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**MCA's Mission**

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

**Announcements****NASCSP Responds to Administration's 2018 Budget Proposal**

The National Association for Community Service Program released a statement on the Trump administration's 2018 budget proposal. The full statement can be read [here](#).

**National Community Action Month in May**

May is National Community Action Month, an opportunity to showcase the work that Community Action Agencies (CAAs) do to help low-income families reach self-sufficiency. CAAs may visit [Community Action Partnership's website](#) for more information and supporting materials on National Community Action Month.

**Upcoming Events**

For a full list of events, visit [MCA's calendar](#).

**MCA Legislative Day at the Capitol May 9**

Day at the Capitol will be held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on May 9. The Community Action awards ceremony will be held at 10 a.m. at the Capitol Rotunda, and the lunch for winners and legislators will follow. The Directors Council and the Board meeting will follow the lunch.

**"Learning With the Learning Community" webinars**

Community Action Partnership will offer three "Learning with the Learning Community" webinars. All webinars are free, but [registration is required](#).

"Bundling Services to Improve Outcomes" will be held May 22 from 2 to 3:30 p.m.

"Financial Empowerment" will be held May 24 from 2 to 3:30 p.m.

"Trauma-Informed Approaches to Alleviating Poverty" will be held May 25 from 2 to 3:30 p.m.

**MMCAA awarded Head Start grant**

Head Start children in mid-Michigan will learn outdoors thanks to a grant from the Clare County Community Foundation (CCCF). The \$5,000 sum was awarded to Mid Michigan Community Action Agency (MMCAA) for the conversion of a preschool playground to an outdoor learning environment. The updated playground is intended to enhance the healthy physical, cognitive and social development of at-risk preschool children.

CCCF grants are funded through contributions to the foundation from Clare County residents and businesses. MMCAA's grant was made possible by the CCCF Youth Action Council and the Brighter Futures Fund.

**Did you know?**

Children who have a high-quality preschool experience show significant, positive developmental differences compared with children who do not, according to research on preschool programs in Michigan.

"The years before a child reaches kindergarten are among the most critical in his or her life to influence learning," according to the U.S. Department of Education. An important component in any high-quality program is the availability of qualified teachers and aides who receive adequate compensation and professional development opportunities.

Working with state and local partners, Community Action Agencies in Michigan help educate thousands of children ages 0-5. Programs such as Head Start, Early Head Start and Great Start Readiness are proven to help children develop cognitive skills, social relationships and emotional resilience. Such child-focused programs increase school readiness of young children from low-income families.

Community Action Agencies take a holistic approach to early childhood education, which include health and nutrition, social integration and parental involvement.

**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 [here](#).

**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  
Community Action Agency

**Arthur Fenrick**  
Lower Peninsula Rural Officer  
Southwestern Michigan CAA

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

**Rhonda Powell**  
Urban Officer  
Macomb Community Action

**Matt Purcell**  
Directors Council Chair  
GCCARD

**Eric Schertzing**  
CAA Governing Board Officer  
Capital Area Comm. Services

**NEMCSA School Success program expands, impacts more families**

Students who participate in NEMCSA's School Success Program are more likely to complete school.

A third-grader struggled to succeed in school after her single mother passed away from cancer. Her father, who lived in the area but had never been involved in his daughter's life, struggled with adjusting to his new parental role while maintaining his night job. With no transportation, the father walked several miles to work and back and was not home in time in the morning to get his daughter to school.

Through the Northeast Michigan Community Service Agency's (NEMCSA) School Success Partnership Program, the young girl was identified as being "at risk for academic failure." She was assigned a "liaison coach" who visited her home and learned about the challenges the father faced. The coach worked to involve him in her academic performance.

"This program is changing cultures in an isolated area," says **Dorothy Pintar**, program director. "We're getting kids excited about education and we're helping schools be more supportive in difficult home situations."

With NEMCSA's help, the father was able to get a bike for transportation and at-home day care services for his daughter. NEMCSA liaisons visit their home regularly to support his involvement in his daughter's education. Now he spends more time at home with his daughter and she is a more successful student.

In 2015, School Success operated in 29 of the 58 schools in an 11-county region of Northeast Michigan. After the state increased its support to \$450,000 for 2015-2016, the program expanded to seven more schools in three additional counties, impacting nearly 26,000 more students.

For **Eric Cardwell**, a principal in the Alpena school district, School Success is "unequivocally a game changer."

"It is the best program that I've seen involving developing relationships with kids and families inside and outside of the schools," says Cardwell, speaking from 17 years of experience as a principal. "It really strengthens schools. I can't imagine us doing our job without that."



NEMCSA's expanded services mean more children, parents and communities will be positively impacted by the program.

NEMCSA's program evaluation reports that student math scores have improved by 50 percent, reading scores have improved by 52 percent and chronic absenteeism has gone down by 98.7 percent.

"It's crazy numbers that we're reaching, above and beyond," says Pintar of the program's successes. "It shows how many more kids we're reaching as the program expands, and that it is working."

NEMCSA is making sure that its programs and extensions are well-established before it continues to expand the program's services.

