

ARRA AT WORK IN CENTRAL AND NORTHEAST KANSAS



The 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, passed by the U.S. Congress and signed by President Obama on February 17, 2009, made nearly \$800 billion in additional federal funds available to create and save jobs and spur economic activity and invest in long-term economic growth.

Locally, Community Action received additional funds through the federal Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) and the Weatherization Assistance Program, administered by the Kansas Housing Resources Corporation, to use within its service area. Following are some new or enhanced local initiatives aided by ARRA funding (Updates as of 5-18-10):

WEATHERIZATION

Community Action's Weatherization Program provides energy saving improvements to Shawnee county residences that are occupied by individuals who are income-eligible for the service.



UPDATE: 1,671 hours worked from Jan. - March 2010. 49 units of work completed from Jan. - March 2010. 240 units of work anticipated for the entire grant period 2009 - 2010.

FREE BUS PASSES



Community Action has monthly bus passes for low-income riders who depend on public transportation to maintain employment or to attend vocational training.

Eligible applicants can receive one monthly bus pass every six months for as long as supplies last (up to two passes in a 12-month period).

Applicants must be at least 18 years of age and at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

Applicants must (1) call Community Action's Swygart Center at 785-235-9296 to be placed on an acceptance list due to limited pass availability, (2) complete the Community Action Consumer Intake Form and (2) provide proof of household income for the past 30 days, employment, or vocational training; and a picture ID and social security cards for all household members.

Bus passes will be distributed at Community Action's Swygart Center, 621 SE Swygart.

UPDATE: 68 bus passes were distributed from Oct. – Dec. 2009. 86 bus passes were distributed from Jan. – March 2010. 154 bus passes have been distributed during the past six months (Oct. 2009 - March 2010).

Comments from Consumers on Free Bus Passes:

“I was able to get back and forth to work. The walk takes an hour and a half. I was able to keep appointments at Valeo Behavioral Health, where walking there would have taken 45 minutes.”

“I had surgery in November 2009 and was off work until my wounds were healed. From Nov. 30 through Dec. 14, 2009, the bus pass I received helped me get back to work and is well appreciated. Thank you.”

SENIOR TRANSPORTATION SERVICES



Community Action provides ARRA funding to assist with transporting seniors in Shawnee County to medical appointments, meal sites, pharmacies, and grocery stores. In addition, these funds allow senior centers to serve more seniors in need. The three participating senior centers are the East Topeka Senior Center, Papan’s Landing and Topeka LULAC.

UPDATE: 3,736 units of transportation were provided to 201 seniors from Oct. – Dec. 2009 (all three senior centers).

1,524 units of transportation were provided to 122 seniors

from Jan. – March 2010 (East Topeka Senior Center and Papan’s Landing only). 5,260 units of transportation have been provided to 323 seniors during the past six months (Oct. 2009 - March 2010).

Comments from Consumers on Senior Transportation Services:

“Joe, the bus driver, is a good worker and he always comes on time to pick up my husband. He seems to enjoy his job because he always has a smile on his face and sounds happy every time he greets me and my husband. Before Joe, I wasn’t sure if my husband would be picked up. Now, I can be confident that someone is going to get him every day. I can do everything that I need to do and not worry about my husband because I know he is well taken care of and he is in good hands with you. Thank you so much.”

WORK TRAINING PROGRAM

Through the ARRA grant, Community Action has created a work training program for people who are studying to receive their Child Development Associate (CDA) or Commercial Drivers License (CDL) certifications.

The agency has hired four CDA trainees who are studying and assisting in Head Start classrooms at the Hudson Center, while one CDL trainee has been hired who eventually may drive a school bus to transport children to and from the Hudson Center.



UPDATE: Jody Randol joined the CDL training program in January 2010 and obtained his CDL in less than 30 days. In addition to obtaining his CDL, Randol also completed a defensive driving course, 15 hours of supervised drive training, first aid and CPR, KDOT physical, and job readiness counseling. He currently is working with Community Action as a Program Support Specialist with the agency's Comptroller.

Four trainees obtained pre-employment skills/competencies required for employment and received training program certificates/diplomas.



Comments from Work Training Program Participants:

“This program has given me the opportunity to pursue my CDL. It has allowed me to seek more employment opportunities in the community and I am better equipped to support my family,” Jody Randol, CDL Training Program graduate and Community Action Program Support Specialist.

