



Covid-19: Community Action Responded Quickly in the Early Days of the Pandemic





Our Mission

To ensure the causes and conditions of poverty are effectively addressed and to strengthen, promote, represent, and serve the Community Action Network.

The Promise of Community Action

Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live.

We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

In December 2019, a previously unknown strain of the novel coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) began to infect vast numbers of people on a global scale, quickly shifting the world into a new era. The first case in the United States was confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on January 21, 2020, and by mid-March communities were issuing stay-at-home orders. Limitations on public and business gatherings resulted in an economic slowdown and recession, with businesses forced to furlough staff as customers disappeared. What started as a global health pandemic has evolved into a “watershed moment” that has broader economic and social implications that will indeed inform well-being and mobility of future generations.

While the entire nation is weathering this storm, its impact is intensified for certain groups. Older adults and people with serious underlying medical conditions are at higher risk of experiencing acute symptoms. In addition, Black, Indigenous, and other persons of color are disparately impacted by both the health risks and economic consequences of the pandemic, due to factors including high comorbidity rates, their disproportionate role as essential workers, and access to quality affordable health care.¹

The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced how crucial strong, reliable institutions and agencies are to a community’s resilience. They mitigate some of the most serious health, economic, and social consequences of a crisis. Time and time again, the Community Action Network (Network) which is imbedded in 99% of America’s counties has emerged as critical emergency first-responders when families and communities need support the most. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Network has once again leveraged its trusted position in communities, provided critical infrastructure, and buttressed local response and recovery efforts. The Community Action Network is the only non-military network in the country directly affiliated with the Federal Government and is a national system of over 1,000 high-performing Community Action Agencies (CAAs),

State Associations, state offices, and federal partners supported by the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG). **During the pandemic, CSBG has functioned as a critical lever for the federal government to drive funds to localities to meet specific local needs and to fuel response, recovery, and sustainable resiliency efforts.**

The Network has long been a support system for the country, providing access to stabilizing supports as housing, food, and utilities, as well as human development services including Head Start and job training. Just as they have numerous times before in the face of natural disaster or economic crisis, when the pandemic wreaked havoc on our communities, Community Action’s systems and services shifted to meet the crisis head on.

In many areas across the country, stay-at-home orders required CAAs to close their doors, but agencies were nimble and quickly pivoted and adopted new forms of service delivery. They found new and innovative ways to serve their existing customers, as well as the thousands of individuals and families who found themselves newly in need of assistance as their health changed, the economy crashed, and jobs disappeared.

The first days of the pandemic took a heavy toll on the American healthcare system, economy, and psyche, heightening the strain of the 43 million people already experiencing poverty, and those living paycheck to paycheck. **Throughout it all, Community Action has been standing strong, working with partners, supporting communities in creative ways, and making a difference in the lives of struggling families.**

During the first 90 days of the COVID-19 pandemic in the US, the National Community Action Partnership (NCAP) collected stories from across the country that show how CAAs adapted and grew during the initial days of the crisis. These stories demonstrate the incredible flexibility and ingenuity of the Network. As stories came in, patterns of innovation and intervention emerged that the Partnership distilled into seven themes:

1 Richard A. Oppel Jr., et al., *The Fullest Look Yet at the Racial Inequity of Coronavirus*, N.Y. TIMES, July 5, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/05/us/coronavirus-latinos-african-americans-cdc-data.html?smid=em-share>.

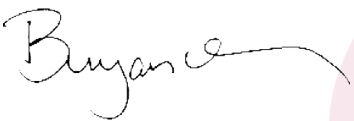
- Using Data to Assess Community Needs and Resources
- Pivoting to Meet Emerging and Increasing Needs
- Leading the Community Response for Struggling Families
- Innovating with Technology to Increase Capacity to Serve
- Leveraging Human and Financial Resources
- Helping Everyday Heroes
- Ensuring Health and Safety

This report touches on these key themes, highlighting ways the Community Action Network has shifted to not only continue providing assistance to people

experiencing hardship across America, but also to rapidly expand services, initiate new services, and engage community partners in joint problem solving. In communities large and small, rural and urban, CAAs have met and responded to the challenges created by the crisis. This report highlights a few of these stories with more details provided at the end of this report in the Appendix. This report is by no means the full story of the Community Action response, but we hope it reinforces the critical role that Community Action plays in communities everyday, especially in the time of crisis.

We invite you to read this report and center yourself in the promise of Community as you learn about our efforts during his critical time in history. Community Action works!

Yours in Community Action,



Bryan Duncan
Chair, Board of Directors



Denise Harlow
Chief Executive Officer

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TAGS:



Census



Child Care



Financial Empowerment



Food



Fundraising



Health



Housing



Utilities

Using Data to Assess Community Needs and Resources

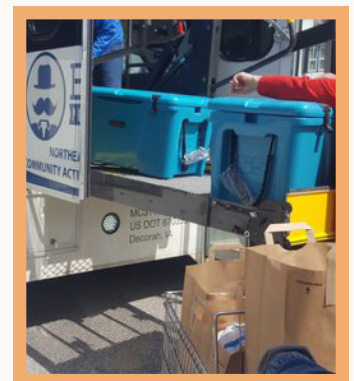
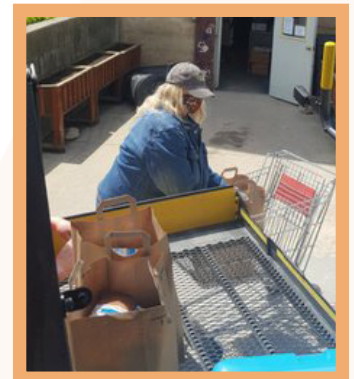
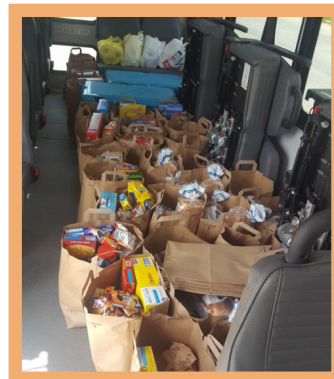
Collecting and analyzing data to inform customer needs and available resources is nothing new for CAAs. The Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) framework – which creates a cycle of continuous improvement – is woven into the Network’s fabric and it prioritizes the use of quantitative and qualitative data to maximize results on the family, community and agency levels. The cycle depends on ongoing assessment of needs and conditions and the evaluation of the outcomes of particular approaches. **In response to the pandemic, CAAs use data and the ROMA performance management system in real time to better serve new and existing customers.**

CAAs regularly conduct assessments of community needs and resources and update priority needs as shifts happen. In the early weeks of the pandemic, CAAs reviewed existing assessments and analyzed data trends. They conducted new local assessments to pinpoint evolving needs and resource gaps and identified the services most likely to be impacted by the pandemic. Although CAAs conduct a full assessment every three years, these rapid updates or addenda were critical to ensuring that the agencies’ responses were relevant and deeply informed by local experience.

Identifying Food Insecurity

Assessments may include community observations and surveys, which is how **Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation (NEICAC)** determined priorities for addressing the impact of the pandemic. NEICAC created and distributed a community needs survey to identify issues across their seven-county service area in northeast Iowa. Food insecurity was commonly noted in the responses. By collecting and analyzing this information, as well as talking with current customers, they recognized that their commitment to decreasing food insecurity could allow community members to stay home and stay healthy throughout stay-at-home orders or in instances where people needed to quarantine.

CAAs assess not only their community’s needs on a regular basis but also their assets; this is essential to determining what resources can be leveraged to address a demand. NEICAC’s public transit system, EARL, faced having to shut down non-essential routes to ensure employee and rider safety during the pandemic. This presented an opportunity to repurpose an existing resource: NEICAC implemented a food delivery program, taking referrals from pantries and



tracking outcomes, while relying heavily on EARL for the completion of deliveries. Because they had assessed both their demands and their resources, the agency was able to quickly adapt existing infrastructure to a new use.

Uncovering Inequities

PEACE, Inc. in central New York, also conducted a COVID-19 community needs assessment update. The agency recognized that real-time data from their community – the demographics of COVID-19 cases – overlapped directly with existing patterns of poverty and inequity in their community. Through their assessment process, they blended national, state, and local documents, interviewed community leaders and agency staff, organized and analyzed the agency's program data and notes, and most importantly, listened and responded to their customers. PEACE, Inc. also included some longer-term data to demonstrate that present-day inequities in their community are rooted in structural issues and policy decisions, which can only be addressed through strategies for broader and longer-term change.

Conclusion

The pandemic has emphasized how crucial it is to assess community needs and resources when crafting an effective community-level response. Comprehensive assessments are endemic to the day-to-day operations of local Community Action Agencies. Using their assessment expertise, CAAs can quickly identify their community's pandemic needs in real time and respond in ways that effectively and successfully address those needs.

“This presented an opportunity to repurpose an existing resource: NEICAC implemented a food delivery program...”

PEACE, Inc. also recognized the importance of collaborating with community stakeholders, leveraging existing data and information sharing networks to distribute the community assessment and get it into the hands of decision-makers in a timely way. In response, PEACE, Inc. has been taking action steps necessary to offer existent and newly emerging basic needs services around matters of nutrition, trauma-informed youth and family development, economic and employment supports, home safety (both physical and emotional), access (to information, to safety net supports, to justice), and equity. The agency recognizes that, taken together, their understanding and response to these social determinants of health will improve a family's ability to emerge from the pandemic healthy and whole.

Pivoting to Meet Emerging & Increasing Needs

When the pandemic swept across the nation and demand for emergency services increased dramatically, the Network responded in force. Some parts of the country have seen a 33% increase in food insecurity, including many individuals and families who had never sought food assistance in the past.² While the newly unemployed focus on covering basic needs, rent and utility debts have also piled up, even where eviction and shut-off moratoria are in place. A recent analysis revealed that nearly 22 million households nationwide — disproportionately African American and Latinx households — may face eviction by September 30.³ **Whether for food, utility, and rental assistance or Head Start, homeownership, and mental health support, families have been turning to Community Action to help them weather this unprecedented storm.**

Accommodating Increased or New Demands

As agencies adapt to the circumstances of the pandemic, they have experienced an influx of new applications and increased demands on staff time and areas of expertise. Benchmarking these new numbers against pre-pandemic levels, agencies such as **Wayne Metro Community Action Agency (Wayne Metro)** in Michigan, responded, *adopting new, online intake procedures*. They worked with state officials to create a universal application for services that included *nine service categories*: utility; food; rent; water; diapers and formula; plumbing repair; property taxes; mortgages; and funeral assistance. Wayne Metro also decided to subcontract with community partners to rapidly deliver assistance to families. A streamlined application process, real-time data about service needs, and increased staff and contractor capacity improved the customer experience and helped the agency respond to increasing demand.

Clark County Community Services, a public CAA in Washington State, observed a dramatic increase in demand for legal representation in unemployment insurance matters, especially among Latinx community members. Analysis of the growing demand led the agency to hire an attorney specializing in employment law.

Several agencies – among them **Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council** (Washington), **Community Action Partnership of Orange County** (California), **Bay Aging** (Virginia), **Thames Valley Council for Community Action** (Connecticut), and **NEICAC** (Iowa) – have assessed the growing need for food assistance and delivery and adjusted their operations and initiated fundraising campaigns accordingly.



Hampton Roads Community Action Program (HRCAP) in Virginia has been determined to maintain its focus on longer-term goals for a cohort of Head Start families engaged in the agency's whole family approach initiative. Management and staff regularly analyze outcome reports from the now-virtual individual and group counseling sessions facilitated by a licensed clinical social worker and adjust programming as new needs arise.

2 Meredith T. Niles, et al., *The Early Food Insecurity Impacts of COVID-19*. Cold Spring Harbor, NY: medRxiv, 2020, available at <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.05.09.20096412v1.full.pdf>

3 *The Latino Community in the Time of the Coronavirus: The Case for Broad and Inclusive Government Response*. Washington, DC: UnidosUS, 2020, available at <http://publications.unidosus.org/handle/123456789/2066>.

Adapting Operations to Changing Circumstances

The pandemic is requiring CAAs to prioritize which programs to fund, and also how to deliver these programs in a safe and effective way. For services that require minimal physical interaction with the public, CAAs quickly modified operations related to delivery locations and staffing capacity. For example, **Community Action, Inc.** in Kansas established a pop-up multi-service center station – accessible via four drive-through lanes – that allowed customers to use video screens to communicate with case managers and paperwork to be submitted contact-free.

“Community Action, Inc.... established a pop-up multi-service center station... that allowed customers to use video screens to communicate... and paperwork to be submitted contact-free.”

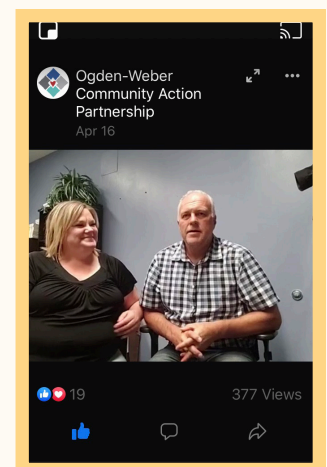
Bay Aging, in Virginia, the public transportation provider for a 10-county service area, mostly serves seniors and others at greater risk of contracting the coronavirus. Bay Aging continues to operate their bus system with new safety measures in place, like plexiglass between the driver and passengers and a cap on the number of riders that can travel at a given time. **HRCAP** in Virginia launched a mobile workstation to assist with job applications, unemployment insurance, tax returns, and Census forms. Local employers, including a shipyard apprenticeship program have hired new staff as a result of this initiative. **Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council** in Washington State jumped at the opportunity to partner with the National Guard to ensure smooth operations at their 12 food pantries by increasing staff capacity.

The majority of CAAs have adapted operations by allowing application processes to be completed online or over the phone. This includes utility programs such as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), and Percentage of Income Payment Plans (PIPP). **United Community Action Partnership (UCAP)** in Minnesota even found a way to continue operating Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites virtually. The State of Minnesota and the state’s Asset Building Coalition publicly praised the way UCAP quickly found solutions to address data privacy concerns.

In Utah, **Ogden-Weber Community Action Partnership (OWCAP)** transitioned both their Circles USA program and mental health services to online. Circles USA allows families to improve their lives by increasing their social capital through acquiring job skills and connections to others. At OWCAP, the Circles USA staff not only made the program completely virtual, but they also began providing weekly pandemic resources, such as a “safety minute” where the OWCAP Safety Coordinator updates families on recent guidance. The agency also began conducting and recording weekly Facebook Live sessions to address mental health issues. The sessions have been extremely well-attended and some of the recordings have more than 350 views.

Integrating Operations

CAAs are often engaged in integrating a range of services to provide effective and efficient services to individuals and families. As agencies seek to integrate, they are often faced with regulations, systems, policy, and organizational culture challenges. As agencies work to overcome these challenges, they pursue new administrative strategies such as aligning funding streams or operational strategies such as integrating intake and assessment procedures. **The**



pandemic has presented agencies with opportunities that have accelerated new service integration practices and procedures.

In response to the pandemic, several CAAs have employed both administrative and operational strategies to integrate services and help customers achieve better outcomes. **HRCAP** in Virginia engaged in collaboration with approximately 30 external partners and has been leveraging the HRCAP database, EmpowOR, to send and receive referrals. They also developed a brief, universal online application for services, since in-person meetings will likely not occur for some time. The **North Carolina Community Action Association** and its state-wide network adopted the use of NCCARE360, the first statewide coordinated care network, to better connect individuals to services such as food, housing, or medical assistance.

“...the first statewide coordinated care network, to better connect individuals to services such as food, housing, or medical assistance.”

Within a matter of weeks from the start of the pandemic, **Wayne Metro** in Michigan quickly trained staff on their new intake process, but they soon brought four more teams in who were cross trained to handle the increased load.

Northwest New Jersey Community Action Program has been focusing on its 150 Head Start families, cross-training early childhood and food bank staff to offer food and baby supply packages. Similarly, **Northern Kentucky Community Action Commission** trained its Head Start staff to work with the food assistance team, since in-person instruction has been suspended, and the food bank resources have been stretching to meet demand.

