

reporter

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CHALLENGE in the COUNTRYSIDE

This issue of the CURA Reporter looks at another major Community Development effort in the State of Minnesota. CURA's belief is that projects like the Countryside Council will benefit not only the area directly served but the State as a whole. Material about the Council was submitted by Dr. Robert Johnson, Vice President, Public Services and Development, Southwest Minnesota State College. Information about the Lincoln County project was provided by Robert Morse, Associate Director, Urban Education Center.

INITIATION OF COUNTRYSIDE COUNCIL

Focusing on a section of Minnesota that covers almost 16% of the state's land area and houses 8% of the state's population, the Countryside Council provides an arena for community cooperation and an avenue for higher education to play a leading role in solving community problems.

Because of the potential benefits of a cooperative venture, the people in a 19-county area of west central and southwestern Minnesota joined with an educational consortium of area vocational technical institutes, community colleges, the state college system and the University of Minnesota to tackle community problems.

The members of the educational consortium are: Canby, Granite Falls, Jackson, Pipestone, and Willmar Area Vocational Technical Institutes, Willmar and Worthington Community Colleges, Southwest Minnesota State College and the University (Cooperative Extension, Continuing Education and Extension, and the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs).

The approximately 13,000 square miles composing the Countryside Council's territory includes some of the best farmland in Minnesota. Highly productive soils and rich prairie land encourage cash grain and livestock farming. With greater than 90% of the land used for crops, the area supports the most intensive use of land in the state in addition to yielding the highest value of farm products sold per acre.

Like most rural sectors, however, the 19-county region involved in the Countryside Council is characterized by declining population. Between 1960 and 1970 the region realized a net population loss of 13%.

Encompassing an area under the aegis of four different regional development commissions, the Countryside Council

offers a broad base for organizing community cooperation. A 23-member Executive Committee composed of one representative from each of the 19 counties and each of the participating levels of higher education directs the council's activities.

Employing study techniques modeled on the process used by the Citizens League, the Countryside Council uses a task force approach in dealing with broad problem areas which confront the area as a whole. In addition the Council assists some specific community projects.

"While each community is unique, there [is] a common thread . . . the overriding concern at any given time may be related most directly to an economic, political, environmental, social or moral problem, but the common theme . . . is probably encompassed in the phrase, *quality of life*."¹ While the Council meets regularly, it is the people themselves who define the problems, study them in depth and propose solutions to the wide range of social and economic problems they face.

The Countryside Council, now in its second year, was established to operationalize a modern-day "work bee" where neighbors help neighbors in projects beyond their individual capabilities. The University of Minnesota's Cooperative Extension Service through its Community Resource Development (CRD) agent and the Lincoln County Extension Agent provides assistance to the Council.

Basic financial support for the Countryside Council is provided through a \$774,000 grant for a 39-month period from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan. Southwest Minnesota State College is fiscal agent for the Kellogg grant.

¹Kinsinger, Robert E., Vice President, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, in an address delivered at the Community and Campus Conference sponsored by the National Association of Development Organizations, Washington, DC, May 1, 1974.

Through the program called "Challenge in the Countryside", the Council is seeking to explore and expand countryside services such as leadership and training of locally elected and appointed officials; environmental research; human services delivery; community and regional development; and, alternative methods of providing educational and cultural resources for the people of the region.

A major goal of the Countryside Council is to develop methodologies or strategies for solving areawide problems and to devise model approaches to community problems which could be implemented by various communities throughout the area.

Although the Council had little difficulty in identifying broad problem areas which require attention, they were less certain about the best method of generating problem solutions once the problems were identified. Because of this

uncertainty the Citizens League (serving the Twin City Metro Area) was contacted for consultation. After an explanation of the Citizens League approach, the Council decided to adopt their problem inquiry method.

TASK FORCES

To develop problem-solving strategies in previously-identified areas, the Council has organized research task forces to study the broad fields of transportation, economic development, training of public officials, human services and the arts (fig. 1). Housing and health care task forces are waiting in the wings and are expected to begin intensive work in the fall. Each task force is chaired by at least one Council member, and all concerned citizens of the region are encouraged to join them.

The task forces are staffed by research coordinators who are responsible for

arranging the groups' meetings, providing resource speakers and supplying the members with research materials bearing on their specific areas of study. In addition, when the task force has completed its research and analysis the research coordinator assists the task force members in drafting a report of their conclusions and recommendations.

This report is submitted to the County Chairpersons Committee who may accept it or refer it to the task force for further refining. If it is accepted, the report then goes to the Council as a whole which also has the option of accepting the report or returning it for further work. When the Council accepts a report, the Council becomes an advocate for its implementation and will entertain a proposal for funding the program through the Kellogg Grant.

