



COMMUNITY ACTION IN INDIANA:

Summer 2022

HOW CSBG CARES ACT FUNDS CHANGED COMMUNITIES

Who Is Community Action?

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 created the Community Action Network of national and locally-focused organizations that connect millions of children and families to greater opportunity. This legislation came out of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty and from the advocacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Action Agencies (CAAs) have a rich history of advocacy for, and service to, low-income people and remain important in domestic social policy to the present day.

This Promise of Community Action guides the work of the 1,000 CAAs across the nation including Indiana's 22 Community Action Agencies that serve all 92 of Indiana's counties. CAAs create and partner on local solutions to meet the needs of the low-income folks in their communities. This looks different in all areas of the state and nation, but the thread that connects them all is a commitment to addressing the conditions and causes of poverty.

Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live.

We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

The Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA) was created in 1978 by the Indiana General Assembly and is a quasi-public financially self-sufficient statewide government agency. IHCDA's programs are successful in large part because of the growing network of partnerships IHCDA has established with local, state, and federal governments, for-profit businesses, and not-for-profit organizations. This report was made possible through CARES Act funding received by IHCDA from the Administration for Children and Families at the United States Department of Health and Human Services.



Community Action is funded through the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), which “provides funds to alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty in communities” . The federal funds are passed through and monitored by the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA). Agencies have many other funding streams, from federal housing or energy assistance money to income generating programs like professional development training, a coffee cart, and even an opera house!

COVID-19 changed the game for every community. Those who were already struggling were put into even more precarious situations. Meanwhile, people who had never experienced poverty were finding themselves without a job or facing eviction or trying to work while caring for kids doing virtual learning. The stakes were high, but that is where Community Action thrives! CAAs were able to respond to their communities’ needs with new programs and initiatives. They were able to help connect people to resources and lift them out of seemingly hopeless situations. They met mental health needs of clients and staff, recognizing the global trauma that everyone was experiencing. Communities across the world came together to address COVID-19. This report looks at the specific niche Community Action filled, and continues to fill, in their respective Indiana communities.

CARES and Community Action

The CSBG Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funds provided \$1 billion in supplemental funds to states, territories, and tribes authorized under the CSBG Act. These funds were intended to address the consequences of increasing unemployment and economic disruption as a result of COVID-19.

The Community Action Network’s response to COVID-19 is impressive and unsurprising. Community Action leveraged a nationwide network of 1,000+ local Agencies, deep-seated state and federal partnerships, a wide breadth of social services and programs, and almost 60 years of experience fighting poverty to help communities recover from the pandemic. As the pandemic evolves, Community Action strives to build a more equitable and prosperous future for families experiencing poverty. Community Action embraces calls to “build back better” and reimagine the systems and programs that give everyone an opportunity to thrive. This report details how Community Action was ready to act, responded rapidly, helped families recover from crisis, and is building community resilience for the future.

The Office of Community Services (OCS), which is the federal agency that oversees CSBG, offered guidance in 2020 to help CAAs distribute funds to their communities. The CARES Act authorized states to revise the income eligibility ceiling from 125 to 200 percent of the federal poverty level for CSBG services furnished during fiscal years 2020 and 2021, including services furnished with the state’s regular CSBG appropriations during those years. This allowed CAAs to serve people who saw significant financial loss from the pandemic but may have been self-sufficient if not for that catastrophic global event. In so many communities across Indiana, people who had never used public benefits before were seeking help from Unemployment Insurance (UI), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), and a variety of local programs.

Client Stories

Community Action Agencies report annually on unduplicated counts of clients served, percent change in poverty metrics, the number of community partnerships, and many other quantitative data points. Those numbers are used to show impact and justify funding, but the heart and soul of Community Action is much better seen through the stories of clients and community members. These qualitative metrics—the reduced stress, increased time with family, and removal of burdens from people’s shoulders—are what truly tell the story of Community Action.

MEET DYLAN

During the COVID-19 pandemic when schools were closed, Dylan took leave from his job to care for his three children so his estranged spouse could continue working. Due to the extended leave, he lost his job and his unemployment payments didn’t cover all the family’s expenses and the rent. Dylan, who ask that his last name not be used, is a 52-year-old Army Veteran. He hates having to ask for help, but found himself about to be evicted.

While in an appointment at the VA, Dylan was introduced to Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) at Brightpoint. The SSVF program assists Veterans in finding housing, while also focusing on other life areas to improve the chances for long-term success. Within a week, Dylan was enrolled and approved for assistance to get caught back up on his rent. However, the trailer park where he was living refused the payment and evicted him anyway.

With the help of his caseworker Angie, Dylan was able to connect with Liberty Landing and stay there while he searched for housing. The children were able to stay with their mother during the nights, but most days, Dylan had to care for them while she was working. The shelter accommodated him as best they could by letting him spend time with his kids in their conference room for a couple of hours a day.


Dylan somberly revealed the moment when his son figured out he was homeless. Dylan reassured him, but his son spent two days crying. Dylan worked out with the shelter to take his son to his room, so he could see that daddy had a roof over his head and a place to sleep. Seeing his son’s reaction to his circumstances motivated Dylan to push forward to find stable housing.

With Angie’s guidance, in a few weeks, Dylan was approved for a place to live. Brightpoint assisted him with move-in costs and temporary financial assistance for rent and utility deposits. Dylan commented that he felt well understood throughout the experience and that the landlord collaborated well with Angie.

“Brightpoint has been very supportive. It has all been a very positive experience,” said Dylan. “Angie is very responsive and understands me and my humor. I’m able to joke around and just be myself.”

Now, Dylan has an apartment and a vehicle. Currently, he is working part time and is aiming for full time employment. He can now feed his kids and pay for gas. Dylan stated that without the assistance he received at Brightpoint, he would be living on the streets somewhere. Moving forward, Dylan intends to work with the SSVF Health Coordinator to get Medicaid and his VA disability re-evaluated.

