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e-news

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Letter from the President

Dear Members,

I would like to begin by wishing each and every one of you a Happy New Year. I trust and hope that you all had a wonderful time during the holidays. As we begin this new year of 2006, I would like to reflect on our trials, tribulations, accomplishments and opportunities for 2005. Hopefully by doing so, we can put our plans and strategies for 2006 into perspective.

It is quite disconcerting that every year the challenges Community Action faces are not getting any easier. How can we be expected to focus on our mission when the majority of our time is spent on fighting for our survival? How can we truly win the war on poverty when we are constantly engaged in a war for funding? Some things we have shown our detractors over the years are resolve, focus and determination to help and change people's lives. No matter what they throw at us or the road blocks they place in our way, Community Action is here to stay for another forty years and more.

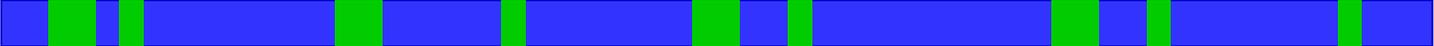
The year 2005 brought many challenges to the Community Action movement. The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funding had been zeroed out in the President's budget for FY 2006. The justification continued to be that CSBG supported organizations that were static and had no tangible outcomes. These cuts and language justification had been consistent with the administration's budget in the four years of its first term in spite of the tremendous work that has been done by community action to tell its remarkable story of changing people's lives. The Community Action movement rallied the troops and worked hard to have the funding cuts restored with great success.

On the state level we saw the budget woes adversely affecting human services funding including our own Family and Community Development (FCD) program. In the Governor's budget for 2005, FCD funding was zeroed out. Even though ICAA, through its contractual lobbyist, Michael Mannion, along with ICAA's legislative team diligently worked to have this funding restored, the program was cut by \$250,000 leaving us with only \$75,000 in the program.

Community Action in Illinois was dealt another challenge when the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity announced that discretionary funding was going to be opened up for bid to other organizations outside of our network. This poses a serious challenge because of the impact this decision will have on ICAA, IVCA, ICADC and the Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities and the network as a whole. As you know, this is the funding that has enabled ICAA to provide comprehensive technical assistance to agencies in transition and to those with the Head Start program in order to ensure corporate stability. This is also the same funding that has enabled the network over the years to be creative and innovative. Without that funding we would not have an Illinois Ventures for Community Action or an Illinois Community Action Development Corporation building affordable housing and the capacity of the membership to engage in this still unmet need. We would not have a scholarship program that has assisted many whom we serve pursue their education. We are one of the strongest networks in the country because of the few reasons outlined here. A strong Association has meant a strong Community Action network and a strong CSBG program in the state of Illinois. We will keep working with the department to ensure that this remains the case.

A greater state challenge we dealt with on the legislative front was SB 110 which proposed to provide the Department of Healthcare and Family Services the flexibility to allow townships to administer the





LIHEAP program in the territories within their jurisdictions. This certainly posed a very serious challenge and threat to the network, but at the same time it gave us an opportunity to utilize our “grassroots club” to defeat the legislation. The membership should be highly commended for responding to the call for advocacy around this issue. Many were reminded of the ability the Community Action movement has to effectively organize around issues impacting those whom we serve. We intend to continue to build our capacity on this grassroots victory.

The year 2006 ought to be embraced with a sense of optimism because in spite of the challenges ahead, there are opportunities to be sought. The reenergizing of our grassroots plan on the feet of SB110 and a rather tumultuous legislative session we experienced with Congress regarding our programs and many others in 2005 has become a necessity for our continued survival here and beyond. We are planning to spend some time during ICAA’s Advocacy Day and other Association meetings with the membership to collectively figure out ways of breathing life into the grassroots plan. Grassroots advocacy is the one way we can be heard by those who are in positions of making decisions.

An activity being planned that will help us to enhance our advocacy efforts, fundraising and communications is training on messaging. This training will help us to conduct a self assessment on how we communicate our issues to those in positions of making decisions. How effective is our messaging? How do those to whom we communicate respond to our message? What model or framework is out there that can be adopted for purposes of communicating? The goal would be for our network to adopt an effective means of framing our issues so that they resonate with decision makers.