"We have a waiting list of schools who want to partner with us," Pintar says. "Our goal is to be in every school in our region."

Cardwell, who serves as the vice president for the National Association of Elementary School Principals, says he would like to see School Success implemented nation-wide.

"It's the best I've seen," he says, comparing School Success with other programs in the country. "Nothing else comes close. Every child should have access to a program of this quality."

**MCA brings low-cost loans to poverty-stricken communities**

Low-income residents throughout Michigan will have an alternative to high-cost payday loans, thanks to a partnership between Michigan Community Action (MCA) and a Texas-based nonprofit corporation.

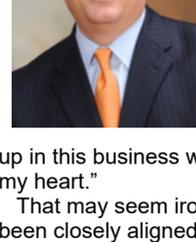
MCA will act as statewide coordinator for the Community Loan Center of America's Affordable Small Dollar Loan Program, building a network of local lenders that will in turn provide consumers with a lower-cost alternative to short-term payday loans, which carry high interest rates and fees.

"Affordable, low-cost lending solutions are often the difference between a household remaining in poverty or moving forward," says MCA Executive Director **Kate White**. "MCA's partnership with Community Loan Center of America ensures that our network of agencies as well as associations and other community lenders can provide fairly priced credit to help households get on a path to self-sufficiency."

MCA's network of local lenders will engage employers in their communities to offer loans to employees at no cost to the employer.

The Affordable Small Dollar Loan Program will offer employees of participating employers the opportunity to borrow up to \$1,000, repayable over a one-year term, at 18 percent interest and a \$20 administrative fee that is rolled into the loan. Borrowers typically repay the loan through payroll deductions or electronic funds transfers.

Community Loan Center of America's terms are more favorable than those offered on payday loans. In Michigan, payday lenders can extend loans for up to 31 days. Because the payday loan is short-term, the service fee translates into a triple-digit annual percentage rate, the Michigan Attorney General's Office notes. A customer who borrows \$100 for two weeks and is assessed the maximum \$15 service fee is effectively paying an annual percentage rate of 391 percent.

**MCA lobbyist profile****Kennedy helps steer MCA's public policy work**

Robert Kennedy has represented Michigan Community Action for 15 years in Lansing, navigating the waters of politics to help ensure stable funding and sound public policy for the state's largest human services agency outside of state government.

He says MCA is more than just another client.

"It's as much a mission for me as it is for them," Kennedy says. "I've literally grown up in this business working for MCA. Their issues are close to my heart."

That may seem ironic for a veteran of the state capital who's been closely aligned with Republicans. Before becoming a lobbyist, Kennedy worked much of the 1990s for Republicans in the Michigan Senate as a legislative aide, rising to the job of special assistant to the majority floor leader. He worked for another multiclient lobbying firm before launching his own – Capitol Affairs Inc. – in 2006.

The Community Action network's cost-efficiency and commitment to self-sufficiency are two reasons he was a good fit to represent its interests in Lansing.

Representing a nonprofit interest like MCA isn't always easy because it lacks the deep pockets of large corporate interests that may oppose legislation that affects social services funding and operations. Kennedy said as a small, boutique-style firm, he gives more personal attention to his clients, which include small businesses and multinational companies.

"A group like MCA can't compete financially with corporations, so we have to be more efficient and targeted in who we educate and support," Kennedy says. He says it's important for MCA affiliates to build relationships with their local boards, which include county commissioners and others who may wind up in the state legislature.

"That's a natural connection we can build on," he says.

A key issue this year will be to extend the state's annual funding of home weatherization programs administered by MCA affiliates. Without the funding guarantee, weatherization becomes haphazard and less effective, he says.

Kennedy would like to see employees of Community Action agencies become more engaged with their local board members, and even state lawmakers.

"We have a lot of smart, committed, passionate people," he says. "Sometimes having their voices heard can be just as powerful as an executive director who may see a legislator numerous times throughout the year."

**Allegan County CAA celebrates its mission, supporters**

Nearly \$16,000 was raised at Community Action of Allegan County's (CAAC) Hearts and Hands Celebration to support families striving to achieve economic security. More than 100 Community Action supporters, including businesses, community leaders and elected officials gathered April 20 to raise money for CAAC programs as well as recognize CAAC's volunteers and partners.

**Rep. Mary Whiteford** (R-Casco Township) and **Sen. Tonya Schuitmaker** (R-Lawton) presented tributes they signed along with the lieutenant governor to CAAC's Partnership Award Recipients.

"Community Action of Allegan County has been a staple of Allegan County for more than 50 years," Whiteford says. "The impact this organization has had on our community has been everlasting and Allegan County is blessed to have such a compassionate organization reaching out to residents and families who need it most."

U.S. Rep Fred Upton's (R-St. Joseph) staff also attended to present a congressional proclamation launching Community

Action Month in May.

"When families get the right resources at the right time, our community becomes stronger and more resilient," says **Lisa Evans**, CAAC executive director. "The money raised will help us introduce our work to new donors, engage and motivate current donors, and educate the community about how Community Action brings hope, help and change to thousands of families every year."

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