

WASHINGTON COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION ORGANIZATION

451 S. First Ave., Suite 700, Hillsboro, OR 97123

Hillsboro Office

451 S. First Ave., Suite 700
Hillsboro, OR 97123
648-6646 – Administration
FAX – 648-4175

- Executive Director
- Finance
- Head Start
- Child Care
- Parenting Education
- Resource Development
- Client Services
- Self Sufficiency
- Weatherization
- Fair Housing
- Housing Advocacy

648-0829 – Client Services

- Information & Referral
- Intake & Assessment for all WCCAO Services
- 640-8951 (part year) Heating Assistance

Emergency Shelter Home

210 S.E. 12th
Hillsboro, OR 97123
648-0829

- Temporary Family Shelter

Tualatin Valley Food Center

925 S.W. Baseline
Hillsboro, OR 97123
640-6005
FAX – 681-4932

- Christmas Clearing Bureau
- Brown Bag

Neighborshare

12750 S.W. Pacific Hwy.
Suites 110 & 111
Tigard, OR 97223
639-0495

- Information & Referral
- Intake & Assessment for all WCCAO Services & Tigard Shelter

Play It Again (Thrift Store)

4955 S.W. Hall Blvd.
Beaverton, OR 97005
644-8956

August 10, 1993

MEMO

TO: WCCAO Board of Directors

FROM: Jerralynn News 

Last year an eighth grade student from Evergreen, named Rachel Hanen, was paired up with me as part of their TAG Mentor Program. She spent the year familiarizing herself with WCCAO and the needs of the low income community. At the end of the year she produced a report entitled, "Social Services & Homelessness", for which she received an A+ - the only A given.

I wanted to share her report with you as the document is well written and very informative. I hope you enjoy it.

JN:ns
Attach.



A United Way Agency

"People Helping People"

Social Services and Homelessness

Past

Homelessness and poverty have always been a problem in America. Twenty-nine years ago on August 20, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA), which proclaimed in its preamble: "It is the policy of the United States to eliminate the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty in this nation by opening to everyone the opportunity to work, and the opportunity to live in decency and dignity." With this eloquent statement, the "War on Poverty " was declared.¹

The EOA included new education, employment and training, and work experience programs such as the Job Corps, The Neighborhood Youth Corps, and Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA), the "domestic peace corps". Congress bypassed the state and local governments and provided direct funding of community groups - the Community Action concept.

The Federal Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) was to lead the efforts of the War on Poverty and coordinate related programs of all other federal agencies. So-called Community

Action Agencies (CAAs) were created to fight the War on Poverty "at home".

The EOA also provided for the creation of State Economic Opportunity Offices (SEOOs) at the state level in order to involve the governors in the war on poverty. While governors were not given the authority to give prior approval on OEO grants, they did retain the right to veto any of these that they thought inappropriate. Many, especially those in the South, exercised this right, only to be checked by another EOA provision for a veto override by the director of OEO, Mr. Shriver. Mr. Shriver overrode virtually all vetos.

CAAs varied from grass roots community controlled groups to those with experience members and a highly visible professional staff. Most were incorporated as private, non-profit organizations. A few were city agencies. Funds were provided through OEO. the local CAAs determined the use of the funds to meet the needs of the poor as they defined them. These funds were called "local initiative" funds, and were used for a variety of purposes.

The community action program grew rapidly and poured large amounts of federal funds into communities, leaving some elected officials concerned over the control of the CAA boards. Unhappy with the new power blocks outside their own political organizations, a few big city mayors communicated their

concern to Congress and President Johnson. As a result, Congress began to earmark new funds into Congressionally defined National Emphasis Programs that reduced the ability of the CAAs to use the funds for their own purposes. The President's enthusiasm began to decline.

In late 1967, Congress passed the Green Amendment, which required that a CAA must be designated for that area by local elected officials, in order to operate in that community. After designation, OEO could then recognize the CAA and provide funds.

The formal recognition of the political, economical, and community power proved to be a tremendous strength. In many places, the CAA board became the arena for local officials, the business sector, and the poor to reach an agreement on the policies, self-help activities, and programs to help the poor in their community.

