

OCTOBER 9, 2019

community action  
association of pennsylvania

22<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL  
self-sufficiency  
awards

SHERATON HARRISBURG HERSHEY HOTEL  
HARRISBURG, PA

# WELCOME

Annually, for the past 22 years, the Community Action Association of Pennsylvania has bestowed Self-Sufficiency Awards recognizing the significant achievements made by the award winners. Their stories reveal not only the focused determination and momentous deeds of those who persevere in their quest to become self-sufficient, but also show how Community Action Agencies (CAAs) support individuals on their journeys.

Self-sufficiency is a measure of the income needed for a family to adequately meet its basic needs – without public or private assistance. This achievement is not reached alone, but through the combined energies of the family and community. CAAs are there to empower the nearly 1.6 million Pennsylvanians living at or below the federal poverty line by providing them with resources to gain skills and opportunities needed to succeed. Every community and every family have unique needs and resources. For 55 years, the 43 CAAs in Pennsylvania have been there, in all 67 counties, identifying community assets, forging partnerships, encouraging volunteerism, and gathering, growing and extending valuable resources in a multitude of ways to empower individuals.

Tonight, CAAP is proud to honor seventeen individuals who demonstrate how hard work, determination and the right support can change lives.

## An Evening of Celebration

Dinner	5:30 p.m.
Caylin Moore, Dinner Speaker	6:00 p.m.
Ceremony	6:30 p.m.
Self-Sufficiency Progress Awards	
Self Sufficiency Awards	
Award Winner Photos by LensCAAP	8:00 p.m.

## Caylin Moore, Speaker

By all rights, Caylin Louis Moore should be dead, in prison, or a gang member. In this inspiring keynote, drawn from his acclaimed book *A Dream Too Big: The Story of an Improbable Journey from Compton to Oxford*, Caylin Moore shares the story of his exodus from one of the most impoverished, gang-infested communities in the United States to becoming a Rhodes Scholar attending Oxford University in England.

After Moore's mother gathered her three young children and fled an abusive husband of nine years, leaving behind a comfortable middle-class life, Moore found himself in a bewildering and dangerous environment. The family lived in a neighborhood ruled by the Bloods, and Caylin often lay awake at night, terrified by both the sounds of gunfire outside and the scratching of rats and roaches moving in the walls. When Caylin's father was convicted of murder and his mother sexually assaulted in the hospital while recovering from open-heart surgery, he was forced to enter adulthood prematurely. Embracing his mother's steely faith in God and education, Caylin skirted the gangs and the endemic violence of Compton to excel on the football field and in the classroom.

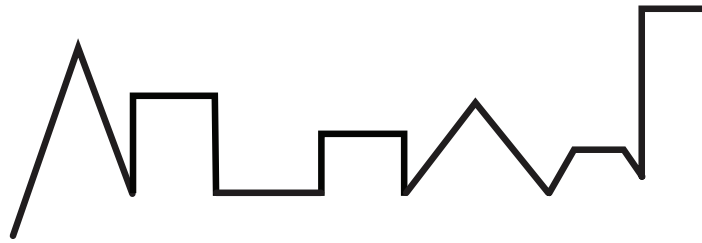
His eye-opening, inspirational story proves that, contrary to what others told him on his journey, there is no such thing as a dream too big.



# 2019

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self-sufficiency

progress award

winners



# BRITTNEY JONES

CENTRAL SUSQUEHANNA OPPORTUNITIES, INC.

Brittney Jones experienced a life of trauma and hardship. As a child, she lost her mother to drug addiction and her father was unable to raise her on his own. She had to be raised by other family members.

After having a son and becoming a single mother, she moved to Central PA to be closer to a friend. Brittney was determined to provide the best life she could for her son. She obtained employment but found that even with a job she was still in need of public assistance as she struggled to make ends meet for herself and her now two children.

In November 2018, after a broken ankle left her unable to work as a personal care aide, Brittney went to Central Susquehanna Opportunities, Inc. (CSO) for assistance. Brittney was falling behind on bills and needed assistance supporting her children. Without employment, she was unable to afford needed car repairs and was left without transportation.

CSO case manager Kathie O'Grady helped Brittney set attainable goals to get back on her feet. She helped Brittney apply for unemployment compensation due to her inability to work with a broken ankle. Brittney attended financial literacy workshops, including budgeting to learn to manage her limited income while unemployed. She worked to enhance her resume and job searching skills. Kathie helped her obtain winter coats and Christmas gifts for her children through CSO's annual drives. CSO was able to pay for her car repairs, enabling her to look for new employment and transport her children to school and medical appointments. Brittney found temporary employment as an office assistant, which provided her with experience in a new field and allowed time for her ankle to heal.