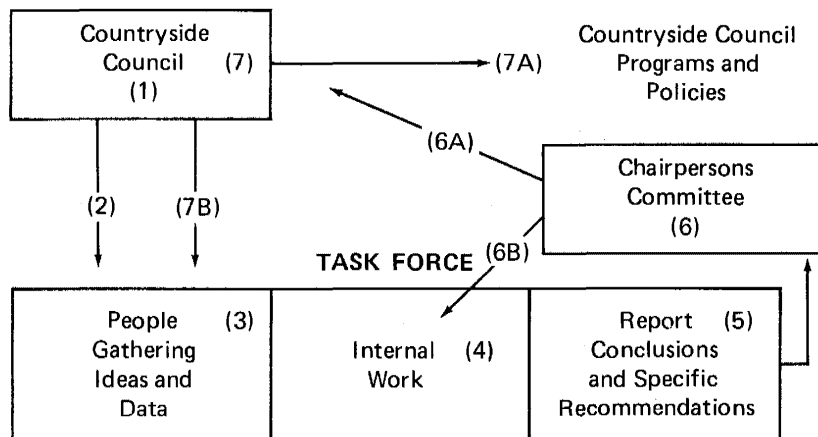
People in the countryside have responded to the task force process. Citizens from all walks of life have come together, in many instances from widely separated parts of the 19-county area; they have clearly defined the problems in their own terms and are now attacking these problems in dynamic, creative ways. These task forces move at their own pace with separate schedules, so the following description of individual task force activities reflects task force progress only to an arbitrarily chosen point. In some cases this summary may not sufficiently reflect achievements of a group.

Human Services Task Force

Through a Human Services Task Force, between 70-75 people from all the counties in the region are actively engaged in determining ways in which human needs can and should be met either by existing human service delivery systems or by developing new services. They have organized into sub-groups focusing on the following principal areas of interest:

1. New Projects and Programs — a group of 35-40 people divided into subsections to concentrate on:
 - Family Life;
 - Bi-lingual Education;
 - Minibus Transportation for the Elderly and Handicapped;
 - Youth Centers
2. Voluntarism — a group of 8-10 people currently working toward the establishment of a Governor's Commission on Voluntarism.

CHALLENGE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE
Task Force Process and Reporting Procedures



1. Countryside Council identifies problem areas.
2. Countryside Council initiates the task force.
3. Task Force organizes and identifies specific problem areas.
4. Task Force sets up priorities and refines programs.
5. Task Force writes report with conclusions and specific recommendations and presents it to the Chairpersons Committee (2 weeks before meeting).
6. Chairpersons Committee Acts:
 - A. If accepted, the report is presented to Countryside Council (Presentation at least 2 weeks before meeting).
 - B. If not accepted report returns to Task Force with recommendations for further work.
7. Countryside Council Acts:
 - A. If accepted, Council becomes advocate for implementation.
 - B. If not accepted, report returns to Task Force with recommendations for further work.

3. **Human Services Integration** — a group of 20-25 people trying to solve the problems of agency overlap and uncoordinated services. The group is made up of professional welfare directors, public health nurses, county commissioners and lay people.
4. **Information and Referral** — a group of 10-12 people exploring ways of collecting and disseminating reliable information on existing agencies in the 19 counties. The use of microfilm and computers for information retrieval are two of the methods under consideration.

These groups will soon be preparing formal written reports to the Countryside Council on their findings.

Transportation Task Force

The Transportation Task Force was developed in an attempt to resolve some common but extremely important problems of the product shipper in Southwestern Minnesota. Resource people who have addressed the group include representatives of the Minnesota Public Service Commission and the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad Company, a special assistant to Senator Walter F. Mondale on current and pending legislation affecting transportation, and a representative of a South Dakota transportation task force dealing with similar problems. The group has assigned priority to: 1) a public information program which will alert the people of the area to the gravity of the transportation situation; and 2) a concerted effort to secure corrective legislation. The first step in this direction was taken when the task force chairman appeared at a proposed railroad abandonment hearing held in June at Windom. The hearing took place before a Minnesota House of Representatives subcommittee on railroad abandonment and land use after abandonment. The chairman presented statistics assembled by the task force showing the comparative costs of upgrading railroad branch lines and underweight county roads and the financial hardship that would result from the announced abandonment of two specific branch lines.

