



# 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

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Partnering with People to Overcome Poverty  
SERVE. EDUCATE. TRANSFORM.



**Community Action**

## A WORD FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

2020 certainly proved to be a year like no other. COVID-19 has quite possibly changed our world forever. The new experience of social distancing and sheltering in place resulted in agencies such as ours adapting and responding to the most pressing needs of our neighbors, and thus, substantively reimagining how we deliver programs and services. Through diligence and dedication, coupled with innovative tools and strategies, Community Action Partnership of Ramsey & Washington Counties was able to rise up to and meet the challenge before us. We are proud to share examples of our staff's creativity and commitment in the pages of this report.

And yet, even prior to the onset of this pandemic, it is essential that we remember that, every day far too many people struggle to meet their most basic needs because distribution and access to resources continues to be significantly inequitable. Be it safe and affordable housing, dependable childcare, reliable transportation, or access to quality healthcare and adequate nutrition, low-income individuals and families are always at a disadvantage. And, of course, America's history of systemic racism and white supremacy has long wrought profound racial disparities that have only been deepened by COVID-19.

The tragic and senseless death of George Floyd, here in the Twin Cities, further illuminated these racial inequities and the persistent violence perpetrated against BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities in Minnesota and across the country. Moreover, it intensified an enduring trauma in this nation that is not merely decades, but centuries old.

For 56 years Community Action has supported people living in poverty. During that time the vast majority of the people we have served are members of historically marginalized communities including African Americans, Indigenous people, other people of color, and new Americans from across the globe. As such, race equity has always been at the heart of what we do. Yet still, we recognize that we can and must do better in our effort to assist our neighbors with their daily struggle to find stability and justice by ensuring that the lived experience of people with low incomes continue to drive and shape our work each and every day.

The impact of the global pandemic that is still with us and America's current racial reckoning are powerful calls to action. To chart a course toward a healthier, stronger, just, and truly equitable community, state, and country we must summon the spirit and resiliency in all of us to overcome our divisions and amplify our collective humanity. At Community Action, we are resolved to keep pushing forward in continued partnership with you our neighbors to create a better world for all of us.

In Solidarity,  
**Connie Greer**  
Board Chair

**Catherine Fair**  
Executive Director



## Supporting Our Neighbors During a Worldwide Crisis

In 2020, Community Action shifted our time, attention, and years of experience to create innovative solutions to help relieve the suffering created by the COVID-19 pandemic because we knew that people with low incomes were inevitably going to be the hardest hit. Through our wide-reaching relief and assistance initiatives we broadly supported people living in both Ramsey and Washington counties by distributing critical financial assistance. Additional partnerships with the cities of Roseville, New Brighton, and White Bear Lake provided targeted grants to residents because city leaders knew that working with us would ensure that available financial assistance would reach residents of their communities most deeply impacted by the pandemic. Crisis dollars distributed through our COVID-19 relief initiatives helped households to cover past due rent, make mortgage payments, and keep up with their utility costs. And, for those who were either working or searching for employment, the assistance also supported participants with the cost of car repairs and general automobile maintenance.

All told, throughout the year, Community Action coached and advised tens of thousands of people who needed support, provided more than 48,000

referrals to community-serving organizations, and partnered with the State of Minnesota, Ramsey County Emergency Assistance, area foundations, and local municipalities to distribute more than \$12 million in direct assistance to people experiencing profound financial crises caused, and exacerbated, by the pandemic. Regarding her experience with Community Action's staff and our COVID-19 relief and crisis assistance initiatives, a community member who was in dire need of assistance, said this,

*"I have a lot of telephone numbers in my resource book, but Community Action is the only one that always calls me back. That always listens to me. That is always there to help."*

In addition to the economic impact made by these direct assistance initiatives, Community Action also played a critical role in helping people navigate systems and access resources including federal Economic Impact Payments (EIPs), expanded unemployment benefits, Pandemic-EBT, SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), and connected them with other critical Community Action-administered programs such as Energy Assistance and Conservation, employment services, and our VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) Clinic. Furthermore, staff worked to educate people with low incomes about the importance of engaging in the civic life of their communities by encouraging participation in the 2020 Census and voting in local, state, and national elections which ultimately could result in a brighter future for generations to come through better public policies and dismantling of inequitable systems.