In addition to cross-training, many CAAs nationwide have been co-locating services to allow for greater — and safer — customer access. Families coming to **Maine’s network of CAAs** for assistance have appreciated the streamlined approach to service delivery. Maine CAAs have been providing wrap-around support for those in quarantine due to the coronavirus, to include meal delivery, transportation, and behavioral health services. They have also set up emergency wellness shelters for those who need to self-isolate apart from family members. Many of these individuals have been learning for the first time about the variety of services available through Community Action.

CAAs nationwide are truly embracing what research already shows: “Integrating services ... is a means to [achieving] better outcomes by transforming customers’ experiences through a new service delivery system and philosophy.”⁴

Conclusion

Community Action has responded to the pandemic in innovative ways, using data to inform response efforts, which have included administrative and operational pivots that integrate services. Such approaches will not only assist with the continued response and recovery efforts, but will make Community Action a stronger, more resilient force in future crises.

4 National Webinar: *Laying the Groundwork for Service Integration and a Whole Family Approach*. Washington, DC: Community Action Partnership, 2018, available at <https://communityactionpartnership.com/webinar/laying-the-groundwork-for-service-integration-and-a-whole-family-approach/>.

Leading the Community Response for Struggling Families

Community Action has historically played a catalytic role in local communities, especially during times of crisis. The CSBG funding that designates a CAA was designed to be flexible and adaptive to address local community needs as they change over time, including during times of crisis. This pivot was in evidence following Hurricane Katrina, during the Great Recession, and in local communities after flooding, tornados, and other disasters. This experience gives CAAs the ability to bring together various community partners, shift available financial and human resources, and tailor services and strategies to quickly create effective responses to the pandemic.

As organizations that are deeply connected to the community, CAAs have been able to quickly assess and meet unique local needs as viral hotspots migrated across states and regions. The nature and experience of Community Action allowed much of this initial response and service delivery modification to occur prior to agencies receiving any additional funding. From pop-up care station collaborations to partnering to protect the unhoused population to combining internal and external resources to deliver food to doorsteps, Community Action has been critical in leading the response in communities across America.

Community Action as a Catalyst

Leading a community response to a widespread crisis, such as a pandemic, requires a strong community leader. Community Action has filled this role consistently since its inception. Many agencies used their assessment data, as well as ongoing feedback from the community and customers, to act and respond quickly. This was evident as CAAs brought together community partners, shifted resources, organized around a common goal, launched fundraisers, and created new programs or adapted existing services and strategies.

One agency in north central and northeast Kansas, **Community Action, Inc.**, realized that thousands of community members and dozens of social service agencies would need safe, innovative ways of accessing and providing assistance. To do so, they quickly partnered with Capitol Federal Bank to create the *CapFed Community Care Station* – a multi-service care station that *opened less than three weeks after the mid-March*

“Leading a community response to a widespread crisis, such as a pandemic, requires a strong community leader.”

shutdowns began. Coordinated by Community Action, Inc., the Care Station provided safe ways for area nonprofits to coordinate, remain accessible, and provide direct service supports, while limiting physical interactions between customers and providers. A number of options were available under one roof, including

internet-equipped computers for job applications, video meetings with case managers, legal aid, tax preparation services, food, laundry services, diapers, pet supplies, utility and rental assistance, and even no-cost notary services. **The collaboration received tremendous support from the community for its timely, innovative work, which resulted in unsolicited grants and donations from several new community partners.**

In Vermont, **Capstone Community Action (CCA)** realized they could assist a larger demographic by collaborating with government entities and other community-based organizations. Through those partnerships, the

Leading the Community Response for Struggling Families

agency learned that an overcrowded shelter was being relocated, and quickly deployed their food assistance program, Food Shelf and Community Kitchen Academy, to prepare and deliver meals to the shelter's residents. Recognizing how effective that collaboration had been, the partners created a formal Regional Command Center to efficiently address community needs during the pandemic by providing myriad services through a single point of contact.

Some early responses continued to grow as needs developed, as illustrated through the work of the **Community Action Partnership of Orange County (CAPOC)** in California. Initially, CAPOC identified the need to feed their community in Orange County, California and partnered with an organization for emergency food and the local mall as a site for distribution. As the need grew and people accessed this service, the agency's food supply reserves were heavily impacted. To replenish supplies, CAPOC sent a request to the community for virtual food drives, as well as a request to corporate partners and foundations for donations. The response was immense. Numerous supporters participated in the drives, philanthropists donated to ignite the campaign, and Amazon partnered to provide complimentary home delivery. Through these partnerships, *CAPOC led a response that raised*

nearly \$2 million, distributed 6.4 million pounds of food during the month of June, and delivered food to over 25,000 seniors in the first months. Furthermore, all of this was achieved with social distancing in mind, with minimal person-to-person contact, and contact tracing being utilized where needed.



Leveraging the Statewide Community Action Networks

The infrastructure and connectivity embedded in the Community Action Network is vital in times of crisis.

Statewide networks of CAAs are connected through Community Action State Associations, which provided states an opportunity to deploy pandemic response efforts quickly. This existing infrastructure, coupled with the trusted reputation of CAAs in their communities, led several states to tap into the Network as they planned and executed their early responses to the pandemic.

Governor Tony Evers of Wisconsin selected the **Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP)** and its local member CAAs to distribute \$25 million in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security

(CARES) Act rental assistance. In about two weeks' time, WISCAP and its 16 member CAAs began disbursing funds from the Wisconsin Rental Assistance Program (WRAP) to eligible households statewide. In addition, the Wisconsin Department of Administration contracted with the 16 local agencies directly: each local agency conducts intake and eligibility determination and works to finalize vendor agreements with landlords. The state office then uses the agreement to cut a check directly to landlords. With current program funding, WRAP will provide an average of \$1,500 in rental assistance to an estimated 10,000–15,000 households.

Leading the Community Response for Struggling Families

In Maine, the Governor's office and MaineHousing also identified Community Action as a ready conduit to implement a statewide rental assistance program and worked with **Maine Community Action Partnership (MeCAP)** to deploy payments. The COVID-19 Rent Relief Program was operated through the 10 Maine CAAs providing assistance to those unable to pay their rent because of the pandemic. One agency, **Aroostook Community Action Program (ACAP)** in the northernmost county of Maine, did not have an existing rental assistance program, but their proven impact and expertise with comprehensive service delivery, as well as the capacity to adapt, still made them an effective conduit. The Governor dedicated \$10 million to the program, allowing CAAs to offer \$1,000 to eligible customers for a period of three months to stay sheltered.

In Iowa, the state government tapped the existing infrastructure of the state's CAAs to help distribute CARES Act funding for emergency rental assistance and utility payment plans. The COVID-19 Iowa Eviction and Foreclosure Prevention Program provides eligible renters and homeowners who have experienced a loss of income due to the pandemic with monthly arrearage payments of \$3,200 and \$3,000, respectively.⁵ Iowa CAAs

were authorized to distribute \$37 million in assistance through the program.

On the tax assistance front, **UCAP** became the sole provider of VITA services in Minnesota during the pandemic by partnering with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and Minnesota Department of Revenue. The agency processed 1,600 filings during the first 90 days of the pandemic.



Conclusion

A catalyst is defined as a person or thing acting as the stimulus in bringing about or hastening a result. These examples typify Community Action's ability to act as a catalyst and lead a community response during a crisis. The existing infrastructure of CAAs, their expertise, experience, and trusted role in communities provides the conditions needed for them to serve as catalysts. A CAA's ability to act quickly and leverage partnerships and resources has benefited many people in communities across the country, as evidenced by the stories throughout this report.

⁵ COVID-19 Iowa Eviction and Foreclosure Prevention Program, Iowa Finance Authority (last visited, Aug. 19, 2020), available at <https://www.iowafinance.com/covid-19-iowa-eviction-and-foreclosure-prevention-program/>

Innovating with Technology to Increase Capacity to Serve

One of the most challenging aspects of the pandemic for human and social service providers has been the extreme shift in service delivery models in response to physical distancing and other public safety measures. For many providers, this has required a complete transformation in the way that they do business, transferring many of their essential programs online to keep families and employees safe. CAAs have exemplified true creativity and commitment to serving people with low incomes in response to the pandemic, developing innovative uses of technology to maintain and improve programs. In the first 90 days alone, CAAs leveraged videoconferencing and other virtual communication platforms, online and smartphone applications, community collaboratives, private and public partnerships, and most importantly, the commitment and dedication of their staff to ensure that communities remain resilient and healthy during this period of increased need.

Using Technology to Improve Efficiency and Increase Impact

The primary obstacle for human service providers created by the pandemic was the sudden cessation of essentially all in-person programming. As organizations considered ways to maintain their essential programming in the face of unprecedented need in their communities, customers and employee safety became the focus for service delivery approaches. Shifting to an internet/phone-based approach for core programming was quickly utilized across the Network in an effort to keep communities informed and engaged as they adapted together in response to the pandemic. Barriers had to be overcome, but the crisis pushed new systemic changes.

“Barriers had to be overcome, but the crisis pushed new systemic changes.”

Minnesota’s **UCAP** shifted a range of key programs online, which allowed the agency to increase its reach and optimize essential services. When news of the pandemic reached UCAP in rural Minnesota, it sparked the creativity of staff, who immediately began to look for a way to translate programs to a new environment.



COVID-19 hit at a typical high point of the tax season. Tax credits and returns provide an important source of additional income for residents with low-income every year, but under current circumstances these larger, one-time payments offer an essential supplement for individuals struggling to make ends meet. The UCAP team recognized this at the start of the pandemic, and by coordinating with the IRS and Minnesota Department of Revenue early, before systems became overwhelmed, they were able to serve as the sole provider of VITA services for the entire state through the first 90 days of the pandemic. As noted above, by the end of June, over 1,600 filings were processed, bringing more than \$3.2 million in returns to families and individuals across the state.

Utilizing technology allowed this rural CAA, which under normal circumstances would have served a nine-county service area, to not only increase their impact, but also to serve as a best practice model for other human service providers in their state. Both the state of Minnesota and the Minnesota Asset Building Coalition looked to UCAP as a

Innovating with Technology to Increase Capacity to Serve

leader and leveraged their insights to help other human service organizations pivot their tax and financial assistance programming.

As noted above, **Wayne Metro** in Michigan adopted new, online intake procedures and cross-trained more staff to handle the workload. They worked with state officials to mitigate emergency service application barriers to improve customer experience and increase efficiency in processing, both of which are critical in times of personal and systems crises. They deployed an online universal application for multiple types of emergency services (food and income support, water and energy assistance, rent and mortgage assistance, property tax assistance, emergency plumbing repair, and funeral assistance). The application takes less than five minutes on average to complete, and by mid-April, the agency had already received 8,000 applications. They utilized Google Forms and a series of cascading Google Sheets, and worked to ensure data security, document collection and storage, and the audit trail for the project were intact.

Food distribution was not a primary activity of the agency pre-pandemic, but to respond to the crisis, Wayne Metro deployed two additional technology projects. The first related to their contactless, drive-through food distribution sites. To capture data on users, families would register their desire to participate, and were sent a QR code that would be scanned from a customer's cell phone as they came to the distribution area. This allowed data to be collected easily and safely regarding usage and demographics of the individual families served. Second, they developed a phone app that allowed families to order food specific to their household preferences, which was then delivered to avoid contact.

As a result of these technological innovations, Wayne Metro has timely pandemic data dashboards that are used by staff to monitor program needs and usage, allowing them to pivot as the pandemic changes over time.

Lake County Lifeline out of Lake County, Ohio, leveraged an existing relationship with a local school district to ensure students experiencing poverty were not left behind as education suddenly went virtual. The staff at Lifeline worked with the Painesville City School District to offer mobile hotspots using the school's van fleet. Vans moved throughout the city at regularly scheduled times to allow students to connect to the internet in order to download and upload homework assignments. Because of this quick action to meet a need, an average of 78 users were able to access WiFi each day within the first month.

Agencies have been leveraging technology to continue operating without interruption by making services virtual, as evidenced in Head Start teachers reading to students over YouTube at **Aroostook Community Action Program (ACAP)** in Maine. That virtual Head Start programming led to a notable increase in parental engagement with the learning process, as well as active participation by siblings of enrolled children.

“...virtual Head Start programming led to a notable increase in parental engagement with the learning process...”

Streamlining Access Through Leveraged Partnerships

Another hurdle for human service organizations has been simplifying program enrollment processes and coordinating service delivery in response to the sheer volume of families and individuals now in need of essential services. The rapid spread of the virus followed by its disproportionate impact on communities of color made clear that adapted service strategies need to center the people struggling the most within our communities. With the deep extent of racial, social, and political barriers to life-saving programming laid bare, **many CAAs used this time to not only update enrollment, but work with others in the community to ensure that community members have quick and**

easy access to all of the services needed to support them through the pandemic – and beyond. **HRCAP** in Virginia has used technology to improve engagement with both community partners and families through the creation of a universal intake process and online application. When families come to HRCAP to request services, they are connected with partner organizations that can provide a rapid response to their requests. In response to the pandemic, HRCAP expanded their partner network from 70 to more than 100 organizations to meet the growing need. Additionally, families that are enrolled in their whole family approach pilot program can now receive counselling with Licensed Clinical Social Workers via teleconferencing. While many CAAs like HRCAP continue to work diligently to stay connected with families and individuals, work to ease access and build important community partnerships is also happening on the state level.

In collaboration with Amazon Web Services, **Wildfire** in Arizona has developed a state-wide pandemic emergency assistance relief application system. As the Arizona state association, Wildfire had a unique perspective on the many challenges that CAAs in their state were facing in quickly adapting to a contactless service approach. While agencies and other organizations were able to leverage technology for actual service provision, many program enrollment processes still relied on in-person or paper completions. Seeing the potential for long program waiting lists, particularly for the large immigrant and refugee communities in the state who are more vulnerable to the health and economic impacts of COVID-19, Wildfire began considering how partnerships at the state level could help to mitigate the challenges being faced by agencies and communities. By reaching out to partners in the public sector, such as the Arizona Department of Economic Security and the City of Phoenix, a recent connection with Amazon that was made possible through their community collaborative that provided a unique opportunity to make requests for services more efficient and equitable during a time of unprecedented need.

The state-wide emergency assistance enrollment system was launched in mid-July, making over \$26 million in rental and utility assistance safely and easily accessible to customers across the state of Arizona. On top of the monumental task of streamlining access to services across the entire state, Wildfire also ensured that an equity lens was applied to the work. Immigrant, refugee, and asylum seekers were given prioritized access to the enrollment system, placing them at the forefront of need and concern during the height of the pandemic.

Building Organizational Rapport and Capacity Virtually

While many of the incentives for improving technological capacity during the pandemic have been in response to customer needs, increasing investments in technology has had the added benefit of building connections among teams within agencies. While physical distancing is an essential protocol for limiting the spread of the coronavirus, it has the potential for negative impacts on both the efficacy and emotional wellbeing of staff. In light of increased needs for emergency assistance programming, such as food deliveries or education packets for children, many agencies are calling for “all hands on deck” to get essential resources to families as quickly as possible. For some employees this has meant shifting into new roles, requiring re-training and increased flexibility in a period of heightened stress. In addition to the stress of new responsibilities, a key consideration for staff during this time is mental health. Adjusting to a work from home schedule, combined with the secondhand stress from witnessing the impacts of the pandemic, and the emotional toll surrounding recent conversations on racial justice and the Black Lives Matter movement, has required agencies to prioritize regular and supportive engagement with staff. Some in the Network, like the **Illinois Association of CAAs**

“In addition to the stress of new responsibilities, a key consideration for staff during this time is mental health.”

(IACAA), are meeting staff at the intersection of both issues by facilitating a series of racial equity team conversations.

