



Rising to the COVID-19 Challenge:

Responses from NYS Community Action Agencies



New York State Community Action Association
Helping People. Changing Lives.



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I. Introduction

A Word from the CEO

Will COVID-19 ever end? When this report was commissioned in January 2021, vaccines were just becoming available, and it felt like the finish line was in sight. It seemed too soon to think about how COVID-19 affected CAAs, their staff, and customers when many agencies were still in the thick of the pandemic. As time went on, however, it became clear that this report would encapsulate the ongoing challenges of the pandemic and beyond as Community Action Agencies (CAA) adjusted to their “new normal.”

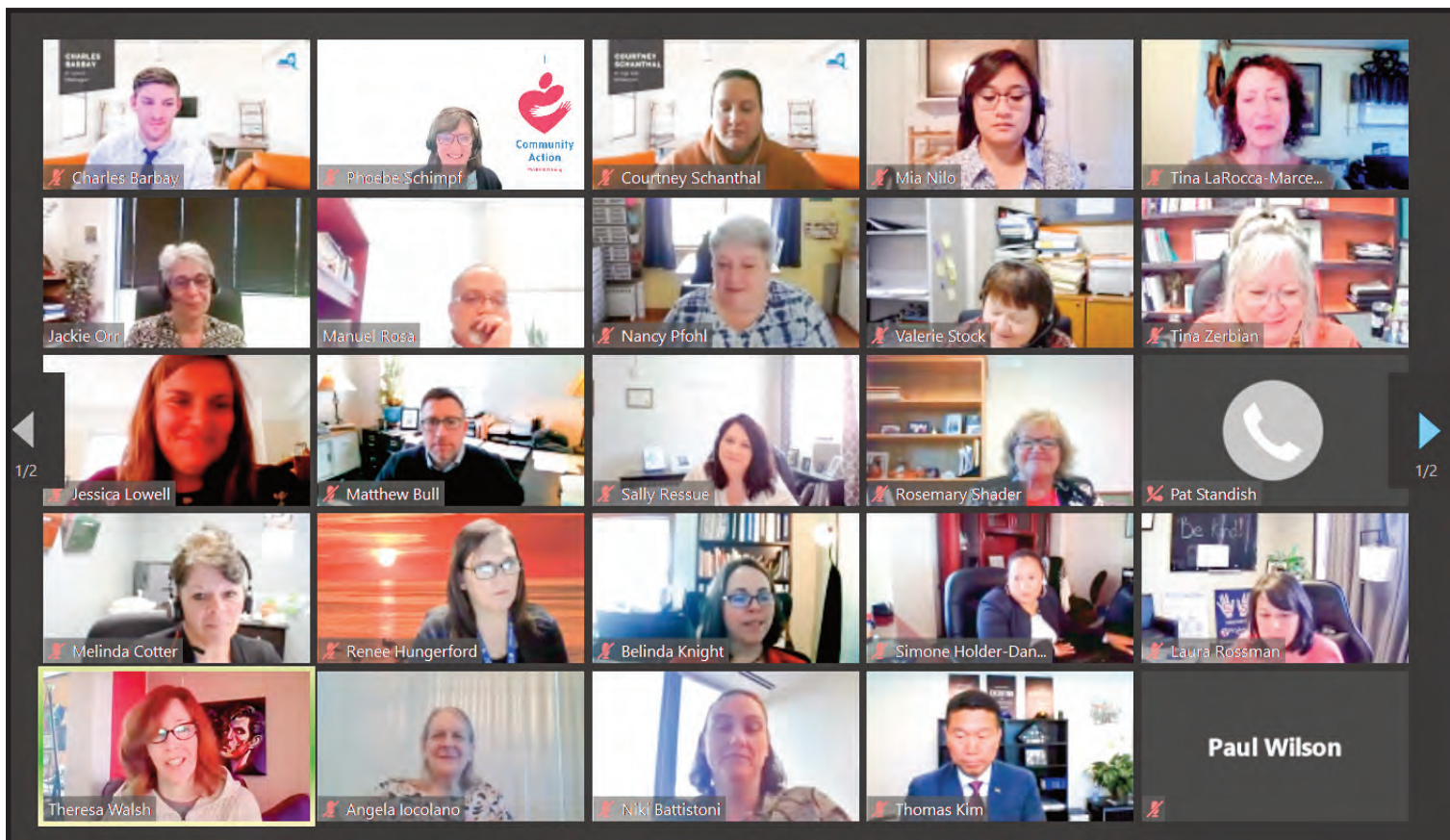
As this report will demonstrate, CAAs continued to operate during the worst of the pandemic, stepped up, never faltered, and met the needs of their communities with compassion, skill, and grace. This intense and seemingly never-ending work took its toll on direct service workers who could see the stress and unease in their customers’ faces, which often mirrored their own anxieties. Managers and Directors had to navigate ever-changing and contradictory state and federal guidelines and rules.

But, with crisis comes opportunity, and CAAs took advantage. They streamlined customer intake processes to make it easier and less burdensome. They designed and developed new methods to continue to engage customers, such as through remote classrooms and support groups, even offering unique prescription and grocery pick-up services. They augmented existing partnerships and developed new coalitions to deliver food, conduct outreach, and provide crucial support to families with low-income disproportionately affected by the pandemic. They made changes to their facilities and offices to ensure the safety of staff and customers. Many of these changes will continue into our “new normal.” But one thing will always remain: CAAs will search for these in-person connections with their customers and partners to build trusting and impactful relationships.

We at NYSCAA are incredibly proud of our network’s willingness to embrace change in the face of adversity and admire the nimble dance agencies made to ensure the operational policies and procedures and the service delivery changes implemented not only protected their employees and customers but also served clients well during the

challenging weeks and months, lasting into years. Unfortunately, we weren't able to highlight all of NY CAAs in this report. Community Action Agencies have shined during the pandemic, and we want to ensure those efforts are recognized in this report.

Jacqueline Orr



Western Regional Meeting May 2021

About Community Action

Community Action Agencies (CAA) originated as part of President Johnson's War on Poverty in 1964. Through the passage of his Economic Opportunity Act, Community Action Agencies were tasked to "strike poverty at its source – in the streets of our cities and on the farms of our countryside." By 1969, programs such as Head Start, Foster Grandparents, Neighborhood Centers, Summer Youth Programs, Congregate Meal sites, Legal Services, and Economic Development were emerging nationwide. CAAs are federally designated as the frontline resource for people living in poverty, providing direct services and support in the areas of education, employment, and support services for families with low income to achieve economic security.

Today, there are over 1,000 CAAs in the country and 47 in New York State. There is a Community Action Agency serving every county in NY State, each with a board consisting of elected public officials, private sector representatives, and low-income residents.

In addition to their direct services, CAAs are leaders in their communities promoting community economic development through partnerships and inter-agency collaborations. CAAs work in both the public and private domains, leveraging support from many community sectors. CAAs are supported by federal, state, and local resources. One of the core funding streams is the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), a vital resource to CAAs, and one that allows flexibility in responding to emerging community needs quickly and effectively. This need was demonstrated during the pandemic.

Throughout this economic and public health crisis, CAAs remained open to serve the most vulnerable community members and those affected to the greatest extent. As one CAA staff member said, "We didn't have weeks or even days to figure out how we were going to continue to provide services, we had hours." And CAAs did what they do best – they figured out how to responsively meet their communities' needs. CAAs quickly updated their mandated community needs assessment to get a fuller picture of the impacts of the virus and the added challenges facing low-income and minority individuals, including technology and healthcare shortfalls, unemployment, housing, food insecurities, and other social inequities. CAAs assessed their communities' growing and changing needs, identified gaps, and adjusted their priorities and resources to most effectively meet those needs.

The Promise of Community Action:

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.

Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Supplemental Funding

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) a pandemic (#1).

Shortly after that, on March 27, 2020, Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Securities Act (CARES). The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) CARES Act 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 due to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). The CARES Act allowed for an increased eligibility level of up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) (#2).



On June 1, NY Community Action Agencies (CAAs) were notified of the available funding. Agencies had already begun to prepare for, prevent and respond to the virus, but now additional financial resources were made available to aid the exacerbated needs in the communities and alleviate financial constraints hindering providers.



EOC Suffolk Food Van



ACAP Teacher and Student

II. CAAs Move into Action

On March 22, 2020, with the issuance of the “New York State on Pause” Executive Order 202.6, non-essential businesses statewide were not allowed to have their employees report to the workplace, and individuals were required to remain indoors to the greatest extent possible. Essential businesses deemed necessary for public health and safety were required to continue providing services. Many Community Action Agency programs were considered essential and proved vital in delivering critical services to the economically disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and families throughout New York State.

From the onset of the pandemic, CAAs rapidly responded to the evolving needs of their organizations, customers, and communities, reimagining their business processes and procedures, adapting facilities, expanding communication methods and platforms, and redefining priorities in delivering both essential and non-essential services.

COVID-19 called for an extraordinary shift, and despite incredible challenges, Community Action Agencies remained unwavering in their mission to be the frontline resource to some of the most vulnerable populations. In uncharted waters, Community Action (in true Community Action form) met their community where it was, mobilizing partners and maximizing resources. Again and again, the CAAs overcame the unique challenges presented by COVID-19 and proved vital in stabilizing low-income communities during one of the most extraordinary times in history.

To help address the critical needs of the agencies and their communities, CAAs conducted updated needs assessments to draw out COVID-19 challenges in the community. They also submitted individual community action work plans to the NYS Department of State (NYSDOS). Agencies identified various strategies and goals to prevent, prepare for and respond to the COVID-19 virus, including expanded mental health and emergency support services and enhanced community partnerships.



Individuals and families who had not needed assistance before COVID-19 were turning to CAAs for support. The level of unemployment skyrocketed while the ability to find or continue to work and earn an income declined. Unemployment in March 2020 was at 3.8% and reached its peak at 11.3% in March 2021 (#3). During those months, CAAs saw an increase in the need for food and supplies as individuals avoided going out in public, and shortages of many items occurred globally.

The loss and reduction of income, available jobs, resources, transportation, child care, and basic essentials due to the spiraling effects of the pandemic exacerbated the financial, emotional, and mental health of customers and staff alike.

How and where services were provided drastically changed and continued to demand reimagining through each phase of the pandemic. Staffing resources were adjusted as needed, virtual events replaced in-person activities, homes were converted to office work spaces, technology became a necessity, remote, mobile, and delivery services were expanded, and mental health became a more significant concern. As the pandemic progressed and businesses reopened, health and wellness checks and safety protocols were implemented, sanitizing became second nature, space was modified to meet social distance mandates, and remote services became the norm.

In their dedication to ensuring the successful delivery of services, CAAs also engaged in new and enhanced partnerships. Agencies worked more closely with other nonprofit and nonpublic organizations, churches, school districts, local health departments, and government agencies to maximize coordination of services and minimize duplication of efforts. In other cases, new partnerships were formed with community providers such as farmers, retail businesses, volunteer groups, colleges, and other organizations in the community to meet ongoing needs more effectively and efficiently.

Many agencies were able to utilize CSBG CARES funding as stop-gap funding or a resource for new initiatives. At the same time, some also took advantage of other grants and funding sources made available in response to the pandemic through private and public entities.

At CAAs across the state, organizations, businesses, and individuals in the community contributed by providing space, financial and material donations, volunteer services, or in-kind support. Without the generosity and involvement of all partners and community members, CAAs would not have been as successful in meeting the increased needs of their staff and customers. Throughout this report, you will see how grateful CAAs are for this support for their work in the community.

The following information highlights the incredible and extraordinary work Community Agency Agencies (CAAs) and their partners have done to overcome the many challenges presented by COVID-19 while continuously providing services. This report will highlight specific actions that CAAs took to meet their local community's immediate and ever-changing needs.

Report Methodology

To better understand the challenges and document the responses to COVID-19 by Community Action Agencies, NYSCAA conducted surveys and interviews, reviewed Community Action Plans submitted to the NYS DOS, and researched many agency reports. These resources provided insight into the considerable struggles and adaptations experienced by CAAs. Agency statistics referenced throughout this report have been obtained from the agency or extracted from other agency-specific reports.

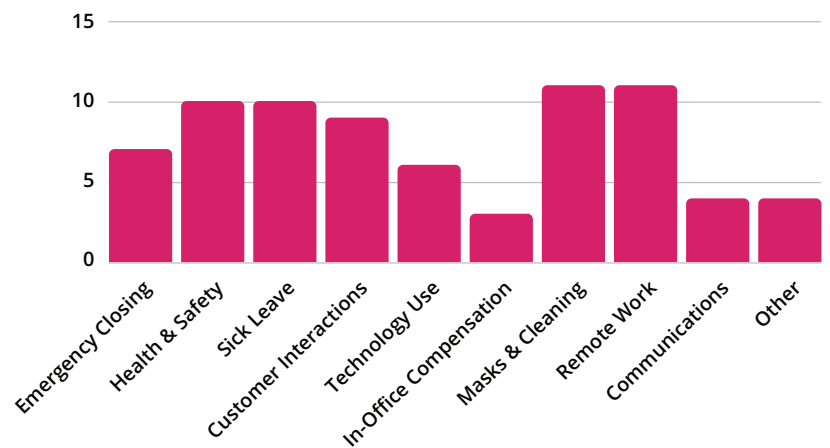
An initial survey was completed in the early stages of the pandemic, directed toward operational policy and procedural changes that CAAs put in place following the announcement of "New York State On Pause." Many changes were intended to be temporary, though some resulted in modified, long-term arrangements such as teleworking. Part I – *Policy and Procedural Changes* presents this aspect of the pandemic-driven changes.

After two years of living in a pandemic world, NYSCAA again surveyed the agencies to learn about specific service delivery changes and efforts that CAAs undertook as they passed through phases of the pandemic. The intent was to identify programs impacted the most, why and in what ways, and how CAAs responded. In many cases, the changes were temporary due to legislative mandates such as allowing remote services for some programs (i.e., Head Start and Women, Infant and Children (WIC)). Other adaptations have proven beneficial and will continue, such as the use of virtual platforms for training and communicating. General and specific CAA service delivery adaptations, enhancements, and partnerships are highlighted and presented in Part II – *Service Delivery Reimagined*.

III. Policy and Procedural Changes

Many agencies immediately responded to COVID-19 by reviewing and developing operational policies and procedures to address issues related to the pandemic, including emergency closings, health and safety policies, technology use, and remote work.

Represented here are the types of policies CAAs adopted over time. The actual implementation of those policies was unique to each agency, depending on its size and what services it offered.



Types of COVID Response Policies Implemented by CAA's

Interim guidance for in-office work during COVID-19 based on CDC recommendations was released through the governor's office when the phased reopening plans were announced in May 2020. Other policies later became mandated by New York State, such as requiring an Airborne Infectious Disease Prevention Plan and the NY Forward Safety Plan.

"The first 45 days after mid-March were definitely very significant. Having to try to understand the implications of a global pandemic, how we would continue to provide services while trying to protect and meet the needs of staff was challenging. Having to make decisions with little or no information about things that we had never had to deal with before was very challenging. Working for hours to develop a response or plan to learn new information that would change that plan significantly was challenging. Learning to live in a world where there were no black and white answers, living in a perpetual gray world, was challenging. Juggling being sympathetic to the needs of our community, our staff, and ourselves as individuals was very challenging.

— Cortland Community Action Program (CAPCO)

In this report section, three distinct categories of policies are discussed. Administration and Communication references how COVID-19 guidance was received and distributed and how the management of staff changed due to new policies, such as remote work. Emergency Measures refer to specific approaches to limit the transmission of COVID-19 while in office and respond to statewide restrictions. Information Technology Devices and Remote Work relates to changes in what kinds of technologies were used, how they were used, and expectations for staff interaction with those technologies. While the following section focuses on the solutions pursued by three specific CAAs, the kinds of challenges they faced were experienced throughout the entire NYSCAA network.

A. Administration and Communication

Early in the pandemic, guidance from health departments around handling issues stemming from the pandemic was vague or inconsistent. Many health department representatives could not be reached with their physical offices closed and, in some areas, working at reduced capacity. CAAs were operating based on an assortment of available information. The challenge was keeping staff and their communities informed of what was happening and what was being done.



Schenectady Community
Action Program
Creating Opportunity in Partnership

Schenectady Community Action Program (SCAP) operates on an \$11 million budget, providing services to over 7000 individuals annually with a team of 120 employees (#18). SCAP was uniquely prepared to take on the challenges of remote work because they had previously converted their technology and systems to allow for offsite work in 2018 and 2019. It was just a matter of equipping staff who did not typically work offsite to work remotely according to their rotating schedule. The success of SCAP's hybrid remote work wasn't from the technology itself or how the scheduling was made but how management responded to problems and how it communicated guidance during a time when conditions fluctuated. Policies had to be adjusted and updated as more information became available and offered further clarifications and guidance.

SCAP developed guidance primarily based on the available NY Health Department and CDC guidance. Like many CAAs, SCAP began to form a closer partnership with their local health department. SCAP's CEO attended regular meetings with Schenectady County Public Health Services (SCPHS) and other local organizations, which was crucial to receiving news on public health trends and updates on the COVID-19 conditions specific to their area. Then, when vaccines became available, SCPHS held a vaccine clinic at the SCAP offices every Tuesday that was open to the public and made available to SCAP customers and staff. SCPHS communications were always consistent with NYS guidance, making them a good resource when SCAP had questions about changing conditions.

SCAP's Early Learning Program (ELP) published its *Operational Procedures During a COVID-19 Pandemic*, following Head Start and NYS Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) regulations. These were two of the few entities publishing straightforward policies that agencies could follow. Having clear guidance allowed staff and customers to feel more grounded in uncertainty. Archived Head Start COVID-19 Updates included guidance on supporting emergency childcare by repurposing closed Head Start facilities and flexibility for wages and benefits for staff. SCAP's ELP COVID-19 manual was invaluable for communicating specific regulations, expectations, and instructions for parents and staff and included topics such as how to handle drop-off and pick-up. It also satisfied proof of compliance as a NYS Universal Pre-K provider to the NYS Education Department.