# Keeping Utility Bills Affordable for Everyone

In March 2020, when COVID-19 forced most businesses and government offices shutter, people living with low incomes still needed critical programs and services to stay safe and warm. In recognition of this reality Community Action's Energy Assistance Program, while temporarily suspending walk-in appointments, never fully shut down and instead continued to process applications and distribute millions of dollars in energy assistance to thousands of households during those critical early months. Kevin Adams, Interim Senior Director, credits a dedicated staff and a strong crisis preparedness plan for the team's ability to continue to serve people while the rest of the world seemingly came to a stop, "Everyone is totally committed to our mission and our ability to move quickly meant that we could continue our critical work uninterrupted."

As the pandemic continued it was clear to everyone that people with the lowest incomes, including the newly unemployed, were going to need additional help to find firmer financial footing. To that end, the Minnesota Department of Commerce expanded eligibility and extended the deadline to apply for energy assistance in 2020. Community Action staff took advantage of the extended program season to approve nearly 17,000 primary heating grants. Additionally, the program provided crisis utility assistance to more than 6,000 households and funded over 900 energy related repairs (such as furnace repair and replacement). In total, Energy Assistance paid out nearly \$10.5 million to vendors on behalf of income eligible households in our service area. A new program participant shared that program staff were "very responsive and helpful," noting that she was "treated with dignity and respect in spite of my fears of being treated otherwise. A plus!"

On the other hand, Community Action's Energy Conservation department, due to the intimate nature of the work in people's homes, was forced to cease in-person operations during those early months of the pandemic. Instead the team took the opportunity to examine its practices and processes and consider innovations. Energy Conservation staff participated in comprehensive training and planning sessions explicitly devised to establish a new virtual/remote home auditing process, COVID-19 safety protocols and practices, and additional tools and strategies designed to maximize efficiency and impact, while ensuring the safety of staff, program participants, partners, and the larger community.

Upon returning to the field in July, Energy Conservation safely and successfully weatherized a 67-unit multi-family senior high rise, partnered with Energy Assistance to spread the word in a 90-unit townhouse complex about available energy assistance and weatherization services, and connected with another 435 households with low incomes through targeted marketing and outreach initiatives.

# Feeding Bodies and Minds

One of the most fundamental issues that people with low-incomes have faced during the pandemic is food insecurity as food shelf visits have increased exponentially across our community. In addition to Community Action's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) outreach program, in which staff help program participants connect with this important public benefit, our Head Start program also partnered with other agencies to safely provide free meals to its students. Along with educational materials and essential household items, such as toilet paper, diapers, cleaning supplies, and personal hygiene items, staff distributed nearly 42,000 meals to Community Action's Head Start families during the spring and summer months from multiple sites across St. Paul. This colossal effort caught the attention of the National Child and Adult Food Care Program (CAFPC), which featured our Head Start program in their national newsletter. Regarding the impact of these expanded efforts, Jessika Thomas affirms,

Community Action's Head Start program further bridged nutritional gaps in our service area by sharing extra meals with the Wilder Child Development Center, directing families to the Journey School's USDA Summer Food Service Program, and partnering with the North Saint Paul Food Shelf, The Food Group, and others to meet cultural and dietary needs of families. By the fall, Head Start had safely re-opened to provide in-person classroom services to more than 400 children and enrolled an additional 420 children in distance learning, while continuing to make sure their nutritional requirements were met. "Our community knows that they can depend on us," notes Rich Boyce, Head Start Family Engagement Coordinator, "When families come to us for assistance I often ask 'Why did you come to us?' The response is always, 'I knew that I could get help here.'"

*"As both a Head Start parent myself and President of the Head Start Policy Council, I can say that this service has been a blessing. Without it, hundreds of families would be struggling to put food on the table each day."*



# Ensuring Vital Resources Reach our Neighbors

As the result of social distancing requirements and other safety protocols Community Action's VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) Clinic went completely virtual in 2020. Each year the VITA Clinic provides free federal and state tax preparation services to eligible low- to moderate-income households across Ramsey and Washington counties. Despite the challenges and significantly reduced capacity, the effort still helped to put nearly \$200,000 back into the hands of local taxpayers through tax refunds and valuable tax credits.