Brittney enrolled in the Getting Ahead program where she attended class on a weekly basis and learned to overcome barriers that keep people in poverty. With her positive attitude and eagerness to learn, Brittney not only graduated but also gave the graduation speech!

With a desire to motivate others and break people's cycles of poverty, Brittney promoted Community Action services and the Getting Ahead program on local radio and news stations by sharing her story.

Brittney's ankle has since healed, and she has secured employment working as a personal care aide and as an office assistant at a home health care agency. She obtained a Limited Liability Company (LLC) license to start her own cleaning business for private homes and businesses. She is actively working with a tutor to earn her GED and is enrolled in an upcoming Staying Ahead program. She has opened a savings account and raised her credit score.

Brittney said of her experience with CSO, "Who would have known so much greatness could come from a bad situation? All it took was a walk into CSO's office and an amazing case manager who gave me that little bit of faith to keep me going. I will be forever grateful for CSO. Thank you for everything you have done for me and my family."



# ALYSSA MAINHART

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP



Growing up in a single-parent home, Alyssa and her brother were often left alone as their mother worked. As a teenager, Alyssa experimented with marijuana, alcohol, and sex. At 16, Alyssa was involved in a car accident which left her without mobility in her left arm and bleeds in her brain. This near-death experience is what first introduced her to opiates. With no self-respect or self-worth, Alyssa went from one abusive relationship to the next as her addiction grew.

In 2010, Alyssa moved to Butler through the VOICE program to escape a violent relationship. She soon met her son's "donor," a man more abusive than any other she had been involved with. Alyssa's addiction grew as she began to experience suicidal thoughts and self-harm. Alyssa had already lost 3 children to the state due to her addiction and abusive relationship. Alyssa attempted suicide twice afterwards: "I was not even a person. I was a shell of a person."

Alyssa's ex continuously got into trouble and she would cover for him, giving herself a criminal record to keep him out of jail. In August 2011, Alyssa turned herself in to the authorities after failing to report for probation after 3 misdemeanors: "I did not want to run anymore, and I didn't know what to do."

During a 43-day incarceration, Alyssa found out she was pregnant with her son, Gunner. After failing 3 innocent children already, Alyssa felt she did not know how to be a mother. She became determined to give her son the best possible life she could provide for him.

Once released from jail, Alyssa entered the Lighthouse program where she gave birth and enrolled in beauty school. Alyssa was later able to go to Cosmetology School and obtain her Cosmetology License. At that time Alyssa was unable to drive, leaving her to walk miles a day to get to school and take her son to daycare.

Alyssa moved to the Catholic Charities Home Again program for single parents who battle mental health problems and addiction. Here she began to build a support group for other recovering addicts.

Alyssa's dad had come back into her life and helped her obtain her driver's license while the Lighthouse Program helped her with a car. Within 2 years of earning her Cosmetology License, Alyssa became assistant manager of a hair salon. However, her income was too inconsistent and she began to seek other options.

Alyssa began to work at an inpatient rehab facility and was able to go back to school where she became President of the Social Work Club and Phi Theta Kappa, one of the largest honor societies in the world. She is pursuing a double major in Social Work and Criminology.

Now, Alyssa volunteers at the same woman's abuse shelter that helped her move to Butler. She gives free haircuts to homeless veterans at the VA's Stand Down event, helps addicts get into treatment, and speaks at facilities in her area. She is also a member of the Community Partnership board of directors!

Alyssa's life has changed drastically. She drives a Jeep, has improved her credit score (which she continues to work on), and is in a healthy relationship with a great man. Alyssa has become a great mother and has primary physical and sole custody of her son. She no longer needs to rely on assistance programs and only receives state aid from CCIS for Gunner's daycare.

6-year-old Gunner is happy, healthy, intelligent and loves to play baseball. He is entering the first grade this year! They have everything they need and some of what they want. Alyssa still has a way to go to achieve the goals she set for herself and Gunner, but she continues to work hard to meet them.

# JOSHUA BOWER

LYCOMING-CLINTON COUNTIES COMMISSION FOR COMMUNITY ACTION, INC. (STEP)

Joshua Bower is an 18-year-old residing in Allenwood, Pennsylvania, who graduated from Montgomery Area High School and Compass Academy in May 2019. Joshua was referred to the STEP Youth Enrichment for Success Program by the Lycoming-Clinton Mental Health Intellectual Disabilities (MHID) Office. Joshua had been placed on Adult Probation for an incident that occurred at the school district and was struggling academically.

In the Youth Enrichment for Success (YES) Program, Joshua worked towards his future goals of completing high school, obtaining sustainable employment, furthering his education, building employment skills, enhancing healthy relationship skills and providing for himself.