B. Emergency Measures

Lockdowns and whether specific programs at CAAs were deemed essential was the first challenge faced by CAAs. This caused major disruptions across the network, with some CAAs working by appointment only as they figured out new operational procedures. No national or state entity could answer how long CAAs would need to continue services under pandemic conditions. When guidance was given, those parameters could change rapidly. Most CAA programs were considered essential due to their service delivery, especially those with programs that supported health and family services, emergency food, or housing. However, some programs, like Weatherization, were not considered essential. Thus, the challenge became how to stay open *safely* within state guidelines. When an office building couldn't be changed to accommodate socially distanced staff and customers, tech-forward and creative solutions had to be found to augment the space.



Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. (COI) operates a budget of over \$16.7 million with 215 employees and provides services to nearly 3,500 individuals annually (#18). Like all CAAs, COI changed its office space to provide a safer work environment. These changes protected both customers and staff in their interactions. Technology enabled remote workers to continue to connect with customers. Some of the office upgrades included:

- Key fob system upgrades for keyless entry to the service building
- Seven kiosk stations in waiting rooms for customers to interact virtually with staff and apply to open positions
- Laminated signs and training materials
- Upgraded payroll system to eliminate paper checks
- Increased cleaning services
- Obtained licenses for GoToTraining and GoToMeeting
- Software and licenses for electronic signatures

Following state guidelines, not all staff at COI were considered essential. Therefore, COI identified all staff as either essential or non-essential. Non-essential employees worked remotely from home, and essential employees worked on-site and remotely according to a rotating schedule determined by their department's supervisor. This schedule created enough physical distance between those working in the office. HR and leadership staff broke down the rotating in-office and remote scheduling for each department and discussed how challenging it was to transition.

One example of departmental breakdowns and assignments is outlined below:

Child Care Council

- 4 staff onsite
- 10 staff hybrid (3 days in, 2 days remote)
- No Issues

IT and Central Services

- 4 staff remote
- Tech and customer intake much easier to do remotely
- Provided necessary tech to make the transition easy

Finance

- 3 staff hybrid (3 days in, 2 days remote)
- 3 staff onsite 4 days with extended hours
- Staff made an extra effort to keep in touch and update with all staff with scheduling

Housing and Youth Services

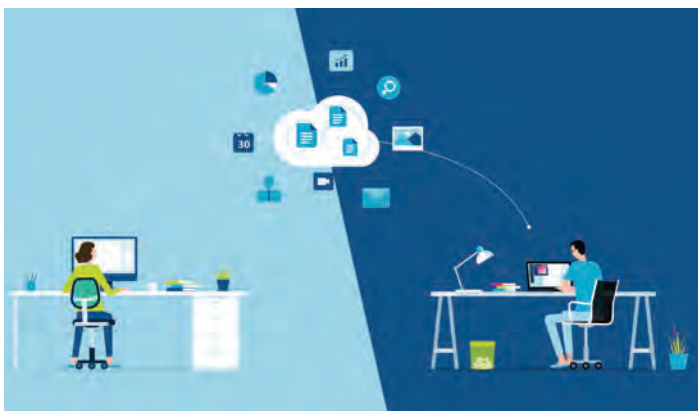
- 8 full time staff onsite, plus 5 as-needed staff 7 staff remote
- 14 staff hybrid
- Difficult in the beginning but with technology and training
- Challenge with some staff not having compatible internet for VOIP phones

Health and Family Services

- 100% staff onsite
- Fatherhood, 6 staff remote for 6 months
- Zoom classes M-Th. Life coaches did phone calls and Zoom Meetings
- Challenge distributing paperwork and incentives
- Required home visits or community location dropoffs with proper PPE

C. Information Technology Devices & Remote Work

Lockdowns and pandemic work conditions necessitated remote work as the most readily available and widely used solution. However, some CAAs were caught unprepared for going virtual. This unpreparedness was due to many factors: limited access to high-speed internet, lack of adequate hardware for all staff, limited technology or training to do remote work, or not having policies around managing a remote team. This unpreparedness affected not only how staff interacted with each other but also how they interacted with their customers.

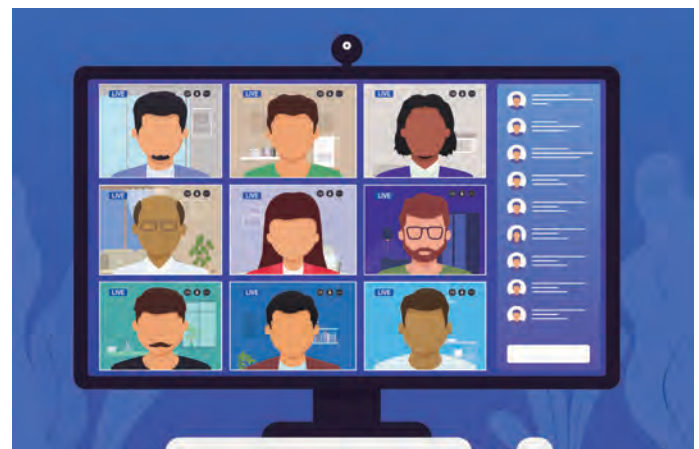




ACCORD, Inc. provides an example of policies developed and implemented in CAAs around the state. ACCORD provides customer services in Allegany County with an operating budget of over \$7.5 million (2020 Annual Report). ACCORD had already invested in significant technology and device upgrades before the pandemic. However, they were suddenly faced with needing to codify policies about how those technologies were to be used. For ACCORD, the goal was to learn how to use these virtual technologies more *efficiently*. In a short time frame from April-August 2020, ACCORD updated and implemented the following modified policies to meet the challenges of working during a pandemic:

- Emergency Closing
- Mobile Device
- Technology
- Non-Traditional and Telework Scheduling

The ability to hold virtual board meetings was already in the agency's bylaws. However, the interaction between the leadership team, including the Executive Director (ED), division directors, and IT managers, and the relationships between county-wide partners changed significantly as virtual meetings became the norm. Virtual meetings were considered a time saver and critical to staying connected. What had been daily meetings at the start of the pandemic between the leadership team continued every week, and telework was explicitly written into ACCORD's Emergency Closing Policy. One of the advantages of documenting telework policies is clear parameters for granting remote flexibility based on performance and feedback from customer service.



The Non-Traditional and Telework Scheduling Policy specified that alternative scheduling or teleworking options were neither entitlements nor an agency-wide benefit but an option and method for performing staffs' usual duties. Outside of emergency measures, the policy also included a formal telework schedule available for one day per week, with additional days determined by the ED and Division Director. There was also an option to utilize non-traditional work schedules, such as working extended hours four days a week during the summer months of July and August when there was a decrease in overall program activity.

The Mobile Device Policy included specifics around how a private phone could be used and how to isolate agency information, which was sometimes an unavoidable concession during the pandemic. The Technology Policy outlined the agency's technology and devices currently in use, how to maintain confidentiality, IT considerations like passwords and enhanced security measures, new remote monitoring and maintenance via Datto, messaging etiquette, and guidelines for using OneDrive for Business.

The ability to accommodate the many changes came from sound policies and open communications between staff and management, allowing for as much flexibility as possible. SCAP attributed a quick transition to a working hybrid model as a factor in resisting burnout since it allowed for some staff interaction and alleviated Zoom fatigue. Some technologies enhanced communication, like creating an online portal for board members or using synchronous messaging on Microsoft Teams, replacing an email, and filling in the gap left behind by spontaneous hallway meetings no longer occurring.



SCAP's existing feedback mechanisms ensured that changes to operations during this time were fine-tuned with staff input and enhanced daily operations. For example, the rotating scheduling underwent much trial and error and sometimes changed weekly. SCAP was committed to figuring out what worked best, not just for the work itself but to keep everyone safe and healthy.

Taking the lessons of what was at first a scramble to implement and turning them into standards for emergency preparedness has helped to build resilience. Adapting to the pandemic has evolved into flexible policies. Empathetic and frequent, clear communications are baked into successful remote management styles. CAAs have found ways to continue and thrive.

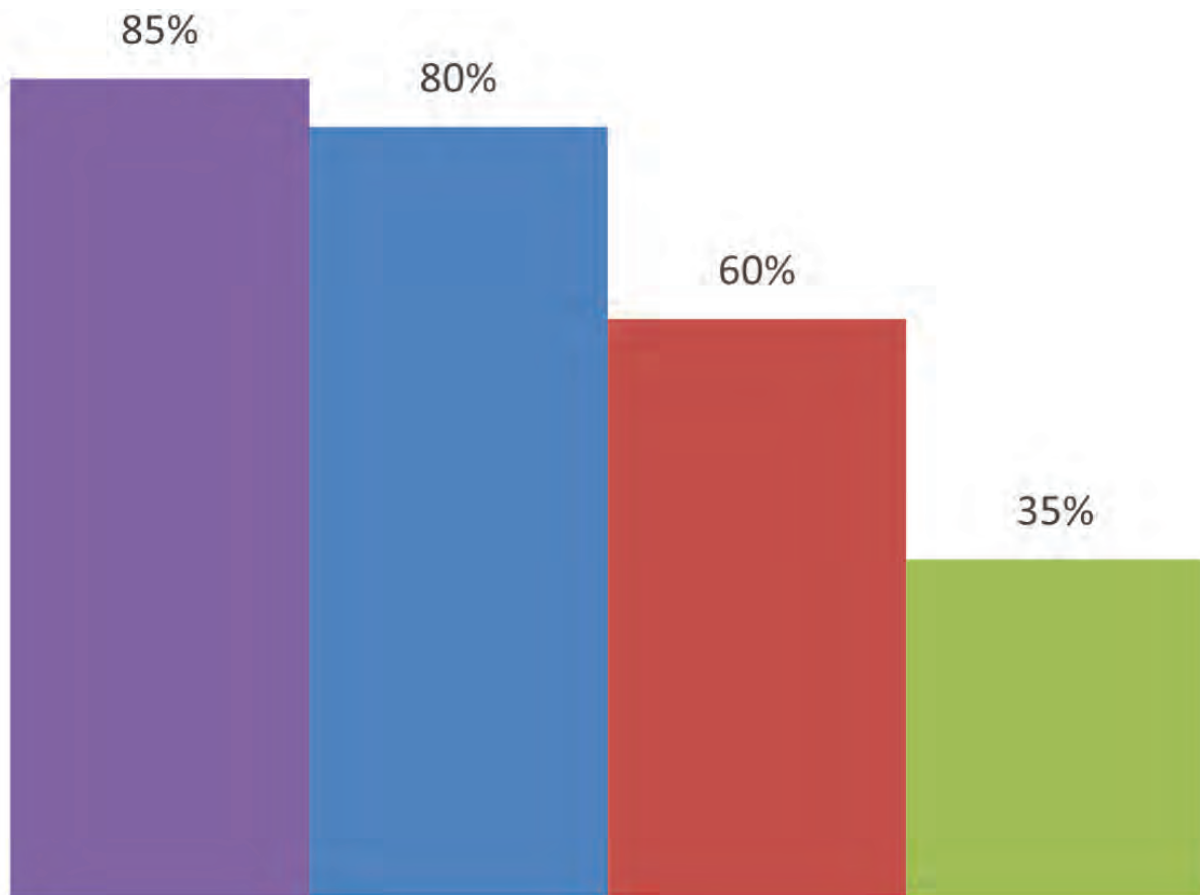
IV. Service Delivery Reimagined

Immediately following the declaration of the COVID-19 Pandemic by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), and with the subsequent guidance from New York State, CAAs assessed every facet of service delivery. Changes were put in place to meet federal and state mandates to protect individuals and prevent the spread of the virus, including social distancing, shelter-in-place, travel limitations, safety protocols, and closures. As restrictions were lifted, various aspects of service delivery operations continued to be modified and adjusted as needed.

Based on the second survey conducted by NYSCAA, twenty CAAs (46% of the network) indicated that the most significant impact on program services occurred in the following four areas:

1) CHILDREN/FAMILY SERVICES	2) NUTRITION SERVICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Head Start Head Start Day Care Services Parent Education/Family Development Youth Development/After School/Summer Programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food Pantries Health Nutrition Education Mobile Food Pantries/Meals on Wheels Summer Food Pantries Women, Infant, Children (WIC) Program
3) HOUSING ASSISTANCE	4) EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, AND TRAINING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affordable/Subsidized Housing Emergency/Temporary Housing Emergency Rental/Mortgage Assistance Homelessness Prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult Education/High School Equivalency Computer Labs Job Readiness Services Re-entry Employment Services Vocational Skills & Training Wheels to Work

Ranked Top 4 programs impacted by COVID-19 based on CAAS who responded



CAA Network Survey Responses

- Children/Family Services
- Nutrition Services
- Housing Assistance
- Employment, Education, and Training

Not included in the four programs most impacted, but still critical and covered in this report are Health and Senior Services.

The following sections highlight the barriers and challenges that CAAs faced and some creative and collaborative solutions implemented to continue to effectively meet the changing needs of all those impacted during this pandemic. Some changes positively impacted the delivery of services and provided value to customers and will continue. However, not all efforts were successful or beneficial and are noted in the report.

A. Service Delivery Challenges

With the declaration of a pandemic and issuance of recommendations, mandates, and various legislative orders from Federal, State, and local government agencies, CAAs were immediately faced with new challenges to keep employees and customers safe while providing needed and vital services.

While there were obstacles that CAAs confronted in specific program areas, there were a few challenges and barriers that CAAs had to overcome that were experienced across all areas. These include outreach, transportation, and technology.

Outreach/Intake

With the initiation of the NYS on Pause and stay-at-home orders, CAAs quickly shifted their in-person outreach and intake efforts to online portals, phone calls, postal service, emails, texting, social media, and mass distribution of newsletters, flyers, and posters. Document requirements were modified, delayed, and even waived temporarily, while some agencies implemented drop boxes or accepted necessary documentation via texting and messaging.

As restrictions lifted, agencies accommodated walk-in services with scheduled appointments and implemented safety measures, including health screening processes, temperature checks, and sanitization practices for all in-person programs. At the same time, CAAs continued to reach out and work with customers remotely. Agencies did note that limitations in in-person outreach methods, combined with technology barriers, negatively impacted the number of individuals who could access programs and reduced the ability to reach some individuals who would benefit from the services.



Wear Mask



Wash Hands



Temperature
Check



Social
Distance



Use Hand
Sanitizer



Make an
Appointment



Well-ventilated
place

While some Community Action Agencies had existing intake portals with varying functionality, many still used paper processes to collect information. Those with online applications as an option for people seeking services were better prepared to provide continued access to essential services in the face of a pandemic. While technology made virtual interviews more widespread, the CAAs noted that in-person connection during the intake process is still the preference for building trusting relationships.

Highlighted below are four CAAs that took advantage of the COVID-19 restrictions to establish or enhance online application systems to reach current and new customers.

Equity in technology, however, was and remains an issue that CAAs continue to pursue.



Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. (COI) and **Learning, Employment, Assistance, Partnership (LEAP)** are two agencies that enhanced their existing public intake portals, while **Schenectady County Community Action** and **Pro Action of Steuben and Yates** developed new systems, all providing for greater efficiency and accommodating the remote processing that was required in

response to the pandemic. These portals streamline data collection processes, allow customers to upload documents, often provide for electronic signatures, reduce data entry by staff, and support an improved mechanism for triaging customers and their needs.

Prior to the pandemic, SCAP had started to develop an online intake process, and the pandemic helped to move the process along. SCAP's online portal has proven to be an effective tool that they will continue to use moving forward. In 2021, over 2000 individuals had accessed services through their portal, with 93% indicating no concerns with its use.

While an online intake process reduces LEAP's administrative and data entry tasks and is efficient, staff believe customers "have a story to tell that requires a personal connection." Due to COVID-19, some interviews were held remotely to streamline the intake process, but LEAP prefers an initial face-to-face meeting to develop and cultivate relationships.

Before the enhancement of their Public Intake Portal (PIP), COI averaged five (5) persons per month completing a simple online request for services. Currently, 20-60 individuals apply for benefits through the portal each month; 15-18 successfully move forward to receive assistance.

Pro Action noted that the capabilities of their online intake process contributed substantially to successful service delivery during the pandemic and feel that "these changes will continue to provide benefits to the customer and agency."

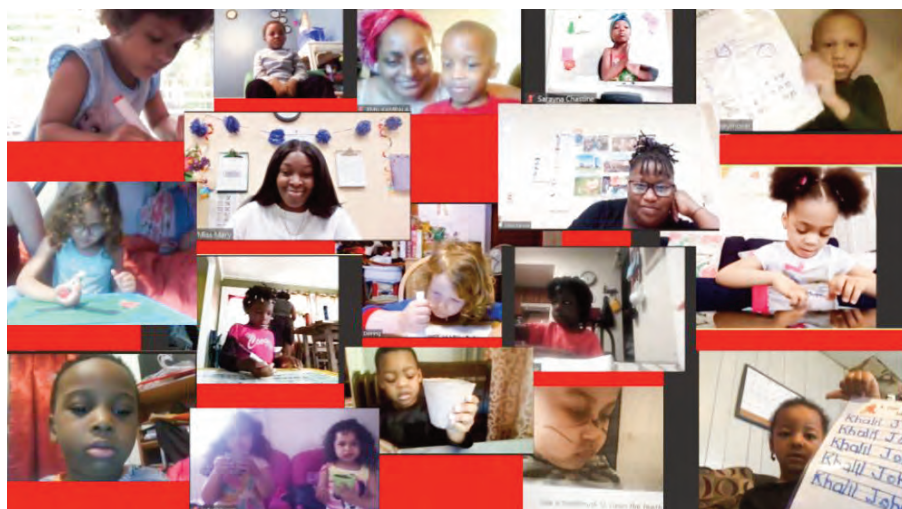
Technology

In response to COVID-19 and social distancing mandates, technology solutions increased and are necessary to support operations, outreach, education, and training across the Network. The pandemic also emphasized the disparities among the underprivileged and the need for global internet access, basic technology, and training.

Although the digital divide has been dramatically reduced with advancements in broadband access, the digital divide remains. While 98% of NYS residents had access to broadband internet in September of 2021, 36% of households earning less than \$20,000 were still without an internet subscription (#4).

