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Indiana Community Action Network Newsletter

February 2009

First "Getting Ahead" Graduates for Monroe County Circles Initiative!

On January 15, 2009 the Monroe County Circles™ Initiative housed and staffed by South Central Community Action Program (SCCAP) graduated its first class of low-income "Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin'-By World" students.



In May of 2008, SCCAP launched the Circles™ Initiative as a way to fulfill its mission of helping people work their way out of poverty. Circles is a strategy to build intentional friendships and a community across race and class lines to empower people living in poverty. In each community, direction is provided by a Guiding Coalition composed of a cross-section of community members, comparable to a very hands-on Board.

People transitioning out of poverty are called Circle Leaders because they are responsible for creating their OWN plans to transition out of poverty, and letting their middle-class community Allies know the kinds of support they need in order to follow their plans. Circle Leaders are trained in the 15 -20 week "Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin'-By World" curriculum.

After graduating from "Getting Ahead", each Circle Leader can choose to be matched with three to four Allies.

Volunteer community Allies are trained in a 6-hour "Bridges Out of Poverty" course and also complete a 3-hour Ally Orientation. Allies provide friendship, emotional support, help with problem-solving, and connections to the middle-class world that low-income people often don't have.

Twice monthly the weekly Circles™ Community meeting provides programming on topics of interest to Circle Leaders in helping them to build their resources, and one meeting each month is a Big View

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About the Indiana Community Action Network

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (EOA) established over 1,000 Community Action Agencies (CAAs) at the local level to implement EOA programs. EOA programs included: VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America); Job Corps; Neighborhood Youth Corps; Head Start; Adult Basic Education; Family Planning; Community Health Centers; Congregate Meal Preparation; Economic Development; Foster Grandparents; Legal Services; Neighborhood Centers; Summer Youth Programs; Senior Centers; and others.

CAAs vary widely, with

gathering to which the entire larger community is invited to work one by one, step by step, on issues that Circle Leaders have identified as central to keeping them in poverty.

Free meals and child care are provided at Getting Ahead trainings and weekly Circles™ Community meetings in order to eliminate barriers that might prevent participation by Circle Leaders. "Breaking bread" together also helps the group build community.

The "Getting Ahead" graduation was the culmination of an 18 week process of learning and growth for Circle Leaders. During the class, students explored the myriad causes of poverty, from issues of individual responsibility, to community problems, to predatory practices and systemic issues. They also learned about the hidden rules of class, assessed the relative strengths and weaknesses of their own resources, and the strengths and weaknesses of the Monroe County Community. They used the assessments of their own lives to create their plans to transition from poverty, and used the assessments of the community to plan a presentation for the public, planned for February 12, 2009. The "Getting Ahead" training is an emotional process: close bonds were formed among these Circle Leaders and many tears shed before they received their certificates. Some excerpts from their graduation speeches:

" A few weeks into it, I had this thought, 'you know, Stephanie, you've gotta stop thinking that people are only not helpful, and you've gotta start looking for the angels.' And lo and behold, I've got like three new angels... And I've started to reach out for support, when I'd been very isolated and I'd never made time to reach out...the people in this group inspired me...with that human spirit of persisting, and keeping coming back, and the empathy they have for others even when they themselves are struggling."

"This program has given me such confidence, and my self-esteem has been built and raised...if you can feel good about yourself you can do a lot for others as well. Nothing has given me more hope than the Circles™ program. I believe that this program will be the community's best resource for ending poverty. And for myself, I'm already getting ahead. I want to embrace life by reaching out to others."

"Circles has helped us learn about 'how.' How did we get to this point in our lives? And we all came from different directions to get here. How are we going to handle this new information? This has required a lot of soul-searching and a lot of self-examination, and we had to shoulder a few things that we weren't proud of, but we understand them now. So now it's, how are we going to get ourselves out of poverty, but also help open the eyes of the community and be the leaders that can really make a difference. And that's the journey we're setting off on as Circle Leaders...I'm truly honored to have been chosen to be part of the first Getting Ahead class for Circles in this area...you can't really even explain the second wind it gives you, the breath of fresh air to know that people really believe in you."

"We learned a lot about ourselves in the process. I have a great new family that can relate to what I say or what I do. You are all my second family. I will miss coming to the class, but it's far from over. And we're gonna kick butt the middle-class way, believe it!"

some being non-profit groups, others being city agencies, and some being community-controlled groups. Many CAAs vary greatly in how their agencies are organized and in the type of services they provide to their local communities. In fact, the number of CAAs has increased and it is now estimated that CAAs serve over 80 percent of all U.S. counties. Although CAAs were established over 40 years ago, they have a rich history of advocacy for and service to low-income people and remain important in domestic social policy to the present day.

We have 24 Community Action Agencies that serve all 92 counties of Indiana. Each Community Action Agency periodically analyzes community needs to identify strategies that will work best in attacking poverty. Each CAA is different because its programs reflect the needs of their local communities. These agencies are unique in their ability to deploy diverse program activities and services in meeting their mission. They operate an array of programs which include, but are not limited to: Head Start; the Energy Assistance Program; the Weatherization Program; Individual Development Accounts; Homeownership Counseling; Owner Occupied Rehabilitation; Housing Development; Foster Grandparents; Child Care; and many more programs and services.

