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Winter 2010 Newsletter



Arizona Community Action Association

Advocating, Educating and Partnering to Prevent and Alleviate Poverty

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Letter from the Director

Thanksgiving is upon us, and we all have a great deal to be thankful for, and know many who continue to need our assistance and support as they re-establish themselves financially. I am grateful to each of you for the work you do every day to build a strong Arizona and serve families needing a hand up.

The results of the state and national elections are in, and to say that there was a significant shift in party representation is an understatement.

The Arizona state budget is a serious problem with huge deficits to be eliminated, the unemployment rate remains very high and the number of families seeking assistance continues to climb. While all of this seems pretty bleak, now is the time for us to work together to protect the future of this state and the families we serve. So, how do we do that?

ACAA will be focusing on a number of areas over the course of the next several years, and we need your help.

We will be working to build a movement among families and individuals who are currently struggling or care about the families struggling, and who want to strengthen the Arizona environment so that it becomes a place where all of us are respected, valued and given the opportunity to improve ourselves and our lives. We will be working to break through the stereotypes that exist about poverty and to bring empathy and understanding to the challenges those living in poverty face.

We will be working with Community Action Agencies on a plan for sustainability and innovation, involving various community partners in this strategy in order to not only survive these challenges, but to thrive going forward.

We will be working to create positive relationships with our elected officials in order to serve as a resource to them as they make difficult decisions about our future, and we will be seeking your assistance in building these relationships.

We will be communicating more regularly about local and federal issues, in order to engage you and to alert you to actions that need to be taken, calls that need to be made or visits to decision makers that need to be held. We believe that some of the federal funding that has supported our work and

NOW!



our families may be threatened at the federal level in the next few years, and our collective voice will be more important than ever.

So while things appear bleak, we also believe this is a time of great opportunity for creative planning and visioning, working to create the environment we need to allow all Arizonans to prosper.

Join us. We need you now more than ever.

Cynthia Zwick

Executive Director

Community Action Spotlight: Tempe CAA Homeless Client In the Media Spotlight

Dave Tally has received help from the Tempe Community Action Agency over the past 4 years he's experienced homelessness, and he turned to TCAA once more last week. When Mr. Tally found a backpack with \$3,300 in cash in it, he took it to his caseworker at TCAA, who was able to find its owner and return the cash. Mr. Tally is a true example of doing the right thing, and ACAA would like to recognize him and TCAA for their part in helping Mr. Tally along his journey!

See the story's national coverage here, and follow us on Facebook for more updates:

http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2010-11-19-homeless19_ST_N.htm?csp=usat.me

ACAA Receives Grant from Marguerite Casey Foundation

ACAA was honored to receive an invitation to apply for a three year grant from Marguerite Casey Foundation in Seattle, which enables us to continue our movement-building work in communities throughout Arizona. The Marguerite Casey Foundation solicited a proposal from ACAA in recognition of the work done surrounding the Changing Face of Poverty and Choose To Help campaigns, and our application was bolstered by the powerful voices we heard coming out of our Community Forums.

Thanks to support from Marguerite Casey Foundation, ACAA will continue utilizing a movement building model which:

- will help families find their voice by building a community-wide constituent base of supportive

Suggestions for our next newsletter? Please email them to info@azcaa.org!

families

- will honor that voice and assist with the emergence and development of leaders within this community
- will help amplify that voice through various communication tools and networks within communities
- will work to ensure that this voice is never silenced by creating strong public policy that supports family goals.

We look forward to working with our members and friends from throughout Arizona to make this movement a reality. We would also like to express our sincerest gratitude to the Marguerite Casey Foundation for their vision and support of ACAA!

To learn more about the Marguerite Casey Foundation, please visit their website at www.caseygrants.org

Food for Thought: ACAA Staff and Board Spend a Week on a Food Stamp Budget

Though economists and policy makers claim the Great Recession is officially over, Arizona has not yet healed. As recently as October 2010, there were over 1.05 million individuals in Arizona receiving SNAP (food stamp) benefits. In response to recently released poverty data, debate on SNAP benefits raging in Washington, and a continuing desire to call attention to the plight of poor Arizonians, the staff and Board at ACAA pledged to live on a weekly food budget of just \$30, the average per-person weekly SNAP benefit in Arizona. Challenge participants tracked their consumption habits before the Challenge, crafted careful shopping lists, and, from October 18-24, lived on just \$30, or \$1.43 per meal. Many chose to chronicle their experiences on the ACAA Food Stamp Challenge blog, www.acaachallenge.wordpress.com.

