



The Best Practices & Promising Practices of 2013-14

Community Action:
Helping People. Changing Lives.

Presented by:
Minnesota Community Action Partnership
MN Department of Human Services Office of Economic Opportunity
University of Minnesota College of Education & Human Development

What is a Minnesota Community Action Partnership Best Practice?

A *Minnesota Community Action Partnership Best Practice* is a program, project, process, procedure or strategy that has been deemed by a University of Minnesota College of Education & Human Development evaluation team to meet the following criteria:

1. Measurably improves the efficiency or effectiveness of customer service or support systems;
2. Is an innovative or creative solution to the problem addressed by the “practice”;
3. Has a reasonable plan for long-term sustainability in funding and community support;
4. Exemplifies true collaboration with community partners; and
5. Is replicable with modification in other Community Action Agencies.

A *Promising Practice* has met the same criteria but has existed for less than one year, therefore has not yet obtained the significant measurable results of a *Best Practice*.

Caries Away! — Best Practice

Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency

The Practice: *Caries Away!*, an oral health initiative operated by Arrowhead Early Head Start since 2006, focuses on low-income, high-risk infants, toddlers, and pregnant women across rural northeastern Minnesota. Families receive individualized anticipatory guidance related to oral health. They are given and taught to correctly use oral hygiene products. Professional relationships with several local dentists have been fostered to secure dental homes for children, ages birth to three years, who would otherwise go without seeing a dentist.

The Impact: Since *Caries Away!* began, 100% of Arrowhead EHS families have received oral health education and hygiene supplies. Over 1,800 children have received fluoride varnish and oral health screenings through an in-house preventive fluoride varnish program.

Special Thanks to

Keynote Speakers

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Lincoln Park Farmers Market — Promising Practice *Community Action Duluth*

The Practice: Community Action Duluth's home neighborhood is Lincoln Park. It is a "food desert" by USDA definition, meaning that it has a poverty rate over 20% and no supermarket within a mile. Because of this, their low-income neighbors struggle to purchase food for their families. In response, Community Action Duluth's Seeds of Success urban farming program started the Lincoln Park Farmers market in June 2013.

The Impact: In its first season of operation, the market attracted an average of 3.8 vendors per week. Over the course of the season, it attracted over \$1,000 of spending by customers using food support benefits.

Food Hub — Promising Practice *Minnesota Valley Action Council*

The Practice: Minnesota Valley Action Council is launching a food hub to make fresh, healthy, locally grown food readily available to institutions, retailers and consumers in its nine-county region. This new, self-sustaining initiative will create jobs, boost the income of dozens of small-farm families (one quarter of which are low-income), and provide support for the regional economy. In addition, it will increase the flow of local food to food shelves and school backpack programs and enable SNAP recipients to maximize their benefits. It is the first step in an ambitious local food initiative designed for impact across the CAP network.

The Impact: MVAC is currently working with 25 small farmers (one-quarter of whom are low-income) and more than a dozen institutions to meet their need for fresh, healthy, locally grown food. The food hub also received \$20,000 in seed money from the Minnesota Cup competition. Other funding streams for the project include the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Community Service Block Grant, agency funds, and several other grants.

Financial Opportunity Center — Best Practice *Community Action Duluth*

The Practice: Community Action Duluth transformed their agency through the Financial Opportunity Center model. This bundled approach to providing services allowed our program participants to ultimately have better outcomes. The main services coordinated under the Financial Opportunity Center are employment services and coaching, green jobs, financial services and coaching, free tax prep, income supports, and community engagement. Now the goal for participants when they enter Community Action Duluth is to be provided with as many holistic, comprehensive, and coordinated services as possible and to track outcomes in a cohesive unified way through the agency. Transforming the agency took vision, leadership, willingness to change, ability to evaluate and respond, and perseverance to the cause.

The Impact: Bundled services coupled with agency coordination demonstrates that participants involved in multiple programs truly achieve better results in the areas of increased income, job retention, improved credit score, and increased net worth.

