



# Arizona Community Action Association

Advocating, Educating and Partnering to Prevent and Alleviate Poverty

December 2011

## Arizona Community Action Association Newsletter

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### Letter from the Director

Happy Holidays!

We are providing you with a look at our collective annual achievements for the past year and a peek into what we anticipate for next year. As an association, we plan to continue working toward our vision of ending poverty through activities focusing on Advocacy/Education/Public Policy and Practice Changes, Civic Engagement and specific high impact programs and services. To continue our success we need your help by volunteering on one of our committees (please see the sidebar) and if you are able, supporting our work with a [financial investment](#).

We still have a great deal to do, and with your help we will continue succeeding by helping vulnerable Arizonans achieve their goals and live a life of prosperity.

Thank you for all you do, and thank you for your continued support throughout 2012.

Cynthia

### Keep Up With ACAA

[Find us on Facebook](#)

[Visit our Website](#)

[Follow us on Twitter](#)

### Want to Help ACAA Work to End Poverty in Arizona?

Our committees are a vital component to the work we do, but we need your help to make them successful. Below is a list of our standing committees. We invite you to join a committee and get

### 2011: A Year in Review

The past year posed increasing challenges for the Arizona Community Action Association and Community Action Agencies across the state, but did not diminish the passion, drive and commitment to address and respond to them by staff, volunteers and board members.

The severity of the ongoing economic downturn was reflected primarily by an escalating rise in the number of individuals and families seeking assistance and the concurrent decrease in funding allocations - both in government funding and personal contributions - to programs and services.

To respond to and address the growing need in communities throughout Arizona, ACAA implemented tactics based on a targeted strategy to generate the highest possible impact across the broadest possible spectrum. In this month's newsletter, we will highlight some of our program areas. We invite you to share your thoughts with us about any of these programs by emailing us at [info@azcaa.org](mailto:info@azcaa.org).

involved from the ground up:

- ~ Advocacy
- ~ Annual Conference
- ~ Asset Development
- ~ Energy & Environment
- ~ Fundraising/Fund Development
- ~ Membership
- ~ Nominating

For more information about these committees or to volunteer, please contact us [via email](#) or call us at 602-604-0640.

## **SAVE THE DATE for the 2012 ACAA ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

**May 9 - 11, 2011**

Featuring Sessions On:

*Advocacy  
Asset Development  
Employment  
Fundraising & Sustainability  
Innovation & Renewal  
Energy & Weatherization*

More information to come!

## **Support Our Work. Donate.**

Our mission of preventing and alleviating poverty throughout Arizona is perhaps more relevant now than ever before in our history. We cannot do the work we do without our Board, members, and partners and your financial support. Please consider donating to ACAA at the link below.

[Donate here.](#)

**Donate A New Toy and**

## **Energy Assistance**

Launched in 2007 with a \$1 million budget, the Home Energy Assistance Fund (The Fund) helped 238 households in the first year. During the past 4 years 18,640 families have been served and the Fund increased its budget to \$6 million. Arizona is the first state in the country to have a warm-weather fuel fund, and a large majority of dollars coming into The Fund come directly from partnerships with utility companies statewide and the release of unclaimed deposits. ACAA has expanded the locations and numbers of partners statewide making desperately needed assistance available in all 15 Arizona counties. Thanks to the impressive growth of The Fund, ACAA added the first low-income water bill assistance program through Global Water, providing bill assistance to customers in need.

## **Awareness and Community Engagement**

ACAA continues to focus on public awareness and community engagement in every facet of our work. In 2010, we held a one-day Annual Membership Meeting and Training, which drew DES Director Clarence Carter, Boys & Girls Club National Youth of the Year Mona Dixon, and over 200 attendees.

We collaborate with utility company staff to raise awareness about issues faced by low-income customers and to sustain and enhance bill assistance and weatherization programs and funding. ACAA also continues advocating for discount rates at all major utility companies for income-eligible customers.

Building on a series of forums in 2010 that identified successful strategies to move from poverty to self sufficiency, ACAA continued traveling the state to hear first-hand from struggling individuals and families. The goal of the 2011 forums was to help families find their voice in speaking out about the support they need to succeed and the priorities they have for their communities.

ACAA also hosted the Arizona Assets Alliance, a statewide collaboration focused on increasing access to the Earned Income Tax Credit, financial education and participation in Individual Development Accounts.

ACAA's Changing Face of Poverty Initiative brought ongoing awareness to poverty issues and the growing number of families finding themselves in poverty for the first time in their lives.

More and more broadcast and print media relied on ACAA as a resource and a direct provider of information and compelling stories through articles featuring our programs and staff. Coverage extended beyond Arizona communities to worldwide productions and online reporting.

To complement those efforts, ACAA maintained a substantive social media presence, communicating via Facebook, Twitter and the Food Stamp Challenge blog.

Two videos produced this year told the Community Action and Weatherization stories, which increased awareness about ACAA and the critical and successful CAA programs statewide. You can view our Community Action Works in Arizona [video here](#) and our Weatherization [video here](#).

## Receive Free Document Shredding Services

Arizona Center for the Blind Document Destruction (ACFTB) and Arizona Pacific Pulp and Paper (APPP) are offering free document shredding services through December 19th with your donation of a new toy. Toys will be provided to sick children at St. Joseph's Hospital in Phoenix, to help replace [toys stolen from the facility](#) in late November.

For more information, please contact ACFTB at 602-267-8740 or APPP at 602-220-9200.

