Thoughts on Leadership, October, 2011

Mission • Vision • Strategic Direction • Quality • Innovation • Teambuilding • Communication • Leadership Development

"With dignity and respect, powered by volunteers, MEND's **mission** is to break the bonds of poverty by providing basic human needs and a pathway to self-reliance."

Lee Walcot, long-time executive director of The Ahmanson Foundation, once said on a visit to the MEND Center that he really liked the fact that we have our **mission** statement posted throughout our facilities. He noted that he had rarely seen this done -- and he was someone who likely had visited hundreds of nonprofits.

But beyond the **mission** statement hanging on our walls, how do these words impact how MEND operates day to day? Certainly, there are obvious examples of providing *dignity*: our food boxes overflowing with nutritionally balanced items; our free, gently used clothing displayed to give clients a "retail" experience; our holistic approach to healthcare to include medical, dental, vision, counseling and health education; our education programs thoughtfully designed to accommodate the needs of students with limited schooling – all these are signs of the commitment of MEND workers to fulfill our **mission.**

And beyond the provision of our basic services, every department incorporates *pathways to self-reliance* through job training, special events that include educational components, invitations to 'give back' through volunteering, and much more.

And then there are the "behind the scenes" discussions among staff and volunteers that focus on the **mission** commitment to *dignity* that include such aspects of our work as streamlining processes to limit the wait time for services; the appearance of our facilities and the placement of furnishings to create a welcoming atmosphere; the wording that is used on signs and in written materials that communicates *respect* and helpfulness.

Being *"volunteer-powered"* is the **mission** component that brings a unique vitality to MEND that can be seen in all our operations: people from every demographic group come together to make the work of MEND possible. Employee job descriptions are written to emphasize the importance of staff coordinating the work of volunteers, and employees are regularly trained in effective volunteer management. Volunteers bring new ideas that strengthen programs and committees. And we regularly celebrate the work of our volunteers, not only at our annual recognition dinner, but throughout the year.

From the Leadership Literature

" A mission statement has to be operational, otherwise it's just good intentions."

Peter Drucker, Managing the Nonprofit Organization

Peter Drucker is widely considered to be the "father of modern management", and during his long life, he wrote more than 50 books on the subject. In his later years, he gave increasing focus to the importance of

the nonprofit sector in American society, and recognizes our sector as the primary catalyst for change, particularly at the human level. Drucker adapts many of the leadership principles that he developed for business to social service agencies in his book **Managing the Nonprofit Organization.**