 60-member committee, appointed by Council members such as Mayor Louie Welch and County Judge Bill Elliott, benefited from local government proclamations that applications for federal money for community-wide programs must be funneled through the committee.²⁷ In some instances, the Council helped secure federal funding for local programs and agencies and passed that funding directly to local agencies without involving the United Fund, which became a source of disagreement between the Council and the Fund.²⁸ The government and the United Fund had basically become involved in the same type of business, somewhat diminishing the Fund's paternalistic role with local social service agencies. However, the Fund's main concern with agencies pursuing public money was that they not expect the Fund to pick up any shortfall once the public funding dried up.²⁹

The Council decided that the emphasis of the local effort should be on job training for underprivileged youth and also announced an additional goal of putting in sewers, city water, and drainage in the Acres Homes neighborhood, an African-American community. A Council study had demonstrated that 20 percent of Houston's population was living in poverty (less than a \$3,000 annual household income), and it noted a significant correlation between poverty and crime. A study on the prevalence of divorce as a contributing factor toward an increase in child welfare needs also focused on low-income minority families.³⁰

Although the Council continued its community planning role, it

has been argued that planning took a lesser priority to involvement in the War on Poverty.³¹ The 1965 Council community needs assessment, intended to guide United Fund allocations and agency budgeting, reflected War on Poverty emphases, listing the top community needs as: 1) additional services for unmarried mothers and their children, especially those from minority groups; 2) the creation of social services departments at Ben Taub and Jefferson Davis public hospitals; 3) a major expansion of mental health services for adolescents; 4) homemaker services for the sick and elderly; and 5) more day care services.³² The War on Poverty philosophies, however, frequently corresponded with areas of Council involvement. For example, the federal government made money available for juvenile delinquency demonstration grants. The Council saw no existing agencies that could accommodate the federal program, so the Council started its own agency, Houston Action for Youth. By 1963, it was a fully autonomous agency, receiving federal funds. A Council staff member became the new agency's first executive director.³³

Frank Cleaver, who served as president of the local United Fund/United Way from 1966 to 1985, said that the heavy influx of federal dollars "effectively ended community planning since the federal government was determining community needs and pumping massive sums of money into agencies. Once those bucks came in the door, [local] planning went out the window. It changed everything."³⁴ According to social worker Ron Rea, a Council staff member, "At that time, we witnessed a new phenomenon—that of special interest planning. It outdid the need for broad community planning. Each special interest began doing its own planning, and single-issue interests superseded the broad community interests. For example, with the emergence of federal mental health funds, public mental health agencies had money and constructed their own facilities and funded operations without regard to community planning."³⁵ Cleaver and Malcolm Host, former director of Neighborhood Centers, agreed that the fragmentation of planning was what caused the Council's ultimate demise.³⁶

The mid-1960s launched the creation and growth of numerous local planning entities, each taking on some aspect of the type of work for which the Council formerly had primary responsibility. Examples of such planning organizations included the City of Houston Planning Department, Harris County Community Action Association, the Model Cities program, the Houston-Galveston Area Council, the Rice Center, and the Comprehensive Services Program (CSP) at Neighborhood Centers. The Community Council helped facilitate discussions with

state officials that led to the creation of the CSP. Agencies such as Neighborhood Centers were in the vanguard in directly obtaining government funding, and such agencies began hiring their own planners to write grant proposals and to comply with stringent government fiscal accountability and program evaluation requirements. Some of the Council's most talented planners moved to the new planning entities. Planning groups continued to proliferate into the early 1970s, including the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority of Harris County, the Southwest Center for Urban Research, which researched the delivery of social services in the community, and the Greater Houston Hospital Council. Existing agencies added planning functions, such as the Houston Chamber of Commerce, which began conducting demographic analyses and population growth projections. Community needs and resources were changing dramatically, and planning was becoming increasingly decentralized and specialized.³⁷

