

THE NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS OF YONKERS

RUNYON HEIGHTS NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL, PUBLIC SCHOOL 1

Dorothy Coufos, *Principal*

The Runyon Heights Neighborhood Council was initiated in May 1936 at Public School 1 because of the meager environmental resources and the inadequacy of the school building. Situated three miles from the Yonkers business section with poor trolley service and the most unstable population in the city, this area consists of colored families of fair economic status, Pullman porters, professional and semiprofessional groups, and also an underprivileged Italian group.

The school enrollment shows 35 per cent whites, 65 per cent colored; 29 per cent of pupils are colored welfare wards boarding out. There is much vacant land; housing is fair in the colored sections, poor elsewhere. There are no libraries, movies, or playgrounds. Civic and political clubs, mostly colored, and one church for each race are all active. Colored leadership is easier to find than white. There is no delinquency problem.

The organization of the council is made up of representatives of local organizations; namely, Runyon Heights Civic Improvement Association, Women's Club, Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church, and Public School 1 Parent Teacher Association. Officers were elected and committees on health, recreation, adult education, and publicity were appointed.

During the first year the Council sponsored an operetta, a boy's choral club, a WPA Symphony Orchestra concert, and organized Boy and Girl Scout troupes. This year, through the efforts of the Council, the ragweed in the neighborhood was destroyed. The greatest achievement in the Council's opinion is the securing of the addition and renovation of the school building, a new kindergarten, a portable stage for the gymnasium-auditorium, a nurse's room, and a new office for the principal.

The adult homemaking class has been resumed. The recreation committee has secured two playleaders for afterschool recreation. A large vacant lot with a tax lien has been selected by the Council for a needed playground.

Our Council president conferred with the city planning director and the Council will continue to work until the playground is secured.

The Council has improved community life by facing and working on community problems. This coöperative work for the welfare of the whole is minimizing racial prejudices.

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL, PUBLIC SCHOOL 2

Mamie V. Herald, *Principal*

In a neighborhood predominantly Italian, including Negroes and a small English-speaking group, in one of the most congested, underprivileged sections was found the greatest dependency, the poorest housing, the lowest health record, and the highest delinquency rate in the city.

Three large elementary schools and a large junior high school serve this area, none of which have found it possible to maintain a P. T. A. There are no playgrounds conveniently available.

The occasion which crystallized the felt need for a neighborhood council was school-centered. Public School 2 has suffered a decreased enrollment. Fear of having the vacant rooms of their large modern school building preëmpted by the crowded trade school stirred some of the parents in the neighborhood. The press publicity given to neighborhood councils in other districts caught their attention and several progressive women in the district put the query to the vice-principal, "Why can't we have a neighborhood council?" On November 30, 1936, thirty interested persons met. They knew what they wanted. And forthwith the officers of the Waverly Neighborhood Council were elected; for chairman, a young Italian doctor; for vice-chairman, a housewife, deeply in-

terested in the civic matters of the ward; for secretary, a housewife experienced in church affairs and later active in Girl Scout work; the treasurer, a young colored college graduate, intent on furthering the welfare of his race; the executive, the vice-principal, who has since become the principal. The local priest became the adviser of the Council.

Before the Council was organized there were no successful contacts with the parents. The Council made its first contacts through the sending out of interests' questionnaires written in both English and Italian. There were 105 returns: 33 persons wished to study dressmaking; 15 cooking; 15 knitting; 23 beauty culture; 25 English; 16 bridge; 12 homemaking; 12 dancing; 14 home nursing; with other interests scattered.

In the first year, a Girl Scout troop was formed; a traffic guard was secured from the NYA; a card party and dance was held; dishes were purchased for the school for recreational use; the Red Cross sponsored and financed a course in home nursing for our community; letters and telegrams were sent to the Legislature to support State aid for kindergartens, the Movie Bill, and other bills and projects that affected our community life; letters were sent to the mayor regarding the library closing and delegates and display work were sent to the Convention of Neighborhood Councils. This fall we secured a traffic officer and the Red Cross is again financing the course in home nursing.

Plans for the future include: organization of Cub Packs; securing a playground recreation supervisor after school hours; searching vacant grounds for play space; stopping the sale of salacious literature; working for better housing; establishing a community center in the school. A boy's clubhouse is the dream of the Italian priest. The Council hopes to diminish delinquency by substituting wholesome recreation. At present there are 30 members. A membership drive is to be launched.

