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Neighborhood Justice Centers Field Test

Final Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

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**NEIGHBORHOOD JUSTICE CENTERS
FIELD TEST**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
FINAL EVALUATION REPORT**

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ABSTRACT

This Executive Summary presents the findings of the National Evaluation of the Neighborhood Justice Centers (NJC) in summary form. The NJCs are designed to provide mediation services for resolving interpersonal disputes as an alternative to going to court. The main purpose of the evaluation was to describe and assess the processes and impact of the three Neighborhood Justice Centers located in Atlanta, Kansas City, and Los Angeles (Venice/Mar Vista).

The results showed that the NJCs handled a sizable number of cases (3,947) during their first 15 months of operation. A wide variety of types of disputes from several different referral services were successfully processed by the NJCs. Nearly half of all the cases referred to the NJCs were resolved; six months later the large majority of disputants reported that the agreements still held and that they were satisfied with the process. The NJCs appear to handle most interpersonal cases more efficiently than the courts -- the NJC process is faster and more satisfying to the disputants. Although the NJCs did not appear to have a significant impact on court caseloads, judges and other justice system officials held a positive view of the NJCs and believed that they facilitated court processes. Cases of a civil/consumer nature reached hearing less often than those of a more clearly interpersonal nature, but the interpersonal disputes tended to show a less satisfactory resolution rate upon follow-up. There were indications that the costs per case at the NJCs may become competitive with those of the courts. It was concluded that the Neighborhood Justice Centers provide a needed and effective alternative mechanism for the resolution of minor disputes.

It is recommended that (1) governments support the continued development of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, (2) a program of research and development should be conducted on outreach methods, (3) workshops on such mechanisms should be offered to criminal justice officials, and (4) a national research/evaluation program should be launched to assess current dispute resolution approaches.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. THE NEIGHBORHOOD JUSTICE CENTERS FIELD TEST

Seeking viable alternatives to the courts for persons having disputes with their friends, neighbors, relatives, or with a merchant or landlord, the Department of Justice and the National Institute of Justice established three experimental projects in Atlanta, Kansas City, and Los Angeles. The Neighborhood Justice Centers (NJC) were to provide third-party mediation to resolve disputes as an alternative to traditional litigation. Concurrent with the 18-month test period a national evaluation of the program was conducted; this report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations of that research.

B. GOALS OF THE NJC FIELD TEST AND EVALUATION

There were two major goals of the program and a majority of the evaluation effort was centered around them. The first goal was to establish an effective community mechanism (NJC) for the relatively inexpensive, expeditious and fair resolution of citizen disputes through the processes of conciliation, mediation, and/or arbitration. At the same time the Centers were expected to enhance the quality of justice delivered to the community without diminishing the effectiveness of the existing criminal justice system. The Centers were to help the disputing parties arrive at resolutions which were fair, long-lasting and satisfactory to all those involved, and compare favorably to the courts in terms of cost and the amount of time needed to process cases. The second goal stated that the NJCs should attract a variety of civil and criminal dispute cases drawn from different sources in the community and criminal justice agencies.

In addition to these two major goals, there were four less important goals to be achieved during the course of the Field Test. Two of these focused on the community; it was noted that key elements of the community should have a positive view of the Centers, and secondly, the NJCs should contribute to the reduction of tension and conflict in the communities in which they were to operate. Another goal was to institutionalize the Neighborhood Justice Center concept and procedures in their own communities and provide information to guide the establishment of NJCs in other areas.

Lastly, the evaluation project was to provide information to the National Institute of Justice and the Department of Justice on the progress and effectiveness of the Centers as related to future planning for the expansion of NJCs and their concept.

C. PRECIS OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Conclusions

There were eight major conclusions developed from the NJC evaluation, and they are summarized as follows:

- Neighborhood Justice Centers provide a needed and effective alternative mechanism for the resolution of minor disputes. The three Centers attracted and handled a respectable number of cases during their first year of operations.
- NJCs need to develop more effective ways for improving public awareness about their program, and for bringing cases to mediation or conciliation. While the Centers did resolve disputes after the cases had been referred to them, they had some difficulty in soliciting cases from the community.
- NJCs appear to handle most minor interpersonal dispute cases more efficiently than the courts. The Centers resolve disputes more quickly than the courts, and citizens are more satisfied with the mediation process than those who go to court.
- NJCs with connections to the local justice system will attract and resolve more disputes than Centers without such referral sources. While a modest caseload can be developed from self-referrals and referrals from community agencies, it is the police, prosecutors, and the courts who refer large numbers of cases.
- NJCs are capable of handling a wide variety of minor disputes, including interpersonal/criminal cases as well as civil/consumer cases. Both criminal and civil cases were handled at the Centers, although a higher percentage of interpersonal/criminal cases reached a hearing than did the civil cases.
- Reliable analytical data are not yet available on the costs of processing cases through NJCs as compared to court processing costs; however, available data indicate that Center costs, for at least some cases, may become competitive with the courts.
- The three NJCs differ in caseload size, type of disputes handled, and to a lesser extent, in resolution effectiveness. The most probable sources of these differences include the Centers' philosophy/approach, their socio-cultural context, and their organization and management.

- NJC disputants tend to reflect the ethnic characteristics of their surrounding community, but represent a disproportionate number of low income people.

2. Recommendations

The following recommendations were generated from an analysis of the findings and conclusions of the evaluation study:

- It is suggested that federal, state and local governments support the continued development of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, particularly those which are similar to the NJCs. Since this research has shown that NJCs are an effective alternative mechanism for resolving disputes, more Centers should be established in those areas that do not have other available alternatives.
- A program of research, evaluation, and demonstration should be conducted on strategies and techniques (including media) to improve the effectiveness of NJC outreach methods. Additionally, a modular set of media materials and strategies that educate citizens about alternative dispute resolution techniques should be developed centrally, to be used in any city where dispute centers are established. Public outreach and attracting cases from the community were difficult problems for the Centers. Research and technical assistance designed to increase the effectiveness of these activities would be very useful for these community-based programs.
- A series of regional or local training workshops should be offered on NJCs and other alternative dispute resolution mechanisms for judges, police, prosecutors and other relevant criminal justice officials. If these local policy-makers were more knowledgeable about these programs it would be more likely that they would consider supporting or developing a center.
- A broad, comprehensive research/evaluation program should be launched to document and assess the approaches and performance of NJC-like dispute resolution centers across the nation. Research should be designed to: (1) create uniform data systems among the centers; (2) screen in or out complex interpersonal cases based on the NJC's ability to handle them; (3) assess different potential NJC referral points in the criminal justice processing sequence; and (4) increase referrals from the police.

D. PROJECT DESIGN AND APPROACH

1. Descriptions of the NJCs

The Neighborhood Justice Center of Atlanta served the entire city of Atlanta and surrounding areas; it was sponsored by a nonprofit organization created for that sole purpose. The Center was closely monitored and guided by a Board of Directors composed of court officials, attorneys, and representatives from the police department and community agencies. The Center established and maintained close working relationships with the local court system, its major referral source. Court clerks referred cases to the NJC in lieu of filing charges in court, while judges made referrals for cases at a preliminary (hindover) hearing. Volunteer intake workers were stationed in court to accept cases from these sources. The Atlanta Center also received cases from the community-at-large (self-referrals), government agencies, legal aid organizations, community agencies, and police officers. Its caseload consisted of 60% civil cases and 40% interpersonal disputes. Mediation, and to a lesser extent, conciliation, were the Center's formal means of dispute resolution.

