

2020

Community Action Angels NY



Community Action Planning Council of
Jefferson County's
Community Action Angels

Annual Report

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Wyoming County Community Action, Inc.



ABOUT COMMUNITY ACTION ANGELS NEW YORK

Community Action Angels is a volunteer and resource development program model administered by Wyoming County Community Action (WCCA). This program was founded by a one-time recipient of Community Action services in 1996 and gifted to the agency in 2002 for exclusive use by all Community Action agencies. Individual programs are custom to agency and community needs, coordinated by staff and assisted by an Advisory Board and other dedicated volunteers' representative of villages, towns, and cities throughout the agency's service area.

Since 2002, New York State Department of State, Division of Community Services, has contracted with WCCA to provide technical assistance and training to all Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funded agencies to increase capacity through community engagement. Currently, there are over thirty Community Action agencies that are either operating a Community Action Angels program or have participated in Community Action Angels designed/developed/etc. initiatives.

Since the inception, Community Action Angel volunteers have distributed over 18 million dollars in donations of goods and services through the network of Community Action agencies in New York State. As a result of these donations, the network has been able to assist over 190,000 residents in overcoming challenges, especially, in times of disaster.

OUR MISSION

To provide the training and tools needed to increase the human and financial capacity of Community Action agencies across New York State through enhanced volunteerism, unrestricted resources, and community partnerships so that all people who walk through our doors walk out with greater opportunity.

OUR GOAL

To work together through shared knowledge, data, resources, and activities so volunteer work in Community Action is more organized, accountable, recognized and leaves a significant and positive impact on our state, communities, agencies, and the people we serve.

OUR PHILOSOPHY

We will help everyone who asks for help to the best of our ability. We will encourage those we help to help others to the best of their ability. "*The Circle of Giving.*"

OUR FOCUS

Our focus is on helping all individuals and families to become self-sufficient as well as to help those whose employment income disqualifies them from assistance to remain self-sufficient. This pro-gram is committed to addressing the physical, academic, and social needs of children where current programs fall short or are non-existent.

13TH Annual Meeting of the Minds

This year the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to slow the spread disrupted the work of conference organizers everywhere. The only choice was to move entirely online or cancel altogether. Thankfully, with the support of NYSCAA staff and their expertise, the Meeting of the Minds went virtual and went well. Over 300 people participated over the course of three days with 765 hours of technical assistance training provided during and immediately after the event.

The purpose of the Meeting of the Minds is to bring the “best of Community Action minds” together and share knowledge and experience...to inspire one another through networking. Clearly, there is a barrier to networking through our computer screens. We all miss those conversations to expand new ideas presented. But to shine some light on the positive, it levels the playing field for attendance and allows more of our colleagues unable to travel due to time or money to take advantage of a virtual opportunity to learn new skills and ideas.

While plenty of our colleagues are celebrating the forced shift to virtual conferences because they can attend events this year they've always had to miss in the past, I am hopeful that we can get past this historic time and meet in person next year and make it possible for anyone who wants to attend can. I think all of us can relate to these words of one of our cheerleaders for in-person conferences: “ I want to get in my car, eat the bad rubber chicken dinner and nurse the free cabernet for three hours so I can network and ideate as soon as we are allowed again.”

Thank you to all who supported this year's Meeting of the Minds and for your support of Community Action Angels NY over the years!

MEETING OF THE MINDS RECAP ~ [SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL OUR SPEAKERS AND PRESENTERS!](#)

KEYNOTE: Manual Rosa, Director, Division of Community Services, NYS Department of State

"THE CRITICAL LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS NECESSARY FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE"

Presenter: Lindsey Zajac, *Principal, Ahern, Murphy & Associates*

It is often said that leadership of others begins with leadership of self. With an improvement to our attitudes and emotional intelligence, we as leaders can serve more effectively on high performance teams and create lasting results at home, at work, and in our communities.

