ALMP PLANS CENTER IN WEST PHILLY

ALMP plans to open a community center for "mental patients" in West Philadelphia very soon--probably sometime after the first of the year. Envisioned as a way of expanding our efforts to develop "direct advocacy" and personal support among those oppressed by psychiatry, the center will hopefully involve a greater number of people in ALMP activities while at the same time providing a community of support for those who, for any number of reasons, do not wish to involve themselves in other political, educational, or legal activities of the Alliance.

Many aspects of our plans are uncertain, but several things are already clear to us. For example, we don't want the center to become some new kind of counseling service, with a class of "clients" who receive support from a class of "staff" people--even if the "staff" are all former psychiatric inmates. We intend to create an environment in which everyone involved may both give and receive support as a matter of course.

Nor do we wish to imply that there is a real distinction between personal support and political activity; we realize that support can be political and that political activity can be the most effective form of support. We see the center as being an affirmation of this priciple and hope that some of those who originally come to the center for sanctuary and support will eventually want to work on other ALMP projects as well. However, this will not be a requirement in order to participate in activities of the center.

What we do want to see is a center which reflects at all levels the principle of self-determination. The exact nature of the center will be decided by the people who use it. Some ideas which have been suggested so far include:

1) Generally operating the center as a sanctuary/coffeehouse/"drop-in" center for former and current "mental patients" (opinions vary as to the exact title). This would mean creating an informal atmosphere conducive to socializing, relaxing, rapping about experiences with psychiatry and life in general, sharing personal support, survival skills, etc.

2) Renting a large house for the center and using the top floors for free emergency short-term housing for people being discharged from (or escaping commitment to) psychiatric institutions. This would give some people an opportunity to collect some money for an apartment instead of being forced to live in boarding homes or other undesirable living situations.

3) Reserving a portion of the center as a women's space.

The above should not be considered as the only functions such a center could serve. If you are a current or former psychiatric inmate ("mental patient"), your ideas and especially your help would be most needed and welcome. This project is currently being coordinated by Bob Harris. If you can offer any of your time in order to make this center a reality, please call him at the ALMP office or leave a message.

As with all Alliance projects, the ultimate survival of the center will depend on money to keep it running. However, we can guarantee the center's survival for at least a year--long enough to devise ways to keep the center going if it is successful. Incidentally, if you know of any available houses in West Philly with reasonable rents, please call and let us know.

WOMEN'S SUPPORT GROUP

A weekly support group for women who have been in psychiatric institutions or who have received coercive psychiatric "treatment" in a non-institutional setting is in the process of forming. The support group will be a place where we can validate our own feelings and perceptions without fear of psychiatric labeling or drug pushing, where we can share with each other our daily struggles, and just hang out together. The group will be meeting Sundays at 1 p.m. at different members' houses. To get involved, call or write Jenny at the Alliance office.