

COMMUNITY FOOD VENTURES

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## PROBLEM

During the past few years, the issue of hunger in New York City, always present but usually hidden, has been pushed to the forefront of public consciousness. Rising unemployment, cuts in Federal support programs, lack of affordable housing and the effects of inflation have combined to bring severe hardship to thousands of families and individuals. More and more people find themselves with fewer and fewer resources; family and friends cannot pick up the slack.

Over Thanksgiving and Christmas, newspapers, radio and television were filled with stories of the homeless and hungry. Early in 1984 a top Reagan Administration official commented that people go to soup kitchens because they want a free lunch, not because they are hungry. The President's Commission reported that there is some hunger, but it cannot be documented and existing Federal food programs are adequate to the challenge. A clear situation of selected vision.

It is estimated that 200,000 meals are served monthly through the efforts of churches, synagogues and community organizations, twice the estimates of a year ago. The number of homeless families in New York City keeps growing, totalling 11,800 people. And the number of individuals is at a record high of 7,000. The New York City Human Resources Administration released their own figures of 25% of the population, or one out of every four persons, is living below poverty.

So the pressure continues on the increasing number of people without adequate food. It is the local churches, synagogues and small community groups which have found ways to care for the thousands of individuals, families and children in need, those who were able to barely manage before the current economic situation wreaked havoc with their lives.

These local supports, emergency food pantries and soup kitchens, have been sustained by the response from the less poor in their own parishes and

neighborhoods, and by contributions from the wealthy. This level of support cannot and will not continue. People in poor communities, already with limited access to food, are themselves less able to help their neighbors. Media attention which is crucial to maintain a high level of interest and support from the wealthy, will decrease as we move away from the holidays and the various reports that have been released.

In 1983, there were 45 soup kitchens in New York City. Now, in 1985, there are more than twice as many identified, with information about many more that operate on a small informal scale. Soup kitchens serve anywhere up to 700 people a day, but not all are open everyday and most serve much less than that. Every soup kitchen and pantry has experienced an increase each year of the last few. Many soup kitchens have started in the last two years responding to the need within their communities. Every soup kitchen operates on a shoestring and all could be serving more food and/or more people.

Our survey of the types of soup kitchens now operating identified some which are well-financed and equipped, heavily funded and dependent upon foundations, large churches and individuals. The majority, however, are dependent on contributions from individuals or members and food donations. It is highly unlikely that any of them can continue to receive this level of financial support on a long term basis. During 1984 the Federal, State, City and Borough government made money available for the first time to soup kitchens and pantries.

There are also a large number of soup kitchens which are entirely volunteer operations. Community people, ministers, priests, and nuns, cook and serve meals, and find ever-more creative methods for obtaining food. A number of these volunteer dependent operations are finding it difficult to sustain the level of human effort needed every week, month and throughout the year.

As hunger continues to increase and soup kitchens set in for the months ahead, long term planning beyond the everyday crises needs attention. Many

soup kitchens are facing the need to increase their economic self-support and to generate and retain funds and jobs within their neighborhoods in order to survive.

### GOALS

- 1) Develop mechanisms to assist soup kitchens and community-based organizations in developing community food ventures.
- 2) Provide technical assistance to a small number of soup kitchens and community-based organizations on developing community food ventures.
- 3) Increase the capacity of a small number of soup kitchens and CBOs to increase their economic self-sufficiency.
- 4) To generate and retain funds within poor neighborhoods.
- 5) To retain jobs for employees at soup kitchens and CBOs and/or create a small number of new jobs.

### METHODS

#### I. Soup Kitchen Assessment

A. Survey existing soup kitchens

B. Target soup kitchens according to facilities, resources, neighborhood, organizational structure and support, leadership and interest.