Dylan is grateful for the coordinated services that Brightpoint has provided and that he had a place to turn to when he thought he had nowhere else to go. “I never knew the support was out there,” he said. “Through the help of Brightpoint, I went from bottomed out to turning the corner.”²



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² “Turning the Corner On Pandemic Hardships – One Veteran’s Story”, January/February 2022.



MEET GREG

This interview is from October 8, 2021. Responses have been edited for clarity and the last name has been removed for privacy.

Tell me a little bit about yourself and your family to start.

My name is Greg . I'm 49 years old. I live in Richland, Indiana. I'm a single dad. I'm raising them solely on my own and we're doing pretty good considering.

Can you tell me in your own words what effect COVID had on your family?

When I first started hearing about COVID, I thought, "Oh it's never going to happen to us," but November of last year, my son broke his knee. He went into the hospital and he tested positive for COVID and then they tested me. I tested positive for COVID. I'm a single dad with five boys, and me and my son were in the hospital; I had the other children I had to care for. And this is where life got real tough for me. I was one of those guys that never thought [this would happen], you know? I thought, "Well we're gonna be fine", but it mentally exhausted me. It was tough. COVID was tough on my family.

How did you connect to Lincoln Hills Development Corporation for assistance?

I got a call from Linda Inman and she told me she heard that my son was in the hospital, and asked how they could help. I was always kind of like a proud person and I didn't think that I would need it, but man, did I ever. I was off work for six weeks straight and then a lot after that six weeks. I didn't even know how it happened, but it was a referral for the school. She got a hold of me from the school guidance counselor at the middle school.

What support did Lincoln Hills provide to you and your family?

They helped us with food, and with our electric bill through the Energy Assistance Program.

Resource coordination – she helped me because I have a hard time with paperwork. There's so many kids that you gotta go through, so she helped me go through that and coached me through it. She got me in contact with another lady up in Tell City and she helped me do other programs at Lincoln Hills. She actually brought food out to the house because I couldn't even hardly get up for like a solid month.

Is your son going to start Early Head Start at some point?

Yeah, he's going.



What does life look like now since you've had the support from Lincoln Hills?

It took me from disconnected to actually functioning. It got me back to where I was working again, where my paychecks could pay our own bills. She caught me up, she got me. Yeah, she got me lined out where I could get back on my own again 'cause that that's where I would like to be.

What programs do you think are important to invest in?

I believe that we need to have people like Linda. More of those that can help guys that get so stressed out that you have a hard time ciphering through things. [You need a] coordinator to refer you to programs, to straighten us out.

I think what you're saying is more money should be invested into people like Linda Inman, who is a resource coordinator with Lincoln Hills Development Corporation. She is part of our resource coordination program that can refer and assist families and individuals with Early Head Start, Energy Assistance Program, food assistance, etc. It's really important to invest in programs like that, to continue helping families.

Yes, exactly.

What else would you like people to know about your experience?

That there is help out there. Don't be too proud to ask because it's a good thing and it really makes you sleep better at night knowing that your electric is not going to get shut off or that there's enough food in there because you can't go to the store 'cause you're in quarantine and you went through everything. That people like her were there and relieved a lot of stress. Don't let your pride get in the way. Don't be afraid to ask for help when it's needed, and especially during COVID.

“**She caught me up, she got me. Yeah, she got me lined out where I could get back on my own again 'cause that's where I would like to be. I just couldn't.**”

PACE CLIENTS

“PACE helped me with their COVID 19 Relief Program when I needed help. I had my second child during the Pandemic & the pediatrician recommended not to put a baby into daycare. I already had one 5-year-old child at home due to school being closed from COVID. I was not working. PACE helped me pay the remainder of my rent & assisted in my electric bill, which was about to be shut off. I was referred by Hope’s Voice (Domestic Violence Service Provider) to the program & so glad I looked into it. Without this assistance I would not be able to get back on my feet. I’ve since had a job interview, which I’m waiting to hear back from.”

- Riley

“The last year and a half caused so many unexpected lifestyle changes, and adjustments to a “new normal.” My family and I were quarantined multiple times due to COVID-19, causing a loss of income. I received help with a rent payment and an internet bill. The application process is simple and hassle-free. I suggest anyone who has been affected by COVID-19 to take advantage of this program.”

- Rebecca

“Having COVID & being off work for two weeks, it definitely set me back. Receiving COVID-19 relief assistance from PACE is a huge help.”

- Meagon

“I worked at a daycare and the kids there kept getting COVID-19. I was quarantined about 3-4 times. Meanwhile, my husband, who is a contractor for a gas company, got his hours cut due to rules about COVID. I was worried and stressed about paying bills. We had just got a new house and car. My mother-in-law referred me to the program. The COVID Relief Program has helped my family. I feel relief from the strain of financial burdens of day-to-day life that had been magnified by the pandemic.”

- Kayla

“I was impacted by COVID hard financially. I was working at a local restaurant and they closed due to COVID. The COVID-19 Relief Program helped me by paying my utilities. Now I will be able to pay my rent and catch up on other bills. Now I have money to buy groceries for my family this month. I was referred to the program by a family member in the community.”

- Tia

“I live at Washington Housing Authority and my neighbors had referred me to the COVID-19 Relief Program. I got laid off in March of 2020. The program assisted with my rent expense. The program will help me buy things I have previously not had the money to buy due to being short on funds. I will now be able to purchase personal hygiene items and other necessities.”

- Keith

Client was informed by supervisor that she would need to quarantine and was cancelled from work through the end of March. Employer continuously cancelled work schedule, having an outbreak of COVID at employer site. Company policy changed to not allow PRN (an on-call medical worker) to enter the facility - so at that time she was terminated.

"I want to express my sincere gratitude to the Pace COVID relief program for their generous assistance provided towards my water bill, Verizon bill and especially the subscription to Summit Professional Education. Due to your contribution, I can fulfill my requirements to maintain my Indiana Physical Therapist Assistant License. By June of next year, I need to complete 22 continuing education hours both online and in person classroom courses which help me to learn new skills and keep my Indiana License active in good standing. With your assistance, I will be able to maintain this license."

