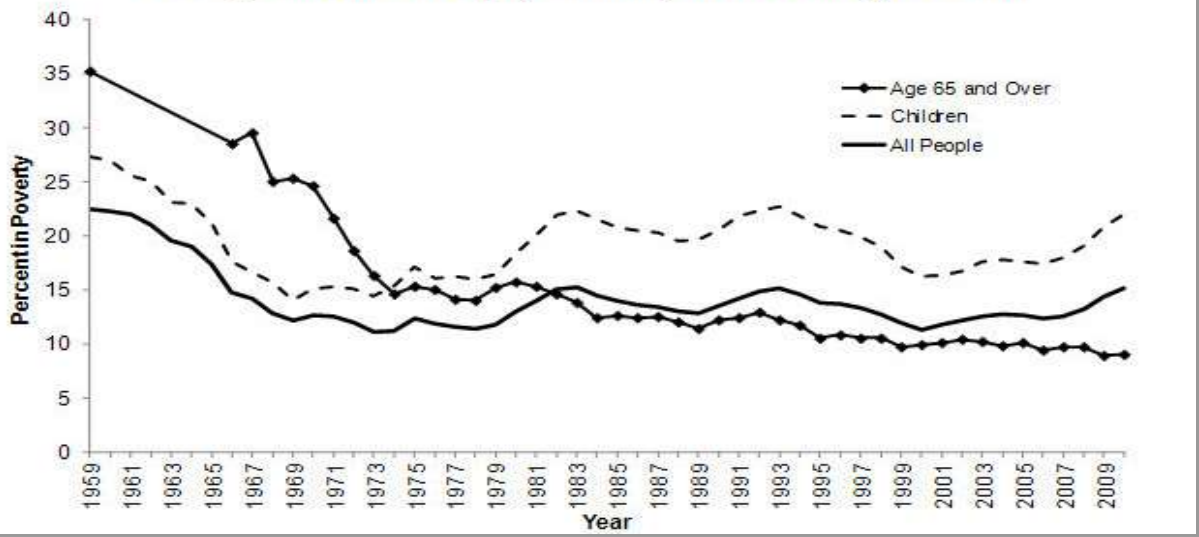


**IF POVERTY CANNOT BE REDUCED, WHAT ELSE CAN COMMUNITY ACTION DO?**  
**An analysis and understanding of the problem and our remaining options**  
*(Part 1 of 3)*

*This article is dedicated to the Community Action Pioneers, the community activists who embraced the concept of “Maximum Feasible Participation”, and those warriors who are still fighting poverty on nearly every front. Thousands upon thousands of people who participated in Community Action’s programs as advocates, recipients and enthusiasts determined it not robbery to help countless single parent families and the elderly and disabled citizens experience a better quality of life. Surely we have heard and read or witnessed over time that “the poor will always be with us.” That understood, we now wonder why a certain level of poverty has persisted in spite of nearly a century of initiatives to reduce or eliminate this condition. America is often touted as the world’s most powerful and richest country. To the contrary, it seems that it’s next to impossible to find a job that pays enough to cover all of the household expenses, which includes educating the children in preparation for the “American Dream.”*

The topic of poverty has caused a range of reactions including debates throughout the United States. Hostility and public demonstrations amongst advocates and individuals affected by the embarrassing and self-effacing phenomenon known widely as poverty occurs on a regular basis. Persons affected by the realities of low or no wages, inability to progress in educational attainment, and issues that are societal in nature are finding it more difficult to figure their way out of poverty. There should be no surprise to some of those who serve the poor that lately their efforts seem to be in vain. This is not because we have failed to help all people, but it is true that all people cannot be helped.

**Poverty Rates for All People, Children, and the Elderly, 1959-2010**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Poverty Division, CPBABEC. “Table 3, Poverty Status of People by age, race and Hispanic Origin 1999-2010

What is happening before our very eyes is the effects of what has materialized over the past fifty five years (since the War on Poverty was declared)... and it has more to do with the construct of American society. This view may be a more agreed upon view than we think. According to this article, <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2018/07/02/update-2018-more-evidence-half-americans-are-or-near-poverty> ....the poverty rate may be higher than we think.

A study by Ron Haskins (Brookings Institute, 2012)...indicates that *only 2% of the population of “Young people can virtually assure that they and their families will avoid poverty if they follow three elementary rules for success – complete at least a high school education, work full time, and wait until age 21 and get married before having a baby. Based on an analysis of Census data, people who followed all three of these rules had only a 2 percent chance of being in poverty and a 72 percent chance of joining the middle class (defined as above \$55,000 in 2010).”* Sadly, since 1965, the poverty rate, despite all of our achievements in community action and other programs or even proposition of Haskins, has still not significantly changed the poverty equation. I will explore why poverty rates have not changed and also propose ways to address this dilemma.

Let me assure you that this article is not intended to be critical of the many agencies which have worked so diligently to encourage change in their communities and the lives of the poor. **In fact, the rate of poverty would be unthinkably high were it not for the enactment of the WAR ON POVERTY in 1964.** The attempt of this article is to remind each of us about the silent destruction that is taking place in poor families. It touches on societal issues that have influenced personal failure and family destruction and indicates reasonable doubt that much of what Community Action Programs and other services do to cause positive change may not work as planned. It also reaches across racial lines and relies upon a holistic approach to solutions through collaboration, sharing of services and a multi-dimensional awareness’ of causes, social barriers and the need for a well-rounded plan. One with a commitment and a sure intent to minimize poverty and ultimately eradicate it.