#### II. Feasibility of Community Food Ventures

##### A. Development of Models or Concepts

##### 1. Food Service

- community cafeteria
- take-home meal operation
- catering
- concession stand(s)
- management company

##### 2. Meal Production

- obtain contracts for Federally-funded programs that do not have their own kitchen facilities, ie. senior center, day care, after school and meals on wheels programs.
- obtain contracts for city-funded food/meal programs, ie. Emergency Assistance Units and welfare hotel residents

### 3. Food Production

- produce an item used by large institution, ie. bread

### 4. Food Processing

- processing facility for New York State agricultural products, ie. beans, and dairy.

### 5. Food Service Job Training and Development

- survey existing programs, survey financing options and explore possible sites and sponsors

## III. Resource Development

Development of a data bank for CBOs on food ventures and community economic development

- A. Identification of technical assistance resources, organizational, financial, business planning, legal and food service expertise including consultants and managers.
- B. Development of Resource Files including food service industry trends, sample feasibility studies and market studies, business plans, loan packages, food service equipment needs, Health Department regulations, and funding contacts.

## IV. Technical Assistance and Implementation

Six groups including soup kitchens and CBOs were targeted for technical assistance. Others will be assisted as they approach, and if feasible.

- A. Survey of need and resources among soup kitchens and organizations..  
Presentation of the community food venture concepts and models.
- B. Development of screening criteria

- C. Definition of organizational assessment process and evaluation
- D. Identification of targeted organizations and soup kitchens
- E. Conduct assessment meetings - define organizations' goals and interest
  - refine organizations' needs and resources
  - definition of working relationship and clarification of expectations
- F. Identification of possible ventures, including models and other ideas that the group suggests
- G. Development of venture selection criteria. Evaluation of criteria
- H. Identify staff within organization to work on venture development.  
Raise funds to hire staff.
- I. Develop and conduct feasibility study(ies) on venture(s), including market surveys and analysis, product identification, competition, organizational capacity and financial feasibility.
- J. Evaluation by organization, determination made on which venture to go ahead with. Identification of a manager.
- K. Assist in site identification, evaluation and analysis.
- L. Development of CED advisory Board within the organization. Recruit and/or appoint to assist in development of business plan.
- M. Development of business plan and financial package including venture design, financing needs, management and staffing pattern, legal structure, marketing plan, financial plans, risk and assumptions, monitoring mechanisms, pre-startup and startup plans, etc.
- N. Evaluation of the business plan and package. Decision to go forward.
- O. Development of financing sources
- P. Secure financing. Hire manager
- Q. Implement plans.
- R. Ongoing evaluation and monitoring

## V. Outreach

Soup kitchens and CBOs are interested in the ideas of this project, they understand the importance for thier long term survival and impact on the community. The challenge for CFRC is, that in a sense, we have to create the market and the interest because groups have not been able to get outside of the day to day survival to give these ventures consideration.

A. A citywide conference is planned for April 1985 for CBOs in NYC to present the food ventures and community economic development. Information and resource people will be present, to walk groups through, some of the steps involved in planning food ventures. Models and successes will be present.

## VI. Community Food Resource Center's CED Work

A. Participation in the Community Food Buying Service (CFBS)

B. Board training in community economic development

C. Defining the role of CFRC in its continuing work in community economic development

## RESULTS

### Assessment

An extensive survey was conducted of almost half the soup kitchens in 1983, 31 out of 83, to understand how they work, their resources and problems. This was done as a combined project with the Food & Hunger Hotline who has continued the survey as the number of soup kitchens continue to grow.

Among the soup kitchens surveyed, over 50% indicated interest in community economic development ventures.

One aspect of the survey dealt with the priority needs of the soup kitchens. Of the soup kitchens visited the following priorities were found, in order of priority: 1) Food

2) Equipment

3) Volunteers

4) Funding

- 5) Transportation
- 6) Space
- 7) Paid Staff
- 8) Supplies
- 9) Shelter for guests at the kitchen

The food cost per meal ranged from 20¢ to \$2.00. The cost depended on the number of people served by the program and the amount of donations, food, they receive. Eighty-seven percent of the soup kitchens surveyed are run by churches. And most significant to the project is that only a handful of soup kitchens have facilities that are certified by the Health Department, a requirement if the kitchen is to be reused for other ventures or programs. And none of the kitchens felt they could consider any of the food ventures without additional staff.