- Sabrina

"When I had COVID, I was spending a lot of money buying vitamins and supplements. It put me behind on other bills. The COVID relief money helped me catch up on bills. I was able to catch up to where I was financially previously. After my application was processed, I was also referred to The Family Meals Programs. PACE has a lot of programs to help those in need, and they're eager to help."

- Myndi

Client shared that her husband missed three weeks from work w/COVID. Now his hours are reduced.

"I saw the COVID Relief Program information located on the bulletin board in the Daviess County Public Library. I am glad to have completed the easy application. Anytime I needed assistance they were a phone call away. The program has helped me so much to get caught up."

- Tori

"I was laid off in March 2020, which caused a financial hardship to my family of two, my daughter & I. We have been quarantined three times throughout the pandemic. In September 2020, I gained employment. PACE assisted with my rent for a month along with my past-due bills. I'm thankful for the assistance that PACE provided. PACE is a beneficial part of the community. If you have been impacted by COVID I urge you to apply for COVID relief."

- Becca



AREA FIVE ADDRESSES HUNGER

When COVID shut down Indiana, it also closed all of the senior congregate meal sites across the state. Thousands of seniors found themselves without their daily nutritional supplementation provided by area senior centers. Head Start classrooms also closed, and thousands of students lost their morning breakfast and lunches that Head Start provided daily. The culinary staff at Area Five Agency on Aging & Community Services, led by Melissa Reynoso, sprang into action and developed a plan to not only continue to provide those seniors and Head Start students with their daily nutrition, but they also expanded their services to provide meals to homeless shelters in several counties throughout the Area Five service area. The Agency pivoted to “grab-and-go” where seniors could stop by daily and have a “contactless pick-up” so they would have a hot meal for the day. They also provided grab and-go meals for Head Start students and their families. They partnered with homeless shelters and local transportation service providers to provide in-home delivery for those seniors who could not get out during the pandemic. “The work and problem-solving that Melissa and her staff put in was simply amazing, and a testimony to our employees’ commitment to our mission, which is to provide programs and services that will benefit low income, disadvantaged and older persons,” said Area Five Executive Director, Chuck LaDow. “My staff showed up, accepted the challenge and actually increased our daily meal preparation from 600 to close to 1,000 meals a day during the peak of the pandemic,” said LaDow.



This kind of commitment to help and focus on community partnerships is the backbone of Indiana’s Community Action Network.

The Work of Indiana's 22 Community Action Agencies and Association

Early in the pandemic, Community Action Agencies were asked to talk about their achievements during the unknown and constantly changing landscape of pre-vaccine life. Many talked about not only how they served the community, but how they labored to become a workplace where people felt safe and could keep doing their essential jobs.

One lasting change in the Indiana Community Action Network is that agencies now have updated and safer technology and cloud systems. Many agencies were using dated electronics and technology, which left them open to cyber attacks and system malfunctions. When the world was forced online, agencies recognized that they must invest in better technology for themselves, their boards, and their community members. Using CARES Act funding, agencies can now better serve their communities because they have reliable and safe electronics, document storage, communications, and client intake systems.

The following stories of change and hard work are in the CAAs' own words, but each touches on ways CAAs saw the pandemic affecting their low-income communities, how they responded to the new and changing needs, and what pandemic-related needs were solved because of CAAs existing in the community.

AREA FIVE AGENCY ON AGING & COMMUNITY SERVICES

New skills, competencies and attitudes were required as we closed our doors to the public and tried to navigate this past couple of years' workplace priorities. Loyal and dedicated employees like ours are the foundation to any successful organization. Glass partitions, grab-and-go meals, and drop boxes were some of the ways that we maintained our connection to our clients. Innovation was vital in order to provide our clients with the information and services they needed. Throughout this pandemic, our dedicated staff stepped up to duties and positions that they were not originally trained for. They innovated new ways to keep their programs moving smoothly as well as volunteering for other programs that they are not normally affiliated with. Even though our doors were closed to the public, our staff's commitment to our agency pushed us closer to achieving our mission.

Our staff conducted an informal needs assessment over the phone to see what our clients needed the most and the results of that are what we pursued in our original CARES Community Action Plan. Being able to provide the members of our community with help with their biggest concerns was the top accomplishment. Area Five Agency was at the center of all COVID needs throughout the pandemic. Everyone in the community inquiring for help was referred to us for help on rent, mortgage, prescriptions, car payments, car insurance, food assistance, utility assistance, mental and medical health assistance, etc. Having the flexibility of deciding what resources we provided and the maximum benefit and requirements for participation allowed us to help as much as we could while reaching as many as we could.



Area Five Agency was at the center of all COVID needs throughout the pandemic.

AREA IV AGENCY ON AGING AND COMMUNITY ACTION

Area IV Agency on Aging and Community Action Programs, Inc., considered its move to remote working for staff to be its greatest accomplishment. It was a difficult transition initially, but our staff adjusted well to this change, and the timeliness of processing applications for services was not affected. Staff members were able to meet with clients via Zoom and/or Microsoft Teams to provide “in-person” assistance as needed. We continued to provide prioritized assistance to those in crisis while processing all other applications in a timely manner.

Being able to continue serving individuals without interruption and provide new assistance is why this move was our greatest accomplishment. The services provided during the COVID-19 pandemic, including rent/mortgage payment assistance, utility payment assistance, and educational assistance, addressed some of the top needs identified in our community. Rent/mortgage assistance has frequently been named as a top need, even before the pandemic. It would be ideal to continue providing this assistance, so Area IV applied for and was approved to be an Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Hub. We continue to listen to our communities about the issues they are facing and are proud to provide assistance.

Rent/mortgage assistance has frequently been named as a top need, even before the pandemic. It would be ideal to continue providing this assistance, so Area IV applied for and was approved to be an Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Hub.