In the fall of 2018, Joshua was struggling with the adjustments of being placed on Adult Probation, a new school environment, building relationships and attending counseling sessions. Joshua was in need of community supports to give him the confidence to continue working towards his goals and to encourage him to develop the necessary skills to become a successful young adult.

Joshua initially participated in weekly appointments with his Family Navigator as he completed the necessary enrollment and assessments to work towards gaining self-sufficiency. The assessments allowed for barriers to be addressed and a goal plan to be developed. With several months left until graduation, Joshua discussed the challenges of starting at a new school and the difficulties of planning for his future after high school. Joshua attended Community Services Group for individual counseling, met with his Adult Probation Officer on a regular basis and engaged with Justice Works staff at Compass Academy.

After several months of meeting with a Family Navigator, Joshua worked to develop and enhance his relationship building skills. Joshua continued to attend school regularly and gradually increased his academic performance. Joshua decided that he wanted to obtain a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) and was provided with a copy of the study manual and incentive check to complete the testing process. Joshua continues to work on the final Hazmat section of the CDL permit.

While enrolled at Compass Academy, Joshua participated in community service that supported the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank. After several months of meeting with a Family Navigator, attending school, working towards academic success and developing employment skills, Joshua was hired part-time at Ralph S. Alberts Company, Inc. He began attending school in the mornings and work in the late afternoons. After graduation, Joshua was offered a full-time position with the company based on his performance and attendance.

Joshua plans on continuing his full-time employment at Ralph S. Alberts Company, Inc. and working towards the completion of his CDL Permit. Once completed with the permit test, Joshua will have the ability to practice his skills and obtain his license which will allow for advancements within Ralph S. Alberts Company, Inc.

Joshua stated that he "really appreciated his senior year of high school and that every day he was happy to be surrounded by community partners and enjoyed their willingness to help him." Joshua further stated that he "hopes that he has a better future after school and is looking forward to full-time employment." Joshua continues to work towards remaining self-sufficient now that he has a strong and supportive foundation leading toward a bright future ahead!



# MARITZA CHRISTIAN

## PATHSTONE CORPORATION



Maritza Christian, a single mother of two boys and one daughter, moved from an area where her family was confronted with drugs, violence, high crime and health issues. Maritza's parents offered her a place to stay temporarily in Monroe County, PA.

Maritza now had the challenge of securing stable housing, transportation, childcare and employment. Maritza sought emergency help through the County Assistance Office and was eligible to receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Shortly thereafter, she was referred to the EARN program which provided a full family assessment and a service plan highlighting her short and long-term goals.

Maritza was a bit skeptical early on. However, she was excited about participating in activities and workshops provided by PathStone and the CaerLink One Stop Center. After taking advantage of a series of these programs, Maritza felt she had the confidence and tools needed to seek employment.

After several interviews, Maritza was offered a position through One-Stop Staffing as a warehouse associate at the Walmart Warehouse in Tannersville, PA. She was offered the first shift, 40 hours per week with a starting rate of \$10.00 per hour. This offer presented mixed emotions. Maritza was happy to have a job but now needed an action plan for transportation. The EARN program case worker was ready to assist in designing her plan.

A program caseworker assisted with transportation for the first week of employment. She temporarily had an Uber service from her residence to daycare, as the walk to public transportation would have been over two miles with three children. From her children's daycare, she was able to catch a bus to her job site. When Maritza's daycare provider could not accommodate her work schedule, the EARN Program Caseworker assisted her with finding a new daycare that could.

Maritza continued to work hard at the Walmart warehouse and was able to save enough money for a car. She obtained a PA driver's license and was now in control of her transportation to daycare and her job site.

Maritza's perfect attendance at the work site, strong work ethic and excellent job performance opened the doors for her to be a direct hire by Walmart Distribution with a pay increase. Maritza also trained as a forklift operator and received accreditation from Walmart.

Maritza continues to visit the EARN program and in her own words she stated:

"When I arrived here, I had no motivation, did not believe in myself and [the EARN program] gave me back the confidence that I needed to move forward, work hard, plan and make good choices that continue to keep me on track of my goals. I already have a car and now I'm in the process of looking for my own place. This is an awesome program, I'm thankful to have met you. I feel part of a family and will always be grateful for the help I got, not just the services, but the emotional support received. You helped me believe in myself and get my confidence back."

Maritza now is paying it forward by helping other individuals she meets at work with transportation services whenever possible. It is a pleasure to see Maritza and her family on the road to self-sufficiency!