Years of Friction

The Council's direction during the 1960s was not popular among those involved with the United Fund.³⁸ The fact of friction between the two agencies is indisputable. What is disputable is the nature of the friction: whether it was polite professional disagreements about philosophy³⁹ or a not-so-subtle struggle over control.⁴⁰ The city's traditional, conservative leadership viewed federal programs as a threat, an attempt to reduce their power and impose socialist and left-wing views on local communities. The extent to which the United Fund's board was composed of conservatives or progressives is open to debate. Cleaver firmly states that the board never represented the community's power elite in these years, and Host maintains that many who served on the board were progressive, but Imogen Papadopoulos, who served as president of the planning agency's board at the time of its merger with the United Fund in 1976, says that the so-called "progressive" members of the Fund's board were stifled in their attempts to act progressively by the conservative majority of the board. Irving Lauber, former planning director of the Council and now president of the United Way in Hawaii, remembers that "The game was about control. The entire seven years I was there, the United Fund was trying to put us out of business." Cleaver acknowledges that the Fund disapproved of some of the Council's positions, but he and Host vehemently deny a hypothesis of a conservative conspiracy involving the Fund to dismantle the planning agency. Both men characterized the conflict as being philosophical, maintaining that the planning agency was out of touch with

changing times and that its demise was the outcome of the growth of decentralized planning.⁴¹ It is likely the friction and disagreements took both forms, and that the Council was a victim both of changing times and of the Fund's opposition to some of its actions.

The Council apparently first publicly disagreed with the Fund over the free school lunch program. Former Community Council President of the Board Curtis O. Johnson (who was allied with the United Fund before he became involved with the Council) said:

[The Council was] lobbying hard for HISD to take over the free school lunch program using War on Poverty money. There was reluctance on the school board's part, and the Fund was reluctant too. What made perfect sense to the Council turned into a major skirmish. It was the first really major feud between the Council and the Fund, and relations never really healed after the Council eventually won that initial skirmish and got HISD to agree to take over the free lunch program.⁴²

The late Harris County Commissioner Bob Eckels, an ardent conservative, was on the school board at that time and he was the major stumbling block in the move to get the school board to assume responsibility for the free school lunch program.⁴³ Unlike 1948, however, the Council did not give in. It took the issue to the press, and HISD eventually agreed to take over funding of the program, using federal funds to enable an additional 23,000 children to participate in the program.⁴⁴

Shortly after the issue of the free school lunch program was resolved, the Council publicly recommended that the United Fund cut off funding to two agencies the Council said were providing inadequate services—the Volunteers of America school clothing center (still being funded by the United Way) and the Salesmanship Club Camp (funded by the United Way until 1987-88, when it merged with the YMCA).⁴⁵ In the early and mid-1960s, the Community Council was still staffing the Fund's agency budgeting and allocations process. Cleaver said that the Council was dividing United Fund agencies. "With the Council doing the allocations, the favored agencies [of the Council] got rewarded, while the agencies whose allegiances were more to the Fund got their allocations cut."⁴⁶ At the time, some United Fund agencies viewed the Council staff as carrying out a surveillance and policing role, trying to dig up dirt on unfavored agencies.⁴⁷

Despite differences between Council and Fund, the Council budget continued to grow. From a Fund allocation of \$76,215 in 1952, the Fund-supplied part of the Council's budget grew to \$99,490 by 1955, \$140,000 in 1961, \$181,868 in 1965, \$245,601 in 1968, and \$278,335 in 1970 before the Fund began cutting the Council's allocations.⁴⁸ Obviously, the Council had a good deal of support among United Fund

agencies and certain segments of the community at large. The Council's influence was strong, and it remained active in many areas besides those connected with the War on Poverty. For example, the Council maintained its close working relationship with the community's public health officials and leaned on its close ties to elected officials to establish the Emergency Medical Service ambulance system in the city's fire department. Prior to the 1960s, ambulance services in Houston, as in other cities, were provided by local mortuaries. A comprehensive health study conducted by the Council led to the formation of the Harris County Hospital District.⁴⁹

