



COMMUNITY ACTION

Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency: Homelessness remains a serious concern here



FEBRUARY 08, 2015 6:15 AM • [SARAH BARNARD](#) |
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For 50 years, the Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency has taken a lead role in examining and addressing conditions that affect the lives of people in poverty, including the availability and accessibility of quality affordable housing in the community. In 1969, the Cayuga County Planning Board completed a study that identified a very serious problem in the area of housing. In response, CSCAA established a housing coordinator position to work on this issue.

The agency secured funding in 1971 to develop a housing program for Cayuga County. Over the next five years, CSCAA provided the support necessary to nurture growth of this program. Funds were secured to hire more staff to undertake low-income housing rehabilitation and weatherization projects, landlord/tenant conflict resolution, rental referrals and housing location assistance, credit and budget counseling, home ownership counseling, packaging of farmers home loans and advocacy, down payment and closing cost assistance, funds for homeowners to take a plumbing course at BOCES, and emergency housing assistance. The agency employed Unity House clients, summer youth and work release inmates to serve as crew on rehab projects.

In July 1975, the housing program spun off from CSCAA as a separate nonprofit with its own board of directors, and continues to operate today as one of our partner agencies, Cayuga County Homsite Development Corp. The weatherization program continues to operate under CSCAA's umbrella as a core program.

The agency secured funding to open the first and only battered women's shelter in 1980. In 1992, the agency opened a homeless transitional shelter. CSCAA was one of over a dozen founding members of the Auburn-Cayuga County Homeless Task Force in the early 2000s and continues to participate in community-wide efforts to end homelessness through this body.

CSCAA has played and continues to play an integral role in addressing the needs of the community's homeless and housing vulnerable population. The agency currently provides emergency assistance in the form of rental, security deposit and utility payments to help homeless and housing vulnerable residents in both Cayuga and Seneca counties; homeless case management and housing to chronically homeless

individuals; emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence; case management and transitional housing for victims of domestic violence and homeless youth, weatherization assistance, and emergency home repair assistance to senior homeowners. We are in the process of establishing the first emergency shelter in Seneca County.

Homelessness continues to be a serious problem in Cayuga County, and one that CSCAA and our community partners are actively working to solve. Homelessness affects families in so many ways, and the problem of homelessness needs to be looked at as more than just finding housing for families; many of these families require ongoing supports. According to the National Center on Family Homelessness, children are greatly affected by homelessness; 74 percent worry that they will have no place to live, 58 percent worry they will have no place to sleep and 87 percent worry something bad may happen to their family. These statistics are indicative of the most devastating problem of homelessness — children who have to carry these burdens around with them through no fault of their own. Our agency feels very strongly that it is our job as human services providers, and frankly as human beings, to address the issue of homelessness and alleviate this stress from our most vulnerable citizens: children.

We have a responsibility as community members to look out for our fellow citizens and to do everything we can to make sure that no adult or child in this county has to worry about where they will lay their head at night. Additionally, we have a responsibility to ensure that they are provided with all the supports needed to rebuild their lives. Staff at CSCAA work every day with the support of our community partners to try to alleviate the complex problems of homelessness through our various programs.

While the programs CSCAA and our partner agencies have developed have been able to alleviate some of the problem, people present every day to our agency who are in desperate need of a safe, warm place to stay for them and their children. CSCAA is committed to continuing to work to fill these gaps. The reality is homelessness still exists in Cayuga County and there is still a lot of work to be done, but the agency is committed to continuing to work to solve this problem and provide the necessary supports to those who need us the most.