# NEWTON EDWARD MULL

## SCHUYLKILL COMMUNITY ACTION

Before coming to Schuylkill Community Action (SCA), Newton Mull had a history of drug and alcohol abuse. He was a self-described functional alcoholic, able to maintain employment with the PA Liquor Control Board. Newt also used methamphetamines to level himself out from the abuse of alcohol.

In 2009, Newt filed for divorce and lost his job as a result of a theft-return scheme to buy methamphetamines and bath salts. The addiction continued and Newt was incarcerated multiple times.



Newt's drug abuse continued until he was implicated in a burglary. He was provided an opportunity to participate in the Schuylkill County Drug Treatment program over serving jail time, but his acceptance was contingent on the approval of the burglary victim. To Newt's surprise and gratitude, the victim agreed.

In March 2017, Newt was admitted to the Drug Treatment Court. With the support of his loved ones, Newt committed to his treatment: "My family never came to visit me in jail, but when I was in treatment my father and son would come visit me every week."

After completing in-patient treatment, Newt found employment at a local warehouse and purchased a vehicle. Due to a slow-down in February 2018, Newt was laid off but was hired at another warehouse in March.

Despite his success, Newt realized his passion was not in warehousing. As he worked full-time, Newt began taking classes to become a Certified Recovery Specialist (CRS). On June 10, 2018, after 9 weeks of hard work, Newt officially achieved the certification.

In December 2018, Newt moved into a subsidized apartment in Pottsville with his son, Jacob. In January, Newt began working as a Forensic CRS at Clinical Outcomes Group, Inc. Through his position, Newt sits on the Schuylkill County Forensic Task Force seeking solutions to the area's drug problem. Newt also works as a CRS with Columbia Montour Snyder Union service system where he encourages others to seek treatment.

Newt remains active in AA and continues to be invested in his own recovery and that of others: "I do what I do because of the victims who gave me a second chance. This is my opportunity to begin making amends to them by helping others struggling with addiction."

Newt has two future goals in mind: purchase a home and earn an associate degree to provide counseling for those struggling with dependency. Once Newt purchases his new home, he will be entirely self-sufficient.

Newt attributes his success to his support system and past success: "I know what it's like to have and to lose. You learn how to better deal with a lot of things when you are sober." Newt said of his Case Plan Specialist, Susan Grow: "She truly cared about me and about my success. She was like a mother to me, always there to support me along the way."

Ms. Grow added, "Newt's transformation has been amazing. He wanted to do well, he wanted to follow advice and guidance. He took his sobriety seriously and met all expectations of the program [...] He was able to accept constructive criticism and thrived off praise."

When Newt returns to work in The Schuylkill County Jail, a place he once called home, he gets asked by his clients "how did you do it, how did you get clean and become successful?" Newt's response is simple and straight forward "You've got to learn to listen." Newt has been clean since December 10, 2016.

self-sufficiency  
award winners

# LISA DIDIANO

## ALLEGHENY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

After 18 years of dedicated employment at a large financial company, Lisa Didiano was informed that her position was eliminated and she would be laid off with one year of severance pay. Understandably, Lisa felt distraught at the loss of a career that she loved and had expected to retire from. She was anxious and worried about having to start over, attend job interviews, and ensure her financial stability.

Lisa diligently job searched yet struggled to obtain employment. Eventually, Lisa depleted her entire checking and savings accounts and maxed out all her credit cards to provide for her basic needs. Lisa felt “embarrassed, depressed, and helpless” about her financial situation and the inability to provide for herself. She did not know where to turn for help.



Lisa was referred to Supports for Success for help and resources to assist her in gaining employment and achieving her financial goals. Lisa enrolled in the program in April 2018, her primary goal being to obtain full-time employment with a living wage or higher. Iris Grilho, a Supports Specialist, met with Lisa multiple times to address immediate needs, including emergency food and utility assistance. Lisa was referred to the Pantry Network of Eastern Suburbs (PNES) in Turtle Creek for food and hygiene assistance, and was provided immediate assistance through LIHEAP, SNAP, and utility assistance programs.

When she enrolled in Supports for Success, Lisa was behind on property taxes, had a 10-day utility shut off notice, and no source of income. Despite her financial struggles and constant fear of “losing everything”, Lisa was steadfast and determined to achieve her goal of obtaining full-time employment and improving her quality of life. “I knew my worth and would not give up,” Lisa said.

Through Supports for Success, Lisa was able to connect with resources that assisted with basic needs and was provided the transportation assistance she needed to continue achieving her education and employment goals. 2 ½ months after enrollment, Lisa obtained employment as an Administrative Assistant, earning over 300% of the Federal Poverty Line.

During the 30-day transition period before her participation in the program ended in August 2018, Lisa was able to focus on her financial goals and work toward improving her credit. She paid off her credit card and other account balances, began investing in a 401K retirement plan, and set and achieved a monthly savings goal.