A central element of staff rapport during this time of crisis is the engagement of organizational leadership, and an excellent example of meeting staff in the midst of this challenge is provided by the northernmost CAA in the contiguous United States. **ACAP** in Maine has found a number of ways to maintain connections with staff during the pandemic. Engagement efforts began with a daily pandemic response email provided by the Executive Director, highlighting the number of families and individuals served during the pandemic, tips for individual reflection and self-care, and accomplishments from the agency's 40+ programs that have since shifted to virtual/limited contact service.

In addition to providing a consistent voice from organizational leadership, this forum has also helped ACAP staff remain connected with the ways in which their efforts across the organization are helping the over 1,000 additional households that have been served since mid-March. A second innovation centering on staff rapport has been the facilitation of weekly community briefings via ACAP's YouTube channel. Since June, the agency's Executive Director has been leading weekly episodes of ACAP Today, and inviting staff from across the organization to provide reports on lessons learned, best practices, and success stories from their continued remote engagement with customers.

Conclusion

Despite its many obstacles, the pandemic has highlighted the capacity for flexibility and innovation throughout the Network. Utilizing technology has provided CAAs with a unique opportunity to exponentially increase impact on the state and local level in a time of intensive need for community members, regardless of background or socioeconomic status.

Leveraging Financial Resources

As the pandemic unfolded and the expanded scope of their communities' needs became evident, CAAs were compelled to look beyond their usual funding sources to bring in sufficient resources. Strategies to meet the sudden increased demand for immediate financial assistance have varied greatly. Among the most innovative have been collaborations with local government, the local Chamber of Commerce, foundations, and even famous actors and comedians. Some CAAs have also turned to innovative uses of online fundraising to fill the gap.

Discovering Novel Funding and Development Opportunities



Action, Inc. in Gloucester, Massachusetts, serves an area of the state that is home to a high concentration of hourly workers. Their response was necessarily focused on helping this segment of the workforce, hard hit by layoffs and furloughs. To that end, the agency partnered with the City of Gloucester and the Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce to create the Cape Ann Emergency Relief Fund for workers laid off as a result of the pandemic. The effort was so successful that the original fundraising goal of \$200,000 was reached in just two weeks. The creation of the Fund and distribution of cash assistance to residents in serious financial need could not have happened without pre-existing trusting relationships with local government, business leaders, and other community-based organizations.

Among the populations with the lowest incomes in the country are residents of the colonias along the Mexican border, where many people live in substandard housing without basic infrastructure like paved roads and sewers. The pandemic has hit this area particularly hard, exacerbating what were already challenging living

circumstances. In order to provide immediate cash assistance to residents of the colonias in New Mexico's Doña Ana County, the **Community Action Agency of Southern New Mexico** partnered with the Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico. Former New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson's foundation provided the first \$10,000 to launch the fund. This was followed by donations from noted actors Edward James Olmos and Danny Trejo and comedian George Lopez. As of mid-June, the agency had received \$75,000 in pledged donations to assist local families. Putting money directly into the hands of residents of the colonias stimulated the local economy by providing residents with the money needed to patronize and support local businesses.



Day laborers are another segment of the population that has been particularly hard hit by the severe economic downturn. Prior to the pandemic, the **Community**

Action Board of Santa Cruz County (CAB) in California operated a hiring center for helping workers find safe employment. Use of the center avoided the abuses inherent when workers are hired randomly from street corners. With the onset of the pandemic the supply of jobs disappeared almost overnight, and without much in the way of savings, day workers faced a disastrous situation. CAB partnered with NonprofitAF to launch a national fundraising campaign, thanks to a connection with their principal, Vu Le, who is well-known in the Network for his insightful writings on nonprofits. The success of the fundraising effort has been covered in the Nonprofit Quarterly Review.⁶

In addition to the immediate need for cash assistance to get through the sudden economic downturn, having sufficient food became a major issue for more and more people in communities across the country, including in Orange County, California. **The Community Action Partnership of Orange County (CAPOC)** in California focused their attention on raising funds to purchase food for county residents. CAPOC set up an on-line portal for interested residents to participate in a virtual food drive by creating fundraising pages and sending them out to their contacts. A long-time county resident and philanthropist committed to contributing \$250,000



by matching donations raised through the campaign 2-to-1. This has allowed CAPOC to serve the food needs of 200,000 people monthly. In addition, CAPOC partnered with Amazon to provide complimentary home delivery of food boxes to over 25,000 seniors each month. CAPOC distributed 6.4 million pounds of food in June 2020, three times as much food as they distributed in June 2019.

Brightpoint a CAA in Northeast Indiana used a similar approach when they cancelled a previously scheduled golf tournament, replacing it with an on-line fundraiser to raise money for the newly created COVID-19 Outcomes Financial Assistance Fund, designed to assist with the personal financial needs of people in their northeast Indiana service area.

In late March and early April, the **Michigan Community Action Association (MCA)** worked closely with the DTE Energy Foundation to create the MCA Greatest Needs Fund matching campaign. Running statewide, but with the ability for donors to select any of the 28 local CAAs in the state, Michigan Community Action Agency generated \$102,538 in donations and \$150,000 in match from the DTE Foundation over the course of three weeks.

Supporting Small Businesses

The small business sector is the segment of the national economy that perhaps has been hardest hit by the pandemic. Critical to local communities, small businesses do not have deep pockets that can withstand long stretches with no income, and – absent immediate financial assistance – a large percentage would be unable to remain in business for long.

CAAs around the country have years of experience working with local small businesses to create employment for area residents; and many CAAs are even certified as Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI). **To quickly address this potentially devastating situation, several CAAs with existing small business or microenterprise loan programs created new emergency loan or grant products to help**

⁶ Philanthropy: It's Time to Stand Up for Day Laborers and Immigrants, NONPROFIT QUARTERLY REVIEW (July 27, 2020), available at <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/philanthropy-its-time-to-stand-up-for-day-laborers-and-immigrants/>.

local small businesses through the shutdown. Details vary from agency to agency, but each program involves either grants or loans with low, deferred interest and minimal paperwork.

Brightpoint in northeast Indiana identified the fact that small businesses were struggling as a result of the pandemic as a service opportunity. Building on their existing Brightpoint Development Fund program that provided small business loans, they created a COVID-19 Express Loan for area establishments that were struggling. This loan product allows small businesses to apply for up to \$20,000 with no upfront costs. The program also provides phone-based coaching sessions to help business owners explore additional relief options.

Conclusion

The pandemic and resulting economic downturn have accentuated the thin financial margins experienced by individuals, families, and small businesses alike. By building on existing partnerships and thinking creatively, the Community Action Network stepped up to provide the assistance small businesses and community members needed to weather the economic effects of the pandemic.

Realizing how difficult it would be for local small businesses to survive the pandemic's economic downturn, **Fresno Economic Opportunity Commission (Fresno EOC)** in California partnered with the City of Fresno to create a new forgivable loan program. The program supplies loans to area concerns in amounts ranging from \$5,000 to \$10,000, some of which could later be converted to grants.

Similarly, **People, Inc.**, which serves southwest Virginia, partnered with the City of Bristol to turn an existing loan program for the city's small businesses into an emergency loan program to help them survive the drop-off in revenue.

Helping Everyday Heroes

The Community Action Network has found many ways to pivot their services to fill needs across the country during the pandemic, often adapting and repurposing resources to close service gaps. **Throughout the crisis, agencies have been creative in keeping staff – and their expertise – engaged in ways that are most impactful to their communities.**

Providing Child Care

Community Action is a backbone of support for many of our nation's first responders and essential workers, something that has been highlighted since the pandemic began. Agencies often provide child-care services to parents so they can work, attend classes, or enroll in programs like financial empowerment. Sixty percent of CAAs across the country operate Head Start or Early Head Start, nationwide early child development programs for children of families with low income. These programs provide child care, while also preparing children for school. Head Start and Early Head Start programs work with families from pregnancy through age five, with the goal of supporting each child's individual growth and health, as well as improving the well-being of their family. While many Head Start programs have shut down because of the pandemic, the facilities and staff remain valuable resources for communities, and have been utilized across the country as part of COVID-19 relief efforts to take the burden of child care off of essential workers and their families.

As the pandemic has unfolded and many people in the U.S. have sheltered at home, a category of “essential employees” has emerged, comprised of people who work in fields considered critical infrastructure. These sectors include medical fields, food service and production, utilities, social services, transportation, and some retail (grocery stores, home improvement centers). Child care has been included as a critical infrastructure piece, but many facilities across the country have shuttered their doors, and children have largely been at home with their parents. For many office workers, this has meant juggling jobs with home schooling and watching kids. But most essential worker jobs require physically being at work, where it is impossible to homeschool or monitor children, so child care is a necessity. Around the country, many cities opened emergency childcare centers, employing existing resources like Head Start facilities to care for the children of essential employees.

United Planning Organization (UPO) in Washington, D.C. is one such CAA. UPO was selected by the District of Columbia's government and the Office of the State Superintendent of Educators (OSSE) as one of six emergency child-care facilities for first responders, essential government and healthcare workers, and support staff for healthcare providers. This has proved to be a vital service to many everyday heroes in Washington, D.C., like Nacole, a healthcare worker at the George Washington University hospital. Her three-year-old son usually attends preschool at a charter school, but that facility is closed indefinitely due to the

“Community Action is a backbone of support for many of our nation's first responders and essential workers...”



pandemic. Without child care, Nacole cannot go to work. Her son has been enrolled as one of 10 students at UPO's emergency child-care facility, allowing her to perform her essential role in our healthcare system.

Other agencies have also used their resources to provide child-care services to essential employees. **TVCCA Little Learners** in Norwich, Connecticut closed their child care facilities to normally enrolled students during the statewide shutdown. However they reopened their doors to the children of essential workers as part of a state sponsored effort called CTCARES for Hospital Workers (also known as *Project 26*)⁷, which offers child-care services to healthcare and other frontline workers.

In Bellingham, Washington, **Opportunity Council**, had already been dealing with a shortage of child-care services available before the pandemic hit. Stay-at-home orders drastically decreased enrollment at existing centers, and the child-care industry was on the brink of collapse in that area, which would have caused cascading problems once working parents resumed more normal work routines. The centers that were open faced serious budget shortfalls with caps being placed on classroom sizes to prevent coronavirus spread coupled with increased costs being incurred for Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies. The Opportunity Council stepped up and organized a coalition to provide mini-grants to child-care facilities, helping them keep their doors open so they can provide child-care services to essential workers, and protecting the centers as a critical resource that will be needed when the pandemic subsides.

Conclusion

Throughout the pandemic, the Community Action Network has shown an incredible dedication to their customers, employees, and community members. Redeploying resources, pivoting towards the most pressing needs, and being creative have led to many agencies being able to support the nation's frontline workers, our everyday heroes.

⁷ *CTCARES for Hospital Workers (Project 26)*, Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, (last visited Aug. 21, 2020), available at <https://www.ctoec.org/covid-19/ctcares-programs/ctcares-for-hospital-workers-project-26/>

Leading on Health & Safety

The Community Action Network has responded to the pandemic's disproportionate effect on lower-income communities with innovative and effective solutions that are helping eradicate inequities in healthcare access and quality. The families served by the Network are more likely to contract the virus and experience more serious symptoms than families with higher incomes. This is due to economic and cultural inequalities that often lead to families who struggle financially having less ability to practice preventative measures or seek timely medical care and therefore experience more acute medical issues.⁸ But that has not prevented CAAs and their State Associations from creating or expanding services that help the entire community. From spearheading bulk purchases of PPE to taking the lead on contact tracing efforts, the Network has moved quickly to address the health needs of the communities they serve.

Serving High-Risk Populations

A hallmark of the coronavirus pandemic response has been the mitigation of infection risk through physical distancing and, in some cases, quarantining at home. But not everyone has access to safe and secure housing. A person with low income is already at increased risk during a pandemic, and that risk is heightened for those in shelters or experiencing homelessness. Housing insecure and unhoused populations are more likely to have underlying health conditions that can increase the severity of COVID-19 symptoms. It is also difficult for them to stay safe through decreased contact with potentially infected community members. The housing insecure often need medical attention and a safe space to receive it and, if necessary, to quarantine.

Human Services Program (HSP) of Carroll County, Maryland, made it a goal to fulfill these needs, but first they needed space. They quickly partnered with the local school district and set up a temporary medical respite

site for the unhoused on the grounds of a local middle school. HSP worked with the county and Access Carroll Integrated Healthcare to staff the tents with healthcare providers who could provide treatment for underlying health conditions. The site included designated camping places, access to food and hygiene products, and on-site doctors and nurses. Those who tested negative for COVID-19, were provided shelter in the school gym. HSP

also set up camping sites around the grounds where those who tested positive could safely quarantine in appropriately spaced tents.

Through its Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program, **Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo (CAPSLO)** of California provides an array of services for homeless veterans.

After the national disaster declaration, the SSVF National Program office allowed for expanded Emergency Housing Assistance services. As a result, CAPSLO's SSVF Program was able to place homeless veterans into

“Housing insecure and unhoused populations are more likely to have underlying health conditions that can increase the severity of COVID-19 symptoms.”

⁸ *Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (July 24, 2020), available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>

local hotels. Emergency Housing Assistance provided veterans with a safe environment during the pandemic, where they could focus on obtaining a new place to call home. In the early days of the pandemic, CAPSLO

worked quickly to modify the shelter's physical space to ensure physically distancing could be deployed and put significant cleaning practices into place.

Spearheading Testing, Tracing, and Resource Coordination

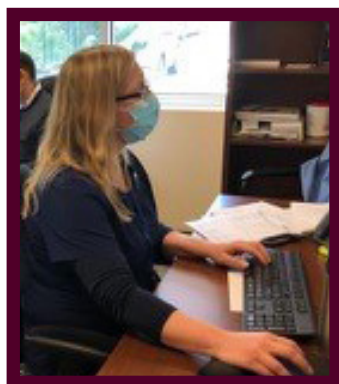
The pandemic has stretched the national healthcare system to the brink, overwhelming hospitals and medical professionals across the country. There has never been as great a need for trained medical professionals as there is now. CAAs often offer medical and dental clinics to populations with lower incomes, but many of these clinics have been forced to close.

Testing for COVID-19 in the U.S. has been inconsistent, compounding the challenge of controlling viral spread. Initially there were not enough tests to accommodate everyone experiencing symptoms or with underlying health conditions. As more tests became available, test sites with adequate staff were lacking in many communities across the country.

In the state of Rhode Island, two CAAs addressed the need for test sites and health professionals to staff them in innovative ways. Near Newport, **East Bay Family Services**, a division of the **East Bay Community Action Program (EBCAP)**, partnered with the National Guard to create two testing sites in their community. Realizing that access would be an issue, the sites provided both walk-up and drive-up services to all members of the community at no cost. Knowing that 44% of the state's population is Latinx, EBCAP made it a priority to provide translation services in a variety of languages.

Just north, in Cranston, RI, **Comprehensive Community Action Program (COMCAP)**, was trying to solve the same problem, but with an extra challenge. Like EBCAP, they also worked with the National Guard to set up testing sites. In addition to other programs, CCAP runs dental and medical facilities that serve populations with low incomes. When the pandemic began to spread in Rhode Island, they were forced to close their dental facilities. This posed a unique challenge for COMCAP. Not only did they not want to lay off their dental staff, but 75% of them were in the country on work visas, and losing their employment status could result in possible deportation, a bad outcome for staff and for the future of the clinic if not addressed. To solve the problem, COMCAP's Chief Medical Officer retrained the dental staff to swab patients at the COVID-19 testing sites, keeping them employed while supplying necessary staff for testing.

As testing became more available, large-scale contact tracing – tracking the contacts of individuals who tested positive so they could be advised to quarantine – began to emerge as an effective way to limit community spread of the virus. The **Maine Community Action Partnership (MeCAP)** recognized that its network of agencies could help in that effort. Through their existing partnership with state public health entities, they connected the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) with the ten Maine CAAs. Contact tracers could refer people who might have been exposed to the virus to their local CAA for follow-up services, including meal delivery, medical transportation services, and behavioral health during a two-week mandatory quarantine to minimize exposure of others. MeCAP took a lead role in providing crucial services to people quarantining due to possible exposure throughout the state, helping them stay at home and reducing the possibility of infecting other individuals.



