

STRAIGHT TALK

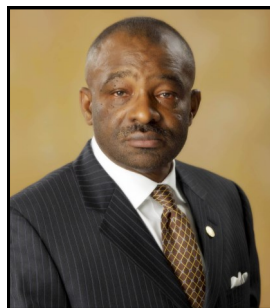
A quarterly update to close friends of
Community Action Partnership of Ramsey & Washington Counties



March 2017

From the Desk of the Executive Director

It is my privilege to use this space to introduce this newly expanded format of *Straight Talk*. While not yet in its final design iteration, modifying this publication is part and parcel of several positive changes that Community Action is undertaking in presenting a new messaging platform and a commitment to reposition and strengthen our agency as a 'thought leader' around issues of low-income and poverty.



The concept of thought leadership, as defined by Denise Brosseau, CEO of the Thought Leadership Lab refers to those "trusted sources who move and inspire people with innovative ideas, turn ideas into reality, and know how to replicate success." Our agency has long maintained such a position, as evidenced in part, by our tripartite Board of Directors. This leadership model requires equal participation from the low-income community, private sector, and elected officials. In return, we are directed by the insight and first-hand experience of those who live in poverty, experts in both the for-profit and non-profit industries, and public servants entrusted to make important decisions that affect all of us.

Community Action also demonstrates its role as a thought leader through our executive administration, senior leadership, and program staff that collectively participate on a myriad of boards, committees, councils, action groups, and professional associations. These memberships position Community Action to influence and educate our peers and the larger community, while also staying conversant with new and innovative ideas, best practices, the latest trends and developments, and all available resources and opportunities.

Thought leaders are "trusted sources who move and inspire people with innovative ideas, turn ideas into reality, and know how to replicate success."

– Denise Brosseau

That said we recognize that there is always room for improvement. And to that end, Community Action made the decision to run our three-year strategic planning process and 2016 Community Needs Assessment simultaneously, so that each exercise could inform and help to guide the other in real time. Among the outcomes from this endeavour were the establishment of our Strategic Initiatives Department and subsequently the development of a new communication and messaging platform. This platform is piloted by three principles: Serve, Educate, and Transform. Community Action partners with people to overcome poverty by:

- Providing the building blocks that strengthen stability and success, through programs that **SERVE** low-income individuals and families. By **servicing**, Community Action helps people: stay warm and meet basic needs; prepare young children for success in school; achieve economic stability and financial well-being; and get the most out of the homes and ensure affordability.
- Amplifying the voices of those living in poverty, which helps to **EDUCATE** the broader community about the support and assistance that is needed. Through **education**, Community Action draws the public's attention to: specific needs and situations; innovative ideas and solutions; and opportunities for investment and action.
- Building alliances that **TRANSFORM** systems and remove the barriers that perpetuate poverty. In **transforming**, Community Action partners with others to: identify the barriers that impeded success; improve how public systems and supports work; and ensure equal access to opportunity.

I am pleased to share this new messaging platform with you so that you and all our stakeholders have a richer sense of our operating philosophy and the breadth and depth of our work.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clarence Hightower".

Clarence Hightower, Ph.D.

Philanthropy expands Car Ownership Program

The genesis of Community Action's successful Car Ownership Program began 29 years ago with an investment by the McKnight Foundation in its Single Parent Loan program. Established in 1988, this initiative provided low-interest loans to single parent households in Washington County so that they may meet their transportation needs. As the Car Ownership Program has evolved over the years, Community Action expanded its reach to include individuals and families throughout both Ramsey and Washington counties. While program participants *must* be employed, a poor credit history, limited income, and other factors do not disqualify them for a loan through Community Action, as they would with a traditional auto loan.

To date, the Car Ownership Program has served hundreds of low-income households through a revolving loan pool. Although the maximum loan amount increased from \$1,000 to \$4,000 during its first two decades, there had not been an increase since 2006.

Since the maximum loan amount failed to keep pace with the automobile market over the last ten years or so, many program participants could often only afford to purchase cars that were in poor or unreliable condition, requiring additional expenses for maintenance and repairs. As such, people were often forced to over-stretch their scant financial resources to cover those costs during the life of the loan.

Happily, in late 2016, the generosity of the Otto Bremer Trust in the form of a \$72,000 grant, has enabled Community Action's Car Ownership Program to increase its maximum loan amount to \$6,000.

Otto Bremer Trust Program Associate Jenifer Robins notes that, "We appreciate the opportunity to provide reliable transportation to low-income households, creating stability and improved economic independence."

The vision and leadership demonstrated by the Otto Bremer Trust positions Community Action to better serve its Car Ownership participants. "The significance of these funds cannot be overstated," says Brooke Walker, Director of Community Engagement, "Reliable transportation is a critical element in a low-income person's ability to find and maintain suitable employment, promote economic stability, and improve other outcomes including the social, educational, and health-related needs of all household members."

To further enhance the impact of the program, Community Action has been approved as a credit reporting agency. Already an asset building program, Car Ownership now has the added advantage of helping low-income individuals build and/or repair their credit history. This will represent another tool in helping to lift our participants out of poverty and on a course toward financial independence.



Happy Car Ownership Participants



Agency News

Volunteer Program

Community Action is proud to announce that we are now a Service Enterprise Certified organization—only the 4th Community Action Agency in the country to be certified and the 1st in Minnesota.