At the start of President Nixon's second term in 1973, he did not request any funds for OEO's Community Action Program division. Nevertheless, Congress provided the funds. President Nixon appointed Howard Phillips as director of OEO, and told him to dismantle and close the agency, and to not spend the money that Congress provided.

After a series of lawsuits, the Federal District Court in Washington, D.C. ruled that the president could not refuse to spend funds that had been appropriated by Congress . Mr. Phillips resigned without having been confirmed by the Senate.

Under President Gerald Ford, in 1974, the Community Services Amendments were passed. OEO was dismantled, and a "new" Community Services Administration (CSA) replaced it. The employees remained and continued to administer the programs. Community Action had found a new home in Federal Government.

In the late 1970s, under prodding from Congress, The Carter Administration initiated large-scale effort to strengthen the role and management systems of both CSA and CAAs. This resurgence of "local" spirit and leadership came to a quick end with the passage of the Omnibus Budget and Reconciliation Act of 1981.

The Reagan Administration began a strong movement to substantially reduce the Federal government's support for domestic social programs . They proposed to consolidate most federally funded human needs programs into several large general purpose block grants, to reduce the total amount of funding by 25%, and to delegate the responsibility for administering these block grants to the states.²

The proposal was partially successful. Congress created eight new block grants, consolidating over 200 Federal programs, reduced the core funding, and turned administrative authority over to the states. However, it did not accept the elimination of federal funding for CAAs.

On September 30, 1981, the CSA was abolished, and the Economic Opportunity Act was rescinded. Approximately 1,000 CSA staff were fired.

Budget cuts in poverty programs continue, but CAAs continue to provide a "hand up, not a hand out". The philosophy of eliminating "The paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty" remains the key concept that motivates CAAs today.³

Past: *WCCAO Family Shelter*

Washington County Community Action Organization (WCCAO) is a local Community Action Agency, with its headquarters located here in Hillsboro. It was created in 1964 as a part of President Johnson's War on Poverty. WCCAO owns and operates a family shelter on 12th street.⁴

In 1976, the house used for the shelter ^{which} was ~~sold to the~~ ^{built} ~~county~~ by the Shute family, ^{became} as a historical landmark, ^{in Hillsboro} WCCAO leased the house and surrounding property, and later bought

it. From the beginning, WCCAO used the house as a shelter, but the early focus was on the individual, where it was open to single adults, only. In 1982, the focus of the shelter was changed to an exclusively family orientated shelter. Only parents with children were accepted. Due to the declining economy, a family of four simply could not get by on minimum wage, even with both parents working. In 1990, the focus widened to include single women and childless couples, if there was room. Due to lack of space, single men are not permitted.⁵

Present

What we have now is an underfunded non-system of public welfare and a myriad of social service programs. We have an America with more than 30 million poor people, of whom more than 12 million are children.⁶ The gap between the rich and the poor has never been greater. In addition, our nation's demographics are changing, as our society ages, and becomes more racially mixed.

As we compare the early 1960s to this age of retrenchment, it is important to remember what is at stake. Poverty is a scourge that strikes at the individual, the family, our communities, and the nation as a whole. If it is not

compassion that moves us, perhaps self-interest will rekindle a desire to solve the "paradox of poverty".

Roots of family homelessness are a myriad and apply to discussions of homeless adult individuals and runaway youths, as well as parents with children. During this past decade, cutbacks in benefits, coupled with severe shortages of low-income housing jeopardized the stability of all people with reduced or fixed incomes- pushing many onto the streets. Although the exact size of the homeless population is unknown, experts know that it is growing. An advocacy group, the Partnership for the Homeless, reported that the number of homeless people increased 18 percent between 1988 and 1989.⁷

Ironically, increases in social welfare spending both in real dollars and in percent of the gross national product, did not benefit the poor during the 1980s. Social Security expenditures, for example, helped only the elderly. Even financial assistance programs, such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), accomplished little. Although most homeless families received such aid, the amounts are well below the 1990 federal poverty income level of \$13,359 for a family of four. The maximum amount of AFDC available to a family of three- even when taken together with food stamp benefits- bought 26 percent less in 1990 than it did in the early 1970s.⁸

At the same time financial assistance plummeted for many people, housing costs outdistanced income. The median rent of unsubsidized, low-income apartments climbed from \$255 to \$360 per month. And the number of poor renters increased from 4.5 million in 1974 to 7 million in 1984.⁹

Gentrification and the conversion of apartments to condominiums further depleted the supply of affordable housing. This shortage was never addressed by federal government. In the past 10 years, the government has virtually ceased funding construction and rehabilitation programs for low- and moderate-income housing.