NEW YORK STATE OFFICE FOR NEW AMERICANS & COMMUNITY ACTION COLLABORATIONS

Presenter: Dr. Laura V. González-Murphy, Director, NYS Immigration Policy and Research at NYS, DOS

The information in this session spoke to the evolution of the Office for New Americans and thus the State's immigration policy, specifically addressing some of the reasons (state, national, and demographic) for the scope of our programming and what the goals are.

MEETING OF THE MINDS CONT.

GUEST SPEAKER: Vida Vera Cayuga, Deputy Secretary of State

#COMMUNITYBUILDERS4CHILDREN

Presenters: Denise Harlow, CEO, National Community Action Partnership
Andrea Ogunwumi, CEO, *Economic Opportunity Program, Inc.*

The current global crisis impacts children and families in a way never seen or experienced before. We must develop strategies and plans that situate dissent as cultural mediators to rebuild our children, families, and communities. Community Action has many great examples of what works, and we will need all the tools in our toolbox to help families mitigate the trauma of this moment to strengthen their well-

being for the long term. This session will provide attendees a blend of the local and national perspectives on how Community Action Agencies can support families and communities.



OPENING REMARKS: Jackie Orr, CEO, New York State Community Action Association

CLOSING REMARKS: Manny Rosa, Director, NYS DOS, Division of Community Services

PROJECT SHARING – DRIVE THRU COMMUNITY BABY SHOWER

Presenter: Joanne Ocasio-Bizardi
Community Action Programs Cayuga/Seneca

A baby shower is a party that we give to celebrate the delivery or expected birth of a child. Due to COVID we decided to still celebrate the family by creating a drive thru community baby shower and providing a free stocked diaper bag of goodies as well as community resources.



FATHERHOOD CONNECTION SESSION

Presenters: Reginald Cox, Founder/Director, Fatherhood Connection
Tina Zerbian, CEO, Connecting Communities in Action

Research establishes links between fathers' healthy, consistent involvement in their children's lives and positive outcomes for children and youth. Healthy father involvement (spending time with children, providing emotional support, giving everyday assistance, monitoring behavior, using non-coercive discipline and providing clear boundaries and expectations) benefits children through greater academic success, more positive social behavior, fewer conduct problems, better self-esteem, lower levels of depression, and reduced contact with juvenile justice system. In many communities across New York State, and in some Community Action Agencies, the Fatherhood Connection program is successfully engaging fathers in the lives of their children and bonding them with other male role models in 13week sessions that encourage growth through vulnerability and transparency. Pastor Reginald (Reggie) Cox explored the approaches and successes of the curriculum, and Tina Zerbian and her team spoke of the successes of CCA's Fatherhood programs.

[PRESENTATIONS CAN BE FOUND ON OUR WEBSITE.](https://communityactionangelsny.org) communityactionangelsny.org

Technical Assistance & Training

REGIONAL MEETINGS ~ New York State Community Action Association

Three regional meetings were facilitated virtually by NYSCAA where agencies across the state had opportunity to attend via Zoom. 114 people attended. Community Action Angels NY participated in all three meetings and provided an update on training opportunities, Community Action Angels Commission for Children Needs Assessment and an introduction to a replicable parenting class called, "Feelings Matter~ Character Counts".

AGENCY FOCUSED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Prior to the state shut down, Jefferson County Community Action, Genesee Orleans Community Action and Department of Youth and Community Developing were receiving training and technical assistance to further develop their volunteer base, advisory boards, volunteer-based programming and leveraging community engagement through partnerships and collaborations. We all look forward to the necessary in person meetings with agency staff and volunteers to enhance the volunteer initiatives and community-based objectives identified in their strategic plans.

