

Notes Voice of the Poor Planning Committee
Monday, April 23, 2007
3:30 p.m. Vincentian Support Conference Room

Attending: Kathy Jorgensen, Julie Douglas, John Feit, Frank Barrios, Walt Gray, Ron Meyer, Tom Finnerty, Lucy Howell

The meeting was opened with a prayer from Sister Joan Chittester, read by Kathy Jorgensen.

New Business:

Restorative Justice: Walt Gray gave an overview of the concept of restorative justice as an alternative approach to the current policy of mandatory sentencing, minimal rehabilitation programs, inadequate post-release help, high recidivism rates and continuing demand for additional prisons. AZ authorities are asking that two more prisons be built. AZ is already sending prisoners to other states to do time.

Walt referenced a study by the USCCB indicating that 60-70% of incarcerated are imprisoned because of addiction and/or mental illness, not violent crimes. Walt has written his own legislators in District 13 as well as contacted the Governor's office suggesting that a pilot program be developed for those who have not committed violent crimes. He is also in contact with an American Friends Group in Tucson working on prison conditions in AZ.

Walt was commended for bringing the issue to the committee. It is a huge problem with change requiring a coordinated effort by multiple authorities, non-profits and faith-based organizations. Politicians do not want to appear "soft on crime". Walt was asked to coordinate with Chris Anderson who has been attending the Post Release meetings coordinated by Lawrence Goodwin at Catholic Charities. This group's mission is to help keep releasees out of prison by helping them find places to live and employment. It addresses one part of the very large problem.

Note bene: National VOP has written and our trustees have adopted a position statement on restorative justice found at www.voiceofthepoor.org

Long Range Plan Review: Last year's submission to the L-R Planning Committee was reviewed and edited. The revised plan will be on the June VOP agenda so that members can select areas where they wish to work. Revised plan is an attachment.

2007 VOP Budget: Last year's budget was reviewed by the committee. All items included last year under Information Management but not used this year were deleted for a total savings of \$4,350. (Note that this included a paid legislative intern for \$3,200).

Direct mailing and travel remain the largest expenses for Voice of the Poor. The travel budget was increased by \$2,000 for the next session. Revised budget is an attachment.

Old Business:

Legislative Update: Tom Finnerty reported that most of the bills we are interested in are still subject to ongoing budget negotiations. Two bills are moving: HB 2681 related to placing unclaimed utility deposits in a separate fund to be administered by AZ Community Action Association and HB 1446 related to payday loans. Kathy Jorgensen reported on her conversations with Rep. Chad Campbell re payday loan bill and our concern that once the sunset provision is removed, the industry will no longer need to work on consumer protection. Representative Campbell would like a tour of the Watkins facility and wishes to attend a VOP meeting. Kathy will extend the invitation. Tom indicated he would like to be part of the group meeting with Rep. Campbell when it is scheduled.

Section 8/Councilman Stanton: Frank Barrios reported that the original date for the D.C. trip was postponed as corporate leaders were unable to commit. Frank has continued to be in regular contact with Kelly Dalton, Councilman Stanton's Chief of Staff. Ron Meyer raised two questions (1) Is Councilman Stanton speaking for the Phoenix City Council on this issue and (2) Which members of the AZ congressional delegation was the councilman hoping to meet with? John Feit asked whether or not Gloria Hurtando of Phoenix Human Services had been brought on board with this effort. Ron suggested that a breakfast meeting with Councilman Stanton, Frank and himself to present the viewpoint of the Society on the acute need for affordable housing as a keystone to alleviating poverty along with positive information from the standpoint of a Section 8 landlord could be very valuable in moving the effort forward. Lucy suggested that setting up meetings locally with members of the AZ delegation when they are home would more likely result in participation by corporate leaders who may be sympathetic but not have time to make the trip to D.C. Frank agreed to call and try to set something up as soon as possible for a conversation with the councilman raising these points.

VOP Communication Survey: Lucy has asked Inge to come up with something on this. We want to keep e-mail members and not overload them. Julie Douglas mentioned that when she raised the issue of the amount of information from VOP, two of her Conference members said they were overwhelmed.

A schedule of meeting dates for VOP for summer and next year was approved. It will be submitted to Patricia Metrick and Janie Fulks (room reservation). It is attached.

The meeting was adjourned at 5 p.m. with the Lord's Prayer.

Lucy Howell