



COMMUNITY ACTION

Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency: How our programs can strengthen families



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Earlier this month, 16 families graduated from Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency's Healthy Families Program. These families have focused for at least three years on supporting the development of their children. Often, interaction with service providers is short-term; however, CSCAA's Healthy Families Program builds relationships with parents for extended periods of time. Staff often partner with parents prior to the birth of their child and develop long-term relationships that explore both the joys and challenges that parenting brings. The rewards of parenting with intention and dedication are long-lasting and felt throughout our community.

In this same spirit, CSCAA offers numerous other programs and services that help strengthen and support families. The agency currently employs five certified lactation

counselors through its Healthy Families and Head Start programs. All are available to encourage and support the needs of breastfeeding families in Cayuga and Seneca counties. Healthy Families operates a breastfeeding support group open to all pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. The group meets at Westminster Presbyterian Church, 17 William St., Auburn, at 1 p.m. the first and third Monday of every month, and at the CSCAA Seneca Programs Office, 23 Center St. in Waterloo, at 10:30 a.m. the second and fourth Monday of every month. Healthy Families will partner with Head Start in the coming months to establish a breastfeeding support group at the Head Start Center, located at 1 Brookfield Place in Auburn.

Early Head Start, Head Start and Universal Prekindergarten continue to actively recruit families for fall enrollment (please call [315] 252-0038 for more information). These programs provide a holistic approach to early childhood education, focusing on child health, nutrition, education and parental engagement at multiple sites throughout Cayuga County. A new Head Start/UPK classroom will operate this year at Seward Elementary School. The agency will also launch the Head Start Backpack Program at its Head Start program on Brookfield Place in Auburn. This program will provide enrolled children with nutritious food

on the weekend, during the third week of each month, when other household resources have dwindled. The Backpack Program has received generous support from Excellus BlueCross BlueShield, Cayuga Community Fund and the Kiwanis Club of Auburn.

The agency's Domestic Violence Services department is also expanding family services. A dedicated victim assistance/court advocate is now on staff to help victims of domestic violence navigate within the legal system. This includes helping victims obtain legal representation and prepare family court petitions. The victim assistance/court advocate also provides accompaniment to court appearances and facilitates referrals to the agency's Supervised Visitation/Safe Exchange Center. A domestic violence/Child Protective Services advocate position is underway, working in collaboration with the Cayuga County Human Services Department to serve families in Cayuga County with an open child protective case that are also affected by domestic violence.

During times of crisis, individuals and families in Cayuga and Seneca counties may seek emergency help, including food and housing assistance through CSCAA. Seneca programs has recently launched an Emergency Baby Pantry, providing income-eligible residents of Seneca County with diapers, formula, wipes, diaper cream, car seats, clothing and blankets monthly. The Emergency Baby Pantry received seed funding through the Greater Rochester Health Foundation. CSCAA also launched an Emergency Personal Care Bank for women at 89 York St. in Auburn. The bank received seed funding and donations of diapers, baby wipes, feminine products, toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, deodorant and hairbrushes through the Zonta Club of Auburn. The agency operates a Car Seat Program in Cayuga and Seneca counties, providing free car seats and installation to income-eligible families. Car seat clinics are held in partnership with county sheriff's offices and provide safety checks and installation assistance.

With colder weather on the way, CSCAA applied for and was recently selected to process Home Energy Assistance Program applications on behalf of the Cayuga County Human Services Department. The energy burden of people in poverty can be as high as 40 percent of household income; HEAP provides a critical resource to help those families and individuals heat their homes during the winter. CSCAA will provide coordinated services to eligible HEAP participants through its weatherization and EmPower programs, which fund energy audits and installation of energy conservation measures within income-eligible households. In-house coordination of services will address immediate needs, reduce energy consumption and costs over the long-term, and help move people in poverty toward self-sufficiency.