PANDEMIC ~ SPECIAL PROJECTS

NEW YORK STATE OFFICE FOR NEW AMERICANS

At the request of the NYS Office for New Americans, and with nearly 100% cooperation from Community Action Agencies across the state, Community Action Angels was able to provide a complete list of statewide food pantries, address, phone number and new Covid hours. These resources are posted on the Office for New American website to help newcomers' access much needed food for their families. This list of resources can be found at: <https://www.newamericans.ny.gov/pdf/covid-19/NY%20COVID-19%20resources.pdf>

SAY CHEESE PROJECT

Say Cheese is a program working in partnership with the Butterfly Foundation and Community Action Angels NY to get nutritious dairy products into the hands of people in need and essential workers stepping up during the pandemic. Through their generous donation, Community Action Angel volunteers across Western New York delivered 3,500 pounds of locally produced cheese to thousands of seniors, people with disabilities, front line workers and law enforcement. The cheese was valued at \$15,700.00 and not only helped our community members but local dairy farmers and small agricultural businesses feeling the financial stress related to the shutdown. Thanks to the Community Action Angel volunteers in Wyoming and Genesee/Orleans Community Action and our assisting partners: Independent Living, ARC, Wyoming, Genesee, Orleans Office for the Aging, Wyoming County Jail and Salvation Army. People in five counties received cheese and we look forward to serving more counties through Community Action Angels NY and their amazing volunteers. Thank you all!



PANDEMIC ~ SPECIAL PROJECTS CONT.



In the very early days of the pandemic, when masks were scarce, I received notice from a downstate agency expressing concern for the number of people accessing their food pantry and other agency programs who were unable to purchase or sew a mask. Their concern was for both their customers and their staff. With a little research we were able to put together a handout that contained directions on how to make a non-sew mask from items in the home along with a list of CDC precautions and safety measures. We shared this with the New York State Community Action network and with the National Community Action Partnership where it was made available to others

in the Community Action Network nationwide.

COMMUNITY ACTION ANGELS NY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN

Despite many obstacles, the commission continued to move forward this past year. The passion of these volunteers for helping children to be the best they can be is evident in the time and effort they put forth in completing the Mission and Vision Statement, developing Core Values and Beliefs, completing our Child Needs Assessment and developing an informal strategy to help children while building a strong foundation of accomplishments from which we can move forward. **Ten members of the commission have stepped up to donate time, talent, and resources to accomplish the following in the upcoming year:**

Reggie and Renee Cox, Founder/Fatherhood Connection, will add a component to fatherhood curriculum to include the children. The purpose is to increase communication skills and open the hearts of both father and child to create a better understanding of one another through the honest expression of feelings and emotions and a discussion on the importance of developing good character traits early on and throughout life.

Lindsey Zejak, Principal of Ahern & Murphy Associates, will develop a series of workshops focused on developing the leadership skills of children. This will be a certificate based, train the trainer series after which staff and key volunteers can provide the training through in-house programs or out in the community. Trainings will be online and in some cases in person. Kevin Bohn, Partner with Spring Collaborative Group and Brendan Bannon, Photographer and Educator, will create video and photographs to compliment Lindsey's trainings. Another video is being created focused on the work of the commission and the needs of children.

Mike and Jan Kamish and Joanne Ryan, Founders, Continual Care Solutions, Inc., will customize the portal needed to collect the data and access the impact of the children we reach through our work. This portal will be open to all participating agencies, organizations, schools etc. participating in programs and projects of the commission. This will provide access to data and reports on collective impact to report to current and potential funders and crucial information for needs assessments.

Vinnie Taylor, President, Waveline Direct/ChildCore Publishing and Pat Standish will create a curriculum (with activities) as a companion piece to their current storybook series to encourage social, emotional and character development of children. A new book called, CHOICES, will be written to cover the important choices children make that affect them in the present and in the future. We are currently writing a book called VOYAGE... the beginning. This book is being created in partnership with the Office for New Americans and is focused on helping non-English-speaking parents identify 0-5 developmental milestones and preparation for kindergarten. Publication scheduled for late November.