FINANCIAL LITERACY

Community Action partnership with Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc. (HCCI) has provided free workshops on financial literacy at Shawnee County schools. The workshops last one hour, followed by group discussion. Additionally, HCCI has provided provide free one-on-one counseling to individuals and families at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

The workshops have been aimed at educating low-income families on:

- Holiday spending
- Filing tax returns
- Understanding contracts, especially landlord/tenant responsibilities
- Establishing a spending plan (budget) to meet daily expenses
- Understanding the cost of predatory lending and escaping the vicious cycle of “payday loans”
- Building family assets on a limited budget



To enroll, please contact HCCI at 234-0217 or hcci@hcci-ks.org.

UPDATE: 78 individuals were served through financial literacy workshops and by short-term counseling sessions in Nov. 2009. 24 individuals were served through financial literacy workshops and by short-term counseling sessions in Jan. - March 2010. Through the 15 one-on-one counseling sessions conducted Jan. - March 2010, parents and other adults have learned and exhibited improved family functioning skills.

INCREASED EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES



Community Action has partnered with Kansas Legal Services (KLS) to provide job and life skills training to eligible individuals. Job skills consist of “resumes, applications, interviews, cover letters, thank you letters, job searches, mock interviews, community resources and workplace etiquette.” Life skills consist of “reflective thinking, goal setting, time management, prioritizing, nutrition, personal budgeting, abuse self-esteem building, personal care and “soft skills” Those training activities have included:

- Community Action’s CDA and CDL trainees attending a one-week session on life skills and a one-week session on job skills
- Community Action referring 20 recently unemployed individuals for up to four hours of one-on-one counseling
- Thirteen classes held at Washburn Rural Alternative High School covering job readiness skills. These sessions will be offered once each school semester with a goal of 20 participants
- The Topeka Housing Authority (THA) holding 10 workshops for job readiness and life skills for Deer Creek and Pine Ridge residents, with a goal of 100 participants
- The Kansas Children’s Service League (KCSL) holding one to four workshops monthly (approximately 10 workshops total) for job readiness and life skills, with a goal of 100 participants
- Community Action offering two-hour workshops on job and/or life skills in Shawnee, Clay, Dickinson, Geary, McPherson, Ottawa, Saline and Wabaunsee counties

Community partners involved in domestic violence/shelters/programs, Head Start, aging-out programs for youths in foster care, unemployed or underemployed parents in Child-in-Need-of-Care (CINC) cases, housing authorities, workforce centers, breakthrough/halfway houses, youths in juvenile justice programs, etc., have been notified of these workshop opportunities. KLS will conduct outreach through legal services field offices and employment training centers.

UPDATE: Five CDA/CDL trainees attended a two-week workshop at KLS. Nine students attended a “Job Savvy Class” at Washburn Rural Alternative High School. During the first three months of 2010, 15 individuals obtained pre-employment skills/competencies required for employment and nine sessions of one-on-one counseling were conducted.

NEW AND ENHANCED PROGRAMMING

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

Entire Service Area (Clay, Dickinson, Geary, McPherson, Ottawa, Saline, Shawnee and Wabaunsee counties) - Community Action, Inc. has provided 124 individuals with deposit, rent/mortgage, and utility assistance.

Comments from Emergency Assistance Recipients:

“Community Action’s assistance kept my electricity on and prevented me from becoming homeless.”

“I have kept a roof over our heads, and I’m very thankful for Community Action services”

“Community Action saved my child from being in the dark and without water.”

Wabaunsee County – Community Action, Inc. has provided emergency services and identify individuals facing potential disconnection notices. Also, Community Action is sharing information about ARRA funds with people in Wabaunsee County so that individuals and families are aware of the funds.

Geary, Clay Counties - Catholic Charities of Salina has provided emergency assistance (rent, deposit, utility) to low-income Geary county individuals and families.

McPherson County – Churches United in Ministry soon will provide direct services; such as rent, deposit, utility, prescription, food and transportation assistance; to low-income individuals and families in McPherson county.

Saline County – Volunteer Connection will purchase tools for a community tool box. Volunteers from the Volunteer Connection will collaborate with local agencies in order to receive referrals for low-income individuals and families who are in need of minor repairs or lawn assistance at their homes in Saline County.

