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OSU, Community Action network recognize Best Practices

COLUMBUS-- The Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies and the John Glenn School of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University recognized seven programs at six different Community Action Agencies last week.

The Best Practice Awards honor innovative and effective Community Action Agency programs that measurably meet the needs of clients, families and communities by helping low income people become more self-sufficient. The awards serve as a showcase for unique Community Action Agency efforts that make a measurable and life-changing difference

The program is funded by a Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Training and Technical Assistance award from the Ohio Department of Development's Office of Community Services.

Awards were presented by Cindy Holodnak, Associate Director of Outreach and Engagement for the Glenn School, and Phil Cole, Executive Director of the Association. Winners were:

- Cincinnati Hamilton County Community Action Agency for the development of the Jordan's Crossing Complex in the Bond Hill neighborhood.
- GMN (Guernsey Monroe Noble) Tri-County Community Action Council, Inc. for the L.I.F.E. (Learning is for Everyone) Program.
- Lima Allen Council on Community Affairs for its Kindergarten Kamp Program
- Ohio Heartland Community Action Commission for its United Community Rx Program
- Supports to Low Income Families of Butler County (SELF) for its EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit) Super Site
- SELF for its Individual Development Accounts (IDA) Program

- WSOS (Wood, Seneca, Ottawa and Sandusky) Community Action Council for its TRIPS New Freedom Passenger Care Attendant Program

The Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency's complex at Jordan Crossing was developed to meet both spatial and coverage needs of the agency.

Using corporate funds, the agency purchased and completely remodeled a 143,000-square-foot abandoned department store in the Bond Hill neighborhood in eastern Cincinnati. The agency partnered with the City of Cincinnati for abatement and site preparation and established a Foundation to raise funds for construction.

More than \$1.5 million was raised and federal approval for the unique project was secured. To cover operating costs of the facility, space



Employees of Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency are pictured with their Best Practice Award. Front row, left to right: Clinton Johnson, Verline Dotson, Executive Director Gwen Robinson, Joan Proffit and Ed Jackson; back row, same order: Charles Woode, Deborah Miller, John Garner, Gwen Larkin, Harrison Nelson and Mason Gray



GMN's Best Practice Award was accepted by L.I.F.E. Program students Liz Pedelose and Cammie Groves; Monroe County Director of Job and Family Services Jeanette Harter; GMN Executive Director Gary Ricer; L.I.F.E. Program administrator Misty Atkinson; Monroe County Commissioner John Pyles and L.I.F.E. Program mentor Rachel Henthron.

was leased to partners whose services compliment the agency's creating a one stop shop for Head Start, housing programs, energy programs, dental screening, job searches and more.

The L.I.F.E. (Learning is for Everyone) Program is operated by **GMN Tri-County CAC, Inc.** within the Switzerland of Ohio Local School District. Emphasis is placed on leadership, academics, goal-setting, career planning, social growth and life-skills training.

In this rural farming region, youths are not exposed to a wide variety of careers, cultural experiences or educational opportunities. Most do not go to college and many that do fail to

transition successfully and drop out of college. The L.I.F.E. Program targets potential first generation college students in high school grades and follows the nationally recognized college preparatory program, Upward Bound.

Two full-time youth mentors work with the program director. A residential campus experience is a popular part of the program.

Lima Allen Council on Community Affairs (LACCA) has closed the Kindergarten readiness gap for some of the poorest children in Allen County by partnering with area schools to provide a summer Kindergarten Kamp.

LACCA collaborated with the Lima City Schools, United Way, Allen County Family and Children First Council and the Allen County Chamber of Commerce to provide a five-week summer Kindergarten Kamp to help at-risk children transition into kindergarten.

The project was funded by a \$40,000 grant from the United Way of

Greater Lima and held at the public elementary schools which were targeted. Two classes were held for six hours each day serving a total of 36 children. School staff reported that children that attended Kamp were more comfortable in the first days of kindergarten, often taking leadership roles with other students who were “new” as well.



Accepting the Best Practice Award for Kindergarten Kamp were United Way of Greater Lima’s Mike Hayden; Lima Allen Council on Community Affairs Executive Director Jacqueline Fox; Tricia Winkler, principal at Unity Elementary School; Mary Early from the Allen County Family and Children First Council; Julie Stewart, principal at Freedom Elementary School and LACCA Head Start Director Phyllis Montrose.

The **Ohio Heartland Community Action Commission** has revised and expanded its United Community Rx Program, originally established as a pilot in 2001 and recognized as a Best Practice in 2002.

