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WASHINGTON COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION ORGANIZATION

451 S. First Ave., Suite 700, Hillsboro, OR 97123
Administration - 648-6646 FAX - 648-4175
Client Assistance - 648-0829

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- Advocacy
- Emergency Assistance
- Emergency Shelter
- Energy Education
- Family Self-Reliance
- Head Start & Child Care
- Homeless Services
- Housing Development
- Housing Services
- Information & Referral
- Parenting Education
- Transitional Housing
- Weatherization

August 9, 1994

MEMO

TO: WCCAO Board of Directors

FROM: Jerralynn Ness, Executive Director

SUBJECT: History of Community Action Agencies

Attached is "The History of Community Action Agencies" by Jim Masters. It was published in the National Association of Community Action Agencies Conference program in September 1989. I hope that you have a chance to read through it as I think your will find it to be useful and informative. Please insert this in your Board note book under "WCCAO History".

JN/pk

Board/Corresp/HisCAA94



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

- Executive Director
- Children & Youth
- Resource Development

648-0829 – Client Services

- Information & Referral
- Intake & Assessment for
all WCCAO Services
- 1-800-533-5941
Special Transportation
- 640-8951 (part year)
Heating Assistance

Emergency Shelter Home

210 S.E. 12th
Hillsboro, OR 97123

648-0829

- Temporary Family Shelter

Aloha Center

20515 S.W. Blanton
Aloha, OR 97007

642-3236

- Tualatin Valley Food Center
- Christmas Clearing Bureau
- Weatherization
- Fair Housing
- Housing Advocacy
- Fiscal Department
P.O. Box 7069
Aloha, OR 97007

Neighborshare

12230 S.W. Main St.
Tigard, OR 97223

639-0495

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

Play It Again (Thrift Store)

4955 S.W. Hall Blvd.
Beaverton, OR 97005

644-8956

September 12, 1989

MEMO

To: WCCAO Board of Directors

From: Jerralynn Ness

Subject: History of Community Action Agencies

Attached is "The History of Community Action Agencies" by Jim Masters. It was published in the National Association of Community Action Agencies Conference program. I hope that you have a chance to read through it as I think you will find it to be useful and informative.

JN/im

By
Jim Masters

BACKGROUND

From the days of the earliest settlers, the spirit of helping others has been a key element of American society. As communities sprang up and populations grew, the church became an important social institution and helpmate to those less fortunate.

The Industrial Revolution in the mid-1800s witnessed the development of the Settlement House, one of the early examples of a physical facility, other than a church, that served as a center of activity for community problem-solving.

In the early 1900s, schools began to offer formal training in the principles and methods of social work, bringing with it the birth of a new profession. The great depression of the 1930s overwhelmed the nation's communities, leaving churches and voluntary social welfare programs unable to cope with the magnitude of the existing social problems.

The Federal government stepped in to provide additional retirement income through a new Social Security Program and to assist those temporarily unemployed with the Unemployment Insurance System. It created new banking and labor laws to strengthen the economy.

A program to provide "temporary public assistance" to widows and children of men killed in industrial accidents was also created. Social workers were hired to determine eligibility, advise recipients about how to use the money, and help them obtain services necessary to get them off welfare.

From the 1930s to the late 1950s, state and local governments had much of the responsibility for administering the programs created during the depression.

As the communications media expanded its scope across the United States, the American public became more aware of the problems of the aged, the effects of segregation, of poor education, of health problems caused by malnutrition and hunger, of the need to educate

people so they might work, and of the growing difficulties of the low income population.

The American public soon believed that everyone could live "the good life" and that society as a whole had a responsibility for helping people overcome barriers that prevented them from sharing in the benefits of American society.

The United States Supreme Court decision in 1954 in *Brown v. Board of Education* declared that separate schools for blacks and whites in Topeka, Kansas, did not provide an equal education, i.e. that "separate was not equal." This landmark decision led to an expansion of federal policy-making into what had previously been a local arena.

That decision served as a catalyst in the area of publicly financed activity such as transportation and licensed public accommodations including lunch counters, restaurants and hotels. Citizens began to organize to guarantee their rights, and the Civil Rights Movement expanded rapidly.

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy's "New Frontier" included support for programs to prevent juvenile delinquency with the focal point, the President's Council on Juvenile Delinquency, chaired by Attorney General Robert Kennedy.

In New York City, the President's Council funded Mobilization for Youth (MFY) with the Ford Foundation and the City of New York. MFY organized and coordinated neighborhood councils comprised of local officials, service providers, and neighbors to develop plans to correct conditions which led to juvenile delinquency. It also enlisted the aid of School Board and City Council members to implement those plans.

It was called COMMUNITY ACTION, and it looked like an effective and inexpensive way to solve problems.

The Ford Foundation was funding other projects including one in New Haven, Connecticut, which recruited people from all sectors of the community to come together to plan and implement programs to help low income people.

MFY and New Haven are often cited as the "models" for a Community Action Agency.