The remaining members of the commission will be providing support to these projects in multiple ways. We are all very grateful to have New York State Community Action Association (NYSCAA) as a strong partner and acting fiduciary agent for anticipated funding meant to benefit children across the state of New York.

COMMUNITY ACTION ANGELS NY-COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN ~ 2019-2020 CHILD NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Compiled by: Pat Standish, Coordinator, Community Action Angels NY

The Community Action Angels Commission for Children was created in September of 2019. The Commission is an organization of dedicated members assembled from diverse avenues of expertise committed to improving the social, emotional and character development of children, and empower them to tackle life's greatest challenges.

Their mission states: "We impact emotional character development of children ages 6-12 by empowering them to deal head on with the challenges they face every day. Our goal is to help them their best lives.' They envision: "All children will have the life skills needed to grow into competent, successful adults who live happy and fulfilling lives: capable of teaching the next generation."

The Commission's core values and beliefs embrace:

- Showing a child their SELF-WORTH and they'll have unshakable faith in themselves and their abilities.
- Encouraging a child to TRUST and they'll bridge honest communication to healthy relationships.
- EMPOWERING a child to problem-solve and they'll be ready to face challenges.
- Teaching a child RESILIENCE and they'll be able to adapt to life changes and different environments.
- Developing a child's sense of EMPATHY and they'll be more tolerant and accepting of others.

The Commission champions projects that promote:

- Healthy Emotions
- Good Character
- Self-Worth
- Resilience
- Respect for Others
- Trusted Relationships
- Social Competence
- Academic Success

With a purpose of exploring the diverse needs of children in communities across New York State, a "Mini Child Needs Assessment" was developed by the Community Action Angels Commission for Children, supported by NYS Department of State, Division of Community Services, and implemented at the 2019 Community Action Angels NY Meeting of the Minds held in Syracuse.

Listening to a diverse group of individuals from across the state is one of the most important things we can do on this journey of taking Community Action Angels NY to the next level. The next level means that we get to hear from multiple sectors of the community and Community Action agencies on how we focus on the right priorities, increase the awareness and funding needed to take care of ALL children in NY State, and the country, and to make a real impact on the transformational outcome of their lives and their families.

To widen the scope of the assessment, information was also gathered outside of the Meeting of the Minds venue from community partners. The information gained was to be used for the purpose of building a foundation of current childhood needs identified from which the Commission would develop their strategic plan of action.

METHODS and DATA COLLECTION

1. Statewide Input at Meeting of the Minds, September 2019, in Syracuse. Commission member, Julia Kivistic, National Director, Corporate and Cause Partnerships at Boys and Girls Clubs of America, developed a series of five questions and posted around the conference venue. Seventy-five participants of the Meeting of the Minds were divided into five groups and proceeded to each posted question to call out answers which were recorded. Participants consisted of fifteen community volunteers representing Higher Education (2), Early Learning (1), Child/Youth Mentoring (1), Drug/Alcohol Rehabilitation, Persons w Disabilities (2), Business/Corporations (5) and Community Action Board Members (2). Fifty-five Community Action staff from eighteen agencies participated and included five Executive Directors and fifty mid-management and frontline workers. Two Department of State, Division of Community Services, Program Analysts and three staff members from the New York State Community Action Association were in attendance.

The following questions were posed to those in attendance:

- What do you think/feel is the greatest need of our kids?
Response: *Out of 102 responses -77 focused on emotional and social needs, 21 on personal and health needs and 3 on education.*
- What are the greatest challenges you face every day as "leaders on the ground" in your communities?
Response: *Out of 38 responses-11 focused on staff, 10 on funding/resources, 8 on measuring outcomes and marketing, 9 on other. i.e. racial inequity, transportation, competition/politics, parent addiction, parent education.*
- What are the resources you need to make things happen?
Response: *Out of 42 responses-16 focused on human capacity (staff and volunteers), 6 on data collection tools/assessment/technology, 4 on funding, 4 on marketing, 2 on workplace safety, 10 on other. i.e. policy and procedure, motivation, leadership, community involvement.*
- What is your vision of what's possible to make a real transformational change for children and their families? Name five most important things needed.
Response: *1. Remove stigma 2. Feel safe in surroundings 3. Increase communication and trust in providers and authority 4. Family Counseling/Parent Education 5. Security (food, childcare, educational and emotional needs met)*
- What is the ONE THING you would like to see happen?
Response: *Out of 33 responses-29 focused on emotional wellness, 4 on basic needs.*

