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**TAKING ACTION.**  
*Improving Lives.*

Indiana Community Action Network Newsletter

September 2009

## Monroe County Circles Initiative Welcomes Second Class of Getting Ahead Graduates

The Monroe County Circles™ Initiative is happy to announce the graduation of the second Monroe County "Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin'-By World" class! Ten participants in this training graduated in a moving ceremony on August 27, 2009.

The Circles™ Initiative centered in Bloomington is now 18 months old. It's one of 50 Circles™ sites across the country, many having recently begun operations, and many others preparing to begin soon. The Bloomington Initiative is the second in the state, following Muncie, and followed by South Bend and Scott County, with Indianapolis and other sites in the planning stages.

The goal of the nationwide Circles™ Initiative is to end poverty. Circles takes a multi-pronged approach to accomplishing this. The strategy is to match low-income people, called "Circle Leaders," with "Community Allies," middle-class people who assist Circle Leaders as they work through the plan that they have created themselves to work their way out of poverty. Allies provide emotional support, assistance with problem-solving, friendship, and connections to the middle-class community.

Second, through outreach efforts, Circles educates the community about the realities of poverty. Poverty simulations, Bridges Out of Poverty trainings, media pieces, and testimonials of Allies and Circle Leaders all help the program accomplish this.

This creates the community understanding and momentum needed to accomplish the third part of this strategy: working together as a local community to break down community barriers that are keeping people from getting ahead. Our "Big View" meetings, which will begin in late January during regular Thursday evening Circles™ Community meetings, will involve any Monroe County resident who wants to be part of this process. Circle Leaders lead the way in this, and are eager to make changes in their own lives as well as in the community.

Each Getting Ahead graduate spoke at the ceremony about his or her life and involvement with the Circles™ community. One new Circle Leader had this to say:

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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;

"I started out, I was working 80 hours every two weeks; then I got my hours cut to 24 hours a week. I'm a single father, and when things got hard - they (fellow graduates) know about me, I was a corner boy from pretty much 15 to 24, 25, and if you don't know what that means, it's a drug dealer - and my way out every time I've been in trouble is to go back to that. And I can honestly say that Circles has played a big part in keeping me away from doing that and channeling my interests into other directions and seeking out other ways to get help, other than to get back out there in the streets. And that means a lot to me because I have a 4 year old son that I take care of by myself. It's real hard as a single father because a lot of times you don't get the help that single mothers get. I've learned a lot from Circles™. I've learned foremost that poverty isn't something that happened to the Black community, the White community, the Chinese and so forth - this is a rainbow problem. It happens everywhere, it happens to everybody. It's nothing to be ashamed of, and it's nothing to be mad and sad about. You just need to use your thinking cap and get it together. And together, I feel that we can make things happen and we can do things to make our community better for our children and for their children."

The previous graduating class of Circle Leaders were matched with their Allies in April. The new graduates will be matched in December. With their energy and enthusiasm, Monroe County is about to undergo a transformation!

## Clark County Coalition Receives \$125,000 to Reduce Substance Abuse Among Youth

On Thursday August 27, 2009, Gil Kerlikowske, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), announced the awarding of \$21 million in new Drug Free Communities (DCF) grants to 161 communities across the country. Clark County Grassroots Coalition from Jeffersonville, IN was one of the grant recipients, and will receive \$125,000 in DCF grant funds to involve and engage their local community to prevent and reduce alcohol and other drug abuse among youth.

"Efforts to keep our youth drug free are critical to healthy communities here in Jeffersonville," said Charles Turner, Jr., Self Initiative & Self Development Director at Community Action of Southern Indiana, the Coalition's sponsoring agency. "The Drug Free Communities Program recognizes the great potential of Clark County Grassroots Coalition to help save the lives of youth. This new funding will allow Clark County Grassroots Coalition to mobilize and organize their community to prevent and reduce substance abuse."

"The Drug Free Communities Support Program bolsters individuals and groups across the Nation that are improving their communities by preventing drug abuse," said Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration Acting Administrator, Eric Broderick. "SAMHSA is honored to play a role in this innovative program, which has done so much to promote well-being, hope and feelings of empowerment among so many young people."