THE HISTORY OF COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES

CREATION-1964

With the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963, President Lyndon Baines Johnson expanded the policy ideas initiated in the Kennedy Administration. In his message to Congress on January 8, 1964, President Johnson said,

"Let us carry forward the plans and programs of John F. Kennedy, not because of our sorrow or sympathy, but because they are right. . . This Administration today, here and now declares an unconditional War on Poverty in America. . . Our



Photos courtesy Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

President Johnson with former President and Mrs. Harry Truman, Hubert Humphrey and Mrs. Johnson.

joint Federal-local effort must pursue poverty, pursue it wherever it exists. In city slums, in small towns, in sharecroppers' shacks, or in migrant worker camps, on Indian reservations, among whites as well as Negroes, among the young as well as the aged, in the boom towns and in the depressed areas."

The "War on Poverty" was born. In February, R. Sargent Shriver was asked to head a task force to draft legislation. In August, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (EOA) was passed, creating a Federal Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) placed in the President's Executive Office. "Sarge" Shriver was named Director, serving until 1969.

Congress also passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, guaranteeing equal opportunity for all. The Economic Opportunity Act, designed to implement that guarantee in the economic sector, stated in part: "It is therefore 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 for education and training, the opportunity to work, and the opportunity to live in decency and dignity."

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 for direct funding of community groups—the community action concept.

FORMATIVE YEARS—1964-1967

The Federal 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 at the local level to fight the War on Poverty "at home."

The EOA also provided for the creation of State Economic Opportunity Offices (SEOO) at the state level in order to involve governors in the War on Poverty. While governors were not given authority to give prior approval on OEO grants, they did retain the right to veto any of these 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. Indeed, Mr. Shriver overrode virtually all vetos.

CAAs varied from grass roots community controlled groups to those with experienced board members and a highly visible professional staff. Most were incorporated as private nonprofit organizations. A few were city agencies.

Funds were provided through the OEO. The local CAAs determined the use of the funds to



Photos courtesy Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

President Lyndon Baines Johnson

meet the problems of the poor as they defined them. These funds were called "local initiative" funds, and were used for a variety of purposes.

One provision of the EOA called for the poor to have "maximum feasible participation" in identifying problems and in developing solutions. Across the nation, CAAs opened neighborhood centers in storefronts, housing projects and other buildings in low income areas to identify people who needed help and to determine eligibility.

A new group of community leaders developed out of these neighborhood organizations voicing the concerns of the poor and insisting on change. The philosophy, the strength and the personal commitments of community action were formed during this period. It was also during this phase that OEO hired 3,000 new Federal employees to manage and monitor all these new programs. Most of these people came from the CAAs, civil rights groups, churches, labor unions and other activist organizations.

The community action program grew rapidly and poured large amounts of Federal funds into communities leaving some local 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 concerns 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 other purposes. The President's enthusiasm began to decline.

RESTRUCTURING PHASE—1967-1968

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



Photos courtesy Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

Meeting with Sargent Shriver.

then recognize the CAA and provide funds.

After months of negotiations, over 95 percent of the existing CAAs were designated. In several large cities, the CAA was taken over by the mayor and turned into a public agency.

Congress also passed the Quie Amendment, which required that CAA Boards of Directors be composed of 1/3 elected officials appointed by them, at least 1/3 low income representatives selected by a democratic process, and the balance from the private sector.

By 1968, there were 1,600 CAAs covering 2,300 of the nation's 3,300 counties. OEO also required many smaller, single county CAAs to join together into multi-county units. By 1969, about 1,000 CAAs had been designated under the Green Amendment and recognized by OEO, reorganized to meet the Quie Amendment criteria and consolidated in accordance with OEO policy. Almost all of these CAAs are in existence today and operate the programs.

These amendments had a positive effect on most CAA boards, though the issue of increasing the influence of local elected officials on the Board of Directors was a significant issue to the leaders of poverty groups which had been operating independently. The formal connection of the political, economic and community power structures 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 agreement on the policies, self-help activities and programs to help the poor in their community.

TRANSITION YEARS—1969-1974

By 1969, many successful self-help programs had been initiated by OEO and the Community Action Agencies including Head Start, Family Planning, Community Health Centers, Legal Services, VISTA, Foster Grandparents, Economic Development, Neighborhood Centers, Summer Youth Programs, Adult Basic Education, Senior Centers, Congregate Meal Preparation and others.

Picking up on the concept of using OEO and CAAs as "innovators and the testing ground" for new programs and that successful programs would be spun off to be administered by other Federal agencies, the Nixon Administration saw the transfer of several large programs from OEO to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and the Department of Labor. Along with the program, went administrative oversight responsibility for a substantial part of CAA funding.

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

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT YEARS—1974-1981

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 the Federal government.

During 1974 to 1981, CSA continued to fund CAAs. CAAs continued to help communities and neighborhoods to initiate self help projects such as gardening projects, solar greenhouses, and housing rehabilitation. They additionally helped create and support Federally funded senior centers and congregate meal sites. Home weatherization and energy crisis programs were initiated in the 1970s.