Since the 1960’s the Community Action network has been accustomed to receiving reliable federal funds year after year. Recent social, economic and political events have made the traditional sources of revenue for Community Action unpredictable. These events coupled with increased competition among non-profits for the available resources are creating an environment of fiscal uncertainty. Pursuing sustainable fund development is an approach the Community Action network can utilize to secure new monetary resources when the viability of past funding is in question. The Illinois Community Action Association (ICAA) intends to respond to this environment of fiscal uncertainty by taking proactive steps to develop a sound approach to securing new monetary resources for the Community Action network. In developing this sound approach the ICAA has engaged in a range of research that included a survey of development approaches pursued by other Community Action Associations, a needs assessment of the existing development capacity within the Illinois Community Action network, research with Development Directors with external non-profits, and research with financial advisors. Based on the research, the ICAA concluded that pursuing fund development is an approach that will improve the Community Action network’s existing capacity and increase its ability to secure a sound fiscal environment in the future. Pursuing sustainable fund development is fully aligned with the ICAA Fiscal Year 2006-2009 Strategic Plan. Within this plan the ICAA membership identified “To ensure the financial stability of the Association” as Goal One. The activities identified by the membership that will be necessary for ICAA to achieve this goal include 1) Prepare a sustainable fund development plan that includes fund-raising strategies and a possible endowment, and 2) Obtain funding to hire a staff member that will be responsible for the creation and implementation of a development plan. I look forward to working with you all on this endeavor.

The last initiative I would like to outline in this letter is the Community Action Partnership’s Pathways to Excellence. As you know one of ICAA’s enhanced Skillbank activities is “Corporate Stability”. This program has enabled this organization to serve its membership through technical assistance in a very meaningful way. Through the utilization of peers from the network, ICAA has facilitated agency wide assessments, program assessments and individualized systems analysis for member agencies. I believe that this activity has helped to build stronger agencies in Illinois. For those that have been involved on the peer teams, their experience has been so enriching that their agencies have become better as a result. However, this initiative has focused on keeping agencies in compliance so that they maintain their funding. It is now time for us to work on how we can build our agencies to be agencies of excellence. Our national association has developed a program called “Pathways to Excellence” which utilizes the Baldrige approach to standards of excellence. I believe that this initiative will help us create that competitive edge, if you will, for Community Action against other entities in this environment of fierce competition for scarce funding. Together with the Board of Directors and the state, we will work on bringing this initiative to Illinois.

Finally, I wanted to remind you that our Board Training manual has been published. This training is designed to be quite comprehensive by not only focusing on the role of the board, but includes ROMA, Head Start and specific CSBG requirements. We are now accepting requests for training to be conducted for your local boards. I look forward to working with you on these initiatives and also getting input from you on what you believe the Association should be doing on behalf of the membership in 2006. Thank you.

Sincerely,





Energy Issues

Utilities Respond to the Affordable Energy Plan: Propose Their Own PIPP Idea

On January 12th, the regulated utilities presented a Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) to the IL Department of Health-care and Family Services (IDHFS) Policy Advisory Council (PAC). This PIPP proposal is a response to the Affordable Energy Plan (AEP) which was proposed three years ago. Twenty-five of ICAA's members have endorsed the AEP which can be viewed at [_http://www.icaanet.org/affordableenergyplan/_](http://www.icaanet.org/affordableenergyplan/) (<http://www.icaanet.org/affordableenergyplan/>)

The Lt. Governor requested ICAA's assistance in developing a counter position to the utility proposal. That counter position is summarized below. The counter position tries to find the reasonable middle ground between the Utility Proposal and the AEP.

ICAA has scheduled an Energy Roundtable on February 9, 2006 to get more input and discussion from the members on this topic. However, the IDHFS has asked the PAC to make a recommendation concerning a PIPP at its February 13th meeting. For the time being, the position that ICAA will be advocating is outlined below.