Certification is awarded by the Points of Light Foundation. Nonprofits that operate as a Service Enterprise are organizations that fully leverage volunteers and their many skills across all levels of the organization to successfully deliver on the organization's social mission.



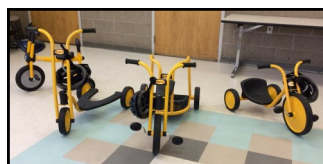
Head Start

Community Action's Head Start/Early Head Start programs have been awarded a "Continuation Grant" to deliver services for the 2017-2018 school program year. The award is \$9,770,118 and is to be used to provide pre-kindergarten education and health services to children and other wrap-around family services to all the income eligible families in Ramsey County.



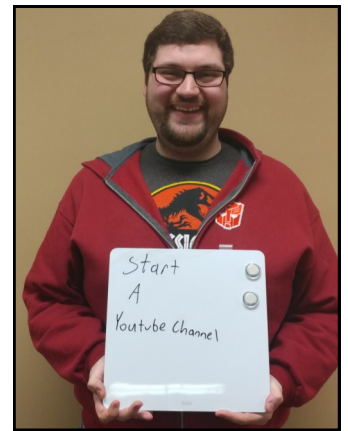
Midway Men's Club Gift of New Trikes

This spring children at Community Action's Mount Airy Head Start Center will be riding new trikes and scooters while wearing new helmets thanks to a much-needed and much-appreciated gift from the Midway Men's Club. This new equipment will be a critical component in developing the large motor skills of young students, as well as an effective way to teach bike and pedestrian safety.



VITA Tax Clinic—A Vital Tax Service

Each year, Community Action provides a valuable service to residents in our community. The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Clinic allows low-income taxpayers the opportunity to schedule an appointment with a trained volunteer tax professional and receive their full tax refund, at no cost. Passionate volunteers are certified through the IRS-sponsored program.



Justin, a tax clinic participant, is using his refund to start a small business.

This year the clinic plans to serve over 100 individuals and families during our weekly clinic. Last year we exceeded our goal and completed more than 80 returns.

This year's clinic includes some exciting new additions: A self-service option, where participants can learn to complete their own tax returns online, with the support of a trained volunteer. Additionally free childcare and interpreters are offered to participants. All appointments are scheduled in advance, which means no long lines or waiting. Appointments are *still* available through Monday, April 10, 2017.

Project Success

Project Success has initiated a new partnership with Ramsey County Workforce Solutions. The new Manufacturing Training Program is an 8 week training that provides coursework on safety, quality practices and measurements, manufacturing production and processes, and maintenance awareness. Those who complete the training will be a Certified Production Technician and will have the opportunity to speak with several potential employers in the industry. The first session is under way with a second session scheduled for June 2017.

Getting Ahead

At the beginning of March, Getting Ahead, which is organized around a nationally-lauded, research-based curriculum is a 16-session leadership group that helps individuals in poverty build their resources for a more prosperous life for themselves, their families, and their communities. Not only do participants investigate poverty and create their own plan for stability, they also enjoy the benefit of free onsite childcare, a catered family meal and a \$25 stipend per session. Future courses will be offered starting Fall 2017.

Agency News

Water's Off Day

On Saturday March 25, Community Action participated in Water's Off. This event is a collaboration between St. Paul Plumbers Local #34, the MN Mechanical Contractors Association and us. Free plumbing inspection and minor repairs are done for low-income seniors or disabled homeowners in Ramsey and Washington counties. This year there were 45 homeowners that received services.



Energy Conservation

Beginning April 24, 2017, the first state-wide weatherization mechanical training in Energy Conservation's new mechanical training room will occur. Energy auditors from around the state will spend up to five days of classroom and hands-on training to improve their technical skills. The next training will begin the week of May 1.



Law Enforcement Career Path Academy

The City of Saint Paul Police Department is launching a new venture to develop career pathways into law enforcement. The Saint Paul Police Law Enforcement Career Path Academy (LECPA) is for young adults who are interested in becoming Police Officers but face financial and/or other barriers to attending college and finding employment. Community Action serves as a key partner in LECPA, providing a full-time staff person to support enrollment and provide career navigation and support services.



Board of Directors News

Congratulations to our new Board Officers:

President

Commissioner Blake Huffman
Ramsey County

Vice President

Kerri Sawyer
Minnesota Department of Health

Treasurer

Michelle Kemper
Washington County Community Services

Secretary

Heather Meyers
Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services

Member-At-Large

Robin Madsen
Former AFSCME Local 1842 President

Welcome new Board Member:

Esmeralda Cortes
Head Start Policy Council

Congratulations to our retiring Board Member:

We would like to thank **LeAndra Estis** for her dedicated and enthusiastic service on the Board of Directors since July 2011.



In her six-year tenure on the board, LeAndra played a central role in the strategic planning, oversight, and ultimate vision of our agency. In addition to serving as Vice President of the Board from 2015-2017, she participated on the Planning and Evaluation, Finance, and By-Law Committees.

LeAndra says that her experience at Community Action has significantly expanded her outlook on the world and notes that "Community Action has made me who I am today and given me the tools to become the person I am still striving to be."