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**MCA's Mission**

To serve member agencies and strengthen their capacity to alleviate the causes and circumstances of poverty.

"Secure Parents and Successful Kids: A Two-Generation Approach to Tackling Poverty"

The Michigan League for Public Policy will host a public policy forum to explore a two-generation approach to reduce poverty and increase economic security on **Oct. 26** at the **Radisson Hotel**, Lansing, from **1-4 p.m.**

The forum is **FREE** but reservations are due by **Oct. 21**. Seating is limited but on-site registration will be accepted if space allows. To register online, [click here](#).

Keynote speaker: Anne Mosle, executive director of Ascend.

The two-generation approach meets the needs of low-income parents and their children simultaneously. Kids can't succeed unless parents succeed too.

Executive Director's Message

Congress should invest in human needs programs, not cut them



By Kate White
MCA Executive Director

Michigan employers struggling to hire qualified workers will see the challenge worsen if investments in human needs programs decline, as they might if Congress proceeds with cuts to human needs programs.

Nearly a quarter of our next generation of employees is at risk of being unemployable, because they are growing up lacking food, safe housing and other resources essential to becoming educated, productive workers of the future. The latest report from the U.S. Census Bureau says 22.6 percent of Michigan children are living in poverty. Congress needs to end harmful sequestration caps and instead invest in human needs programs.

Although poverty across the state dropped a miniscule .8 of a percentage point (from 17 percent in 2013 to 16.2 percent in 2014) according to the report, Michigan children's economic security is threatened by cuts to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), the Child Tax Credit (CTC), subsidized housing and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program (SNAP).

When we invest in programs that foster self-sufficiency and lead people toward education and employment, we help create a valuable future workforce and help end multigenerational poverty. In Michigan, the sequestration caps are hitting the most vulnerable segment of the population the hardest, and there is a serious ripple effect to our economy that

Washington CAA offers tips on adding health care services

CAAs interested in branching out into health care services may learn from a Washington agency that has focused its efforts on health care. At the Community Action Partnership Annual Convention in August, Troy Christensen, chief of operations and strategy for the Metropolitan Development Council (MDC), shared health program models for homeless populations, substance abuse, detox and treatment. Christensen said Community Action is often at the intersection of health and human services in local communities and he encouraged Community Action Agencies to consider a health program focus. He noted that community partnerships with jails, courts and community mental health agencies are critical to success.

MDC partners with courts, jails and community mental health programs and has been focused on health programs for nearly 50 years. It operates specialized health services in Tacoma, Wash., including *Healthcare for the Homeless*, which provides primary medical care, dental care, chemical dependency screening and referrals, mental health treatment and medical case management; and *Acute Medical Detox* a two- to five-day treatment in a 16-bed facility with medically supervised detoxification services for adults and youth over the age of 13.

The *DU Alternatives Program* is for people convicted of a traffic offense involving alcohol and/or drugs, who are allowed to serve their jail time at the detoxification center.

Christensen says skilled leadership is important to launch specialized health services successfully. He advised Community Action Agencies to start with a strategic plan and SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats) to look for opportunities and alignment in the plan where health programming could be identified as a long- or short-term strategy.

"Community Action Agencies' clients are often the most difficult to serve, so we have a niche client population in need of health services," he says.

He recommends adding a staff person who has health care or health administration experience and to start small with one program, such as counseling, and grow from there.

"There is no shortage of need for the population we serve," he says.

For more information about the Metropolitan Development Council, go to [the MDC website](#).

Executive Profile: Louis Piszker Wayne Metro leader helped rebuild once struggling agency



Louis Piszker

When a young man came in to the Wayne Metro Community Action Agency looking for help, Louis Piszker and his staff were immediately struck by his persistence and story. As the sole caregiver and provider for his mother, who had been diagnosed with a brain tumor, the young man had been juggling seasonal jobs to make ends meet. He was devastated when the household utilities were shut off. Just over the income eligibility requirements, the mother and son did not qualify for any assistance programs.

"He told us he had to get the lights back on so that he could take care of her," Piszker recalls, explaining that she was scheduled for surgery in a couple of weeks. "Based on his last three months of income the young man was over the eligibility threshold. He was out of work, caring for a critically ill parent and he did not qualify."

"It's a situation where the standard process and formula did not line up with our mission," Piszker says. "We knew we had to find a way to help."

He says it was one of the highlights of his 21 years at the agency, watching the staff work together to come up with a solution.

"I was so proud of them," he says of his team. They looked at every possible income calculation, including spreading his seasonal income across the entire year. In the end it was determined that Walk for Warmth dollars would be used.

"Emotions ran high with this particular case. Tears were shed and the investment of staff time and energy was moving for me as the leader of this organization."

"I think as a Community Action director, my job is to set the example," says Piszker. "I have to balance following the rules and adhering to standards with staying true to our mission to empower low-income people. As leaders we cannot allow bureaucracy to stop us from doing the right thing. But we also can't go too far off course, either. That's when you start to lose sight of those core values of financial integrity and accountability."

As the agency's executive director since 2007, Piszker says he believes that when there is a culture of creativity and passion, people will always rise to the occasion and come up with solutions to difficult challenges.