Over a year later, Lisa continues to excel in a job she loves, has good credit, and continues to work toward securing her financial future. “I learned to be humble, to accept help, and to be grateful for the resources and supports that are available to people in the community,” said Lisa. Lisa expressed feeling “blessed and forever grateful” for the support and compassion of Iris and Supports for Success.



# THELMA TURNER

## BLUEPRINTS



Thelma Turner first reached out to Blueprints for rental assistance in 2013. Her struggles stemmed from years of substance addiction, but she was committed to putting her life back together after attaining sobriety.

In order to receive rental assistance and avoid an eviction, Thelma was required to meet with a caseworker for a financial coaching session. After the required session, Thelma decided to schedule additional sessions with the caseworker so she could learn how to develop and better manage her personal budget.

By 2014, Thelma enrolled in the agency's Getting Ahead classes. As part of the 16-week course, Thelma completed a self-assessment of her life and utilized that assessment to identify areas to improve. She developed a "future story" through the class, where she wrote, "So, I happily choose to let go of what's comfortable and what's familiar and venture into uncharted territory for the sake of my future. The gift I am leaving this class with is a feeling of empowerment."

Despite some medical setbacks that required hospitalizations, Thelma never lost sight of her "future story". She kept in touch with Blueprints' staff throughout her medical challenges, even talking through budgeting challenges over the telephone while in the hospital.

In 2016, Thelma enrolled in Blueprints' Adult Education program and the Home Ownership Center. While Thelma had her high school diploma, she was committed to brushing up on her educational skills as she focused on securing employment. Through the Home Ownership Center, Thelma started meeting with a housing counselor to begin the process of repairing her credit so she could one day secure a mortgage and purchase her first home.

In 2017, Thelma was hired as a social worker at the SPHS Care Center where she frequently refers clients to Blueprints programs; she has evolved into a true Blueprints ambassador.

In 2018, Thelma enrolled in the agency's Matched Savings Account program in order to save towards her dream of home ownership.

This year, Thelma officially closed a home loan. Construction on the home she is building through the Redevelopment Authority of Washington County is expected to be completed in time for Thelma and her family to celebrate the holidays there. In addition to maintaining her employment, building her home and spending time with her family and friends, Thelma is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Social Work.

# EMILY CITRON

BUCKS COUNTY OPPORTUNITY COUNCIL, INC.

Emily was a single mom of three children when she learned about Bucks County Opportunity Council's Economic Self-Sufficiency (ES) Program. A participant in the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program, Emily also participated in the Housing Authority's Family Self-Sufficiency Program, taking advantage of the escrow account that would be available once she relinquished her Housing Choice Voucher. Emily had previously completed two years of coursework toward her social work degree; subsidized housing became a critical support while she returned to school. Emily was determined to complete her education and gain skills necessary to leave poverty permanently.

From the first meeting of the ES Program, it was apparent to Emily's Self-Sufficiency Coach that she was smart, motivated, and hard working. Emily worked part-time while attending school and raising her three children on her own. As a Hospice Nurse Aide, she demonstrated care and compassion, but her pay was not enough to cover her budget deficit.



After enrolling in the ES Program, Emily and her family were matched with an Adopt-A-Family sponsor who provided back to school and holiday assistance for her children. BCOC provided aid through car insurance, gas gift cards to offset school and work travel costs, and food assistance. Emily has demonstrated reciprocity by assisting BCOC in Poverty Simulations.

In May 2018, Emily graduated from West Chester University with her bachelor's degree in Social Work. In May 2019, she graduated from Widener University with her master's degree in Social Work. She obtained a full-time job with a living wage as a Service Coordinator with AmeriHealth. Emily is free of all government subsidies, including relinquishing her lifetime Housing Choice Voucher. Emily has now set her sights on home ownership!

# JENNIFER FRANZE

## COMMISSION ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY



Jennifer did not come from very stable beginnings. When her family left her at the age of sixteen, Jennifer found herself on her own without support. This period of her life would end up helping to shape her into the strong and independent woman she became.

As a full-time college student and mother of one, Jennifer found herself in a difficult situation when she became pregnant with her second child. Jennifer wasn't sure how she would be able to support herself and her growing family while continuing her education. Jennifer sought assistance through TANF and SNAP from the Luzerne County Assistance Office. She was then referred to the Work Ready program at the Commission on Economic Opportunity to gain the assistance she needed.

At home, Jennifer battled emotional and mental health issues as well as domestic violence. Jennifer knew that she needed a safe place for her daughter Victoria to go during the day while Jennifer participated in the program and went to school. Childcare provided through the program helped her focus on her family's future.