ICAA's counter position to the utility proposal is:

- Where should the PIPP be set (10% vs. 12%)?
 1. Wiggle room would be to agree to a 10% PIPP with a small contribution from customers for arrears. This would be more attractive if the additional contribution is voluntary and especially if the additional contribution is matched by utilities.
- There needs to be an educational component that CAAs will implement concerning what is best for the customers
- What cost containments are in the utility proposal?
 1. Not much
 2. Cost containment is a must
 3. Hedging has to be included to protect the program from catastrophic loss in case of high fuel costs
- Year round program is good

Sometimes a PIPP payment in warm weather months can be higher than the actual bill. This amount could be used as a customer contribution to arrearage reduction.
- Energy efficiency and Weatherization
 1. Has to have curriculum for PIPP participants taught by CAAs
 2. Has to be clear how PIPP people are prioritized to get Weatherization services
- Pilot project
 1. OK, but not five years
 2. Maybe three years to give hedging a chance to work
 3. Five year period seems to coincide with the amount of time the utilities (in their proposal) need to get all the arrearages paid by the state
- Amount of funding & arrearage reduction
 1. \$15 million is OK for total funding
 2. Has to have an arrearage reduction component to encourage regular payments
 3. We do not support all the monies coming from state for arrearage
 4. We could agree to a range of possibilities. For example, we might support something like 1/3 from customer, 1/3 from utility, and 1/3 from the utility.
 5. We are concerned how the funding for the utility proposal is structured. For example how does \$15 million translate to 10,000 participants? If average grants are \$490 per household, this would leave \$10 million for arrearage reduction.
- Structure of the Pilot
 1. Regardless of details it should be set up on a research model with measurable outcomes.
 2. Preferably designed by university based researchers.
 3. We could test the percentage of the PIPP set at different levels for various test sites.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact John Colgan at JTColgan@aol.com.

Homeless Issues

7th Annual HUD Peer-to-Peer Homeless Provider Conference

Since 1999, ICAA has worked with the HUD Chicago Regional Office to put on the HUD Peer-to-Peer Homeless Provider Conference. The conference was held in Peoria September 29-30, 2005 at the Holiday Inn City Centre. Attendance continues to be strong at approximately 240 attendees.

7th Annual HUD Peer-to-Peer Homeless Provider Conference continued

We were fortunate to have Mark Johnston as the keynote speaker. Mr. Johnston is the Director of HUD's Office of Special Needs Programs (SNAPS) in Washington, D.C. SNAPS has jurisdiction over all of HUD's homelessness programming. In addition to updating conferees on HUD happenings and taking questions from the audience, Mr. Johnston joined other federal and state officials in a special panel on activities in support of Hurricane Katrina victims. Mr. Johnston received very favorable comments in the conference evaluations for his frank and insightful contribution.



McFarland Bragg welcomes HUD Peer-to-Peer participants to Peoria

The Hurricane Katrina panel was quite popular, including (in addition to Mr. Johnston) participants from the federal Interagency Council on Homelessness, the Office of Illinois Lt. Governor Pat Quinn, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA), and the Illinois Department of Human Services. The Illinois Housing Development Authority presented an update on their effort to formulate regulations for the newly enacted Illinois Rental Housing Support Program. Other workshops included the following: the ever-popular Consumer Panel, two NIMBY sessions, rural and urban roundtables on HUD policy on chronic homelessness, serving homeless persons with mental illness, homeless youth, and partnering with public housing authorities and law enforcement agencies.

We are in discussions with HUD for the 2006 Peer-to-Peer Conference. Once again, it will be in September. Keep an eye out for dates and location!

IDA Program Featured Participant

Valerie Ross was referred to the Individual Development Account (IDA) Program through the Family and Community Development (FCD) Program at Shawnee Development Council, Inc. She was unemployed, a single mother of three children surviving on child support and food stamps. Through the guidance and support of the FCD Program she was able to return to the workforce and be accepted into the IDA Program.

Her original savings goal was to be able to start a small business. As she neared her savings goal, she learned that her ex-husband was not going to be able to provide much assistance in supporting her eldest child, Christopher, in college. She switched her savings goal to post-secondary education and brought Christopher into the program with her. Together, they completed the savings goal, asset specific education, and educational plan. Christopher enrolled in Southern Illinois University at Carbondale for the Fall 2005 semester. The savings and match funds were used to cover most of the tuition and fees for the 2005-2006 academic year.