Gil Kerlikowske, Director of the Office of National Drug Control

Congregate Meal Preparation; Economic Development; Foster Grandparents; Legal Services; Neighborhood Centers; Summer Youth Programs; Senior Centers; and others.

CAAs vary widely, with 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

Policy (ONDCP) and President Obama's "Drug Czar," said, "Evidence shows that communities receiving DFC funding have lower instances of youth using tobacco, alcohol and marijuana. I commend the coalitions like Clark County Grassroots Coalition, who work tirelessly to prevent and reduce youth drug use across the Nation with the aid of DFC grants."

The Drug Free Communities program is directed by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) in partnership with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The DFC program provides grants of up to \$625,000 over five years to community coalitions that facilitate citizen participation in local drug prevention efforts. Coalitions are comprised of community leaders, parents, youth, teachers, religious and fraternal organizations, health care and business professionals, law enforcement, and the media.

The 161 new grantees were selected from 417 applicants through a competitive, peer-reviewed process. To qualify for matching grants, all awardees must have at least a six-month history of working together on substance abuse reduction initiatives, have representation from 12 specific sectors of the community, develop a long-term plan to reduce substance abuse, and participate in the national evaluation of the DFC program.

The DFC program was created by the Drug Free Communities Act of 1997, and was reauthorized by Congress in 2001 and 2006. Since 1998, ONDCP has awarded approximately 1,500 DFC grants to local communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Palau, Guam, American Samoa and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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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 Association, please visit [www.incap.org](http://www.incap.org).

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## Client Spotlight: CANI Client Gets a Home Makeover

Community Action of Northeast Indiana (CANI) and three Lowe's home improvement stores in Fort Wayne have teamed up to make critical repairs to a LaGrange woman's home. Opal Brinager is the legal custodian of her great-grandsons: 7-year-old Alex and 6-year-old Gavin.



You might think being a 73-year-old parent is challenge enough, but it goes far beyond that according to CANI's Lauren Caggiano. The retired factory worker became legal custodian after they were abandoned because of the high medical bills that came with their Severe Combined Immunodeficiency Disease.

Through it all, Opal displayed a selflessness and dedication to the boys. It was during one of those extended stays at Riley's that problems developed back home. A broken refrigerator and leaky water heater were the start. A rotting sub-floor in the kitchen posed a health issue for the boys.

She turned to CANI for help with the house, and they turned to Lowe's, which has a program called Lowe's Heroes. About 15 Lowe's employees along with volunteers from CANI began work last week, framing separate bedrooms for the boys and a hallway to connect both ends of the house without having to go outside.



All the donated materials and labor are making Opal feel pretty good. When the job is finished later this month, they'll have a home that is conducive to raising young boys that is both functional and safer for the boys' and their compromised immune systems.

Local restaurants and businesses are supporting the volunteers' efforts.

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## CANI Hope Builder Receives Statewide Recognition

By Jennifer Renner, CANI

In June, Consuela Howard, or Connie as she is known at CANI, received a 2009 Hope Builder award. CANI's Hope Builder awards are given to individuals who have used the programs, services, and resources at CANI to achieve outstanding personal success.



*Connie Howard speaks at the statewide conference on Housing and Community Economic Development awards luncheon in Indianapolis.*

On September 1, 2009 Connie was again recognized for her accomplishment as a guest speaker at an awards luncheon held during the 5th Annual Statewide Conference on Housing and Community Economic Development. The conference was held in Indianapolis and was organized by the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA) and the Indiana Association for Community Economic Development (IACED.)

At the awards luncheon, Connie was introduced by Lieutenant Governor Becky Skillman who acknowledged the struggles Connie had endured and congratulated her on overcoming them.

Connie was born and raised in Fort Wayne. She became a mother while still in high school, but graduated in seven semesters; a semester earlier than most other students. Known for her determination and dedication to succeed in life, Connie went on to college and earned a bachelor's degree in business from Indiana Tech.

Being a young mother and going to school was a struggle, but Connie said that programs and services offered by CANI and others truly made a difference.

"I was able to turn to people and agencies who cared - really cared. I turned to the subsidized housing program when I had no one else to turn to," Connie told the luncheon audience. "If it had not been for this program I cannot imagine how I could have provided a home for my family."

During college Connie also received energy assistance and childcare assistance from CANI. Having help with her utility bills and knowing that her daughter was in quality daycare, helped Connie

maintain concentration on her schoolwork.