Securing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

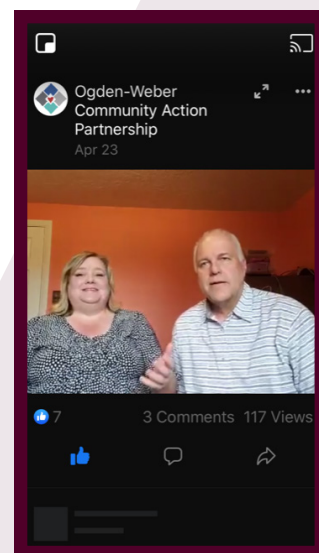
At the start of the pandemic there was a shortage of PPE – masks, gloves, gowns, and even hand sanitizer were in scarce supply. The **Indiana Community Action Association (IN-CAA)** took matters into its own hands and created a strategy to provide PPE for their 22 member agencies across the state. They began buying and storing bulk orders of PPE, increasing the safety of agency staff and customers while saving individual agencies valuable space and resources.

Advocating for Long-Term Care Residents

Residents and staff at assisted living, nursing home, and other congregate care facilities throughout the country have been disproportionately affected by the virus. In response, the commonwealth of Virginia created a Long-Term Care Task Force to identify the causes of the increasing number of cases among its own long-term care facilities and recommend appropriate actions. **Bay Aging**, a CAA in Virginia, was invited to participate because of their expertise in the area of long-term care for low-income seniors. The agency's experience and reputation for serving this population made them a powerful voice at the table to make sure protections for vulnerable populations were a part of recommended solutions. **CRT** (Community Renewal Team), a CAA in Connecticut, successfully focused on keeping COVID out of its assisted living facility, the Retreat, and sent staff to other localities to help respond to localize surges.

Minding Mental Health

The pandemic has affected the mental health of many individuals across the country. **According to an April poll, nearly half of all adult Americans reported that the pandemic has had a negative effect on their mental health and anxiety.**⁹ The **Ogden-Weber Community Action Partnership (OWCAP)** in Ogden, Utah, is addressing this need by providing their clients with virtual access to a mental health professional. Low-income families and community members have access to OWCAP's mental health specialist through events hosted on Facebook Live. A multitude of mental health concerns, including depression, anxiety, childhood development, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), are discussed. One important facet of the service is that community members also have the opportunity to connect with each other during these sessions, which can help diminish the feelings of isolation that can lead to other mental health issues.



Conclusion

While the pandemic has exacerbated existing income and wealth inequalities in our healthcare system, the Community Action Network has played a crucial role in protecting members of high-risk populations – increasing healthcare access to combat COVID-19 and other underlying health conditions, and providing support services to those in quarantine

⁹ Nirmita Panchal, Rabah Kamal, Kendal Orgera, Cynthia Cox, Rachel Garfield, Liz Hamel, Cailey Muñana, and Priya Chidambaram, *The Implications of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use*, KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION (2020), available at <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>

Acknowledgments

The stories in these pages illustrate the creativity, commitment, and reach of Community Action. We are grateful for the contributions of agencies who shared the stories of their work: South Eastern Arizona Community Action Program, INC; Wildfire: Igniting Community Action to End Poverty in Arizona (formerly the Arizona Community Action State Association); Community Action Partnership of Orange County; Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County; United Planning Organization; Brightpoint; Indiana Community Action Association; Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation; Community Action, Inc.; Aroostook County Action Program; Maine Community Action Association; Human Services Program of Carroll County; Action Inc.; Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency; United Community Action Program; Northwest New Jersey Community Action Program; Community Action Agency of Southern New Mexico; Cattaraugus Community Action; North Carolina Community Action Association; Community Action Wayne/Medina; Lake County Lifeline; West Ohio Community Action Partnership; Ogden-Weber Community Action Partnership; East Bay Community Action Program; Comprehensive Community Action Program; Capstone Community Action; Bay Aging; Hampton Roads Community Action Program; Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council; Clark County Community Services; Opportunity Council; and Wisconsin Community Action Program Association.

We are thankful for the contributions of Community Action Partnership staff, including Ryan Gelman, Kathryn Maddux, Lindsay Marsh, Kevin Kelly, Courtney Kohler, Hyacinth McKinley, and Denise Harlow. In addition, we appreciate the work of Jeannie Chaffin, Sr. Advisor for her work on the project.

We want to thank the Community Action Partnership board members for their support and guidance throughout the development of this report: Chair Bryan Duncan, I-CARE, Inc.; First Vice Chair Dalitso S. Sulamoyo, Champaign County Regional Planning Commission; Second Vice Chair Elizabeth “Biz” Steinberg, Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo County, Inc.; Secretary Peter Kilde, West Central Wisconsin Community Action Agency; Treasurer Dreama Padgett, MountainHeart Community Services, Inc.; Cenia Bosman, Community Action Agency of St. Louis County, Inc.; Andrew (Joe) Devany, Ohio Heartland CAC; Paul D. Dole, KCEOC Community Action Partnership; Steve Geller, Southeastern Vermont Community Action; Susan Grindle, HopeSource; Willy Soderholm, Community Action Partnership Minot Region; Karen Swenson, Greater East Texas Community Action Program; Amy Turner, Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency; Maddie Mendez, Community Action Partnership of Madera County, Inc. (CAPMC); and Edith White, Hampton Roads Community Action Program.

We would like to thank the Community Action Partnership member agencies whose involvement in our network helped make this report possible.

A printable version of this report is available for download at <https://communityactionpartnership.com/guidance-and-resources-for-managing-coronavirus-risks/>

This report was created in part by National Association of Community Action Agencies – Community Action Partnership in the performance of the U.S. Department of Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Community Services Grant Number 90ET0469. Any opinion, findings, and conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.



Appendix

Wildfire: Igniting Community Action to End Poverty in Arizona (formerly the Arizona Community Action State Association) – AZ



Wildfire: Igniting Community Action to End Poverty in Arizona, formerly the Arizona Community Action Association, is a growing movement to end poverty. Their efforts aim to ignite lasting change and to stop poverty before it starts.¹² They advocate for fair practices, collaborate on policy issues and support community action initiatives, such as the student loan debt crisis and predatory lending. Statistics show that nearly 60% of all Arizona students graduate college with student loan debt. In addition, Arizona title loan law authorizes annual rates of over 200% – meaning a \$1,000 loan would incur \$1,350 in finance charges if repaid over nine months.



Wildfire has been a key leader in COVID-19 emergency assistance relief. In response to the needs of their community in the face of the pandemic, Wildfire developed an online application process to help Arizona residents access services in a more efficient and simple way. Prior to COVID, CAAs and various community partners used a combination of processes which were mostly paper-driven. Due to demand for limited services, it was difficult to schedule an in-person appointment. For nearly two years, Wildfire has facilitated a community collaboration, recently getting connected with Amazon Web Services and Prefix Health. Prefix Health and Wildfire are developing an online tool for Arizonans seeking assistance, and the pandemic has only hastened the need. In partnership with funders such as the City of Phoenix and Arizona Department of Economic Security, (which administers CSBG), the tool launched in early July. This new approach will add dignity and simplicity to an already difficult time for many.

COVID-19 CARES Act funding for refugees and asylees will be the first program to pilot the technical solution. Soon after, additional residents impacted by COVID-19 can apply for assistance with water, gas, electric, rent and mortgage bills – for a combined total of \$4,200 per household and total funding of \$26 million. The solution is being developed to accommodate Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding as well. The vision is for a streamlined process where an individual can complete a short application, upload necessary documents, learn if they are eligible, and immediately receive assistance – all without having to leave the comfort and safety of their home.

Tag: Housing, Utilities

¹² Wildfire, *About Us*, <https://wildfireaz.org/about/who-we-are/> (last visited Dec. 8, 2020).

Wildfire: Igniting Community Action to End Poverty in Arizona

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South Eastern Arizona Community Action Program, Inc. (SEACAP) – AZ



SEACAP sits in the southeast corner of Arizona, up against the Mexican border, and serves Cochise, Santa Cruz, Greenlee and Graham counties. A remote, sparsely populated area, they are known for gorgeous scenery and small rural towns. The agency has 4 locations located in Bisbee, Nogales, Willcox and Safford, where they provide VITA services, food boxes to seniors in Graham county, money management programs, SNAP, Health Insurance Market Place assistance, rental assistance, utility assistance -including repair, replacement and deposit assistance, weatherization, eviction prevention, and move-in rental assistance.



Agriculture is one of the biggest industries in the area; historically cotton and cattle, but lately expanding into new areas, like vineyards. The single largest employer in the area is Fort Huachuca, a US army base that specializes in intelligence training. A relatively new medical training facility opened in 2015, hiring hundreds. Being located right across the border from Mexico, Cochise County also has an international port. Cochise is the largest of the four counties served and is home to approximately 128,000 people. Of those, about 22% live in poverty (14% white, 8% Hispanic).

Concern about low response rates for the Decennial Census grew for agency staff as COVID-19 uprooted everyday life. Local libraries have been designated as spaces for community members to complete their Census forms, but the pandemic closings meant that people couldn't go to the library. Staff also have not been able to discuss the Census face to face with customers given that their offices have been closed. Massive changes in the US Census Bureau's plan to conduct the count, including pushing back door-to-door enumeration from May to August, spurred staff to find creative ways to encourage census participation across their service areas.

The Census is a crucial part of American life, not only by bringing federal funds to communities across the US based on population counts, but accurate counts allocate state and federal political representation for each district. In 2010, the response rate for Graham County was 48.8%, meaning the county did not receive over half the federal funding they should have for programs like Head Start, CSBG, LIHEAP, Section 8 housing vouchers and more. This undercount also means that the county has been underrepresented in the Arizona State Legislature, and possibly even on the Federal level.

To combat the low response rates across these four counties, community action agency staff have stepped in to help reach those least likely to return the Census forms. SEACAP saw an opportunity to assume the library's role and started offering 15-minute time slots for customers to work with agency staff on completing Census forms. If customers did not get their Census forms in the mail or were having trouble completing the form online or over the phones, agency staff helped them. Consultations were offered in English and Spanish, and once completed, they have tried to find incentives to gift participants – in Willcox, the Dairy Queen was offering free ice cream for all household members who were counted.^{10 11}

Tag: Census

10 Brooke Curley, *Officials concerned COVID-19 may impact Census participation numbers*, EASTERN ARIZ. COURIER, Apr. 10, 2020, available at https://www.eacourier.com/news/coronavirus/officials-concerned-covid-19-may-impact-census-participation-numbers/article_3ce4e220-7b65-11ea-a1e4-f7f875239e3e.html.

11 SEACAP, *Community Events*, <https://www.seacapaz.com/community-events.html> (last visited Dec. 8, 2020).

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www.seacapaz.com

Community Action Partnership of Orange County (CAPOC) – CA



Community Action Partnership of Orange County (CAPOC) realized a great need for neighbors needing food in their community, especially seniors. Therefore, as an early response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CAPOC partnered with a local organization for emergency food distribution at the local mall. As the need grew and people accessed this service, their food supply dwindled. In order to refill supplies, CAPOC sent a request to the community to support virtual food drives, as well as a request to corporate partners and foundations for donations. Philanthropist Mohamed El-Erian, a longtime resident of Orange County and chief economic adviser at Allianz, also initiated a matching challenge in late April during the peak of the pandemic. El-Erian committed \$250,000 upfront, matching \$2 for every \$1 donated during the campaign. A total of 560 individuals, many first-time donors, made contributions. As a result of the generosity of corporate partners, foundations, and individuals, CAPOC has been able to raise nearly \$2 million to date to assist with COVID-19 efforts, which will help serve the increased need that is 3 times more than this time last year.



As for the virtual food drives, CAPOC set up the infrastructure for community members to set up online fundraising pages via everydayhero, an online social capital and fundraising platform. Interested community members can simply click on a link, create a fundraiser page, and share – with proceeds collected going to CAPOC for the purpose of providing food to the local community. CAPOC's everydayhero COVID-19 Response page now has 32 supporters. In addition, on May 30th, 2020, CAPOC partnered with the Long Beach Community Action Partnership agency to distribute more than 1,000 emergency food boxes and fresh produce to families in need.¹³



As the work continued, operational adjustments were made to the food distribution program, despite the hardship caused by the pandemic. CAPOC:



- Redesigned production assembly lines to build in social distancing for volunteers
- Launched online volunteer registration providing 100% traceability in the event a prior volunteer tested positive for COVID-19 and notification became necessary
- Supported drive thru food distributions to minimize person-to-person contact in providing service
- Partnered with Amazon to provide complimentary home delivery of food boxes to over 25,000 vulnerable seniors each month
- Distributed three times as much food in June 2020 (6.4 million pounds), during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to June 2019 (2.1 million pounds)

Tags: Food, Fundraising

¹³ A video highlighting the partnership between the two CAAs can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xi1e8RnmxEo&feature=youtu.be>

Community Action Partnership of Orange County

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www.capoc.org

Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County (CAB) – CA



“Now more than ever, Community Action is needed to strengthen and support our safety net for the most vulnerable in our communities. Families are struggling for their bare essentials like food, rent, and utilities. While responding to these urgent needs, we are also tasked to challenge disparities that have been exposed and fueled by this pandemic: the time is now for Community Action to continue to push against racial injustices, health disparities, and systems that at their very core, are not accessible for all. We must be better and DO better for our most vulnerable.” –Maria Elena De La Garza, CAB Executive Director



Community Action Board
of Santa Cruz County, Inc.

CAB serves Santa Cruz County and the Pajaro Valley in northern California, where it operates six programs assisting close to 10,000 people with low-incomes with emergency, human development services. In addition, they serve an additional 7,000+ people with requests for information and referrals. Over three-quarters of CAB's clients have family incomes of less than 100% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines and at least a quarter of clients have less than 150% of the Guidelines.

The programs offered by CAB form four pillars of focus areas that include: Homeless and Housing Services, Immigration Services, Employment, and Youth and Community Development. Specific CAB programs include: The Day Worker Center, Rental Assistance Program, Santa Cruz County Immigration Project, Davenport Resource Service Center, Alcantara Employment Programs, Emergency Payments Program and the Thriving Immigrants Collaborative.

Santa Cruz County has a population of 255,000 people, with 72% white, 32% Latino (can be any race), 4% Asian, 1% Black, and with an overall 12% poverty rate. The Pajaro Valley is the center of substantial agricultural activity and the source of much of the nation's fruits and vegetables. This community is known for cultivating strawberries and raspberries, and is the home of Martinelli's Apple Cider. The local economic force is fueled by its large farmworker population who are essential workers and among the lowest paid of the county's residents.

Prior to the pandemic, CAB was operating a Day Worker's Center, which helps workers to find safe employment through a hiring hall and an organized process that avoids the abuses inherent in workers being hired randomly from street corners. As a result of state orders to shelter in place and the subsequent suspension of much of the state's economic activity, dayworkers were left with very few employment opportunities. Most of them had very little in savings and had great difficulty surviving financially for long without work.

To ameliorate this situation, CAB quickly redirected services to focus on food distribution, utility support and a new strategy called “No Barrier Rental Assistance.” This new strategy allows for rental assistance for day workers who would otherwise typically not qualify. Yet despite even these additional efforts, the need far exceeds the resources. CAB formed a new partnership with NonprofitAF.org to launch an aggressive fundraising campaign to bolster resources for their Day Worker Center. The Center, which previously averaged 150–300 work placements a week, now averages just five due to the pandemic. Committed to being an economic resource for the immigrant population that it serves, CAB

Community Action Board of Santa Cruz
County

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is working directly with Vu Le. Vu, who is the head writer for NonprofitAF¹⁴, is known for his spitfire and straight forward approach to helping non-profits troubleshoot and strategize.