The Kansas City NJC was sponsored by the city government under the auspices of the Community Services Department, which monitored the Center's activities and served as its policy-making body. An Advisory Board composed of community, agency, and city government representatives advised the NJC on local needs and problems and provided support and assistance. The NJC received the majority of its cases from the criminal justice system and served all of Kansas City and nearby communities. The Center's major referral sources were the Police Department, the City Prosecutor's Office and judges in Municipal Court; the resulting caseload was primarily interpersonal/criminal disputes. Referrals were also received from community sources, government agencies, and legal aid organizations. The Kansas City NJC used arbitration as a means of dispute resolution, but only for a small number of cases; it relied primarily on mediation.

The Venice/Mar Vista Neighborhood Justice Center was sponsored by the Los Angeles County Bar Association. A Board of Directors, composed of Bar Association, community, and public agency representatives, served as the Center's sole policy-making and guiding body. The Center adopted a community approach to dispute resolution, concentrating outreach activities and media coverage in the Venice and Mar Vista target areas. Over half of the NJC's cases were initiated by the disputants themselves at the Center. The NJC did establish non-coercive referral arrangements with several small claims courts, and received cases from court clerks and judges. Nearly all of the NJC cases involved small claims disputes or other civil matters. Mediation and conciliation were the primary forms of dispute resolution and the NJC developed an extensive system for providing disputants with referrals for additional assistance.

2. Methodology

In order to accommodate the developing nature of the three Centers -- hiring and training staffs and mediators, establishing linkages to referral agencies, creating public outreach programs -- a multifaceted evaluation methodology was employed. There were three primary data collection activities during the NJC evaluation:

- An Implementation Study designed to document the initial phase of program development and operation.
- A Process Study intended to describe NJC caseloads, handling procedures, and resolution outcomes.
- An Impact Study designed to assess the impact of the NJCs on the disputants, the courts, and the community.

Each of these three primary studies are briefly described below:

- The Implementation Study documented the sequence of events by which the NJCs were established within their local communities. The implementation activities included locating project sites, hiring and training mediators, developing referral mechanisms with the courts and other local criminal justice agencies.

In addition, case handling procedures were documented including public outreach, intake, case assignment and disposition. Also considered to be critical during the implementation phase was the role and support of the NJCs' governing boards, and the organizational structure of the project.

- The Process Study was designed to gather data in four critical areas of NJC program operations. The first area was designed to identify the disputant population that participated in the NJC mediation program. The second area of data collection was designed to identify the types of disputes referred to the NJCs (i.e., whether the cases involved neighbors fighting over property rights, or relatives harassing each other, or a consumer cheated by a merchant). The third category of process information assessed the dispute resolution procedures and whether or not an agreement was reached among the parties involved. The fourth area of data collection tracked the initial 4,000 cases from the source of referral through the NJCs' intake process to case disposition.

A routinized data collection system was developed which gathered data on the source of client referrals to the

NJCs, the nature of the dispute, the relationship between the parties, the characteristics of the disputants, the disposition of cases referred to the Centers, and the hearing sessions themselves. The data system was used to generate periodic feedback on NJC operations to program planners and policy-makers, as well as the National Institute project monitors.

- The Impact Study was designed to assess the NJC impact on the disputants, courts, and the community. Impact data collection was conducted within five primary categories:
 - (1) Disputant follow-up interviews -- approximately 1,300 cases were followed for a period of six months after they had been handled at the NJCs. Either one or both parties were interviewed to elicit their satisfaction with the NJC process and determine the long-term resolution of their dispute. Two other surveys with disputants were conducted; one was face-to-face interviews with 46 disputant parties to validate the telephone follow-up process. The second was a survey of 50 persons who contacted the NJC, but were referred to another agency; this study was to assess whether or not the persons contacting the NJC were actually following the referral advice.
 - (2) Court comparison studies -- about 900 court cases were followed in two of the NJC sites (Atlanta and Kansas City), and follow-up interviews were conducted with 67 complainants (prosecuting witnesses) who brought their cases to court. The complainants were asked for their reaction to the judicial process and whether or not bringing their case to court helped resolve their problems.
 - (3) A survey of community residents -- to test the impact of the NJCs on local community residents, a random sample of about 200 residential and business phones was identified in the Venice and Mar Vista areas of Los Angeles. The sample respondents were questioned on their awareness and perceptions of the NJC.
 - (4) Impact interviews -- a series of interviews were conducted at each of the three NJCs to assess the reaction to the program from those agencies referring disputants to the program.
 - (5) Cost data -- the costs involved in processing cases and conducting mediation sessions were computed and

cost per referral and per resolved case were determined. These costs were then compared with available data from other mediation evaluation projects.

Two special evaluation procedures were employed in the study. First, nearly all of the on-site data collection was conducted by three evaluation analysts hired and supervised by the central evaluation project. They worked throughout the Field Test period and were crucial in providing the needed link between the central evaluation staff and the NJCs. The second procedure was a series of monthly feedback reports to the NJCs and to the LEAA program monitors. These reports provided timely information on caseloads, referral sources and case dispositions. The feedback process alerted program management to potential problem areas as well as charting project accomplishments.

E. MAJOR FINDINGS

The evaluation of the Neighborhood Justice Centers concentrated on the process and impact of the program. Process data were routinely collected to analyze case (referral source, type, disposition, etc.) and disputant (sex, race, etc.) characteristics; the impact of the NJCs on the disputants, community, and court system was assessed via follow-up interviews, a comparison study of court cases, and a community survey.