Training of Public Officials Task Force

The Training of Public Officials Task Force was established to discover if a need exists in the 19-county area for new and/or revised training programs for elected and appointed local government officials — municipal, township, county —

and, if so, to determine how this need may best be filled. Assessment of needs was carried out through personal interviews and a mail survey in addition to an inventory of existing training programs and resources. Based on their analysis of these materials, the task force members are outlining a set of training priorities for southwestern Minnesota which will eventually be written into a report for submission to the Countryside Council. Training programs will deeply involve the member institutions of the Consortium and will be financed by a Northwest Bancorporation grant.

Economic Development

Although economic development is of vital importance to the 19-county area, it is a broad issue for which it is difficult to develop a strategy. Since the conventional task force technique used in dealing with other problems appeared unworkable for studying economic development, the president of one of the area's largest agriculturally-related management firms was asked to bring together a group of leaders in Minnesota agri-business to discuss the problem, particularly as it relates to agriculture.

At its subsequent meeting the group identified five areas that should be considered as offering significant economic benefits to the region.

These areas are:

1. The processing of corn-related products;
2. Utilizing animal wastes for energy production;
3. Area-wide programs in weather modification;
4. Increasing the production efficiency of the sugar beet refinery in Renville County by exploring off-season use of the plant; and
5. Increasing livestock production, notably that of sheep.

These project ideas are being explored further and outside sources of funds are being investigated. In carrying out its mission, the group is cooperating with the Minnesota Agri-growth Council in a program similar to one in California where that state's Agri-growth Council is working with the cooperation of its universities and colleges.

Arts Task Force

The goal of the Arts Task Force is to develop a regionally coordinated long-

range plan for the growth and development of the arts in southwestern Minnesota. A series of 13 meetings at various locations around the region were held to determine the needs and enlist the support of concerned individuals who would make up the membership of an Arts task force.

The organization which grew out of the meeting series set machinery in motion to replace the task force with a non-profit corporation to aid in the growth and development of the arts and humanities in southwestern Minnesota. As the first step, the task force elected a founding board of directors to incorporate the new organization and to write its constitution and by-laws. The formal report to the Countryside Council has been accepted and a proposal is in preparation.

Housing Task Force

The Housing Task Force is still in the information-gathering stage. Task force leaders and the area Community Resource Development Agent have visited five leading housing specialists at the federal, state and agency levels to gain exposure to the resources available. Based upon these contacts and information gleaned from other sources the leadership will develop a series of priorities which may form either the basis for an implementation plan or the guidelines for the formation of a research task force to study the problem in greater depth.

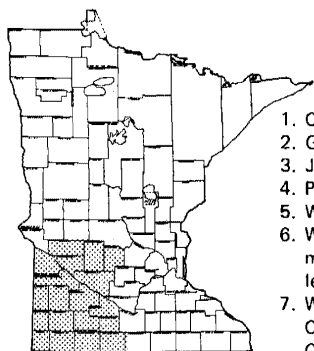
Health Services

Included among the grave health-related issues in the 19-county area are: the shortage of physicians, dentists and allied health personnel; a number of hospitals finding it difficult to obtain recertification; and the need for improved emergency care systems.

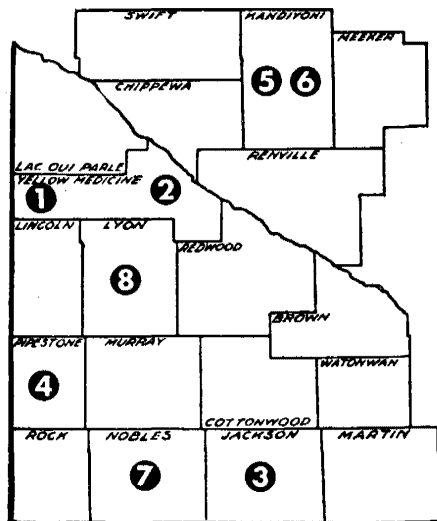
The health care issue is being considered by a small study group, headed by the director of the largest mental health organization in the region. The members are reviewing the problems and will write a report, probably in the fall, defining their priorities and identifying issues which should be pursued through task force study.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION CENTER

The original proposal to the Kellogg Foundation stressed the necessity for a



1. Canby AVTI
2. Granite Falls AVTI
3. Jackson AVTI
4. Pipestone AVTI
5. Willmar AVTI
6. Willmar Community College
7. Worthington Community College
8. Southwest Minnesota State College



comprehensive information base, easily accessible to researchers and decision makers working on countryside problems. The concept became a reality with establishment of the Community Development Information Center at Southwest Minnesota State College in Marshall.

Its diverse users include members of the Countryside Council and its research task forces; the administration, faculty and students of southwestern Minnesota's educational institutions, particularly the member institutions of the educational Consortium; local, regional, state and national government officials involved in formulating public policy; and, individuals seeking information on rural America.