MariaElena De La Garza, CEO of CAB, met Vu Le at a National Community Action Partnership conference and began following Vu on social media soon after. MariaElena sent a message to Vu to outline the effects of the pandemic on the immigrant population. Vu immediately offered his support. In partnership with the National Day Labor Organizing Network, NonprofitAF, Casa Latina, InclusionAction, and Hispanics in Philanthropy, they launched a national fundraising campaign, Pa'Lante Fund, that was covered in the NonProfit Quarterly Review¹⁵. The aim of this fund is to provide direct resources to the Day Worker community along with much needed organizational capacity for 50 centers throughout the United States.

Tags: Food, Fundraising, Housing, Utilities

¹⁴ NonprofitAF, <https://nonprofitaf.com/>

¹⁵ Editorial, *Philanthropy: It's Time to Stand Up for Day Laborers and Immigrants*, NONPROFIT QUARTERLY, July 27, 2020, available at <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/philanthropy-its-time-to-stand-up-for-day-laborers-and-immigrants/>

United Planning Organization (UPO) – Washington, DC



United Planning Organization (UPO) is a nonprofit Community Action Agency in Washington, DC designated for the District of Columbia. Their service area is comprised of 43% white and 49% Black individuals. 16.8% of the general population is in poverty with 24.8% of children living in a state of poverty. Median household income rests at \$82,533. Serving a wide variety of low-income demographics, UPO provides early childhood education, youth services, a workforce institute, community wellness, a treatment center, housing counseling, a Foster Grandparent program, and more.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UPO utilized their expertise and programming for early childhood education to provide an essential service to healthcare professionals, such as Nacole.

Nacole Thrower is a single mother of a three-year-old little boy, Hudson. Nacole is a healthcare professional, providing registration and administrative support to the OB/GYN department at George Washington University Hospital in Washington, DC. Prior to the onset of the pandemic and the DC Mayor's mandate to social distance, Hudson was attending preschool at KIPP. KIPP closed its doors in March and assigned Hudson to one of six emergency childcare facilities in the District serving essential employees. This left Nacole to make the hard choice of sending her child to a daycare facility during a pandemic.

With reluctance, but driven by the need to remain employed, Nacole enrolled her son in the emergency childcare facility operated by UPO at Marie Reed Elementary School. Under the leadership of a UPO staff person, a small team cares for up to 10 children each day, taking each child's temperature upon entry, facilitating multiple 20-second handwashing sessions, and delivering a kindergarten readiness curriculum. Due to this service adaptation by UPO, essential workers like Nacole are able to remain employed while having comfort that their child is being cared for, is safe, and has the opportunity to learn.¹⁶

Tags: Child Care, Health



¹⁶ Perry Stein, *At this D.C. day care, few kids, lots of hand-washing, and a savior for a single health-care worker*, WASH. POST, Apr. 19, 2020, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/dc-emergency-child-care-covid/2020/04/19/88bf95c8-7d86-11ea-8013-1b6da0e4a2b7_story.html

United Planning Organization
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Brightpoint – IN



Brightpoint, a Community Action Agency in Northeast Indiana has a mission to help communities, families, and individuals remove the causes and conditions of poverty. They serve 15 counties in the northeast corner of Indiana, which include about 1.5 million people. This area has a 15.5% poverty rate with a population rate that remains steady. African Americans have the highest rate of poverty among all races and ethnicities. Median household income ranges from \$40–55k across the 15 counties.

A variety of programs and services are provided by Brightpoint, including, but not limited to: child development, weatherization, energy assistance, family development, and a Brightpoint Development Fund (BDF) that includes housing development, a loan center, small business loans, and financial education. Regardless of the physical office closure, the agency continued to offer many of their regular services remotely.

In response to COVID-19, BDF has created a COVID-19 Express Loan for businesses in northeast Indiana impacted by the pandemic. Their loan product is designed to help small businesses who are experiencing financial hardship due to the economic crisis. The loan can offer up to \$20,000 with no cost up front and immediate deferred payment options available. Limited documentation is required up front and can be uploaded through a website to enable businesses to quickly apply, remain physically distant, and receive financial relief. Staff also offer virtual coaching sessions to explore relief options available so local businesses can develop a financial plan to recover or remain stable, as well as get connected to additional resources.

In addition to the assistance for small businesses, the agency has a COVID-19 Outcomes Financial Assistance fund to assist individuals and families with needs brought about by the crisis. To raise funds for both types of assistance, the agency shifted their annual golf fundraiser to be held on June 4th to a virtual fundraising event to directly benefit the COVID-19 relief programs. By June 4th, over 20 generous sponsors and donors had joined together to support families and communities in northeastern Indiana.

Tag: Fundraising

Brightpoint

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Indiana Community Action Association (INCAA) – IN



The Indiana Community Action Association (INCAA) is a state-wide nonprofit that envisions a “state with limited or no poverty, where its residents have decent, safe, and sanitary living conditions, and where resources are available to help low income individuals attain self-sufficiency.” INCAA’s most recent outcomes report shows that nearly 1 million “Hoosiers” live in poverty. Indiana CAAs offer an array of services to address needs such as early childhood education, weatherization assistance, housing assistance, and financial empowerment programs.



INCAA proposes to use a portion of the CSBG CARES Act funding to go toward personal protective equipment (PPE). INCAA recognized how critical PPE was going to be for the state’s 22 Community Action Agencies (CAAs), and decided to help meet the need. INCAA ordered a first round of supplies in bulk and going forward will serve as a repository – saving the Indiana Community Action Network both dollars and space.

INCAA plans to use CSBG CARES Act funding to help cover the cost of supplies across the state. CAAs have mostly requested KN95 masks, surgical FDA and non-FDA masks, face shields, gloves, disposable gowns and digital thermometers. As of the end of April, the Indiana Community Action Network had purchased the following items:

- 66,800 pairs of gloves;
- 7,000 face shields;
- 73,830 KN95 masks;
- 27,200 surgical masks (FDA);
- 4,700 surgical masks (non-FDA);
- 10,250 disposable gowns; and
- 11 digital thermometers

INCAA’s PPE purchase will allow local agency staff to return to the field more safely and effectively.

Tag: Health



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Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation (NEICAC) – IA



Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation (NEICAC) serves 7 counties in the northeast region of Iowa. The percent of households in poverty for all service area counties is 9.67%, with a higher proportion of women (11.8%), children (11.5%), and Hispanic/Latinx (29.60%). Black or African Americans are impacted disproportionately with one county (Bremer) as high as 63.37% in poverty for this demographic. As a result of COVID-19, 53% have seen their income decrease.



Even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, NEICAC remained committed to serving their communities, but had to do so with minimal physical contact. Through conducting a needs survey and observing concerns with food supply and access in their area of Iowa, they responded with a food delivery program in effort to meet the need, as well as contribute to flattening the curve in northeast Iowa.

The Food Delivery Program was initiated by a partnership with Northeast Iowa Area Agency on Aging (NEI3A). NEICAC Transit has been delivering frozen meals to NEI3A clients in five counties since mid-April. In addition, two counties in the service area (Howard and Winneshiek) received federal Community Development Block Grant funds. NEICAC also had many local contributions and area businesses providing financial support to the program. NEICAC made every effort to connect with all food pantries in the seven-county service area to share the vision of the program.

NEICAC redeployed their EARL Public Transit system to offer home delivery from the area food pantries to the homes of customers in need. The transit system was faced with shutting down non-essential routes because of COVID-19, but this presented an opportunity to use this resource in a different way. NEICAC relied heavily on their transit system for completion of deliveries, taking referrals from pantries, and tracking outcomes. In addition, they were able to include Weatherization staff, who are not currently working in homes, to provide deliveries in two counties that the transit system does not cover.

Through this program, families are able to arrange a delivery through their local food pantry who would then arrange the delivery with NEICAC. A NEICAC staff member then contacts the family to confirm the delivery date and time. By early August, NEICAC had delivered 52,678 lbs. of food to 905 households. One customer shared her gratitude, saying, “The home delivery is wonderful. It takes a lot of stress off of me and my worries about how I am going to feed my family. Without a car and no transit, it has been a challenge to find people willing to give me a ride to the store and pantry”.

Tag: Food



Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation

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Community Action, Inc. – KS

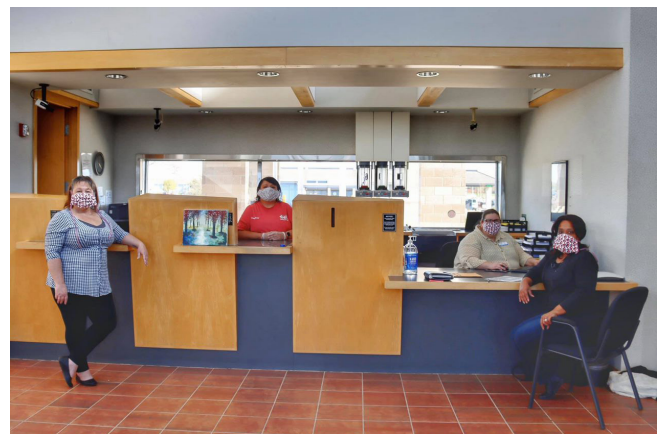


Community Action, Inc. is a non-profit Community Action Agency serving 20 counties in North Central and North East Kansas. The service area is 87% white with a poverty rate just below the state average at 11.47%, but is higher for demographic groups such as women (12.6%), African Americans (21%), Hispanic/Latino (21%), and Native Americans (24.9%). The percentage of the population without a high school diploma is better than the state and national average at 7.9%.

The agency mission is to help people move from poverty to prosperity through economic, social, and policy opportunities. The agency offers support to families, children, and seniors and a variety of services ranging from child care, rental housing, income tax preparation, weatherization, and more.

When the need to socially isolate became apparent, it was clear that thousands of community members, and dozens of social service agencies would need safe, innovative ways of accessing and providing assistance with meeting basic needs. Community Action, Inc. quickly partnered with Capitol Federal Bank to create the CapFed Community Care Station, a pop-up multi-service care station, which opened in less than three weeks from the onset of mid-March isolations. Coordinated by Community Action, the Care Station provided safe ways for area nonprofits to coordinate, remain accessible, and provide direct service supports, while limiting physical interactions between customers and providers.

The Station, a former bank building, was available to anyone affected economically by the COVID-19 crisis, in the Shawnee County, KS area. Customers were able to access services, exchange documents and signatures, and have face-to-face interactions with service providers via four drive-up lanes. An enclosed foyer and ample front parking area made it easy to safely provide larger supports like groceries and household items. Appointments were available for customers to access one of five private office suites to use internet-equipped computers for job and unemployment applications, educational testing requirements, and video meetings with case managers, counselors, legal aid and more. A partnership with a local CPA resulted in customers receiving free tax preparation services at the carefully controlled Care Station. Other supports provided included rent, mortgage and utility payments, a food pantry, fuel cards, laundry services, diapers and period supplies, pet food, prescription assistance, and even no-cost notary services. The CapFed Community Care Station received tremendous community support for the timely, innovative and collaborative work, including unsolicited grants and donations from several new partners. Strict safety protocols were practiced, including daily screening of anyone entering the building, required mask and glove use, disinfecting any equipment immediately after use, covering keyboards with plastic wrap disposed of between uses, and hourly disinfecting of shared spaces. Through the entire three months of the Care Station's operation, and at the height of the pandemic, no coronavirus contractions occurred.¹⁷



Tags: Fundraising, Health

¹⁷ A short video about the Care Station can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AbhOacPdQA8&feature=youtu.be>

Community Action, Inc

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Aroostook County Action Program (ACAP) – ME

Aroostook County Action Program (ACAP) serves residents of Aroostook County, the northernmost county in Maine. This rural service area is geographically larger than that of Connecticut and Rhode Island combined. Households are 96% white with a median income of \$37,000 annually, as of the last Census.

In response to the economic fallout from the pandemic, ACAP has taken on new programs while strengthening existing ones. ACAP is one of ten CAAs statewide to implement a rental assistance program, in partnership with the Governor's office and MaineHousing. The COVID-19 Rent Relief Program is for renters who cannot afford to pay their rent due to circumstances related to the pandemic. The Governor has dedicated a total of \$10 million in coronavirus relief funds for the program, and ACAP has processed over 500 applications for the initial program that provided a one-time \$500 support payment. The state recently modified the rules and will now allow up to \$1,000 per month over a period of three months. This change comes as eviction moratoria are set to expire as well as federal support for Unemployment Insurance.



ACAP has doubled down on its whole family approach and comprehensive service delivery during this difficult period, after seeing a spike in coaching referrals even by late March. The number of first-time customers who came through many of the agency's 40-plus programs became too many for the existing number of coaches. ACAP is now using CSBG CARES Act funding to support navigator positions to link families to services in a seamless way. Because ACAP had previously committed to pursuing an agency-wide transformation in the adoption of a Whole Family Approach, staff were quickly able to transition to becoming navigators -- such as an ACAP dental hygienist who typically works in public schools.

With the whole family approach to guide the agency, ACAP has connected with families during the pandemic in unique and innovative ways. Technology platforms between educators and families immediately replaced in-classroom learning. ACAP's Head Start transportation program reverse-engineered overnight and staff regularly picking up children to bring them to center-based programs found themselves delivering activity packets and meals to hundreds of families region-wide – over 60,000 through early July. Not only were families benefitting from the nutritious food delivered to their doorstep, but staff in ACAP's Early Care and Education Program found that parent engagement in the child's learning process notably increased as parents, and the siblings of enrolled children, would actively participate in the Zoom learning sessions coming into their living room. That increased participation by families continued through the summer with the addition of appropriately socially distanced driveway visits by ACAP educators to the homes of program participants.

Meeting the immediate needs of the community for ACAP also involved establishing an emergency overnight wellness shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness over the first three months of the pandemic. True to the Agency's Comprehensive Service Delivery Model, the shelter offered extensive day services and coaching that resulted in residents accessing permanent housing, enrolling and



Aroostook County Action Program

Aroostook County Action Program

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participating in distance learning opportunities and gaining employment. One such shelter success story, a Veteran with no income or housing, was connected with part-time employment and housed in a safe and secure rental unit in just two weeks. He was further connected by ACAP Coaches with a local Congressional Office for assistance with accessing VA benefits, which are currently pending. He was also connected with a local VA team that provided him with donated furniture to completely furnish his new apartment.

ACAP is also using the available technology to not only better serve the community, but to also boost staff morale during this difficult time. Executive Director Jason Parent distributes a Coronavirus Daily Distribution Briefing email to staff and community/state partners. Included in this briefing document are the numbers of clients served, such as the overall increase of over 1,000 new clients between March 15 and June 1, 2020. Almost every program area has taken a virtual approach to serving clients – from Head Start teachers reading to students and engaging with parents via YouTube, to housing staff offering a First-time Homebuyer Education Program over Zoom. Executive Director Jason Parent includes a quote of the day, such as this one from a recent edition: “You don’t build a business – you build people, and then people build the business.” To show their appreciation for staff, ACAP developed a more light-hearted video to the tune of “The Brady Bunch,” with specially written lyrics and a comical nod to the Zoom Meeting world that many have become all-too accustomed.

In addition to the daily email, Parent provides regular updates over ACAP’s YouTube channel. In one *ACAP Today* webisode, Parent made those listening aware of the services available to them through ACAP as well as how to access those services. Parent then interviewed a state senator and state legislator – both members of ACAP’s board – to allow viewers a chance to hear directly from elected officials. Unemployment insurance backlogs and barriers were a main point of discussion. In another edition of *ACAP Today*, Parent interviewed both ACAP team members and a regional partner that focus on workforce development, including entrepreneurship, allowing viewers to hear how to access their services remotely.

One ACAP team member recently expressed a shared sentiment among staff when saying, “I can’t imagine us managing through this situation nearly as well prior to our Agency Transformation.”

Tags: Child Care, Food, Housing



Maine Community Action Association (MeCAP) – ME



The Maine Community Action Partnership (MeCAP) is a state-wide organization “dedicated to improving the quality of life of Maine’s low-income citizens by aggressively advocating for, enhancing and supporting Community Action Agencies.” CAAs across the state administer programs including asset development, child care and youth development, employment training, energy and weatherization assistance, and health-related programs among others.