Valerie Ross is shown with her son, Christopher and David McKenzie, Shawnee IDA Coordinator

RCAP

New staff

The ICAA IL RCAP program is pleased to welcome Sarah Mueth and Tim Olmsted.

Sarah Mueth serves as a Rural Development Specialist – Technical Assistance Provider. Sarah is a graduate of the University of Illinois at Springfield with a BA in English. Prior to joining the IL RCAP program she worked for the Association and coordinated their Dialogue on Poverty program.

Tim Olmsted serves as the ICAA Director of Rural Affairs and is the State Coordinator for the IL RCAP program. He is a graduate of the University of Illinois at Springfield and holds a BA and MA degree in Political Studies. Prior to joining ICAA Mr. Olmsted was employed with the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, Division of Insurance (formally the Illinois Department of Insurance). For the past five years he directed, managed and coordinated activities of a federal grant focusing on health coverage for Illinois' uninsured population. Tim was previously employed by ICAA from 1999-2000 and served the Association as the Education and Training Specialist and as the RCAP State Coordinator.

Activities

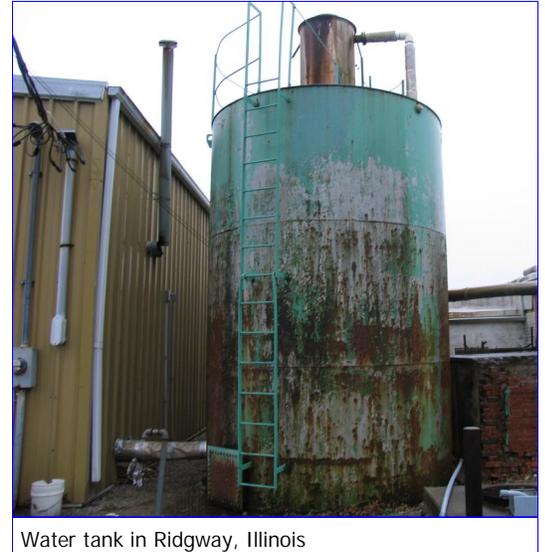
In October RCAP personnel attended the regional Great Lakes RCAP training in Columbus, Ohio that focused on Community Leadership. The training sessions were facilitated by the Fanning Institute, a public service and outreach unit of the University of Georgia. The training included an examination of the Institute's five essential areas that are designed to provide a foundation for basic leadership skills.

The IL RCAP program recently conducted an internal comprehensive needs assessment. This allowed the program to identify its strengths, challenges and opportunities regarding services, capacity, training and partnerships. Over the course of the next year RCAP will be expanding the services it provides to communities and will continue to build capacity and develop partnerships.

IL RCAP helps small rural communities find funding

RCAP has been very successful this past year with leveraging approximately \$3.5 million in CDAP grants for water and waste water projects for rural communities throughout the state. Communities to date include:

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Cropsey Township | \$395,430.00 |
| Village of Fithian | \$ 85,250.00 |
| Village of Weldon | \$205,000.00 |
| Jonathon Creek Township | \$301,484.00 |
| East Nelson Township | \$309,786.00 |
| Village of Long Point | \$395,430.00 |
| Linder Township | \$395,000.00 |
| Rubicon Township | \$395,000.00 |
| Wrights Township | \$395,000.00 |
| Rural Township | \$100,000.00 |
| Village of Ridgway | \$ 85,600.00 |
| Woodville Township | \$150,000.00 |
| Village of Bulpitt | \$ 24,000.00 |
| Village of East Cape Girardeau | \$ 25,000.00 |
| Village of Brighton | \$312,339.31 |



In addition the program recently submitted CDAP applications on behalf of 8 communities that totaled \$1.8 million.

Congratulations to our Rural Development Specialists!