#### Technical Assistance

The following is the status of the work with the six groups working on developing community food ventures.

E.N.T.E.R.  
252 East 112th Street  
New York, N.Y. 10029

Venture: Development of a food service training facility with a community cafeteria component.

Status: Located in East Harlem, ENTER is an ecumenical organization that runs a residence for homeless youth, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation program, a residential treatment center and St Anthony's soup kitchen. ENTER has a 3,000 sq ft facility, ground floor access, that is ideal for a combination of a training facility and community cafeteria. A food service specialist analyzed the space and assessed the renovation and equipment needs. We helped ENTER develop a food service training program proposal, which was later turned down by the NYS Department of Labor. A survey was developed with ENTER to test the market in the neighborhood for a cafeteria.



Three factors raise problems: 1) the food service specialist assessed the equipment costs at \$75,000 plus additional renovation costs; 2) NYS and City Employment and Training funds do not seem to be available at this time for food service training; and 3) the space is unused at this time and there is pressure within ENTER to use the space now. The Director, Alfonso Siverls, decided to go ahead with planning a venture with lower startup costs and potential breakeven within a short period of time. An exterminating company has been identified with a possible experienced manager within the organization. Resources have been provided to them for the company but because it is not a food venture CFRC will not be working with them. A food service venture is still of interest to the organization but has been put on the back burner.

All Soul's Episcopal Church  
88 St Nicholas Avenue  
New York, N.Y. 10026

Venture: Development of a community cafeteria including a take-home meal component.  
Status: Located in Harlem, the church houses an excellent youth education program, a block association, a summer meal program and a number of other community activities. They periodically have a food pantry available to those who come to their door in need of food. All soul's has an excellent kitchen facility, 230 sp ft and Health Department certified, with a 2,700 sq ft dining facility. Rev Jones, church members and the Block Association are interested in starting a community cafeteria, open in evenings, with a take-home component. A survey was developed to test the market in the neighborhood. A nonprofit meal producing organization, Community Works-MAP, to rent the kitchen space and assist with the development of the cafeteria. Community Works, though interested, is not able to move or work with them at this time. Rev Jones wants an experienced food service person identified before moving on. The search for an appropriate person is still on. All Soul's is included as one of the groups to get funding from New York Foundation for staff. They are also included as one of the possible sites for the NYS department of Health SNAP proposal.

Our Lady of Presentation  
1661 St Marks Avenue  
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11233

Venture: Development of a food service facility run by participants and serving community residents, including a take-home meal component.

Status: Located in Brownsville, this Catholic church has a comprehensive social service unit which works closely with housing and tenant groups in the area. They also run the Lord's Table feeding 200 people a day, five days a week. ULP's soup kitchen is inadequate for anything larger than their current operation. Other kitchen facilities in the area have been explored. A section 8 building with 204 units for seniors is under construction across the street. A food service specialist has assessed the kitchen plans for maximum usage. Now the negotiations are with the Housing Authority around changes in the plans. The building is due to be completed in June. OLP and another church in Brownsville are the possible sponsors for the site, so a needs assessment is being conducted for an elderly feeding program at noontime and breakfast and lunch being available to the community.

Fifty percent of the soup kitchen's participants are from the city's William Street shelter. Mechanisms are being explored for OLP to receive some reimbursement or contract for these meals.

OLP has been identified to receive New York Foundation funding for the staff person to further develop the cafeteria idea. At this time the appropriate person has not been found. OLP received assistance on developing their FEMA proposal for food, equipment, supplies and rehabilitation monies for the soup kitchen.