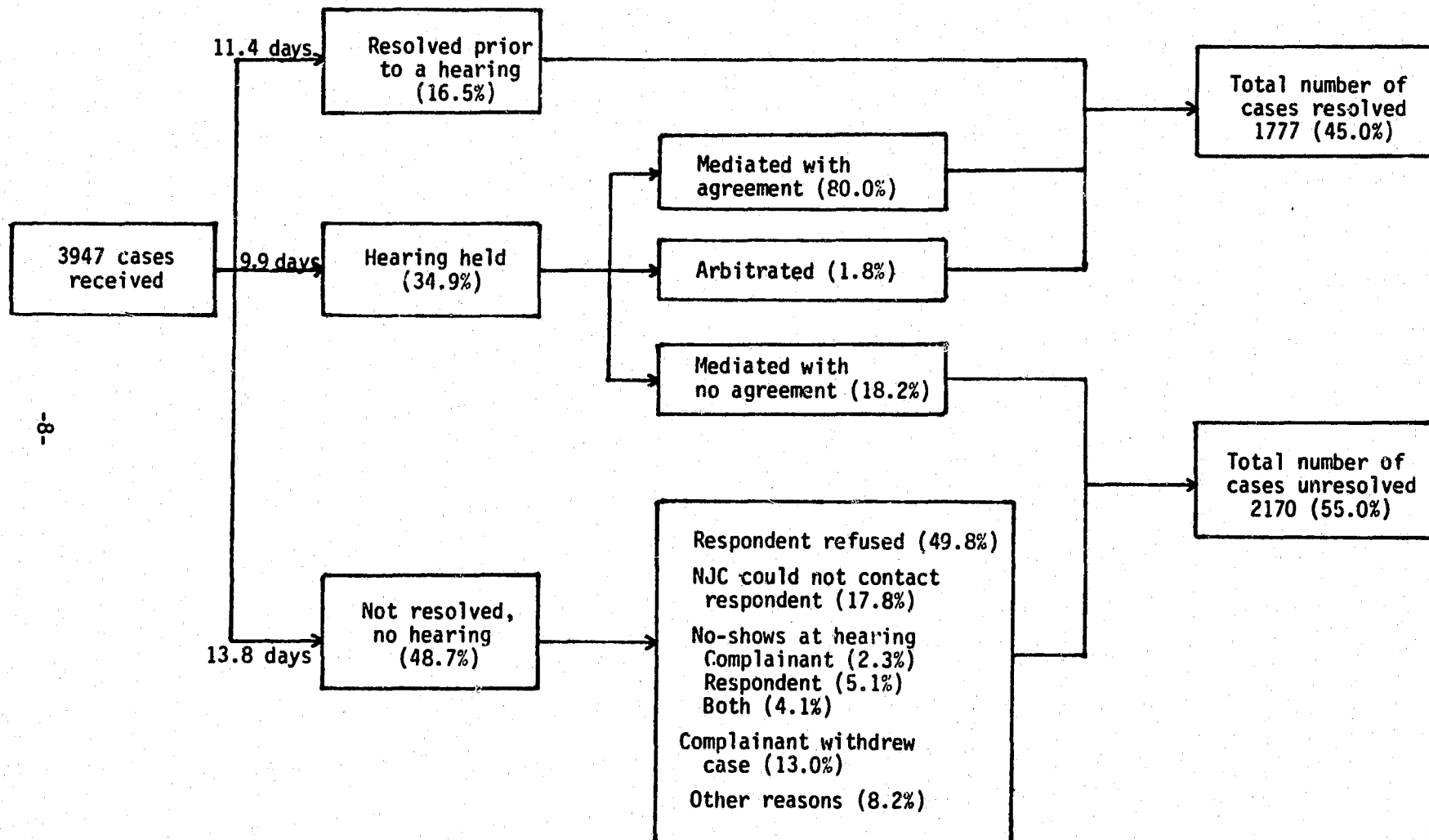
1. The NJC Process: Case Characteristics, Disposition, and Flow

Figure 1 depicts the flow of the cases through the NJCs; 3,947 cases were handled between the Centers' opening in March 1978 and the end of the data collection period in May 1979. A case (synonymous with a referral) was defined as a mediable dispute brought to the attention of the NJC by a previously defined referral source, including the community-at-large. A case involved two or more disputing parties; the initiator of the dispute was referred to as the complainant while the second party was labeled the respondent.

As indicated in Figure 1, there were two immediate outcomes of cases -- they were either resolved or not resolved after contact with the NJC. The primary means of dispute resolution practiced by the NJCs was mediation; formal mediation hearings, where a neutral third party attempted to facilitate an agreement between the disputants, were held for 35% of the NJC cases. A great majority of the mediated cases were resolved at the hearing by the disputing parties reaching an agreement. For 18% of the mediated cases, no agreement was reached by the parties and the case remained unresolved.

A sizable number of cases were resolved before a hearing took place, often during the process of contacting the responding party to

FIGURE 1
CASE DISPOSITION FLOW



solicit his or her participation in mediation. These cases resolved prior to a hearing typically involved a form of conciliation, but the intervention of a third party, the NJC staff person, ranged from none, where the disputants resolved the problem on their own, to active participation, where the NJC staff facilitated resolution by making a series of telephone calls to move the parties toward a mutual agreement. In total, nearly half of all cases were resolved by the NJCs via mediation or conciliation prior to a hearing. The term "resolved" indicates that an agreement was reached in a hearing or the complainant and/or respondent reported the dispute was settled prior to a hearing; the actual extent and permanence of the resolutions are discussed below.

The remainder of the cases were closed by the NJCs without any apparent resolution of the problem. The most common reasons for cases not being resolved or mediated were the respondent's refusal to participate in mediation and the inability of the NJC to contact the respondent due to inadequate information regarding the person's telephone number and/or address.

Case characteristics. Tables 1 and 2 provide information on the referral sources and types of cases processed by the NJCs, broken down by their disposition (mediated, resolved prior to a hearing, or unresolved). These data indicate that the NJCs are capable of attracting and processing a wide variety of case types from both criminal justice and community sources of referral. A majority of the NJC cases were referred from the criminal/civil justice system -- judges, court clerks, public attorneys, other court officials, and police officers. The remainder were self-initiated by individuals or referred from a variety of community, private, and government organizations.

The cases were fairly evenly divided between two broad categories of (1) interpersonal disputes in domestic, neighbor, family, and other close relationships which may be civil or criminal in nature and (2) civil disputes between tenants and landlords, consumers and merchants, and employees and employers. The categories of case types in Table 2 are:

- (1) Assault and/or harassment charges between currently or formerly married or living together couples.
- (2) Disputes between currently or formerly married or living together couples which involve money or property settlements, child support, and visitation rights.
- (3) Family disputes between relatives, siblings, and parent/child.
- (4) Assault and/or harassment charges between neighbors.

TABLE 1: ALL NJCs
CASE DISPOSITION BY REFERRAL SOURCE

| | Judges (Bench Referrals) | Fros. Office or Civil/ Criminal Warrants Desks | Police | Community Agencies | Self | Legal Aid Organizations | Government Agencies | Others | Tot. |
|--|--------------------------|---|--------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Cases with hearings, resolved | 515 (69) | 279 (20) | 94 (33) | 33 (18) | 99 (15) | 29 (15) | 29 (12) | 46 (24) | 1124 (28.7) |
| Cases with hearings, unresolved | 95 (13) | 68 (5) | 8 (3) | 7 (4) | 32 (5) | 18 (9) | 4 (2) | 17 (9) | 249 (6.4) |
| Cases resolved without a hearing | 15 (2) | 260 (19) | 33 (12) | 34 (19) | 147 (22) | 39 (20) | 76 (32) | 36 (18) | 640 (16.4) |
| Cases unresolved, no hearing (no-shows, withdrawals) | 89 (12) | 226 (16) | 48 (17) | 37 (20) | 106 (16) | 35 (18) | 42 (17) | 29 (15) | 612 (15.6) |
| Cases unresolved, no hearing (respondent refusals and no contacts) | 31 (4) | 559 (40) | 99 (35) | 71 (39) | 295 (43) | 73 (38) | 90 (37) | 68 (35) | 1286 (32.9) |
| Total | 745 (19.0) | 1392 (35.6) | 282 (7.2) | 182 (4.7) | 679 (17.4) | 194 (5.0) | 241 (6.2) | 196 (5.0) | 3911 (100%)* |

*Missing data on 36 cases.