The collection is expanding rapidly with an emphasis on materials concerning the nature of life and needs in southwestern Minnesota, the Countryside Council's research task force topics, and materials which place southwestern Minnesota's concerns in the context of national rural development policy. Collection resources include state and federal government documents, census data, books, journals, data base print-outs, con-

ference proceedings, research reports and studies, as well as reference materials such as indexes, bibliographies and directories.

The growth of the materials collection of the CDIC has been greatly aided by the cooperation of the University of Minnesota libraries, several special libraries in the Twin Cities area, the college and public libraries in southwestern Minnesota and the Offices of Minnesota legislators in the state capitol and Washington. The CDIC makes extensive use of MINITEX and the Minnesota Analysis and Planning System in securing information. It also encourages the use of its materials on an inter-library loan basis by libraries of the state, region, and nation.

An integral function of the CDIC is to match the information need of a user with the available material. To carry out that function it offers a variety of information services, for example:

- a reference and referral service;
- an acquisitions list of newly acquired materials arranged by subject;
- a series of bulletins issued as part of the CDIC's Current Awareness Service.

During the 1974 Minnesota Legislative Session, a bi-weekly current Awareness Bulletin was distributed to over 300 individuals and groups in southwestern Minnesota. It was an impartial summary of legislation pending in the Minnesota Senate and House of Representatives which in any way affected the 19-county area. Similar but less frequent bulletins were published summarizing federal legislation. On request, library users were furnished with copies of pending bills and reports of their status in the Legislature and Congress.

Depending upon the user's specific information needs CDIC performs a variety of services such as the compilation and dissemination of data, or literature searches and preparation of subject bibliographies. The Librarian is currently in the process of updating the PUBLIC AFFAIRS DIRECTORY FOR SOUTHWESTERN AND WEST CENTRAL MINNESOTA, and establishing a southwestern Minnesota Grant Information Center.

GRANT PROGRAMS

The Council participated in the implementation of three grant programs established in the educational Consortium by the State Arts Council, the Minnesota

Resources Commission, and under Title I of the Higher Education Act. The State Arts Council grant was in the amount of \$20,000; MRC provided \$50,000; and Title I committed \$20,000. 61 projects are supported by funds from these grants.

Involvement in these consortium grants has expanded the Council's sphere of influence and afforded it the opportunity to attract funding to supplement its Kellogg funds. In addition, it is able to play a key role in meeting the needs of the region as well as providing a peer review of projects adding a dimension of community involvement to the project selection process. Furthermore, through their participation, Council members are gaining familiarity with the process of considering proposals and allocating funds which will be valuable when they begin making disbursements for the Council's own programs.

Early in 1974, the Council launched its own \$20,000 small grants program designed to benefit citizens and communities in the 19-county area. Grants are intended to support significant and deserving projects in amounts not to exceed \$1,000. In its review of nearly 150 proposals, the County Chairpersons committee applied the following criteria:

1. That the grants would support programs and projects in areas where other funds were not available or difficult to procure;
2. That the grants would encourage development of local programs which would generate community support and participation; and
3. That the projects funded would ultimately result in an improved quality of life in the west central and southwestern Minnesota region.

A total of 26 projects and programs were funded. A random sample indicating the range of these projects includes: establishing a countywide teen-age employment agency - financing the costs of a judge, ribbons, and cash awards for a community art show - providing adequate lighting in a county museum - purchasing materials used in the renovation of a town's municipal building.

A program of incentive tuition scholarships for continuing education available to anyone in the 19-county area over 25 years of age has also been established in the Consortium. The scholarship program is funded by the Otto Bremer Foundation of St. Paul in cooperation with the Western State Bank in Marshall,

the Bank of Willmar, and the State Bank of Redwood Falls. A total of \$50,000 was granted to fund the scholarships to be disbursed at the rate of \$10,000 a year over a five-year period.

Eight Consortium institutions — the five Vocational-Technical Institutes, the two Community Colleges, and Southwest Minnesota State College — participated in the Continuing Education program which was launched in November 1973. The lowest average age, 31, was reported by the Canby Area Vocational-Technical Institute while the highest, 43, was reported by its Jackson Area counterpart. Course offerings have included such disparate titles as Psychology of Death, Introduction to Astronomy, Business Law, Nurses Aide, Refrigeration, Farm Management, Principles of Accounting, Alcohol and Drugs, Deviant Behavior, and Earth Science.

In October 1973, nine Northwest Bancorporation member banks in west central and southwestern Minnesota committed themselves to financing a three-year program of education for elected and appointed officials in the area the Council serves. The annual budget for the program is \$15,000 and the Council's Training of Public Officials task force has been designated as the implementing agency.