For years, the need for affordable technology and associated internet costs had been identified by many CAAs in their community needs assessments (CNA). COVID-19 brought this disparity to the top of the needs list. It became evident that access to technology is a basic need and that deficiency was acutely felt in specific communities.

With the exception of essential food services, reaching out and connecting with customers transitioned from on-site physical locations to social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. In-person conversations and meetings were replaced with remote, virtual programs, including GoToMeeting, Zoom, Google Classrooms, WhatsApp, and ClassDojo. Food service programs often also used computer applications to facilitate contactless ordering.



ACAP Virtual Classroom

Customer access to reliable, affordable broadband and tools helped them apply for services and provided access to necessary support services and resources that were moved to virtual platforms. These virtual services included education and training programs, mental and physical health workshops, telehealth services, and various child, parenting, and senior programs. Individuals and families who did not have reliable and affordable access to technology were at-risk of not receiving the help and assistance they needed. Providing the technology, remote services, and virtual training and education allowed agencies to meet their customer needs at a time when in-person activities were not allowed or unsafe and have proven to be essential.

While CAAs have taken steps toward addressing the disparity in providing critical tools and access to technology resources, efforts to overcome these barriers must continue to ensure effective service delivery to those most in need and impacted by the digital divide.



In response to the lack of technology and support, CAAs supplied the following technical support through a variety of programs, partnerships, and financial aids:

- Laptops/Tablets
- WIFI Access via public locations and Hot Spots
- Cell Phones and Data Cards
- Technical support

Below we highlight the creative efforts of four CAAs to mitigate the technological barriers and challenges that rose to the forefront during the pandemic. The CAAs provided equipment to program participants and offered necessary training to their customers and staff, enhancing their skills. These efforts will have lasting impacts beyond the pandemic and help to close the technology gap.



Action for a Better Community, Inc. (ABC), which serves Monroe and Ontario County residents, operates on a \$27.4 million budget and provides services to more than 3,500 individuals annually (2020 Annual Report). To address the identified digital

divide in Monroe County, ABC, with federal funding and assistance from a local federal credit union, purchased and distributed approximately 1,150 computers for children and families, giving them access to the internet and hardware for employment, education, and medical purposes. Of the 1,150 computers, nearly 200 were donated to seniors in the community. Recipients also received 12 months of free internet service through ABC. To further support their customers with the new technology and ensure the proper use of these devices, ABC staff offered technology training for those who requested assistance. In 2022, Monroe County remains with the lowest broadband coverage in New York State, at 58.8%, with approximately 21,000 people having access to only one or fewer wired internet providers at their address (#5). Recognizing the need and benefits of technology and virtual services being here to stay, ABC continues to research ways to provide ongoing technical support to those most in need to ensure they receive essential services.

Yonkers Community Action Program, Inc. (YCAP) is staffed by five (5) employees who provide multiple services to over 800 individuals in Westchester County on a \$1.5 million budget (#18). To assist with the technological needs in their county, YCAP developed an initiative to collect used technology, as well as to purchase new laptops, and was able to distribute forty devices to those in need. Even with providing technology to individuals/families, adequate internet remained an issue, and households could not always access the internet at home. In their perseverance to assist customers, once the NYS on Pause restrictions were lifted, YCAP modified office space to provide on-site computers and internet access for those requiring additional assistance. YCAP managed participation in on-site assistance through reservations and sanitization practices with appropriate precautions to protect staff and customers. This service will continue to accommodate those who need to participate in virtual education and training programs and apply for other services.



Community Action of Orleans and Genesee Counties (CAOG) operates on a \$75 million budget, employs 100 staff, and provides services to over 3,500 individuals annually (#18).

In response to the sudden shift to virtual and remote services, three CAOG staff were trained to teach digital literacy to community members to improve their awareness of and access to available resources. This training was made available through an enhanced partnership with a digital literacy partner and the local United Way. CAOG staff were equipped to provide their customers with the skills needed to live, learn, and work in a pandemic society where communication and access to information are primarily made available through the internet, social media, and mobile devices. The current program runs through November of 2022.



The Community Action Organization of Western NY (CAO) supports Erie County residents on a budget of \$48 million, with 560 staff, providing services to over 14,000

people annually (#18). In 2020, in Erie and Niagara counties, one in five families did not have an internet subscription (compared to one in three statewide), with one in seven homes without a computer (#6). CAO's Youth Services Department collaborated with national public radio to broadcast an analog program providing educational development for grades Pre-K through 12. This program, accessible by radio, was an effort to overcome the digital gap in Erie County.

Transportation

Transportation is often a barrier for those living in poverty. However, COVID-19 aggravated the mobility and transportation struggles experienced by many, particularly in rural communities across NY (#7).

As noted by survey respondents, transportation became a more significant challenge to families and programs throughout the pandemic. Public, private, and volunteer transportation services were substantially reduced or eliminated during the height of COVID-19, making it more difficult for customers to access critical services, including food pantries, medical appointments, educational services, support groups, and other training, as well as employment.



Due to loss of income and other economic struggles, many individuals and families fell behind on auto repairs, car loans, or insurance payments, while others lacked the financial resources to acquire affordable and reliable transportation. This lack of transportation hampered program participants' ability to obtain and maintain successful employment. In response, some agencies created new partnerships in this area or provided financial support, including additional bus tokens, metro cards, vehicles, or payments for vehicle maintenance and insurance costs to address these needs.

Presented on the next page are several agency solutions implemented to mitigate COVID-19's effect on transportation. Many of these programs will continue to support the customer' and providers' access and mobility needs.



Fulmont Community Action, Inc. (Fulmont CAA) operates a budget of \$6 million, providing services to over 5,200 individuals annually with 99 employees (#18). They serve Fulton and Montgomery Counties, encompassing nearly 900 square miles (#8). In February of 2021, to assist individuals in overcoming transportation barriers due to the wide geographic area, Fulmont initiated the Cars for Careers Program with CSBG CARES funding. Thus far, individuals have been supported with three vehicles and four repairs. Fulmont is currently waiting for a dealer to locate a used car for another participant; however, this has proved very difficult due to the price and demand for used vehicles as a result of COVID-19 and the resulting supply/demand issues. Additionally, in September of 2021, Fulmont received limited funding from Montgomery County to help reduce transportation barriers. This resulted in the provision of two repairs to participant vehicles to maintain employment.



St. Lawrence County Community Development Program (SLCCDP) operates a budget of \$6.5 million, with 120 staff providing services to over 2,100 individuals annually (#18). SLCCDP serves an area larger than the State of Rhode Island, with a population of over 108,000, and falls in the top 10 NY counties with the highest percentage of people living in poverty (#19). Due to their geographic span, many customers must commute an hour to access services at the agency's primary location in Canton. Because transportation is a significant barrier, SLCCDP initiated a project utilizing CSBG CARES funding to purchase two vans to provide mobile services to customers in the outlying areas. Through an enhanced partnership with United Way, SLCCDP received and distributed essential supplies such as PPE, diapers, and baby formula which they delivered weekly during summer 2020 to over 100 individuals.

The original intention for purchasing vehicles was to provide mobile food pantries throughout the county. However, the scope was expanded to provide Mobile Neighborhood Centers, supplying food, financial services, and other technical support for various program applications. The vehicles will eventually be equipped with a printer and copier. In addition, SLCCDP is an agency that does not have an online intake portal. This mobile service will allow them to assist more customers in processing applications via pen and paper on the road. While 98.3% of residents in NYS have broadband access, St. Lawrence



SLCCDP Mobile Neighborhood

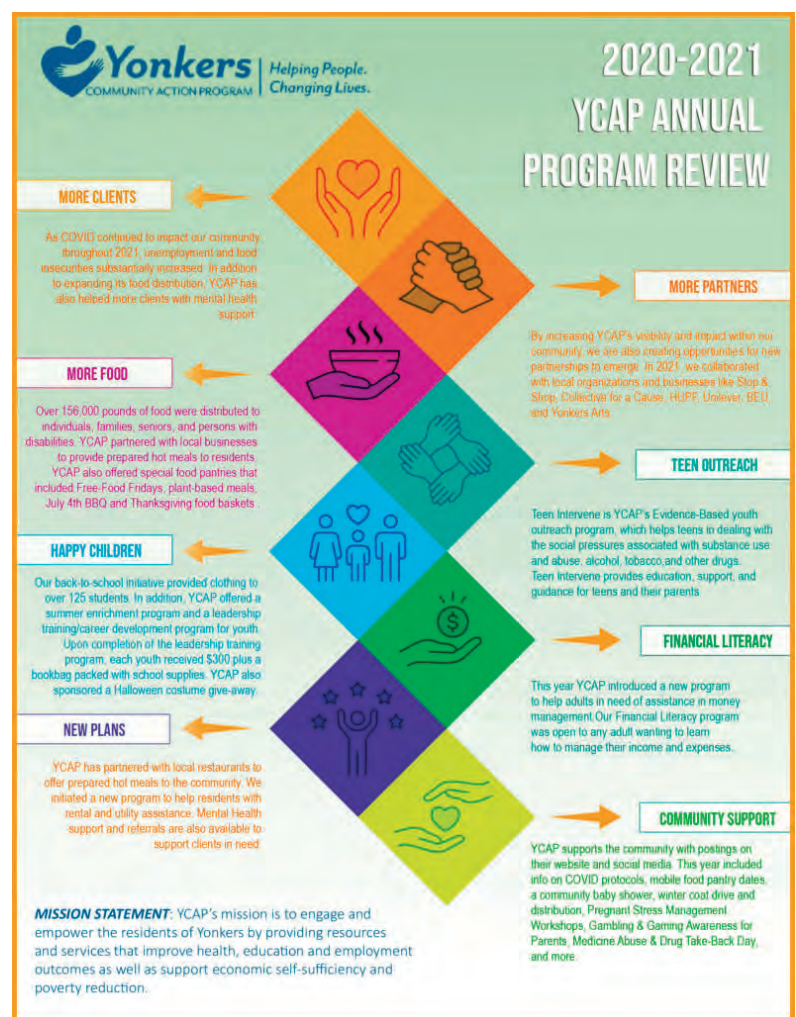
County falls below that rate at 94.5% (#9). Due to their large geographic region and spotty broadband in rural areas, there are no plans to implement a virtual application process. SLCCDP anticipates having the vans ready to operate by mid-summer and are confident that this will enhance their outreach and successful delivery of services.

Community Action of Orleans and Genesee Counties (CAOG). Like many CAAs, COAG has been a valuable resource providing affordable transportation for its community members. However, the effects of the pandemic and other economic factors forced them to downsize their transportation services. Fortunately, after suffering significant losses exacerbated by COVID-19 and loss of funding sources, CAOG received a grant from a local community foundation for its *Door-to-Door Transportation for the Elderly Program*. This service is critical for these elderly individuals to access healthcare and other essential needs. CAOG and its partners will continue to explore additional options to support other rider-need programs in their counties.

B. Program Solutions

Throughout the pandemic, from the initial determination of essential services and staff, through the phased reopenings and subsequent vaccine arrival, CAAs adapted and looked for solutions to new and emerging challenges. Below we highlight the major program areas and the diverse efforts and initiatives by CAAs, from expanding community partnerships, adjusting service delivery practices, and developing staff skills to supporting economic development.

Nineteen (19) CAAs are highlighted, demonstrating the adaptations they made to continue to meet customer needs in a strengths-based approach, remaining aware of and sensitive to the anxiety, frustration, stress, and trauma customers were experiencing.



Yonkers CAP Program Review

Children and Family Engagement Services Center



Early Pre-K teachers delivered activity packets to Head Start students and families to prepare for at-home learning during the COVID-19 shutdown.

As noted by 85% of the respondents in NYSCAA's second survey, Children's Services were the most impacted by COVID-19 due to the mandates and safety protocols implemented to protect all individuals and prevent the spread of the virus. Children and Family Engagement services include programs for children and families, encompassing daycare, child education, after-school programs, youth programs, parent and family training, and health education.

With in-school instruction being fully remote from March–June, 2020 and periodically remote for the 2020-21 school year, families with pre-school and school-age children struggled not only with the typical after-school child care challenges but also with remote instruction, technology barriers, and unmet nutritional needs.

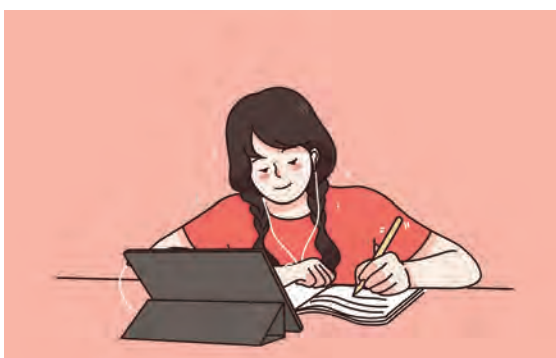
To help alleviate the tremendous stress placed on families and children, CAAs quickly pivoted and developed new methods to deliver education, training, and nutritional

support to their families. To meet educational needs, CAAs provided technology and technical support to ensure families had the hardware, skills, and access to technology to participate in remote instruction and communication.

The most challenging change would have to have been for our Early Childhood programs. The way education services were delivered, when and if at all, was ever changing and evolving, which as you can only imagine was very disruptive to children, families and staff. Support needed to come to and from all directions in the way of creativity, flexibility, funding and new IT. Having to move to a completely virtual delivery of education for children was a huge change and while better than no instruction at all was very challenging for staff and children, especially those children that needed more attention."

— CAP Cayuga/Seneca

Many CAAs operate Head Start programs, both in and outside of school settings, and these centers posed specific concerns for the CAAs. Per mandates from the Federal Government, all Head Start programs migrated to a digital platform with 100% virtual learning from March-July 2020 and hybrid learning options from September 2020, depending on local community health conditions. CAA staff used their creativity and designed and produced remote educational services, including virtual lessons and parent/child activities through platforms such as:



- Google Classrooms
- Zoom
- Face-time
- Skype
- WhatsApp
- ClassDojo
- Ready-Rosie

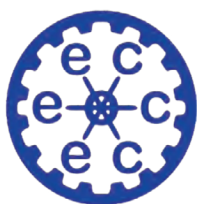
CAAs were committed to maintaining a connection with their families. They met on porches, in backyards, and in local parks. They were flexible in using the best method to accommodate each family: via computer, phone, or socially distanced in open spaces.

CAAs provided virtual education and delivered food, infant, health and school supplies, and other necessities while following CDC health guidance. Virtual services were made available live and recorded on various platforms such as Facebook and Youtube, delivering services such as nutrition education, health and safety, support groups, and counseling sessions. To provide entertainment and reduce the loneliness and isolated feelings experienced by children and adults, agencies put together a variety of live, interactive, and recorded events and activities to engage families.



Photo courtesy of WestCOP

CAAs developed virtual education and family programs and provided resources for critical child care services in their communities, including the following:



Economic Opportunity Commission of Nassau County (EOC of Nassau) operates a budget above \$8 million with 130 employees and provides services to 5,000 individuals annually (#18). EOC developed a hybrid (virtual/in-person) learning model approach in 2020-21 to support Head Start children's school readiness development through play-based technology. Tablets with keyboards were acquired for children to use during virtual instruction with classroom teaching staff. With the implementation of the learning platform, a total of seventeen thousand, three hundred and seventy-three (17,373) additional pieces of assessed observation documentation were gathered to support school readiness development through hybrid technological learning play. The assessment data found that the supports assisted classrooms in curving the learning gap caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic and maintained positive child outcome gains despite children's inability to attend school full-time in-person instruction five (5) days a week.



Learning, Employment, Assistance, Partnership (LEAP) provides services in Washington County to over 3,000 individuals annually, with an operating budget of over \$6.5 million (2021 Annual Report). For LEAP staff, like many other CAAs, not being able to interact in person with the children and their families was a drastic change and challenge. Initially, every family was contacted by their home visitor or family advocate twice a week and a teacher once a week. Educational services still needed to be provided to these families. Using Gmail accounts already in use with program participants, LEAP staff quickly transitioned to a remote methodology using Google Classrooms. Staff provided both live and recorded education and training. This platform allowed children to participate in classes and provided a forum for families to attend parent workshops virtually. In 2020, LEAP continued to provide Head Start services to 250 children in 219 families in their county through Google classrooms.

Of particular concern was reaching those households where grandparents were the guardians. In many cases, they struggled with technology and experienced increased stress since children were not leaving home to go to their classrooms for part of the day. To help address both the lack of respite for grandparents and to offer a sense of community at the height of the pandemic, LEAP staff provided parent workshops and cafes virtually. Groups of up to 10 were scheduled with recurring weekly sessions that included mental health and COVID-19 check-in at the beginning of each, allowing participants to discuss topics of their choice. LEAP also invited a local counselor to the

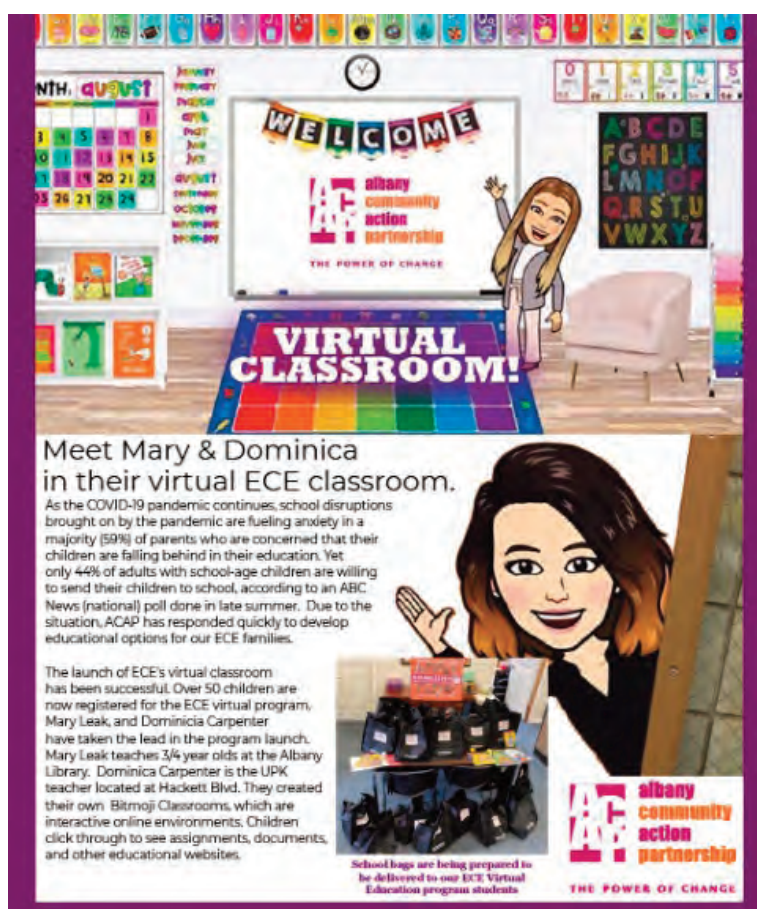
workshops and provided one-on-one counseling sessions when needed. On average, 25 – 30 families participated in the groups, and the guardians welcomed the added services and opportunity for socialization. They indicated that they felt “less alone.” Like most agencies, face-to-face visits are preferred, but virtual meetings gave staff some visual confirmation of physical health and safety.