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

In September 1981, Congress provided that all CAAs designated and recognized by CSA were eligible to be funded under the 90 percent pass-through requirement on the Community Services Block Grant. Congress also rescinded the EOA and the Green Amendment, eliminating the procedures and regulations for designation and recognition of CAAs.

BLOCK GRANT YEARS—1981-Present

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 percent, and to delegate the responsibility for administering these block grants to the states.

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. The Community Services Block Grant ensured the continued funding of the "eligible entities," i.e. the CAAs, migrant programs and certain other entities that had been financed through Local Initiative Funds by CSA.

Even with reduced core funding, CAAs have been able to leverage funding. A recent survey showed that with a CSBG budget of \$305,000, the average Community Action Agency was able to leverage more than 2.9 million dollars, a ratio of \$9.50 for every dollar of core funding. Agencies also recruited an average of 8 volunteers for every paid staff person.

Whatever the specific approach taken by individual states and the block grant, the number of CAAs has increased since 1981 from

about 932 to 954; the number of counties covered by a CAA has increased from 2,300 to 2,700 of the nation's 3,300 counties; and the number of dollars administered by CAAs has increased from about 1.9 billion in 1981 to about 2.7 billion in 1989.

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.

PROGRAMS CATALYZED BY THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 1964

The EOA was a major testing ground and incubator for new program ideas. Many of the publicly funded programs that are being operated today originated in the federal Office of Economic Opportunity in the 1960's, in the Community Services Administration in the 1970's, or by a State Economic Opportunity Office or by a Community Action Agency or a delegate agency of a CAA.

Some programs such as VISTA, the Job Corps, the Neighborhood Youth Corps and Legal Services were included in the original EOA. Over the years, these programs were spun-off from the EOA and from OEO by Presidents and the Congress. These programs were given their own statutes, new federal administrative structures and local delivery systems.

Other programs were developed by the federal Office of Economic Opportunity and CAA network as demonstration programs and subsequently expanded under the EOA. Head Start, the Foster Grandparent Program, Green Thumb, and Community Economic Development Programs are some examples here. As time passed many of these programs, too, developed into their own networks.

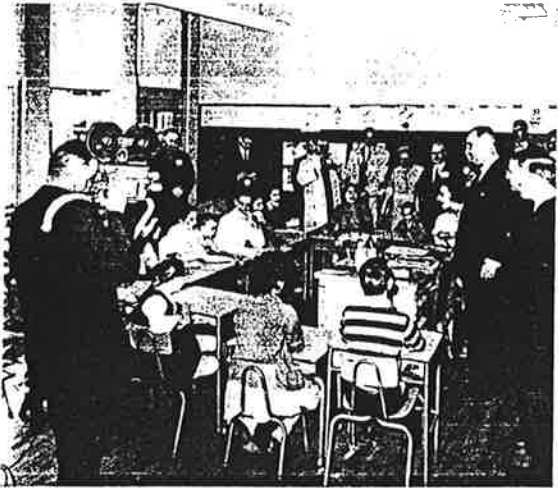
Other programs were started by the OEO/CAA network and using the flexible funds available under the EOA. They were started by CAAs and enough activity was going on, enough federal funds were being spent on that activity, to make it worth keeping track of them. As these programs matured into program models, or "program accounts" as they were called, the Congress picked them up and created entirely new statutes for those programs, without first incorporating them into the EOA. The Adult Basic Education Program and Family Planning programs are two examples here.

Other federal statutes incorporated many of the ideas, principles and local program functions from the EOA. The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) that is the precursor to the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) is an example here.



Photos courtesy Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

Addressing Congress after the Kennedy assassination



Photos courtesy Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In a classroom during the War on Poverty Tour

Many of these programs are still administered at the local level by community action agencies. Others, such as Job Corps, utilize the CAA network extensively for outreach purposes but have evolved separate delivery systems. Still others have evolved in ways that the local program has only a referral relationship with CAA. Community Health Centers are an example. Other programs have evolved entirely separate delivery systems, with little contact with the agencies that initially helped develop the ideas on which they are based. The Senior Community Service Employment Programs are examples here.

Below is a brief description of some of the publicly funded programs that were started by, developed under, or heavily influenced by the principles and operations of the EOA:

1. Weatherization

The Low-Income Weatherization Assistance Program (LIWAP, or WX) funds the purchase and installation of materials that reduce heating and cooling costs in low-income households. Typical measures may include caulking, storm windows, weatherstripping, clock thermostats, low-flow showerheads, and attic, wall, or floor insulation. The funds are used to purchase the materials and to hire people to install the materials. Congress appropriates about 167 million dollars directly for this activity, and permits the use of funds from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program to be used for weatherization as well.

In many areas, the local public utilities are also financing weatherization measures through CAAs because it is cheaper for them to reduce energy consumption by paying for energy conservation measures than it is for them to build new generating capacity. This is over 100 million dollars a year.

2. Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance

Program (LIHEAP) is the Federal government's major effort to help low-income households pay for the cost of home heating. LIHEAP funds are used to pay a portion of the bills for gas, electricity or oil. The Department of Health and Human Services distributes funds to the states based on a complex and controversial formula based on climate, the cost of heating and cooling, and other factors. State offices channel funds to CAAs and other local agencies to provide four types of services: heating payment assistance, energy crisis assistance (shutoff prevention), cooling payment assistance, and weatherization. About 1.3 billion dollars are appropriated by Congress for LIHEAP.

3. Head Start

The goal of the comprehensive Head Start program is competency development. One outcome of this is to give preschool children the assistance they need to get ready for school and to function effectively in school. Most Head Start programs operate year-round and include several services to children and their families:

- comprehensive health services, such as medical, dental and mental health related services,
- nutrition program,
- educational program
- social services, and
- parental involvement.

These services and developmental opportunities improve the quality of life for low-income children and enable them to develop more effectively.

There are 1,287 Head Start grantees operating almost 10,000 Head Start Centers. Nationwide, 452,000 children ages three to five are enrolled in the program. For FY 1989, Congress appropriated \$1,235,000,000.

Almost eleven million children have participated in this program since its inception as an OEO pilot program in the summer of 1965.

4. Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program, or TEFAP.

The Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) allocates commodity foods to states along with a modest amount of administrative funds to pay for their distribution. The commodity foods typically include dairy products (cheese, butter, dehydrated milk or eggs), grains and honey. The commodities come from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's farm price-support programs. States then distribute these foodstuffs through participating nonprofit agencies.

5. Employment and Training Programs

The Neighborhood Youth Corps and the Comprehensive Employment Program (CEP) were grounded in the EOA. Both evolved into

the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1972 (CETA) with local CAAs as the sponsor. In an effort to shift the balance of decision-making (about who was to be trained for what) to employers, Congress passed the Job Training Partnership Act of 1982. JTPA provides funds for training for disadvantaged youths and adults, summer employment and training for youth, and retraining services to dislocated workers.

The U.S. Department of Labor allocates JTPA funds to states, where a State Job Training Coordinating Council (SJTCC) allocates funds to substate Service Delivery Areas, or SDAs. There are 637 SDAs nationwide. Each SDA has an Administering Entity that manages the funds, and it has a Private Industry Council (PIC) composed of people from a variety of sectors of the community including nonprofit agencies. The PIC allocates funds among program priorities and selects subcontractors to deliver the services.

In 1989, Title II-A programs for adults will spend about 1.78 billion on 373,000 enrollees. In the seven years of its existence JTPA has served over two-million adults. For FY 1989, Title II-B programs for youth, ages 14 to 21, received 718 million dollars.

The Job Corps program, JTPA Title I, now has 10,500 year-round full-time-equivalent slots. These young people spend twelve months in one of the 107 Job Corp Centers developing literacy and work skills. In FY 1988, Congress appropriated \$716,135,000 for Job Corps. Job Corps is widely recognized as an effective program whose cost is more than paid back by the benefits it produces—to the individual and to society.

The JTPA also authorizes other national activities including training native Americans, migrants and seasonal farmworkers.

6. *Work Experience, or Public Service Employment*

Congress sharply limited the amount of JTPA funds that can be used for stipends to pay people while they are in training or to pay them to perform public service. However, the Title II-B youth programs in JTPA, the Senior Community Service Employment Program under the Older American Act, and many rehabilitation programs still pay people while in training or for public service employment.

The new "workfare" requirements for public assistance recipients are another opportunity to help define new ways for people to do work that is meaningful to the person and that is useful to society—in return for receiving their public assistance check. This offers local sponsors an opportunity to be the testing ground to develop new social roles that people can perform. Many people will benefit from the stronger link to society that comes from doing socially

useful and desirable work. In some cases this may lead to unsubsidized private sector employment. However as long as there are more low-income people than there are appropriate jobs for them, the work the person does in the nonprofit or public agency will be a good and desirable end—in and of itself.

7. *Older Americans Act*

The Older Americans Act, passed in 1965 and amended in 1981, is the major vehicle for funding of services to the elderly. The Department of Health and Human Services allocates funds to the State Units on Aging (SUAs). The SUAs then contract with the Area Agency on Aging (AAAs).

The Senior Opportunities and Services program, or SOS, under the EOA was a major testing ground for Title III of the Act. It authorizes nutritional services and other supportive services to be provided through local nonprofit agencies.

Title V of this Act provides for subsidized part-time employment for low-income older persons to work in the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). It includes recruitment and job placement either in the private sector or in a nonprofit agency.

8. *Social Services Block Grant*

The Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) channels federal funds to the States to provide certain types of specific social services. This block grant continues the social services initially funded under Title XX of the Social Security Act. The EOA heavily influenced the way that Congress shaped this piece of legislation in that Congress allocated some roles to the SSBG and left others in the EOA. This division of labor has been checked periodically by the General Accounting Office (GAO) who report that there is no significant duplication of effort.