Among the tax credits that help support individuals and families managing low or moderate incomes is the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Considered by experts to be one of the most effective poverty-fighting tools in the United States, the EITC lifts millions of Americans above the poverty line every year. In 2020, by helping families use their EITC Community Action's VITA Clinic helped return a total of \$48,878 to 28 eligible households.

Across all clinic participants, the average total benefit (in both credits and tax refunds) to households was \$3,034.43. Elizabeth Caldwell, Financial Services Specialist in our Community Engagement Department, observed:

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program is vital to our community, especially this past year. Many community members needed to file a return simply to receive the stimulus payments owed to them. Refunds and credits such as the EITC also played an important part in keeping individuals and families afloat through very tough times, and I am proud that we were able to help them out this tax season.





## Helping Our Community Heal

In September 2020, Community Action partnered with Anthony Taylor, Minneapolis-based activist, cyclist, and outdoor recreation enthusiast, to co-host our first ever Slow Roll community bike ride. Founded in Detroit during the fall of 2010, the Slow Roll movement was established to “empower people to rediscover, reconnect and reimagine their communities together by bike,” while addressing the widespread social, environmental, and health disparities that plague BIPOC communities.

The Slow Ride movement uses bike riding to promote the mental, emotional, and physical health of people from all ages and backgrounds as well as to promote racial and social justice. When asked if bike riding and outdoor activity can truly help to further social equity, Anthony Taylor commented:

*“It does if we choose to use outdoors as part of our anti-racism strategy for building great humans. It offers unique and special opportunities for growth, self-discovery, human development, family building, health promotion. The outdoors creates a deep connection to the body... I want to use outdoors as a counter to all the things in the world that makes Black and Brown children want to hate themselves. That is the work.”*

The Slow Roll: Community Action Edition, featured friends, family, and neighbors taking a leisurely, socially distanced 90-minuted bike ride through the historic streets of St. Paul. Guided by renowned Twin Cities artist Seitu Jones, the event took the time to commemorate and teach participants about several local sites that are of great cultural significance to St. Paul’s BIPOC communities. And, in the spirit of the Slow Roll movement’s aim to build healthy, vibrant, connected, and people-centered communities participants gathered for a post-ride meal and music. Based on the success of the event, Community Action is planning several more rides in the summer and fall of 2021.

## Elected Officials Turn to Community Action for Guidance

During a four-month period, more than 55 million Americans filed for unemployment benefits having lost their jobs due to COVID-19, including a record of 20 straight weeks where the number of claims exceeded one million. Put another way, roughly 20 more million Americans sought unemployment insurance from late March through July of 2020 than during the entirety of the Financial Crisis of 2007–2009. Congress, with the leadership of lawmakers like Congresswoman Betty McCollum who sought guidance from leaders across the Community Action movement including those in Minnesota, passed the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act. The CARES Act provided critical support by, among other measures, providing direct assistance to all households through Economic Impact Payments, an additional \$600 per week to unemployment beneficiaries, and directed \$1B in supplemental aid to poverty fighting organization across the country.

Like Congresswoman McCollum, Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith continued to regularly seek input from leaders of the Community Action movement, including our Executive Director, Catherine Fair, about what could be done at the federal-level for those most deeply impacted. In June, after the civil unrest prompted by the killing of George Floyd, Senator Tina Smith visited our own Community Action Resource Center located in St. Paul’s Midway neighborhood, which along with many neighboring businesses sustained significant damage. The discussion focused on the critical need to direct more resources and attention on achieving racial justice and economic equity and helping historically marginalized communities find firmer financial footing.

Later in the summer, on August 6, Governor Tim Walz, Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan, and three state agency commissioners held a press conference at our St. Paul headquarters in an effort to push federal legislators to restore the additional unemployment benefit that had expired on July 31, with the Governor noting that in spite of new jobs being created, not all these opportunities were well suited to those who were recently unemployed. Moreover, the nature of many newly created lower wage jobs would likely cause undo health risks for far too many vulnerable Minnesotans at the height of the public health emergency.

Although Congress ultimately failed to restore the additional unemployment benefit that expired in July, the state applied to FEMA and received federal approval in August to launch its Lost Wages Assistance Program, which provided a much needed \$300 per week unemployment bonus to more than 400,000 laid-off Minnesota workers. In addition, the Governor’s visit created another unique opportunity to remind our fellow Minnesotans that there were other resources available to them through their local Community Action agencies and other nonprofits, including crisis support, that could help address critical areas of need such as housing and rental assistance, childcare, healthcare, mental health services, and food support.



