

More Families Affected by Weak Economy, Community Responds

Across the nation, just as it is here in Washington County, the economy is uppermost on people's minds. Working mothers and fathers are unsure if wages will cover family expenses in the coming months; senior citizens worry whether fixed incomes can be stretched any further; young families just starting out wonder what opportunities will exist for their children.

With home sales down by more than 20 percent, and foreclosures doubled in the Portland area, housing security has become a serious concern for more families than ever before. Add to this a spike in the Oregon jobless rate of 8.1 percent and it is clear that this is a time when any family can be-

come vulnerable to economic insecurity.

Our staff recently shared some of what they are experiencing as they respond to clients.

- Ordinarily, Community Action receives about 400 requests for rent assistance each month. Available funding helps 40 or 50 of these families avoid homelessness. Recently, that number has doubled to 800 requests per month but funding has not kept pace.
- More and more of those turning to Community Action for help are two parent households with both parents employed, and most have never had to ask for help before.
- As housing costs and property taxes rise, senior citizens and others on low fixed in-

comes are being pushed out of their housing and are at risk of becoming homeless.

Since 1965, issues of economic insecurity have guided the work of Community Action. While the faces of poverty have changed over the years, the need for communities to unite together to help those who are most vulnerable remains more important than ever.

The good news is that the majority of those families turning to Community Action for the first time will regain stability as the economy improves.

While it won't happen quickly, we can have confidence that if our community works together to help families weather these tumultuous times, they will be successful.

Volunteers Complete Shelter Yard Make-Over, Install Playstructure

Just in time for the holidays, community volunteers put the finishing touches on a "make-over" of the back yard at Community Action's Hillsboro Family Shelter, 210 SE 12th St. Today a new play structure stands where an old wooden structure, deemed unsafe, was demolished more than two years ago.

The idea to replace the old structure was initially sparked by a few dedicated volunteers. The project eventually grew to include a variety of community partners. The biggest step forward was made last June when Leadership Hillsboro, sponsored by the Hillsboro Chamber of Commerce, took on the grounds refurbishment as their 2008 community service project.

The icing on the cake came when Eagle Scout candidate Tanner DeVoe organized and supervised volunteers who installed the new play structure in November. "I really have a sense of accomplishment when I look at what we've built, and I hope that you can see how you helped to make it possible,"



Before - what remained of wooden play structure, shelter yard awaiting make-over.



After - new play structure with landscape design, garden beds, and play house.

he wrote in a message to volunteers.

Patrick Rogers, who manages the Community Action shelter, noted significant individual contributions. Retired Pacific University Mathematics Professor John August has been devoted to the project since its early beginnings, and landscape designer Ann Nickerson created an attractive and functional design for the yard. Leadership Hillsboro participant Ann Roth organized volunteers and secured donated materials for the "make-over." Dozens of volunteers

contributed many hours of labor, as well as thousands of dollars in materials. The new play structure provides a safe place for children to get outdoor exercise and, for a while at least, forget about the challenges their families are facing. "This is an outstanding achievement! It shows what amazing work can be done to assist struggling families when community members take initiative and give their valuable time to help others," said Lisa Brown, Community Action Director of Development and Community Relations.

Dear Friends,

Over the past few months, we've heard from many people who've expressed concern about how the current economy is impacting local families. They've wondered if Community Action has experienced an increase in demand for assistance and they have asked if more resources are needed to help. As you might imagine, the answer to both of these questions is yes.

Each day, families who never expected to find themselves struggling to make ends meet are turning to Community Action. Increased unemployment, a volatile housing market, and rising food and energy costs have placed more Washington County residents at risk than ever before. Members of our staff have shared concerns that the demand for energy and emergency rent assistance is far outpacing available resources. There is a fear that more families will become homeless if we cannot help them maintain housing stability. And at the most fundamental level, parents worry that they will not be able to feed their children. To meet the escalating need for assistance, Community Action is working diligently with community partners to prevent our neighbors from falling through the cracks.

If the results of November's "People You Should Know" fundraising breakfast are any indication, we have reason to hope. A record number of people attended this year's event, pledging more than \$72,000 to support Community Action programs and services. Event sponsorship by Kaiser Permanente allowed 100% of all donations made at the breakfast to go directly to supporting our mission. Funds raised at events like this help maintain our capacity to deliver critical programs such as financial assistance for families with eviction or utility shut-off notices, and housing and homeless services to stabilize families in crisis. Community contributions also make possible educational opportunities and quality child care for low-income children, and allow us to maintain a county-wide information and referral network of vital health and social services.

Our annual "Adopt-a-Class" program was a resounding success this year. We are so pleased that every Head Start classroom was adopted by a local business or community group. Adopters provided essential items for children in nearly 50 classrooms, including hats, gloves, coats, and educational toys and books. These gifts brightened the holidays for our Head Start families, many of whom could not afford to purchase these items, and provided a meaningful connection for participating donors.

These are just two examples of how our friends and neighbors chose to make a difference during the holiday season. Countless people donated to food, toy, clothing and fund drives held throughout the community, benefiting thousands of families served by partner organizations like the Oregon Food Bank or the Salvation Army. Local churches, schools and civic organizations also worked hard to ensure that those in need had a place to turn for a warm holiday meal or a food box. Seasonal giving is so vital to all nonprofits and we are truly grateful for the exceptional generosity of our community. But the need for our help exists 365 days a year. Community partners continue to work diligently to provide shelter and meals for the homeless during the cold weather season. And the lobby at Community Action remains filled with struggling families unsure of where to turn at this challenging time. As we move into a new year, we urge you to continue to reach out to our neighbors in need. It is your support and involvement that makes it possible for Community Action to help where help is most needed.