Concrete evidence of the growing distance between the Fund and Council came in 1965 when the Council conducted a self-study to clarify its mission in the community. Among the reasons for the study that were cited in the final report of April 4, 1966, were "increasing differences of opinion among Council board members, agencies, the United Fund, and the general community about the proper role and activity of the Council," as well as "development of new planning and service programs that by-pass the Council." Findings of the self-study included a lack of community knowledge about the Council and its capabilities and a lack of "forceful leadership in health and welfare planning [by the Council] that is required in our community, especially in bringing about coordinated action to meet total community needs." Recommendations of the self-study included becoming an "action agency" in addition to being a planning agency, acting as a liaison between agencies and government at all levels, and separating structurally from the United Fund. "This would enable the Council to relate itself more effectively to long-range planning and area-wide programs that go beyond the scope of the United Fund and its participating agencies." The recommendations also called for the agency's basic financial support to still come from the United Fund, supplemented by organizational dues and foundation and government grants.⁵⁰

The dissatisfaction evident in the self-study contrasts sharply with the optimistic tone of only three years before. A 1963 brochure for the United Fund and Community Council boasted, "Interrelated and operating under the same charter, these two philanthropic organizations have specific aims and activities which are cooperative and complementary."⁵¹ The Council had a 1963 membership

of more than 180 organizations and hundreds of individual civic and professional leaders. Member groups include: 1) voluntarily supported agencies, such as the Lighthouse for the Blind and the Jewish Home for

the Aged; 2) tax-supported organizations such as the Houston Parks and Recreation Department, the State Department of Public Welfare and the Veterans Administration Hospital; and 3) civic and professional groups such as the Junior League of Houston and the Harris County Medical Society.⁵²

Goals for the Council were to monitor and develop resources to meet the community's health and welfare needs; to promote the quality and efficiency of local social programs; to coordinate the efforts of agencies meeting the community's health and welfare needs; and to work toward the elimination of conditions that cause or perpetuate social problems. To meet those lofty goals, the Council board had numerous committees. The Council staff included:

- Executive Secretary, who also served as associate director of the United Fund and secretary of the Fund budget committee
 - Director of Planning, who wrote funding proposals to the federal government on behalf of the Council and local agencies, as well as directing the Council's community planning efforts (today's United Way Community Planning Vice President)
 - Health Section, responsible for conducting community and inter-agency studies of mental health, special education, and rehabilitation services
 - Recreation/Informal Education Section, studying unmet needs, particularly in outlying areas with high rates of delinquency
 - Family and Child Care Section, studying the community's child care and child welfare services
 - Research Bureau, which maintained records on agency services, served as the information-gathering arm of the United Fund and local social service agencies, conducted studies of community social problems, reported on social conditions, provided information for community planning and assisted agency staffs with research (today's United Way Planning, Research and Evaluation Services)
 - Health and Welfare Information Service, which was an information and referral operation (today's United Way HELPLINE and Crisis Intervention of Houston)
 - Volunteer Bureau, which recruited and referred volunteers to various social service agencies (today's Volunteer Center)
 - Personnel Administration Consultation Service, which consulted with agencies on recruiting, retaining, and utilizing professional personnel
- The increasing tensions between the United Fund and the Council, however, would soon seriously affect the latter's work and existence.

Structural Study

In 1966, the same year in which the Council completed its self-study, two representatives of the United Community Funds and Councils of America came to Houston to conduct a study of the structural relationship of the United Fund and the Community Council. The report indicates that the study resulted from a joint request from the local Fund and Council, and the three basic areas addressed by the study were:

- 1) Does the present structural relationship between the Fund and Council in Houston handicap the social planning process?
- 2) What structural relationships between Fund and Council have other communities similar in size and complexity to Houston found effective?
- 3) What structural relationships would best meet the long-term needs of Houston and Harris County?⁵³

The representatives of the national organization "encountered different reactions and various shades of opinion on the desirability of complete structural separation of the United Fund and Community Council (in some instances sharply contrasting points of view.)"⁵⁴ The national representatives wrote:

The Fund should view the Community Council as a planning instrument whose area of concern must encompass the broad social needs of all people and whose study activities must be directed to the services of tax-supported as well as voluntary agencies. Therefore, even if the Council derives its main source of support from the United Fund, it should not be expected to give exclusive attention to the United Fund Budget Committee and member agency problems and needs. It must focus its activity on broad community problems, giving appropriate attention to both governmental and voluntary agency programs.⁵⁵

The report said that of 62 studies conducted by the Council over the three preceding years, 14 originated at the request of the United Fund Budget Committee, three were asked for by the United Fund Executive Committee, 12 were requested by agencies (three of which were governmental agencies), three originated from other sources, and 38 were initiated by the Council itself.

In answer to the question of whether the structural relationship between the two entities handicapped the social planning process, the two national representatives hedged, writing that they found no evidence that the structure had been used as a device by the United Fund to interfere with or dominate the Community Council's social planning function. However, they also noted several incidents where the "conservative power structure" of the United Fund acted as a psychological barrier to the Council's freedom to move into such controver-

sial areas as air and water pollution, zoning, and desegregated housing.⁵⁶ Interestingly, the latter contention is one where nearly everyone involved in either of the two organizations agrees. Cleaver acknowledged that the Fund did act as a psychological barrier to Council endeavors.⁵⁷ Lauber, who was often at odds with Cleaver, said:

The Fund, of course, tried to influence our activities. There was a constant questioning in the agency of what the Fund would think of this or that. Certainly, it had an inhibiting effect. Texans were very anti-planning, and I was there during the great boom years, when the word "planning" was like a four-letter word. From the United Fund, there was always an implied threat of no more funding if we pursued the wrong avenues of research.⁵⁸

Answering the question of what structural relationships existed between the two entities in cities of similar size to Houston, the national representatives found Houston to be like the majority of major cities in having a separate planning entity, but unique in the fact that the planning entity operated under a joint charter with the Fund. The local Community Council was advocating for complete structural autonomy, and the national representatives hedged again, asserting, "Structure is not necessarily a key factor in Council effectiveness."⁵⁹

Answering the third question of what structural relationship would best meet local needs, the national representatives found that if the United Fund and Community Council were to become completely separate entities, the two organizations could become oppositional.

Among specific recommendations made in the report were a cooperative effort with other planning service systems in the community to avoid plan duplications, and an effort to develop and influence social policy. The role of developing and influencing community social policy could be the dominant role of the Council in years to come, the report said. To do so, they found that the Council would need "greater community status and sanction" than it had at that time, hinting at a national trend of United Funds taking over the previously separate planning activities.⁶⁰

The national representatives recommended making no structural changes between the Fund and the Council, but eliminating the provision in the Fund by-laws where the Council's Executive Secretary also served as the Associate Executive Director of the Fund and secretary of the Fund Budget Committee. They also recommended transferring agency budget staffing functions from the Council to the Fund. This appears to have given the Fund the impetus to begin the dissolution of the Council.

Council Executive Secretary Joseph L. Zarefsky, on December 28,

1966, wrote an acrimonious letter to the two national representatives who conducted the study, demanding, in vain, that they change their recommendation and instead advocate for structural independence.⁶¹ The Community Council then took its case to the newspapers. H. R. Safford, chairman of the Council board, said, "Too many people think the Council is just an arm of the United Fund concerned with budgeting and overseeing expenditures." The Council staff felt that its effectiveness was being compromised by its close association with the Fund.⁶² Hard feelings between the two entities were apparent. A January 16, 1967, memorandum from United Fund President Frank Cleaver to three Fund board members detailed an attempt to block the Council's move toward structural autonomy by loading the Council board with individuals allied to the Fund.⁶³

The 1966 study appears to have been a watershed event in the relationship between the two entities, at least in terms of financial support. Over the next five years, 1967 to 1971, while the United Fund campaign collections increased 26.8 percent, funding to the Council increased by only 11.3 percent.⁶⁴