METHODS and DATA COLLECTION CONT.

2. A meeting of the Community Action Angels Commission convened at the Meeting of the Minds where fifteen members of the commission gave input on childhood needs and the unmet needs of specific age groups of children. Information was based on professional and personal experiences and observations.
3. Interviews and formal discussions focused on needs of children were held in both rural and urban areas. One on one interviews were conducted by both staff and volunteers with the following:
 - Teachers
 - School Principals
 - College Professors/Administration
 - Law Enforcement
 - Non-Profit Leadership and Staff
 - Recovery/Rehabilitation Providers
 - Parents/Grandparents
 - Incarcerated Parents
 - Child Psychiatrist/Counselors/Physicians
4. Group presentation and feedback sessions were implemented by both staff and volunteer efforts. Those participating were organizations whose work focused on needs of children in homes of addiction and poverty in both urban and rural communities. Fifteen (15) organizations participated.

The main strengths of the assessment process are the large number of participants with opportunity to speak at length and brainstorm about a variety of topics affecting children. i.e. poverty, parent addiction, incarceration, abuse, neglect, education, mental and physical health, character traits, resilience, self-esteem and emotional and social wellness. The process to identify needs through group and individual input at the Meeting of the Minds provided opportunity for the Community Action Network staff working with children and families in poverty to bring forth issues and needs that are currently unmet in their agency programming and share proven solutions.

The primary participants who administered the process, collected the data, analyzed and interpreted the information presented in the report was the Community Action Angels NY Coordinator, Community Action Angels Commission Members, community partners and key volunteers.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Children need positive social and emotional development to influence their self-confidence, empathy, ability to develop meaningful relationships and a sense of importance and value to those around them. Children need a strong social and emotional foundation in childhood to impact positive attitudes and behaviors, academic performance, career path and adult health outcomes.
2. Children need to be nurtured and surrounded by a strong network of supportive adults and peers who can offer practical and emotional support, build positive character traits and teaches them to trust and communicate with others. Positive role models and connectedness at home, school and in the community can buffer or redirect a child on a trajectory of risk by encouraging healthy choices, boost their ability to cope with stress and trauma and provide encouragement and opportunities.
3. Children need to feel safe and should never be deprived of basic needs which can result in a wide variety of challenging behaviors, physical and mental health issues, social isolation, poor grades and hopelessness that will follow them through life.
4. To make real transformational change for children and families, agencies need to increase both agency and human capacity. i.e. sustainable funding, marketing, data collection, measurement, assessment, staff support and buy-in from leadership, child and family focused programming to educate parents, remove stigma, child and family focused resources/partnerships, community support and volunteer engagement.
5. There needs to be a worldwide consensus that children are the key to the future and their voice needs to be heard.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a two-year strategic plan for the commission focused on the assessment findings and recommendations.

Create a portal where the voices of children can be heard and where their opinions and ideas can be part of the commission's strategic plan.

Build a network of like-minded community volunteers and resources, develop and provide the tools, and launch that network on a program of support for children.

Create a funding stream to provide support to organizations and programs that encourage the emotional and character development of children.

Invest in comprehensive data collection tool and process to measure the long-term impact on the children and families served through the work of the commission.

Create a team to be advocates and the commission's vehicle used to speak to all stakeholders regarding both the common and diverse needs of children.