

**In This Issue:**[Washtenaw OCED works to end homelessness](#)[Outdoor "classrooms" enhance childhood development programs](#)[MCA summer conference July 19-21](#)[Did you know?](#)**Quick Links**[MCA Website](#)[Contact Us](#)[Legislative Priorities](#)[Member Services](#)**Follow MCA on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.**

We'd like you to become a "follower" of MCA. Keep up with news and events, media coverage and action alerts. Click on the links below to "follow" MCA today.

**MCA's Mission**

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

**CAP hosts July webinars**

Community Action Partnership will host a webinar called "Assessing the Use of Debt (Loans) in CED: Upsides and Downsides" on July 27 and another called "National Poverty Trends Session 3" on July 28. The conference on July 28 is free, but registration is required for both.

[Click here to register.](#)**CAP Annual Convention in Texas 8/30-9/2**

The 2016 Community Action Partnership Annual Convention will be held in Austin, Texas, at the JW Marriott Aug. 30 to Sept. 2.

The conference is titled "Building Resilience: The Promise & Practice of Community Action."

[Click here for more information.](#)[Click here to register.](#)**Did you know?**

Community Action Agencies provide an array of housing programs, from homebuyer education classes to housing vouchers and mortgage assistance. The goal is to help families and individuals become self-sufficient.

**Michigan successes by the numbers\* :**

- More than 3,460 people obtained and maintained safe and affordable housing through MCA.
- About 2,820 people received emergency rent or mortgage assistance.
- Approximately 1,780 people obtained temporary shelter.
- MCA agencies preserved or improved more than 1,580 safe and affordable housing units through construction, weatherization or rehabilitation.
- More than 200 people received emergency protection from violence.
- About 136 people participated in Individual Development Accounts (IDA) program to buy a home.
- In 2015, 72 people bought a home with an IDA.

\* Community Action agency 2015 Report

**MCA Officers/Board Members 2015-2017**

**John Stephenson**  
President  
Northwest Michigan CAA

**Louis Piszker**  
Vice President  
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

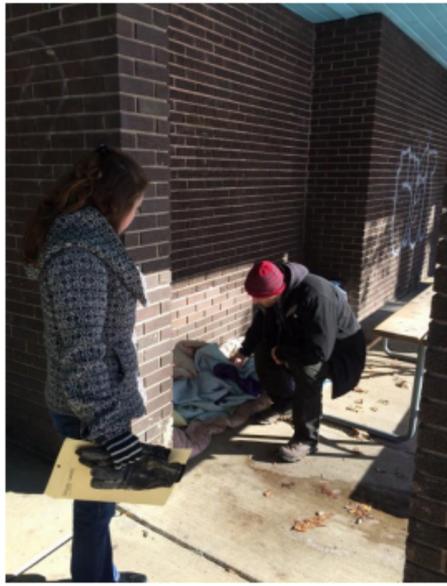
**Kerri Duff**  
Upper Peninsula Officer  
Gogebic Ontonagon CAA

**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

**Washtenaw OCED works to end homelessness**

Washtenaw OCED conducts its count of homeless individuals.

Washtenaw County knows the number of homeless people in its communities and also knows their faces and names. Now, with the help of community groups and nonprofits, Washtenaw's Community Action Agency's effort to end homelessness is limited only by the housing available on any given day.

The Washtenaw Office of Community and Economic Development (OCED), the county's designated CAA, participates in a nationwide competitive program called Zero:2016. Washtenaw County is one of 75 communities selected for the federal program, which focuses on reducing veteran and chronic homelessness to "functional zero" - the point at which the system of care for people experiencing homelessness is able to move more people out of homelessness than are currently homeless or entering homelessness at any given time.

The agency kicked off the effort at the start of 2015 with a count of homeless individuals - including a more thorough assessment than had been done before.

"We created the foundation for a real-time list of individuals experiencing homelessness in the community that included names and photos of those encountered during the count," says Andrea Plevak, human services manager of Washtenaw OCED. "We have built upon that effort, continuing to improve our by-name list using our coordinated entry system, common assessment tool and biweekly case conferencing meetings with key stakeholders. Put simply, we asked, 'What do we have to do and how do we do it differently, and better, to get a better outcome?'"

In order to reach functional zero, Washtenaw OCED had to reimagine its system, aligning its goals and actions with other county programs. Committing to the principles of quick change and systems alignment has allowed Washtenaw to make progress unlike it has seen in the past.