The Fund was concerned over the areas in which the Council chose to become involved.⁶⁵ So-called inflammatory research apparently deepened the Fund-Council division. A July 1968 Council report on civil rights and anti-war demonstrations in the community criticized the city, the police department, and even the Houston Independent School District for overreacting and for reacting in racially prejudiced manners.⁶⁶

In apparent response to that report, and in accord with the recommendations resulting from the 1966 site visit by two members of the national Fund, the United Fund in 1968 took back the responsibility for agency allocations from the Council and amended the by-laws to remove the Council executive secretary from the position of Associate Director of the Fund and secretary of the Fund Budget Committee. The disharmony between the two entities was evident in Fund budget committee meetings, as minutes show considerable discussion and criticism of the Council.⁶⁷ Again, specifics are missing and memories are vague, but one result of that 1968 meeting was the establishment of a Fund committee to monitor Council activities. That committee drafted an outline of responsibilities, trying to draw in the reins on the Council by limiting its duties to planning and research efforts solely on behalf of Fund agencies and other specific areas requested by the Fund.⁶⁸ It is quite clear that the Council did not heed the committee's recommendations.

Community Welfare Planning Association

As a result of the Council's disregard of the committee's recommendations, and possibly in response to the Council's July 1968 report, in 1969 there was a massive personnel turnover in the Council. Virtually the entire Council staff was dismissed. The name of the Community Council was changed to the Community Welfare Planning Association (CWPA), reflecting a Fund desire to create a new planning identity. A new president of the CWPA board was appointed, Curtis Johnson, who was quoted as saying the Council "has not had any impact on the community. It would expose a problem, but fail to propose meaningful solutions."⁶⁹ Dismissed Council employees "privately aired their dissatisfaction with the Council board, claiming it was reluctant to study and divulge the real problems of the community for fear of upsetting the sensitive civic leadership."⁷⁰ Frank Cleaver brought in a new executive secretary from the United Fund system, Ed McClure, and he brought in his own staff. Cleaver maintains that the move was an effort to preserve the separate planning agency, saying that the United Fund was facing numerous philosophical changes at the time that needed the attention of the planning agency, which, he said, was too involved with non-Fund activities to devote sufficient time to the expansion in Fund activities.⁷¹ Some Council board members, however, spoke anonymously of the new director, McClure, being hired without consultation with the board.⁷² The Council had been criticized by civic leaders for its studies—notably the report that suggested racial discrimination by the police, city, and school officials—and the housecleaning was an unmistakable message that the United Fund expected something different from its planning organization. "Some [Council] board members attacked the new approach, saying CWPA intends to concentrate on innocuous programs instead of vital problems such as poverty, racial issues, transportation and pollution."⁷³

At the time, the Fund was interested in addressing new ways to interface with Fund-supported agencies. One of the major questions the Fund was grappling with was whether "the Fund is primarily a mechanism to consolidate [fundraising] campaigns, or whether it has a broader objective in attempting to meet human needs."⁷⁴ The Fund was still struggling to determine what services and programs should receive Fund support while also receiving tax or other support. The Fund was entertaining recommendations to expand into the Freeport-Lake Jackson, Galveston, Texas City, and Baytown areas, and the focus of those deliberations appeared to be more fiscal than service-oriented, as the ma-

jority of discussion appears to have centered on U.S. Steel in Baytown adding many new employees, which could add greatly to Fund collections.⁷⁵

The Fund had a list of issues that it wanted the CWPA to study, including:

- Studying a possible unification of services to the handicapped by perhaps merging the Lighthouse for the Blind, the Center for the Retarded, and the Cerebral Palsy Treatment Center;

- Assisting with the faltering merger discussions between the Family Service Center and the Council on Alcoholism;

- Resolving funding problems with the Community Coordinated Child Care Program, a day-care planning program run by the CWPA;

- Addressing an emergency faced by the Florence Crittenton Home and Villa Maria, which had both been ordered by public health officials to improve their physical facilities;

- Evaluating whether Protestant Charities should continue as a Fund-supported agency;

- Developing a cooperative program among the community's child adoption agencies for the "hard to place" child.