United Bronx Parents  
773 Prospect Avenue  
Bronx, N.Y. 10455

Venture: Development of a community cafeteria with a take-home meal operation, large-scale meal production, and food processing. The cafeteria is the priority.

Status: Located in the South Bronx, in an old school building, United Bronx Parents runs a day care center, after school program, English as a Second Language and GED program for adults. They have provided meals for hungry families and individuals from their kitchen facility as well as food packages to take home. UBP has a kitchen facility in their school building in addition to the kitchen in the day care center. A proposal was developed for a feasibility study of the three ventures which was not funded. UBP has identified a consultant, Julio Pabon, to receive the funding available from New York Foundation to assist in developing the plans. With the recent sad loss of Evelina Antonetty, UBP is regrouping but the project will continue. A survey was developed to assess the need for the take-home meal operation with the UBP staff, school staff, and the day care parents and staff. A team of youth is being put together to conduct the survey in late January. UBP has received assistance in developing their FEMA proposal for food, supplies and equipment for their food pantry. UBP is one of the possible sites for the NYS Department of Health SNAP Proposal for a combined cafeteria/kitchen project. UBP was also assisted in developing their own SNAP proposal for a kitchen/cafeteria project.

Manhattan Church of the Nazarene  
140 West 44th Street  
New York N.Y. 10036

Venture: Contract meal production with NYC agencies. Contract or obtain funding for providing meals for the residents of the welfare hotel nearby.

Status: Located in the Times Square area, the soup kitchen feeds at least 100 people a day with a range of different meals offered throughout the week. The soup kitchen has an excellent commercial kitchen facility, Health Department certified with a licensed caterer on staff. The kitchen is not used to capacity and the church could contract with city agencies to provide meals and/or food. The NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) now contracts for a packaged meal to be served to people at the Emergency Assistance Units (EAUs). Three new EAUs

are open and with a tremendous amount of effort the HRA is finally opening up this contract to soup kitchens and non-profit organizations. At this date HRA contracted with the same for-profit as before because they never sent the bid specifications to any of the groups. But the next chance is for July 1985. The city's welfare hotel next door to the soup kitchen, which "temporarily" houses families on welfare, has greater and greater numbers of people coming to the soup kitchen. Most disturbing are the children. The church opened up an additional meal three days a week especially for the residents. Numerous proposals have been made to HRA for the city to support this effort. A Task Force of the NYC Coalition Against Hunger has been set up of groups operating or planning pilot meal programs for hotel residents. This task force's first demands are to ensure that no resident's benefits are reduced because of their participation in one of the meal programs. Many of the pilot programs are being started with money from the NYS Department of Health SNAP funds.

Godian Food Center  
106-07 Guy R. Brewer Blvd.  
Jamaica, N.Y. 11433

Venture: Development of a newly renovated building providing community space with food service included. Also developing a meal program for residents of three hotels nearby.

Status: Located in Jamaica, Queens, Godian is a religious organization with a large emergency food distribution center for both individuals and agencies within the neighborhood. It is a strong membership-based organization that distributes food under the Needy Families Program to a network of 200 organizations. It also provides transportation for the elderly and disabled. Godian has been working for a year to gain full ownership and renovate a 5,000 sq ft building located next to their current food distribution and office facility. They have extensive plans for the use of the space in the new building but need renovation funds. Plans were developed detailing their income generating activities to support the

building. A survey was developed to assess the strength of the demand for space. They were turned down by a bank and approached a foundation loan guarantee program which is pending until they raise more grant support.

Godian received assistance in developing their FEMA proposal for food, supplies, equipment and renovation for their pantry. They also received assistance in developing their own proposal for the SNAP funds for a meal program for residents of three hotel nearby.