Most SSBG services are provided to people who have very narrowly defined needs. The range of services includes special services to children, the handicapped, and the elderly. Typical services are: emergency and medical transportation, protective services for children, and home health care for the elderly. Recently, more monies have been directed toward preventing child abuse and to assist missing children's programs.

9. *Federal Housing Programs*

The Federal Housing Act of 1968 provides for various federally-sponsored housing assistance programs. Among those ideas tested extensively under the EOA are: 1) a home ownership program which provides loans to low-income families to buy, build or rehabilitate homes; 2) a program for families and the elderly which makes grants of loans for renovation to meet health and safety standards; 3) a self-help

housing program which counsels groups of low-income families on the construction and rehabilitation of their homes. All three of these are administered by the Farmer's Home Administration.

10. Action Programs

VISTA. Volunteers in Service to America was developed under the EOA. Long known as the "domestic version of the Peace Corps," VISTA provides a nominal stipend to people who go out to low-income communities and live there to assist in community development projects. Since its creation, tens of thousands of volunteers, young and old, single and married couples, have participated.

The Office of the Older American Volunteer Programs also manages the Foster Grandparent Program, the Senior Companion Program and the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).

As **Foster Grandparents**, low-income persons aged 60 and over provide companionship and guidance to mentally, physically, and emotionally handicapped children, children who are victims of abuse or neglect, and those who have other special needs. **Senior Companions** are low-income persons 60 or over who provide care and companionship to other adults, especially the frail elderly. Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions work 20 hours per week and receive a small stipend.

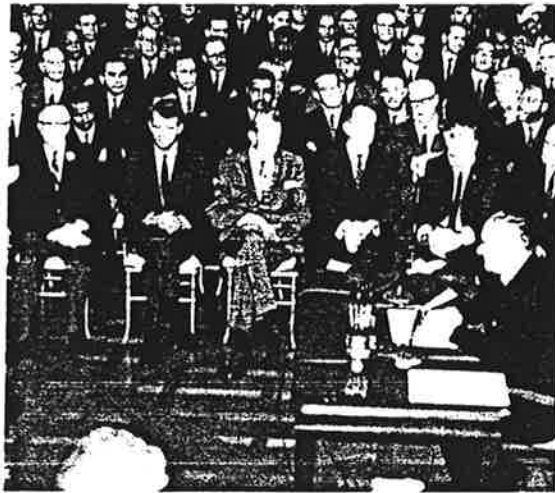
Retired Senior Volunteers provides opportunities for older citizens to use their talents and experience in community service. RSVP volunteers serve without compensation.

11. Economic Development Programs

The EOA was amended in 1967 to include a Title VII, the Kennedy-Javits Amendment, that provided funds to initiate economic development programs in low income communities. The key concept was that the community was to play a significant role in terms of ownership, making policy decisions, and receiving the benefits such as employment in the new ventures.

The local sponsors were initially CAAs and delegate agencies of CAAs and free-standing entities called Community Development Corporations or CDCs. Some famous examples include the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation and the Harlem Commonwealth Council. These entities have evolved and new groups have started. They are now called Community-based Development Organizations, or CDBOs. A 1988 survey by the National Congress for Community Economic Development estimates there are over 1,500 CDBOs. Many of them receive funding today from the Community Services Block Grant discretionary program, which is about 25 million dollars.

CDBOs have built nearly 125,000 units of housing, developed 16.4 million square feet of



Photos courtesy Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

Signing the 1964 Civil Rights Bill

retail and office space, and helped start 2,048 enterprises. They own and operate 427 businesses themselves.

12. Stuart B. McKinney Act Programs for the Homeless

This is a relatively new program that provides funds for services to homeless individuals and families. Absolutely in the tradition of the EOA, it focuses on the "poorest of the poor." McKinney Act funds are used to pay for emergency shelter, food, clothing, transportation, and medical care. The Act also emphasizes development of transition housing and support services and permanent housing for people with disabilities.

13. Legal Services

The Legal Services Act of 1977 set up a separate national corporation to administer the program. Legal Services Attorneys in local offices provide representation in civil cases, such as divorce, bankruptcy, contracts and landlord-tenant issues. There are 325 grantees nationwide.

They served 1.4 million people in 1988. Some people need only a few minutes of advice and others are involved in cases that may have lasted for more than a year. In FY 1989, the appropriation for Legal Services was \$308,555,000.

Public financing for legal services for the poor has been opposed by some people, on ideological grounds, even before the first day of the existence of the program. The Legal Services Program has survived largely because of the strong support of the American Bar Association.

14. Women, Infants, Children

The WIC program grew out of the EOA and related activities. It provides food supplements and nutritional counseling to women prior to and immediately after the birth of their child.

The WIC appropriation for FY 1987 was 1,813,012,672.

15. The Community Services Block Grant

As the successor-in-interest to the Community Services Act and the Economic Opportunity Act, the CSBG channels about 322 million in federal funds through states to provide the core administrative component and service delivery programs operated by the nation's Community Action Agencies (CAAs). Under state administration of the CSBG, new CAAs have been created and existing CAAs have expanded their coverage. The number of CAAs have increased from 932 in 1981 to 954 today, and the number of counties covered has increased from about 2,300 in 1981 to about 2,700 counties today.