TABLE 2: ALL NJCs
CASE DISPOSITION BY TYPE OF CASE

| | Domestic Assault and Harassment | Domestic Settlement and Other | Family Dispute | Neighbors: Assault and Harassment | Neighborhood Nuisances and Other | Friends: Assault, Harassment and Other | Landlord/Tenant Disputes | Consumer/Merchant Disputes | Employee/Employer Disputes | Other | Tot. |
|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Cases with hearings, resolved | 181 (56) | 111 (40) | 88 (45) | 147 (48) | 86 (31) | 169 (43) | 77 (12) | 152 (18) | 31 (9) | 80 (31) | 1122 (28.6) |
| Cases with hearings, unresolved | 20 (6) | 26 (9) | 12 (6) | 8 (3) | 18 (6) | 20 (5) | 25 (4) | 77 (9) | 19 (5) | 22 (8) | 247 (6.3) |
| Cases resolved without a hearing | 23 (7) | 18 (7) | 16 (8) | 32 (10) | 47 (17) | 40 (10) | 176 (26) | 185 (22) | 87 (24) | 23 (9) | 647 (16.5) |
| Cases unresolved, no hearing (no-shows, withdrawals) | 57 (18) | 57 (21) | 36 (18) | 38 (12) | 38 (14) | 80 (20) | 115 (17) | 103 (12) | 56 (15) | 35 (13) | 615 (15.7) |
| Cases unresolved, no hearing (respondent refusals and no contacts) | 44 (14) | 66 (24) | 45 (23) | 82 (27) | 92 (33) | 89 (22) | 279 (42) | 323 (39) | 172 (47) | 101 (39) | 1293 (33.0) |
| Total | 325 (8.3) | 278 (7.1) | 197 (5.0) | 307 (7.8) | 281 (7.2) | 398 (10.1) | 672 (17.1) | 840 (21.4) | 365 (9.3) | 261 (6.7) | 3924 (100%)* |

*Missing data on 23 cases.

- (5) Neighborhood nuisances such as barking dogs, encroaching tree limbs, and disputes over shared driveways.
- (6) Disputes of all kinds (half were money or property settlements, half were assault/harassment) between friends, acquaintances, and roommates.
- (7) Landlord/tenant disputes: the majority were brought by the tenant and involved upkeep and shelter issues and/or money settlements.
- (8) Consumer/merchant disputes: most were initiated by the consumer and involved typical consumer problems.
- (9) Employee/employer cases were usually disputes over money initiated by past employees.
- (10) Other cases between strangers and other complex relationships usually involving money or property settlements.

Generally, the interpersonal disputes were referred by criminal court judges and officials and law enforcement officers, while the civil cases tended to be self-initiated or be referred by small claims courts and community and other agencies.

Measures of NJC effectiveness include the number of cases which reach a hearing and the number which are resolved. The two major factors, referral source and type of case, affect whether a case is mediated or not and resolved or not. Interpersonal disputes were more likely to reach a hearing than civil cases and were more apt to be resolved via mediation or conciliation; half of the interpersonal cases were mediated. In contrast, only 23% of the civil cases reached a hearing but many others were resolved prior to a hearing. The source of referral had an effect on whether a hearing was held for a case or not. Hearings were held for 82% of the judge-referred cases; however, the majority of the other cases did not reach a hearing. For all other referral sources only 14-36% were mediated, yet almost as many cases were resolved prior to a hearing as through a hearing. Referral source and resolution rate are also related; 71% of judge-referrals were ultimately resolved, as were 35 to 45% of the cases from other sources.

Disputant characteristics. The characteristics of the disputants varied among the three NJCs, reflecting the different demographic compositions of the three cities, but the Centers appeared to attract a disproportionate number of lower income people. Nearly half of the respondents in the Atlanta and Venice/Mar Vista NJCs were representing small businesses.

Center differences. The caseloads of the three NJCs reflected their primary referral sources and orientation to the criminal justice system. The Atlanta NJC processed 2,351 cases during the Field Test period, 60% of the total NJC caseload. Almost half of these cases were resolved either at a mediation hearing or prior to a hearing. The majority of Atlanta's cases (68.6%) originated in the criminal/civil justice system. The Atlanta NJC's primary referral sources were the clerks in the small claims court followed by the judges in criminal court. The Atlanta caseload was dominated by cases of a civil nature, and consumer/merchant cases were the most frequent type, followed by landlord/tenant and employee/employer disputes. Judges and police officers tended to refer cases involving a close interpersonal relationship, while the court clerks and other agencies referred cases of a civil nature.

The Kansas City NJC processed 845 cases between March 1978 and May 1979; hearings were held for 40% of the disputes and 19% were resolved prior to a hearing. The criminal justice system was the primary source of the Kansas City cases, with 68% of the cases originating there. The prosecutor's office referred the most cases, followed by the police and judges. In contrast to the other NJCs, the Kansas City Center handled primarily interpersonal cases involving criminal and, to a lesser extent, civil disputes. Referrals from both police officers and the Municipal Court judges and prosecutor's office primarily involved neighbors and domestic couples, while self and community agency referrals tended to be landlord/tenant and consumer/merchant cases. Neighborhood cases accounted for 36% of the total caseload, followed by domestic disputes.

Of the 751 cases processed by the Venice/Mar Vista NJC, hearings were held for 31% of the cases, 14% were resolved prior to a hearing, and the rest remained unresolved following NJC contact. Over half of the cases opened in the NJC were initiated by the disputants themselves. Community organizations were not a major referral source, however. Small claims courts (judges and clerks) and police officers followed self-referrals in number of cases referred. The Venice/Mar Vista NJC caseload was dominated by disputes of a civil nature between landlords and tenants, consumers and merchants, and employees and employers. These civil cases made up 73% of the total caseload. Furthermore, landlord/tenant and consumer/merchant cases were by far the most common cases in the Venice/Mar Vista NJC, and very few criminal-type cases were handled.

The three Centers had significantly different hearing and resolution rates. The Kansas City NJC heard and resolved proportionately more cases than the other two Centers. The Kansas City NJC held hearings for 39% of its caseload and, combining successful mediations and conciliations, resolved 56%. In contrast, the Atlanta NJC heard 35% of its cases and ultimately resolved 44%; the corresponding figures for Venice/Mar Vista were 31% and 35%. The Kansas City NJC

also had a higher rate of hearings which ended in resolutions -- 95% of the hearings ended in an agreement. In Atlanta and Venice/ Mar Vista, the agreement rates were 81% and 66%, respectively. These hearing and resolution rate differences are probably related to the Centers' referral sources, casetypes, and screening processes.

2. Impact of the NJCs

The primary goal of the evaluation impact analysis was to assess the impact of the NJCs on disputants after their experience at the Centers. The major focus was on information which indicated whether the elements of the resolution process were satisfying to disputants and resulted in lasting resolutions; additional analyses explored the sources of observed variation in disputant satisfaction and resolution stability. The impact study also compared court and NJC cases in terms of disputant satisfaction, resolution rates, and processing speed, and provided information on how the Centers were perceived and utilized by elements of the local justice system. Finally, the impact of the Centers on community residents and organizations was explored.

