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March 26, 1997

**MEMO**

**TO:** CADO

**FROM:** Jerralynn Ness

**SUBJECT:** CADO Mission and CAA History

I would like to suggest that we consider eliminating the term "poor" from our language and replace it with terms such as living "in poverty" or "on low incomes". This is a change my organization recently made as the result of a story that was told to my Board by one of our low income representatives. This Board member continually praises Community Action for our ability to work with low income people in ways that are respectful and preserve dignity. She has helped us to advance our knowledge of and sensibility to the ways in which our language and choice of words can have a positive or negative impact. The following is a story from Katy about how labeling can be hurtful and stigmatizing:

*After being gone for a couple of days to attend a state Head Start Association meeting, I came home to find my young son, Tommy, in tears. I asked him what was wrong and he said nothing. I pressed him, and he finally said, "Billy said he can't play with me anymore because we're poor." "Are we poor, Mom?"*

*Katy responded by asking her son, "Are we poor because we don't have a home?" Tommy said no.*

*"Are we poor because we don't have enough food to eat?" Tommy said no.*


*"Are we poor because you don't have decent clothes to wear to school?" Tommy said no.*

*"Are we poor because we don't have enough love in our family?" Tommy said no.*

*Katy called her family together for a family meeting. She told her children that poor is apparently a word that some people use to describe others who are living on low incomes. She told her children that they live on a low income, but that they were not poor.....in fact, that they had many riches. The family decided that poor was a word that would not be allowed in their home.*

I have forwarded to Carmel a marked up copy of our Mission Statement and CAA History eliminating the word "poor", for CADO's consideration. Thank you.

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