

improved in order to maintain the educational progress of Head Start children and to avoid unnecessary duplication and conflicting standards among the various federal and state programs. Finally, although we have cheered the successes of Head Start, when we observe the cutbacks in other Economic Opportunity Act programs we wonder about the wisdom of earmarking such a high percentage of EOA funds for this purpose.

Although the earmarking of funds reflects the dramatic community acceptance of Head Start, it also mirrors the controversy surrounding the establishment of many of the community action planning groups. League members can sympathize with the anxiety of Congress. Nineteen of our Leagues have members serving on Community Action or boards of related agencies. Many other Leagues have had regular observers at CAA board meetings. Without exception Leagues report on the great difficulties encountered in developing CAAs.

We have learned that there is a necessary pattern in developing an effective agency. Time, patience, and negotiating skill are needed for a community to prepare itself to use the funds available. It takes time for many communities to determine whether they have problems which could be met by the Economic Opportunity Act; this does not imply an absence of local problems—rather a delay in identifying them or an unwillingness to do so. It takes time to pull together the appropriate representatives of governmental agencies and the poor into a working board. It takes time to make the necessary preliminary studies. Most difficult, and often more publicized, it takes time for these diversified groups to learn how to work together and develop effective programs. This painful process may require twelve to eighteen months but it can work.

We recently received a letter from a League president describing a relatively new Community Action Agency.

"This group," she said, "has been in a state of crisis for many months now, culminating with a 'vote of no confidence' in the Executive Director . . . followed immediately by the firing of the Commission officers. By mid-March it appeared that the Regional Office . . . would close the local office . . . This immediate crisis is past, but our Commission is still operating on a month to month basis . . . and no Executive Director has been hired."

The League in question has decided to extend its efforts to assist the agency to strengthen itself and will assist in the poverty election to be conducted in June.

In sharp contrast is this report from another community where the program has been in operation for a longer period. Reporting on many successes within the community despite inadequate funding the League president writes, "Our assessment is that the combination of having a highly competent Director and a well-functioning Board is the key to the strength of the poverty program . . ."

As a result of our work with the "indigenous leadership," League members have come to recognize the need for short-term self-help projects, and many Leagues have applauded what one League called the 'heart of the Community Action Program'—the neighborhood service center. Through its location, the Center has solved the problem of distance and transportation; through its referral programs it has finally made our numerous public and private health and welfare agencies truly available for those they were designed to serve; and most important, through its employment of neighborhood workers recruited from the target areas, the centers have broken through the barriers of language, custom, and mistrust.

Unfortunately, last years' cutback in funds came when programs were beginning to prove their worth and new leadership was learning to work effectively. There have been bitter disappointments when communities have had to close down many functioning programs. Those communities needing a longer period in which to plan have had most projects rejected for lack of funds.

But the issue is greater than a lack of funds or the value of any specific program. What is at stake here is the faith of the community in the self-help concept; to the deprived CAP has come to spell HOPE that there really is a way into the mainstream of the American economy and body politic.