

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1967 4117

An appreciation of the services was evident from our interviews with community leaders as well as clients and in many instances, the appreciation approaches enthusiasm.

9. *Community Action*

It was previously mentioned that the emphasis of the poverty program in this county is placed upon service to the individual, not on the encouragement of community action. The geographical nature of the area, and the reticence of the residents would seem to preclude any type of mass organization of the poor for expression of grievances. Many of the area residents are isolated from each other and from the ideas of the outside world. Thus, in this area we find no indication that the idea of concerted action has even occurred to the area's residents.

10. *Participation of the Poor*

Participation by the poor is encouraged through the policy of open membership in the CAA corporation, through the board structure, and through the direct employment of many of the poor throughout the program.

As presently constituted, six members of the Board of Directors represent the low income groups and four represent the Negro minority. The representatives of the poor and the minorities on the Board report that they feel they have gained the acceptance of the not-so-poor Board members; they feel that their suggestions are considered with respect, that their opinions are actively sought, and that their recommendations are given attention. Participation is a new experience for the poor here. Professionals involved with the program feel that the poor residents will assume responsibility more effectively if they are allowed to assume it gradually. After experience as Board members or as clients of one of the Homemaking classes, the poor seem to develop more courage that enables them to articulate their ideas and speak out at meetings. This is a population traditionally characterized by silent despair, depression and isolation from the ideas of the world outside their immediate area. They are unaccustomed to the oral expression of ideas and concepts of an abstract nature; therefore, active participation is not easy for them.

The poor are afforded participation through the CAA's policy of employing non-professionals from the low income group. They are exposed to the concept of incentive reward through the policy of advancement to higher positions with the development of the skills and experience. The Homemaking Instructors are all residents of the area who have undergone training for their positions, and several of these people have been advanced to higher positions as supervisors and Center Directors.

The client role is an active one. Here, the poor are not passive recipients of services but are encouraged through the informal classroom and group environment to give voice to their opinions and to make suggestions regarding curriculum to meet their needs. The staff attempts to follow resident suggestion where feasible and reflect these recommendations in the actual curriculum. The present approach is to provide the clientele with the opportunity for a gradual but continuing increase in participation.

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1. *History and Origins*

The Community Action Program is an outgrowth of a previously existing Youth Opportunity Board, a joint powers committee of state, county and city governments and the city and county school boards. Funds were provided by the Department of Labor and disbursed by this board to operate projects and activities for the benefit of delinquent and pre-delinquent juveniles. In 1964, when the prospect of OEO funds entered the picture, a meeting was called to reorganize under OEO guidelines and to apply for available OEO funds. However, the poor were not represented at the reorganizational meetings, and OEO refused for this reason to fund projects for the area. For over a year, progress was held up, while the OEO, the poor, and the Board haggled over the amount of representation that should be afforded the poor.

During the summer of 1965, one of the poverty areas was literally torn apart by riots, and the governor and federal authorities intervened to hasten the development of the poverty program. The governor chose a panel to select members of a new board from applications received from target area residents. A board numbering 24 was chosen, with seven members representing the 13 poverty areas. OEO allocated funds in the fall of 1965, and projects for the 13 designated poverty areas finally became operational in December of 1965.