"We have one of the premier VA hospital systems in the country in our backyard but we've struggled to provide service to homeless veterans who aren't necessarily touching the right system for their situation," Plevak says. "With the Zero:2016 effort, we're ensuring veterans are getting those resources, and we're working together to ensure they're getting housed."

In 2015, the goal was to house 153 veterans by the end of 2015 and 121 chronically homeless by the end of 2016. The agency exceeded its goals for both veteran and chronic homelessness, housing 172 veterans and 158 chronically homeless. According to Plevak, 2016 is proving to be the same.

"We are looking at how we can help decision makers, property owners and landlords, and affordable housing developers increase our community availability of affordable housing," Plevak says.

As veteran and chronic homelessness numbers continue to diminish toward functional zero, Washtenaw OCED and its partners are planning future endeavors, such as serving youth and families with children.

"We're in year two and of this effort and we've made tremendous change in our community," Plevak explains. "Our nonprofit partners are spectacular. They work tirelessly to help people find housing in an environment of limited resources and regulatory constraints. That being said, we need our state and federal partners to help us understand how resources and policies will shift to sustain the great work that our community has accomplished."

**Outdoor "classrooms" enhance childhood development programs**

Clare County children participate in MMCAA's outdoor classroom program.

Bugs, mud and fresh air are all part of Mid Michigan Community Action Agency's (MMCAA) preschool outdoor "classrooms," where children explore nature and increase physical activity and creativity. As a new component to MMCAA's Head Start and Great Start programs, outdoor classrooms extend learning environments to the outdoors.

"We saw stress decrease and improved behavior in the classroom, as well as increased muscle memory development," says Susan Harvey, MMCAA's Early Childhood Services director. "Parents are starting to see the impact of letting their children play outside and reducing 'screen time.'"

As negative classroom behaviors decrease, Harvey says, the ability for children to learn and be successful increases. Gross motor skills, through movement and coordination, also increase.

"Our overall goal is to decrease childhood obesity, increase children's opportunity to love nature, and nurture stewardship of nature," Harvey explains. "Playing today often involves an iPad or a gaming system. Child play should be exploring and enjoying nature, and learning to protect our environment."

Once the program is nationally certified, MMCAA plans to set the standard for outdoor classrooms and serve as a training ground for other groups that are interested in expanding their early childhood development programs. Such collaboration would only increase the outdoor classroom's positive impact.

"It would be great to open our doors to other programs and allow the staff to see the benefits," Harvey says. "We'll be setting the trend."

In order to help teachers transition from indoor classrooms to outdoor classrooms, MMCAA offers training that addresses potential challenges and gives them the tools and ideas to create outdoor learning areas.

"One year it was the mud that proved to be somewhat challenging. Another year it was creating outdoor rules, as well as classroom rules," Harvey says. "We sent teachers to a nature institute and set up partnerships with another local nature center that has outdoor classrooms."

With the program established, MMCAA's biggest challenge is continued funding. Its goal is to incorporate the program in all 16 of its preschool programs.

"We're fortunate that we have Rural Development funding," Harvey says. "The fortunate playgrounds we have were partially funded by Rural Development grants. So we'll be applying for more grants to fund the classrooms."

Meanwhile, MMCAA is proud to demonstrate the benefits of the concept to other agencies and teachers.



Grat finding sought for outdoor classroom programs.

## *MCA summer conference heads to Port Huron 7/19-21*

### *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](#)



*MCA's annual summer conference will be held at the newly constructed Blue Water Convention Center in Port Huron*

MCA will host its annual summer conference July 19-21 at the Blue Water Convention Center in Port Huron. Among the topics are self-sufficiency programs, agency entrepreneurship and an update on the Michigan Energy Assistance Program.

National speakers, including Director of the Association of Nationally Certified ROMA Trainers Dr. Barbara Mooney and David Bradley of National Community Action Foundation, will conduct sessions at the conference.

Several state department leaders will speak, including MSHDA Chief Housing Investment Officer Michele Wildman and Director of Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency James Redford.

"Our state and national speakers will help Community Action agencies augment existing programs and develop new best practices," says MCA Executive Director Kate White.

In addition to regular sessions, participants can attend presentations conducted by the consulting firm Wipfli on agency budgets, technology planning, data security and uniform guidance on fiscal policies. These events require pre-registration.

The Blue Water Convention Center is located at 500 Thomas Edison Pkwy., Port Huron, MI 48060.

To register, view the schedule of events and download driving directions, [click here](#).

Michigan Community Action  
2173 Commons Parkway  
Okemos, MI 48864  
Phone: 517.321.7500  
Fax: 517.321.7504  
[info@mcaaa.org](mailto:info@mcaaa.org)