Since we know the pandemic is far from over and its impacts will be far-reaching we welcome the continued interest of elected officials in our approach to fighting the causes and conditions of poverty in our community. In 2021, let us hope our collective action will move us ever closer to our shared goals of equity and justice for all.

# IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS



Provided Energy Assistance services to **17,437** households made up of **49,780** people.

Made a total of **48,149** referrals to connect participant households to other critical programs and services.



Improved the living condition of **907** households through essential home repairs.

Weatherized the homes of **245** people improving energy conservation and lowering utility bills.



Provided **1,622** children ages 0-5 with comprehensive early childhood education, health, and nutritional services.

Assisted **82** families with free tax preparation to help them benefit from the Earned Income Tax Credit and other program, while delivering financial counseling to an additional **54** people.



Coached **149** adults seeking to improve their employment and increase their income.

Distributed **41,680** meals to help meet the nutritional needs of Head Start children during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Improved the conditions in which low-income residents live by weatherizing a total of **103** homes.

Prevented eviction or homelessness for **162** individuals through emergency rental assistance.

Supported **8,391** individuals with disabilities and **4,747** seniors (65+) maintain an independent living situation.

Provided transportation services to **1,743** individuals including transit passes and support for automobile purchase and repair.

Conducted **1,553** home visits in supporting the health and development needs of Early Head Start children and families.

Helped **27** households increase their savings and **8** families purchase a financial asset.

Connected **3,209** people to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits.

Involved **1,267** individuals in community and civic engagement initiatives including voter education and access, volunteer training, and leadership development.

# ANNUAL REPORT FINANCIAL SUMMARY

## Statement of Financial Position

Year Ended September 30, 2020

### Assets

Cash	\$492,834	5%
Receivables	\$4,818,318	49%
Inventory and Other	\$28,700	0%
Prepaid Expenses, Advances	\$29,262	3%
Property & Equipment, Net	\$4,120,031	42%
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$9,752,145</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Liabilities & Net Assets

Accounts Payable	\$1,535,448	16%
Accrued Expenses	\$2,092,711	22%
Deferred Revenue & Other	\$703,043	7%
Long-Term Debt	\$191,150	2%
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$3,206,286	33%
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets	\$2,023,507	20%
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Net Assets</b>	<b>\$9,752,145</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Statement of Activities

Year Ended September 30, 2020

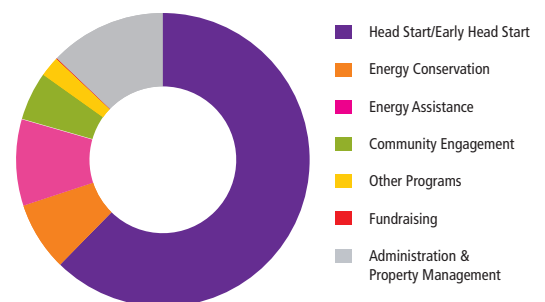
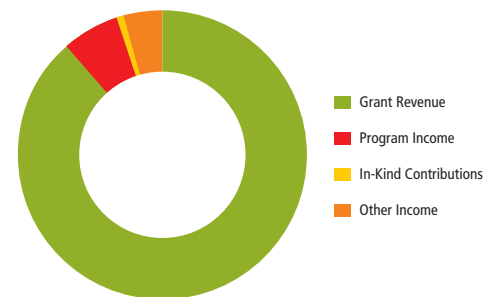
### Revenue

Grant Revenue	\$25,070,965	89%
Program Income	\$1,793,662	6%
In-Kind Contributions	\$212,696	1%
Other Income	\$1,225,080	4%
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$28,302,403</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Expenses

Head Start/Early Head Start	\$17,352,118	62%
Energy Conservation	\$2,112,711	8%
Energy Assistance	\$2,648,484	10%
Community Engagement	\$1,500,476	5%
Other Programs	\$614,038	2%
Fundraising	\$22,804	0%
Administration & Property Management	\$3,581,901	13%
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$27,832,532</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Change in Net Assets** **\$469,871**



## Community Action Partnership of Ramsey & Washington Counties

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651-645-6445 • www.capr.org



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