Participants found the experience eye-opening, providing convincing evidence that \$30 per week is not enough to buy food that is both healthy and filling. Many participants were surprised to discover the limitations on food eligible for purchase with SNAP. Others reflected on an unexpected feeling of social exclusion due to having insufficient funds to eat out. Many participants, imagining themselves on a food stamp budget in the longer-term, reflected on the pain it would cause them to tell their children that there was not enough food in the house to quiet their grumbling stomachs. Still others lamented the lack of "wiggle room" in their food budgets and the hunger pains between and even after their small meals. In all cases, final reflections were clear: common perceptions of SNAP and stereotypes of SNAP users are largely at odds with the reality of living on a food stamp budget and the skills and resilience necessary to make ends meet on a low income.

ACAA was pleased to receive positive news coverage of their efforts during the "Making a Difference" segment on ABC 15 (available at http://www.abc15.com/dpp/about_us/as_seen_on/15links_thursday/valley-organization-'making-a-difference'-by-fighting-hunger). The Washington, DC-based Food Research and Action Center also commended ACAA's efforts to bring to light the difficulty of living on a food stamp budget while

Congress prepares to begin the lame duck session and debate cutting SNAP benefits to fund child nutrition programs.

Many thanks to all who participated in the Challenge and followed the blog. ACAA is now producing a Challenge toolkit for other interested organizations and working to use information gained through our collective experience to better advocate for low-income families in Arizona. We encourage participants to continue the conversations inspired by the Challenge experience and to think critically about how benefit programs like SNAP are not simply anti-hunger programs; they affect the health, dignity and self-sufficiency of our neighbors, co-workers, family and friends.

Arizona Celebrates Weatherization Day 2010

Arizona has a long-standing commitment to conserve energy resources and help low-income households through its Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). Around the state the program has provided Arizonans with more energy-efficient, safe, and healthy homes; and recipients have hailed the program for saving incomes, stabilizing budgets, and empowering them with the opportunity to afford basic necessities.

The WAP program has helped more than 24,000 families in Arizona since 1977. Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act stimulus funding, 2813 low-income Arizona homes have been weatherized to date, and it is anticipated that a total of 6400 homes will be weatherized by March 2012.

Residents save an average of 25 to 30 percent on their monthly heating and cooling bills after receiving weatherization help including heating and cooling system improvements, ceiling, wall and floor insulation installation as well as weather-stripping and reducing air infiltration and pressure imbalances. Weatherization saves \$437 in heating and cooling costs year after year at current prices. Savings are still higher if lighting and appliances are upgraded. (ORNL/TM, EIA February 2010 Short Term Energy Outlook).

Each year, throughout the state, agencies celebrate their Weatherization successes in a variety of ways. This year the Governor issued a **Home Energy Efficiency Day** proclamation (www.azcommerce.com) to bring attention to Weatherization.

The Gila County Community Action/Housing Services Department presented a Weatherization Day Proclamation recognizing National Weatherization Day to the Gila County Board of Supervisors. Weatherization contractors were recognized at the event for their outstanding services and participation in WAP. Contractors celebrated included: Art Rodriguez, Rodriguez Construction; Jerry Philpot, Green Tree Construction; Byron Tenenhouse, Noble Construction; Carl Hacker, Technaframe Construction; and David and John Oddonetto, Mountain Retreat Builders. Since receiving the Weatherization stimulus funding, Gila County has completed 43 weatherization projects, at a total cost of \$264,000.

For many of the Gila County contractors the Weatherization work has kept their company in business. Dave Oddonetto, of Mountain Retreat Builders, stated that the weatherization projects gave them the "opportunity to continue to do business in the slowing economy". Not only did the stimulus money keep the brothers in business, it has provided local subcontractors – electricians,

plumbers, installation installers, and suppliers with continued revenues to support their businesses.

Pinal County's Community Action Agency, Community Action Human Resources Agency (CAHRA) celebrated Weatherization Day with a breakfast and weatherization information program at Pinal Gila Council for Senior Citizens. Following the breakfast program, Arnold Zambrano, CAHRA, Lead Housing Technician, gave a Weatherization demonstration at the home of a program participant in Casa Grande.