Today, upon entry into the Early Head Start Program, families are immediately set up with access and prepared for virtual learning and training in the event classrooms are forced to close due to any emergency. LEAP is ready for any future crisis.



Albany Community Action Partnership (ACAP) operates on a \$10 million budget with 180 staff members serving over 6,000 individuals in 2021 (#18) and provided over 61,000 meals through their Early Childhood Education program in 2020. To better serve

families in the Capital District, ACAP’s team developed a virtual Early Childhood Education program for 57 families who preferred to have their children stay home during the 2020-21 program year. To support virtual education, six families were given tablets, and four were provided with Wi-Fi hotspot devices. Staff were trained in new ways to communicate with families and created resource documents. ACAP staff offered one-on-one instruction to every family before they started the program. The enrolled children were furnished with weekly materials to work on at home while enjoying and following the online program. As the effects of the pandemic continued to hurt underserved families the hardest, ACAP’s Community & Careers staff put together COVID-19 supply bags for customers. The bags were filled with items families needed but were not always available at food pantries, such as shampoo, soap, household cleaning products, and toiletry items.



Virtual Classroom Flyer - ACAP

Youth and Child Programs

For children and families served by Community Action Agencies, the feelings of loss and stress were amplified due to the temporary shutdown of schools, summer camps, sporting events, and other social activities, negatively impacting emotional and mental well-being. To support the needs of the youth, many CAAs created virtual programs and online activities to engage this group through arts, music, games, etc. As one example, **Fulmont CAA** provided funds for 113 school-age children to attend camp, sports/education programs, and receive school supplies for the school year.

Below we highlight the offerings of three CAAs to help meet the needs of the youth in their communities.



NYC Division for Youth and Child Development (DYCD) serves the five boroughs in New York City, operates a budget of over \$960 million, and provides services to more than 220,000 persons annually (2021 Report). In response to the restricted lifestyle imposed by

COVID-19, DYCD launched various virtual services programs and events to help children and families stay connected remotely during the height of the pandemic. Programs were advertised and offered via Facebook and YouTube, as well as through other free internet service programs. Shown here is one sample of the initial virtual programs offered by DYCD. While DYCD continues to reach out



#DYCDatHome VIRTUAL EVENTS 4/27-5/01

- 4/27** • Performing Arts: Introduction to Puppetry by Young Audiences New York @ 4:30PM
- 4/28** • First Draft Workshop & Open Mic by Meera Dasgupta Feat. Mahogany L.Browne @ 3:00PM
- 4/29** • Afro-Contemporary with Candace Tabbs @ 3:30PM
- 4/29** • Performing Arts: Introduction to Puppetry by Young Audiences New York @ 4:30PM
- 4/30** • The DYCD Heroes Project @ 3:00PM
- 4/30** • DYCD Recipe Rescue Submission Deadline Today
- 5/01** • Performing Arts: Introduction to Puppetry by Young Audiences New York @ 4:30PM

Text (347) 349-4361 to get involved.

DYCD Virtual Event Calendar

and connect with many individuals through remote platforms such as FaceBook, its focus remains on providing in-person resources and services to its customers.



Pro Action of Steuben and Yates, Inc. (Pro Action)

operates a budget of over \$17 million with 300 staff, serving over 12,000 individuals annually (#18). They developed a new Youth Development Program (YDP) in the fall of 2020

to meet the remote learning needs of children ages 8-18 in the face of closures. During the 2020-21 report year, the program provided activities to 48 children. A faith-based partner in Bath, NY offered its space, a coordinator was hired, volunteers were recruited and on-boarded, and community partners provided push-in programming regularly, touching on topics such as conflict resolution. The program served children in a drop-in capacity, with safety protocols in place, providing supervision, nutritious meals, homework help, access to the internet for homework, and attendance in remote classes. A core aspect of the program is to fund activities that enhance the positive development of youth. YDP includes a “Girls Who Code” club and other Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (S.T.E.A.M) projects and field trips to learn about wetland ecology.



Pro Action Youth Development Program Participants



Economic Opportunity Commission of Suffolk (EOC Suffolk)

operates a budget of \$22 million, with a staff of 388, and provides services to over 3,700 customers annually (#18). During NYS on Pause, EOC was able to employ four youth workers to support a Community-

Based Initiative (CBI) program. This was originally a two-month summer program that was extended to run four additional months in the fall of 2020. The program consisted of specific Zoom activities held on each weekday. “Mindfulness Mondays” alternated between yoga and meditation and presentations on various ways to be more mindful, such as breathing exercises and ways to ground yourself and be more present. On

“Trivia Tuesdays,” students logged on to play a different game each week, such as an escape room, Kahoot, and others. On “Wellness Wednesdays,” they discussed health and wellness through presentations on how stress affects our bodies, healthy eating habits, and why self-care is important. Wednesdays also included instruction on producing a podcast from start to finish. On “Throwback Thursdays,” students often played various Jeopardy games. On “Fun Fridays,” students would showcase their arts and crafts projects, have discussions, watch movies, and play music. The CBI program provided 30 students with an outlet to learn and connect with others, helping ease the stress caused by the pandemic.

Family Services

One of the most devastating impacts of the pandemic and the extended period of limited social contact was an increase in instances of domestic violence, mental and emotional struggles, opioid and alcohol abuse, and suicide. All these issues contributed to an increased need for Family Support Services (#11). Below we highlight how several CAAs responded and met the needs of families to help alleviate the ongoing effects of the pandemic.



Community Action Programs of Cayuga/Seneca (CAP Cayuga/Seneca) operates on a \$10 million budget, employs approximately 65 staff, and provides services to over 7,000 individuals annually (2020-21 Annual Report). CAP operates a Kinship Care Program

that supports non-biological parents or caregivers. The program provides trauma-informed case management, practical assistance, and supportive services to those in need. Initially funded by the state, and with the availability of CSBG CARES funding, CAP Cayuga/Seneca was able to continue the program as critical support for families impacted by COVID-19. Program staff were trained in Trauma Informed Care to work more effectively with caregivers affected by COVID-19. In some cases, COVID-19 resulted in added challenges in supporting new customers and families through the legal system. Additional staff efforts were required to assist in completing the process remotely due to closures in the court system and limited access to public records and other legal resources. With the closure of schools, lack of in-person support groups, the stress of stay-at-home orders, and to bring a sense of normalcy and fun to the household, a package of items for the guardians and children was assembled by the staff. Items included movies to watch at home, child activities such as games and coloring books, popcorn, etc. On average, about 35 families participate in the Kinship Care Program and continue to receive support to mitigate the effects of COVID-19.

To support the increased need to provide emotional and mental health services and to encourage conversation about men and their mental health, the **New York City Department for Youth and Community Development (DYCD)** launched the Barbershop Talks series in June 2020, continuing to this day. The initiative brings together experts and community stakeholders to promote healthier men

and communities. These programs are offered monthly via YouTube and allow for active dialogue among speakers and participants. In 2020, over 100 men participated in the sessions, designed to mirror the conversations men have at their local barbershops and encourage men to enroll in human services programs. Monthly topics included definitions of



DYCD Barbershop Talks

masculinity, mentoring to build generational leaders, men's interpersonal relationships, LGBTQ, and gender identity, to name just a few.

Right now, we continue to adjust as more resources become available to help families stabilize and recover from the pandemic. Making sure we are getting all the resources available to the right people in the right way at the right time, is exhausting, challenging, scary and exhilarating!

— ACCORD (Newsletter)

Nutrition Program

Food insecurity has always been a concern for the vulnerable and families with low income. COVID-19 created new and exacerbated challenges for families to access food. The spiraling economic effects of the pandemic resulted in more people needing food assistance and simultaneously created difficulties for CAAs to provide food due to the mandated closures and efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19. These challenges included:

- Shortage of food/essential items;
- Increased delivery needs;
- Transportation issues; and
- Safety protocols;



CAOG food drive

CAAs that housed food pantries reduced walk-in service options to prevent the spread of the virus. They replaced them with scheduled appointments, phone or new online ordering systems, contactless pickup, home deliveries, and pre-packed meals. Agencies implemented online food pantry programs allowing individuals to select foods that met their dietary needs and preferences, thereby eliminating waste from receiving unneeded or surplus items that may come in pre-packaged bags.

Many CAAs saw an increase in demand and were fortunate to receive additional food donations from local businesses, restaurants, and farmers. CAAs purchased refrigerators/freezers, vehicles, and shelving to accommodate the increased volume, while others renovated existing space and/or rented additional space. In addition, refrigerated trucks served as mobile food pantries to reach a wider geographical range of customers.



Photo courtesy of CAP Cayuga/Seneca

CAAs quickly found creative uses of resources to support the increased need to collect and distribute meals. School buses, volunteer vehicles, U-Hauls, and other transportation providers were used to pick up and deliver packaged Grab & Go meals. In some areas, the National Guard assisted in delivering food and essential items to their neighbors in need.

CAAs were well prepared to address the nutritional needs of families and individuals through existing and expanded partnerships. In addition, CAAs were often used as intermediaries in organizing and carrying out collaborative events and programs such as free food giveaways. Here are a few challenges and solutions CAAs developed to combat food issues identified or amplified due to COVID-19.

Food Pantries



Community Action of Greene County (CAGC), operating on a \$3.2 million budget with 20 staff, provides services to 2,200

individuals annually (#18). With the onset of COVID-19, CAGC prepared to expand its food storage capacity to reduce food waste and better meet the needs of its community and the surrounding counties. Through the reassignment of staff, CAGC was able to avoid layoffs and address the urgent food needs in the community. They renovated space and built a new storage shed to expand their food pantry's reach. In April 2020, during the height of demand, CAGC was able to quickly operationalize a mobile food pantry. CAGC began making door-to-door deliveries, providing nutrition to seniors who were afraid to leave home, those in quarantine, homeless individuals in motels, and others who lacked transportation to get to a local food pantry. The mobile pantry delivered to over 50 individuals in 20+ households every month for the first months of the pandemic. CAGC now can store 40 tons of food weekly, collect excess farm produce, provide free Farm Stand Tuesdays, and set up and stock free fridges near homeless motels for use by those residents and individuals nearby. These expanded capacities were vital in reaching those who are hard to reach and better prepares CAGC to meet community food needs for many years.



CAGC staff expand storage capacity

Below we provide CAGC statistics that speak to the critical impact of COVID-19 at the beginning of the pandemic.

2020 At A Glance	2021 At A Glance
Food Pantry 3,117 persons Mobile Food Pantry N/A 28,053 meals	Food Pantry 1,957 persons Mobile Food Pantry 644 individuals 17,613 meals
Lbs. distributed to other pantries 8,805.50	Lbs. distributed to toher pantries 4117.75



Commission on Economic Opportunity (CEO) services Rensselaer County, operates a budget of over \$21 million, employs 200 individuals, and provides services to over 11,800 customers annually (#18).

Due to COVID-19, their walk-in, on-demand food pantry sites were replaced with mobile, pre-packaged food boxes for pickup or drop off by the front door of customers' houses without any contact. CEO had already moved to an appointment-based customer choice food pantry for pickup before COVID-19. Once the shutdown occurred, participants would request their items via phone, and staff and volunteers would pack them for pickup. Customer data was then added to two databases, permitting the county to track customers' needs and



Photo courtesy of CEO

determine where additional services might be required. CEO discovered that phone ordering was a welcomed change by many customers. It will continue to be an option as customers were previously required to fill out the forms, which proved to be a barrier for those struggling with math and literacy. In 2020, CEO supported the nutritional needs of nearly 5000 individuals through their programs.



LifeWorks Community Action provides services in Saratoga County and operates a budget of over \$10.2 million, with 142 staff assisting over 4,600 customers annually (#18). The demand for all services increased four-fold during 2020, with a dramatic increase

in meals from 135,000 in 2019 to over 300,000 in 2020. To meet their needs, LifeWorks rented warehouse space to receive, store, package, and distribute 10,000 pounds of food per week. The demand for food pantry deliveries tripled at the beginning of the pandemic and has slightly decreased to almost double pre-pandemic levels. A partnership with the regional food bank that delivered food at least twice per week was an invaluable collaboration since staff at Lifeworks would not have been able to travel an hour each way to pick up the food needed. In addition, because loading and unloading food was an issue, LifeWorks purchased a pallet mover. Over 60 volunteers safely delivered food packages to customers' doorsteps, providing over 10,000 hours of donated time. In addition, an online ordering system tied to inventory was implemented and continues to be available today.

Food Delivery



Community Action Planning Council of Jefferson County, Inc. (CAPC) operates an \$8 million budget, with 180 staff providing services to over 10,500 individuals annually (#18). In 2020, they served over 20,000 customers, reflecting the dramatic increase in the number served in the first year of the pandemic. To address the increased demands, CAPC

partnered with several local organizations to provide community members with nutritious food, providing a vital service for families facing food insecurity in Jefferson County. Their long-established partnerships with their local community have kept the service stream flowing throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic.

CAPC also embarked on a collaboration with school districts to deliver meals to children while they were out of school. The school superintendent, concerned about how students would access meals during remote instruction, immediately offered their school buses and staff to deliver meals if CAPC could prepare them. CAPC staff and volunteers prepared breakfasts and lunches for children each day, which were delivered through the largest school district in the county. The meals for a smaller school district were also prepared, and transportation was arranged with agency staff or volunteers for delivery. Over three months, in the spring of 2020, 21,802 breakfasts and 21,802 lunches were delivered. In July 2020, the meals were prepared and offered through the regular Summer Food Service. The local housing authority also partnered with CAPC to provide meals to seniors in their housing units. CAPC prepared boxes each week with tailored food for seniors at ten sites, and the housing authority picked them up and delivered them for the duration of the pandemic. In addition, CAPC also developed a new partnership with the volunteer transportation center, which supported the delivery of prepared food pantry boxes to quarantined COVID-19 families. Staff at CAPC would receive a notice from the local public health department when a quarantine took effect, including how many were in the affected family. CAPC would then contact the volunteer transportation center, and their volunteers would pick up and deliver the food boxes as needed.



Photo courtesy of CAPC Jefferson County

In Westchester County, with a 16% unemployment rate and a county where 52% of families receive free/reduced lunches, **Yonkers Community Action Program (YCAP)** is well known for its food pantry and housing assistance programs. The nutrition program services are often the first point of contact for many with YCAP. They are then provided with additional information for other available services.

Prior to COVID-19, YCAP served 125-150 families every other Friday for local distribution at an on-site Customer Choice pantry where individuals could select and package what they wanted. Since COVID-19, the number of families served has increased to 200-300, with prepackaged bags available for pickup on site. In addition, prepackaged meals

were also delivered to approximately 40-50 additional individuals impacted by COVID-19 and quarantined. These homebound individuals would contact YCAP, which then collaborated with the local fire department and other community-based organizations to assist in delivering the meals for YCAP.

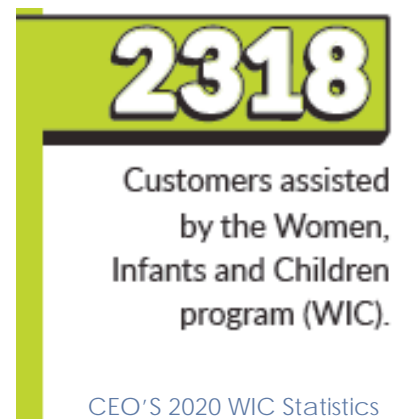
YCAP developed partnerships to help expand its reach. Utilizing rented U-Haul trucks, YCAP provided site-specific monthly food deliveries to approximately 115 disabled and homebound seniors in four housing units and homes in the city. Under a new partnership developed with a non-profit agency in Westchester County, YCAP was able to donate prepared meals for these disabled and homebound seniors over 16 weeks, with the National Guard helping to deliver the meals. As a result of the project and its success, YCAP

began a Free Food Fridays project operated through partnerships with local small businesses. YCAP purchases prepared meals utilizing grant funding and distributes them on a first-come, first-serve basis. To meet the dietary needs of their diverse community, prepared meals have included: Mexican, Chinese, Jamaican and Caribbean cuisine, among other themes. The free program continues to operate on average every other month.



At **CEO**, the need for the federally funded Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) nutrition programs increased significantly during the pandemic. When COVID-related shutdowns began, CEO reacted quickly, offering remote appointments and workgroups, and saw their participation rates increase. Due to virtual appointments and support groups, fewer individuals missed appointments, and more customers followed through and received benefits. The opportunity to connect remotely allowed more participants to attend meetings and support groups. Customers didn't have to worry about transportation, coordinating childcare, taking time from work, or other traditional barriers to keeping an appointment.

Caseload retention and breastfeeding services increased during COVID-19, which was unique in NYS. To retain customers, CEO adopted new phone and recertification services which allowed CEO staff to immediately recertify and provide services to their customers. While remote services have benefits, staff are ready to reconnect and work with participants in person again. In addition, many social activities such as food tastings, baby showers, and other wellness outdoor events are still on pause, and none are scheduled. It should be noted that unless WIC regulations change, all WIC services will return to in-person once the emergency declaration ends. There is no option to serve individuals remotely during a non-emergency declaration - though there is support to change this, according to CEO Staff.



