

Thirty Years of Achievement

The Success Stories of Community Action Agencies



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Even the best and most well-intentioned community action agencies can lose their ability to provide needed services when the facilities they occupy are inadequate, inconveniently located, and too costly. When there is little space for staff, insufficient room for volunteers, and literally no privacy for clients discussing their most intimate problems, it is clear that a change is required. The alternatives are few: move to different facilities, renovate existing ones, or build completely new ones.

Of the three choices, the third—building a new facility—is the most intimidating. It requires courage, commitment, and cash—lots of cash. In the long run, however, it can be the most cost-effective route to take.

After years of trying to operate a full-service agency from as many as 16 separate locations at one time—most cramped, energy inefficient, and in disrepair—Washington County Community Action Organization (WCCAO) in Oregon looked at the options, took a deep breath, and made a decision that eventually involved the entire community: they would conduct an intensive capital campaign to raise funds for a centrally located complex that would include a Multi-Service Center, a Child Development Center, and a Nutrition Center in a single facility. The projected cost for land, construction, and development was \$2.5 million.

Getting from the dream to the reality involved a strategic plan for fund raising that included government grants, corporate and business contributions, private agency and foundation donations, and individual giving. By the time construction began, 70% of the capital had been raised.

The first money—\$424,000 in Community Development Block Grants—kicked off the campaign. Sale of two WCCAO properties yielded another \$315,000. A key to obtaining the rest has been the ingenuity used in involving the whole community. Volunteers have formed teams to raise many gifts from individuals, businesses, corporations and foundations. The Capital Campaign Committee made it easy for the community to contribute through a number of clever ways:

- 4,000 bricks inscribed with a name and placed in the front entryway were available for \$50 per brick;
- 50 trees identified by a plaque naming the donor were available for \$1,000 each;
- a 5K run/walk event was coordinated by the Washington County Employee Relations Committee in which individuals could sponsor participants with a donation to the fund.

No one could predict the outcome when the Capital Campaign started, but WCCAO Board of Directors and staff were committed, enthusiastic, and confident. More importantly, they were willing to work hard—and work they did. The campaign was kicked off in March 1993 and the ground-breaking ceremony for construction of the facility occurred right on target in June 1994. The grand opening is scheduled for June 1995. It has been a process of which the entire community can be proud.

It is estimated that at least \$100,000 will be saved each year by consolidating space and moving from renting to owning a facility. That is \$100,000 more that can be used to provide services to the needy in Washington County, Oregon.

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