Community Support for anti-poverty activities and programs is vital to a CAA. From the Economic Opportunity Act to the Community Services Block Grant Act, there has been an emphasis on "the catalytic role (of the CAA) in making the entire community more responsive to the needs and interests of the poor" and also, that "CAAs must mobilize and utilize public and private resources."

CAAs emphasize local participation, local control and local support. Hence, one measure of the success of a CAA is the extent to which it has enlisted public and private support. After 20 years of community service most CAAs are recognized institutions able to attract considerable support from the communities each serves. This support takes several forms:

- a. local contracts and foundation funds,
- b. cash contributions,
- c. in-kind donations,
- d. volunteer services, and
- e. public funds.

Each of these are reviewed briefly below.

a. Local Contracts. Many other private agencies and organizations rely on CAAs to provide services on a contract basis. In urban areas, the CAA is often the hub of the network of agencies for the poor. In rural areas where relatively few other providers exist, CAAs are characteristically multi-purpose entities through which a wide variety of services are delivered. In some small communities the CAA may be the only agency in town. The amount of funds received from local contracts in a typical CAA is \$252,000.

b. Cash Contributions. Private cash contributions are those received from individuals, businesses, churches, civic clubs, or private membership organizations. These contributions reflect the involvement and commitment of the community-at-large to the work of the CAA on behalf of low-income people. The annual per-agency average of these contributions is \$47,034.

Most of the CAAs that reported receiving no private contributions were public CAAs—those run by local governments.

c. In-Kind Donations. In addition to cash, there are always unused church basements, empty warehouses, an extra panel truck, outgrown clothing, used furniture—the list is endless. A CAA can put this assortment of unwanted or underutilized goods to a useful purpose. Contributions of free space, computer time, office equipment, vehicles, and office supplies help the CAA to keep their operating costs low.

Free or nominal cost clothing and household goods are appreciated by those who have little or nothing. Some CAAs have opened full-scale thrift shops.

When asked for the dollar value of in-kind contributions, CAAs report they received an annual per-agency average of \$290,931 worth of goods, facilities and equipment.

d. Volunteers. All Community Action Agencies rely heavily on volunteers to carry out a variety of planned activities. These volunteers represent the community as a whole and signify personal support for the CAA. The NACAA survey reveals that volunteers come from all age groups, represent the entire spectrum of skills and abilities found in the community, and perform a broad range of services to the CAA and to the people in their community.

Each CAA utilizes an average of 833 volunteers who contribute a grand total of 34,855 hours annually. This enormous amount of volunteer power is persuasive evidence of the success of CAAs in mobilizing and utilizing local community resources.

e. Public Funds. CAAs are major administrators of public funds that flow down from the federal and state governments, including many of the types of programs described in this document. The total number of dollars that CAAs administer has increased from about 1.9 billion in 1981 to about 2.7 billion by 1986. A good portion of this increase was LIHEAP.

IN CONCLUSION. As we have seen, many programs received their start directly from the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Using the flexible funding in the EOA, other programs were developed by the federal Office of Economic Opportunity, by State Economic Opportunity Offices and by CAAs. Most of these new programs took on a life of their own, developing their own constituencies, creating new federal and state administering agencies and local delivery systems. Many other programs were shaped because the EOA existed. All in all, the EOA is one of the most significant pieces of social legislation ever passed.

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By
Arthur I. Blaustein

Twenty-five years ago, this nation undertook a course of action designed to combat "the paradox of poverty amidst plenty." In doing so, President Lyndon Johnson decided upon a broadside effort to seriously attack the root causes of poverty: inadequate health care, impaired education, lack of decent jobs, deteriorating housing, and decaying neighborhoods. When Johnson requested, and Congress passed, the Economic Opportunity Act, it also signified a moral commitment on the part of our political leadership to pursue the unfulfilled goals of equality, justice, and opportunity.

It truly was an historic moment—one worth recalling with pride—for it was a time when Americans demonstrated their commitment, openness, and generosity. A new Federal agency was created to spearhead and coordinate this endeavor: the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), which had the responsibility for initiating several programs, including Head Start, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), Legal Services, Job Corps, Upward Bound, Foster Grandparents, Community Economic Development, and Community Action; all of which were direct and specific, aimed at pressing national problems.

It was a time of enthusiasm and hope. People not only thought about what was right and talked about what was wrong; they accepted personal responsibility for actually doing something about righting those wrongs. The nation's spirit was enlivened by the tens of thousands of young (and not-so-young) Americans who volunteered for the Peace Corps, VISTA, Legal Services, and the Teacher Corps, or who supplemented their education by providing worthwhile social services to the poor through the more than 900 Community Action Agencies (CAA's) established across the country.