By mid-2020, we provided \$1,303,214 in COFA assistance to our community, serving 942 families.

BRIGHTPOINT

Along with our collaboration partners, we were the first in our area to get off the ground and provide assistance to families suffering from pandemic-related financial issues. Regardless of the physical office closure, the agency continued to offer many of their regular services remotely. We had already built the infrastructure and, to some degree, the resources to quickly mobilize. This led to Brightpoint being viewed as a key relief organization in our area, and we were able to attract over \$2 million to CARES Other Financial Assistance (COFA) beyond what was provided via CSBG, EAP, etc. By mid-2020, we provided \$1,303,214 in COFA assistance to our community, serving 942 families.

Brightpoint provided a variety of programs and services, including Brightpoint Development Fund (BDF) that includes housing development, a loan center, small business loans, and financial education. In response to COVID-19, BDF has created a COVID-19 Express Loan for businesses in northeast Indiana impacted by the pandemic. Our loan product was designed to help small businesses who were experiencing financial hardship due to the economic crisis. The loan offered up to \$20,000 with no cost up-front and immediate deferred payment options available. Limited documentation was required up-front and could be uploaded through a website to enable businesses to quickly apply, remain physically distant, and receive financial relief. Staff also offered virtual coaching sessions to explore relief options available so local businesses could develop a financial plan to recover or remain stable, as well as get connected to additional resources.

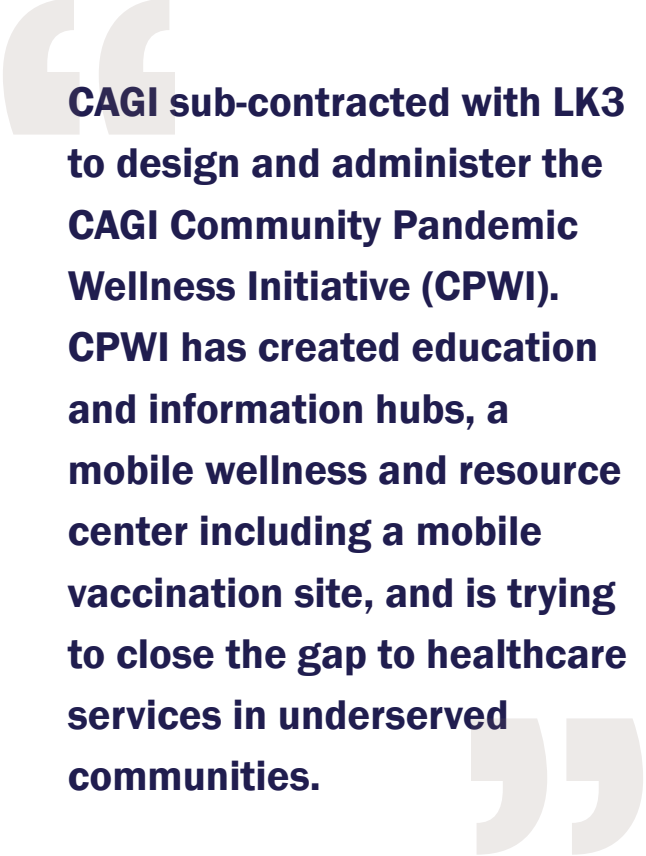
In addition to the assistance for small businesses, Brightpoint had a COVID-19 Outcomes Financial Assistance fund to assist individuals and families with needs brought about by the crisis. To raise funds for both types of assistance, the agency shifted our annual golf fundraiser to be held on June 4, 2020, to a virtual fundraising event to directly benefit the COVID-19 relief programs. By June 4th, over 20 generous sponsors and donors had joined together to support families and communities in northeastern Indiana.³

³ National Community Action Partnership, 2020.

COMMUNITY ACTION OF GREATER INDIANAPOLIS (CAGI)

CAGI sub-contracted with LK3 to design and administer the CAGI Community Pandemic Wellness Initiative (CPWI). CPWI was a holistic mind, body, and soul approach to achieving community wellness during the global pandemic of COVID-19. The purpose was to address the health disparities of black, brown, and poor communities. CPWI created education and information hubs, and had a mobile wellness and resource center including a mobile vaccination site to try to close the gap to healthcare services in underserved communities. In partnership with Shalom Health Center, CPWI touched approximately 1,000 persons including specialized healthcare, primary care, and home healthcare referrals, vaccinations, and screenings.

CAGI also updated its network infrastructure to allow employees to work from home during the pandemic. VPN accessibility was provided to employees in order to comply with the stay-at-home order initiated by Governor Holcomb. In doing so, CAGI was able to continue operations during a trying time. Technology upgrades included printers, laptops, and a docking station infrastructure. CAGI also migrated from local servers to cloud based servers with continual backup for remote and emergency access.



CAGI sub-contracted with LK3 to design and administer the CAGI Community Pandemic Wellness Initiative (CPWI). CPWI has created education and information hubs, a mobile wellness and resource center including a mobile vaccination site, and is trying to close the gap to healthcare services in underserved communities.

COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM OF EVANSVILLE (CAPE)

Because of this funding, our agency has been able to help households avoid eviction!

Due to funding provided by the CSBG CARES Act, our agency was able to help individuals who were facing evictions. Rental assistance was, and is, a much-needed resource for our community and although we have a housing department, rental assistance was not provided by our organization before the pandemic. Because of this CARES Act funding, our agency has been able to help households avoid eviction! The state eviction moratorium ending meant many more residents in our community who were affected by COVID-19 needed rental assistance. This additional resource was just another example of why our agency is vital for the residents in our community.

A portion of the CSBG CARES Act funding has allowed our agency to move from the Grants Management System (GMS), which was a manual accounting system, to Sage Intacct, a web-based accounting and human resource system. The new database will reduce supply costs, increase accuracy, increase reporting time, and allow our agency to better track spending for each program. The database will also allow managers to have real-time access to their program budgets. The database will streamline the human resources onboarding process, implement electronic employee files and payroll, and claims will be done in less than half the time they are done now. The CAPE team feels as though this program has moved our agency into the 21st century. We are very excited about the new database, and are looking forward to things becoming paperless.

COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM OF WESTERN INDIANA

Our main goal during the pandemic was to keep our staff and clients safe while continuing to provide quality services. We upgraded our technology, our website, and provided hardware for our staff to work from home. Applications for various services were designed, available, and submitted on-line. Employment interviews were conducted via Zoom. Staff were able to communicate with families via Zoom. WIC vouchers were issued from our kitchens and living rooms. Children were visited in parks or other outdoor venues. Our Board of Directors were provided with iPads with the Boardable software so they could continue to be informed and provide their steady guidance. We updated the reception areas in our offices to have as little face-to-face contact as possible; we installed Ring doorbells and provided PPE to clients and staff. We followed all protocols as recommended. Technology was our friend. We survived!

Our top accomplishment was our ability to continue to provide quality services and to meet the needs of our families and communities. Whether it was distributing food via drive-thru, home delivery or food gift cards, we met that need.

Our top accomplishment was our ability to continue to provide quality services and to meet the needs of our families and communities. Again, our goal was to keep our families safe. We understood it was a very hectic, chaotic, and terrifying time for many. Applying for services was streamlined. Our website was updated to allow applications to be submitted on-line. We made every effort to help them through their trying time, whether it was assistance with their utilities or keeping them in their homes. Many suffered with depression, hopelessness and despair. We were able to assist those who needed that help. Even though our doors were closed, our ability to help was not. Whether it was distributing food via drive-thru, home delivery, or food gift cards, we met that need.

COMMUNITY ACTION OF SOUTHERN INDIANA (CASI)

Our Head Start program had many obstacles to overcome with COVID and a building move. The Head Start staff went above and beyond to meet the families' needs when we could not have the children physically in the building. They dropped off food and educational activity kits, virtually met with families to check-in and refer them to get help with our emergency assistance program if they needed it, and continued e-learning. Now that we are back to in-person learning with Head Start children, we can see the difference it made to stay connected and help where we could during the shut-down. The families have shown us their gratitude.

The top accomplishment of our agency was moving into the Spring Hill campus. Having a building that we own has given our staff ownership. It has also put us in a great position financially to be able to better serve the mission of our agency.

Now that we are in-person learning with Head Start children, we can see the difference it made to stay connected and help where we could during the shut-down.

COMMUNITY AND FAMILY SERVICES (CFS)

Starting in March 2020, we were contacted by City Serve to help with the distribution of USDA food boxes. For approximately 60 weeks, CFS received one semi-trailer per week filled with over 1,000 prepared food boxes consisting of dairy, meats, eggs, etc. Due to the overwhelming demand, CFS partnered with local churches and law enforcement agencies to help direct operations and traffic flow. This project provided thousands of families with much-needed food items. Many volunteers helped distribute these food items to those individuals who could not leave their homes due to COVID or other prohibitions.

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When COVID became prevalent, CFS recognized a deficiency in coping with remote work to keep staff and clients safe. We could not hold remote Board of Directors meetings or staff meetings. A lack of communication options was problematic for effective communication. Our finance team was not capable of working from home without a cloud-based accounting system. Using CARES ACT funds, we provided several Board of Directors members with a laptop computer and internet service. Additionally, CFS purchased Zoom software to be utilized for the agency, board meetings, and external meetings. This allowed a free flow of communication for all parties. Our finance team upgraded our accounting system to a cloud-based platform enabling the team to work from home if needed. The IT team upgraded many computers with the proper tools to allow other staff access to Central Office servers and files to enable staff to work from home.

HUMAN SERVICES, INC. (HSI)

Our agency quickly shifted from in-person to virtual services to continue serving and supporting our families while maintaining employee health and safety. With the changing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, communication and support was a top priority. We worked with our families through text messages, email, phone calls, home visits, virtual visits, and Facebook to ensure the necessary communication was happening and we were meeting families where they were mentally. We provided hygiene items (toilet paper/hand sanitizer), food, diapers, formula, educational home packets, virtual reading, and community resources to meet the needs of the whole family, but most of all we provided coaching. Staff maintained connections with families to provide the needed social support and needed resources as well, such as utility assistance, rent assistance, employment information, etc. Staff attended virtual community meetings and resource sharing with various agencies in each county to ensure that our families had everything they needed.

Staff maintained connections with families to provide the needed social support and needed resources as well such as utility assistance, rent assistance, employment information, etc.

Shifting to remote working and service delivery due to COVID-19 shined a light on the lack of technology preparedness. For too many years, technology has not received the time or investment to create the proper security, accessibility, and collaboration necessary to support a high-performing organization. This crisis finally highlighted why it is so crucial to build efficient, electronic workflows that do not require the paper shuffling we are accustomed to. During this crisis, we became increasingly aware of the need to move some of our key systems and processes to the cloud. We experienced limited or no accessibility to some systems, slow performance, and increased risk in a time when things needed to work to keep staff performing and delivering. This is being addressed with a professional consultant to maintain and resume the operation of programs and create a more stable and sustainable organization into the future.

HOOSIER UPLANDS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The top accomplishment that we achieved as an agency for clients and the community included providing personal protective equipment (PPE) to those in need which was funded, in part, by this CSBG CARES funding. Early on in the pandemic, PPE was extremely hard to find and was so expensive that many healthcare providers were reusing PPE in order to save as much of what they had, but also risking the spread of disease. Through CSBG CARES funds as well as local grants and local agency funds, Hoosier Uplands distributed approximately 86,300 individual pieces of PPE, 94 gallons of hand sanitizer, and 32 boxes of cleaning supplies.