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL OF PUBLIC SCHOOL 5

Ruth Freal, *Principal*

The Senior Council of Public School 5 was organized on January 27, 1936. The membership included representatives from the ten important civic and social clubs in the community, interested parents, and professional groups.

The object of the organization was to coördinate the services of the community and school for the welfare of the girls and boys.

In order to function, officers were elected which included chairman, co-chairman, corresponding secretary, recording secretary, and financial secretary. Vital community problems were discussed and the following committees were appointed: recreational sites committee, school-building committee, adult recreation, and neighborhood safety improvement.

The Council of Public School 5 held meetings once a month during the school year and the achievements were: (1) compilation of a survey showing location of tax lien property appropriate for recreational sites; (2) securing of patrols for coasting and skating areas; (3) providing leaders for school Scout troops, Cub and Brownie Packs; (4) conducting adult play nights; (5) forming of adult-education classes and forums; (6) purchasing of play material for school recreation room from proceeds of community bridge party; (7) showing of motion pictures by community club.

This Council has proved to be a very active coördinating force in the community and has made extensive plans for the coming year.

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL, PUBLIC SCHOOL 6

Eljah Parmerter, *Principal*

An old residential section, now a heterogeneous locality with slum areas due to business encroachment; a mixed population of 70 per cent whites of fair economic status and 30 per cent of under-

privileged Negroes of good class—this is the neighborhood of Public School 6.

The school enrollment has dropped; the population is unstable and decreasing; the older of the two elementary buildings was abandoned and the children crowded into one unit, without sunlight, auditorium, playroom, library, and special class. Education comparable to that furnished in other Yonkers schools could not be provided.

With problems of delinquency, unemployment, and dependency, with poor housing, and a wretched school building, it is not surprising that the Neighborhood Council of Public School 6 was the first to be organized, May 1936.

The Council consists of eight local clergymen from both races, both white and colored parents, a local woman doctor, a real-estate dealer, a lawyer, an engineer, an insurance broker, an NYA director, some business men, two aldermen, several teachers, and the principal.

The Council has made solid achievements. The present building is completely and attractively renovated, the older building razed, and a modern unit is to be erected on that site. Use of the armory parade ground for recreation during the school day was secured, and one objective of the Council is to secure this area with a recreation leader after school hours. On February 9 the colored civic-forum group opened a community gameroom in the neighborhood to operate daily for adults and children. A petition bearing 400 names requested city officials to purchase the Pitkin property for a neighborhood park. A sponsoring committee from the Council has developed a Boy Scout troop of 22 boys under the leadership of a parent. A Clean-Up Week with Council members acting as judges, and awards given, was carried out.

The local colored minister who made a Negro housing survey of this locality serves on the Housing Committee of the Yonkers Co-

ördinating Council. Through his efforts and the curriculum units on local housing initiated by the school children, the neighborhood is intensely conscious of its housing problem. The local newspaper has given much publicity and editorial space to this need.

A delegate of the Neighborhood Council reported fully and wittily at the convention of the Council on May 25, 1937. Our Neighborhood Council has joined the Coördinating Council.

The Council sponsored many neighborhood entertainments: the WPA symphony concert in the school yard; a strawberry festival for adults and children for which parents hulled eight crates of berries, and at which a choral club of colored boys sang spirituals under neighborhood leadership; a reception; a beautiful brooch and eulogies for the principal who had coöperated valiantly with the Council. Home talent contributed vocal and instrumental music and luscious refreshments. Warm fellowship and good will marked the evening. In November came a Hallowe'en party, with a dress parade of children and parents, followed by games and refreshments. A friendly neighborhood spirit has been created.

The Council still has many problems. Adult education waits on the new building; a branch library requires a home; public land on the river front for recreation is desired; the purchase of land for a park is another need; yards should be cleared of debris and soil enrichment for gardens is needed; problems of housing, recreation, and obscene literature have been referred to the Yonkers Coördinating Council.

The Council has operated through two years of building turmoil. It knows its problems. It has expanded its activities, enlarged its membership, and improved its leadership technique. There is a new spirit of hope in the neighborhood. Life is richer for both adults and children through opportunities for coöperative service. The Council has developed its own sense of stability and permanency.