An additional challenge early in 2022 was the infant formula recall and subsequent formula shortage that created issues for many families that persisted at the time of this writing. CEO is also a WIC provider, serving over 2,300 customers annually, and is the grantee of one of four WIC Vendor Management (WVM) contracts in NYS. Due to formula shortages, phone calls to locate supplies significantly increased from about 3 per month to 160 per month.

Nourish New York



In response to the increased food insecurities experienced by so many, three Community Action Agencies: **Delaware Opportunities, Inc., CEO of Rensselaer County, and CAP Cayuga/Seneca** developed a new partnership with the Department of Agriculture and Markets through the Nourish NY initiative. This program made funds available to support local farmers' incomes while providing nutritious food to households with low income. Purchases were made from local NY producers and farmers, who then distributed requested products to emergency food providers, and local school districts in outlying, rural areas. This collaboration allowed CAAs to have a greater reach in addressing food insecurities beyond their food pantry capacity.

In a recent quarter, CEO indicated that they served an additional 1000 customers in these outlying areas through providers who would not have had the extra resources without Nourish NY. Nourish NY is an open program with much fewer regulations than food pantry funds, without customer tracking requirement. During the pandemic, those funds were made available for three months at a time, with a recent one-year extension to carry them through April of 2023.



Delaware Opportunities, Inc. (DO) operates a budget of over \$16 million and provides services to 15,000 individuals through 200 staff members annually (#18). Delaware Opportunities, via the regional food bank, provided local dairy products to the county through dairy distributions at the food bank location and in many communities around the county. Almost \$150,000 was spent directly coordinating local dairy product distribution to the community. Some events saw as many as 400 families picking up dairy products.

In Cayuga and Seneca Counties, where the poverty rate is at 12.1% and 58% of households participate in the free/reduced lunch program, **CAP Cayuga/Seneca** places a heavy focus on meeting the nutritional needs of their communities, participating in the Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP). This program recovers and distributes non-perishable, perishable, and gleaned foods to CAP's 32 emergency food providers. The pandemic impacted the Food Recovery Program with a decrease in donated foods received for redistribution and increased need by the community. In response, CAP reached out to local vendors and farmers for additional assistance.



Once COVID-19 hit, schools, restaurants, and other food programs were forced to shut down. However, farmers were still producing commodities and did not want to see their hard work and food go to waste. With the assistance of CAP Cayuga/Seneca, a local dairy donated pallets of specialty yogurt that CAP helped distribute to not only needy families within their geographic region but also to BOCES and Head Start programs for their use. BOCES used the yogurt (with food coloring added) as paint for kids. Staff also partnered with a Co-op of dairy farmers and conducted a sizeable free dairy pick-up day. In addition, CAP received a large donation of cheddar cheese from a local creamery. With the cheese and 650 books donated by Community Action Angels, CAP put together *“Grab a Book, while I Cook, Take a Seat and Eat”* boxes with everything to make macaroni & cheese. Each package consisted of one gallon of milk, one pound of butter, macaroni, and broccoli, one pound of the donated cheddar cheese, and two books distributed through their food pantry network.



Mobile deliveries were made twice monthly and increased 500% a month due to COVID-19 and remain at a 300% increase from pre-pandemic levels today. Because emergency services and food pantry workers were the only staff on-site during the height of COVID-19, CAP reassigned two additional staff from other areas to support the increased need in the emergency food pantries.

Prescription Pickup Program

Older adults suffered many effects from COVID-19, including isolation, fear of leaving home, and limited access to healthcare. **The Joint Council for Economic Opportunity of Clinton and Franklin County (JCEO), Delaware Opportunities, Inc. (DO), and Tioga Opportunities, Inc. (TOI)** stepped up and provided personal assistance in helping neighbors maintain access to nutrition and medicine. They implemented and continue to provide a grocery and prescription pick-up and delivery service for older adults and other customers in need, whether due to an inability to leave home, lack of transportation, quarantine, or other barriers.

Joint Council for Economic Opportunity of Clinton and Franklin County (JCEO), serving Clinton and Franklin Counties, operates on an \$8.5 million budget, with 120 staff and served over 6,200 individuals during 2021 (#18). JCEO reached out to a local grocery store that agreed to have JCEO staff shop for customers with identification. The staff would procure a list from the customer and shop for the items. Once all the items were collected, the staff would show identification, and after the items were scanned, the customer was called, and they would then read their card numbers to the associate to pay for the groceries. The store would provide two receipts, one for the consumer, and JCEO kept the other on file. The staff member would proceed to deliver the groceries to the customer's house.

Housing Supports/Services

Housing stability and homelessness prevention is an essential service provided by CAAs. Fortunately, fewer families were initially in jeopardy of becoming homeless due to the eviction moratorium that was put in place and continued in New York until January 2022 (#20). The economic effects of COVID-19, however, resulted in increased housing costs, lack of access to affordable housing options, and reduced incomes, adding to the ongoing struggles for many.



Photo courtesy of CA of Wyoming

According to a report from the National Alliance on Homelessness (#12), in comparing 2019 to 2020, the homeless population in New York State decreased by 0.9% (from 92,091 to 91,271 individuals). However, that number is expected to increase following the moratorium's expiration and other financial impacts of the pandemic.

While the pandemic underlined many issues in society, it also highlighted positive aspects, including the ability of people and organizations to unite and work together to create a better future for all. CAAs increased their partnerships with many housing service providers, working together to address homelessness and the health and safety needs of the homeless. They did this by combining federal and state funds from other local organizations to, for example, cover more than one month's rent/mortgage, to help households remain stably housed and prevent homelessness.

Highlighted below are several initiatives undertaken by CAAs to address pandemic-related health and safety concerns of the homeless and to prevent instances of homelessness.

At the beginning of the pandemic, as the largest provider of housing services in Schenectady County, **Schenectady Community Action Program (SCAP)** quickly became the point agency for financial and housing assistance services under the *One Schenectady Coalition*. This partnership was developed with other nonprofit agencies providing relief work during previous disasters and was rapidly reactivated during the pandemic. Through the Coalition, different partners in the county took charge of various programs to most effectively consolidate resources and minimize duplication of efforts. The Coalition provided a hotline number, and customers were directed to the appropriate organization depending on their needs: rent, food, domestic violence, health services, etc. During the height of the pandemic, rental assistance requests through SCAP increased by 1000%. Below are the statistics of housing services provided to customers in 2021. Statistics for 2021 indicate 1000 housing services provided to customers, reflecting a 20% increase in services provided during 2020.

Community Services: *As a leader in affordable housing, employment and community resources navigation, SCAP serves more than 7,000 individuals in over 2,500 families*

105	Persons served in 29 Supportive housing apartments (scattered sites) with 100% housing stability.
91	Persons served through Rapid Re-housing with 97% housing stability.
103	Persons served in Sojourn Transitional Housing (mothers and children) with 92% housing stability.
299	Households served through Emergency Rental Assistance; with 100% housing stability.
30	Households served through Medicaid Redesign Supportive Housing with 97% housing stability.
51	Households served through Supportive Housing Solutions; with 100% housing stability.
105	Households assisted with Eviction Prevention services.

According to NYSCAA's 2021 Poverty Report, Chautauqua County has a poverty rate of 18.2% and had an increase of 17% in those classified as homeless in 2020, largely because of COVID-19 (#19). In anticipation of a rise in COVID-19 cases among the homeless in congregate shelters, **Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. (COI)** expanded



Photo courtesy of CEO

its partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to place homeless individuals in single-family housing that COI owns and manages. During the pandemic, one property was set aside specifically to place individuals coming from a homeless shelter who may have been COVID-19 positive or in quarantine. COI was notified by DHHS when someone in a congregate shelter needed placement and then made arrangements with the local police department to transport the individuals to the COI housing. They were quarantined in the house with regular check-ins from the Count Department of Health and then discharged when their quarantine period was over. Since they were homeless, this typically meant returning to the congregate shelter or another housing option. Thankfully, the number of homeless individuals who tested positive in the county's congregate homeless shelters was not as high as initially feared, but the system was put into place to protect the public, homeless individuals, and shelters against further spread.

Many CAAs were involved in assisting families to apply for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), operated through the state. Several established partnerships with their local county departments to help with outreach and assist an individual with the online application process. To expand its outreach efforts, **CAP Cayuga/Seneca** enhanced their partnerships with the Cayuga County Department of Social Services, a local housing program, and a rescue mission to send out information to all Cayuga County residents about ERAP. Each partner posted information on social media, mailed an informational flyer to all households, and put banners across the city of Auburn. This partnership ensured that as many residents as possible were reached. Throughout the pandemic, CAP also posted information on social media about different housing assistance programs and sent flyers out through their mobile food pantry and emergency food pantry baskets to help provide the information to their customers.



available, CAPCO implemented an initiative called CAPCO Cares Kits in response to the growing homeless population in their community. According to reports, homelessness increased by 50% between 2021 and 2022 in the Southern Tier region (#13). Once the pandemic started and necessities became scarce, the team found that the items included in the Cares Kits were needed by both homeless individuals and families who were working but having difficulty making ends meet. The kits were provided in a durable mesh, waterproof bag. They included canned food items, personal care items, utensils, and a pair of socks, along with information about its free Clothing Closet. CAPCO received CAPCO Cares Kits.



— Cortland Community Action Program (CAPCO)

Employment, Education, and Training Services



Photo courtesy of Albany CAP

At the beginning of the pandemic, with NYS on Pause, the provision of services for job-readiness, re-entry employment, and other education and training services were almost non-existent as non-essential businesses were closed, unemployment benefits were increased, and individuals remained home. As restrictions lifted, many businesses operated at reduced levels or did not reopen, resulting in increased unemployment levels (3.8 % before March of 2020 compared to 11.3% in March of 2021) (#3). In partnership with the NYS Department of Labor, many CAAs provided referral services and technical support to ensure that newly eligible customers applied for and received unemployment benefits.

Over time, Employment Services case managers continued to see an increase in the need for assistance with obtaining and maintaining employment. The pandemic's impact on program participants caused case managers to provide more intensive support to eliminate barriers to employment, including technology, transportation, child care, and other financial assistance.

Job training and employment support services provided by CAAs are needed more than ever as the state and country recovers. Below are just a few initiatives implemented by CAAs to provide virtual training programs and other supports to meet the employment and training barriers heightened by the pandemic.

In response to the closure of schools and summer programs at the beginning of the pandemic, **NYC DYCD** implemented the *SYEP Summer Bridge* (2020) program to temporarily replace their onsite Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) with a virtual training program. SYEP engaged a national education curriculum developer to create a digital and in-person curriculum. Internet-connected devices were distributed to youth in need. To ensure participant safety during the pandemic, the traditional work experience was replaced with a digital platform that allowed youth to complete up to 30 hours of remote work-readiness experiences during the summer. The curriculum was tiered with multi-leveled learning and included foundational work readiness subjects such as career exploration, resume writing, interviewing skills, workplace communication, financial literacy, and civic engagement.

Participants took a series of assessments and spent time taking deeper dives into careers of their choice. Young people took part in workplace challenges which connected participants to employers in their communities to deliver an authentic learning experience. Youth built critical executive skills, including teamwork, communication, project management, and creativity, and developed a tangible product to highlight on their resume, allowing them to earn up to \$1,000 in stipends. Activities were related to NYC's recovery from the coronavirus, including projects on public health, education, infrastructure development, and supporting small businesses. More than 35,000 youth participated in the five-week virtual program to explore, experiment with, and prepare for a wide range of career opportunities.



DCYD SYEP Participant Testimonial

For the summer of 2021 and 2022, there was a strong need to return to the traditional program model while retaining some of the best practices developed and lessons learned during the virtual pandemic summer. The program continues to enroll most youth virtually, allowing for online document upload and verification. Orientation is conducted online, allowing for high-quality educational program delivery. The regular SYEP also continues to develop remote and hybrid internship opportunities as well as professional and technical academic hours in various fields, including technology, youth development, and green jobs.

CEO of Rensselaer County provides a Youth Build program focused on training and employment for out-of-school youth between the ages of 16 -24. CEO enrolls the youth and provides education, case management, transportation, and other support services to prepare them for their high school diploma and vocational training to learn a trade (construction or culinary). A virtual model was rolled out during the pandemic. CEO staff discovered the virtual training option was not as successful as the typical youth build training and employment services because it was challenging to maintain the engagement of the participants in online training. Because General Education Development (GED) testing centers were completely shut down until September of 2021, and the Rensselaer County testing center remains closed, the backlog of individuals waiting to test for their high school equivalency has skyrocketed. CEO is finishing a virtual program but will not be starting another session as the grant is ending. To continue to support these services

to their community, they have begun to refer candidates to a neighboring Youth Build program. While several programs successfully designed remote curricula and engaged participants, in-person is the preferred model for this program.

Connecting and Supporting Seniors

Throughout the pandemic, seniors were significantly impacted as they were at the greatest risk for contracting COVID-19, experienced longer recovery times, saw higher rates of death, stricter lockdowns, and felt a more significant loss due to limitations of social support (#15).



Photo courtesy of PEACE, Inc.

While agencies continued to provide all essential services across various programs to seniors, many CAAs also found new ways to engage seniors during isolation and quarantine. They included giving home activity kits and books and offering virtual programs and interactive games such as Bingo, incorporating exercise, nutrition, and fall prevention. A few CAAs became creative and developed innovative and novel ways through health, wellness, and support groups to continue to engage and maintain communication and

engagement with seniors. These efforts went a long way to reduce the isolation seniors experienced and maintain their mental and physical health.

At **Pro Action**, the Senior Nutrition program transitioned from offering both congregate and home delivery to only home delivery. Congregate customers were able to get a meal delivered to their homes and maintain the service, which supported a critical need. However, the pandemic prevented any opportunity for socializing regularly, which impacted both physical and mental wellness.



Do you want to do exercises that can help to maintain your balance and increase your flexibility?
Would you like to learn how to increase your bone density?

Healthy Bones

Healthy bones is for you! Healthy Bones is an evidence based exercise program that helps to strengthen our bones, improve flexibility, and restore balance right from your own home.

We work with hand and ankle weights doing exercises. We also do balance exercises without the weights. This could be a great stress reliever and help to strengthen your muscles. It is a lot of fun and is not strenuous or time consuming; all it would take is a 1/2 hour of your time.



If you are over the age of 70, please check with your doctor before starting any exercise program.

For a copy of the video, you can reach out to the Chautauqua County Office for the Aging, Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. or view it on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15sJ-UGB3ww>

We provide the weights and you can do this in the comfort of your own home while watching the video.

If you would like some weights, please call (716) 366-3335 or (716) 661-9430 ext 1236

Supported in part by a grant from the NYS Department of Health



To mitigate potential deterioration in physical and mental health and support seniors in their wellness efforts, **Pro Action** and **Chautauqua Opportunities** developed programs for seniors exercising (Bone Builders and Healthy Bones). Through these programs, the instructors conducted live classes via zoom and recorded YouTube videos for seniors to continue the program in their own homes during and following the COVID-19 Pandemic.

CEO was forced to put the Foster Grandparent Program on hold, which further impacted seniors and contributed to the isolation from COVID-19 restrictions. The inability to actively participate in the Foster Grandparent Program during the 2020 and 2021 school years also resulted in a loss of small stipends to those eligible

volunteers and eliminated opportunities for them to interact with other adults, children, and students for an extended period of time. To maintain communication with and support these volunteers during this period of separation, virtual weekly tea times were held with a group of 25-35 interested foster grandparents. CEO loaned laptops to interested participants and provided instruction where needed. The tea times offered an opportunity for socialization and interaction and included speakers who provided information such as an overview of the COVID-19 vaccine. CEO also held a food truck recognition event for senior volunteers, arranged free meals for pickup, and delivered items to their doorsteps. In the spring of 2022, Head Start programs began accepting volunteers but not the school districts. There are typically about 80 volunteers in the CEO Foster Grandparent Program, but as of this report, there are only 65, with 25% back in service.



Tioga Opportunities, Inc. (TOI) operates on a \$7.5 million budget with 66 employees providing services to over 3,100 customers annually (#18). In their county, 35% of their customers are seniors, and 19% of their population are seniors living in poverty (2021 Annual Report). To further assist their elderly residents in dealing

with the mental impacts of COVID-19, TOI collaborated with the NYS Office for the Aging, who provided TOI with their first batch of robotic pets early in the pandemic (dogs and cats). The animals respond to sound and touch, helping the older adults not to feel so alone. TOI received very positive feedback from the families who received these animatronic pets, and a second order was subsequently placed and homed to local families. TOI also partnered with a local library for a book-sharing program. Home Delivered Meals customers were given the opportunity to participate. If interested, they provided their book preferences, which TOI staff passed along to the library. When books were available, drivers delivered them to the customers with their meals. At the end of six weeks, the drivers picked the books up during the meal delivery, and the next set of books would be delivered. This book delivery was very well received.

Health Services Support for Employees and Customers

Of noticeable impact during and following the shutdown was an uptick in mental, emotional, and physical health issues as both CAA employees and customers continued to struggle with isolation, fear, a lack of information and knowledge, unemployment, and working from home, as well as a loss of valuable resources and services. According



Photo courtesy of ACAP

to a report by the World Health Organization, COVID-19 resulted in a 25% (#13) increase in anxiety and depression in the first year of the pandemic worldwide, with NYS reporting a 40% rate of poor mental health in February of 2021 (#14).

CAAs have focused on the overall wellbeing of vulnerable and marginalized individuals and families, which did not change during the pandemic. Instead, CAAs emphasized addressing the mental health issues exacerbated by the pandemic, resulting in the integration of additional health

support through all program areas. Like other services, the limited access to in-person treatment for some time and the transition to telehealth services only added to the cumulative stress of technology, social isolation, and economic hardships. CAAs, not surprisingly, rose to the challenge and initiated or expanded telehealth services, resources, and referrals. They offered virtual health and wellness seminars on mental

wellness, self-care, family violence, child care, addiction, COVID-19 prevention, vaccine safety, etc., partnering with medical professionals and colleagues.