Jennifer also enrolled in vocational education where she attended courses and received additional assistance. Jennifer knew that her education was only part of the solution to her current situation. She used the resources provided by CEO's Work Ready program to build her resume, practice interviewing, and grow her communication and interpersonal skills. Jennifer worked incredibly hard to meet her goals, often exceeding required hours.

Depression is an issue that Jennifer has dealt with for most of her life and it reemerged occasionally while she was with Work Ready. However, she was able to overcome this because of her ambition to create a better life for her children: the life that was not provided for her growing up.

In the Spring of 2018, Jennifer graduated with an associate degree in Business Administration. With the skills she gained from Work Ready, and all that she learned while in school, Jennifer began working as a CPA assistant at an accounting firm. Jennifer is still happily employed with this company to this day.

In November of last year, Jennifer's home burned down, leaving her family in a difficult and tragic situation. Employed full-time, financially stable and the proud mother of Victoria and Vincent, Jennifer is now focused on increasing her credit score so that she would be in a better position to purchase a new home for her family. "Nothing really stands in my way. I'm like a locomotive, I just keep going."

Jennifer considers her time in Work Ready as a growing experience. She took herself out of a difficult situation and was able to achieve self-sufficiency through hard work and dedication. She thanks her caseworkers at Work Ready, for always being there to help her as well as her children, for being the driving force behind her success. The Work Ready staff consider her to be one of the most motivated individuals who has ever come through the door. Jennifer has overcome every obstacle placed in her way, and there is no doubt that she will continue to do so moving forward.



# LISETTE COLON

## COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP OF LANCASTER COUNTY

Lisette Colon was just 17 years old when she gave birth to her first child, Jailene, and the hospital nurse navigator referred her to the Community Action Partnership of Lancaster County. Lisette first came to CAP in 1996 for assistance in obtaining WIC benefits and received help in receiving child care subsidy through the Child Care Information Services (CCIS) program. She also participated in the Teen ELECT program (Education Leading to Employment and Career Training).

Obtaining CCIS was a flagstone in Lisette's path to self-sufficiency. YWCA Lancaster operated a child care in the high school which accepted CCIS subsidy, helping Lisette to finish high school. Not long after her birth, Jailene's father was sentenced to a lengthy prison term. Lisette became involved in an abusive relationship. A representative from CAP's Domestic Violence Services aided Lisette in obtaining a Protection from Abuse order.



In 2000, Lisette gave birth to her second daughter, Gisselle (Gigi). After Gigi's birth, Lisette struggled with postpartum depression which caused her to lose her job and apartment. Gigi's father was unable to provide a home for them and she soon found herself living in her car with her two young daughters.

Lisette found a job that paid well enough for her to rent her own apartment, but she couldn't afford the security deposit. CAP was able to provide her with assistance on the deposit. Lisette continued to utilize CCIS to ensure her girls were well cared for while she worked.

After serving eight years in prison, Jailene's father was released on parole and reunited with Lisette and the kids. After getting married, they had two additional children, Annaliese and Izabella. Her husband worked as a carpenter and Lisette worked for the Family Services now known as Pressley Ridge. However, with a family of six, their wages were not enough to remain financially independent and they still relied on WIC and CCIS to meet the needs of the children.

Lisette knew that she needed to continue her education if she was going to increase her income and become self-sufficient. She enrolled in an 18-month program with a goal of obtaining an associate degree in Business. In 2008, Lisette earned her degree and went to work at the YWCA Lancaster as a Finance Associate. Her role was later expanded into the role of Billing and Receivables Manager.

After the economy took a downturn, Lisette's husband often struggled to find work. Not long after their fifth child, Carlos, was born, Lisette discovered that her husband was using illegal drugs regularly. He became unreliable for assisting with family needs and financial support. Lisette found the courage to end the marriage and again found herself a single mother, this time with five children.

Lisette had to rely on public assistance again, but only for a short period. Despite all of her personal challenges, she continued to focus on her job and excelled at her work. In 2018, she was promoted to Finance Manager. In the course of ten years, Lisette nearly doubled her income. She owns a home and a reliable vehicle large enough to safely transport her whole family. She no longer needs the assistance she had relied on in the past but recognizes the role that assistance played in getting her to where she is. She also knows the assistance only worked because she worked too: "There are programs out there to help you, but not to enable you. You have to push forward and do the work for yourself, or you'll end up right back where you were."

Lisette is proud to provide for her family and to teach them the lessons she learned the hard way. "I want to make sure my children never fall like I did. I will always push my kids to be the best they can be."