In the memorandum from Fund president Frank Cleaver to CWPA board president Curtis Johnson, outlining these topics, Cleaver said, "The United Fund has been guilty in the past of trying to 'go it alone' in grappling with problems such as this, candidly, because we did not have much confidence in some of the staff direction of CWPA."⁷⁶

Debbie Elliott, who worked as research manager for the CWPA, remembers numerous informal and formal links between the CWPA and the Fund. She said the informal links were close friendships among staff members of the two entities. The formal links included loaning staff to the Fund for allocation work and providing research and data to the Fund and Fund agencies. One CWPA project she remembered vividly was compiling the first computerized Information and Referral directory in the city, which was used by Fund agencies.⁷⁷ However, although the CWPA did not turn its back on the Fund, neither did it devote its full attention to the Fund. Irving Lauber said, "We conducted a lot of research and were contracted to evaluate numerous programs—some United Fund agencies, but a lot of non-Fund agencies. Basically, we were a private, not-for-profit consulting agency."⁷⁸

CWPA Projects

The CWPA maintained its tradition of involvement in child care and child welfare under McClure:

Through CWPA efforts, Houston now has what may be the first child care council in the United States. The council, which meets federal requirements for a coordinating agency, will develop a plan for federally funded and private services for deprived children and children of working mothers. The council will access existing services, such as day care and Head Start, and consider plans for new services.⁷⁹

That council, the Community Coordinated Child Care Program, is a perfect example of the continued autonomy of the CWPA. Lauber did the grant writing to establish the program, which planned day-care-center and day-home services. The program was selected over Neighborhood Centers as the Model City day care provider in order to increase minority participation in publicly assisted day-care programs. Lauber helped the program use United Fund and Model Cities money to match state and other federal funds.⁸⁰

Early CWPA efforts under McClure also included studying high crime areas and juvenile delinquency. A CWPA study on the high number of illegitimate births, infant deaths, and poverty in the Fifth Ward included a recommendation once again for a comprehensive service center similar to Ripley House to be established in the Fifth Ward.⁸¹

"Another accomplishment is the newly formed coalition of 70 organizations making up the Harris County Committee on Drug Abuse. Its main purpose is to identify what is now being done to combat the drug problem." Lauber remembers that the Council and then the CWPA were around at the onset of the drug abuse era, and the agency was instrumental in establishing many local drug abuse projects. Mary Johnson, a CWPA staff member, said the CWPA started the DARE (Drug Abuse Reaches Everyone) program in Houston, which is not the same as the DARE program currently operating in the community. Project DARE conducted a community drug abuse study for the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority of Harris County (MHMRA) in 1972 and 1973, financed by a \$50,000 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health. Recommendations of that study were that MHMRA should establish a comprehensive drug abuse service, using the CWPA to conduct the planning necessary for the establishment of such a program. The CWPA called for drug education in local schools, and played down a law-enforcement emphasis in drug abuse, maintaining instead that alternatives to incarceration should be seriously considered. The 1973 report suggested eliminating or at least lessening criminal penalties for the private possession and use of marijuana, saying public opinion favored such a move.⁸²

Sylvia Brooks said the CWPA also originated Crisis Hotline at that

time. The service was spun off as an independent agency (Crisis Intervention of Houston) following the dissolution of the CWPA.⁸³

The Council/CWPA was also instrumental in getting the Graduate School of Social Work established at the University of Houston. The Children and Families Committee of the Council/CWPA was composed of community agencies that hired social workers. All the casework agencies had developed their own scholarship funds to attract and train social workers. According to Malcolm Host:

