

*January
2009
Newsletter*



Arizona Community Action Association
Advocating, Educating and Partnering to Prevent and Alleviate Poverty

Highlights!

- City of Phoenix Utility Disconnect Project
- Earned Income Tax Credit outreach
- Guardianship Workshop

Save the Date!

ACAA Annual Conference
May 14-15th, 2009
Phoenix Airport Hilton

Message From the Director

From all of us at ACAA, thank you for all the work you have done over the past year to help low-income families improve their lives and become self-sufficient.

We have recently welcomed a new President, one who is sharing the message of hope, change and belief that working together we can make a difference. The message resonates at this time as so many of us struggle to maintain our basic quality of life and sustain our basic needs, being required to make difficult choices for ourselves and families. It is time when reconnection to community and our neighbors is so important.

As we are all aware, 2009 holds many challenges and opportunities for the social human service community. As we enter this year, ACAA is moving forward with our "Changing Face of Poverty" campaign, as well as our community based Strategic Crisis Solutions work. The "Changing Face of Poverty" campaign has as its goals: increasing awareness about the impact of the economy on our communities and the impossible choices families are forced to make, and to provide an opportunity and call to action for members of our community to help one another as the crisis in our County and our State continues.

The four sub-committees created as part of this effort are working to: develop tools and processes to serve families in need of assistance by increase resources available to help; to better track and communicate what resources are available; to develop and share tools for how community members may engage; and how to best communicate the issue and need. The sub-committees are Direct Care/Navigator, Donations, Data and Messaging. The next meeting of the full group will take place on February 17th at 1:00pm. If you would like to become engaged or learn more please let us know.

Opportunities also abound as we develop new community partnerships, work with a new State administration lead by Governor Jan Brewer and her team, and as we look to ways to improve service delivery and systems in Arizona.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cynthia".

Cynthia Zwick
Executive Director

ACAA Annual Conference - Save the Date!

The ACAA Annual Conference will be held May 14-15 at the Phoenix Airport Hilton. The conference

will cover topics about personal wellness and office safety, renewable energy and best practices for advocating at the state and federal level. The conference will also feature speakers to address the economic conditions and how these affect the low income community. Please look for conference registration and program information included in our next newsletter.

This event is made possible in part by our sponsors: Southwest Gas, Arizona Public Service, Salt River Project and UniSource Energy Services/Tucson Electric Power. A silent auction and raffle will take place during the conference to raise donations for our partnering organizations.

If you are interested in being a sponsor or supporting the raffle or silent auction, please contact ACAA at 602-604-0640.

Spotlight: City of Phoenix Utility Disconnect Project

Utility disconnects are not only costly for the customer, the utility company and other rate payers, they also present health and safety issues including heat stress, heat exhaustion and even death. Customers often find an already troublesome situation is worsened by the additional charges associated with a utility disconnection.

In March 2006, the Human Services Commission formed a committee to explore options to potentially improve the effectiveness of the City of Phoenix's Human Services Department (HSD) response to utility disconnections, especially for the low-income residents. As a result, a pilot program was developed to target an area with a high disconnect rate to provide energy education, weatherization, utility assistance and case management services, with the goal of reducing the disconnection rate. The 85032 zip code area was targeted because a point-in-time study by HSD, using data provided by the local utility companies, indicated that zip code area had the highest disconnect rate in the city.

HSD staff also met with Neighborhood Services Department staff, along with representatives from Arizona Public Service (APS), and the Foundation for Senior Living (FSL), which identified more than 20 existing programs and services which could be bundled to provide comprehensive energy education and/or weatherization services to clients through a single point-of-contact provided by HSD caseworkers.

Energy audits were completed on all 20 owner occupied homes. As a result of the audits, water heaters, stoves, refrigerators and HVAC were repaired and replaced. The work on the homes also included installation of sunscreens, compact fluorescent light bulbs, and insulation among many of the other services. The affects of these services will studied for the next 18 to 24 months to ascertain the effectiveness of a coordinated, multi-agency effort in terms of disconnect prevention and general health and safety concerns for vulnerable populations. In addition, the team will be analyzing the energy usage of the 20 owner occupied homes receiving services in comparison to households who did not receive the multiple services.

The second program component was to provide comprehensive energy education to as many residents in the 85032 zip code area as possible. The team held a kick off event for the program at the Paradise Mobile Home Park, were residents received compact fluorescent light bulbs, water saving devices, DVDs and other literature in addition to energy education presentations. Staff continues to present the energy education curriculum to groups within the 85023 zip code.

