

July 22, 1996

MEMO

To: CAO Executive Committee

From: Jerralynn Ness

Subject: The Faces of Poverty Report

I am seeking your involvement and approval for the direction we go in making changes to the Faces of Poverty report.

Marc Smiley, our consultant, submitted his final draft of our needs assessment report last May. Since then, some Board members have provided me with additional input requesting changes in this report. Marc indicated to me that he is not opposed to us making changes to the final document. Our contract with him, however, has ended.

It appears that the editorial work could be quite extensive, so I asked the Board Planning Committee for help to identify a skilled volunteer editor. Margaret Eickmann suggested her husband, Jim, and he has agreed to assist us with this task.

Jim does not consider himself to be a professional editor, but for many years he supervised and edited the work of authors of Internal Research and Development plans and reports for engineering departments at the Hughes Aircraft company. He worked for the company for more than thirty years, and says that he had much practice in the delicate work of matching the words of the authors----engineers and scientists who tended to be disorganized writers but were proud of their prose----with the expectations of government agency representatives who thought the quality of the plans and reports should reflect the large amounts of research and development money spent.

In addition, Cindy recruited a friend, who is a professional editor, who is willing to assist. We think that he could be helpful with a final review of the document before we approve it for printing.

I met with Margaret and Jim on July 22nd to discuss the task. In our discussion, we realized that it would be important to establish what we can realistically expect from the report, based on the original content, the research and data presented. We felt that the editorial work will assure that the report is non-offensive, readable and believable, in other words capable of being substantiated by back up data. The report seems to adequately define poverty and describe its conditions, as well as the extent to which it exists in our county.

On the other hand, the conclusions that the author has made seem to be too premature to advance given the level of analysis of the problems or the causes of poverty. The result leaves us with a report that is easily challenged and to some it might be offensive. Obviously, neither of these outcomes is desirable.

The document might serve us better if we don't expect it to address causes and solutions, which the report is weak in substantiating. Instead, we could use the document to educate the public about what poverty is, who is poor or struggling economically, the extent to which it exists in our communities and possibly some information on services needed and service gaps. We could then discuss what additional information the organization needs or would like to have, and how we might obtain it, such as a deeper look at the causes of poverty.

We also discussed including an introduction by the Board that lays out why we asked for the report, what we expected, and how the information will be used. In addition, we would like the author to add a section describing his research methodology.

### **Background for Discussion:**

Our original purpose in obtaining a needs assessment report was to have information needed by the organization to plan a future direction for CAO services and resources. The general goals established were:

1. To produce a report that assesses the needs of low income people in Washington County, the resources available to meet those needs and the gaps that may exist between existing needs and resources.
2. To provide a solid background for CAO's strategic planning process by highlighting trends and emerging issues in the report.
3. To produce a document that supports the education, advocacy and fundraising needs of CAO by designing a report that is easily accessible, attractive and very credible.

This report was intended to describe the demographics of poverty, including those living at 150% or below the federal poverty level, in both statistical and real life terms. We asked the consultant to describe the conditions and causes of poverty, as well as the barriers, from the low income perspective, to move out of poverty. We also asked the consultant to report on the social services available to assist people in moving out of poverty and what gaps existed in services needed.