Saline County – Central Kansas Mental Health Center (CKMHC) purchased 12 laptops for case workers to use for on-site mental health counseling with clients in Saline and Ottawa counties. The laptops will provide greater efficiency and allow case workers to serve more low-income individuals and families on a daily basis.

Comments from CKMHC staff:

“I use my laptop everyday! I am less stressed and know that I have my notes completed on time. I have access to my all of my notes, either from a previous session or a current session. Being in outreach counties, I can now do a note anywhere and not worry about driving to the Center, which takes up more mileage/time. I love it and it makes my job so much easier! Thank you so much.”

“I like a great deal the laptop that I’m using. I use it on a daily basis now. I like being able to enter a note anywhere I’m at, pull up information on p-notes, and be more efficient.”

Dickinson County – Kids in Crisis will serve at least 72 children with assistance in attending medical appointments, including vision and dental; school supplies, and mental health services. Also, services like utility assistance or travel costs associated with getting clients to and from medical appointments will be covered. An additional 60 children in Dickinson county will be served by receiving back-to-school supplies in July 2010.

Dickinson County – Family Resource Exchange (FRE) will provide emergency assistance, supplemental good and supplies, clothing and other living necessities. FRE proposes to serve 90 families with emergency assistance in Dickinson county.

ARRA “PERSONAL SUCCESS STORIES”

Juan Bailon

Juan is 32 years old, has been married for 15 years and has five children. He lived in Denver, CO for eight years after coming from Mexico, where his family remained. His first job in Denver was as a dishwasher at a restaurant. After three months he began selling ice creams from a cart. He began saving money from the ice cream gig and eventually built a home for his family in Mexico. Later, he worked for a cement/construction company in Denver. He then sent for his family to join him in Denver. However, the cement/construction company soon closed down. After that shock, Juan decided to move to Topeka. Once here, he did small jobs as a construction worker. He then was hired on a permanent basis, but after being hired his hours were reduced. Unfortunately, there weren't any jobs in construction. At that point Juan sought out Community Action for help with his utility bill. He received help through the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Now, as Juan has started working every day and gradually working more hours, he is able to support his family and stay current on all of his bills and rent.

Ann Page

“I want to thank Connie Blake and the people involved with Churches United in Ministry (McPherson county, KS), as well as those in Topeka, KS who are involved in the (ARRA) grant process that is helping people like me. Although I have a doctorate in education and have tried to operate a non-profit ranch for youth in McPherson county, hard times hit me last year. By October 2009 my electricity and telephone were shut off. Then my car wouldn't start. For four months, during the freezing winter, I lived a pioneer lifestyle, hauling water from a hand well to drink, wash clothes, and flush plumbing. I heated water to bathe and cooked flat bread on top of the furnace. I cooked beans outside on a wood fire.

“On Feb. 4 of this year I walked four miles in the snow to the Roxbury Post Office and called some Christian people I know. They came over to help me start my car and insisted that I stay with them for a few days. They also suggested that I call Churches United in Ministry.

“(Churches United in Ministry's) Connie was the most gracious person I have ever dealt with who is involved in community service. I felt insecure and embarrassed because I had always had a good job and was now destitute. She identified a \$300 grant to pay on my propane gas bill that I had been unable to pay during the fall of 2009. She also called me about a week later to ask how I was doing and worked with the Salvation Army to pay my first electric bill since my service was reconnected.

“Things began to open up for me. Within a couple of weeks, after submitting resumes to two colleges for employment, I went to Kelly Services in McPherson and got a contract job at Hospira Pharmaceutical. I am going through initial comprehensive training and probably will begin production line work soon. There is great hope for me to be hired directly and be able to obtain a better position in the near future.

“I believe the program you have in place is so very beneficial to those in need. Individuals have different circumstances, and even if one tries to do good and be responsible, bad things can happen. I would hope that everyone who receives help from you (and your program) would deeply appreciate it, as I do, and be inspired to get moving forward in life, and then help others. I will continue to pass it on -- remembering the kindness of strangers in my home state -- by sharing what I have.

“My deepest thanks. Bless you all.”

For more information on these local ARRA activities, please contact Community Action’s Wendy Coonrod at 785-235-9296 (800-792-7056) or wcoonrod@inlandnet.net.

For more information on the national ARRA initiative, please go to www.recovery.gov. For information on the Kansas ARRA initiative, please go to www.recovery.gov/?q=content/available-amount-program&state=KS.

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