NODINE HILL COUNCIL, PUBLIC SCHOOL 7

Georgia King Pearson, *Principal*

Nodine Hill, one of the oldest sections of Yonkers, is now predominantly foreign. This group is about 61 per cent stationary and contains many underprivileged families. Of 262 school families questioned, 86 per cent live in cold-water flats, 14 per cent in heated apartments, and 6 per cent in private houses. Thirty-six families have no inside bathrooms and share outside toilets. Twenty-eight per cent have no books, 18 per cent read no newspapers, and 67 per cent have no social-club interest outside of school. A large percentage is, or has been, on relief due to factory conditions. There are no adequate available recreational facilities. The big boys "hang around" and there is a serious afterschool delinquency problem in the neighborhood.

The elementary school, one of the oldest and shabbiest in Yonkers, was recommended by a survey to be abandoned and the children transferred elsewhere. Sentiment and the closing of a parochial school have combined to maintain the building in active service.

In May 1936, the Public School 7 Council was formed. Some old alumni, some parents, political leaders, and representatives of the school staff constituted the Council. This group began working for needed school repairs and took a keen interest in the activities of the school-community center which the principal had attempted to maintain singlehanded for nearly two years.

A reorganization of the Council took place in November 1936. Local clergy and realtors became members and the name was changed to the Nodine Hill Council because of its wider community interests. A real community spirit was born. Council committees and their achievements follow.

1. Health and safety. This committee worked to restore free diphtheria immunization clinics to the city. School rating for immunization rose from 81 per cent to 96.8 per cent.

Under the committee's leadership the Council sought action from our State senator regarding effective legislation to deal with sex crimes. He is working to secure such legislation.

2. Recreation. This committee is seeking increased play space.
3. Sale of obscene literature. This city-wide problem has been referred to the Yonkers Coördinating Council for action.
4. Religious training. The Council went on record as advocating religious training for all children in the community.
5. School-community center. The needs for a gymnasium and repairs to the building have been presented to the Board of Education.
6. Housing. This committee has made one report as to housing conditions in the Nodine Hill section.
7. Neighborhood movies. This committee has requested reserved sections and matron's care for the children.

Council Objectives 1937-1938

To make Nodine Hill Council a clearing house for neighborhood problems; to secure adult leadership for the activities of the school-community center; to work for the renovation of Public School 7; to work for better health and safety conditions in the neighborhood and school; to work for better motion-picture programs and theater conditions for the children of the community.

The Public School 7 neighborhood has developed a splendid spirit of understanding and good will. It is learning to face its problems through the service of the Nodine Hill Council and hopes to secure better recreational, social, and moral conditions for its people.

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL, PUBLIC SCHOOL 12

Agnita C. Wallace, *Principal*

The sociological survey shows this neighborhood in the blue (lowest) classification on every one of the eight factors used. Out of twenty-four ecological areas surveyed, this section ranked twenty-second in economic status; twenty-first in population growth; twenty-third in stability of population; twenty-third in

housing; twenty-first in dependency (one third of the families are on relief); twenty-third in delinquency; twenty-third in health, with the highest tuberculosis death rate in the city. There are twenty-three nationalities in the school.

Intermittent employment in the carpet factory is at the root of much of the poverty found here and has affected the shift and decrease of population. These people are dependent on all the social agencies, and the school must help to make needed contacts. The children were better nourished when city relief selected and provided the food.

Housing conditions are bad; the toilets in the halls are used by several families; sleeping rooms are often without airshafts. In this congested, underprivileged area there are no outdoor recreation spaces for children in the immediate locality. The older boys "hang around." Gangs congregate on corners and around the poolrooms. Naturally, delinquency looms large after school hours. With such a conglomeration of neighborhood problems, it is not surprising that the principal took the initiative in organizing the Neighborhood Council, after experimenting with the junior alumni group.

Twenty-four persons attended the first meeting on December 1, 1936, and the Neighborhood Council was organized. A neighborhood man, although inexperienced, accepted the chairmanship. The charter members included a former mayor who is interested in this section, two clergymen of the locality, the alderman, the Scout troop leader, three teachers of the school, and several fathers and mothers.