#### CFRC's Community Economic Development Work

During the period of this project, CFRC went through a financial crisis cutting its budget in half and closing down its first food venture, the Community Food Buying Service (CFBS). CFBS is the food venture that I brought to CFRC and directed until September 1983 when I started on this soup kitchen project, later named community food ventures. As a result of tremendous changes and turmoil within CFRC, the community economic development work came into question. After closing the CFBS in September 1984, the board had their first training, from Michael Swack, on what community economic development is, what it means for a nonprofit and community-based organizations, and more specifically what does it mean for CFRC. From the readings and the training, questions were raised and an agreement was made to provide technical assistance to community organizations on starting food ventures. A workplan was agreed upon for three months in which a conference will be organized to present these concepts and information to community organizations. The board wants to see the extent of the interest before CFRC makes a commitment to further work in this area as a technical assistance provider.

#### ANALYSIS

I experienced difficulties in working on two projects at once. My roles were very different with CFBS and the community food ventures. The first was as a project planner and then manager and the other was as a technical assistance

provider. I did not see any progress on this project until I started working on it fulltime in October 1984.

Some of the organizational politics have taught me to never venture into a CED project without your board's support. CED and starting new ventures is guaranteed to disrupt the daily functioning of an organization. Without support it is not worth the struggle. This was particularly true at CFRC which had built its reputation on its advocacy work. There are significant differences between advocacy and CED work, it can be complimentary but it can be more easily in opposition. The differences must be shared openly in a trusting environment so the organization can prepare and make decisions when needed.

A CED strategy must be carefully thought out before starting. This is true both organizationally, in relation to gaining the board's support, and strategically in defining the role and the venture(s). Once the role is defined and you have support on hand or at easy access, half the battle is won.

I still have many questions about community economic development for small nonprofits that are service oriented. Generally, anykind of venture must be started when an organization is financially sound, at least not when it is in a financial crisis. Given the economy, government cutbacks for at least four more years and the generally deteriorating conditions in so many neighborhoods in New York City, the norm for nonprofits and community organizations is constantly being on the financial edge. As I see it these are the groups that most want and need a community economic development strategy.

I met with some success on this project. All the goals were met, with some base building for ongoing efforts in the future. The test of time is crucial to understand any lasting impact from these food ventures. The lessons learned from working with soup kitchens and other community-based organizations are:

- . Small struggling organizations are not good candidates for starting new ventures.
- . Most small organizations need a tremendous amount of organizational and management development, to strengthen their base.

- . Financing is needed for even the most preliminary stages of planning. Without the funds or the staff time to plan and assess their needs, groups can never get beyond the daily crises. Many times they are caught up with the difficulties of survival which is a very reactive mode. CED requires an offensive strategy with clear vision and direction.
- . Ventures with low startup costs are often of more interest to community organizations. Limiting the risk is important.
- . It is important to assess an organizations experience so that any ventures grow naturally from their experiences and assets.

The successes include:

- 1) The ground work was laid for nonprofits to gain access to government support through opening up the food and meal program contract process. Four nonprofits will be bidding in the next couple of months for some contracts.
- 2) A pot of money was raised for community organizations to hire additional staff to explore the feasibility and planning of any food ventures. Three groups have hired staff.
- 3) Additional funding was raised from the state for groups to operate food service programs. Three groups received these grants.
- 4) Community organizations were organized to explore various kinds of meal programs for residents of welfare hotels and mechanisms for support. Two groups are starting a program.
- 5) The pilot programs that are starting meal programs for residents are organized into a task force to support each other and face the city with a united voice.
- 6) CFRC has defined its commitment, though temporary, to provide technical assistance on food ventures as the community economic development work.

Throughout this project was more involved with organizational politics and survival than "community" politics. I now see this as a necessary step in order to have any support. I see the months ahead as focusing on community work with the individuals and financing identified for some new ventures. My concerns with empowerment have been focused on the individuals that I am

working with at each organization. As the ventures, particularly the cafeterias, develop I see that as the opportunity for more community involvement and participation and ventures responsive to the needs of the members of the various communities.