CAHRA assists homeowners in permanently reducing their energy costs through education and with use of computerized energy audits and advanced diagnostics technologies, determine the most cost effective measure for each home about health and safety measures along with evaluation of air quality and heat loss inside existing low-income homes. The findings from the weatherization audits results in the installation of energy-efficient appliances, insulation, smoke detectors, and other measures that improve the health and safety of the homes.

The energy-efficiency measures are installed free-of-charge for qualifying low-income homeowners, and are designed to provide sustainable solutions to save money and conserve energy, year after year. "Pinal County homeowners who take advantage of this program will not only see smaller utility bills, but an improved quality of life. The work that we do helps to take away some of the burden of keeping the house warm in the winter and cool in summer so folks can put food on the table.", said Mary Lou Rosales, Director of CAHRA.

Locally, the CAHRA Weatherization Assistance Program contributes to strengthening social, economic and environmental progress by creating jobs, stimulating retail purchases in the community, improving housing stock and stabilizing neighborhoods. To date, CAHRA has weatherized 106 with the weatherization stimulus funding and 1,583 since the program started at CAHRA in 1983. Hundreds of jobs have been created through the weatherization program in Arizona. CAHRA hired five individuals while contractors were able to save several jobs and hire additional employees.



The weatherization stimulus funds are helping Arizonans in so many ways – these funds not only help homeowners and low-income renters to realize energy savings each month and put money back in their pockets for other necessities, but these funds create jobs – for staff and for contractors, and local businesses, allowing many to keep their doors open during this time of economic challenge. From the single mom going to school in Bullhead City to the Domestic Violence Shelter in Casa Grande whose monthly utility costs have been cut in half, to the elderly couple in Tucson who can now remain in their home because of newly installed air-conditioning, Weatherization is making a

difference in people's lives every day.

Weatherization makes a difference in people's lives every day.

ACAA Announces A Case Management Pilot

ACAA is excited to announce we have begun work on a Case Management Pilot! Kris Stout was hired in October to conduct the pilot and we would like to take this opportunity to welcome him to our staff. Kris has a Master's in Social Work and has experience in both writing curriculums and training. The catalyst behind this pilot was hearing from both Community Action Agencies and individuals and families that utilize their services that case management is an effective strategy to help people reach their goals and obtain and maintain self sufficiency.

The Case Management Pilot will be conducted with 4 agencies; WACOG, NACOG, CAHRA, and Gila County. Throughout the end of the year Kris will be traveling to visit these agencies and work with staff to develop strategies and a curriculum that will work best in their community. Beginning in January, Kris will begin to train the case managers that will be conducting the pilot. Following several months of implementation, ACAA will evaluate the results and report back the outcomes to the Community Action Network and members.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the agencies that agreed to participate. We are excited to share the results of this work come Spring!

Community Forum Wrap-Up

What a journey! ACAA has completed the 5 Community Forums we began this summer and we heard from individuals and families all over the state on what has helped them on their path to success. We are very grateful for everyone's participation and heard over and over again how powerful Community Action can be!

What's next? ACAA is working on creating videos to share the powerful stories of Community Action and the positive impact it has on people's lives. Beginning in January, we will also begin to present what we heard to social and human service agencies and providers throughout the state. Finally, look for the report done by our partners at ASU on our website soon!

Global Water and ACAA Partner to Assist Low-Income Households

The Arizona Corporation Commission (ACC) has tentatively approved the Low Income Relief Tariff Program which will be funded by Global Stakeholders and Global customers. ACAA will be

administering this program through our Home Energy Assistance Fund. The program will provide water bill assistance to residential customers only for their primary legal residence.

Applicants must have household income equal to or less than 200% of the currently Federal Poverty Guidelines. A qualifying household will be eligible for \$250.00 per year. Funds may be used for any of the following fees incurred by the customer: deposits, late fees, service fees, returned payment fees, after-hours service fees (where applicable). Final approval by the ACC is expected this month and the program start date has been set for the beginning of the year.

WACOG Receives Brian Mickelson Housing Hero Award WACOG

Congratulations to the Western Arizona Council of Governments (WACOG) on being selected as a 2010 Brian Mickelson Housing Hero Award winner in the category of Outstanding Local Housing Program. ACAA is extremely proud of WACOG for the amazing work they do in their communities!

Here, an excerpt from the nomination sent in on WACOG's behalf:

"Tienes que ir al WACOG ahora!" ("You have to go WACOG now!")

I heard the statement one day at a grocery store in Yuma. A lady was describing her unfortunate situation to another lady. Her electricity was about to be shut off in the middle of summer.