Earnest consideration was given to neighborhood problems. The cleaning of the neighborhood brook, a menace, was an important issue. A mother of seven spoke for safe recreation places; another for safe paths for bicycle riders; the children now take their chances with trucks in crowded traffic. Committees on recreation, housing, health, safety, adult education, delinquency, membership, publicity, Scouts, and social activities were appointed.

Achievements during the Council's first year include a mass meeting initiated by the chairman; endorsement of the Wagner Bill and the Federal Housing Bill; securing afterschool recreation for children; securing a speaker on safety and crime prevention; organizing adult classes in dressmaking; organizing Play Night and Bingo parties; checking the condition of the Nepperhan Creek; petitioning a city clinic for diphtheria immunization; petitioning for a full public-library schedule; petitioning for a safety light; forbidding trucks on streets where children play.

At the opening meeting for this year, the future plans of the Council included finding play spaces, finding recreational leaders, improving schoolyard, checking creek conditions, watching legislation, and expanding membership.

The greatest value of the Council is the opportunity it offers for mutual recognition and local leadership. The growth of the chairmanship has been outstanding. The Council affords opportunities for the exchange of ideas. People are beginning to feel that the Council, the school, and the community belong to them.

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL, SHERWOOD PARK PUBLIC SCHOOL 14

Elizabeth M. Elliot, *Principal*¹

Quoting from the speech made by the Rev. Bernard Montgomery, President of the Sherwood Park Neighborhood Council, at the Neighborhood Council Convention on May 25, 1937:

For a number of years, some of us in the various organizations active for community betterment felt the need of coördinating our efforts and eliminating useless duplication. We have seen the futility of endeavoring to accomplish singly what can only come through coöperation. We have seen problems arise that fell within the province of none of the existing organizations, yet their solution was urgent. There was also the needless competition that came from knowing nothing of what the other group was doing; of planning alone what concerned the whole.

¹ With quotations from the Rev. Bernard Montgomery, President of the Council.

It was from such a background that the Sherwood Park Neighborhood Council arose.

The actual impetus which brought the Council into being was a meeting of the Parent-Teacher Association of Public School 14 at which the whole problem of our neighborhood conditions was faced courageously. At this meeting we were given a very comprehensive survey of our community by the assistant superintendent of elementary schools, which showed the great need for certain activities for several groups. We then had reports of what the various organizations already in the field were doing to correct the conditions discovered. We found that before we could adequately begin to correct conditions, we must unite our efforts.

Thus all the organizations were ready in March 1937 when the principal of the school sent out a call to all those interested in community planning. The fact that the organizations responded without a single exception showed that they were ready to go forward. The first meeting resulted in the appointment of a committee to frame a constitution and to nominate officers. A second meeting saw the constitution adopted and officers elected.

Our brief history has shown that the spirit of unity exists in our midst. It is because of this evident intention to cooperate which we see in all our groups that we are expecting great things in the future. We have already set up the machinery to further this undertaking through an exchange of information and the clearing of dates through a local coordinating committee. We hope to discover the most urgent needs of the community and, working through the existing organizations, set out to provide a solution for them.

The Council has appointed committees on membership, playgrounds, clearing of dates, welfare, and program. It helped to secure full-time library service and is petitioning to have the school building kept open for recreation four nights a week for evening classes. Neighborhood playgrounds and a traffic officer for the school corner are problems left for solution.

MORSEMERE NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL, PUBLIC SCHOOL 16

Julia Gregory, *Principal*

This area constitutes one of the most desirable residential sections of Yonkers; deluxe estates of millionaires, the Thompson and Untermeyer show places; the Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research with its great gardens; and many attractive houses in less spacious settings. The sociological survey ranks it in the highest classification except for health. Many residents are leaders in industrial, social, and governmental affairs of city, county, and State. They are interested in the numerous organizations in the neighborhood: a civic association; six churches, Catholic and Protestant; two country clubhouses; a large active P. T. A.; and minor groups which meet for entertainment and study.

A neighborhood experience on a community project created a favorable mind-set for the organization of a council. A group of 30, representative of the section, met in December 1936, talked over its problems, planned a mass meeting, at which the Neighborhood Council was launched, sponsored by many of the most prominent citizens of the section.