Impact on the disputants. Six-month follow-up interviews were conducted with both disputants in a large number of the NJC cases. Interviews with one or both parties were held for 63% of mediated cases, 48% of those resolved prior to a hearing, and 28% of unresolved cases. The questions assessed the disputants' satisfaction with the NJC process and the permanence of the resolution, if any.

The indices of disputant satisfaction and the stability of the agreement for mediated cases are displayed in Tables 3 and 4, respectively. These follow-up data on mediated cases show that a substantially high proportion of both complainants and respondents were satisfied with their overall experience, the mediation process and the mediator, and the agreement terms. A slightly lower, yet not unimpressive, proportion of disputants indicated that the agreement had held, and that they would return to the NJC with a similar problem.

Over one-third of all resolved cases were resolved prior to a hearing, and follow-up data on these cases show that such resolutions were effective. Only a few of the complainants and respondents reported that the dispute was unresolved. The majority of the disputants reported no more problems with the other party and a high degree of satisfaction with the NJC experience. The majority of the complainants and half the respondents would return to the NJC for a similar dispute.

Disputants whose cases did not reach a hearing and were not resolved were also followed up to determine how their dispute had fared and how they viewed their limited experience with the NJC. The

TABLE 3
DISPUTANT SATISFACTION
FOR MEDIATED CASES

| Index/Response | | Disputant | | Total |
|---|----------|-------------|------------|-------|
| | | Complainant | Respondent | |
| Satisfied with overall experience at NJC? | Yes | 428 (88%) | 347 (88%) | 775 |
| | No | 43 (9) | 30 (8) | 73 |
| | Somewhat | 18 (4) | 17 (4) | 35 |
| Satisfied with mediation process? | Yes | 414 (84) | 335 (89) | 749 |
| | No | 61 (12) | 41 (10) | 102 |
| | Somewhat | 15 (3) | 21 (5) | 36 |
| Satisfied with mediator? | Yes | 432 (88) | 348 (88) | 780 |
| | No | 39 (8) | 26 (7) | 65 |
| | Somewhat | 19 (4) | 21 (5) | 40 |
| Satisfied with terms of agreement? | Yes | 335 (80) | 296 (83) | 631 |
| | No | 65 (15) | 45 (13) | 110 |
| | Somewhat | 20 (5) | 17 (5) | 37 |

TABLE 4
STABILITY OF THE AGREEMENT
FOR MEDIATED CASES

| Index/Response | | Disputant | | Total |
|--|-----------|-------------|------------|-------|
| | | Complainant | Respondent | |
| Have you kept all terms of the agreement? | Yes | 316 (79%) | 303 (87%) | 619 |
| | No | 9 (2) | 20 (6) | 29 |
| | Partially | 14 (3) | 21 (6) | 35 |
| | No Terms | 63 (16) | 7 (2) | 70 |
| Has other party kept all terms of the agreement? | Yes | 287 (69) | 236 (67) | 523 |
| | No | 77 (18) | 47 (13) | 124 |
| | Partially | 49 (12) | 24 (7) | 73 |
| | No Terms | 8 (2) | 47 (13) | 55 |
| Any more problems with other party? | Yes | 135 (28) | 87 (22) | 222 |
| | No | 341 (72) | 307 (78) | 648 |
| Where would you go in future with a similar problem? | NJC | 346 (72) | 285 (73) | 631 |
| | Court | 79 (16) | 45 (12) | 124 |
| | Attorney | 20 (4) | 17 (4) | 37 |
| | Nowhere | 15 (3) | 22 (6) | 37 |
| | Other | 20 (4) | 19 (5) | 39 |

majority of complainants said that their dispute remained unresolved, while less than half of respondents claimed that it was unresolved. Most of these disputants did not use other resources after their contact with the NJC; if they did, it was most likely to be the courts or an attorney. A large majority of both complainants and respondents were satisfied with the overall experience at the NJC.

Disputant satisfaction varied slightly as a function of case type and referral source, but their effects were not particularly strong or widespread. Agreement stability appeared unaffected by the source and type of case. Interpersonal disputes, especially those between domestic couples, family members, and neighbors, performed slightly less well than the consumer/civil cases. Disputants were slightly more dissatisfied in these cases and reported more problems with the other party. However, the uniformity of positive results across all cases supports the contention that the NJCs can effectively handle a broad variety of minor disputes.

There are a number of significant differences among the NJCs in disputant satisfaction and agreement stability, due in large part to the variation in context, case type, and referral sources across Centers. For mediated cases, the Atlanta NJC consistently displayed the highest proportions of satisfied disputants and stable agreements. In cases resolved prior to a hearing, the Venice/Mar Vista NJC cases revealed the highest levels of disputant satisfaction and these disputants were most apt to report that the NJC had helped to resolve their dispute. The Venice/Mar Vista NJC also tended to be perceived most favorably by disputants whose cases remained unresolved following NJC contact. Although these differences are consistent and significant, they are not large -- all three NJCs yielded high rates of disputant satisfaction and agreement stability.

The findings on NJC resolution effectiveness parallel results from studies of other similar dispute resolution programs around the nation. A follow-up study of disputants in Boston's Dorchester Urban Court Program revealed results which are highly similar to the NJC cases -- the majority of the disputants were satisfied with the mediation process and their dispute was resolved on a long-term basis. The rates of satisfaction and the stability of resolutions in the studies of the Brooklyn Dispute Resolution Center and Florida's Citizen Dispute Settlement Programs are also similar to the rates in the NJC cases. To a high degree, the mechanism of third-party dispute resolution operates successfully across different locations and types of dispute resolution organizations.

Impact on the courts. The Kansas City Municipal and Fulton County State courts were selected for a comparison study of court cases since they were primary sources of case referral for the Kansas City and Atlanta NJCs, respectively. In addition to interviews

conducted with justice system officials in all three sites, court cases similar to those in the NJCs were analyzed to see how far they penetrate the court system before being dropped or resolved, and a sample of court complainants were interviewed regarding their experiences in the system.

A comparison of processing times for the courts in Kansas City and Atlanta with the NJCs in those two cities indicates that case processing in the courts can take five to ten times longer than in the Justice Centers. The length of time required to process court cases in Atlanta from filing to trial was 98 days; if the case was dismissed at the Bindover Hearing, it was in the court system for only six days. Mediated cases at the Atlanta Neighborhood Justice Center, on the other hand, required an average of only nine days between intake and hearing, and those that were resolved without a mediation hearing were processed in an average of eight days. In the Kansas City Municipal Court, cases took an average of 63 days from filing to final disposition at a court hearing. In contrast, the NJC in Kansas City mediated cases within an average of 13 days from the time of referral. On the average, cases that were resolved without a mediation hearing required an additional two days of NJC time.

