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**MCA's Mission**

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

Community Action Professional Certification Training in Okemos

On April 12, a continuation of training for those seeking Certified Community Action Professional (CCAP) designation will be held at the MCA office in Okemos.

The program is designed for current and emerging managers and leaders involved in Community Action. Some benefits of CCAP are the visible recognition of accomplishments in the field both locally and nationally, and providing an advantage for public and private grant funds.

CCAP is the only national, peer-review-based recognition of Community Action managers and leaders. It is based on input from more than 150 Community Action leaders in the field with oversight from the Certification Commission appointed by the Partnership board chair. Candidates are selected based on experience, skills and knowledge of Community Action.

MCA meetings set for April 28 in Lansing

Both the Directors Council and Board of Directors will meet at the Radisson Hotel in Lansing on April 28.

Directors Council meeting: 9 to 11:30 a.m.

Board of Directors meeting: 2 to 4 p.m.

Radisson Hotel is located at [111 N. Grand Ave., Lansing, MI 48933](#).

CSBG Conference May 5-6, Mt. Pleasant

The Bureau of Community Action and Economic Opportunity will hold its annual Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) conference at the Comfort Inn in Mount Pleasant May 5-6.

The CSBG provides funding to local agencies to reduce poverty, revitalize low-income communities and to empower low-income families to become self-sufficient. The CSBG network consists of more than 1,000 agencies that create, coordinate and deliver programs and services to low-income Americans in 99 percent of the nation's counties. Community representation and accountability are pillars of the CSBG network.

The Comfort Inn is located at [2424 S. Mission St., Mount Pleasant, MI 48858](#).

MCA Officers/Board Members 2015-2017

John Stephenson
President
Northwest Michigan CAA

Louis Piszker
Vice President

Project Impact Helps Bay-Arenac homeless youths

Brianna was on the street, bouncing from shelters to friends' couches, when Mid Michigan Community Action Agency (MMCAA) stepped in with a new program that set her up in an apartment so she could finish high school and keep her fast-food job.

"It was a lifesaver," says Brianna, 19, who drifted after she was removed from a foster home in October with no support to back her up. Brianna, who asked that her last name not be used, is among the first to benefit from Project Impact, launched in February to assist homeless and runaway youths in Bay and Arenac counties who are ages 13 through 19 and still in high school. Brianna said she was referred to the MMCAA program, which paid her initial costs for a \$335-a-month apartment.

Project Impact is funded through the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. It assigns caseworkers to eligible youths to coordinate housing, counseling and other services for a youth population that can fall through cracks in the social safety net, says **Jill Sutton**, MMCAA executive director. The goal is to teach them to be self-sufficient.

"Often they haven't the skills or life experience. This helps them to navigate into their adult years," Sutton says. "We want to reunify them with their families if that's an option. If not, a case manager will help them to apply for a job, apply for college. They may lack basic life skills like shopping for groceries or doing laundry or handling money."

Those who can't be reunited with families are placed in a home by Adoption Option Inc., or they are placed in housing of their own, with ongoing support from MMCAA.

Brianna says she's been in foster care since she was about two years old. Besides completing high school, she works more than 30 hours a week to pay her bills and support a sister and her sister's two young children.

Brianna says she wants to attend Delta College to study criminal justice and agricultural science. She says she can't wait to graduate high school, and says Project Impact has provided her moral and emotional support.

"My caseworker is someone I can confide in, so I know I'm not alone," she says.



Jill Sutton, MMCAA Executive Director

Webinar:

Prepare for meeting with public officials

Meeting with public officials to educate them about Community Action can be intimidating, but a recent MCA webinar explained the importance of building those relationships and making connections with them more productive.

"It just makes good sense to engage with legislators," explained **Kate White**, MCA executive director, who introduced the webinar, "especially at the local level and now that we have term limits."

John Stephenson, MCA president and executive director of Northwest Michigan CAA and **Ron Borngesser**, CEO of Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency, echoed White's point, stressing that the earlier CAAs build a strong relationship with local or state public officials and their staffs the more access they will have down the road.

Understanding the difference between advocacy and lobbying is important, said **Robb Kennedy**, MCA's lobbyist and owner of Capitol Affairs in Lansing.

"You can do 98 percent of what you need to do and not be lobbying," Kennedy explained. "When you are just answering questions, you are not crossing the line into lobbying. Until you name a bill and ask for a vote, then it's lobbying." Kennedy noted that the term lobbying came into use decades ago when people would approach a former president when he entered the lobby of the Willard Hotel near the Capitol to ask for jobs or attention to their special interests.