Through CSBG CARES funding, the agency was able to purchase technology to help numerous staff work from home during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This included switching our mental health clinic to almost solely telehealth services for a majority of the last year. Prior to the pandemic, the clinic wasn't providing any telehealth services, so switching over to this service in such a short amount of time required a massive amount of technology purchases, training, and staff willingness to learn quickly. Everyone worked well together to make it possible and opened up a new opportunity for a different way to serve our clients at Serenity Now Psychiatric & Counseling Clinic.

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INDIANA COMMUNITY ACTION ASSOCIATION (INCAA)

INCAA proposed to use a portion of the CSBG CARES Act funding to go toward PPE. INCAA recognized how critical PPE was going to be for the state's 22 CAAs, and decided to help meet the need. INCAA ordered a first round of supplies in bulk and going forward will serve as a repository for PPE – saving the Indiana Community Action Network both dollars and space.

INCAA's PPE purchase allowed local agency staff to return to the field more safely and effectively.

INCAA used CSBG CARES Act funding to help cover the cost of supplies across the state. CAAs mostly requested KN95 masks, surgical FDA and non-FDA masks, face shields, gloves, disposable gowns and digital thermometers. As of the end of April 2020, the INCAA had purchased the following items:

- 66,800 pairs of gloves;
- 7,000 face shields;
- 73,830 KN95 masks;
- 27,200 surgical masks (FDA);
- 4,700 surgical masks (non-FDA);
- 10,250 disposable gowns; and
- 11 digital thermometers⁴

⁴ National Community Action Partnership, 2020.

With normal routines upended, many elderly faced increased isolation, reduced family contact, and fears of contracting COVID. To increase contact and offer a needed service, staff organized food and meal deliveries for the elderly in New Castle.

INTERLOCAL COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM, INC. (ICAP)

ICAP developed strategies in the early phases of COVID that focused on assisting vulnerable groups who were at high-risk if exposed to the virus. One of these groups was the elderly. With normal routines upended, many elderly residents faced increased isolation, reduced family contact, and fears of contracting COVID. To increase contact and offer a needed service, staff organized food and meal deliveries for the elderly in New Castle.

ICAP's ability to utilize our communication technology, including VOIP telephone communications, electronic payroll systems, and centralized client databases helped staff maintain communication and program updates during this period. All staff had access to either a desktop or laptop, and were able to attend webinars, trainings, staff meetings and board meetings via Zoom or telephone interface. Increased use and adaptation of our Google drive resulted in management information being reported in a different electronic format, particularly in the finance area. Data transmission was in real time and each program director had access to these reports.

JOB SOURCE

Our greatest accomplishment was our Families and Education Gap Assistance Program (FEGAP) program. FEGAP provided internet and computers for students who had no access to this equipment or service during the first semester of remote learning (Spring 2020). We provided the tools needed for over 200 students in Madison and Grant Counties to re-engage with their schools during remote learning. Based upon feedback from the schools and instructors, this program made a stronger impact than we expected. The students we provided internet and systems for were able to re-engage with their studies and tripled their attendance. Additionally, we simultaneously worked with the families to identify other wraparound service needs. While working with the students' tech needs, we were able to direct these client families toward weatherization, EAP, rental assistance, food pantries, medical and HIP services, Township Trustee services, as well as any number of other needed, community offered services.

Serving students allowed us to work directly with the students' families, and grow our service client base. We increased our income-eligible client base by more than three times through creating trusting relationships with new families and by identifying wraparound service needs and referring them to the appropriate community partners. We also identified community service gaps, which will serve as directional guidance for our programming going forward. Additionally, this program put us in a position to actively re-engage with our community partners during a challenging time of limited contact and little face-to-face interaction. Some agencies shut down, some opened, some changed structurally and being in an active referral mode with our clients allowed us to stay on top of what was happening in our communities. This program was an essential new program for JobSource following the organizational changes in Fall 2019.

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LINCOLN HILLS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (LDHC)

LHDC staff and program collaboration increased internally, as we worked together to assist those in need. This collaboration increased internal and external referrals and communication to better assist the families and individuals we served in a more comprehensive way.

LHDC Resource Coordination staff collaborated with Perry County Council on Aging, Catholic Charities, United Way and local food pantries to create a food assistance hotline for individuals and families impacted by COVID-19. Through this collaboration, many families and elderly individuals were assisted with food boxes. The hotline also allowed LHDC staff to make contact with individuals that needed assistance with rent/mortgage, utilities, and other community resource needs.

LHDC Resource Coordination staff collaborated with Perry County Council on Aging, Catholic Charities, United Way and local food pantries to create a food assistance hotline for individuals and families impacted by COVID-19.

Because of CSBG CARES Act funds, we were able, for the first time – our agency has been around for 55 years – to assist clients with payment of water bills.

NORTH CENTRAL COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES, INC. (NCCAA)

The top accomplishment our agency achieved was the fact we remained accessible to the clients during the major shut-down during the months of March-June 2020 to assist them with rent/mortgage, water, heat, and electric payments. Our agency was able to receive local foundation and United Way funds in March of 2020 to assist clients until the CSBG CARES money was received in late June 2020. In addition, the agency provided staff with the necessary equipment to work remotely if needed.

Because of CSBG CARES Act funds, we were able, for the first time – our agency has been around for 55 years – to assist clients with payment of water bills. This type of assistance has been non-existent in the service areas our agency covers before the Pandemic.

NORTHWEST INDIANA COMMUNITY ACTION (NWICA)

In March of 2020, when Governor Holcomb declared the public health emergency, NWICA implemented its emergency operations plan and shifted all of its operations to a remote work environment. Initially, the Senior Management Team met twice each day via Zoom to plan and to respond to emerging issues and needs. The Senior Management Team, in conjunction with the organization's managers, were able to establish productivity measures for all employees in a remote environment and to assign emergency operations tasks to employees whose jobs could not be completed remotely. NWICA is proud to have navigated the COVID-19 health emergency without laying off any employees or eliminating any programs or staff positions.