His background and training may have been timely for the agency that was in financial turmoil when he joined it in 1994. With a bachelor's degree in accounting and a master's degree in public administration, he put his skills and talents to work to re-establish the agency.

"I just grew with the organization," he says of his early years when the agency was rebuilding itself. He believes the commitment to the mission is what has spurred the growth of the agency along with support from the community. "We go in, we provide high-quality services, and we treat people with respect and compassion. That's it. That is the secret to our success. That's what we've done from top to bottom."

Being able to respond to as many as 10,000 calls a month, however, and offer timely, high-quality service is an ongoing challenge for Wayne Metro.

"Taking advantage of technology is critical," he notes. "We had to develop a centralized outreach and client intake system and our staff has essentially gone mobile in order to keep up with demand and make services accessible. Clients can request services online now. They can take home buyer classes using our website. Program reminder calls are automated. We are evolving the way we do business every day."

"I'm really big on using text messaging to communicate with clients," he explains. "It has paid dividends. The text reminders have cut down our no-show rate by 70 percent and reduced our come-back rate by 50 percent. The agency can also inform clients about upcoming classes or events on topics such as financial literacy, homebuying, energy conservation - all of which are a step toward self-sufficiency and a step out of poverty."

"We can also follow up a month or two down the road. Check in and find out if they are still on the right track," he says. "Whether it's for financial counseling or energy conservation tips, the agency can help."

Piszker's concern for his clients seems to extend beyond his day-to-day responsibilities.

"I developed a passion for this work. I grew up here. I raised my kids here and now my kids are raising their kids here," he says. "I can drive by one of our housing developments or visit a community garden and know I am contributing to the solution. I am proud to be among the many fighting the war on poverty."

MPSC says energy waste reduction programs paying off for consumers

Michigan energy customers continue to reap benefits from the state's energy optimization (EO) programs designed to help them slash bills, a new report from the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) found.

In 2014, aggregate EO program expenditures of \$257 million by all natural gas and electric utilities in the state are estimated to result in lifecycle savings to customers of \$1.12 billion, the MPSC's Energy Optimization Report states.

needs to be recognized.

If Congress does not act, funding cuts scheduled to take effect this fall will exacerbate specific Michigan's challenges.

The EI TC and CTC lifted 230,000 Michiganders, including 119,000 children, out of poverty each year, on average, during 2011 to 2013. Michigan needs the federal EI TC and CTC to continue to reward work and reduce the tax burden on the working poor. Beyond EI TC and CTC, fewer children will be able to participate in Head Start, compared with that proposed in President Obama's budget. Research confirms that Head Start helps prepare children from low-income families for success in school and life. Cuts would be a major step backward and could negatively impact Michigan's progress in blending Head Start with state funding for the Great Start Readiness Program (aka GSRP). Congress's plan derails important housing, employment and other proven anti-poverty programs that would jeopardize the stability of our low-income neighbors. Members of Congress should stop the sequestration cuts and instead expand programs that prevent and eliminate poverty in Michigan.

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Overall program expenditures of \$1.1 billion from 2010 to 2014 are estimated to achieve lifetime savings to all customers of \$4.2 billion.

"The cheapest energy is the energy never used, and this has proven to be the case again with Michigan's energy optimization programs in 2014," says MPSC Chairman John D. Quackenbush. "Because they focus on reducing energy waste, energy efficiency programs benefit all utility customers. For every dollar spent on these programs in 2014, customers can expect to realize \$4.38 in savings - more than any year since 2010. Customers who take advantage of energy efficiency programs personally benefit even more."

For measures installed in program year 2014, electric savings total over 1.4 million megawatt-hours, and natural gas savings total over 4.8 million Mcf.

The entire report can be found [here](#).

MCA recognized at Michigan Interfaith Power and Light



From left: Valerie Brader, Michigan Agency for Energy; Chere Coleman, MCA; Sean Williams, CLEAResult and Leah Witse, MI PL.

Michigan Community Action, CLEAResult and Consumers Energy were recognized for their energy efficiency efforts at the [Michigan Interfaith Power and Light](#) 10th Annual Sustainability Conference on October 9 at The Peoples Church in East Lansing. Valerie Brader, executive director of the Michigan Agency for Energy, presented the award to MCA's Chere Coleman and CLEAResult's Sean Williams during the conference awards lunch.

MI PL is a nonprofit coalition of faith communities across Michigan that promotes earth stewardship through implementation of energy efficiency, renewable energy and related sustainable practices through education, advocacy and action.

"Weatherization Day at the Capitol" set for Thursday, Oct. 29

MCA is planning a special event at the State Capitol **Thursday, Oct. 29** from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. to demonstrate to legislators how Weatherization Assistance Programs (WAP) benefit their constituents. It will be held on the main floor of the Capitol building in the South Corridor. The event is in conjunction with National Weatherization Day on Oct. 30.

WAP has helped low-income American families save millions of dollars in heating and cooling costs since the program began in 1977.

"Community Action Agencies are proud of our achievements in low-income weatherization," says Kate White, MCA executive director. "As families spend less on their heating bills, they free up money that can be used for other necessities. It gets them closer to the goal of economic self-sufficiency."

For more information, visit www.mcaaa.org

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