LINCOLN COUNTY ACTION

The Lincoln County Project demonstrates the type of results that have been achieved through the Countryside Council's efforts. In the spring of 1974 Brian Shorten, then a senior student in the Urban Studies Program at the University, began a 1-quarter internship in Ivanhoe, Minnesota. The object of Shorten's internship which was sponsored through CURA's Urban Education Center (UEC) and financed through the Kellogg grant was to gather economic data to answer Lincoln County's questions — What shape is our county in; what are we gaining or losing; and, from whom are we gaining or to whom are we losing?

Through a referral from the Countryside Council's Director, a request for an economic survey was submitted to UEC by the Lincoln County Planning and Development Committee, an ad hoc citizens' advisory commission. A team of students from Southwest State and the University assisted Shorten in conducting the survey, as well as tabulating and interpreting the data.

The data collection process, similar to the method used by UEC in Renville County, was modeled on the survey instrument and market mapping technique developed by Brian L. Barry, an Economic Geographer. UEC's adaptation of the technique involved simply scaling down to deal with smaller communities.

Through the cooperation of the local school boards, the area school districts were used as basic geographic units and the high school seniors formed the sample population.

UEC was also interested in helping this community with general physical design problems and providing the people with some visible results. The Lincoln County Planning and Development committee defined some problems by UEC students. A sample of the problems identified by the Lincoln County Planning and Development Committee includes:

1. Park Planning

- In Ivanhoe the people wanted to add a tennis court but did not want to sacrifice their park land — through the work of UEC students a park design was prepared to add the tennis court which allowed them to realize an expanded amount of park space.
- In Tyler the students assisted in siting playlot equipment.
- In the Lake Benton area UEC students will be working on play equipment for a county park in addition to landscaping a Senior Citizens Home in Lake Benton.

2. Community Center Design

- In Hendricks students are still working on a Community Center which will be made out of an old clinic on the town's main street. The Center is being designed to provide facilities for both young and elderly.

Looking toward the future, the Lincoln County Planning and Development Committee also began to focus its attention on the County's housing situation. The basic question they addressed was "What kind of governmental structure is necessary to facilitate housing improvement and make use of the data we have collected?"

Realizing that they would need someone to handle the data and work it into programs, the committee advanced a proposal to hire a planner/developer. As a result of their request that the County

establish a planning commission and a planner/developer position with partial County support, the existence of an inactive commission was discovered. The Lincoln County Planning Commission which had been appointed 5 years earlier was reactivated. Brian Shorten was involved in assisting the Commission to prepare a job description and to establish selection criteria for the planner/developer position. The County hired Dennis Whitney, a former regional commission employee, to fill the new position.

In recognition of the benefits they derived from the student's involvement the County and community offered to support Shorten to continue his work with them. Shorten, however, has accepted a job as a regional economic development planner in South Dakota.

The UEC is now planning how to operationalize a survey requested by the Lincoln County Planning Commission to help them obtain a picture of the status of their housing stock. In addition, the survey should help prepare them to take advantage of housing support programs such as the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and Federal Housing and Urban Development Department Leased Housing monies.

A key element in the Countryside Council is that the program begins and ends with people. The faculties and students of the Educational Consortium together with the men and women who make up the task forces, either as members of the Council or as involved citizens, are essential resources.

Two important aspects of the Council's operation are:

- the residents of the area are becoming informed about their communities and problems while gaining the knowledge they will need to deal effectively with policy-makers who affect Southwest Minnesota; and
- the action program adopted for the region will have been generated by the citizens of the region rather than derived from an administrative fiat.

The Countryside Council through its member educational institutions will provide residents of the 19-county area with the tools they need to identify and implement solutions to their problems. The Kellogg grant provides the funds needed to turn their research into action.

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● *A note to our readers about
John Borchert, CURA Director.*

In June of this year John discovered that his tussle with an ulcerous stomach had taken a new turn (the ulcerous condition shouldn't be a shock to anyone who is familiar with John's continuing way of doing the work of four men — and doing it exceedingly well). All this has required

2 surgical experiences and a period of required convalescence all pointing to a condition of "as good as new" in time but with rest and adaptation to a "lighter load" for awhile. John currently describes his digestive process as one resembling a "Rube Goldberg invention" with all the accompanying ups, downs and ins and outs. John will be on leave fall quarter to aid in this process, but in typical Borchert

fashion he won't be far away and will be making a major contribution to both CURA and the Geography Department. We're all sure that cutting back to normal output for one quarter will have him back as healthy and vigorous as ever in January.

Thomas L. Anding
Associate Director