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MCA's Mission

To serve member agencies and strengthen their capacity to alleviate the causes and circumstances of poverty.

Announcements

Summer Conference designed with frontline staff in mind

Helping Community Action Agencies (CAAs) gain a foundational understanding on the "culture of poverty" and how to help families move to self-sufficiency is the goal of MCA's 2017 Summer Conference. This year's sessions are designed with frontline staff and CAA board members in mind.

The conference, July 11-13 at Crystal Mountain, will feature speakers on institutional bias, FACSPRO, CAA best practices, advocacy, community needs assessments and strategic planning. MCA has also invited David Bradley of the National Community Action Foundation to present a half-day history of Community Action and a legislative update. A Bridges Out of Poverty workshop will teach empathy, strategies and techniques to communicate with and support low-income families. Other workshop offerings include social media, community organizing, OMB circular, indirect cost rates, audits and much more.

Registration is open now. For more information and to register, [click here](#).

National Community Action Month in May

May is National Community Action Month, an opportunity to showcase the work that Community Action Agencies (CAAs) do to help low-income families reach self-sufficiency. CAAs may [click here](#) for more information and supporting materials on National Community Action Month.

Upcoming Events

For a full list of events, visit [MCA's calendar](#).

"National Poverty Trends Session 7" Webinar April 13

The free webinar, held by Community Action Partnership, will run from 1-2:30 p.m. [Registration is required](#).

"Decreasing Family Homelessness" Webinar April 19

The free webinar, held by Community Action Partnership, will run from 2-3:30 p.m. [Registration is required](#).

"New Executive Director Orientation" April 20-21

Monticello Area Community Action Agency's New Executive Director Orientation will be held April 20-21 in Chicago at the Sheraton Grand Hotel. [Contact Leah Pauletti](#), director of operations at Minnesota Community Action Partnership, for registration information.

"Conducting an Assessment to Become a Trauma Informed Organization" Webinar April 27

The free webinar, held by the Community Action Partnership, will run from 2-3:30 p.m. [Registration is required](#).

Day at the Capitol May 9

Day at the Capitol will be held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The Community Action awards ceremony will be held at 10 a.m. at the Capitol Rotunda, and the lunch for winners and legislators will follow.

CAAs awarded new Head Start grant

High school students in the metro Detroit area interested in early educator careers will be able to participate in Wayne Metro Community Action Agency's new apprenticeship program thanks to a grant from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan (CFSEM). Wayne Metro, along with Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency and Macomb Community Action, received CFSEM's Head Start Early Childhood Innovation Fund Collaborative (Innovation Fund) to expand their services and impact more families.

The Innovation Fund awarded nine grants totaling \$1.5 million that will support nearly 9,000 young children and their families enrolled in local Head Start agencies in Detroit, Wayne County, Oakland County and Macomb County. Each Community Action Agency was awarded \$125,000.

"The Innovation Fund was impressed with the plans agencies proposed for teacher recruitment and retention," said Katie Brisson, CFSEM vice president of programs, "as well as programs that will assist early educators in supporting children and families living in adverse conditions."

The Innovation Fund awards competitive grants for programs and partnerships that improve the quality of Head Start services and outcomes for children and their families in Detroit and the tri-counties. It also provides strategic support for systemwide needs, such as oversight of a monthly Learning Network, creation and administration of a common enrollment campaign, comprehensive data collection and provision of collaborative access to shared resources, such as quality training.

Did you know?

Sixteen percent of Michigan's residents cannot reliably obtain enough food to feed themselves and their families, according to a 2014 study by Feeding America.

Nearly 24 percent of Michigan children live in poverty and regularly face food insecurity.

Low-income Michigan residents confront barriers in accessing reliable food sources. Many urban neighborhoods are "food deserts" and have access only to convenience-type foods that are high in calories and low in nutritional value.

Rural and suburban low-income residents might face other challenges, such as transportation to a grocery store or knowledge about making good food choices.

Community Action Agencies (CAAs) feed thousands of people every year through hunger-related programs and services. CAAs in Michigan also support localizing food systems and community revitalization.

BWCA hoophouse program promotes healthy communities



Currently, four local farmers participate in BWCA's Hoophouses for Health program. This season, BWCA plans on adding more.

The trunk of a minivan opens to reveal stacks of sweet corn ears, grown in local "hoophouses" and on their way to the farmers market and the tables of Blue Water area families.

Blue Water Community Action's (BWCA) "Hoophouses for Health" program provides families with healthy food and nutritional education while helping farmers expand their growing season. BWCA was already a food distribution site when its local farmers market contacted the organization about a potential partnership. The resulting program combines food distribution, state aid and education to improve the lives of community members.

Farmers extend their growing seasons using hoophouses, or mini-greenhouses. With funding from the state, farmers take out loans to build them, then pay back their loans through cashed food vouchers, which BWCA provides and distributes to qualifying Head Start families.



Hoophouses help farmers extend the growing season.