Connie is currently employed at CANI as a Family Support Caseworker. She believes her main purpose in life is to help others eliminate the causes and conditions of poverty as many social services agencies have done for her.

"I am the product of hope. I am now returning that hope to each individual I can reach out to. CANI has given me that chance to give back."

Connie concluded her speech with these words: "Thank you to everyone who has helped me and is helping those who are just as determined. Please keep fighting - it works. I am a result and we are hope. Thank you for all you do!"

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## Indiana Community Action Association Awarded Two Federal Grants

The Indiana Community Action Association (IN-CAA) was awarded American Recovery and Reinvestment (ARRA) Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funds, totaling \$105,000 a year for the next two years. These funds will be used to increase the capacity of the Community Action Network through training and providing technical assistance to Community Action Agencies (CAAs) Board of Directors. Additionally these funds will be used to publicize ARRA CSBG projects and the impact they are having in local communities.

IN-CAA was also selected as a subrecipient of ICF and will receive Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) funds to provide technical assistance to round 1 and 2 NSP recipients over the next three years.

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## Indiana Institute for Working Families Press Release on Poverty Published in USA Today

On September 30, 2009 the Indiana Institute for Working Families, a program of the Indiana Community Action Association issued a press release on the new 2008 U.S. Census American Community Survey data. This press release was picked up by the Associated Press and picked up by The Chicago Tribune, USA Today, The Indianapolis Star, The Kokomo Tribune, RTV 6 News, WIBC, and National Public Radio, Morning Edition. The USA Today article is listed below. To view the full press release, visit:

<http://www.incap.org/documents/CensusPressRelease%2093009.pdf>.

### **USA Today Article News »Nation**

#### **Census data shows Ind. poverty hits 13.1 percent**

**INDIANAPOLIS (AP)** - New census data shows Indiana's poverty rate reached 13.1 percent during 2008 and that more than 800,000 Indiana residents are living in poverty.

The Indiana Community Action Association says the American Community Survey data released this week shows the new state poverty rate is just shy of the national average of 13.2 percent and a significant increase from 2000, when Indiana's poverty rate was 10.1 percent.

The group cites Indiana's declining median household income as a key factor. That figure was nearly \$48,000 last year, compared with the 2000 figure of more than \$51,000 in current dollars.

The Community Action Association says Indiana's childhood poverty rate of 17.9 percent last year compared with a rate of 14.3 percent in 2000.

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## Indiana Institute for Working Families 2009 Fall Forums

The Indiana Institute for Working Families is once again hosting their Fall Forums. At the forums the Institute will discuss the 2009 Status of Working Families report, the 2009 Indiana Self-Sufficiency Standard, Investing In Indiana's Adult Workers: Increasing Financial Aid Opportunities report, and their 2009 Policy Agenda.

The forums will be held:

### **NORTH FORUM**

**October 23, 2009, 10 am - 2 pm (CT)**

Hosts: Northwest Indiana Community  
Action Corporation and  
Lake Area United Way  
Calumet College, Room 300  
2400 New York Ave.  
Whiting, IN 46394

### **CENTRAL FORUM**

**October 26, 2009, 10 am - 2 pm (ET)**

Host: Indiana Community Action Association (IN-CAA)  
IN-CAA, Classroom A and B  
1845 W. 18th St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46202

### **SOUTH FORUM**

**October 28, 2009, 10 am - 2 pm (CT)**

Host: TRI-CAP  
Huntingburg Event Center, Souders Room  
110 E. 14th St.  
Huntingburg, IN 47542

**The registration deadline is October 21, 2009!** To learn more about these trainings or to register, please visit [www.incap.org](http://www.incap.org), click on the Indiana Institute for Working Families, and then click on Institute Trainings.

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## Indiana Training Institute (ITI)

The last quarter of ITI trainings have been scheduled and are as follows:

- **Developing Job Descriptions and Employee Performance Reviews** - October 30, 2009
- **ROMA Training** - November 6, 2009
- **Succession Planning and Developing Your Leadership Bench** - November 16, 2009

To learn more about these trainings or to register, please visit [www.incap.org](http://www.incap.org), click on the Indiana Training Institute, and then click on Training Schedule.



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