

**COMMUNITY ACTION:
Renewing the Mission, Preparing for the Future**
May 7-8, 2009

Over 150 Community Action Agency leaders attended the 10th Annual Southern New England Community Action Conference at the Sea Crest Resort in North Falmouth, MA to hear national, state and local officials discuss critical issues impacting individuals and families during the current economic crisis.

We were fortunate in having national leaders such as David Bradley, Executive Director of NCAF; Mary Ann Higgins, Regional Administrator for the Administration of Families and Children, HHS; Janell George, Lead ARRA Coordinator for the Community Services Block Grant at the federal Office of Community Services; and Peter Kilde, NCAP board member and director of WestCAP in Wisconsin.

There were workshops on the stimulus funding (ARRA) and there were workshops on fundraising. Seemingly incongruous, this fit the theme of the conference. While ARRA money is allowing us to renew our mission for today, we must also remain focused on our strategy for sustainability for tomorrow.

According to David Bradley, Executive Director, National Community Action Foundation (NSCAF), the spotlight will remain on the CAAs for the next three years as we implement the historic American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). This is our opportunity to do what we do best with unprecedented amounts of funding. It is an exciting time in Washington, D.C. The stakes are high and we will be held accountable for using the funds as intended and with transparency.

Bradley indicated that it is not likely this funding will be renewed unless we can show results that realize President Obama's agenda of energy efficiency, conservation and independence; green job/s creation around environmentally friendly technologies, and educational opportunities for our low-income customers. As we implement the stimulus funding, we must also be implementing strategies for fundraising for sustaining these efforts in the future. We need to keep one eye on today and the other eye on tomorrow. He further noted that we will need to work smarter, do more with less, combine resources and in some cases, merge agencies, especially since the federal deficit is predicted to be large for years to come. Many speakers noted that this is the worst recession we have seen in many years and there is a general understanding of the extent of the budget deficit due to 8 years of tax breaks for the wealthy and uncontrolled defense spending by the Bush administration - all acknowledged that it will take many years to get back to budgets that are 'balanced' and not on the backs of poor people.

You can't talk about today's stimulus funding, without discussing weatherization, energy and green jobs. Other workshops at the conference ranged from ramping up for weatherization to implementing innovative programs. Peter Kilde, Executive Director of WestCAP in Wisconsin, shared his agency's program for buying and selling 'energy

efficient' cars to Head Start Mothers. He also delivered a sobering plenary presentation on "Peak Oil, Climate Change and Economic Collapse." Martin Mobley of Morgan Stanley, talked about the partnerships his company is forming to promote weatherization and alternative energy technology. Morgan Stanley is working with community agencies to train workers on installing his company's solar panels which are being used to weatherize low-income housing.

Mary Ann Higgins, ACF Region 1 Administrator ARRA, gave an update on Child Care Development and Head Start Funding and Janell George, ACF/OCS Manager, discussed ways she would like to work with the community action agencies with CSBG funding. Eleanor Evans of CAPLAW conducted a workshop on the impact of the stimulus act on major CAA programs; ARRA administrative requirements and stimulus changes that apply to employers.

Laura Crimaldi, reporter for the Boston Herald and Brian Ballou, reporter for the Boston Globe, discussed effective ways to frame the issue of poverty, engage the community in discussion, work with the press, and to gain commitment for taking action to reduce poverty. Developing and maintaining strong media relationships is always important – it will become even more essential as the public demands to know how the stimulus dollars have been spent.

Many thanks go out to the organizers of this year's regional conference; in particular, Joe Diamond of MASSCAP and Rhonda Evans of CAFCA. Their hard work, along with that of all staff made the conference a great success!