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

## Nutrition Assistance Outreach and Partnerships

ACAA became the lead agency for the Nutrition Assistance Partnership Network, initiating partnerships with 9 agencies. The work of ACAA and our partners contributed to the addition of nearly 16,000 eligible households to the program.

ACAA also hosted our SNAP Experience, inviting staff, Board, members, and community partners to experience 7 consecutive days with a food budget equal to that of the average SNAP benefit in Arizona. This year's Experience included a unique component that asked participants to try to follow the budget guidelines while also formulating a weekly meal plan conforming to the USDA's new MyPlate recommendations. The Experience was documented on [our blog](#), covered by [Channel 3 News](#), and drew national attention from groups such as the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC).

## High Impact Strategies

ACAA's focus on high impact strategies was multi-faceted. ACAA staff worked both internally and in collaboration with CAPs statewide to evaluate the impact of our programs and identify potential ways to make changes or improvements to the methods we use to provide services.

In the fall of 2010, ACAA was selected to host a Congressional Emerson Hunger Fellow to help identify barriers to Hispanic/Latino families enrolling in SNAP and other nutrition assistance programs and to develop recommendations for improvement and innovations at the community level. In spring of 2011 the Congressional Hunger Center encouraged ACAA to apply for a second Fellow to expand upon the work done in the first year. Our current Fellow, Sarah Bagge, joined our office in September to spend 5 months working within the community to help identify barriers and opportunities in the Phoenix Metro area.

ACAA developed and implemented a case management pilot to better assist clients and ensure and monitor progress toward achieving high impacts in communities. The pilot was designed to work intensively with individuals and families to set and achieve goals to facilitate their move out of poverty. Results are still being compiled but many participants are actively working towards their goals.

During 2010-11, ACAA also identified a new case and data management software system to better collect, track and analyze family and agency outcomes. This system was implemented in all 11 Community Action Agencies to provide invaluable information to the network about individual and community needs moving forward.

## Weatherization

Through an ARRA grant, ACAA promoted Weatherization services throughout Arizona and organized a peer-to-peer forum for weatherization providers to meet, identify and share best practices. CAP offices statewide offer Weatherization Assistance to eligible households. Through the Weatherization Program, energy-efficient measures installed in 6,052 homes of low-income individuals and families increased energy efficiency, reduced fuel use and energy costs, and created safer, healthier and more comfortable homes.

Weatherization has saved Arizona homeowners approximately \$1.6 million, reduced energy use by more than 15 million kilowatt hours and created more than 140 new jobs.

More than \$40 million of Arizona's total \$60 million weatherization allotment has been invested in projects implemented by Community Action Programs statewide in partnership with the Governor's Office of Energy Policy and utility companies.

Our [Weatherization website](#) features information about the program and eligibility, success stories, and our [Weatherization video](#).

## **Community Action Program Highlights**

City of Phoenix: Seven major campaigns have been successfully carried out by a coalition of more than 80 private and public entities that have joined efforts in promoting awareness and utilization of the EITC program by low and moderate income Phoenix residents. In the course of eight city of Phoenix Earned Income Tax Credit campaigns, almost 51,900 low and moderate income Phoenix families received over \$57.7 million in federal refunds at free tax preparation sites. This year's campaign was the most successful since the inception in 2003. Over 5,700 households received \$9.1 million in tax refunds. The returns were prepared at 21 City of Phoenix Volunteer Income Tax Assistant (VITA) sites.

Gila County Community Services: The final numbers are in, and Gila County assisted ninety three households with ARRA Weatherization. In addition to ARRA dollars, there are several CDBG Owner Occupied Housing Rehabilitation Contracts in place. They also were able to complete three homes with 5KW solar panels systems, providing utility savings of over eighty percent (80%) from the previous years, and installed solar hot water heating systems in seven households in conjunction with CDBG Housing Rehab.

NACOG (Northern Arizona Council of Governments): <http://www.heatsmart.net/>). Partnering with Weatherization and Area Agency on Aging within NACOG and North Country Health Care in Holbrook, White Mountain Catholic Charities in Show Low, New Hope Ranch in St. Johns, and Old Concho Community Assistance Center in Concho to distribute wool blankets to eligible families. We purchased 500 wool blankets to distribute to families at or below 125% of the FPL, and have distributed 25 blankets to eligible families so far.

WACOG: Western Arizona Council of Governments: WACOG celebrated its 40 year anniversary this year. For 40 years WACOG has addressed problems and challenges of mutual interest and concern to the communities it serves. With state and federal funding, and through partnerships with community organizations in western Arizona, the agency provides vital programs to the most vulnerable populations, such as Head Start children and their families.

## **Looking Ahead to 2012 and Beyond**

Although poised to make the most of the progress we experienced this past year - and committed to ensuring that programs and services remain viable, accessible and effective - we are also preparing for additional cuts in Federal funding to Community Service Block Grants and programs including the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Weatherization.

We are working locally and nationally to engage with and expand our network of advocates. We intend to deepen the relationships by providing better tools and messages for advocates to use in addressing the needs and issues faced by individuals and families on the edge of or experiencing poverty.

Our goals cannot be achieved without broad community partnerships and participation and new collaborations outside what have historically been considered traditional targeted audiences.

We are driven, encouraged and gratified by the focus of our staff, volunteers and board. We also recognize the daunting challenges in front of us, but remain committed to identifying, developing and implementing solutions to mitigate and ultimately eliminate poverty in our state and in our nation.