A Hand Up

With the foreclosure crisis in Arizona having a significant impact on the residents of our service area, we knew we had to act and we did. In April of 2010 our housing counseling program was approved by HUD. Our program is called A Hand Up and it is staffed with four experienced counselors, two in our Yuma office and two in our Kingman office. The program's goals are 1. asset development and 2. long-term solutions for the households and communities we serve. The program offers one-on-one counseling services and group educational workshops in the following areas: Resolving and Preventing Mortgage Delinquency, Pre-Purchase Education, Non-Delinquency Post-Purchase, Locating, Securing and Maintaining Residence in Rental Housing, and Shelter/Services for the Homeless.

In the few months following the program's approval by HUD, we have already worked with 184 individuals. We are making a difference and we are helping Arizona combat the foreclosure crisis. Our services are confidential and free of charge.

As of June 2010, our weatherization team has completed 173 weatherization units. An average of 40 completed units per month is the goal moving forward. To accomplish this goal the weatherization team is:

- *utilizing an automated procurement system to track, award and report weatherization projects (new and innovative proprietary software which has already saved WACOG hundreds of manpower hours) and*

- *continuing to formally educate contractors on Davis-Bacon reporting requirements.*

Green Earth Living Project (GELP) is the only project of its kind in the Yuma area with future plans for replication in La Paz and Mohave Counties. The purpose GELP is to combine energy conservation with affordable housing in a multi-phased mixed income setting of single-family homes and condominiums.

In order to successfully achieve the development goals, the project takes the approach of a whole building concept that encompasses the [climate](#), the specific [home site](#), the [foundation](#), [walls](#), and [roof](#), the use of [windows and doors](#) and natural lighting, the [heating and cooling](#) systems, [appliances](#), and [lighting](#).

*WACOG expects our programs will benefit more than **20,000** individuals in 2010.*

We are privileged to have the support of many organizations throughout our service area. We have partnerships and agreements with many nonprofit organizations and other entities. They include: AZ Community Action Association, Arizona Public Service, Campesinos Sin Fronteras, Fernando Padilla Community Center, and Social Service Interagency Council of Lake Havasu City, Inc.

"Tienes que ir al WACOG ahora!"

"You have to go to WACOG now!"

Predatory Lending Practices Continue Despite Sunset of Payday Lending

The Southwest Center for Economic Integrity was a principal group championing the sunset of payday lending in Arizona. Their hard work was recognized by ACAA at our 2010 Annual Conference, and now they need our help to continue fighting predatory lending practices.

As we move into the enforcement phase of the payday lending debate, the Center is looking at auto title loan contracts. If you have access to such contracts and would be willing to share, the Center needs your help! If confidentiality is an issue, the Center can still use contracts with all personal identifying information removed. SCEI hopes to put together an information packet for the Attorney General and DFI regulators to investigate the payday lending industry's migration to offering sham auto title loans as a means of continuing to extract predatory profits from modest income families.

The Center is hoping to gather as much information as possible. If you have a contract that SCEI can use for these purposes, please forward to Cynthia Zwick at czwick@azcaa.org, and ACAA will forward to the appropriate contact at the Center. If you have questions, you can also reach the Southwest Center for Economic Integrity at 520-882-2165 or online at www.economicintegrity.org.

Arizona Assets Alliance to Host Financial Independence

Fairs

The Arizona Assets Alliance will host "From Poverty to Prosperity" regional Financial Independence Fairs, in the month of December. **These events are free and open to anyone with an interest in becoming economically self-sufficient.**

The Regional Fairs will take place from 2:00pm-6:00pm on:

Tuesday, December 7th - Flagstaff, AZ

http://listserv.azahcccs.gov/listimages/MIG-AEDP-L/Fair_Flagstaff_12-7.pdf

Wednesday, December 8th -Tucson, AZ

http://listserv.azahcccs.gov/listimages/MIG-AEDP-L/Fair_Tucson_12-8.pdf

Thursday, December 9th - Phoenix, AZ

http://listserv.azahcccs.gov/listimages/MIG-AEDP-L/Fair_Phoenix_12-9.pdf

Renew Your Membership or Join ACAA NOW!

To join online and pay by credit card OR to print an application and pay by check, [please visit ACAA's website.](#)

ACAA offers a low-income waiver to households meeting certain criteria. To see if your household qualifies and apply for a low-income waiver, [please visit ACAA's website](#) and look at the downloadable application available there.

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