In Kansas City, trials were ultimately held for 53% of the cases followed up; 25% were withdrawn by the complainant, 11% were dropped by the prosecutor, and in 11% warrants were never served. Of the cases tried, only 27% involved guilty verdicts. In the Atlanta court, only 14% of the cases were tried. Two-thirds (67%) were dropped prior to the trial, 31% before the bindover hearing, 27% at the bindover hearing, and 9% before the trial date. In another 19% of the cases, a warrant for the defendant's arrest was never served. Of the small number of cases which reached a trial, 6% were dismissed and 14% received not guilty verdicts; the rest resulted in guilty or nolo contendere verdicts or were bound over to Superior Court.

Reactions of the complainants who took their cases to court were contrasted with the results from the long-term follow-up interviews with complainants who had cases mediated in the NJCs. There were not substantial differences between NJC and court complainants in terms of whether or not the dispute had been resolved, but on satisfaction indices, there were numerous differences -- all in favor of the NJC. The NJC process appears to be a faster and more satisfying experience than the courts for the resolution of these types of disputes. However, these findings should not be viewed as conclusive, given the small sample sizes and other methodological limitations of the court studies.

In interviews, court judges stated they were highly supportive and positive about the Neighborhood Justice Centers. While nearly all said the NJC had not reduced their caseload to any noticeable extent, the judges also reported that the NJCs facilitated the

processing of all cases by diverting cases which were inappropriate and time-consuming for the court.

Impact on the community. A random telephone survey of 200 households was conducted in the Venice/Mar Vista NJC target area to assess the community awareness of the Center. Venice/Mar Vista was chosen because of the Center's community orientation and emphasis on local outreach and media coverage. Thirty percent of the people reached were aware of the NJC and the majority understood roughly what services were offered. The community residents learned of the NJC primarily through media coverage and public outreach activities conducted by the NJC.

F. CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions of the evaluation are repeated in detail below, along with a brief discussion of each conclusion. The conclusions of this study are most relevant to the three NJCs studied, and are therefore stated in reference to those Centers. However, the conclusions, and recommendations which follow them, also have distinct implications for the other dispute resolution mechanisms which share the concepts and procedures of the NJCs. The conclusions are:

- Neighborhood Justice Centers provide a needed and effective alternative mechanism for the resolution of minor disputes.

According to nearly all indices of effectiveness, the NJCs perform a needed service in an effective fashion. Process and impact data show the following about the NJCs:

- The Centers attracted and handled a respectable -- and in Atlanta, quite large -- number of cases during their first year of operations. These caseloads indicate that the NJCs are responding to a genuine public need.
- A wide variety of cases from many different sources were processed effectively by the NJCs.
- Nearly half of all cases referred to the NJCs reached an agreement through mediation or conciliation.
- Cases were processed quickly and efficiently: hearings typically occurred within one-two weeks of intake and required only about two hours.
- A large majority of both complainants and respondents found virtually all aspects of the NJC experience satisfactory -- the mediation process, the mediators, the agreement terms, and the overall experience -- and would return to

the NJC if they should have a similar dispute in the future.

- A large majority of agreements were still holding six months after the agreement was established, and most disputants reported having no more problems with the other party.
- Nearly all the officials from the courts and from social service agencies in the community viewed the NJCs as a helpful service and one which has helped them perform their job better. In particular, judges were unanimous in stating that the NJC facilitated the processing of cases in their courts.

Reviewing the goals and objectives of the NJCs, as articulated by the Centers and by the Department of Justice at the outset of the NJC Field Test, it must be concluded that the Neighborhood Justice Centers have, in an overall sense, been successful. The NJCs are not without their flaws and uncertainties, both in concept and execution, but it must be said that this is a concept and a process that works: it meets a clear public need with indices of performance and satisfaction that are rather extraordinary. On the negative side, it appears that the NJCs' observable impact on reducing court caseloads and community tensions has been negligible; although it is noted that in the current effort the impact in these areas (particularly the latter) has not been assessed with the appropriate level of resources.

- Neighborhood Justice Centers need to develop more effective ways for improving public awareness about NJCs, and for bringing cases to mediation or conciliation.

Although 18% of the cases which reach a hearing do not result in an agreement (and this rate can probably be reduced as more is learned about mediation techniques and approaches), the mediation/conciliation process -- the *raison d'être* of the NJCs -- yields a high proportion of efficient, satisfactory, and lasting resolutions. The weak links in the mechanism exist at points prior to a hearing.

Perhaps the first problem lies in the attitude and awareness of the public. As the community survey indicated, even after a year of public service announcements, television appearances, and several other community outreach efforts, approximately 70% of the Venice/Mar Vista residents had not heard of the Neighborhood Justice Center. But even these outreach efforts were sporadic and limited by meager resources; the NJCs simply did not have sufficient staff time or funds to mount an effective public awareness/education campaign. Such a campaign would be directed at two stages of citizen consciousness. Citizens should first be aware of the NJC and the purposes it serves, so that if they have a dispute, the NJC occurs to them as a salient

option. Beyond this level of awareness is a more difficult stage to reach: the understanding that an effective way to resolve a minor dispute between two parties is to attempt to work out an agreement with the assistance of a neutral third party rather than either avoiding the problem or taking the dispute to court. This perspective requires both disputants to confront the problem directly (when they may prefer avoidance) and to understand that negotiation and compromise may be preferable to a declaration of a winner and a loser. Such an understanding requires a fairly basic shift in the attitudes of most citizens -- although it is not so difficult a shift that thousands of NJC disputants could not make it. In order to attract and resolve more civil/consumer cases, the awareness and attitudes of the corporate respondent must be improved; the landlord, the merchant, the employer, and others must be persuaded that it can be in their own best interest to use the NJC rather than ignoring the complainant or engaging in litigation. It would seem that this cost-conscious group might be swayed by evidence that they can save personal time and legal costs by using the NJC for minor complaints.

The second broad audience toward which more intensive outreach efforts might be directed are the relevant segments of the justice system and other community agencies. The NJCs devoted tremendous amounts of staff time to cultivating the courts personnel (prosecutors, clerks, judges, etc.) and, particularly in Kansas City, to the training of police. In Atlanta, their continued overtures of the Fulton County Court eventually paid off in large number of referrals, but only after considerable and rather precious staff time had been devoted to the task, and to the relative exclusion of other potential referral systems. The Kansas City NJC staff devoted similar attention and resources to police training, with the result that they received many more police referrals than the other Centers. It is interesting that the three Centers focused their outreach efforts in three very different areas (community, police, court) and, although the effects were muted in Venice/Mar Vista, their efforts produced substantial numbers of cases from those sources. Of course, the NJCs consciously decided to direct outreach efforts toward the audience where the probability of success was greatest. Nonetheless, the results may also be interpreted as indicating that potential cases reside in diverse locations, awaiting sufficiently forceful outreach efforts to dislodge them. In addition to some necessary personal contact which NJC staff must make with officials from these justice agencies, it would seem that offering a series of special workshops (local, state or regional) on Neighborhood Justice Centers for the courts and police personnel would greatly assist the drawing of cases from the justice system.

- Neighborhood Justice Centers appear to handle most minor interpersonal disputes more efficiently than the courts.