Rising rents in a tight real estate market were enough to cast thousands if not millions of borderline workers and welfare families out of their homes. Under the Reagan Administration, the federal government cut housing assistance by 75 percent, and much of what was left was wasted. The Department of Housing and Urban Development stopped subsidizing new housing, and handed out rent vouchers instead. This increased demand without increasing the supply.¹⁰

There are many programs to try and help the homeless. Here in Eugene, Oregon, a new camp for the homeless has opened and is quickly proving to be a success. The Continental Car Camp for the Homeless charges only one dollar per night for motor homes and tents. The camp was started as a means of giving homeless people a safe haven at night. Several camp coordinators work eight-hour shifts, checking in with camp residents to make sure that there are no problems. The camp has a round-the-clock coordinator, portable toilets, clean water, bus service, and a pay telephone, and a maximum of 30 tents or vehicle campers. It will be open through May 31. The people, who are mostly temporarily down on their luck, see staying there as a way back up.¹¹

Washington County Community Action Organization (WCCAO), is a local organization dedicated to serving the economically disadvantaged in Washington County by providing for basic needs and by promoting long term self-sufficiency. WCCAO provides many activities, as you will see in the outline below.¹²

A. Information and Referral: Specialists inform clients of services available both through WCCAO and through other agencies. Referrals are made for services that are not provided by WCCAO.

B. Intake and Need Assessment: Specialists work with clients to assess both emergency needs and other needs for assistance. The following services may be provided:

- 1. Emergency Shelter: Temporary emergency housing is provided for homeless families with children, and migrant workers.**
- 2. Transitional Housing: Temporary housing in single family dwellings is provided for families transitioning from emergency shelter to independent living situations.**
- 3. Rent Assistance: Clients are given financial assistance to help prevent homelessness.**
- 4. Fair Housing: Information is provided to promote equal opportunity in housing. Tenants receive help to resolve problems and, if necessary, file housing discrimination complaints.**
- 5. Heating Assistance: Clients are given financial assistance to help with heating needs; information is provided on utility policies and consumer rights.**
- 6. Energy Self Sufficiency: Case managers work with identified households to help them reduce their**

energy bill through a combination of weatherization, conservation, budget counseling, and co-payment plans.

7. **Energy Conservation:** Education, training, and weatherization services are provided to low-income households to conserve energy, and reduce home heating costs.

8. **Brown Bag Program:** Surplus food and incidentals are distributed on a monthly basis to members. Membership is open to all low-income families for a \$12 annual fee.

9. **Christmas Clearing Bureau:** The Bureau is a clearing house for the Christmas Basket applications. It is run by volunteers that match sponsors up with clients. Some holiday food baskets are provided through the Food Bank.

10. **Head Start:** Three and Four year old low income and handicapped children attend classrooms five days a week. Parent involvement is emphasized by encouraging parents to serve as aids in the classrooms, help plan the center activities, and participate in program decision making as members of the Policy Council.

11. Parenting Classes: Educational programs and support are provided to parents, in an effort to give assistance with parenting issues.

C. Self-Sufficiency Support: Case management services are provided to homeless families residing in WCCAO's shelter home, Tigard Christian Ministries Shelter, and Transitional housing, and to low-income families participating in Head Start, Oregon Partners in Energy, and Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention programs. Comprehensive, family-based services are provided, which include needs identification, goal setting, linkage to services, and advocacy.

Washington County's homeless rate, a mere six percent, is the lowest in the state.¹³ However, Washington County is also one of the most populous, and the number of homeless is alarming. The homeless shelter has to turn away hundreds of people a month.

