

**COMMUNITY ACTION**

How action is taken against poverty in Cayuga County

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Cayuga Seneca Community Action Agency, along with more than 1,000 Community Action Agencies nationwide will be celebrating Community Action Awareness Month this May. The history of community action took root in the 1960s as a direct result of President Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty, an anti-poverty initiative that sought to provide low-income families and individuals with the tools needed to develop self-determination, self-dignity and self-sufficiency.

CAAs across the country have continued to exist and thrive for more than 45 years due to like-minded leadership encompassing shared values and a connectedness of mission that is the backbone of this unique organization. The CAA philosophy is that, as a society, we all bear responsibility for helping people overcome challenges that bar the doors to self-sufficiency. CAAs remain committed to this day to the principle that local communities can best decide how to meet the needs of their citizens and, most importantly, that low-income citizens are afforded the opportunity to actively participate in determining the programs and policies best suited to foster self-sufficiency and financial stability.

Since the 1960s, CAAs have provided low-income families and individuals with access to a wide variety of programs designed to alleviate the destabilizing effects of poverty. These programs pave the way for positive change in the lives of countless members of our communities. Many are designed to intervene with specific issues or target populations, such as youth, the elderly, veterans or those with disabilities, while others are preventative programs designed to serve all customers, such as asset development, financial literacy, domestic violence, weatherization and homeless intervention. CAAs recognize that in order for customers to achieve and sustain self-sufficiency, immediate needs such as food, shelter and safety must be met prior to the development of a more comprehensive and strategic approach to personal goals. Staff is readily available to meet with customers, develop an action plan to address the immediate crisis, advocate on customers' behalf, and ultimately move forward with a holistic plan to work toward individual self-sufficiency goals.

The national network of CAAs is funded in part by the Community Services Block Grant administered by the federal government. CSBG funds are used by CAAs to address the unique needs of their communities. Funds support programs such as food pantries, case management, transportation services and emergency services for customers in crisis. CSBG also allows agencies to build the necessary infrastructure to maintain and develop additional programming to address new challenges within the community. Other CAA funding comes from numerous sources, including state, local, foundation and private dollars, many of which are program-specific.

CSCAA would not be successful without its dedicated and seemingly tireless staff that routinely goes above and beyond to assist customers in meeting their needs. Case managers, home visitors, support workers, emergency advocates, teachers and volunteers all work in tandem across agency programs to ensure that the services offered by CSCAA are accessible to all customers. In addition, all agency programs work closely with municipal and community organizations such as local school districts, the Cayuga County Department of Health and Human Services, mental health providers and many others to ensure that customers receive the necessary services to alleviate crises and build the foundation needed for stability.

CSCAA currently administers programs that address a wide variety of need across the community and include Head Start and Early Head Start, Healthy Families, Weatherization, Domestic Violence Services, Emergency Services, Homeless Intervention, Supportive Housing Program for Young Adults, Seneca Programs, Food Pantry and Free Clothing. Forty-seven years later, CSCAA continues to develop new programming to meet the ever-changing needs of our customers in Cayuga and Seneca counties, and works to ensure that all members of our community have the resources necessary to achieve and sustain self-sufficiency.