

KITSILANO CITIZENS COMMITTEE ON MENTAL HEALTH

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BRIEF: The Composition and Role of
Citizens' (Community) Committees.

The Kitsilano Community

Kits contains recognizable groupings of wealthy managerial and professional people; university students; working class families; Greek immigrant families; young people involved in the social services, the arts, teaching; an often highly visible number of transient young people. This then is very much of a patchwork community about which it is very difficult to generalize, except to say that it is in a state of accelerated change.

From the beginning, the Kits Citizens' Committee has sought to incorporate a broad spectrum of people: professionals, non-professionals, working people, people on welfare and U.I.C., ex-mental patients, pensioners and all those interested in mental health.

Kitsilano Citizens' Committee

This committee has a form quite different from the one suggested by the Sub-Committee on the Composition and Role of Community Committees. We have a large group of 25 - 50 people which is the actual locus of power. Group members are neither chosen nor elected, but voluntarily attend open general meetings held every two weeks. These meetings are run with a minimum of Robert's Rules formality, though official motions are moved, seconded, discussed and voted upon. Our Steering Committee has rotated the Chair to give maximum exposure in terms of experience and to minimize the centralization of authority in individuals. In essence, the general meeting establishes the policy directions of the Kits Citizens' Committee and directs the actions of its elected officials.

Thusfar, two widely advertised informational meetings have been held in addition to regular general meetings. Two election meetings have been held. At these, members have democratically elected various people to represent them on the Kits Steering and Personnel Committees, on the Inter-Area Committee and on the G.V.M.H.P. Coordinating Committee. Significant Committee tenure is 6 months. Ad hoc or activity committees are struck and destruct as need dictates. Elected committee members should not miss three consecutive meetings of their committee without their position being disputed. These elected representatives are required to carry on the daily work and report faithfully to the membership every two weeks at general meetings.

Whither the Energy?

Most people on our Committee (s) are donating time. Working people don't have much free time. That which they do have is usually spent recovering from the work day, taking care of personal business, spending time with the family and friends and taking part in recreational activities. Meetings are additional work, not recreation.

To ease this burden, the G.V.M.H.P. should make funds available for postage, printing, publicity, occasional hall rental and coffee. Although some money has been provided, funds have been limited and repayment slow. To ease and expedite the functions of citizens' committees, we strongly urge establishment of a citizen-controlled budget to be applied within the above parameters and accounted for on a twice yearly basis.

More than funds, however, what is needed from the G.V.M.H.P. is the understanding that community participation is sometimes a slow and tedious process. It does not spring up overnight. This is often overlooked by people who are paid to do the very things that Citizens' Committees are asked to do voluntarily. While this must be balanced against the legitimate request that teams become operational as soon as possible, it is our opinion that without strong and effective community involvement, the project is going to fail in its purported attempt to meet community needs. Patience thus becomes a prime virtue.

Recommendations

1. Composition and meeting structure of Citizens' Committees.
 - a) Each Local area (e.g. Kits; Strathcona; etc.) should hold a widely publicized information meeting every six months. The purpose of these meetings should be to broaden the representation of the citizens' committee by attracting new people, as well as to publicize the role of the G.V.M.H.P. and the citizens' committee.
 - b) Within two weeks of an information meeting, an election meeting should be held.
Interested citizens who attended the information meeting will be able to vote on a far more knowledgeable basis.
 - c) Elected individuals should be functionaries who carry out the wishes of the citizens' committee. They should seldom, if ever, act entirely on their own initiative and should be required to report regularly to their constituency.
 - d) Elected individuals must live or work in the local area.
 - e) 50% of the elected individuals must live in the local area.
 - f) No individual may hold an elected position in more than one local area. → at one time
 - g) No elected individuals may be appointed or voted to positions of greater representative authority within the G.V.M.H.P. superstructure solely by members of their own committee. The general membership

Flexibility

100%
Team
members
cannot be
elected

Recommendations (cont'd.)

1. Composition and meeting structure of Citizens' Committees.

- g) cont'd.
of the citizens' committee must ratify or elect the person to that more responsible position. (e.g. Any member(s) of the Kits Steering Committee must be ratified or elected to the position of G.V.M.H.P. Coordinating Committee or Advisory Board representative(s) by the Kits general membership, not just by fellow Steering Committee members.)

2. Role of Citizens' Committees.

- the citizens steering committee with the assistance of*
a) ~~At the local area level, members of both the treatment team and the citizens' committee should form a steering committee to~~ *should* establish treatment policy guidelines as well as to plan, budget implement, and change whenever necessary the program.
b) Citizens' Committees (or sub-groups thereof) should have power to short list and approve team applicants and then refer them to G.V.M.H.P. personnel committee.
c) Citizens' committees (or their sub-committees) should have power to veto any job applicant approved by G.V.M.H.P.
d) Members of citizens' committees should act as a liason between the community and the team in order to: obtain volunteers to work with the team; coordinate community resources with those of the team; inform and organize citizens around issues relevant to the team.
e) Citizens' committee members of their elected functionaries should act as ombudsmen for people being treated by the team, for area residents and for team members by bringing the issue to the attention of (1) the team (2) the Coordinating or Executive Committee (3) the Metropolitan Board of Health (4) local M.L.A.s and the Minister of Health (if necessary).

3. Structure of G.V.M.H.P.

- a) Change it.
Each local area citizens' committee should elect at least one person (from its general membership or from a previously elected committee) to a Citizens' Advisory Board (C.A.B.). The Metropolitan Board of Health should appoint professionals to a Professional Advisory Board (P.A.B.). From these two groups should be elected a Coordinating Committee whose membership would be 75% citizens from C.A.B. The G.V.M.H.P. Executive Director would be a member of this committee. Meetings of this committee should be open to the public or else to all other members of C.A.B. and P.A.B. who would attend as non-speaking, non-voting auditors.