Once the COVID-19 outbreak began, MeCAP leveraged its existing relationship with state public health entities to advocate for the leadership role Community Action Agencies (CAAs) could play in respect to contact tracing and arranging critical social supports. In mid-May, the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) wanted to ramp up its efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19 and looked to the state-wide network of CAAs to be a vital part of the solution. Maine CDC contracted with the ten CAAs across the state to expand social supports for individuals and families exposed to COVID-19.

It is difficult for most of us to remain physically distant in order to protect public health, but particularly so for people struggling with housing, food security and transportation. Once a Maine resident learns they may have been exposed, the contact tracer refers them to their local Community Action Agency for follow-up services. The Maine Community Action Network has risen to the challenge and particularly has built upon their existing infrastructure of meal delivery, transportation and behavioral health services. In addition, to help people to quarantine safely, several CAAs have arrangements with local hotels, or have set up emergency wellness shelters.

While in isolation, Community Action staff provide wrap-around support to make sure individuals are aware of all the other services that may be available to them. Many people are learning about Community Action for the first time as they face job loss, or as they wait on Unemployment insurance to come through. No income eligibility requirements exist for accessing a hotel or shelter. Community Action’s service integration approach has allowed many Mainers to not only address short-term needs, but also to begin focusing on longer-term goals.

Tags: Health, Housing



Maine Community Action Association

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Human Services Program of Carroll County (HSP) – MD



Unlike most CAAs, HSP of Carroll County was not started in the 1960s, during the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty. It was created in 1987 by a former employee of Carroll County Department of Social Services, who saw people in need that could not be helped through existing county programs.



All programs and services operated by HSP have been initiated to meet a need that was not being met by other agencies in Carroll County. The three core programs include: Family Support, Home Energy, and Shelter and Housing.

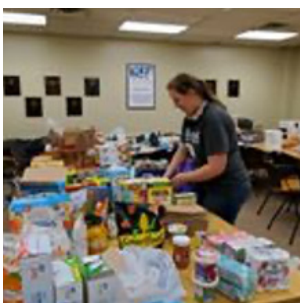
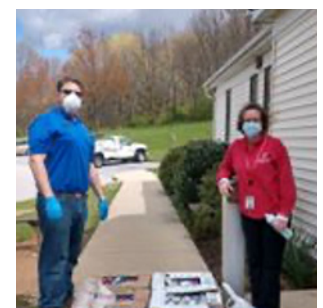
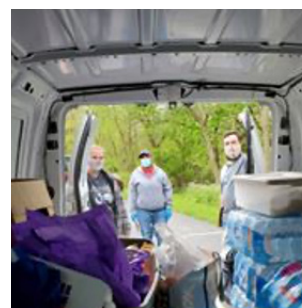
Carroll County has a population of 168,000, with 89% white, 4% black, 4% Latino and 2% Asian. Of the total population, 6% are in poverty. HSP operates three homeless shelters year-round (Family, Adult, and Night-by-Night). All shelter residents receive case management services.

Among the most susceptible to contracting COVID-19 are homeless people, many of whom have pre-existing medical conditions. HSP of Carroll County was the only shelter system in the state to continue to take new people during the pandemic. To help keep this population safe during the pandemic, the agency looked for ways to isolate them from possible contact with people with COVID-19 and provide doctors for needed care for anyone who may contract the virus or has other health problems.

In order to do this, HSP of Carroll County partnered with the Carroll County School District, Carroll County Government, and Access Carroll Integrated Health Care to provide critical services to the county's homeless population during the pandemic. First, in March of 2020, HSP of Carroll County opened a day center and connected with partners to develop encampments, allowing for space and distancing between individuals and families. The partnership set up a temporary medical respite site for the homeless on the grounds of a local middle school. Using large tents for exams, as well as the school gym, and designated camping places on the school grounds, the county is providing doctors and nurses for on-site services through Access Carroll. Those at a higher risk of COVID-19, but who have not tested positive, stay in the gym, while those who wish to have safe shelter or have tested positive will be able to camp in tents that are physically distanced from each other. In addition, elderly and more vulnerable populations have been hoteled. As of August 2020, HSP is still able to report zero cases within the homeless population in Carroll County, as verified by the local health department.

Through this multi-agency partnership, HSP of Carroll County has been able to provide the homeless population with on-site food, hygiene products, safe shelter, financial education, job search assistance, restroom and hand washing facilities, as well as doctors and nurses (via Access Carroll).

Tags: Health, Housing



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Action Inc. – MA



The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the important role that partnerships play in effective Community Action initiatives. Agencies that build strong partnerships with regional and local entities can respond more quickly to crises. The added capacity resulting from such partnerships leads to greater community impact.

In mid-March 2020, Action Inc., a Community Action Agency serving the Cape Ann region in northeastern Massachusetts, quickly responded to the emerging pandemic by reaching out to existing local partners to help lay the groundwork for a regional response. Due to Action Inc.'s longstanding partnerships and consistent track record, it quickly became a go-to agency in this time of crisis.

On March 20, 2020 Action Inc. embarked on a partnership with the City of Gloucester and the Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce to establish the Cape Ann Emergency Relief Fund (CAERF), which distributes direct cash assistance to residents. As a coastal region with substantial tourism business, Cape Ann has high numbers of hourly workers who have been disproportionately affected by the outbreak. Initially, they limited beneficiaries to unemployed or furloughed hourly workers. Originally, the goal was to raise \$200,000 and distribute \$500 checks to 400 families. The fund reached its \$200,000 goal in just two weeks and began accepting applications on April 6, 2020. In order to qualify, applicants must reside in the region, be an hourly worker working at least 10 hours per week who was laid off or furloughed as a result of the coronavirus, and have income at or less than the 100% of the area median income (AMI), which for a family of four is \$119,000. To overcome the challenge of workers submitting documents while physically distancing, Action Inc. allows applicants to send in photographs of eligibility documentation.

As of May 21, 2020, the CAERF has raised over \$330,000 from nearly 400 individual donors. Given the strong community response, enough funds were raised to expand assistance to residents who are self-employed and impacted by COVID-19. Action Inc. supplied \$1,000 checks to 210 households, with 100 more applications in process. Providing assistance to these households was only possible because of Action Inc.'s role as a trusted community member and existing relationships with municipal governments and other community-based organizations.

Tag: Fundraising



Action Inc.

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Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency (Wayne Metro) – MI



Wayne Metropolitan
Community Action Agency
Established 1971



Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency serves the city of Detroit and Wayne County, Michigan. Nearly 23% of Wayne County's population is living in poverty, which exceeds the national poverty level by 11.4%, and the state rate by 9.5 %. For each racial or ethnic category, the poverty rate is higher in Wayne County than in the state or country. Michigan and Wayne County also have higher rates of Black individuals living in poverty than the U.S. average.¹⁸ Wayne Metro is a prime example of how CAAs across the country have been nimble and intentional with their response to COVID-19. In mid-March when the pandemic began to hit Michigan, Wayne Metro quickly assessed all aspects of operations to ensure seamless service delivery for customers.

Knowing that in-person appointments would not be feasible during this time, Wayne Metro staff developed an online universal application that clients could access 24/7. The primary focus for the online application included ease of access for the customers: the application takes 4-5 minutes on average to complete. Within the first three weeks of launching, Wayne Metro received 8,000 applications covering 21,000 total service requests. To keep this in perspective, Wayne Metro normally serves about 35,000 requests per year.

Wayne Metro had to be flexible on the staffing side as well to continue to keep their commitment to quality customer service. At first, one team was processing all of the applications. Management regularly analyzed the data and saw the need for more capacity, and quickly added four more teams to the mix. Keep in mind this new process occurred at the same time staff were adjusting to working remotely. In an effort to manage increased call volumes and provide immediate assistance to the most vulnerable residents in Wayne County, the agency then hired temporary staff to help fill the gap. Between April 27 and August 3, over 17,500 applications, covering 43,000 requests have been received. Wayne Metro has now processed over 25,000 of the requests with the available funding.

Tags: Food, Housing, Utilities

¹⁸ Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency, *Community Assessment*, July, 2019, available here <https://www.waynemetro.org/wp-content/uploads/2019-WM-CNA-Report.pdf>

Wayne Metropolitan Community Action
Agency

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Detroit, MI 48202
(313) 873-6000
www.waynemetro.org

United Community Action Partnership (UCAP) – MN



United Community Action Program (UCAP) serves a mostly rural thirteen-county area in Southwest Minnesota. Census data estimated nearly 11,000 households – or nearly 10% of the total -- are living in poverty in UCAP's service area. Ninety-four percent of the population is white.¹⁹



UCAP and its virtual Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program exemplify the leadership and ingenuity of the Community Action Network. Within a matter of days of learning about the COVID-19 pandemic, UCAP staff developed a plan of action to provide uninterrupted VITA services. Staff then worked closely with the Internal Revenue Service and the Minnesota Department of Revenue to have the virtual tax clinic policies and procedures approved. The State of Minnesota highlighted UCAP's creative approach in a newsletter to all 200+ VITA sites, encouraging all to adopt similar procedures. In addition, the Minnesota Asset Building Coalition held a webinar and asked UCAP to discuss how they overcame barriers to having customers scan and send documents, along with data privacy concerns.

Until mid-June, UCAP was the only operational VITA site in Minnesota during this time of physical distancing. UCAP typically works in a nine-county rural service area; however, now has been serving customers state-wide. Many are first-time filers, including those who may not have earned enough income in the past to file taxes, but who would still be eligible to receive the Economic Impact Payments of up to \$1,200 per individual. UCAP has completed more than 1,600 returns this tax season, totaling more than \$3.2 million in refunds to residents.

As Angela Larson shares, UCAP Director of Family Services, the agency can indeed attribute its success to “staff creativity and volunteers’ dedication.”

Tag: Financial Empowerment



¹⁹ United Community Action Partnership, Inc., 2018 Community Needs Assessment, June 26, 2019, available at <https://unitedcapmn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/UCAP-Community-Assessment-8-13-19.pdf>

United Community Action Partnership.
1400 South Saratoga St
Marshall, MN 56258
(507) 537-1416
www.unitedcapmn.org

Northwest New Jersey Community Action Program (NORWESCAP) – NJ



Norwescap serves over 30,000 people in a normal year. With the COVID-19 pandemic, they have seen those numbers rise dramatically as people across the country are impacted with layoffs, furloughs, hour reductions and more. They have created the Norwescap Resiliency Fund²⁰ to help provide services, food, and supplies to those in need.



The Head Start program housed at the Norwescap agency shut down center-based services during the pandemic, however they are still in touch with their parents, and are still providing food services to customers. Through this contact, a need for diapers and other essential baby items emerged as a growing problem. Norwescap's Head Start staff teamed up with Food Bank and Child Care Resource & Referral staff to create baby supply packages for more than 150 families, including over 200 cases of diapers and wipes. Staff delivered the packages to families in need across the area.

Norwescap created a video and posted it on YouTube²¹. Social media tags include: #Onenorwescap #diaperfairystatus #weloveourfamilies #weloveourcommunities.

Tags: Child Care, Food



20 NORWESCAP, Get Involved, <https://norwescap.org/get-involved/> (last visited Dec. 8, 2020).

21 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfmOm6-02yY&feature=youtu.be>

Northwest New Jersey Community Action
Program

350 Marshall St.
Phillipsburg, NJ 08865
(908) 685-3033
www.norwescap.org

Community Action Agency of Southern New Mexico (CAASNM) – NM



The Community Action Agency of Southern New Mexico (CAASNM) is a nonprofit that mobilizes communities, represents the poor, voices community concerns, and insists on change. In order to achieve this, they focus on high-impact strategies that enhance sustainability through asset building and connecting clients to care. Their efforts serve the 5 counties in southwestern New Mexico: Doña Ana, Hidalgo, Sierra, Luna, and Grant. The service area is 94% white with a majority having Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. As a whole, the 5 counties have a 27.2% poverty rate – significantly higher than state or national average. In addition, 20.4% have no High School diploma and 16% are food insecure with a 27.5% child food insecurity rate. Annual median household income for the service area ranges between \$30,000–40,000.



The Colonias area of Southern Doña Ana County in New Mexico already experiences challenges as many communities lack infrastructure like paved roads and functioning sewer systems. The COVID-19 crisis exacerbated such challenges and health concerns, as well as the economic hardship facing the community and families struggling to afford basic necessities. While CAASNM closed physical offices through June 2020, they remained open via remote work, accepting virtual applications for many of their programs and services and innovating to meet the increasing needs of the community.

In addition to their regular services, CAASNM has collaborated with local partners and funders to provide cash assistance to families. A fund established by former Governor Richardson of New Mexico and two actors, Edward James Olmos and Danny Trejo, in partnership with the Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico and CAASNM offers families in the Colonias area a one-time cash assistance check for their needs during this time of crisis. As of June 8, 2020, actor and comedian George Lopez joined the effort as well. The assistance is being provided through CAASNM and offers applicants \$150 to families without children and \$300 to families with children. Dawn Z. Hommer, Chief Executive Officer of the Community Action Agency of Southern New Mexico states: “providing cash assistance allows for families without the means or desire to travel to big box stores to spend money in their local communities and has the added benefit of injecting support into locally-owned small businesses.” The fund was initiated with a \$10,000 donation from former Governor Richardson’s foundation and as of mid-June, has received \$75,000 in pledged donations to assist local families.

Tag: Financial Empowerment

Community Action Agency of Southern New Mexico

3880 Foothills Road, Suite A
Las Cruces, NM
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www.caasnm.org

Cattaraugus Community Action (CCA) – NY



The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated food insecurity in upstate New York. It has negatively affected food bank resources, national supply lines, hospitality businesses, and food service and grocery workers. The fact that effects are industry-wide, however, has resulted in some innovative partnerships and collaborations within communities. Faced with a stay-at-home order, Nick and Kendra Pitillo, restaurant owners in western New York created an online portal offering dishes to-go on a large scale and marketing them to customers as perfect dishes to freeze for later. They called it Stock-Your-Freezer. Customers began asking if they could buy meals through the portal and donate them. Enter Community Action.

Cattaraugus Community Action (CCA), an agency based in Salamanca, New York, partnered with Stock-Your-Freezer to deliver a portion of the donated meals. CCA's reputation as a trusted community-based organization in the region combined with its existing distribution network made it a natural and effective choice for meal distribution. Since its launch in March 2020, the website has expanded as more area restaurants ask to add their menus. By May 2020, the website had donated 19,578 meals to disabled family members, food pantries, frontline workers, and laid off food service workers. Throughout the pandemic, CCA averaged roughly 675 meals distributed throughout Cattaraugus County. Without CCA's partnership and network, the program would not have been able to scale-up its donation distributions so quickly.

Tags: Financial Empowerment, Food

Cattaraugus Community Action
25 Jefferson Street, #1
Salamanca, NY 14779
(716) 945-1041
www.ccaction.org

North Carolina Community Action Association (NCCAA)/Action Pathways Inc. (API) – NC



The North Carolina Community Action Association (NCCAA) is committed to living and fulfilling the promise of Community Action. Each and every day, North Carolina's Community Action Agencies (CAAs) assist people and families across the state in their efforts to overcome poverty, secure decent housing, access social services, pursue education, and obtain good jobs. In recent years, North Carolina's 34 CAAs have assisted an average of 121,000 people annually—a number roughly equal to the population of Wilmington, the state's eighth most populous city.²²



The North Carolina Community Action Network continues to serve as a leader nationally when it comes to social determinants of health. In response to COVID-19, the state network of CAAs have been readily responding to the changing conditions in their respective communities and implementing new approaches. This includes participating in the recently launched NCCARE360, the first statewide coordinated care network to better connect individuals to local services and resources – across the health and human services sectors. The system tracks when a need such as food, housing or medical assistance is resolved. At present, half of the NC Community Action network has begun coordinating with their health counterparts in such a manner, and more are to come online going forward.