We were all giving money for employees to attend either the University of Texas or Our Lady of the Lake in San Antonio. We were all frustrated that there was no graduate social work program in Houston where our employees could study while continuing to work for our agencies. So, we banded together, pooled our scholarship money, which totaled approximately \$50,000, and gave it to the Council to use as leverage in getting the University of Houston to establish a Graduate School of Social Work.⁸⁴

Even with the establishment of the local school in 1968, the scholarship fund continued under the administration of the CWPA. Mary Johnson said the deal was that if a student worked in social work in the Houston area following graduation, the money did not have to be repaid. Irving Lauber said that if the student took employment away from Houston, the money was supposed to be repaid to the scholarship fund, but "that didn't always work too well." Host, who taught at the University of Houston Graduate School of Social Work for a while, said, "The scholarship fund actually ensured a tie, a bond, between the school and the community. At about the same time as the CWPA's demise, though, the Graduate School of Social Work took a shift toward private practice, and the ties between community organizations and the school were not nearly as strong as before. It was a real pity." Ron Rea said the shift in emphasis at the graduate school was not due to a conscious decision to change the school's direction, but rather the consequence of a lack at that time "of strong leadership to link graduate training and agency practice."⁸⁵

Merger with United Fund

The differences between the Fund and CWPA continued in the 1970s. The CWPA's reluctance to fully accommodate Fund research needs, as well as the reabsorption by the Fund of staff responsibility for agency allocations are reflected in the funding of the CWPA. United Fund's allocation to the CWPA fell from \$278,335 in 1970 to \$243,697 in 1971, and from \$250,255 in 1972 to \$222,722 in 1973. From 1972 to 1976,

while the United Fund campaign grew by 48.3 percent, allocations to the CWPA averaged a flat increase of 0.14 percent.⁸⁶

In 1973, Cleaver convened a special study committee to consider the Fund-CWPA working relationship. It was comprised of community volunteers and representatives of both the CWPA and the United Fund. It is apparent that the committee was put together to hasten a merger between the two entities, but that is not what happened. Rather than advocating for a merger, the committee recommended structural autonomy for the CWPA, and the planning agency became a legally separate entity on September 16, 1974, moving into separate quarters from the United Fund, but still relying on the Fund for the bulk of its operating budget. The special study committee suggested that the Fund not cut the CWPA's budget for two years following the 1974 separation of the two entities. In its report, the committee wrote that after that two-year period "The extent of future funding would depend on the excellence of program and execution."⁸⁷

Cleaver saw the move as just delaying the inevitable.

From the United Fund's point of view, the CWPA was an expensive endeavor for eggheads. The fallacy of doing community planning in that particular environment, where the United Fund was trying to meet community needs and the federal government was determining community needs, is that the nonprofit field does not respond to the marketplace, but rather to whatever funding is available. The funding actually began determining the community services that were provided, so the CWPA had outlived its usefulness. This wasn't just the case in Houston, but all over the country. Independent planning councils were all being taken over by the local United Funds. It was definitely a national trend. In 1966, when I became president of the United Fund here, we were providing 90 percent of the agencies' funding. By the time I left in 1985, we were providing only about 20 percent of the agencies' funding. A major source of the difference was government funding.⁸⁸

An analysis of the years 1983-86, the close of Cleaver's tenure, shows that of 76 agencies receiving United Way funding, 60 were also receiving government funding. Although the United Way's allocations no longer provided the majority of the agencies' funding, the government's contributions were slightly less than those of the United Way. In 1983, United Way money accounted for 29.5 percent of total agency budgets and government funding accounted for 25.3 percent, while other sources of income, such as private contributions, service fees, or insurance reimbursements, accounted for the bulk of the funding—45.2 percent. By 1986, reflecting government cuts to social service programs, United

Way funding had risen slightly to 32.1 percent of total agency budgets, while government money had dropped slightly to 23.6 percent. Other sources of income held relatively steady, comprising 44.2 percent of total agency budgets.⁸⁹