"It's beyond helping just farmers," says BWCA Deputy Director **Sherry Archibald** of the three-year-old program. "We're introducing families to fresh food, allowing them to have fresh fruits and vegetables all summer long and now in the winter."

For BWCA, the program has been an opportunity to develop local partnerships and set new standards for food distribution success, helping its Head Start families obtain locally grown, fresh food. After the first two years, it saw an opportunity to expand the program further.



Families who learn how to grow and preserve their own food free up vouchers for other families to use at the farmer's market.

"One of our clients came in and wanted to buy tools to grow a garden," Archibald says. "We decided to write two different grants to buy all the things needed, supplied an extra \$100 in vouchers and in the spring started offering gardening classes."

BWCA expanded its healthy food initiative further by offering classes on canning and freezing food like tomatoes and beans.

"When our communities come together, they influence positive change," says **Sen. Phil Pavlov** (R-St. Clair Township). "BWCA's efforts to eliminate hunger go past charitable work. Through their educational efforts, they lay the foundation for healthy living across generations of families."

In the upcoming season, BWCA hopes to grow its partnerships to include more farmers as well as offer more vouchers and a wider variety of foods.

2017 NCAF Legislative Conference Insights

CAAs know how to weather the storm

By MCA Executive Director Kate White



What a time to be in Washington, D.C., last month – snow, icy winds and the chill of a proposed federal budget that would gut many of the programs that fund Michigan's Community Action Agencies.

The MCA team and our local agencies spent March 14-17 on Capitol Hill meeting with our Michigan congressional delegation, reminding them of the important role Community Action serves in their local communities. It was especially helpful to explain those services to new members of Congress, as President Trump's new budget proposed large cuts and elimination of many programs operated by Community Action. If you haven't touched base with your members of Congress, it is not too late!



U.S. Rep. Jack Bergman (R-Watermeet)(left) meets with MCA's Kate White and Michael Shalley during NCAF's 2017 Legislative Conference.

The president's budget was a jolt for the annual National Community Action Foundation conference, which serves to keep our key issues in front of those who hold the purse strings that affect us. David Bradley and the NCAF staff provided regular updates as details of the President's budget emerged. More than 200 Community Action representatives from around the U.S. converged on the nation's capital to make our voices heard.

Having so many programs that affect the poor and elderly recommended for elimination is unusual. These cuts, if passed, would disproportionately affect rural areas where federal money is so crucial.

It was ironic that one of the inspirational speakers was JC Vance, author of the acclaimed book "Hillbilly Elegy," a compelling glimpse into the generational poverty that afflicts rural white families. He reaffirmed the importance of our self-sufficiency work. At the same time, you had a budget that reflected a philosophy of cutting programs that are understood to protect low-income families, people with disabilities and the elderly. Everything seems to be on the table in terms of elimination or reduction.

That includes cuts to Community Services Block Grants – the bedrock of Community Action funding – and a 50 percent cut to Community Development Block Grant program, which many of our members use to improve the quality of life in communities.



NCAF CEO David Bradley listens to U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders' speech in support of Community Action Agencies.

There were encouraging words from Sen. Bernie Sanders. U.S. Rep. John Lewis, told our group it's "time to be bad--in a good way," reminding people of the importance of persistent advocacy.

We've seen harsh cuts proposed before and we survived. With danger comes opportunity! We need to stay on our toes and in regular contact with our members of Congress to make sure they understand the value of our programs. Stressing self-sufficiency, job creation, and our contributions to the economy are critical.

My advice: Be ready for anything. And don't give up.

Community Action means H.E.L.P

Good elevator speech delivers concise, memorable message

Agency leaders might not actually be in an elevator when the chance to talk about Community Action occurs, but having the "elevator speech" ready will help advance understanding about Community Action Agencies' work.

"It's not an easy mission to explain," says **Kate White**, MCA executive director. "So we've simplified it down to an easy acronym for all of us to remember – H.E.L.P, which stands for the four key areas of our work."

- 1) Housing and homelessness (including weatherization, affordable housing, supportive services for veteran families and senior citizen housing)
- 2) Emergencies (including food, heating assistance, rental assistance and transportation services)
- 3) Learning (including early childhood education, financial literacy, GED preparation and parenting)
- 4) Poverty (including alleviating poverty, building skills, communities and self-sufficiency)

With help from their CAA, clients can be healthier and more productive at school or work, and more likely to reach their full potential.

Catalyst welcomes input, story ideas

Is there a story or issue you'd like to see covered in Catalyst?

Let us know what's happening in your agency or region.

Success stories? Recent events? People news?

We welcome your input and feedback. Please send your comments and ideas [here](#).

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A good elevator speech encompasses an organization's mission and goals, and allows opportunity to transition into more detailed conversation.

"Since Community Action is so multifaceted it's not easy to explain or for all of us to be consistent," says White. "We encourage everyone involved in CAAs to begin using the H.E.L.P acronym so that others gain a better knowledge of our work."