These results indicate that NJCs resolve disputes more quickly -- one to two weeks, on the average -- than the courts. NJCs typically require only one hearing of less than two hours in duration, as opposed to the several visits often required for court processing. The data also suggest that citizens who use the NJCs are more satisfied than those who use the courts. The follow-up data from the small sample of court complainants showed that while they were satisfied with some aspects of their experience, they also felt that the court did not keep them informed, and many felt that the case handling was poor.

Perhaps the most striking difference between the NJC and the courts is illustrated by the responses of the NJC disputants in the follow-up interviews in households. It seems clear that at the Justice Centers, citizens are listened to, respected, even cared for. As a citizen steps into the Justice Center and proceeds through the resolution process, it appears that he or she is assisted and supported, kept informed of the procedures and alternatives, and does not lose control of the dispute or the decisions about how to resolve it. It is typically a positive experience for both the complainant and respondent. Even in the most responsive court systems these experiences -- certainly in any overall sense -- rarely occur. On the other hand, the courts do effectively resolve disputes -- even when cases are dropped or dismissed, most complainants report that the problem has been resolved.

- Neighborhood Justice Centers with connections to the local justice system will attract and resolve more disputes than Centers without such referral sources.

To the extent that a dispute resolution center is interested in building a sizable caseload -- providing services to the maximum number of citizens -- it appears essential that it develop strong bonds to the courts and other elements of the local justice system. A modest caseload can be built on self-referrals and referrals from other community agencies (as the Venice/Mar Vista NJC illustrated), but such a community oriented stance increased the difficulty of attracting cases.

- Neighborhood Justice Centers are capable of handling a wide variety of minor interpersonal disputes, including interpersonal/criminal cases as well as civil/consumer cases.

There were only small differences between interpersonal/criminal disputes (domestic conflicts, neighbor conflicts, and family and friend disputes) and civil/consumer disputes (landlord/tenant, consumer/merchant, employer/employee, etc.) in the number of cases which were attracted or referred to the NJCs. And although there were substantial differences in the mix of case types across the Centers, all three NJCs handled cases from both categories. However, a

considerably higher percentage of interpersonal disputes reached a hearing than did the civil cases. A larger proportion of the civil cases were resolved prior to a hearing, but the overall resolution rate for civil cases was still less than that for the interpersonal cases. Thus, in terms of getting a case to mediation or conciliation, the NJCs seem to do better with interpersonal cases than with civil cases.

There were also some differences between the broad case types in the degree to which they achieve a satisfactory and lasting resolution after their contact with the NJC, but these differences were of lesser magnitude and meaning than the pre-hearing differences. However, the data indicated (and the results of other studies more strongly support this contention) that interpersonal cases involving complex underlying problems tend to achieve lasting resolutions somewhat less frequently than other types of cases. With the exception of this small subset of cases, one would be hard pressed to identify any of the types of cases herein represented that appear inappropriate for NJCs. Perhaps the most meaningful differences among case types occur at the pre-hearing stage and have implications for outreach strategy rather than for resolution techniques.

- Reliable analytical data are not yet available on the costs of processing cases through Neighborhood Justice Centers as compared to court processing costs; however, available data indicate that NJC costs for at least some cases may become competitive with the courts.

Available data indicate that the costs of processing dispute cases through the courts are between \$144 and \$148 per case (although this figure can vary according to type of case, point of referral, etc.). The Atlanta NJC already resolves cases at a rate of \$142. Thus, until more accurate estimates can be constructed -- through comprehensive cost-benefit analysis -- it must be concluded that the NJC mechanism might very well be competitive with the courts in the near future, if not at present in Atlanta.

- The three Neighborhood Justice Centers differed in caseload size, type of disputes handled, and, to a lesser extent, in resolution effectiveness. The most probable sources of these differences are (1) Center philosophy/approach, (2) Center socio-cultural context, and (3) Center organization and management.

The differences in Center philosophy, context, and management were probably responsible for the substantial differences in the size of caseload and the type of disputes handled. Despite such differences, indices of resolution effectiveness were remarkably similar across Centers. These findings indicate that Center differences (in philosophy, context and management) have major impact on

pre-resolution events -- types of referral sources, case types, and caseload size -- but that when a case reaches conciliation or mediation, the uniformity and effectiveness of the mechanism produces highly similar rates of agreement stability and satisfaction.

- Neighborhood Justice Center disputants tend to reflect the ethnic characteristics of its surrounding community, but represent a disproportionate number of low income people.

The information gathered on disputants indicates, with the exception of individuals representing businesses, that the people who use the NJCs are generally representative of the community in terms of ethnicity. However, it appears that the NJCs attract primarily low income residents. This may be partially a reflection, at least in Kansas City and Atlanta, of the characteristics of litigants in the court system. It may also be the case that middle- and upper-income people tend to hire third parties (attorneys, counselors, etc.) to resolve their disputes. On the one hand, this finding indicates that the NJCs are providing dispute resolution services to poor people, some of whom may have had less access to the justice system in the past. But if, as originally intended, the Centers are to serve a cross-section of their communities, they will have to attract more higher income citizens.

G. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for future policy, practices, and research on Neighborhood Justice Centers are discussed below at two levels. First, recommendations for broad national policies and activities will be discussed. These recommendations are directed specifically at the National Institute of Justice and the Department of Justice, other federal agencies whose purview includes the resolution of disputes among citizens, and interested university research centers and private foundations. More specific recommendations will be made with respect to the development and establishment of NJCs and other dispute resolution mechanisms.

1. Recommendations for Broad Policy

a. It is suggested that federal, state and local governments support the continued development of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, particularly those which are similar to the Neighborhood Justice Centers. The NJC is the rare example of the experimental government-sponsored program that not only works but which is comparatively inexpensive -- indeed, it might even eventually save taxpayer monies. Moreover, it is an approach which meets important public needs while serving to humanize the system of justice in this country. Governmental support for NJCs and similar mechanisms may be realized in several ways. A bill recently passed by Congress provides

for the establishment of many dispute centers around the nation, and provides for a dispute resolution research and development centers. The passage of this bill is a significant stride toward more effective government support, but in addition to the bill's provisions, we believe that federal and state governments should make every effort to assist the establishment of NJCs.

b. A program of research, evaluation, and demonstration should be conducted on strategies and techniques (including media) to improve the effectiveness of dispute center outreach methods. Additionally, a modular set of media materials and strategies that educate citizens about alternative dispute resolution techniques should be developed centrally, to be used in any city where dispute centers are established. At present, the most difficult obstacle facing NJCs is the lack of understanding of dispute resolution alternatives. Citizens must be educated in the benefits of third party resolution techniques short of adjudication, and in the existence and use of dispute resolution programs. It is not known which of the traditional outreach methods (presentations at local meetings, newspaper coverage, public service announcements, radio and television appearances, personal contacts, etc.) is most effective in educating the community in the existence and benefits of dispute resolution programs. At this point, NJC staffs devote an enormous amount of time and energy to community outreach with no knowledge of the effectiveness and efficiency of their efforts. A program of research should be conducted to explore new strategies and techniques for using them to enable local programs to reach their target population.