It was paramount for CAAs to keep both employees and customers safe and supported. CAAs implemented several initiatives and partnerships, presented below, to assist customers and staff in dealing with the immediate and long-term traumatic impacts of COVID-19.

To support staff and customers during this heightened stress and conflict, **Schenectady Community Action Program** expanded behavioral health therapy services to provide more services and support to customers and case managers. Before the emergence of COVID-19, these services were only available within select service areas but were expanded to provide these resources to all customers. The services were very flexible, and meeting health insurance requirements were unnecessary. The services were offered wherever the customer requested, including indoors, outside, and virtually. The team of therapists assisted 152 customers during 2021, providing individual and family therapy as needed.

With the increased pressure on front-line workers, therapeutic services were also available to staff to support their mental health and provide health education Sessions such as self-care and setting boundaries. In 2021, the behavioral health therapists also provided over 500 consultation and coaching services to the staff in managing their cases, some of whom did not have a clinical background. This expanded service was highly beneficial to staff and customers and will continue beyond CSBG CARES funding through other financial resources.



Photo courtesy of Tompkins CA



Connecting Communities in Action (CCA) serves Cattaraugus County and operates an \$11.3 million budget, providing services with a staff of 132 employees to over 3,600 customers per year (#18). CCA staff and their Victims

Services Department (VSD) adapted to change without hesitation, remained connected and sustained relationships, customer rapport, and services. They worked with community partners to enhance in-person and virtual case collaboration and wraparound services for survivors of crime. These enhancements included:

- A strengthened relationship with family court to complete Family Orders of Protection(FOP's) virtually to keep customers safe.
- Provided domestic violence education and support during a period of increased risk and isolation and continued meeting unique needs that survivors faced during the pandemic.
- Distributed items such as board games, puzzles, books, and other outdoor activities to support emotional, mental, and physical wellness.



CCA Therapist Resource

Advancements with virtual platforms provided HIPPA-compliant online contact to customers for therapy and educational advocacy sessions. When able and appropriate, CCA used creative funding channels and COVID-19 funds to provide phones, phone cards, and phone payments to customers who did not have internet bandwidth or phone time to complete sessions. Therapists attended training on remote engagement, adapting trauma modalities to remote delivery. Therapeutic activities were mailed out to families through activity packets, games, and reading materials. The children's therapist even created a character of herself to laminate and send to the children she was working with to talk to if they couldn't "see her."

Phone therapy and educational sessions increased as well, as the program followed guidance from the Office of Mental Health on allowing more phone and telehealth therapies to meet patient needs. Services were offered to existing customers and also offered to any new individuals requesting services by contacting the hotline or asking for this support once they were connected to an advocate. Therapeutic sessions mirrored in-person sessions with psychoeducation regarding trauma, safety planning for both victimization and mental health symptoms, goal planning, identification and rehearsal of coping skills, and even trauma reconciliation utilizing the new skills and creative methods adapted during remote work.



Just about all of the CAAs provided opportunities to get the COVID-19 vaccine to customers and employees. One example is **Mohawk Valley**

Community Action Agency (MVCAA),

which serves Oneida and Herkimer Counties,

operates a budget of approximately \$18 million, with 250 employees providing services to 6500 individuals annually^(#18). MVCAA collaborated with their local Health Department, County Emergency Services, and a medical facility to set up Vaccine Pods in various sites. They surveyed their community and determined where there was a need. The Pods provided not only the vaccination to interested individuals but also offered valid

information concerning the virus, vaccines, how to properly wear a mask, hand washing, myths, facts, etc. MVCAA is also currently purchasing a vehicle through a grant that will be used to continue delivering information, supplies, and vaccines in their rural communities.



MVCCA Health Fair

Community Action of Orleans and Genesee (CAOG) has the third lowest health ranking in New York State for both outcomes and health factors^(#21). Limited availability and opportunity to obtain adequate health care for the marginalized was compounded by the affects of COVID-19. To provide improved health care access, CAOG embarked on a new community partnership project referred to as “Axis of Care,” reflecting a point around which local agencies gather together to provide “access” to health care. In response to an identified shortage of medical professionals in their region and limited access to healthcare, CAOG was awarded a grant to bring a telehealth hub to Community Action’s Eastern Orleans Community Center. The project, expected to be fully operational in the late summer or early fall of 2022, will bring free healthcare to the homeless and those experiencing poverty and other hardships. A health coach will connect and coordinate individuals with services, set and track goals and outcomes, improve health literacy among those in need and coordinate transportation to healthcare facilities as needed. Services will include primary care, behavioral health, substance abuse, and information on the agency’s other services, such a

weatherization, Head Start, utility assistance, and daycare. The agency is partnering with several health-focused and community organizations to support these telehealth services and will have a mobile health van available.



Photo by Tom Rivers – Mobile Health Van

C. Developing Programs and Enhancing Partnerships

While CAAs worked diligently to address program-specific issues and challenges, many expanded their efforts to meet individual and comprehensive family needs, including assessment, planning, facilitation, care coordination, evaluation, and advocacy for moving beyond COVID-19.

The added socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 required CAAs to provide expanded and comprehensive support to help existing customers manage the added struggles of the pandemic and prevent others from falling further into poverty. Below we highlight a few CAAs who developed and implemented specific in-depth projects to meet the needs of their communities. These projects reflect the commitment and mission of all CAAs to focus on and support the overall well-being of individuals and families as they achieve independence and self-reliance.



In addition to developing and enhancing partnerships, CAAs focused on essential community resources and supporting individuals and families. Access to affordable child care has been a barrier and challenge for working families. Child Care reached a crisis point during the pandemic. With COVID-19 restrictions in place, many family-based childcare programs were forced to close, and daycare centers had to limit the number of children they could serve, posing challenges for families and those business owners

who made a living through their family-based programs. Three thousand five hundred twenty-four child care programs closed across New York State between January 2020 - July 2022 (#23). The programs most affected were in-home child care programs (family or group family child care).

CAAs rose to the challenge to support their local family child care programs experiencing difficulties with enrollment and supply chain concerns. Several CAAs organized drive-through events or made deliveries to help keep the facilities operational. Items purchased and distributed included paper and cleaning supplies, touch-free trash cans, thermometers, PPE, diapers, wipes, and food boxes with fresh fruit and vegetables from local farmers and other businesses.

CAAs also worked tirelessly to address the increased challenge of finding child care due to the pandemic. Even before COVID-19, it was a struggle to hire Early Childhood educators. One agency is highlighted below



Photo courtesy of SCAP

for their continued efforts in ensuring daycare programs are available and have the necessary resources to help provide this critical asset in their communities.



PEACE, Inc. (PEACE) serves Onondaga County and operates a budget above \$22 million annually (2019 Annual Report).

PEACE used CSBG CARES funding to support their Early Childhood Careers Pathways Program, which lost county funding at the height of COVID-19. Through an existing collaboration with Child Care Solutions of NY, this program provides technical and financial support to individuals seeking employment in the childcare field. Before COVID-19, Between 2019 and early 2020, the program supported the opening of 15 home daycare facilities. However, from March 2020 through the fall of 2021, no new centers could open due to the inability to conduct inspections. During that time, PEACE continued to support their customers in setting up their facilities, making repairs and completing a myriad of paperwork before approval to operate. Since the Fall of 2021, six new providers have opened due to PEACE's ongoing commitment, making 192 childcare slots available in their communities.

Pandemic Affected Response Team Project (PART)

The Pandemic Affected Response Team (PART) project was developed at **Action for A Better Community, Inc. (ABC)** to provide direct support and navigational case management to those families and individuals most economically impacted by COVID-19, living at or below 200% of federal poverty guideline levels. Before CSBG CARES funding was made available, private donations, beginning with contributions of stimulus checks totaling close to \$20,000, were distributed to individuals/families with low incomes in Monroe County. As those donations ran out and the CSBG CARES funding became available, the PART project was developed and came to life.

Along with helping families immediately with financial support, the PART project required and provided 180 days of case management to monitor and ensure progress toward self-sufficiency. In all, 179 families were supported with various services through this project.

The program was designed to address COVID-19–related loss of employment, inability to keep up with household bills, and food insecurity. PART navigators worked with applicants to determine their financial situation (looking at current and pre-COVID-19 data) and developed an action plan to help them achieve stability. The program has a beneficiary fund that supports the following needs:

- Rental assistance
- Utilities/household assistance
- Food assistance
- Auto payment assistance

Additionally, ABC developed a new partnership with a consumer credit counseling organization as part of their comprehensive services. ABC referred individuals to them to provide financial literacy, and they, in turn, referred individuals to ABC for their services.

While this specific project will end with the CSBG CARES funding in 2022, this anti-poverty initiative and the project's design are geared to keep people from sliding into poverty and returning them to a level of stability and self-sufficiency, and will continue to be a focus of the agency.

Excluded Work Fund Program (EWF)

EOC of Suffolk participated in New York's Excluded Work Fund Program (EWF), which provided monetary relief to NY workers who suffered income loss due to COVID-19 and were not eligible for unemployment insurance or related federal benefits. The funding offered a one-time payment of up to \$15,600 to eligible workers who lost their jobs between 3/27/2020-4/01/2021. EOC was one of many organizations that partnered with the NYS Department of Labor and served as a trusted messenger and helper within communities with the highest concentration of excluded workers. EOC staff conducted outreach in targeted communities and, utilizing a strategic media campaign, disseminated program information, and provided direct application assistance and critical services to individuals (i.e., financial literacy, case management) eligible through its Family Development program. EOC of Suffolk's outreach efforts reached over 4,000 individuals and brought financial relief to workers across the state who were financially impacted by COVID-19.

Early Release Persons Program

EOC of Nassau participated in a new program funded by the NYSDOS, the COVID-19 Early Release Persons Program, which was implemented to assist formerly incarcerated individuals who were released due to the pandemic. This program provided services to 50 individuals in the areas of employment, housing, and health. Additional funding from NYSDOL enabled EOC to provide services to individuals who were ineligible to receive COVID-19-related benefits (stimulus payments). This program provided financial help to New Yorkers who lost income during the COVID-19 Pandemic and were left out of various federal relief programs, including unemployment and pandemic benefits. A one-time payment was given, dependent upon the information and documentation required by the program.

Building Resilience in Essex Families (BRIEF)



Adirondack Community Action Programs (ACAP) operates a \$7.8 million budget with 135 employees providing services to over 2,500 individuals annually^(#18). They are a member of the Building Resilience in Essex Families (BRIEF) Coalition, which was developed

in response to COVID-19 in 2021. This Coalition is a cross-agency convener of over 25 stakeholders (including service providers, families, and community members) working to Increase collaboration, improve communication and foster a spirit of goodwill and continuous improvement.

The coalition received a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) grant to support the following four-year plan:

- Continue to develop & strengthen SOC governance
- Conduct school outreach to offer social-emotional learning (SEL) training and improve referrals
- Focus on Transition Age Youth and improve access to vocational and skill development (Families First and ACAP)
- Provide Health Home Care Management using Wraparound to TAY, in partnership with family and youth peer service (Families First)
- Implement Nurturing Parent curriculum in the county, offered in schools (ACAP)
- Certify two Mental Health clinicians in Infant MH Services (ECMH)
- Establish linkage with pediatricians, public health, and out-of-state OB-GYNs to screen and connect families in need of early Mental Health intervention (ECMH) and other services.

In partnership with this coalition, ACAP will continue to promote a proactive system of care that focuses on education, encourages empowerment, builds resilience, and reduces stigma for all families in Essex County.

Community Schools Model

At **JCEO of Clinton and Franklin Counties**, Saranac Lake School developed and presented a Community Schools Model recommendation to JCEO, and together, they began to plan. The model represents a place-based strategy in which schools partner with community agencies and allocate resources to provide an “integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement.” With this partnership, they opened multiple food pantry/outreach centers which offered food, emergency services, clothing and information, and referral to those in need, ensuring that outreach and services were effectively provided to as many individuals as possible. In the first year of the pandemic, services were provided to over 11,700 individuals (2020 Report) and 6,200 individuals in 2021, reflecting successful outreach efforts and meeting family needs.

V. Training and Support

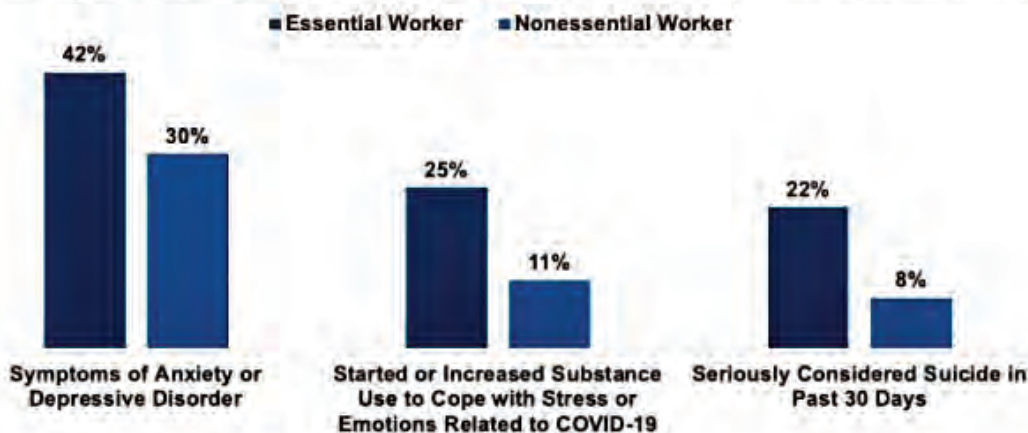
A. CAA-Provided Training and Support

Community Action Agencies have continuously supported their employees in their professional and personal development, but COVID-19 led to an increased awareness of the exacerbated health and social issues that arose. Staff, many of whom were considered essential workers, were faced with the added stress of dealing with long work hours, increased likelihood of exposure to COVID-19, lack of socialization, time away from family members, anxiety, and secondary traumatic stress.

The figures below provide a clear picture of the impacts that COVID-19 immediately had on many essential workers during the pandemic (#16). As of March 2021, more than 50% of essential workers noted that they relied on unhealthy habits to get through the pandemic, with 29% feeling a decline in their overall mental health, according to a report by the American Psychological Association (#17).

Figure 1.

Among Essential and Nonessential Workers, Share of Adults Reporting Mental Distress and Substance Use, June 2020



Across the network, CAAs increased their focus on recognizing and addressing the direct and secondary effects of stress and trauma. Below we highlight just a couple of CAAs and their efforts to further support their employees' physical and mental well-being.

Self-Care

Connecting Communities in Action (CCA) supported its staff by giving consistent attention to their physical and mental health, including weekly self-care challenges that were fun and educational and helped them remain a strong, cohesive unit. The activities were based around embodying peer support, one of the six principles of trauma-informed care, and practicing their agency value of belonging. CCA structured the self-care challenges using a workspace platform and created a Team Connection channel. This encouraged team chats, sharing of work and non-work-related positive and motivational items, appropriate humor, and structured self-care. Some challenges included uploads with examples of who practiced the most creative self-care activities from home, cutest pet co-workers, most creative “professional vision boards,” posting healthy at-home lunches, staff trivia, etc. CCA staff has since created a team sub-committee to continue supporting staff, and current efforts revolve around coming back together in person.



Photo courtesy of CCA

“In some ways, the work culture became more supportive, as we added a focus on wellness (physical and mental) that included regular check-ins, virtual stress reduction, and yoga classes. As policy and practice changed almost daily from March 2020-July 2020, change fatigue became a very real problem for employees and customers. We recognized that many people were working hard-er and longer because of program demands and attempted to offer opportunities for self-care. However, in some ways, the absence of inter-departmental events and opportunities for socialization created some personal isolation and departmental silos.”

— Connecting Communities in Action, Inc.)

Delaware Opportunities, Inc. (DO) is committed to assisting community members, including its own employees. DO has established several staff-led committees focusing on organizational culture and safety. The committees include Safety Committee; Wellness Committee; Staff Book Club; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Workgroup; ACEs Workgroup; and an Events Committee. These groups, coupled with a host of new in-service opportunities, will continue to provide outlets and avenues for staff to share, express, and rebuild self-care strategies that will help be sustainable.

In response to the increased mental health concerns raised by COVID-19, more than 20 stand-alone workshops have been offered to **NYC DYCD** leadership staff and the frontline and leadership staff at DYCD-funded providers. Topics included: psychological first aid after disasters, strategies for managing compassion fatigue and burnout prevention; resources for managing stress during COVID-19; effective supervision through a trauma-informed lens; strategizing youth engagement through COVID-19; racist violence; and trauma.

At the organizational level, consultants provided team support for 30 DYCD-funded program staff, who received team and individual support around strategies for managing crisis and stress, coping skills, and accessing mental and emotional health resources. Events included a two-day symposium around reflecting, responding and rebuilding/creating safe spaces in uncertain times for all DYCD-funded providers focused on trauma-informed practices, strategies for responding to the impacts of COVID-19, and skills for building emotionally safe spaces for youth programs. Additionally, a second two-day event focused on historical and racialized trauma to enhance awareness, build skills, and increase a trauma-informed approach to programming.

Staffing/Employment

Supporting and assisting customers to find employment was an ongoing challenge during the pandemic as CAAs were experiencing their own struggles to recruit and maintain staff. Due to staff and operational reductions in non-essential services, individuals seeking employment were limited in options. Many were also facing additional barriers, such as transportation and childcare issues. Below we highlight the efforts of two agencies to ease the employment challenges and workforce shortages.

Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency (MVCAA) developed a partnership with colleges with grant programs, such as Re-entry and Fresh Start, that supported eligible individuals who needed assistance obtaining and maintaining employment. The college agreed to provide the students with a brief overview of MVCAA during MVCAA's recruitment efforts. MVCAA staff took the opportunity to develop a specific and targeted curriculum to help in attracting potential candidates. Zoom classes included an informational session about MVCAA along with soft skills training. Other sessions focused on how to interview, oral communication skills, mentorship, writing professional emails, and teamwork. Developing this valuable partnership with their local college has helped MVCAA in its recruitment efforts. That local college continues to refer graduates from their programs, and several have been hired as full-time staff at MVCAA.