The goal of the new program was to form a collaboration with expanded community partners improving access to the effective, affordable medications program for a growing number of Marion County residents.

Marion County has a higher than average percentage of seniors without prescription coverage (25 versus the statewide percentage of 11.8) and has the highest unemployment rate in the state. Nearly one in five Marion County residents was pushed into poverty last year, primarily due to rising unemployment. These factors demonstrated a need to expand the program.

Since modifying the program, client assistance levels have increased 217 percent. During the last 12-month documented period, 765 prescriptions were filled for 500 clients with an estimated customer savings of \$450,000. OHCAC anticipates the need for the program will increase at least 10 percent in the first six months of 2010.



Ohio Heartland Community Action employees are pictured with their Best Practice Award. Left to right, Phil LaDouceur, Hazel Blakenship, Executive Director Andrew “Joe” Devany and Nikki Hamm.

Supports to Encourage Low Income Families (SELF) opened its Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Super Site in January 2007. The site acts as a one stop shop for Butler County residents. Clients come to the site for free tax preparation which includes determining if they are eligible for the EITC. All clients entering the Super Site are assessed for potential eligibility in other programs that support the working poor.

The EITC Super Site increases the number of eligible families claiming the EITC. Many do not claim it, losing \$1.6 billion in tax credits and other supports. Additionally, free tax preparation saves low-income families money. Meanwhile, they are able to get assistance they did not know was available to them.

The site operates from January 2 through April 15. In the last tax season, SELF helped low income families receive \$432,000 in tax credit refunds. More than 482 households were assisted and 145 working families were enrolled in other services.

SELF’s Individual Development Account (IDA) program has been in operation for nearly four years. IDAs with SELF can only be used for first-time homeownership, post-secondary education or business start up.

Programs such as the IDA promote financial education and asset development through individualized case management, 14 hours of financial education and eight hours of asset-specific education. Additionally, SELF matches every dollar saved with \$2 as an incentive to the clients. With these resources, in addition to ongoing encouragement from SELF staff, low-income clients have can accomplish goals they never thought possible.

SELF’s IDA program targets the “working poor,” meaning that all participants are employed (either full or part time) and most are not receiving cash assistance. Some participants



Supports to Encourage Low-Income Families (SELF) received two Best Practice Awards. Pictured are Executive Director Jeffrey Diver; Community Relations Coordinator Kim Weigel; IDA Coordinator Jerry Brown; EITC Super Site Coordinator Norma Smith and Cindy Holodnak from the John Glenn School of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University, who presented the awards.

work multiple jobs. Clients must be able to deposit earned income into their IDA account. They must also specify the asset for which they are saving.

Participants must be living at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Line. Participants in the program to date have an average annual household income of \$20,350 and most are living paycheck to paycheck and/or are single parents. Participants must save between \$25 and \$125 each month.

Since SELF's first financial literacy class, 71 individuals have completed the financial literacy program. Twenty participants have cashed out purchasing assets totaling more than \$724,000. Of those, nine purchased a home, six started a small business and five continued their education. Currently, 35 more individuals are saving for their assets.

The New Freedom Passenger Care Attendants program was established in 2009 to provide assistance to the frail elderly, the disabled and other mobility challenged residents of Sandusky County. It is a service of the TRIPS public transportation program operated by the **WSOS Community Action Commission.**

TRIPS had been providing curb to curb service for its clients when its Advisory Committee conducted a customer satisfaction survey. The Advisory Committee found clients using the transportation service needed help getting to and from the vehicle.



Receiving the award for WSOS Community Action Commission are Executive Director Neil McCabe, volunteer coordinator Cindy Horn, transportation director Robin Richter and community relations coordinator Joyce Huntley.

WSOS received a grant from the Ohio Department of Transportation's New Freedom Fund to hire a volunteer specialist to implement the Passenger Care Attendant (PCA) Program. Since the service went public in June, 16 volunteers from the college's work/study program and the WIA youth program have been used. These volunteers assisted those from the target population to make public transportation more accessible, something they were unable to do previously

Ohio's Community Action network consists of 52 agencies around the state serving the needs of low-income people in all of Ohio's 88 counties. The agencies administer nearly \$750,000,000 in resources aimed at alleviating the problems of poverty in Ohio's communities. They employ more than 6,000 people and provide service to nearly 800,000 Ohioans. Programs include home heating assistance, weatherization, food pantries and emergency shelters.

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