# KRISTA & DAN GREEN

## COMMUNITY PROGRESS COUNCIL



In 2004, Dan left the classrooms at Northeastern High School for the last time. At just 17 years old and a high school junior, he was leaving school to pursue full-time work to support his girlfriend, Krista, and their infant son.

“My wife and I moved out when we were 18 years old, and have been on our own ever since,” Dan said. “The thing I always told my wife, ‘We are not going to be a stereotype.’”

Initially, Dan struggled to find a job with a livable wage, while Krista cared for their young son. Years later, Dan and Krista were working hard to keep their family afloat with odd jobs, but the need for

reliable childcare for their son was becoming increasingly important so they could find and keep sustainable employment. When the Greens learned about Community Progress Council’s Head Start program for 3- and 4-year-olds, little did they realize it would be a giant steppingstone toward economic self-sufficiency.

Dan volunteered in his son’s classroom as often as he could, and his involvement led to an opportunity to become an assistant teacher with the Head Start program. Soon after, CPC’s Head Start program paid for Dan to obtain his teaching certificate with Penn State York, and he continued as a teacher for the following five years. Krista remained active on Head Start’s Policy Council, including being a state representative for CPC. Both were part of Community Progress Council’s inaugural “Getting Ahead in a Just-Getting-By World” course as part of the agency’s new Self-Sufficiency Program.

Throughout their early years, Dan and Krista’s dream to find a home for their growing family eluded the young couple. Dan recalls a time when the trailer park they were living in was sold, and they were told they had three months to move out: “We drove around not knowing what to do,” said Dan. One day, the family pulled up to a stop sign and looked over and saw a rental sign for an apartment – a place that would bridge the gap to future possibilities.

A big break came when a family member rented a home for them to live in at a very affordable cost. They lived in that house for nine years before realizing a dream to own their own home.

The Greens worked through Community Progress Council’s Housing Counseling program and attended a Homebuyer Education Workshop. Dan and Krista eventually turned to the financial lender who spoke during the day-long class and secured a grant and a 0% interest loan from the Pennsylvania Housing and Finance Agency (PHFA) to help them purchase their new house.

Today, Dan makes ink at Greydon, a local company that manufactures printing machines for labeling and packaging. Krista works part time at a local café. Their family of five enjoys their quaint blue colonial home just a few miles outside of York.

# CHOTTA WATSON

FAYETTE COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY, INC.

Chotta Watson is married to Tommy, and together they have a young child, Alessa. In January 2017, Chotta went to Fayette County Community Action Agency, Inc. (FCCAA) as an intern in Social Work from West Virginia University. At the time, she and her family were living in subsidized housing due to having very limited income in her household. Her husband was working, but not at a high paying job. The family's biggest challenge was to live on their limited income while paying their bills and completing the internship. Chotta knew about FCCAA because she had received Women, Infants and Children (WIC) services through them for her daughter. When Chotta joined the agency as an intern, her main goal was to complete the internship and find full-time employment to support her family while her husband went back to school to learn welding. Chotta also wanted to move out of subsidized housing.



During Chotta's internship, she worked in the housing department where she was taught by housing case managers about the multiple programs in that department and the agency. Chotta showed an aptitude for learning and quickly became an asset to the department. She also helped others within the agency through her willingness to learn and grow. She was an integral part of the agency's annual Quality Review process.

Because of the support of various project managers and directors at FCCAA, Chotta learned about every program at the agency. As her internship came to a close, FCCAA had an opening in the housing department for a case worker. Chotta applied for the position and was hired in May 2017. Her internship provided her with an inside edge for the position because she already knew many of the data collection systems that are used. She took over as a case manager for a program that provides ongoing housing case management to clients. Her transition into this position was seamless. She used her understanding of living in poverty to assist her clients. With Chotta's new full-time position, she was able to support her family while Tommy went back to school.

Tommy completed his welding program and gained full time employment. Chotta and her family were able to move out of subsidized housing and into a rental unit, where they have been for over two years now. Chotta is still at FCCAA and continues to be an asset to the housing department. She has taken the lead on several projects because she has shown initiative and drive. Chotta's current project manager feels that "she is a great worker who really takes pride in everything she does. She has the drive to go far in this agency." Chotta credits FCCAA for aiding her and her family to change their lives for the better.



# JUBETSY MOORE

PATHSTONE CORPORATION



In November 2017, Jubetsy Moore began her journey of self-sufficiency. Jubetsy, a single mother of four, was a victim of domestic violence. In her distress, Jubetsy was not mentally prepared for the course her life was about to take. She found herself without a job or financial means to support her family.

Jubetsy reached out to the Chester County Assistance Office for emergency services and was eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Shortly thereafter she was referred to the Employment, Advancement and Retention Network (EARN) program.