"Never go into meeting without an agenda," Stephenson stressed. "Don't just wing it. Know your talking points. Have a 'leave behind' to give to the legislator or staff person."

"Have an 'elevator speech' ready about your agency," Borngesser advised. "Keep it short and sweet - how we help people help themselves. Show the economic impact of community action. MCA is the second largest community agency in the state, second only to the DHS."

Other tips the group recommended:

- Do your research on the public official; know his or her background and be familiar with bills they've supported in the past.
- Recognize that relationships with legislators' staff members are just as valuable, since they often work beyond the terms of the legislator and move into other staff positions.
- Have a CAA success story in mind when the opportunity to talk to a legislator might occur.
- Always maintain calm when discussing controversial topics; Don't get into an argument with a public official.
- Make your 'leave behind' concise and factual. Explain the issue with the legislator's constituents in mind.
- Keep in contact with the legislator by providing requested information, supporting their fundraising events and attending their community forums.
- Be sure to send a thank you note after any meeting with a public official expressing your appreciation for their time.

For more information and to listen to the webinar, [please click here](#).

Asset strategy helps combat poverty

Asset building is a strategy to help families escape poverty and put them on a path toward self-sufficiency. The key to self-sufficiency is financial security.

Financial emergencies are common among low-income people. Services that help low-income families make ends meet have the ability to stabilize them during a crisis and/or help them rise above the poverty level. In 2012, 343,231 Michigan residents received emergency services.

Poverty in Michigan by the numbers

- About 17 percent of Michigan residents lived below the poverty line in 2008, which is 1.4 percent higher than the national average.
- Nearly a quarter (24 percent) of Michigan's children were living in poverty in 2013 - roughly half a million children - up from 19.7 percent in 2007.
- Michigan's median income has dropped by nearly \$5,000 annually since 2008.

For more information, [click here](#).

MCA hosts Day at the Capitol and CA Awards April 28

The halls of the Capitol Building in Lansing will be filled with Community Action staff members, volunteers and program recipients on April 28, for Michigan Community Action's annual Day at the Capitol, to recognize the contributions of those who exemplify the mission and spirit of Community Action.

Each award winner will receive a \$100 gift card, an

Wayne Metro CAA

Jill Sutton

Secretary Treasurer

Mid Michigan CAA

Toby Berry

At-Large Officer

Jackson CAA

Arthur Fenrick

Lower Peninsula Rural Officer

Southwestern Michigan CAA

Kerri Duff

Upper Peninsula Officer

Gogebic Ontonagon CAA

Charlotte Smith

Urban Officer

Kalamazoo County CAA

Bill Raymond

Director's Council Chair

Ottawa County CAA

Eric Schertzing

CAA Governing Board Officer

Capital Area Comm. Services

Caroline Ross

CAA Governing Board Officer

EightCAP

Catalyst welcomes input, story ideas

Is there a story or issue you'd like to see covered in *Catalyst*?

Let us know what's happening in your agency or region. Success stories? Recent events? People news?

We welcome your input and feedback. Please send your comments and ideas to:

[Click Here](#)

inscribed trophy and recognition in the event program.

A selection committee, made up of MCA Training Committee members, reviews all nominations and selects five from each category to receive an award. The committee contacts award recipients in advance with an invitation to the event.

MCA can help with travel expenses for U. P. agencies or others who might require financial support, including two nights in a hotel and meals for up to three award winners, plus reimbursement for mileage and parking.

For more information, [contact Mike Shalley.](#)

MCA launches donation campaign to help Flint residents

A donation page, *Give to the Flint Flexible Fund*, has been set up on the MCA website to donate to the Genesee County Community Action Resource Department (GCCARD), which is the member agency on the frontline of the Flint water crisis. Donations to the GCCARD will go toward supporting the continued efforts of the agency's work with the Flint water crisis.

"We're proud of the work GCCARD is doing in response to the Flint water crisis," says MCA Executive Director Kate White, "We know people would like to help with the effort and this donation function is a way to reach people using our website to find out more about Community Action in Michigan."

[Click here to donate.](#)

Catalyst newsletter reader survey

The *Catalyst* reader survey was sent to all *Catalyst* recipients on April 5. If you haven't responded it will only take a minute or so and will give MCA feedback on the *Catalyst* newsletter. If you have not received the *Catalyst* reader survey, please [click here to access it.](#)

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