Media coverage has informed many citizens of the alternative dispute resolution mechanisms available in their community; currently, however, each new dispute center must develop its own mass media strategy and materials designed to make the public aware of the dispute center and to mold new attitudes about how citizens can resolve disputes. Individual local programs simply do not have the time or resources to develop adequate media materials or campaigns. More appropriately, high quality materials (video tapes, radio messages, pamphlets, etc.) would be developed once for use by any dispute resolution center. Periodic national media campaigns might be undertaken as well. In this manner, local centers would be able to devote their resources to other important efforts and gain the benefit of an effective mass media effort.

c. A series of regional or local training workshops should be offered on Neighborhood Justice Centers and other alternative dispute resolution mechanisms for judges, police, prosecutors and other relevant criminal justice officials. Many officials in local criminal justice systems are essentially unfamiliar with the purpose and workings of NJCs and similar mechanisms; others have predictable concerns about due process. The probability of centers establishing

effective referral relations with local justice agencies would be considerably improved if key officials from the agencies were to attend workshops on the topic and learn detailed information about the advantages (and possible disadvantages) of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. Again, it would seem both more effective and much more efficient to conduct such orientation/training efforts in a concentrated series of workshops, rather than individual NJCs attempting to do so.

d. A broad, comprehensive research/evaluation program should be launched to document and assess the approaches and performance of NJC-like dispute resolution centers across the nation. During the past few years the number of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms has increased at a geometric rate. Unfortunately, each center is developing its routinized data system -- or none at all -- and there is no central documentation of project approaches, organization, or performance. In short, valuable information is being lost. Thus, it is recommended that a program of research and evaluation be initiated to develop new knowledge about dispute resolution effectiveness. One segment of such a program would be designed to establish uniform data systems, particularly among new centers. Other topics of interest to be addressed within this program would include research on: (a) accurate identification of the complex interpersonal cases, reliable means for screening and referring out those which are most troubled, and developing supplemental strategies and resources for handling such cases; (b) an assessment of the different potential referral points in the processing sequence of the criminal justice system, determining particular consequences (costs saved, eventual resolution effectiveness, etc.) of referring cases at specific points in the sequence; and (c) research on ways to increase referrals from police, through different methods of training and management.

2. Brief Guidelines for the Establishment of NJCs

- a. NJCs should seek to attract a variety of case types, including interpersonal disputes involving families, friends, and neighbors, as well as civil/consumer disputes between landlords and tenants, consumers and merchants, and employers and employees.

A wide variety of disputes may be resolved under one roof; there is no compelling reason for excluding any of the above broad types of disputes. NJCs offer a needed resolution service between the courts and long-term therapy or counseling. A central problem in screening concerns those cases which more properly belong in the courts, because of the magnitude of the dispute or because of particular legal problems; or in therapy or counseling, because of a serious and continuing underlying problem (e.g., alcoholism, complex marital problems, etc.). However, at present, it is probably only through

careful examination of screening that such problems can hope to be identified. General case classifications of minor disputes should not be excluded.

- b. NJC staffs must devote a great deal of time and effort to the cultivation and nurturing of referral sources, particularly segments of the justice system.

Referral sources, particularly the courts and police, require early and continued attention if the NJC expects to eventually receive cases from them. For example, the NJC may have to place an intake worker in court for four to six weeks before the first referral is made. Staff cannot expect that one or two meetings with the court administrator or judge will be sufficient.

- c. The managing Board of an NJC should be composed of active members who can help develop referral sources; the Board should closely monitor and support the NJC staff.

Board members should be able to materially assist the NJC in establishing fruitful relationships with referral sources, such as the courts, police, or a community organization. Ethnic and geographic diversity is also desirable, but probably less important than influence and willingness to assist with referral sources. The Board should meet often (monthly) with the NJC senior staff. They should actively guide the staff, monitoring performance as well as providing close support.

- d. The location of an NJC within a city government will raise its probability of survival, but may lower its flexibility and autonomy.

If an NJC is positioned within the city government, its chances of plugging into referrals and future funding will probably be increased. However, its flexibility may be significantly hindered by necessary adherence to city regulations on hiring policies, administrative procedures, etc.

- e. The most important criterion in the selection of the NJC Director should be that he or she display past success in a management position.

The most important skills for an NJC Director are management skills. He or she should display not simply some management experience, but specific and impressive experience in a management position. Contrary to general public perceptions, the director of a new, innovative community program such as an NJC must be an extraordinary manager, tolerant of ambiguity, possessing leadership qualities, able to set and meet goals and deadlines, etc. The skills of dispute resolution and knowledge of the workings of segments of the

criminal justice system are helpful, but less important and more easily acquired than management skills.

- f. NJCs should develop and utilize a large cadre of motivated volunteers, not only to perform mediation, but to assist in outreach, case processing, etc.

Probably no single element in the approach of the Atlanta NJC was more significant than their creation of a highly motivated cadre of volunteers. The volunteers performed invaluable outreach functions, spending days and weeks in the courts soliciting and screening referrals, assisting with mock mediation presentations to civic organizations, etc. Senior NJC staff nurtured, directed, praised, and provided feedback to this valued resource on a daily basis. Moreover, all the mediators were used on a periodic basis; and a good deal of staff time was spent scheduling mediators, calling to remind them of hearings, etc. Volunteers are critical resource people who can make a significant impact on an NJC.

- g. Although mediation hearings are at the heart of NJC functions, increased attention should be given to conciliation and out-referral.

The results of this research showed that a large number of disputes are resolved -- and remain resolved -- without going to a hearing. In many cases, important disputes were resolved in a matter of minutes through a few brief telephone calls -- a very efficient means of resolution. Of course these conciliations are not applicable to all types of disputes. An analysis of complainants who were referred to another agency showed that a significant proportion (although a minority) of them followed the referral and were assisted in some fashion. NJCs should look closely at the increased use of such out-referrals.

- h. Mediator training can be accomplished, at least partially, through the use of local resources.

In most major cities, effective mediator training can be accomplished with local training resources, using outside experts (who are typically more expensive) only for spot counseling. NJCs should take care not to train more mediators than they can initially use, or the mediators may lose interest or become frustrated. Initial training probably does not have to exceed 60 total hours; beyond this period, participants may begin to become bored and restless. It is important for staff to attend the mediator training as well, since it familiarizes them with the process, and they will be prepared if called upon (as can happen) to perform a mediation.

- i. Well before an NJC becomes operational, the senior staff

and Board should carefully articulate their goals and objectives.

The NJC senior staff and Board should devote as much as eight to ten hours across several sessions in articulating their goals, objectives, and their underlying philosophy. These goals should also be prioritized according to importance. This exercise can help to ensure that all the senior staff and Board members attain some degree of consensus on the nature and direction of the program.

- j. After center operations are under way, NJCs should continue to monitor caseload data, continue outreach, provide feedback to referral agencies, and conduct follow-up on cases resolved.

At the outset of center operations, NJCs must establish a routine for monitoring, feedback, follow-up, and outreach. Case-loads (size, type, referral source, etc.) should be monitored regularly. The NJC should provide formal and informal feedback to referral sources. Mechanisms for routine follow-up of resolved cases must be established, and outreach functions -- presentations to groups, media campaigns, etc. -- must be continued on a regular basis.

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