NWICA was able to operate all programs with almost no service interruptions throughout the COVID-19 public health emergency because of the planning NWICA engaged in related to emergency operations. When it became necessary to close our Senior Meal Sites, we provided home-delivered meals to all of the site participants, ensuring that their nutrition needs continued to be met during the stay-at-home orders. We were able to provide emergency housing for veterans in hotels while shelters were closed through the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program. Energy Assistance and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) programs were able to implement contactless application and preparation procedures. With the exception of Weatherization services, all NWICA programs were able to continue operations, meeting critical needs for the people we serve in Northwest Indiana.

We were able to provide emergency housing for veterans in hotels while shelters were closed through the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program.

OHIO VALLEY OPPORTUNITIES (OVO)

Throughout the pandemic, all programs remained operational except for Weatherization when the state mandated program closure. We developed policies and procedures and provided PPE to ensure the health and safety of staff and clients. We initiated remote work options for personnel during the height of the pandemic, and administrative staff meet virtually on a daily basis to ensure continuity of operations. We conducted a vaccination campaign with personnel and throughout the community to further reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Immediately upon receipt of our CSBG CARES Act contract, we rapidly responded to identified needs that were not being addressed at that time. First, our CARES Project paid electric bills in arrears for 181 eligible households. This project was completed within 29 business days! Second, through our Air Conditioning for At Risk Populations Project, 102 households received a window unit. This project was completed within 20 business days. We continued to address service gaps as other programs started (i.e., rent, utility assistance, etc.).

First, our CARES Project paid electric bills arrears for 181 eligible households. This project was completed within 29 business days!

In April 2021, we developed the PASS Project in response to a reduction in social distancing mandates and the need for programs/services that promote wellness. We established a new partnership with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) which included a rate reduction from \$50 to \$30 per permit. This allowed us to utilize remaining CARES funds and a portion of regular CSBG funds to purchase 2021 Annual State Park Entrance Permits for 1,915 eligible households.

PACE COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY INC. (PACE)

We partnered with local libraries to allow easier access to resources for our clients. Clients could use technology available at the libraries to provide necessary documentation to apply for our programs at no extra cost to the client. This made internet and technology readily available for clients who did not have the technology at home. Since the agency was closed to the public, this provided clients access to send in requested documentation for our programs. Since we partnered with library branches in all of four of our service delivery counties, clients did not have to travel far to access this resource. Libraries also were open extended hours, which was an added benefit to our clients.

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PACE's Family Meals Program was developed during COVID to address food insecurities for low-income families. PACE paid/partnered with local restaurants to provide prepared family meals. In addition to family supports, we provided small business supports. Restaurants were able to remain open and to keep staff employed.

PACE's top accomplishment during the pandemic was being set up to work remotely with minimal issues. We were on the forefront of technology. Once the pandemic hit, PACE was ahead of the curve, which allowed many staff to continue serving customers remotely. This allowed us to continue our regular operations with minimal interruptions.

REAL SERVICES

We are proud of our low-tech, high-touch response to the pandemic. REAL Services wanted to ensure that our clients were doing the best they could at the onset of the stay-at-home orders. We called all older adults and other vulnerable participants receiving assistance for EAP and other programs to make sure they had food, could get their medications, and answer questions about PPE and quarantining. We offered direct assistance as well as community resources to help everyone stay safe at home. Over 4,200 older adults had regular contact – and the effort turned into a sustainable formal program now called REAL Friends – and calls are made by volunteers.

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The REAL Services' Rental Program had a profound impact on citizens in our five-county service area (Elkhart, Fulton, Kosciusko, Marshall and St. Joseph counties). Over \$2,100,000 has been allotted via six funding sources impacting more than 650 low-income families at or below 200% of the federal poverty level who were affected by COVID-19. The actions we took included developing the program in three weeks, re-allocating staffing, and bringing on additional staff to successfully achieve this accomplishment. The ultimate outcome was avoidance of evictions, and thereby maintaining a stable dwelling place and neighborhood, as well as avoiding the further spread of COVID-19.

SOUTH CENTRAL COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM (SCCAP)

In the midst of the pandemic, we faced the tough situation of needing to meet our clients' needs while also ensuring the safety of our staff was a top priority. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and public health concerns, our agency made the decision to refrain from opening our doors to the public. This created a dilemma for us to be able to continue to offer services to the community. Many of our clients rely upon our staff to file their paperwork. Without access to staff, they would endure more hardships. In order to address this issue, we determined the best course of action was to construct a walk-up window in our front lobby along with a roofed addition to our building to shelter clients in inclement weather. This allowed our staff to engage and assist our clients while keeping both parties' safety in mind.

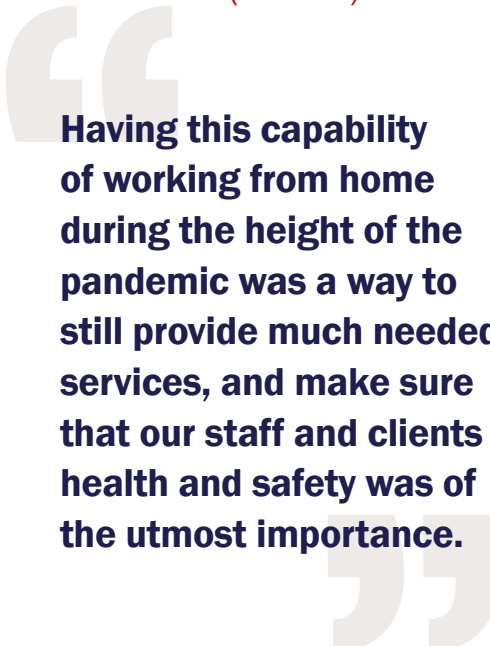
In 2020, our agency partnered with Bloomington Mask Drive (BMD), a local coalition of volunteers with the mission of slowing the spread of COVID-19 by providing free, high-quality, homemade masks to the Bloomington community. We hosted a mask station at our office that was available to the public during our business hours that distributed over 3,000 masks. We were consistently one of the top distributors of masks made by the BMD, which include children's masks, adult masks, and masks for the at-risk populations - which include an extra layer of protection. We are confident that by increasing the accessibility of free, clean masks we did a small part in helping to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our area, and in turn helped our community to be a healthier one.