There are hundreds of studies and documentaries about poverty in America and it’s relieving that many do not blame the poor themselves. I’ll be citing articles which are based on surveys and research to illustrate my understanding and the points made in some articles. This topic is driven by examples like this one:

<https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2017/07/lack-hope-america-high-costs-poor-rich-land.html> ... a somewhat radical assertion, but it’s actually based in reality. Consider the income chart below as we examine the title of this discussion with the question ....**what can we do?**

Community Action professionals have provided services that move people out of poverty, but we have

**COVERAGE YEAR 2019**

FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINES (COVERAGE YEAR 2019)							
# in Household	100% FPL	138% FPL	150% FPL	200% FPL	250% FPL	300% FPL	400% FPL
1	\$12,140	\$16,753	\$18,210	\$24,280	\$30,350	\$36,420	\$48,560
2	\$16,460	\$22,715	\$24,690	\$32,920	\$41,150	\$49,380	\$65,840
3	\$20,780	\$28,676	\$31,170	\$41,560	\$51,950	\$62,340	\$83,120
4	\$25,100	\$34,638	\$37,650	\$50,200	\$62,750	\$75,300	\$100,400
5	\$29,420	\$40,600	\$44,130	\$58,840	\$73,550	\$88,260	\$117,680
6	\$33,740	\$46,561	\$50,610	\$67,480	\$84,350	\$101,220	\$134,960
7	\$38,060	\$52,523	\$57,090	\$76,120	\$95,150	\$114,180	\$152,240
8	\$42,380	\$58,484	\$63,570	\$84,760	\$105,950	\$127,140	\$169,520

For households with more than 8, add \$4,320 for each additional person.  
 Note: Eligibility for premium tax credits in coverage year 2019 is based on poverty guidelines for 2018. FPL = federal poverty line.  
 Source (plus Hawai'i and Alaska guidelines): [aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines](https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines)

not been able to change the statistical dynamics over the past three decades.... And it is reasonable to ask the question, ‘Why?’ Is there a reason that encourages more government and corporate investment

or belief in the efficacy of our work? Is there a reason that we, who provide services to and for the poor, have not given up?

This phenomenon I'm identifying may have existed as a silent cause of poverty and failure for decades before and since the "War on Poverty" was declared by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964. The continued efforts of Community Action and other programs established to end poverty must embrace strategies that address a silent causal phenomenon... **TRAUMA**. Defined as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience to the mind (like overt & covert racism, domestic violence, child abuse, sudden death of a parent or child), **trauma and post-traumatic** stress are often a result of a mental reaction to an event or multiple events that cause immense stress and an inability to cope with ordinary to complex issues of life. All too often a traumatic experience which could be addressed in the lives of the poor... simply are not addressed or even acknowledged ...for various reasons, including an inability to acknowledge, provide intervention, or a service provider's ability recognize the need.

Here is a list of some human matters that cause trauma more as this discussion becomes more relevant to you.

- a. A Sudden Life-changing Event... e.g., fire, weather-related catastrophes, accidents
- b. Child Abuse, Molestation by a trusted person, Rape
- c. Parental Abandonment, Foster Care, Incarceration of a caretaker
- d. Violence...e.g., parental fights/abuse, public shootings, robbery, accidental loss of a relative of friend
- e. Successive Losses... jobs, homes, relationships, breakups, etc.
- f. Dysthymia: Multiple Losses, Gentrification, Income inequality, Criminal System Injustice

### **Now, Can we suggest ways to address programs for those who need intervention?**

YES WE CAN! The **Fulton Atlanta Community Action Authority** is one of the many services that offers help to parents who may be gifted but cannot meet the goals involving change. This is usually due to family and personal 'barriers' we may also call *roadblocks*. FACAA has launched a service to reach single parents who seem to have difficulty achieving stability and very little, if any, support or camaraderie with family and friends to attain social and economic stability. Most single parents have witnessed generational cycles of poverty and have no idea of available support to avoid continuing a life of poverty and failure. Many have shared their traumatic experiences during their participation in this newest program.

FACAA's **Single Parents' Society (SPS)**: Established as a support system and learning environment attended primarily by single mothers, this program intends to identify needs that extend beyond the service model and allows positive assimilation through regular meetings, outings and opportunities to help others who have similar experiences. Once the life experiences of each participant are shared within the group, FACAA's resource staff members have been able to help single parents find external programs and services that might help them address the deeper needs that could cause further problems. The acquiring of life skills has been a long-term need for people who had heretofore been unable to engage in effective problem-solving. Finding and keeping a job...managing money and parental responsibilities along with community involvement are goals that accompany the program's design.

[See... https://singlemotherguide.com/single-mother-statistics/](https://singlemotherguide.com/single-mother-statistics/) for more information about the needs of parents who are experiencing the traumatic task of raising their children in a complex society while overcoming many issues of growing up themselves. As we explore ways to help parents confront traumatic experiences, we will be better enabled to help people change their lives. We know that hundreds of attempts to reduce poverty have been made, countless success stories have been shared, but it seems that poverty is evidently impossible to reduce and historically impossible to eradicate. This three-part report reveals that Single Parenthood is indeed a major causation of Poverty. As we learn more about the single parents' psychological hindrances to success, **Community Action** will get closer to sure sociological solutions to the nightmare of poverty. It must be honestly disclosed that trends in statistics indicate that the institution of marriage is currently facing decline.

*Another report that explains income/wealth/poverty can be found at this site:*

<https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2018/demo/p60-263.html>

*“ There is one unmistakable lesson in American history; a community that allows a large number of young men to grow up in broken families, dominated by women, never acquiring any stable relationship to male authority, never acquiring any set of rational expectations about the future - that community asks for and gets chaos.” The Late Senator, **Daniel Patrick Moynihan***

**END: PART ONE OF THREE**

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[www.facaa.org](http://www.facaa.org)