Action Pathways' Second Harvest food bank of Cumberland County is one such North Carolina CAA seeing the impact of NCCARE360. As recipients of a more than \$200,000 grant from the Wal-Mart Foundation, Action Pathways has been able to support its network of food pantries and purchase a refrigerated truck to distribute approximately 2.2 million pounds of fresh produce. In addition, Action Pathways was recently awarded a grant from Feeding America to effectively provide emergency food assistance, including fresh produce, to populations disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Lonnie Ballard, CEO of Action Pathways Inc, sees the short- and long-term impacts the agency will have on families in southeast North Carolina when sharing, "we will not only provide meals to people in need, we also hope to improve health outcomes."

Tag: Health



²² North Carolina Community Action Association, *Ripple Effects: How Community Action Works for North Carolinians and The State's Economy*, Aug., 2018, available at <http://files.constantcontact.com/0f30278d001/769be524-8f39-4c65-9cb1-df2dbf1daca9.pdf>

North Carolina Community Action Association
4428 Louisburg Road, Suite 101
Raleigh, NC 27616
(919) 790-5757
www.nccaa.net

ActionPathways, Inc.

316 Green St
Fayetteville, NC 28301
(910) 485-6131
www.actionpathways.ngo

Community Action Wayne/Medina (CAW/M) – OH



For over 50 years, Community Action Wayne/Medina (CAW/M) has been providing services to people with low incomes in Ohio. In normal times, the agency offers Child and Family Development (Head Start, Early Head Start, Car Seat safety programs, Medical & Dental Health, and Nutrition programs), Energy Services and Economic Assistance (Housing Assistance, HEAP/PIPP), and Transportation Assistance programs. Utilizing three facilities, offices in Medina and Wayne counties and a food bank, their service area is approximately 108,000 households. A mix of rural and small towns within an hour of Akron and Cleveland, Medina County boasts the headquarters for Westfield Insurance as well as several large manufacturing plants: RPM International, MTD Products, Owens Corning, Sandridge Food Company and Parker Hannifin. Wooster is the county seat in Wayne, located halfway between Canton and Mansfield. Wayne County has the third largest agricultural economy in Ohio, and is known for its food manufacturing, with the headquarters for JM Smucker and Smithfield foods, and other manufacturing plants for GOJO Industries, Schaeffler, Artiflex, Pepsico, MARS, Morton Salt, Daisy Brand, Cargill, Purina and Gerber Poultry.²³




Education in self-sufficiency extends beyond early childhood. For example, last Spring the agency began a pilot program in the Cloverleaf High School aimed at teaching students skills in resilience and future planning. The agency's Bridges Out of Poverty program includes *Getting Ahead*, a program that enhances financial literacy and soft skills to improve employability and to help individuals achieve their greatest potential. Offering various workshops across the two counties, the Bridges program has also succeeded in educating employers, educators, and leaders in the community about the various challenges facing those with fewer resources. Its financial literacy program has recently been augmented to further assist people who have been impacted by COVID-19.

These programs maintain a safety net for residents, as 4 out of 10 Americans cannot cover an unexpected \$400 out-of-pocket expense (2019 State of Poverty) and prevent the downward spiraling that often occurs when these expenses occur.

Community Action Wayne/Medina has been at the forefront of providing free and affordable transportation options for Wayne County residents with its Free Transportation Program, Free Out-of-County Medical Transportation, Rural Mobility Solutions (RMS) Work Transportation Program and the City of Wooster Transportation Program. Since 2016, it has been awarded a Mobility Management grant from the Federal Transit Administration and has continued to assist seniors, people with disabilities and residents with low-incomes with assistance in finding and using various transportation options. During this same time, Community Action has partnered with the City of Wooster and area agencies to grow the Wooster Transportation Program and Wooster Transit. Through working with Community Action, Wooster Transit expanded its bus service from 4,235 rides for WTP members in 2016 to 48,404 rides in 2019.

²³ Community Action Wayne/Medina, *Community Needs Assessment 2017-2019*, 2019, available at <https://www.cawm.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Community-Needs-Assessment-2017-2019-.pdf>

Community Action Wayne/Medina
799 N. Court St.
Medina, Ohio 44256
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www.cawm.org/



During the pandemic, Community Action Wayne/Medina is adapting to the changing needs of customers and going above and beyond normal services to help people. Service at the food pantry has expanded greatly and is now being operated as a drive-up pantry only with no client contact, and now reaches more than double the number of pre-pandemic distribution. Also new, deliveries are being made in both counties to people who are elderly, disabled and have special circumstances that make them especially vulnerable.

COVID-19 has limited operations out of CAW/M offices, leaving customers unable to come in for assistance for many services. Having vulnerable populations that rely on the agency, staff became concerned for the welfare of customers, and began calling them for wellness checks and to provide resource connection and referrals. One man they reached was having difficulty paying his rent, as his landlord refused to accept his usual cash payment due to COVID-19 concerns. Being elderly and at risk for getting seriously ill from the virus, the customer was uncomfortable leaving his home to go to the bank for a money order. Staff arranged to have a driver pick up the customer's rent payment in a safe way (and deliver food!), then purchase and deliver the money order to the gentleman's landlord. To help him handle gas and electric bills that had jumped dramatically, they also virtually enrolled him in the Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) program, which bases payments for utilities on a percentage of household income and makes payments consistent from month to month.

Community Action is uniquely suited for such adaptations, since this different service model is often only possible when trust has been established between an agency and a customer. Without a history of positive interactions, no one would be willing to hand cash to a driver the way this special request worked out. CAW/M is seeking out and fulfilling requests like these through wellness calls, and in doing so, they are finding new ways to serve their communities during the pandemic. New outreach efforts will include service outreach for older adults in Wayne County, expanded transportation services in both its counties of service, increased food assistance and delivery of resources and boosted utility assistance including water bill payments. Through expanded Facebook marketing and other outreach, CAW/M works to reach those who are now in episodic poverty due to the impact of COVID-19.

“Efforts to assist people in maintaining stability during these tough circumstances are made stronger with the elevated eligibility threshold for CSBG related services,” said Melissa Pearce, CAW/M President/CEO.²⁴ “When our resource-challenged neighbors thrive, the entire community benefits.”

Tags: Housing, Utilities

²⁴ CSBG CARES funding allows states the option to increase the eligibility level to 200% FPL.

Lake County Lifeline (Lifeline) – OH



Lake County Lifeline has been serving low-income residents of Lake County, Ohio since 1973, and was designated a Community Action Agency 14 years later. In 2008, they were certified as a mental health agency by the Ohio Department of Mental Health. A suburb of Cleveland, just north east along Lake Erie, Lake County is the smallest county geographically in the state, with a majority of the area (77%, 752 sq. miles) being water. A majority of the county's approximately 230,000 residents are white, and 8.1% of families live below the poverty line. Manufacturing is the largest industrial category, followed by health care and social assistance, and retail trade.



Normally, the agency offers assistance in four major categories: Healthcare Assistance, Housing & Energy Assistance, Consumer Education and Job Training, and Information & Referral services. In 2018, Lake County Lifeline served 2569 households, helped keep the heat on for 829 households, and fielded 36,317 referral/assistance calls through their 2-1-1 center.

When the pandemic hit Lake County, the staff's focus turned to Painesville City's school district. With a high poverty rate, a heavy reliance on free lunches, and no access to libraries or school amenities, pivoting to distance learning without reliable internet access was going to pose a problem for many of the students.

The school district, with funding assistance from Lifeline, began offering WiFi through mobile hotspots on April 22, 2020, using the school's van fleet. Vans move through the city at regularly scheduled times during the week, allowing students to logon to download/upload homework assignments. With a 500-foot range, the vans often reach students at home, although students are also welcome to move closer if need be, provided pandemic precautions are observed. During the first full month of this service, the van program averaged 78 users a day.

Tag: Utilities



Lake County Lifeline

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(440) 354-2148
www.lclifeline.org/

West Ohio Community Action Partnership (WOCAP) – OH



WOCAP serves Allen, Auglaize and Mercer counties, all located on the west side of Ohio, not far from the Indiana border. They have extensive offerings, all designed to help lift community members out of poverty. WOCAP Transportation, Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), Emergency Assistance (FEMA/EFSP), Homeownership/Down Payment Assistance (First Home Lima), Fair Housing, Head Start, Early Head Start, State Preschool, Most Valuable Parents (MVP) Program, Rx/AIM Prescription Assistance, Financial Literacy, Homeless Prevention Services (HCRP), Youth Employment and Kindergarten Kamp.



Stay-At-Home orders came in mid-March for WOCAP, and the Homeownership program was half-way through their curriculum when they were forced to stop meeting in person. To maintain the progress and hard work the participants had started, WOCAP found ways to continue the classes and the case management work virtually so families could complete the course. Participants also had in-person meetings scheduled for down payment help and closing on their house. WOCAP also worked quickly to contact title companies and associated parties to re-tool the process to accommodate social distancing. Instead of in person meetings, documents were dropped off for home buyers to fill out. Closings were reconfigured to limit the number of participants around the table, which made them permissible under the stay-at-home orders.²⁵

Because of the quick action on the part of the WOCAP staff, families were able to complete their course and three families closed on their new homes. Homeownership impacts the lives of those customers immeasurably, but also is helping to bolster the local economy during the pandemic.

Tag: Housing

²⁵ Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies, *Keeping the economy moving during the pandemic*, May 6, 2020, available at <http://oacaa.org/2020/05/06/keeping-the-economy-moving-during-the-pandemic/>

West Ohio Community Action Partnership
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Lima, OH 45804
(844) 221-9447
www.wocap.org

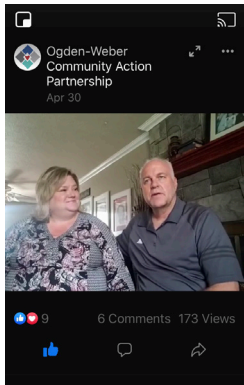
Ogden-Weber Community Action Partnership (OWCAP) – OR



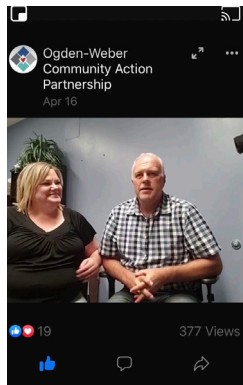
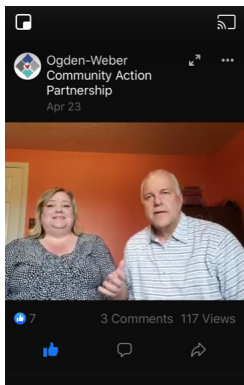
The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in CAAs providing emergency services and assistance, but it has also required agencies to think creatively about how to adapt existing programs to stay-at-home orders and physical distancing guidelines. The Ogden-Weber Community Action Partnership (OWCAP) in Utah has done this successfully by moving two of its most crucial programs completely online: mental health services and Circles USA.



The protective measures instituted in response to the novel coronavirus pandemic are unique to the crisis. Quarantine, self-isolation, and physical distancing can help mitigate community spread, but they have consequences of their own. Multiple studies have demonstrated that physical isolation can lead to emotional distress, especially when exacerbating factors such as exposure to or contraction of the virus, economic stress, or family tension are also present. As a result, mental health services are in greater demand in our communities but cannot be accessed through traditional in person visits.



OWCAP is addressing this need by providing virtual access to a mental health services. OWCAP's mental health specialist began conducting Facebook Live sessions on a weekly basis where families can engage virtually both with the specialist and with each other through chat. Community members ask questions about COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 issues facing families, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and childhood development. Chris Ipsen, OWCAP's Executive Director, said they've been pleasantly surprised at how well-attended the sessions are, as well as how many community members access them after the recording is released. Some recorded videos have more than 350 views.



OWCAP also runs a chapter of Circles USA, a free resource for families who would like to improve their lives by increasing their social capital, improving job skills, and connecting to members of the community. Participants create connections with mentors in the community through weekly meetings where dinner and childcare are provided.

During the pandemic, the Circles weekly meetings have become completely virtual. Circles staff try to keep up with innovative and entertaining lessons to continue providing value while staying safe and staying apart. The program participants receive weekly guidance and activities for their children, including a "safety minute", where the OWCAP Safety Coordinator provides informative

and recent guidance on a number of safety topics. Some weekly meetings are Family Fun Nights where families play games for prizes. Before one recent Family Fun Night, Circles staff delivered boxes of food, books, activities, crafts, resource information, and BINGO play cards.

Evolving to meet the needs of changing circumstances is a hallmark of the Community Action Network and OWCAP has stayed true to that strength by bringing their mental health services and Circles USA online and adjusting the resources provided by those services to meet families' needs during the pandemic.

Tags: Child Care, Health

Ogden-Weber Community Action
Partnership

3159 Grant Avenue
Ogden, UT 84401
(801) 399-9281
www.owcap.org

East Bay Community Action Program (EBCAP) – RI

Access to coronavirus testing has emerged as a major factor in a community's ability to contain the spread of the pandemic. In the absence of a national strategy to achieve widespread testing for all individuals and families, it has been left to state and local governments as well as community-based organizations to establish and execute testing plans. In response to the need for testing, East Bay Family Health Services, a division of East Bay Community Action Program (EBCAP) in Rhode Island has partnered with the National Guard to set up two COVID-19 testing sites.

The testing sites, located in Southeastern Rhode Island, provide both drive-up and walk-up services to all members of the community at no charge, regardless of age, income, insurance coverage, or immigration status. As in other states, coronavirus disproportionately affects communities of color in Rhode Island, especially the Hispanic population, which makes up 44% of all COVID-19 cases in the state. In an effort to effectively test all community members, EBCAP has set up resources to service patients who speak a wide variety of languages, including sign languages.

Tag: Health



East Bay Community Action Program
19 Broadway
Newport, RI 02840
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www.ebcap.org

Comprehensive Community Action Program (CCAP) – RI



The COVID-19 pandemic is unique because it has characteristics of a natural disaster, economic downturn, and public health crisis all effecting our communities simultaneously. It requires Community Action Agencies to think innovatively and solve multiple problems at once. A perfect example is the Comprehensive Community Action Program (CCAP) in Cranston, Rhode Island. CCAP is the largest Community Action Agency in Rhode Island and provides a variety of services including family medical and dental care, early childhood education, nutrition assistance, and behavioral health services. In 2019, CCAP provided services for over 25,000 Rhode Islanders.



CCAP's medical and dental facilities serve populations with low-incomes by accepting all third-party insurance coverage, including Medicare, Medicaid, and RiteCare (Rhode Island's Medicaid managed care program for families with children and pregnant women). In the beginning of the pandemic, CCAP was forced to close their dental facilities. The organization did not want to leave their dental professionals unemployed. But they had an even bigger issue: 75% of the dental staff were in the country on work visas and being laid off would violate the terms of their visas, potentially resulting in removal. CCAP thought quickly. As part of their response, they partnered with the National Guard to create a COVID-19 testing site. CCAP's Chief Medical Officer trained the dental staff to swab for COVID-19 and they are now in rotation at the testing site. By thinking innovatively, CCAP allowed their dental staff to keep their work visas by keeping them employed while adding personnel to their COVID-19 testing operations.

Tag: Health



Comprehensive Community Action Program
2311 Doric Avenue
Cranston, RI 02910
(401) 467-9610
www.comcap.org

Capstone Community Action (CCA) – VT



Capstone Community Action was founded in 1965 to fight the war on poverty in central Vermont. Capstone provides a broad scope of programs and community services including Head Start/Early Head Start early education programs, fuel assistance and crisis services, weatherization and energy efficiency support, tax assistance for households with low-incomes, job training, Food Shelf and food assistance programs, housing and homeless prevention programs. Capstone serves 5,000 residents a year with access to basic needs, including 1,500 children.