I do not have to tell you that times have changed. Nowadays, people complain a lot, but they do not take personal responsibility for anything other than their own ambition, career, or security. On campus and off, rather than activism, idealism and vitality; the mood has shifted to apathy, fatalism, passivity, and privatism: "Look out for number one,"—those who can't are shiftless, a drag on the economy. Our moral decline deepens as we are tempted to choose quantitative values over qualitative ones, greed over sharing, and privilege over human needs; and as we condone the sheer political power of self-serving private corporate interests over the legitimate authority of public and community interests. People programs are out; quick-buck schemes are in.

Times have changed for our disadvantaged youth also. In the 60's, there was hope: Upward

Bound, the Neighborhood Youth Corps, and the Job Corps held out a helping hand. Youngsters who had never before had a chance believed that the dream of achieving selfhood could become a reality. By the early 80's, though, that hope had been dashed and it was replaced with despair, as youngsters turned to drugs, crime, and violence. The contrast between then and now is just as true for poor white youth as it is true for minority youth. We should not lose sight of the fact that the anti-poverty programs were color-blind, and that two-thirds of the poor in America were white.

It is important to clarify this reality, for along the way, in deliberate efforts to destroy the credibility of these programs, conservative politicians began manipulating symbols in order to stigmatize them. During the Nixon era, they cleverly began to refer to them as "minority" and "welfare" programs, rather than as "opportunity" ones, thereby switching the message from a positive to a negative one. This kind of deceit and distortion was not an accident; it was designed to exploit fear and racial divisiveness.

By the time we reached the 80's, we had entered an era that officially—at the highest levels of government—condoned and even encouraged negative attitudes, code words, and symbols directed against the poor in particular, and toward basic human and social service programs in general. Those conservative politicians who did so are adept at moralizing endlessly over the issues: the "problems" of the unemployed and underemployed, the homeless and hungry, of alcoholism, drug abuse, mental illness, infant mortality, child and spouse abuse, and disrupted families. But they have neither the heart nor the will for the rigorous thought and work of finding cures, or even just relieving some of the suffering and symptoms.

Let me give a concrete example of what I mean. During the course of the 1980 Presidential campaign, then-candidate Reagan would entertain crowds with the line: "Do you know how much it costs to keep a kid in the Job Corps? [pause] And how much it costs to send a youngster to Harvard? [long pause] Well, I'll tell you: \$8,200 for the Job Corps and only \$8,000 for Harvard." This usually elicited gales of smug laughter. But it was a totally false comparison, a perversion of reality. It just shows how distortions and false myths are created. The average taxpayer doesn't want a complex economic answer, but they do deserve an honest answer. There are substantial costs if we eliminate the Job Corps. For example, it costs \$26,000 a year to keep a youngster in prison. It costs \$32,000 to keep a youngster in an alcohol and drug abuse program or a halfway house. It costs \$55,000 to keep a youngster in a mental institution. And it costs only \$16,000 to keep a youngster in the Job Corps,

THE WAR ON POVERTY

25 Years Later,
Reflections on Then
and Now



Photos courtesy Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

Civil Rights leaders at a meeting (l.-r.), James Farmer, Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, Jr. and Martin Luther King, Jr.

where they're learning self-respect and job training.

The issues are: What are the values of the society? Where do we want to spend our money? The alternative to the Job Corps is not Harvard, it's despair. And there are substantial future costs to taxpayers! Drastic cuts in basic social and human service programs will exact social and human costs, and they will also appear as direct financial costs at future times in different ledgers.

There is a very real price to be paid for Reagan's reduction of human and social services. The price is that these cutbacks did not reduce crime; they increased it. They did not reduce drug abuse; they increased it. They did not promote better family life; they destabilized it. They did not reduce alcoholism; they increased it. They did not increase respect for the law; they weakened it. In addition, there are other costs for poor nutrition and lack of health care: people cannot function well and healthily in jobs. These painful realities had not been factored in to the Administration's game plan.

The four particular elements of the Reagan administration's policies that have served to undermine our social equilibrium are: (1) the massive across-the-board cuts in social and human service programs; (2) the transfer of Federal authority and program responsibility to the states; (3) the abolition of delivery systems provided for in the Economic Opportunity Act; and (4) the abdication of moral leadership.

I want to quote from a tribute to Jane Addams made in 1960 by the distinguished writer and historian Archibald MacLeish; because they touch my sense of the meaning of the War on Poverty. Jane Addams, he said,

... was not working for her immigrants and her poor: she was committing herself with them to the common life—that life our generation watches more and more as spectators, as though it were not common, as though it were a life for someone else. She was as explicit about that as a woman could be. She was not, she said, a reformer: she wanted to establish a place "in and around which a fuller life might grow for others and for herself. And having made that much clear she then reversed her words to make her declaration clearer still. *"The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life."*

No, Hull House changed Chicago and changed the United States, not because it was a successful institution but because it was an eloquent action by a woman capable of action regardless of the dark ahead. We talk as though the great question before our society was whether the things that need to be done in America to keep this last best hope of earth alive should be done by the federal government or by the states or perhaps by the cities or by industries or by some other kind of organization. But that, of course, is not the question. The question before our society is simply whether or not these things *will be done*. And the answer is that they will be done if we ourselves see to it as Jane Addams and her friends saw it—if we accept, as she accepted, responsibility for our lives. That, when all is said and done, is why our

time remembers here—that she accepted for herself responsibility for the “common life.”