Earned Income Tax Credit and Tax Preparation

ACAA is working to increase enrollment for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for Arizona residents, especially to rural and Native American communities. January 30th is also EITC National Awareness Day, so spread the word.

EITC is an easy way to bring income to low income families that need it the most. Families that earned less than \$41,646 in 2008 may be eligible to receive a tax credit. Families can also have their taxes prepared for free, participate in financial literacy and asset building activities. Tax

preparation sites will be opening in late January. To find a VITA and EITC tax preparation site in your area and information on eligibility visit: <http://www.cir.org/seasonal-tax.html> or contact Community Information & Referral at 1-800-352-3792 or 602-263-8856.

Sponsorship Recognition: Southwest Gas Corporation



ACAA and its members thank Southwest Gas Corporation for their generous contribution to the Home Energy Assistance Fund. Southwest Gas Corporation has provided for the hosting fees of the Fund's online donation page for two years. This page will allow the Fund to receive donations online, and generate online marketing campaigns. Support from Southwest Gas is greatly appreciated and will be valuable in making an impact in the community.

Salt River Project Announces Energy Assistance Program

The Salt River Project (SRP) has committed to supporting the Home Energy Assistance Fund of ACAA by funding an energy assistance program. The energy assistance will be administered by the Community Action Agencies throughout the SRP territory. The partnership and funding with SRP is invaluable to the Fund and by their low income customers.

Low Income Energy Assistance Program Increases Funding

The Federal Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) has received funding at the appropriated level authorized by the U.S. Congress which has brought a significant increase in funding to Arizona for 2009. Arizona will receive \$31 million for energy assistance which includes bill assistance and weatherization components compared to \$8.1 million in 2008. The increase in funding will provide relief for many additional households struggling to meet their energy needs, although available still exceeds the need.

Message from the DES Hunger Advisory Council: Childhood Hunger is Unacceptable In Arizona

Every day in Arizona, approximately 1 in 5 children suffer from hunger or food insecurity. Access to regular meals and proper nutrition has been linked to improved school performance and better health outcomes for children.

To address this issue, Department of Economic Security Hunger Advisory Council has formed the Arizona Partnership to End Childhood Hunger.

Community Ownership and action are essential to solving the issue of childhood hunger. Community leadership and commitment is the driving force to ending childhood hunger. The partnership was created to develop strategies, working models and tools to support communities in this endeavor and to promote awareness and the opportunity for communities to prioritize and take action to solve issues related to childhood hunger.

The Partnership's vision is that *every child in Arizona will have access to the nutritious food the need to learn, grow, and thrive in their families, at school and throughout their communities.*

As part of your local community, you too can become involved in the Partnership. To learn more about the Arizona Partnership to End Childhood Hunger, please visit the new website www.EndChildHunderAZ.org. Each of us must take action to ensure everyone has enough to eat

and a safe place to call home.

Attention KidsCare and AHCCCS supporters!

The US House passed a SCHIP bill that will move to the Senate for consideration. The bill, if it becomes a law will provide an extension of the current program with some expansion provisions.

The majority of the AZ Legislature is considering eliminating KidsCare even though it creates \$3 from the Federal Government for each \$1 of State funds. If you would like more information, visit www.azchildren.org or www.pafcocoalition.org. You may also contact Karen McLaughlin, Director of Budget and Research at (602) 266-0707 ext. 207 or kmchlaughlin@azchildren.org with questions or comments.

Guardianship Workshop

Having custody of the children you are caring for could open many doors for you and for them, like being able to take them to the doctor, enrolling them in school and getting cash assistance.

Come get assistance directly from an attorney or paralegal who will explain the guardianship process and help you fill out the forms for FREE!

Location and Time

Golden Gate Community Center
1625 N 39th Ave, Phoenix, AZ 85009
February 20th, 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm

This workshop is for families that are raising their relatives children. If you are interested in attending this workshop of for a calendar of workshop times you must contact Sarah Gonzalez at 602-233-0017 ext 42.

K.A.R.E Kinship Support Group

Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles and anybody that is raising a child born to others, are invited to come share their wisdom, experience and concerns. This is a monthly opportunity in a relaxed environment, for kinship families to find support with others who share similar experiences. Situations may differ but family needs are the same. Come meet other kinship families and enjoy a nice meal with us.

Meetings are on the third Saturday of every month. Next meeting is on February 21st at 10:00am.

Location:
Golden Gate Community Center
1625 N 39th Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85009
(McDowell & 39th Ave)

Please RSVP to Sarah Gonzalez at 602-233-0017 ext. 42. Childcare will be available.

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