



COMMUNITY ACTION

Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency adapts to meet local needs

DECEMBER 15, 2013 6:00 AM • [LAURIE PICCOLO | SPECIAL TO THE CITIZEN](#)

Next year marks the 50th anniversary of President Lyndon Johnson's declaration of the War on Poverty and passage of the movement's signature legislation that authorized formation of local Community Action Agencies. In partnership with our umbrella organization, New York State Community Action Agency, we are planning many activities throughout the year to commemorate this milestone and to raise local awareness about the ever-changing face of poverty. As we look forward to next year, we should take time to reflect on this year's agency highlights — many of which are in response to shifting local needs.

Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency Inc. is playing a key part in the roll-out of the new federally mandated health care system. The agency was awarded a five-year contract with the New York State Department of Health to provide navigator services in Cayuga and Seneca counties in partnership with our subcontractor, the Cayuga County Chamber of Commerce. Family Development and Seneca Programs staff are helping families and individuals, and chamber staff are helping small businesses and their employees to access quality affordable care through the New York State of Health marketplace. Together, CSCAA and the chamber have worked through many technical, contractual and regulatory questions to help our community's uninsured and under-insured access affordable health care, regardless of income or health status.

Another recent federal change with significant local and agency implications was de-funding the furnace replacement and repair component of the Home Energy Assistance Program. Our community's low-income homeowners were hard hit by the loss of funding. CSCAA's Energy Services Department rallied to respond to this newly created urgent local need, shifting funding and priorities to avert crises among impacted homeowners, including many senior citizens and families with young children. The agency is providing one of few options locally to lessen the impact of lost funding.

In the wake of uncertain funding, Domestic Violence Services staff organized the department's first dedicated fundraiser. The Purple Tie Event was attended by hundreds of people and helped raise thousands of dollars for domestic violence services in Cayuga County. Over the summer, and after a year-long planning process, CSCAA's Supervised Visitation/Safe Exchange Center opened at 146 North St. in Auburn, expanding services to victims of domestic violence. The center provides a secure, welcoming environment where court-ordered or self-referred parents can exercise visitation or safe exchange of their children with a formerly abusive partner.

In early fall, CSCAA was approached by The Citizen and the Auburn Rotary Club to partner on Warm the Children, an annual program providing new winter clothing to Cayuga County children

in need. The Citizen provides marketing and the Rotary Clubs of Cayuga County provide fundraising for Warm the Children; 100 percent of funds go directly to the children. Through the agency's Head Start program, staff handled intake of more than 500 applications and coordinated shopping trips for 185 children and their families to purchase new winter coats, boots, gloves, hats and other clothing.

Most recently, CSCAA's Healthy Families Cayuga/Seneca program obtained approval from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services to expand its services into Moravia and Locke, an under-served area. Healthy Families Cayuga/Seneca is a nationally accredited free, voluntary home visiting program that provides support and information to new and expecting parents of all ages.

In Seneca County, CSCAA is one step closer to opening the county's first homeless shelter for women. With the help of a \$250,000 gift from Generations Bank, the agency recently purchased and is currently renovating 23 Center St. in Waterloo, a former convent that serves as the agency's Seneca programs office. The building's upper floor will offer five furnished single bedrooms equipped with individual closets and bathrooms, a large community room and a kitchen to serve residents. The Rotary Club of Waterloo donated furnishings for all five bedrooms. The shelter will be operational in 2014 and provide emergency housing and case management services to homeless women.

These milestones highlight ways CSCAA is adapting to meet local needs. One of the most exciting changes is the recent sale of our administrative offices at 65 State St. and pending consolidation of five components under one roof! This longstanding goal of the agency will soon be realized, as we prepare to relocate administration, Family Development, Domestic Violence Services, Energy Services and Healthy Families to a new facility on York Street early next year. The move will enhance delivery of services to our customers, expand opportunity for internal collaboration, and position the agency to more quickly respond to the ever-changing needs of our community.