To find your local CAA or to learn more about the Indiana Community Action Network or State

The next step for the Monroe County Circles™ Initiative is to match Circle Leaders with Allies. This will take place in early March. One Ally already plans to guide several excited Circle Leaders in creating a community garden! Circle Leaders plan to participate in the local "Bowl for Kids Sake," a benefit for "Big Brothers/Big Sisters," and continually find ways to engage in giving back to the community - reciprocity is a cornerstone of the Circles™ model.

A motto created by Circle Leaders exemplifies the spirit of the Monroe County Circles™ Initiative: "Together We Rise!" With this kind of motivation and enthusiasm, Circle Leaders of today will reach their goals, and will eventually become Allies to new Circle Leaders, creating cycles of prosperity instead of cycles of poverty.

Association, please visit
www.incap.org.

C.A.S.I. Honored

Community Action of Southern Indiana (C.A.S.I.) became the first organizational recipient in the twenty-five year history of the Martin Luther King Holiday Award when it was recognized at a King Birthday celebration at Jeffersonville's St. Stephen Church, Indiana. Executive Director Fred Mitchell said the agency "was honored to have been recognized for its work on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised."

C.A.S.I. has been a leader in advocating for low-income families for over 44 years. Mitchell also stated that its agency was "inspired by the pregnant potential of a new and different human spirit as demonstrated by the reenergized national efforts for economic parity for our citizens."



Client Spotlight

Human Services, Inc. Helps a Family in Jackson County

Lisa moved to Seymour in 1994 with her four children. Her husband had passed away nine months earlier and she had a daughter who was going to

Riley Hospital for treatments for heart and lung disease. Her daughter was later diagnosed with a brain tumor. Because of all of the medical equipment required to take care of her daughter, it was difficult to rent a home. Lisa became approved as a first-time homebuyer and thought part of her problems would be over.

However, soon after moving into their new home, she and her children kept getting sick with asthma, allergies, colds, coughing, breathing problems, and hives. The moisture and condensation in the home was causing a mildew and mold problem. Lisa's daughter was especially affected because of the trach, oxygen, ventilator, and many medications. Infections were a constant problem. Her daughter passed away two years ago at the age of 18.

Human Services, Inc. had assisted Lisa over the years with Energy Assistance, CSBG medical, Emergency Food and Shelter, and Salvation Army funds for frequent trips to Riley Hospital. The rest of the family continued to have health problems that she believed were caused by the problems with the house. In 2008, Lisa approached

Human Services, Inc. with the problems she was continuing to have with her home and the sickness that her family was experiencing. Our County Director connected Lisa with The Seymour Housing Authority as well as recognized community members to seek out help for Lisa. The Seymour Housing Authority arranged for Lisa to move into another home while repairs were being made to her home. The housing Authority organized a fundraiser to cover some of the cost of making Lisa's home a safe environment again. A local builder, local businesses, and volunteers came together to replace duct work, install a new furnace and air conditioner, and did necessary repairs to the home. When all was done and the family could move back into their home, 23 community resources including Human Services, Inc. completed approximately \$75,000 worth of home repairs from donations and volunteer time. Actual cash money used was between \$3,000 to \$4,000. CSBG supported the County Director time and benefits involved (\$225.00). Also, in 2008, Human Services, Inc. helped Lisa with assistance through the following programs, Emergency Food and Shelter had provided mortgage payment assistance, Salvation Army provided gas money for medical trips, and Energy Assistance Program with heating expenses. The percentage of CSBG dollars utilized is such a small percentage utilized but was an important factor in pulling together all of the necessary resources in the Community to assure that Lisa and her family could again live in the safe and secure environment of a healthy home.



Save the Date: Statewide Conference!

The Statewide Conference for Indiana's Community Action Agencies will be August 10-11, 2009! This year's statewide conference will be held in Indianapolis, IN and will focus on Emerging Leadership. More information will be coming soon!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Lisa Travis at ltravis@incap.org or 1-800-382-9895.

Registration Now Open for Indiana Training Institute Trainings

The Indiana Training Institute (ITI) Trainings for March and April 2009 are now posted Community Action Training section of INCAA's web site at www.incap.org. Training information posted

includes trainers, training descriptions, training times, and registration deadlines.

Trainings currently posted include:

- **Family Development Matrix Training** - March 17, 2009
- **Board Fiscal Oversight Training** - March 18, 2009
- **How to be an Effective Supervisor in a Time of Change** - March 30-31, 2009
- **IHCDA Quarterly Meeting with Executive Directors** - April 8, 2009
- **Spring Regional Meeting, Central (Indianapolis)** - Not-for-Profit Organization Accounting, New Form 990, and Auditing Issues Update - April 27, 2009
- **Spring Regional Meeting, South (Mitchell)** - Not-for-Profit Organization Accounting, New Form 990, and Auditing Issues Update - April 28, 2009
- **Spring Regional Meeting, North (Plymouth)** - Not-for-Profit Organization Accounting, New Form 990, and Auditing Issues Update - April 29, 2009

More ITI trainings have been scheduled for May - November 2009 and the training and registration information should be available online in the coming weeks.

If you have other questions about the training, please feel free to contact Lisa Travis, Team Leader, CAA Network Support, at ltravis@incap.org or 1-800-382-9895.

Survey on Network Capacity and Expertise

We are surveying CAA staff to see what expertise is contained within the Network that we may be able to utilize for future Indiana Training Institute Trainings.

Please click on the following link to take the survey, http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=YMwNoWvB2v9KCjMGIQ132Q_3d_3d, and answer these questions as they pertain to you.

We will be collecting survey responses from now through Friday, March 13, 2009. Thank you in advance for taking the time to participate in this survey!

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