Photo courtesy of MVCAA



Opportunities for Otsego, Inc. (OFO) operates a \$10 million budget with a staff of 150 who serve over 2,000 individuals annually (#18). The unemployment rate in June of 2020 in Otsego County was greater than 8%. As part of the agency's

strategy to positively impact those unemployed or underemployed, OFO partnered with the Chenango-Delaware-Otsego Workforce Investment Board (CDO Workforce) and the New York State Weatherization Directors Association (NYSWDA). The project's goal was twofold: to address the staff shortages at OFO and provide weatherization skills training to eligible young adults and those unable to return to their previous occupations.



OFO'S Training Program participants

The project included partnerships with a local transportation provider to facilitate student access to the program and a large home improvement retail store that donated tools to the trainees upon completion. The ongoing pandemic made providing the training program challenging due to health and safety requirements. However, OFO and its partners have run the program three times since November 2020, with a 100% completion rate and approximately 70% of participants obtaining jobs either within OFO's weatherization program or with area employers. The intent is to continue the program after CSBG CARES funding expires well into the future.



MVCAA Voice of Diversity Committee

In response to COVID-19-driven staff shortages, **Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency (MVCAA)** sought creative solutions to find qualified candidates to fill vacancies in their Head Start Programs. In 2020, the Workforce Development Coordinator at MVCAA became aware that Mohawk Valley Community College (MVCC) had stopped offering their Early Childhood Education degree. Through

a coordinated effort, a specific micro-credential program was developed to increase the pool of eligible applicants from other professional fields. This unique and innovative program is currently in the final stages of approval by the State Education Department. It is expected to serve as a model for replication across the State.

Social/Racial Justice

In response to the social and health inequities and disparities highlighted during COVID-19, CAAs and NYSCAA elevated their efforts to advance positive change in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. CAAs reviewed their human resources policies and procedures, performed assessments and audits of their existing programs and services, developed DEI workgroups and committees, and conducted various trainings and workshops to enlighten and engage staff in their mission to address and eliminate injustices.

Below we highlight the efforts of just a couple of CAAs on their road to developing more inclusive organizations within their communities.

Tioga Opportunities, Inc. (TOI) embarked on a DEI awareness campaign, developing a 30-second commercial featuring community members and members of their Board of Directors, which was broadcast on local TV stations in 2020. TOI also provided training sessions for staff, facilitated by an outside consultant. These sessions promoted honest dialogue and sensitivity around racial equity and diversity and will continue to be a focus of the agency.



Photo courtesy of Tioga Opportunities, Inc.



The **Regional Economic Community Action Program, Inc. (RECAP)** serves Orange county and operates a budget of over \$10.5 million, with a staff of 120, assisting over 6,200 individuals annually (#18). In a continuation of their efforts to advance social justice, in 2020, RECAP created the Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion Academy (JEDI). The JEDI Academy engages staff to examine and discuss race, gender, sexual orientation, identity, and accessibility topics. The Academy illustrates RECAP's commitment to creating an anti-racist organization and a safe and welcoming culture for everyone. In addition to an experiential learning and educational component, JEDI trains staff mentors to provide support and coaching to others throughout the organization. To provide the most thoughtful and well-rounded experience, RECAP worked with external experts, attended trainings, and enlisted the assistance of the Human Rights Commission. This ongoing effort will benefit staff, the agency, and the community.

"The racial pandemic that occurred during the COVID-19 Pandemic made us stop and reflect on our own equity and inclusion practices. We now have a Voices of Diversity Committee that is evaluating all of our practices and agency culture in relation to diversity, equity, and inclusion."

— Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency

B. Network Support Provided by NYSCAA

At the onset of the pandemic, NYSCAA staff stepped up to provide whatever support they could to CAAs navigating a myriad of challenges. NYSCAA developed eLearning courses, provided webinars, and expanded communication efforts among staff at CAAs.

Communication and Information Sharing

Maintaining communication and sharing resources across the state is essential to a thriving Community Action (CA) Network. This need became more evident as CAA staff was forced to work in socially distanced environments during the pandemic.

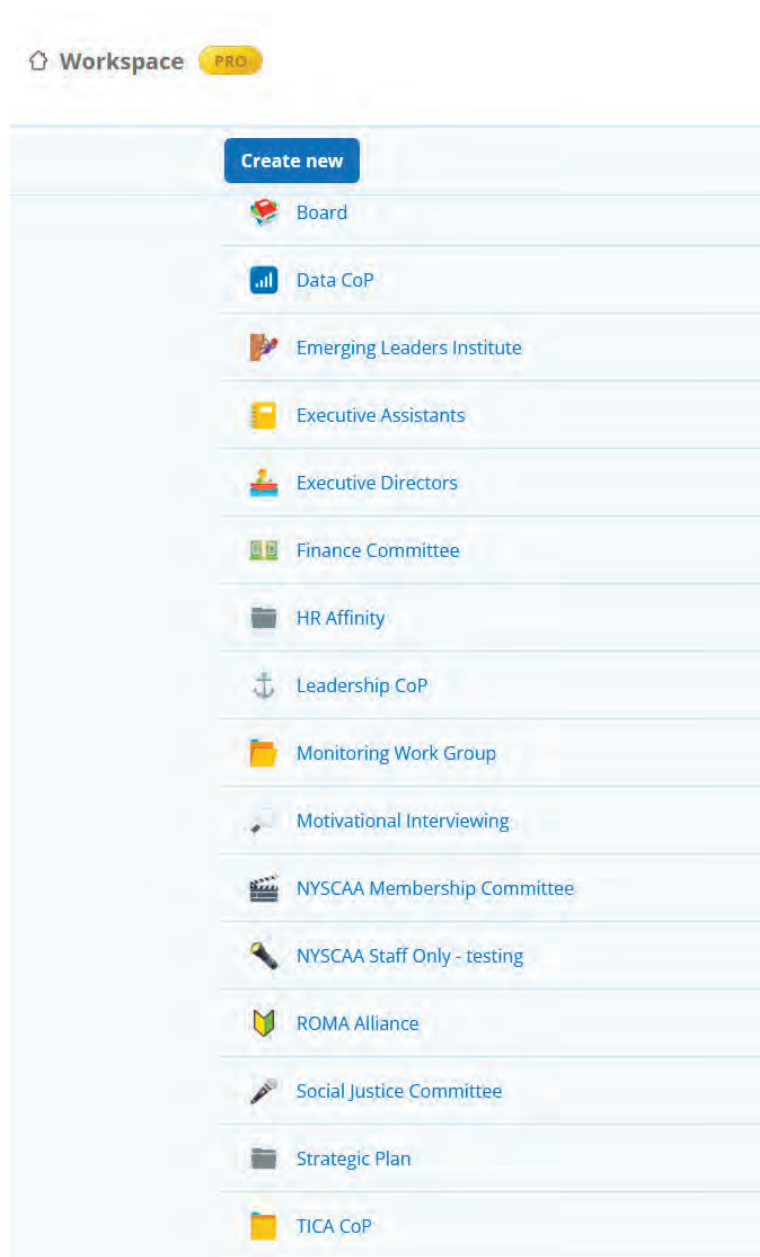


NYSCAA initiated weekly meetings with Executive Directors (ED). It was crucial during the early lockdowns when an avenue was needed to share information, and discuss strategies and challenges as New York State's COVID-19 policies changed week to week. The weekly ED meetings have continued - a clear example of an emergency COVID-19 measure becoming a new, robust standard of practice within the CA Network. Weekly calls have tackled topics such as new data collection methods, vaccine mandates, and frontline staff recruitment and retention strategies.

In addition, NYSCAA implemented a sharing platform (SamePage). The platform is a collaborative tool that helps to build the capacity of CAAs by providing a mechanism for staff to share documents in a readily retrievable format. The materials accessible through this platform include internal policies and procedures, agendas, recordings, and other valuable resources. Having these types of documents accessible and available assists CAA staff as they continue to respond to COVID-19 and as they prepare for future events of a similar nature. It is a valuable tool for network groups such as Executive Directors, the Human Resources and Finance affinity groups, Communities of Practices, the Social Justice Committee, and other committees and workgroups.

The sharing platform allows for:

- Collaboration at a new level with different groups
- History – shared items/videos/pages can be captured and searched in one location
- File sharing with edit log – tagging of documents and searchable across the platform
- Workflow and Project Management
- Mobile App to access materials when needed
- Shared calendars
- Instant conversations/chat



Social Justice Committee

To help increase awareness of the systemic racism and social inequities that exist, NYSCAA developed a Social Justice Committee (SJC) to support the network. This Committee includes membership from 15 CAAs. Activities include organizing, facilitating, and participating in conversations and workshops, developing and expanding partnerships with organizations dedicated to social change and racial equity, and advocating for change in policies and systems that create racial and social disparities. NYSCAA also surveyed the network related to their DEI efforts and subsequently engaged the services of multiple consultants to provide additional training. The goal is to provide a framework for understanding DEI, foster appreciation of differences and inclusive behaviors, and tackle the structures and barriers associated with bias and microaggressions. The SJC will carry on its mission so that strides will continue to be made in developing more diverse, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive organizations.



Network-wide webinars

In response to the increased concerns surrounding frontline workers' mental and emotional health, NYSCAA provided wellness training and webinars to employees across the network. The webinars reflected needs expressed by the Community Action workforce and included topics such as burnout, digital wellness, creative problem solving, balancing life issues, and compassion fatigue.

Given the challenges CAAs were experiencing (and still are) with staff recruitment and retention, NYSCAA supported the Network's HR professionals and other staff with training to assist them in recruiting and retaining staff, focusing on understanding the benefits of a diverse workforce, methods to recruit diverse talent, and ways to improve their organizational

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Motivational Interviewing

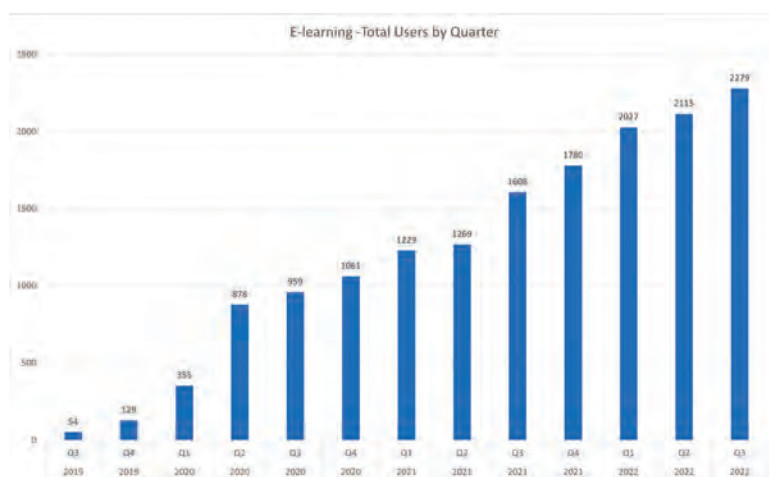
Early in the pandemic, it was determined that learning Motivational Interviewing (MI) techniques for CAA case managers and supervisors was a critical need in response to the struggles and challenges customers faced due to the effects of COVID-19. To offer this professional development opportunity to CAA staff, NYSCAA partnered with two professors at the University of Buffalo. Through participating in this intensive 10-week, 30-hour course, CAA staff gained new skills such as reflective listening, methods to support customers through change, and how to help customers in increasing self-efficacy. This program has been a success, with 53 CAA staff now certified in MI. Those who are certified have indicated that using these techniques and skills has reduced their stress levels when working with customers.

In addition, NYSCAA developed a learning community providing MI-certified CAA staff with the opportunity for ongoing peer sharing and learning. Participants find the learning community valuable in maintaining their MI skills. It is anticipated that these new skills and methodologies, along with ongoing support within CAAs and the network, will promote better communication and work satisfaction, ultimately resulting in increased staff retention.

eLearning

At the beginning of the pandemic, when New York was on pause and some CAA staff was adjusting to working remotely, NYSCAA's eLearning platform, *NYSCAA Learn*, saw a significant increase in usage from Network users, as shown below. CAAs used the opportunity to increase their staff's knowledge. Using the platform was easy – it could be accessed at home and work.

Since 2020, NYSCAA has developed several professional development courses to expand the learning opportunities in NYSCAA Learn. The courses include Strategies for Board Engagement, Applying ROMA in a CAA, What's your Poverty IQ?, Community Action: An Overview, The Community Action Plan, and Phishing and Social Engineering Essentials.



To respond to the continuing needs of the network, NYSCAA recently added an SHRM-approved DEI course, *Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace – Unconscious Bias Awareness*. This course improves recognition of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination while suggesting strategies to halt those practices in favor of an equitable and inclusive environment for coworkers, customers, and the public. The course encourages staff to prioritize inclusion.

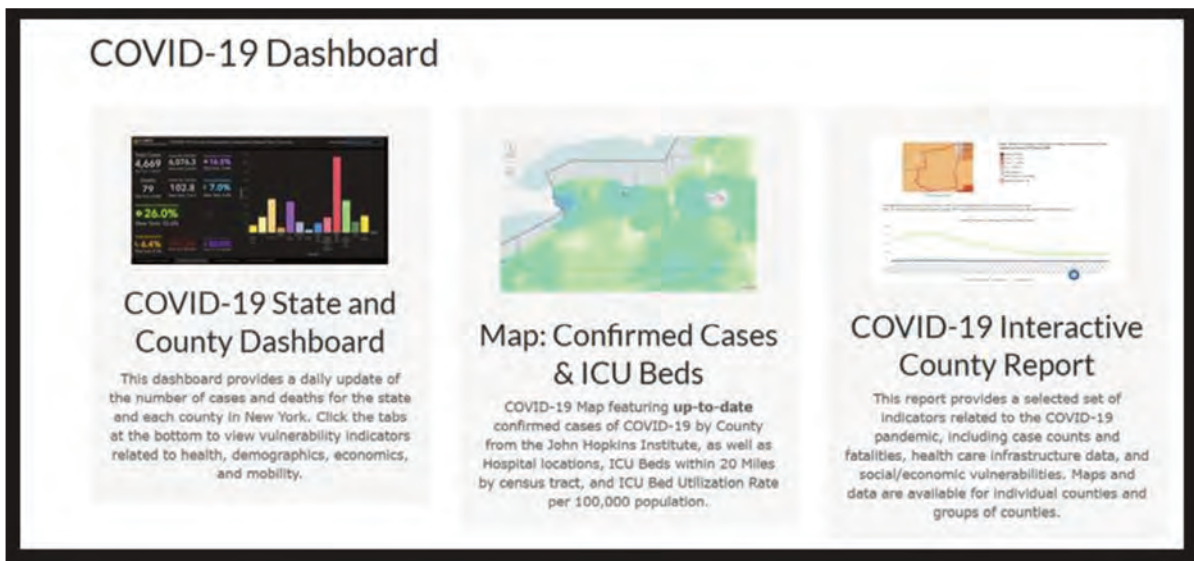
NYSCAA also hosted another course, Conflict Resolution, published in August 2022. This course connects with and is a natural follow-up to the diversity course. COVID-19 has increased employees' stress and frustration, and handling and resolving conflict is more important than ever. The course aids employees in identifying the most common causes of conflict provides techniques for managing workplace conflict and identifies the negative effects of unresolved conflict.

DataHub

NYSCAA's Data Hub provides staff with the quantitative data necessary to develop Community Needs Assessments (CNAs). The Data Hub collects information from various state and Federal sources and compiles it into a single downloadable and editable report.

To support CAAs in assessing, planning, and meeting their communities' rapidly changing needs in response to COVID-19, NYSCAA incorporated additional indicators into the Data Hub Tool, including:

- 185% of the Federal Poverty Level at the School District Level
- 200% of the Federal Poverty Level at the School District Level
- ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) county-level data



These indicators provided CAAs with the data for community members above the 125% poverty level. Also added to the tool was city data for four New York cities: Buffalo, Albany, Rochester and Syracuse. These additional data points assist CAAs as they update their CNAs in response to the effects of COVID-19 in their communities.

The following COVID-19 indicators were also included:

- Cases by County
- Cases (14-Day Trend) by County
- Deaths by County
- Testing (Positive Cases) by County
- Testing Rate by County
- Deaths by Race/Ethnicity

"What was hard was following the many different areas of guidance across agency programs. The variables and constant change were challenging to keep on top of and still offer the services to our community. I feel we are a stronger service provider now and effective at delivering services in today's digital world. I feel lucky that our agency was in a strong position when the pandemic hit and we were able to still be proactive in many areas. Our Board remained very engaged and supportive throughout. And our leaders and staff never gave up and rose up to meeting the needs of our community."

— Pro Action

Conclusion

Today, in the summer of 2022, life appears to be returning to "normal," but normal looks far different from pre-pandemic. Today, remote/hybrid work schedules are in place and widely accepted, social media outreach and online intake and assessment are becoming a standard practice, virtual conferences, services and trainings replace a large number of face-to-face interactions, and internet access, especially for the marginalized, has been recognized as a basic right and not a privilege.

While the pandemic has abated at the moment, the residual effects will take time to overcome. CAAs have and will continue to support their communities and citizens, responding to community needs, delivering services, adapting to expanding customer requests, and increasing community resilience regardless of obstacles. With reimagined services and growing partnerships, New York's Community Action Agencies embrace their mission to help individuals help themselves and rise from poverty to self-sufficiency.