Focus Lease Program — Best Practice *Minnesota Valley Action Council*

The Practice: Safe, affordable and dependable transportation is a basic necessity for people working their way out of poverty. This is particularly true in rural areas, where homes and workplaces may be tens of miles apart and public transportation is nearly non-existent. Minnesota Valley Action Council's "Focus Lease Program" enables working but low-income people to lease new, economical autos at low cost. The program is self-sustaining, with lease payments deposited into a revolving fund which enables the agency to purchase additional vehicles for leasing.

The Impact: In the four-plus years the program has been active, payment history has been excellent with no customers currently late on their payments. Clients have been able to secure a reliable car with reasonable payments, and without enduring the threat of repossession and the resulting devastation to their credit rating if problems arise.

Housing Development - Spring Creek Townhomes in Northfield — *Best Practice*

Three Rivers Community Action

The Practice: Spring Creek is a new 28-unit family rental townhome development in Northfield, MN. The collaborative project fulfilled community goals of utilizing a distressed property, adding much-needed affordable rental housing for families with children, and creating a model development that demonstrates attractive, energy efficient design. Three Rivers Community Action was the developer of the \$6.4 million project, working in close partnership with the Northfield Housing and Redevelopment Authority who donated the land and facilitated the local process. The project serves as a model for how to develop attractive, energy efficient, and affordable rental housing targeted to underserved populations through community-based collaboration.

The Impact: Spring Creek Townhomes is a success because it created 28 family rental housing units for households under 60% of area median income; developed an underutilized plot of land in a prime location in the community, adding to the City's tax base and providing much needed affordable rental housing; strengthened partnership between Three Rivers and local community, including the Northfield HRA, City of Northfield and local media; demonstrated that affordable housing development can be attractive, energy efficient and neighborhood friendly; and provided a revenue stream to Three Rivers in the form of a developer fee that allows the agency to continue to pursue housing development activities in the region.

WCMCA Instructional Community Work Crew — *Best Practice*

West Central Minnesota Communities Action, Inc.

The Practice: The WCMCA Institutional Community Work Crew built 115 affordable and numerous other community projects. While developing job skills, crew members give back to the community and develop relationships. WCMCA partnered with the Department of Correction and the Douglas County Jail to provide Minnesota State Inmates with carpentry experience to assist in the transition to life on the outside.

The Impact: The WCMCA Institutional Community Work Crew built 115 affordable and numerous other community projects. Inmate crew members experience higher rates of employment and wages upon release and lower rates of incarceration.

Food Security Program — *Best Practice* ***Western Community Action***

The Practice: Western Community Action has taken a stand against hunger. In the last five years, Western Community Action has implemented multiple strategies that incorporate the utilization of existing resources while dramatically increasing capacity to serve those in need.

The Impact: Western Community Action's food shelves have increased the number of pounds per person per visit from less than 20 pounds (5 years ago) to 26.8 pounds in 2013. Western Community Action assists with more than 100 SNAP applications per year, and screens hundreds more. Western Community Action has been providing a free meal and nutrition education through our Circles of Support programs since 2006.

Fatherhood Partnership Program — *Promising Practice* ***Anoka County Community Action Program, Inc.***

The Practice: The Fatherhood Partnership Program provides a bridge of partnership services to support ACCAP Head Start fathers in Anoka County. Resources and programming are made available for dads to support their role as a parent in their young children's lives. This includes the Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) program, father-child activity nights that are geared to the interests of dads and their children, and having partners share resources and information about the issues fathers face.

The Impact: Participation in the ACCAP Head Start Fatherhood events has increased 136% over the past two years.

Executive Director Services Agreement — *Promising Practice* ***Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency*** ***KOOTASCA Community Action Council***

The Practice: A unique partnership between the Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA) and KOOTASCA Community Action for shared services, culminating in shared Executive Director services, has the potential to strengthen regional Community Action services, conserve resources, and increase efficiencies across both organizations.

The Impact: Together, the agencies have shaped a mutually beneficial arrangement that is neither a merger nor a takeover, nor is it only pairing and sharing of services. Rather, it is a deal that retains each agency's unique identity, program strengths, and governing Boards, while sharing selected program services and contracting for AEOA administrative expertise.