Throughout history, Americans have banded together when times are tough. Despite the current economic downturn, we remain optimistic for the future. We still have all the right ingredients here in Washington County to prevent the hardships of poverty and create greater economic security for all: vision, collaboration, resilience, concerned and committed leaders, caring communities and proven strategies that change lives for the better. We sincerely appreciate those who have stepped forward to support Community Action as we strive to serve local families impacted by poverty. Thank you for your compassion and your commitment.

All the best to you in 2009!

Sincerely, Jerralynn & Kevin



Jerralynn Ness
Executive Director



Kevin Aguirre
Board Chair

2008 "People You Should Know" breakfast sponsor!



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Thank You!

“People You Should Know” Response Shows Community Concern

Community Action’s annual People You Should Know fundraising breakfast, held November 19th at the Kingstad Center, drew a record turnout inspiring 250 guests to donate more than \$72,000 for Community Action programs and services.

During the one-hour breakfast program, sponsored by Kaiser Permanente, Community Action Executive Director Jerralynn Ness presented an annual assessment of poverty in Washington County.

Special guests Rachel Tran Jimenez and Christy Barker shared their personal stories, highlighting the challenges faced by a growing number of working families struggling with conditions of poverty. Barker reflected on the changes in her family’s financial stability following a job loss. “When we were living our comfortable life,



Community Action board member Christy Barker explains how economic circumstances can change family life.

we did not think about what we would do, or who we would turn to, if we lost everything. I am not exaggerating or being dramatic when I say finding Community Action has changed my life.”

Hillsboro Mayor Tom Hughes urged those in the room to invest in

Community Action programs and services with a financial donation.

“The support generated at the breakfast is vital to our ability to assist those struggling with issues of poverty,” said Lisa Brown, Community Action Director of Development & Community Relations. “This year’s results made it clear that our community understands the need to help. Even in a challenging economy, people are willing to share what they have so that others won’t suffer. It’s truly inspiring.”

5 Ways to Make a Difference

Concerned for families hurt by current economic conditions? Here are a few ways to take action:

1. Financial contributions to Community Action make it possible for us to help families achieve stability and self-sufficiency. Visit www.communityaction4u.org and click on “Support Us” to learn how you can give.
2. Increase community awareness and involvement by scheduling a Community Action speaker for your club, civic organization or classroom. Coordinate a fund drive in support of vital programs and services.
3. Basics like food, toiletries and cleaning supplies are needed year-round at the Hillsboro Family Shelter. Set up a collection site at your office, school or church.
4. Shop for a cause. New Seasons Market (Orenco Station) accepts donations for Community Action at the checkout stand.
5. Learn more about 211Info and help spread the word. People who need assistance can simply dial 2-1-1 for information about available health and social services.

To make a financial donation, schedule a public speaker, or conduct a community fund drive, contact Lisa Brown at 503-693-3230 or lbrown@caowash.org. To receive a current wish list of shelter basic needs, contact Scott Schlegel at 503-693-3254 or sschlegel@caowash.org.

Adopt-A-Class Meets Essential Needs for Young Children

Community Action Head Start teachers and parents are especially grateful for donations of holiday gifts to 800 children in 46 Head Start classrooms through our Adopt-A-Class program. Thank you to groups and businesses participating this year:

- Barco employees*
- Blue Lake Publishing*
- Cascade Microtech Inc.*
- City of Beaverton -*
 - Human Resources & Municipal Court*
 - Community Development Dept.*
- Columbia Community Bank*
- Intel employees, various departments*
- Jacobs Engineering*
- Jennings McCall Retirement Center*
- Kaiser Sunset -*
 - Medical Center Administration*
 - Adult Medicine clinic*
 - Pediatric clinic*
 - Pharmacy*
- Kivanis Club of Cedar Hills*
- Lattice Semiconductor Corporation*

- LSI Corp. Engenio Storage Group*
- Nike Community Relations staff*
- Norm Thompson employees*
- Orenco Presbyterian Church*
- Pacific Cornetta Inc.*
- Touchstone Academy*
- TripWire*
- Volkswagen Credit Inc.*
- West Coast Bank.*



Children in a Head Start class receive gifts of “wish list” items to take home.

Need help finding help? Dial 211, or 503-222-5555, for information about social services in your community, provided by trained information & referral specialists in 150 languages.



1001 SW Baseline St. • Hillsboro, OR 97123

Conserve Resources!

If you are receiving this newsletter by postal mail, we would be happy to send it to you by e-mail.

Please e-mail your request to:
contact@caowash.org.

Please be assured, our list is confidential.

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Community Connections

Community Connections is a publication of
Community Action

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Community Action is a private, non-profit corporation. In partnership with the community, Community Action assists low-income people to achieve self-determination.

For further information, contact Resource Development 503.693.3255, or visit our website:
www.communityaction4u.org

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Jerralynn Ness

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Save the Date!

“Celebration of
Community Spirit”
Awards Banquet

Wednesday, April 1, 2009
Oregon Zoo Ballroom
5:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Corporate Sponsorships Available

For information or to RSVP,
please contact Leanna Woodall,
503-693-3252 or lwoodall@caowash.org