Malcolm Host said Cleaver clearly believed that the community planning process should be an in-house function of the Fund. The perceived disharmony between the two agencies could have been avoided, though, according to Lullellia Harrison, who served on the board of directors of the Community Council, the CWPA, and later the United Fund and United Way, if the two entities had taken the time to clearly define the planning agency's roles and responsibilities. That lack of clarification, she said, caused an overlapping of responsibilities and inevitable hard feelings. "You had two headstrong organizations, both believing they were doing what was right, and neither wanting to budge an inch on their philosophy. The CWPA was the weaker of the two, so it was easily absorbed by the Fund."⁹⁰

In 1976, at the end of the two-year trial period suggested by the study committee, the CWPA was dissolved into the United Fund. The CWPA and the United Fund signed an agreement whereby the Fund acquired the assets and liabilities of the CWPA and the CWPA was dissolved into the Fund. Sylvia Brooks, now head of the Houston Area Urban League, said the public reason given for the merger was cost-cutting, but today no one even maintains that pretense. Host and Cleaver suggest that the CWPA's merger with the Fund was delayed because of the Council's reluctance to see that it had not adapted to changing times and the Fund's reluctance to force the issue. Imogen Papadopoulos said, "The CWPA was getting into controversial areas—areas the Fund needed to avoid to keep getting corporate money—so it was spun out. The Fund was safe, not controversial."⁹¹

United Fund allocations for 1977 to 47 local agencies showed a funding reduction of 18.2 percent for the Lighthouse for the Blind, an agency strongly supported by the Council/CWPA throughout its history. The Florence Crittenton Home, another Council/CWPA-allied agency, saw a smaller than normal increase in 1977 and a 9.2 percent funding cut in 1978. Those were the only noticeable differences in agency funding in the two years following the dissolution of the CWPA.⁹²

Upon the merger, most aspects of the CWPA were incorporated into the United Fund. Lullellia Harrison joined the United Fund board following the merger, and she was adamant about the Fund incorporating certain aspects of the CWPA operation, especially the CWPA's information and referral services. She said information and referral

services have historically been a shortcoming in Houston.⁹³ "The Fund wanted the CWPA's information and referral services badly," Imogen Papadopoulos remembered. Papadopoulos said she was instrumental in getting the Fund to establish the PAIR (Planning, Allocations, Information and Research) section after the merger.⁹⁴

Lauber said that following the merger, planning and research functions were minimized and more emphasis was placed on public policy. Evidence of that contention is easily found, as what little had been retained of planning and research functions under Cleaver's administration was soon shelved by his successor, Betty Beene, in 1985.⁹⁵ They were not resurrected until 1990, under United Way President Bill Schwanekamp. "It's important to make a distinction between community planning versus operational planning," said CWPA staff member Rogene Calvert. "The CWPA was doing community planning. After the merger, true community planning was not done. We did operational planning for Fund agencies."⁹⁶

Today, under United Way President Judith Craven, the United Way's Community Planning Department consists of five functions: Community Planning/Leadership Convener; Public Policy; Planning, Research and Evaluation Services; Grant Development; and Constituent Relations—many of the same functional departments of the old Community Welfare Planning Association. Other CWPA functions have been absorbed by other current United Way departments such as Fund Distribution and Agency Relations, which handles the allocations process, and Community and Agency Support, which handles information referral, management assistance, service centers, and community initiatives. It is important to note, however, that compared to the CWPA's staff of approximately 25 employees in the 1960s, today's Community Planning Department consists of seven full-time employees.

* * *

Despite popular assertions that Houston is simply a "free enterprise city"—without social planning or attention to the needs of the poor and disadvantaged—the history of the Council of Social Agencies/Community Council of Houston and Harris County/Community Welfare Planning Association reveals a much more complex and accurate picture. The ultimate tensions with the United Fund and the CWPA's demise support arguments by scholars regarding Houston's conservative climate and political culture. Nevertheless, the valuable and progressive social research and advocacy on the part of the Council of

Social Agencies from 1928 to 1976 underscores a much overlooked, progressive aspect of the city's history.

NOTES

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