Training Opportunities

FCD Specialist Training

Family and Community Development Specialist Certification Training will be held at ICAA's headquarters beginning February 21, 2006. The cost of training is \$950.00 and includes 12 days of comprehensive case management training focused on family strengths and empowerment, including Community Development, Advocacy, ROMA and the Illinois Family Self-Sufficiency Scale plus all materials. The schedule is as follows:

February 21-24

March 20-23

April 18-21

Hours for training are 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily. Contact Christine Westerlund, cwesterlund@icaanet.org, for more information

FCD Specialist Recertification

This one day training will focus on interviewing skills, compassion fatigue and ROMA. Two sessions will be held at ICAA this spring. Stay tuned for more details....

ROMA

Do you have staff that would benefit from ROMA training? Thinking about those national indicators? Contact Christine for more information and availability, cwesterlund@icaanet.org.



Upcoming Meetings

Save the Date for the following Meetings:

- February 9, 2006 Energy Roundtable (for Executive Directors and LIHEAP Coordinators) - 10:00am-3:00pm - no cost - ICAA Office in Springfield - contact John Colgan, JTColgan@aol.com, with questions
- February 28, 2006 Advocacy Day (Executive Directors and all interested agency staff) - 10:00am-8:00pm - \$10 per attendee - ICAA Office, State Capitol, reception will be held at Pasfield House across from the Capitol - contact John Colgan, JTColgan@aol.com, or Sara Ratcliffe, sratcliffe@icaanet.org, with questions
- March 15, 2006 ICADC Board Meeting (ICADC Board Members) - 10:00am-12:00pm - no cost - lunch provided - ICAA Office in Springfield - contact Don Harris, dharris@icaanet.org, or Kim Colgan, kcolgan@icaanet.org, with questions
ICAA Board Meeting (ICAA Board Members) - 1:00-3:00pm - no cost - lunch provided - ICAA Office in Springfield - contact Sara Ratcliffe, sratcliffe@icaanet.org, with questions
- March 28-29, 2006 LIHEAP Conference (LIHEAP staff) - Day 1: 8:00am-8:00pm, Day 2: 8:00am-12:00pm - no cost - Crowne Plaza Springfield, 217-529-7777 - planned in conjunction with the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services, Office of Energy Assistance - contact Sara Ratcliffe, sratcliffe@icaanet.org, with questions
- April 30-May 3, 2006 ICAA Annual Conference (All Community Action Staff and friends) - schedule and cost tba - Hilton Springfield, 217-789-1530 - contact Sara Ratcliffe, sratcliffe@icaanet.org, with questions

Other News

Presentations at the Region V Head Start Conference

ICAA had a significant presence at this year's Region V Head Start Conference in Ohio, October 24-28, 2005. Dalitso Sulamoyo, President & CEO, conducted a workshop on peer to peer assessment service offered by the Association to agencies facing potential corporate instability. Don Harris, Vice President of Housing, held a workshop on the extensive work of the Development Corporation. Michelle Pulce, Vice President of Programs, co-presented two workshops: the IDA Program with Holly Copeland-Lasley, and the Mock Head Start Peer Review with Mary Lockhart-White, the Executive Director of Community Action Partnership of Lake County. Holly Copeland-Lasley also conducted a workshop on Grassroots Organizing and the Food Stamp Outreach Project.

Press Conference regarding LIHEAP

ICAA held a press conference expressing the need for increasing funding for the LIHEAP program and support for HB 465 which will provide approximately \$8 million into the Supplemental Low Income Energy Assistance Fund. Frank Schwab, Executive Director of Illinois Valley Economic Development Corporation, and Angela Stoltzenburg, Executive Director of Central Illinois Economic Development Corporation, participated in the press conference by sharing their agency's increased demand for the program.

CSBG

The ICAA staff prepared its 2006 budget and work plan for CSBG. The plan includes several new initiatives to develop the capacity of the Association and the network to diversify resources, enhance communication strategies to better frame the issues of Community Action to the public and policymakers, and provide a cost effective solution for training costs for the FCD program.

Agency Corner

East Central Illinois Community Action Agency

Dwight Lucas was selected to be in the Danville High School Wall of Fame. The Wall of Fame provides role models for current Danville High School students and promotes pride in the Danville community.

If you have something you would like to report to the Membership please submit it to Sara Ratcliffe via email, sratcliffe@icaanet.org, or fax, 217-789-0139 by the 15th of each month for inclusion in the ICAA E-News.