

THE CHANGING FACE OF POVERTY
An Assessment of Washington County

Purpose of the Assessment

The assessment is designed to provide background information to the Washington County Community Action Organization for their strategic planning efforts. The assessment will be combined with an internal audit of the organization as background for the planning sessions to begin in fall, 1995.

In addition, the assessment will provide important background information to support WCCAO's fundraising and advocacy efforts. It will also prove to be a useful document for other social service organizations working directly with WCCAO to address poverty issues in the County.

Approach to the Assessment

The assessment will focus on the people in poverty in Washington County and the issues they face. It will look at the perceptions people in the general public have about poverty, and contrast that with the reality of people in poverty — their numbers, their visions and their goals. It will examine what barriers hold people in poverty and what is being done to overcome those barriers. This will identify and analyze the services that support the efforts of people to work their way out of poverty, as well as those services that serve as a safety net for people in poverty.

As implied in the name, the assessment will try to put a "face" on the poverty statistics in the county. It will attempt to "humanize" what can too easily be hypnotizing and lifeless figures about poverty. Key sections will include stories that illustrate the important points raised in the analysis and help people better understand who is affected by poverty and how they struggle to overcome it.

The assessment will be highly graphic and include screened pictures of people to add interest to the document. It will be designed and formatted for easy reading and comprehension.

Specific information will be drawn from typical reference and data sources, including census data, government reports and studies. In addition, focus groups and surveys will add qualitative information about perceptions, goals and attitudes.

Timeline for the Assessment

The assessment project is currently underway, and will continue through the end of May, 1995. Writing, editing and final production will be complete in June, with presentation to the WCCAO Planning Committee at the end of June, 1995.

THE CHANGING FACE OF POVERTY
General Outline

Perceptions of Poverty (FOCUS GROUPS, INTERVIEWS, MEDIA)

What are people's perceptions about poverty?

What is the general public's attitude toward poverty and the people living in it?

Who is in Poverty? (RESEARCH, INTERVIEWS)

Demographic analysis of the extent of poverty

Matrix of problem areas (barriers and symptoms)

The Vision of Escaping Poverty (FOCUS GROUPS, SURVEYS)

Goals and aspirations of people in poverty

Overcoming the Barriers to Escaping Poverty (INTERVIEWS, SURVEYS)

Detailed analysis of fundamental issues that keep people in poverty

Employment

Wage Structure

Education/Training

Job Skills

Language

Child Care

Mental Health

Transportation

Drug & Alcohol

Housing

Family Support

Early childhood intervention

Parenting Skills

Life Skills

Health Care

Legal Services

Analysis of community resources

Inventory vs. demand

Supporting People in Poverty (RESEARCH, INTERVIEWS, SURVEYS)

Inventory of social services vs demand

Legal Services

Housing

Health Care

Weatherization/Energy Assistance

Domestic Violence

Food & Hunger

Barriers to accessing these services

Not program evaluations

Trends Affecting Anti-Poverty Efforts (RESEARCH, INTERVIEWS)

Political (Shifting of programs to the states, fiscal austerity, etc.)

Economic (Growth of underclass, growth of local economy, etc)

Social (Erosion of social responsibility, conservative attitudes, growing intolerance, etc.)

Technological (Increase demand for technical skills, agency networking, etc.)

Philanthropic (Growing burden/demand on philanthropy, trends in giving, etc)