It is appropriate to ponder the meaning of an infrequently quoted statement in the inaugural address of President John F. Kennedy: "If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich."

Present:
WCCAO Family Shelter

WCCAO's family shelter is one of WCCAO's most important services offered. It is geared toward the family, in contrast to most shelters, which are individually orientated. ? → must go through a very careful screening process in order to qualify. People with a history of crime, drug use, mental instability, or domestic violence are not admitted, but WCCAO tries to make referrals to house these people in other places. After the careful screening process which included a background check and a personal interview, and if there is room in the shelter, the family will be accepted. There is room for about eight families in the shelter. They will enter the shelter, and be given a food box. On the second day, they will meet with their case manager, who will be working with them on finding affordable/transitional housing. The case manager will also work with them on finding a job, and other problems. Everyone is expected to follow through on their case, try to get transitional housing, and do their chores and follow rules at the shelter.¹⁴

WCCAO had to turn away 5770 people from the shelter last year, and are expecting to have to turn away at least 8000 this year. This huge amount of people is due to the economic situation. Minimum wage is just not cutting it these days. There is a serious lack of affordable housing, as housing trends

move more towards middle-class apartments and condominiums. In 1987, the people staying in the shelter had mostly low-income, little education, and few skills. The families are becoming increasingly middle-income with a college education. Last year, more than 50 percent of the people were working, earning minimum wage or slightly more. With a family, it just doesn't work.¹⁵

The attitude at the shelter is as varied as the people themselves. The shelter encourages independence and individualized work, with a decreasing dependence on the shelter. The people get along surprisingly well. It is difficult moving in with up to seven other families. Everyone is very different, with a huge diversity in cultures, personalities, and beliefs. Conflicts are few and far between, as people make friends, and seem eager to help one another. If a problem does occur, the staff tries to help the groups work it out, or at least put it on hold for the three week period that they are allowed to live there. If it becomes a real problem, the people are asked to modify their behavior or risk being asked to leave the shelter.

Michael Vigil, the ^{Homeless} ~~Adult and Family~~ Services Manager at the shelter, has worked with WCCAO since 1987. Michael says that he really enjoys his job, and that it is very satisfying to see the difference that you can make. It really gives you a good feeling about yourself. Michael likes seeing people move away

from crisis and in a new direction. The hardest part of his job, Michael says, is having to turn people away. It just tears your heart out. Michael notes that is also easy to become emotionally attached to the people, and that you just have to keep yourself on professional terms with everyone, no matter how hard it is.¹⁶

(cut out a general "Future" section)

Future: **WCCAO Family Shelter**

Measure 5 will have a big impact on the funding for WCCAO's Family Shelter. This measure amends the Oregon constitution by reducing the amount of property taxes. There will be some major funding cuts, and transitional housing funds on both a state and national level will be drastically reduced. Emergency shelters will also be affected.

Michael Vigil feels that resources will become limited, in the future, which is too bad, because there are many things that the shelter still needs. Transportation, child care, more resources, self-esteem and family issue programs, and more money are a few of the many things the shelter needs.²⁵

Michael looks ahead to the year 2000, and still finds a way to be optimistic. He would love it if the shelter was simply no longer needed, in the year 2000, and that low-income housing would be developed, so that the shelter wouldn't be necessary. But he knows that this isn't realistic, so he focuses

instead on the changes for good that are all ready underway. He sees that people are realizing the importance of low-income housing, and is greatly cheered by the fact that more money is going into that aspect. More long-term services are also being developed, to help to keep people off the streets. He also hopes the the generational poverty will change, and that kids will get a chance at life that their parents didn't have.²⁶

As for Bill Clinton, Michael is also optimistic. Clinton's focus is on helping the homeless, not just shoving them under a rug. He feels that Clinton has some of the right ideas, and if given the opportunity, he might be able to turn things around. But, Michael realizes that people aren't going to like the raising of taxes. But, taxes have to be raised in order to help people. "You can't get something for nothing," Michael stated. "I just wish people would realize that." ²⁷