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November 29, 1999

MEMORANDUM

TO: Lowell Greathouse, Community Action Organization

FROM: Evelyn Brzezinski

SUBJECT: Preliminary Needs Assessment Results

I've tallied the results of many of the questions on the needs assessment survey we administered last summer, and want to share them with you now. As you know, our overall response rate was in the neighborhood of 55% (253 returned surveys out of, I think, 450 mailed; please confirm). Of those 253, 81% of the respondents (205) receive requests for emergency basic needs services. And of those 205, 62% (127) provide such services.

Respondents who don't provide emergency basic needs services could select one or more of a list of six possible reasons for not providing them, plus two open-ended options where respondents could write in their own reasons. The largest number of respondents who don't provide services (n = 33, 16% of all respondents who receive service requests) selected the response "No, because providing such services is not part of our mission." The next most common choice (n = 29, 14%) was "No, because there are not enough financial resources to do so." Only fifteen respondents (7%) selected "No, because there is no one available to organize responses to requests." Other choices received even fewer responses. Thus, it does not appear that logistical difficulties account for organizations failing to provide emergency basic needs services. This finding has implications for CAO's coordinating role in the provision of emergency basic needs services (that is, perhaps there's not as much need for an organization to play that role as I had thought).

Only five respondents (2% of the 205 who receive service requests) don't refer individuals to other agencies when they can't provide services themselves. Another nine (4%) only rarely refer individuals to other agencies. The vast majority—159, or 78%—usually refer individuals to other agencies.

When provided a list of 17 different services, plus blanks where respondents could write in two more services, the most respondents (73, or 57% of the 127 that provide services) said they provide food baskets or vouchers for food. The next most provided service (by 66 respondents, or 52%) is financial assistance for transportation. After that, the next most provided service (by 64 respondents, or 50%) is clothing.

The four most often selected services that respondents are unable to provide, even though

they're asked to provide them, are financial assistance to pay for housing (81 respondents, or 64%), financial assistance to pay for utilities (79 respondents, or 62%), emergency housing for a week or more (78 respondents, or 61%), and emergency housing for less than a week (76 respondents, or 60%). It's probably unrealistic to expect the vast majority of agencies to actually provide shelter space, but we do need to make sure everyone is aware of the shelters that *are* available. Of course, as the three Washington County shelters are already turning away clients, it may not be too helpful to have even more agencies referring people to them. But these results point up the real need for affordable housing and shelter space in Washington County.

I'm having some difficulty analyzing responses to the last four questions (most requested services, most important services, number of requests in a year, and percent of requests that are met); the spreadsheet isn't responding as I would have expected, so I may have to enter those data again. I also need to analyze the open-ended responses (other services requested but not provided, the organizations individuals are referred to most often, and the changes that would let organizations meet more needs). I'll try to get that finished this weekend, and will forward the complete report to you as soon as possible after that.

cc: Jerralynn Ness  
Leon Laptok