I cite this passage because it best describes for me the spirit and the intentionality of the Economic Opportunity Act, of its programs, and of the people who worked at OEO. In 1965, the concept of Hull House was institutionalized through the Economic Opportunity Act with the establishment of over 900 Community Action Agencies (CAA's); an indispensable step forward in the delivery of social services to our nation's poor. These multiservice agencies have provided basic life-support services to millions of Americans. Yet, the present Administration is still trying to undo all the positive accomplishments that have been achieved in the past twenty-five years by these agencies. What is it replacing them with? Vague rhetoric about “a thousand points of light” and unspecified notions as to *who else might* do the job. Thus, once again, the stark reality is: the question before our society is simply whether or not those things *will be done*.

In reviewing the policies of the past twenty-five years, we have seen various strategies and theories come and go—a welfare-reform strategy, a private-sector jobs strategy, a minority-entrepreneurship strategy, a special-revenue strategy. Yet, I believe that if we had never passed the original legislation, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which created an independent federal agency supporting CAA's,

we would have to invent it today. It created the only coherent delivery mechanisms—imperfect as they may be—that relate policies and programs to people. That is the genuine achievement of the Economic Opportunity Act.

Lost in the cliches, slogans, and double-talk of conservative antigovernment criticism are the solid accomplishments. The value of these programs, services, and innovations has been obscured; the extraordinary contributions have been slighted. I believed that it is particularly important during a period of passivity, privatism, and rhetoric to recall a time when responsibility for the “common life,” as Jane Addams put it, was the law of the land. When our government actually provided the kind of moral leadership that is consistent with the values of a just, humane, and truly democratic society.

Isn't it ironic? When the Reagan administration abolished OEO in 1981 and transferred authority to the states, it was the first time a federal agency had been shut down since WWII. And it was the only agency that had a “bottoms-up” strategy, instead of a “trickle-down” approach. They shut it down under the pretense of having a better way of fighting poverty. We now know what that meant: stealing from HUD and extorting from WedTech.

For twenty-five years, the programs initiated by the Economic Opportunity Act, and delivered by the CAA's, promoted racial and ethnic cooperation. They helped overcome the physical despair and isolation of the rural poor. They



Photos courtesy Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

President and Mrs. Johnson on a Poverty Tour in Philadelphia.

ve been instrumental in targeting resources J delivering comprehensive services. That they have helped to allay the despair of the urban poor is a matter of record. Conditions, bad as they are, could have worsened. With limited resources and often in hostile political environment, these programs have carried the burden of keeping the promise and conscience of this nation alive.

I believe that a rediscovery of the spirit and a re-enactment of the content of the Economic Opportunity Act would be the most healthy response possible to cope with our present social and community problems. If President Bush is serious about establishing "a thousand points of light," he need not look very far or very long. There are 954 points of light out there now. They are called community action agencies! They have been burning the midnight oil for too long, and are in need of some fuel.

Politics today, in a period of limited economic growth, seems to have reached a level of abstractedness that removes it from the commonplace circumstances of ordinary Americans. When a sane and civilized family runs into tough financial times, two things happen. The one thing that they *do* do is to assure that those members of the family who are least able to fend for themselves are given the protection and minimum amenities necessary for survival. The one thing that they *do not* do is to allow those who have more than enough and are enjoying luxuries to continue to hoard. There *are* certain natural principles of behavior, of caring and decency, that have prior claim over untested game plans of economic theorists or politicians on the make. It is the adherence to these principles that defines us as human.

Our founding fathers were well aware of what was needed: their mature leadership pro-

vided us with a clear and qualitative vision of the public interest. They gave us a land of economic opportunity, not a land of economic opportunists. They knew that a vital and healthy Federal government is indispensable to the well-being of a self-governing people. They believed in the ability of government to secure and protect the liberties of *all* our people—the weak as well as the strong. That is, after all, what democracy is about. Without this protection and security, whole segments of our society—especially those who can least afford it—will give up hope, will become more frustrated and alienated, and this can only serve to further undermine the very social fabric of our communities.

Finally, it must be said in response to the downgrading of national commitment to economic opportunity; in response to our government's avoidance of our growing social problems and its abdication of moral leadership: that only those people have a future, and only those people can be called humane and historic, who have an intuitive sense of what is important and significant in both their national and public institutions, and who value them. It is this conviction, and the continuing belief in the common-sense vision of the American promise, that allows us to recall the significance of the goals and principles embodied in the Economic Opportunity Act. And to remind ourselves that the struggle for genuine equality, justice and economic opportunity is still the most important endeavor of our time.

Mr. Blaustein was Chairman of the President's National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity, and Director of the National Economic Development and Law Center. He now teaches at the University of California, Berkeley; his most recent book is "The American Promise—Equal Justice and Economic Opportunity."