The Council offices are filled respectively by a former majority leader of the Board of Supervisors, a former district attorney, an official in a local building firm, a parent, the P. T. A.'s president, the principal, and a doctor of research at Boyce Thompson Institute. The committees appointed are the following: environment: recreation space, safety, housing; adjustment: guidance, relief, health, adult education; character training: Scouts, clubs; Council activities: publicity, rules and regulations, ways and means; membership: research, fact finding, investigations, nominations, programs for Council.

At first it was felt that the neighborhood had few drawbacks but the Council is awakening to its problems among which are

traffic difficulties, lights, safety signs, police protection on the long steep Broadway incline, and trolley cars on the track terminus.

The Council discovered that even in a privileged influential neighborhood time and effort are necessary for the solution of problems. Slot machines in the small shops have disappeared because of Council agitation but eternal vigilance is needed for this problem. Council publicity has made local sellers of obscene literature cautious. Council meetings, speakers, projects, and publicity have attracted attention to the vital needs of the community. The leadership of the neighborhood, especially its man power, has been enlisted to improve the environment of the children. The Convention of Neighborhood Councils planned by our Council president stimulated greater activity in the community and city. Representation on the Yonkers Coördinating Council will give Morsemere direct contact with city-wide problems and break up its isolation.

Long-time plans of the council call for continued work on the Branch Public Library, additional recreational space and supervision, play space for small children, clearing of vacant lots and hills for recreation.

COMMUNITY COUNCIL, PUBLIC SCHOOL 21

Marion K. King

Due to the good which various communities were deriving from neighborhood councils, some of the citizens of Lincoln Park became interested in the movement.

It was decided that the type of neighborhood council should be one composed of representatives of the key organizations in the community. Hence the three churches in the community, the Civic Association, the Parent-Teacher Association, and the school were each to choose one or two representatives who were to meet and carry on any necessary business which might be taken up through the larger organization to benefit the community.

The purpose of the Council primarily was to bring about a closer coordination of efforts on the part of neighborhood organizations already set up. Four meetings were held last spring. The following list was drawn up as some of the needs of Lincoln Park :

1. Gaining an addition to Public School 21
2. Better transportation facilities
3. Further use of school building for children
4. Further use of school building for adults
5. Enforcement of speed and traffic laws
6. Provision of secondary-school facilities
7. An extension of organizations for children (Scouts)
8. An inventory of neighborhood experts for educational and recreational activity leadership
9. Consideration of street paving
10. Ridding newsstands of salacious literature
11. Better collection of garbage
12. Better sanitary conditions
13. Investigation of lighting problem
14. Investigation of assessed valuation of property

The members of the Neighborhood Council started work on these needs and feel that they have achieved something. In fact we now have better transportation facilities for pupils attending junior high school; we are making further use of the school building for both children and adults; and we are having an extension of organizations for children.

NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL, PUBLIC SCHOOL 24

Lillian F. Morrow, *Principal*

In the sociological survey made in 1935, the neighborhood of Public School 24 stood in the third classification, next to the lowest, on all the sociological factors used except the stability of population in which it ranked in the fourth classification.

Lacking are sufficient social and recreational facilities for children and adults. There is no movie house, library, or adequate play-

ground for children and adults. Three churches and three political clubs afford the chief social outlets.

On February 5, 1937, 50 representative citizens met in the school and formed a Neighborhood Council. Officers were elected and these committees appointed: park improvement, bookmobile service, adult education, publicity, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, membership, and recreation. Among the objectives outlined were a community center for adult education and recreation, play spaces for children, a flooded area for skating, a closed street for coasting, changes in the playground adjoining the school, a bookmobile for the neighborhood, and full sidewalks for the school.

Through the efforts of the Council three aims were achieved: park improvement, bookmobile service, and full school sidewalks. In addition, the Council sponsored the Negro Jubilee Singers' concert and supported the Moffat Slum Clearance Bill.

This year, September 1937, the Council will emphasize adult education, increased play spaces, a closed street for coasting, a flooded area for skating, and afternoon programs for children supervised by the Recreation Commission.

The Neighborhood Council has awakened the people to the needs of their community and given leaders an opportunity to exercise their talents of leadership by helping the community to meet these problems. These leaders have helped to unify the neighborhood in an attempt to better it. The Council has developed a coöperative spirit between the school and the community and has expressed a willingness to promote every movement that concerns child welfare not only in its own neighborhood but in the city.