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SOUTHEASTERN INDIANA ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY CORPORATION (SIEOC)

During the early stages of the pandemic, we were able to purchase and utilize new technology so that we were still able to serve our community. We found that staff were able to work from home and stay connected with clients through various means. Having this capability of working from home during the height of the pandemic was a way to still provide much needed services, and make sure that our staff and clients' health and safety was of the utmost importance.

Through the availability of CSBG CARES Act funding, SIEOC was able to maintain employment for a staff member in danger of being let go due to other contract funding being reduced drastically. Items in our plan required a large amount of client interaction for services. In addition, data-reporting duties fell under her educational background. Therefore, this funding allowed this staff member to maintain full-time employment with us at least until the time of that contract end date, and provided important services to families throughout the pandemic.



Having this capability of working from home during the height of the pandemic was a way to still provide much needed services, and make sure that our staff and clients health and safety was of the utmost importance.

TRI-CAP

We kept all staff employed without anyone drawing unemployment, which we are proud of. We also kept all client services running during the pandemic, no matter what it took to redesign how we interacted with clients while keeping our staff well-trained. Several staff retired during 2020, leaving quite a burden for all of us to keep things running smoothly. We met all programmatic production and budgetary requirements. And we opened and fully leased a new low-income housing development during the pandemic!

We implemented pandemic safety policies and a new agency-wide client database, received a record amount of local donations, purchased one of our formerly rented Head Start centers, and moved one of our health clinics to a new location in order to save over \$41,000 per year. We completed two community needs assessments during the pandemic, and complied with countless additional grant applications' reporting structures, new funder regulations, and seemingly endless funder-mandated trainings.

The biggest accomplishment was finishing the construction of and fully leasing our 56-unit low-income Huntingburg Wagon Works apartment complex on schedule! We were given no graces to get all units fully leased, even though the construction took five months longer than anticipated due to the same delays the entire country experienced with sourcing manpower and materials for construction projects.

We began new partnerships with our local schools to extend school-based counseling services over the summer months of 2021. We maintained in-person clinical visits and classroom-based Head Start services throughout the pandemic with the exception of eight weeks in the spring of 2020. We were able to quickly develop virtual services for all when needed. We maintained and gained new Healthy Families home-visit clients through our virtual services. We met all Weatherization production goals. We partnered with local churches and food banks to bring in the USDA farmers to families' food boxes.

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WESTERN INDIANA COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY (WICCA)

COVID-19 presented many challenges in meeting the growing needs of our community. The restrictions of face-to-face contact could have been detrimental to WICAA programs, but instead of letting those barriers negatively impact our clients, we were able to adapt quickly to our new environment. Our staff were very flexible whether working on-site with PPE restrictions or working remotely. By purchasing laptops and printers, our staff was able to continue contact with clients throughout the pandemic. WIC and EAP families were able to continue services uninterrupted even when staff suffered numerous quarantines. Installing an electric door lock and remote buzzer system, as well as other PPE, further ensured the health and safety of our staff so they could continue to provide services to our community. The willingness and adaptability of our staff was by far our greatest accomplishment and ultimately led to an increase in program participation.

Given that seniors were at a high risk for serious illness with COVID-19, and as a result were isolated, our top accomplishment was providing our Foster Grandparent volunteers Chromebooks. Many programs were available to provide food and utility assistance, but the emotional effects from the quarantine presented numerous challenges, especially for those over age 55. The Chromebooks and subsequent training allowed this group an opportunity to connect with the schools and children where they volunteered. Additionally, the seniors were able to communicate with family and medical professionals online limiting the sense of isolation.

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CONCLUSION

COVID-19 sent our households, communities, states, nations, and world into a tailspin. Through it all, Community Action was vital in making sure all Hoosiers got through the pandemic with food, housing, water, heat, childcare, and many other necessities. With CSBG CARES funds, local agencies were able to innovate and respond to the unique needs in their communities. They did everything from providing masks and internet connectivity to delivering food and visiting with senior citizens. The promise of Community Action was, and is, alive and well in Indiana thanks to the dedicated staff and leaders of CAAs, IHCD, and INCAA.

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Common Acronyms

CAAs – Community Action Agencies

CARES Act – The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act

COFA – CARES Other Financial Assistance

CSBG – Community Service Block Grant

DNR – Department of Natural Resources

FDA – Food and Drug Administration

IHCDA – Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority

INCAA – Indiana Community Action Association

LIHEAP – Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program

OCS – Office of Community Service

PPE – Personal Protective Equipment

PRN – Latin for “pro re nata”, which means “as needed”. PRNs are fully licensed professionals who work on-call.

SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

TANF – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

UI – Unemployment Insurance

VITA – Volunteer Income Tax Assistance

Community Action Agency Abbreviations and Acronyms

Area Five – Area Five Agency On Aging & Community Services

Area IV – Area IV Agency on Aging and Community Action

CAGI – Community Action of Greater Indianapolis

CAPE – Community Action Program of Evansville

CASI – Community Action of Southern Indiana

CFS – Community and Family Services

HSI – Human Services, Inc.

Hoosier Uplands – Hoosier Uplands Economic Development Corporation

ICAP – Interlocal Community Action Program, Inc.

LHDC – Lincoln Hills Development Corporation

NCCAA – North Central Community Action Agencies, Inc.

NWICA – Northwest Indiana Community Action

OVO – Ohio Valley Opportunities

PACE – Pace Community Action Agency, Inc.

SCCAP – South Central Community Action Program

SIEOC – Southeastern Indiana Economic

TRI-CAP – Dubois-Pike-Warrick Economic Opportunity Committee, Inc. d.b.a TRI-CAP

WICAA – Western Indiana Community Action Agency

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