



Minnesota Community Action Partnership

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Community Action Agencies develop new ways to battle poverty

Even after 50 years of service, Minnesota's Community Action Agencies are developing new and innovative ways to provide opportunities for low-income families.

Eight agencies were honored Tuesday for creating new initiatives designed to help people facing a wide array of issues, including chronic disease, lack of transportation and affordable housing, food insecurity, and recidivism. The 2014 award-winners were singled out for creating initiatives that provide measurable outcomes. The winners are: Anoka Community Action Program Inc., Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency, Community Action Duluth, KOOTASCA Community Action, Minnesota Valley Action Council, Three Rivers Community Action, West Central Minnesota Communities Action, and Western Community Action Inc.

Senator Michelle Benson (R-31) and Representative Jay McNamar (DFL-12A) were keynote speakers at the event. Other legislators that spoke included Representative Jim Abeler (R-35A), Representative David Bly (DFL-20B), and Representative Bud Nornes (R-8A).

The Minnesota Community Action Partnership – a consortium of Minnesota's 26 Community Action Agencies – bestows Best Practices Awards bi-annually to agencies breaking new ground in the delivery of services to low-income people. The awards program is a model for other states seeking to coordinate community-based anti-poverty efforts and university systems.

“These awards recognize the extremely effective family-strengthening work of Community Action Agencies statewide,” said Catherine A. Solheim, Ph.D., Associate Professor in Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota College of Human Education and Human Development. “The hallmark of these programs are the tangible outcomes that demonstrate how people living in poverty are improving their lives. I am excited to use these programs as examples in my classroom to train the next generation of professionals in social work, family science, and policy.”

The judges for the awards reviewed nominations based on documented outcomes, innovation and replicability. Bonus points were awarded to projects involving community collaborations.

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The awards underline the urgency of creating innovative and efficient ways for Community Action Agencies to support families living in poverty. Nearly 120,000 Minnesotans slid from the middle class into poverty since the onset of the Great Recession, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Today, nearly one in eight Minnesotans lives in poverty. But government funding for anti-poverty programs delivered by Community Action Agencies has dropped to pre-recession levels.

“While our communities are struggling to respond to increased demand for services from an ever-increasing number of families in need, these programs are crucial,” said Bob Benes, Executive Director of the Lakes and Pines Community Action Council, and Board Chair of the Minnesota Community Action Partnership. “This event showcases the innovative work that Community Action Agencies are doing throughout Minnesota to improve the economic stability of their communities. The range and depth of the programs reflect the diverse needs of today's society.”

Community Action Agencies are locally controlled, private, non-profit organizations designed to improve communities by helping low-income families and individuals leave poverty. President Lyndon B. Johnson launched Community Action Agencies when he signed the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which was the beginning of his historic “War on Poverty.”

The Minnesota Community Action Partnership collaborates with the University of Minnesota College of Human Education and Human Development, and the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Office of Economic Opportunity for the Best Practices awards.

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