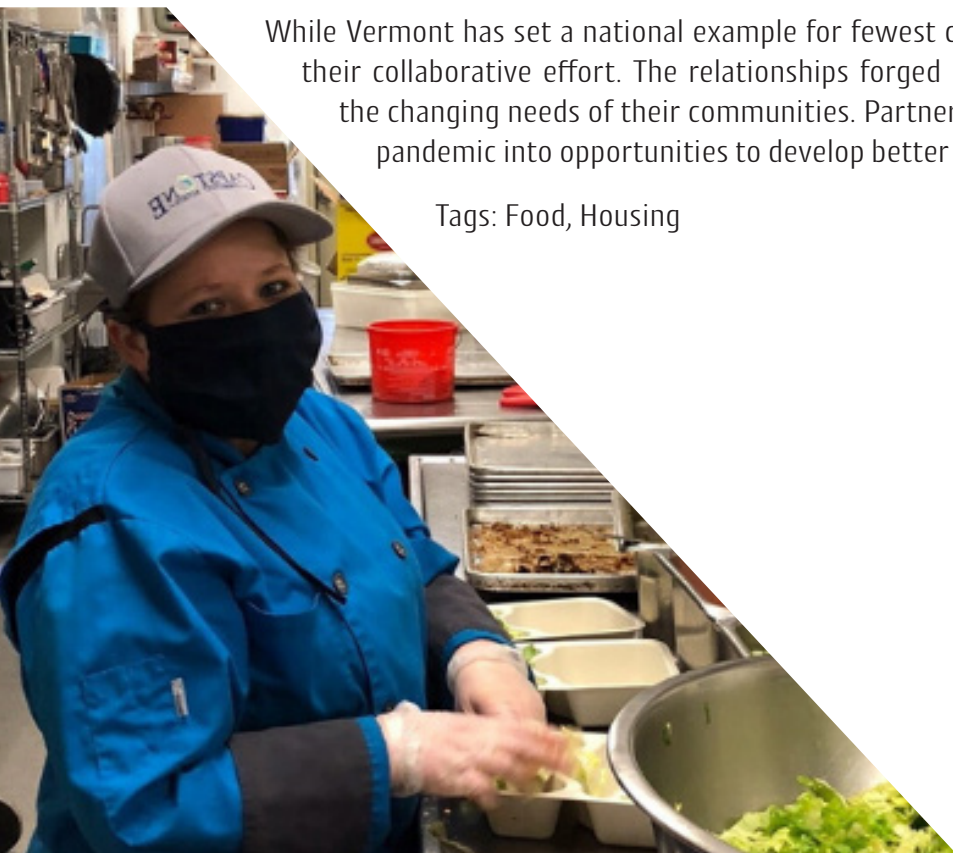


As the pandemic rapidly progressed in early March, 2020, Capstone leaders quickly recognized this unprecedented community challenge required a bold new collaborative action. Working together with 25 core partners, Capstone initiated the development of a Regional Command Center crisis response model of collaboration. Utilizing the Incident Command System as its organizational structure, Capstone joined with community partners from state and local government, health care, housing, mental health and human services to launch a coordinated community response to the pandemic.

The most immediate pressing need for Vermont's most vulnerable was to relocate the residents of Good Samaritan Haven, the emergency shelter, to a COVID safe setting. Homeless community members living on the streets, camping or doubling up also required temporary safe shelter. Downstreet Housing, along with the state and other partners, identified a new location for homeless guests in area motels. In just two weeks, over 300 Vermonters were placed in safe shelter. Capstone immediately repurposed its Food Shelf and Community Kitchen Academy into a mass feeding operation. Partnering with local faith groups and the Salvation Army, Capstone prepared three daily meals for homeless guests which volunteers delivered to the motel sites. All told, the Capstone's regional response team provided over 25,000 meals to hungry Vermonters over the course of the pandemic stay at home orders.

While Vermont has set a national example for fewest cases of the virus, the partners have not ended their collaborative effort. The relationships forged continue to efficiently and effectively address the changing needs of their communities. Partners are committed to leverage the lessons of the pandemic into opportunities to develop better systems and services in the months to come.

Tags: Food, Housing



Capstone Community Action

20 Gable Place

Barre, VT 05641

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Bay Aging (BA) – VA



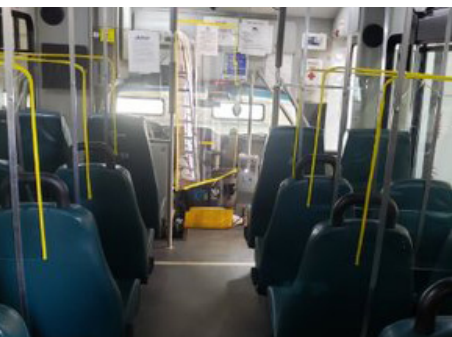
Bay Aging serves a ten-county area in the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula regions of Virginia. This rural region is considered “medically underserved” by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and many residents are extremely isolated. In addition to creating new programs to adapt to these unusual times, Bay Aging is also taking the time to advocate at a state policy level. President and Chief Executive Officer Kathy Vesley was recently appointed by the Governor to the Virginia Long-Term Care Task Force.²⁶ The panel of experts is tasked with solving the issue of what has been an increasing number of cases of COVID-19 across the state’s long-term care facilities. As the CEO of an area agency on aging in addition to being a Community Action Agency (CAA), Vesley brings particular expertise to the table as a voice for seniors with low-income and people living with disabilities.



Serving a population at high-risk for contracting COVID-19, Vesley and her team of dedicated staff have tailored their transportation, housing and home health care services to ensure safety remains a top priority. Bay Aging is the



public transportation provider for a ten-county service area, and continues to operate with several safety measures in place: checking staff temperatures before each shift; installing plexiglass between the driver and passengers; and limiting rides to a maximum of three passengers at a time. The agency also has suspended all fares so as to reduce staff-passenger interaction. Bay Aging’s home care aides place themselves at risk to provide care for people who wish to receive home care services. Vesley said, “the bond developed between the aides and their clients are far stronger than the virus. Our aides want to make sure their people continue to live as healthy as possible.”



These unprecedented times have also required unprecedented partnerships for many CAAs nationwide, including Bay Aging. Vesley and team saw the need for a healthy meal delivery service for seniors who were already home bound, or who now needed to follow the Governor’s stay-at-home order. Because Vesley believes the coronavirus is not only a human crisis, but also an economic crisis, Bay Aging established partnerships with 17 locally owned restaurants to provide nutritious, hot evening meals. The Helping Neighbors project, which began in mid-April, is now providing 1,756 meals to 910 at-risk seniors and others with multiple chronic diseases who are self-isolating. Bay Aging is utilizing several funding sources, including private donations, to fund the Helping Neighbors project. Bay Aging’s extraordinary team of 75 volunteers safely deliver the meals, along with any additional requests for grocery and prescription medicine deliveries.



Vesley’s sentiment rings true for many CAAs during these difficult times: “I am prouder than ever to be a part of the Community Action Network!”

Tags: Health, Food

Bay Aging

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Urbanna, VA 23175
(804) 758-2386
www.bayaging.org

²⁶ Virginia Department of Health, *Virginia COVID-19 Long-Term Care Task Force*, <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/health-professionals/virginia-long-term-care-task-force/> (last visited Dec. 8, 2020).

Hampton Roads Community Action Program (HRCAP) – VA



Hampton Roads Community Action Program (HRCAP) in Virginia offers 20 programs that reach students, parents and clients across the region. The agency's most recent community needs assessment revealed that the top concerns among customers includes greater access to dental, medical and vision care.²⁷ In Newport News and in Hampton City, the poverty rate hovers around 15 percent.

HRCAP has been a key leader in responding to the twin threats of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis. HRCAP already serves as the “backbone organization” for a collective impact approach to addressing the service coordination needs of 250 households in Newport News, Virginia. HRCAP has embraced the operational changes necessary to ensure these households and others are still being served. Customers can now complete a brief, online “universal” application for services. HRCAP and approximately thirty external partners can then quickly respond using HRCAP's EmpowOR database, corresponding online or over the phone with customers. Staff also discuss financial empowerment with interested families, to include credit scores. HRCAP has funding available to assist with consumer debt that may be keeping people from accessing credit.



In addition to improving the application process for customers and other service providers, HRCAP has also developed additional innovative strategies to serve the community. Outdoor, mobile showers are available for those individuals and families experiencing homelessness, many for the first time. For job seekers recently furloughed or receiving smaller paychecks due to COVID-19, HRCAP set up mobile work stations, to include desktop computers and free WIFI. A community partner donated the use of a bus while that organization is currently not operating. The HRCAP workforce development team is on hand to safely assist with a range of issues – including job applications, unemployment insurance applications, taxes and census forms. Local employers already partnering with HRCAP, including a shipyard apprenticeship program, have recently hired from this pool of candidates.



On top of all these efforts, HRCAP also employs a two-generation approach to working with 14 families in a more intensive way. Many of these families have children in Head Start/Early Head Start. Recently, the organization contracted with a Licensed Clinical Social Worker to provide virtual mental health sessions to this cohort. Parents participate in Peer Support Groups as well as individual counseling via Zoom. The group met once in person so far, in accordance with recommended safety protocols, to develop “vision boards” which display personal and professional goals. Such support has been critical during this period of physical distancing as parents cope with the related stressors. HRCAP is documenting the outcomes of these two-generation efforts and already has heard positive feedback from participants. Edith G. White, CEO of HRCAP shared, “HRCAP continues to adapt services to meet the immediate needs of the community in the wake of this public health crisis. We are grateful for strategic partners who help us to expand our footprint in the community and deploy essential services to our most vulnerable communities.”

Tags: Child Care, Health, Housing

²⁷ Hampton Roads Community Action Program, *Community Needs Assessment Report 2016*, Apr. 7, 2017, available at <https://3rup6y218p313qfb2vkowb9q-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Needs-Assessment-2016.pdf>

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Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council (CDCAC) – WA



Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council (CDCAC) serves Chelan and Douglas counties, which includes a mix of suburban and rural towns in Washington State. According to the agency's most recent community needs assessment, these two counties "continue to lag behind the state — as they have for decades — when it comes to income and wage levels, poverty rates, educational attainments, and health indicators." In 2017, over 16% of residents were living in poverty, versus 11% statewide.



CDCAC has shown how Community Action is open to new partnerships in order to meet the increased demand for services brought on by COVID-19. CDCAC was one of three organizations state-wide to respond to a state announcement that National Guard members could be deployed to assist as needed. Initially, ten guard members worked with the agency; however, now 31 members are assisting due to the nearly 100% increase in demand for food assistance. The National Guard has also brought trucks to assist with meal delivery. As of mid-May, food boxes totaled 1,800 per week.

CDCAC has also stepped forward to participate in a couple of food assistance pilot programs during this time. One included partnering with AMI, a company that previously provided meals to the airline industry. Another included working with Fresh Meals, a program offering fresh produce, dairy or meat. The agency could then supplement food boxes with the airline meals and/or perishable items.

Within 24 hours of the fall-out of the pandemic hitting their service area, CDCAC also completely flipped its food distribution process. Prior to March 17, 2020 the Food Distribution Center delivered various items to food pantries, allowing customers to come in to their facility and select items, filling their own bags and boxes. The change CDCAC implemented overnight in operation included: purchasing cardboard boxes, shifting staff from other departments to assist with food distribution, creating an assembly line to fill the boxes, filling boxes with food for individual households, setting up a drive-through pick-up service at food pantry locations, conducting traffic control, and training a team of staff members who had never been a part of the distribution process – all while ensuring new health and safety protocols were properly implemented. The agency stocks 12 food pantries throughout the rural two-county area, and provides home delivered food boxes to 300 seniors. The agency had to move its main food warehouse site to a larger space, offered free of charge by a local community event center.



As Executive Director Alan Walker explains, “we are not sure what next week will bring, certainly not next month...our attention is shifting from how to address an immediate need, to how to sustain and plan for the next two to three months, and beyond.”

Tag: Food

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Clark County Community Services (CCCS) – WA



Clark County Community Services serves a 650 square mile area of Southwest Washington. Approximately 10% of people who identify as white live at or below the federal poverty level in Clark County, compared with 22% who identify as black or African American, and 21% who identify as American Indian and Alaska Native.²⁸

Once COVID-19 came to the region, Clark County CAA saw the demand for unemployment insurance assistance increase more than ten-fold. This public CAA has contracted with a long-standing nonprofit partner, Clark County Volunteer Lawyers Program (CCVLP), to use CSBG CARES Act funding to hire an attorney specializing in employment law. Washington State is reflective of the national statistics in which more than 75% of low-income individuals never have the opportunity to speak with an attorney regarding legal concerns.

Funding for this employment law position will help meet the demand from the more than 25,000 community members who applied for unemployment benefits in April alone. Many had received confusing denial letters, or did not know the appeal process. A majority of these applicants had never before navigated the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system. The attorney is also addressing concerns from residents who do not have the luxury of working from home, but want to ensure they and their family remain safe if and when they return to the workplace. CCVLP is helping clients negotiate with their employers on safe return-to-work protocols.

CCVLP historically has had two volunteer attorneys working on employment issues, who typically see 2-4 clients per month. Having a full-time attorney will allow for full representation of up to 20 clients per month, along with another 350 clients who may receive limited representation or advice.

While the majority of clients and residents in the county are white, Clark County Community Services and CCVLP are being intentional about meeting the legal needs of the disproportionate number of community members of color impacted by COVID-19.

Tags: Financial Empowerment



²⁸ Clark County Community Services, Community Action, Housing and Development Unit, *Community Needs Assessment Report* 2017, Nov., 2017, available at https://www.clark.wa.gov/sites/default/files/dept/files/community-services/Community%20Action/7383Community_Needs_Assessment_Report_web.pdf

Clark County Community Services.

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Opportunity Council (OC) – WA



The Bellingham, Washington community was facing a child care shortage before COVID-19 and the pandemic brought increased risks of losing some child care businesses. As people became unemployed, enrollment at childcare centers decreased, some by 75% or more. The decrease in revenue, plus the expense of health and safety requirements for social distancing and increased staff to child ratios made it impossible for many childcare centers to remain open. In partnership with the Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce, North Sound Accountable Communities of Health, Mount Baker Foundation, Chuckanut Health Foundation, Whatcom Community Foundation and United Way, the Opportunity Council provided stabilization and re-opening mini-grants to retain child care services needed to support essential workers and other returning workers. Said one provider: “Received funds today...I am so appreciative for the financial support during these unprecedented times. This helps my program continue to provide childcare for essential workers. Thank You, Thank You, Thank You!”

Tag: Child Care, Financial Empowerment, Health

Opportunity Council

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Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP) – WI



The Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP) is a statewide voice for Community Action Agencies and people struggling with poverty. The Asset Limited, Income Constrained and Employed (ALICE) report for Wisconsin shows that 42% of residents are not earning enough to make ends meet. WISCAP advocates on behalf of their member organizations “to help people and communities become economically secure.”



As in much of the U.S., the housing crisis in Wisconsin was looming prior to COVID-19, and is even more pronounced today. A public-private partnership in Wisconsin shows how Community Action Agencies are local, trusted entities in communities. Governor Evers of Wisconsin selected WISCAP and its members to distribute \$25 million in CARES Act rental assistance funding. WISCAP Executive Director Brad Paul made sure to inform the Governor’s office about the myriad of benefits to working with the Community Action network. In most states, benefits include: full geographic coverage; coordinated service delivery across areas of need; and that most local agencies already offer some type of housing program.

In just about two weeks’ time, WISCAP and its 16-member Community Action Agencies (CAAs) learned about the influx of funding for the Wisconsin Rental Assistance Program (WRAP), and began disbursing it to eligible households. The Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) is contracting with the 16 local agencies directly. The local agency conducts intake, eligibility determination, and finalizes a vendor agreement with the landlord. The state office then uses the agreement to cut a check directly to the landlord.

With program funding available, it is hoped WRAP will reach from 10,000–15,000 households, with an average of \$1500 in assistance. Wait lists are long. Even the smaller Wisconsin agencies are receiving 600–700 applications per week. Those facing imminent eviction are being prioritized.

As Paul shares, “WISCAP appreciates the confidence in the network shown by the Governor’s office, and this is a time for community action to demonstrate its great importance to our communities.”

Tag: Housing

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