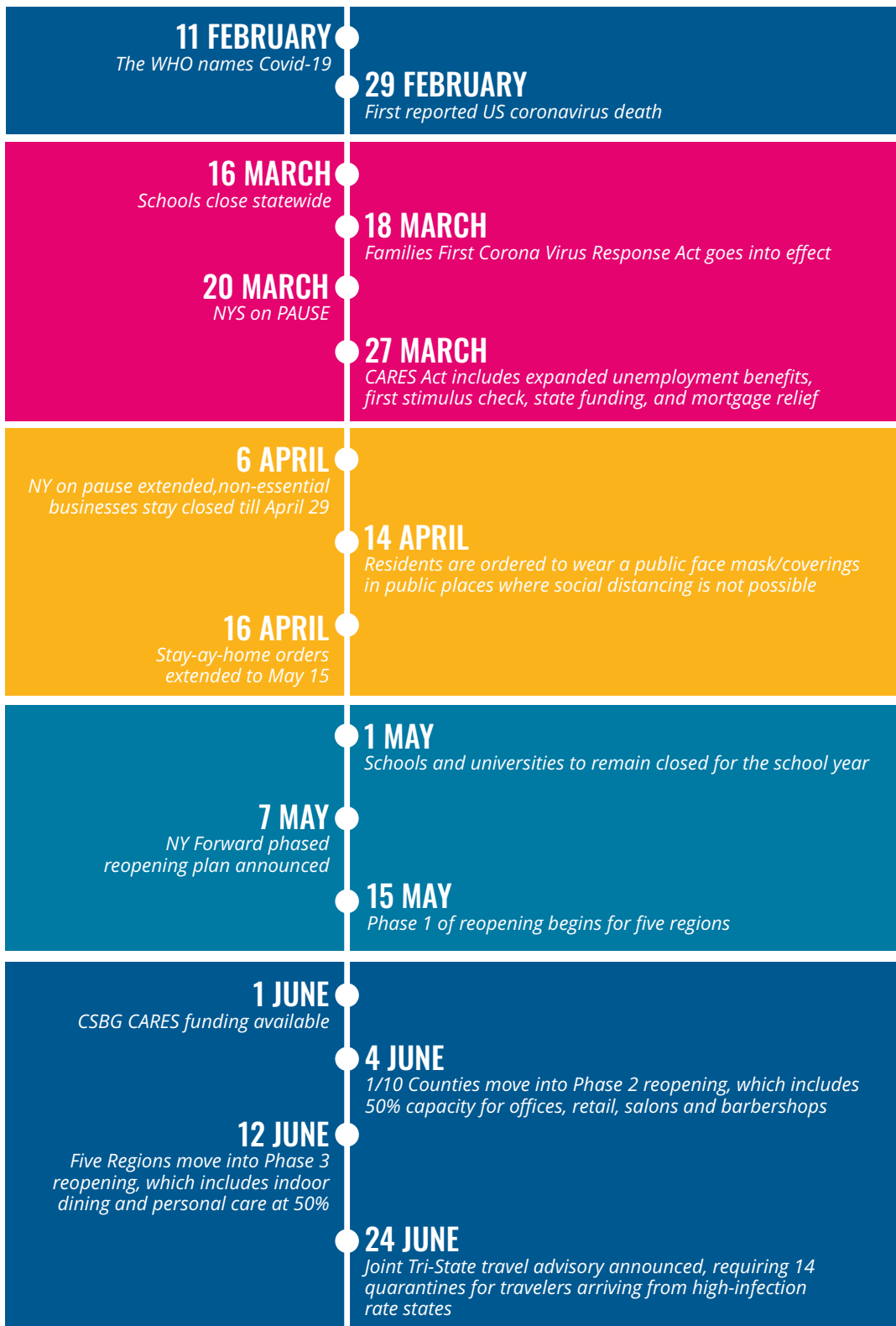
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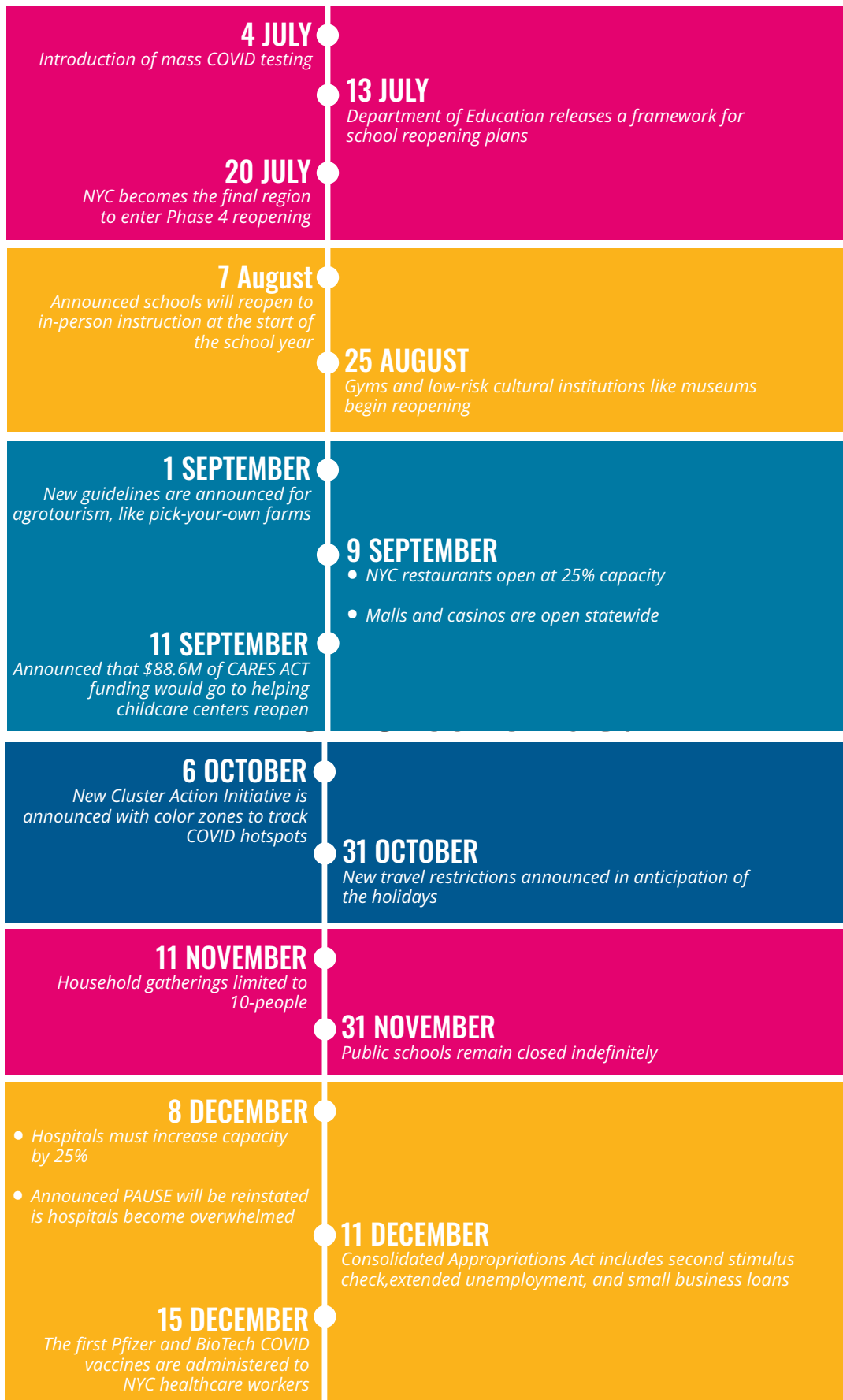
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Overview: A Pandemic Timeline

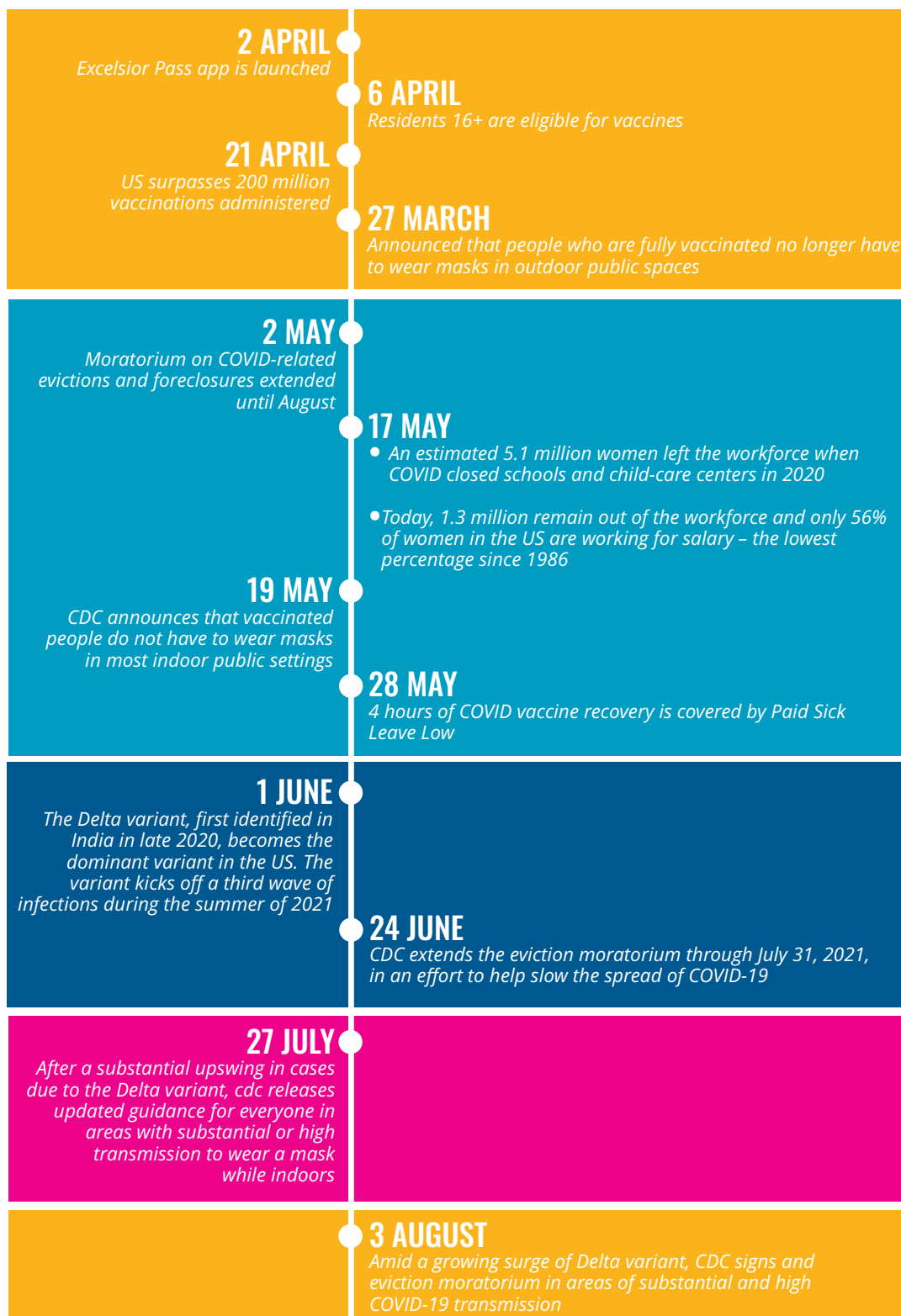
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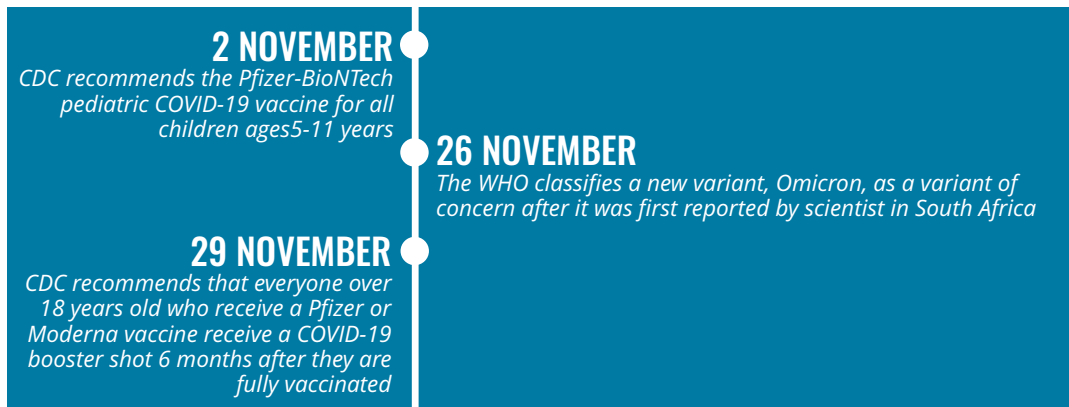




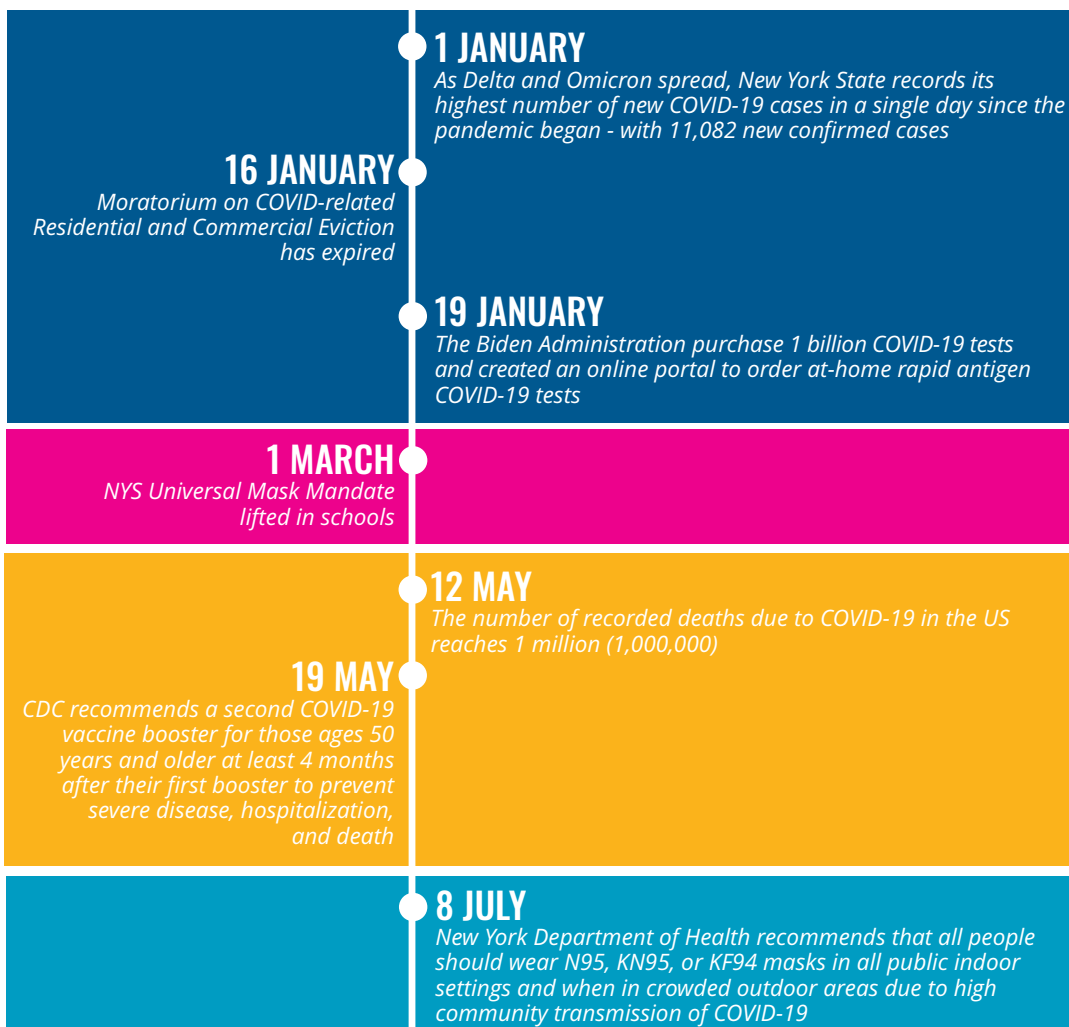
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2022



New York State Community Action Association's

Board of Directors

The NYSCAA Board of Directors is comprised of dedicated individuals from NYSCAA's member agencies. Board members are Executive Directors and key staff from New York State Community Action Agencies.

Officers:

President – Maureen Abbott, Tioga Opportunities, Inc.

Vice President – Debra Schimpf, Schenectady Community Action Program, Inc.

Treasurer – Diane Cooper-Currier, Oswego County Opportunities, Inc.

Secretary – Dan Maskin, Opportunities for Otsego, Inc.

At Large:

Neenah Bland, Albany Community Action Partnership

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Lesley Gooch-Christman, ACCORD Corporation

Diane Hewitt-Johnson, Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc.

Renee Hungerford, Community Action of Orleans & Genesee

Charles Quinn, RECAP, Inc.

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Amy Turner, Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency, Inc.

Nancy Turo, PEACE, Inc.

Jerome Underwood, Action for a Better Community, Inc.

Denis Wilson, Fulmont Community Action Agency, Inc.

Tina Zerbian, Connecting Communities in Action

Many thanks to Grace Cunningham, CARES Program Manager, for compiling this report.

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Connecting Communities in Action

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Community Action Partnership for Dutchess County

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Community Action Planning Council of Jefferson County

CAYUGA & SENECA COUNTIES



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Madison County - Community Action Program



Action for a
Better Community

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SULLIVAN & ULSTER COUNTIES



Ulster County
Community
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PathStone
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RENSSELAER COUNTY



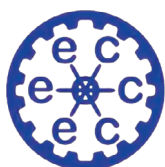
CEO

TIOGA



Tioga
Opportunities, Inc.
(TOI)

NASSAU COUNTY



EOC of Nassau
County

SARATOGA COUNTY



LifeWorks
Community Action

TOMPKINS COUNTY



Tompkins
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SCHENECTADY COUNTY

Saratoga County - LifeWorks Community Action



Schenectady Community
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Creating Opportunity in Partnership

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Yonkers
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Program, Inc.
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OTSEGO COUNTIES



Opportunities for
Otsego, Inc.

SUFFOLK COUNTY



EOC of
Suffolk County

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New York State Community Action Association

2 Charles Blvd. Guilderland, New York 12084

518-690-0491

info@communityaction.org

Jacqueline Orr, CEO

New York State Community Action Association

jorr@nyscommunityaction.org

*Funding support for this report comes from the
Community Service Block Grant provided to
New York State Community Action Association
by the New York State Department of State,
Division of Community Service*



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