PathStone's EARN staff educated her on the services and resources available to her. During her assessment period it was noted that Jubetsy had childcare concerns, anxiety and domestic issues. She was immediately connected to Child Care Information Services, Domestic Violence Therapist, legal aid and Family Services.

The EARN program staff continued to work with Jubetsy in multiple areas with regards to Job Readiness/ Job Search and Customer Service Training. In partnership with Chester County CaerLink and the Financial Stability Center, Jubetsy attended job fairs and workshops on resume building, networking, living healthier and financial literacy. Jubetsy also attained several certifications while enrolled in EARN.

Jubetsy became a very active and strong advocate for participants of the EARN program. She attended the Department of Human Services (DHS) Town Hall meeting in Harrisburg, PA, and participated in a work group to identify the hurdles TANF participants encounter while navigating the various systems. She also attended a PathStone Board Meeting where she spoke on overcoming obstacles and navigating the path to self-sufficiency. The opportunities and experience Jubetsy encountered while in the EARN program gave her hope for the future. Jubetsy was hired by ChesPenn Health Services at \$13.50 per hour in May 2018.

However, Ms. Moore had a dream of becoming a nail technician, which she pursued while working at ChesPenn. Jubetsy obtained three nail certifications and has recently worked alongside celebrity nail technicians David Valentino and Jenny Bui.

Now, Jubetsy is in the process of obtaining her license to facilitate her own personal nail seminars. She is employed at Royalty Hair Salon in Downingtown, PA, earning \$18.00 per hour.

Ms. Moore is a strong believer that all things are possible and says the biggest lesson she has learned is never to give up: "obstacles are meant to be confronted and resolved so that opportunities can be created". She is thankful she had the staff of the PathStone EARN program in her corner and who believed in her and her dreams!

# TINA COULSON

## SCHUYLKILL COMMUNITY ACTION

When Tina came to Schuylkill Community Action (SCA) for assistance, she was homeless and living on friends' couches and in her storage unit. Tina had previously earned a bachelor's degree in Psychology and a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling with a focus on Mental Health from Penn State University while working full-time and raising a young child.



Tina was working as a counselor when her father was diagnosed with cancer. He was able to successfully beat cancer, but radiation had taken a toll and he developed dementia. Tina was responsible for her father's doctor's appointments and day-to-day care. Her father was placed in a nursing home, but received substandard care so Tina moved him into her home to create a hospice environment.

This came at an expense as Tina drained her savings and pensions to care for her father. Tina's father passed in 2014 and she was left to pay for her father's funeral, draining all of her financial assets. On top of this, Tina's employer had let her go due to time missed caring for her father.

Looking for a fresh start, Tina decided to move to Philadelphia. She worked multiple jobs as a nanny, pre-school teacher and UPS loader to pay rent while her son attended college. After her son moved out, her rent increased so Tina had to make the decision to either stay and struggle or move back to Schuylkill County to restart.

In September 2018, Tina chose to move back to Schuylkill County and was transferred to the UPS facility in Schuylkill County. She reached out to a friend in the area, who offered her a place to stay in exchange for rent and caring for her friend's partner.

However, Tina did not know that her friend had developed a methamphetamine addiction and used narcotics daily. Tina's housing situation became less secure and her friend was taking additional money from her to finance his addiction. After the holidays, Tina was laid off by UPS, leaving her without financial resources. Once she drained her resources, Tina's relationship with her friend became abusive. In March 2019, Tina was abruptly kicked out after confronting her friend about his drug abuse.

For the first time in her life, Tina was homeless. Instead of being discouraged, Tina asked for help and made her first visit to SCA in April 2019. There she worked with a case manager, was assessed for homeless services and referred to SCA's Rapid Rehousing program.

Within a month, Tina secured an apartment in downtown Pottsville and found employment with the Redco Group working part-time with adults with intellectual disabilities in a group home. She was able to achieve full-time employment working as a Nurse's Assistant at the Lehigh Valley hospital.

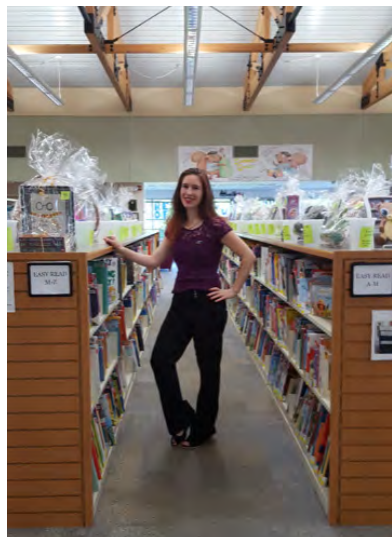
Tina was able to work her way off subsidized benefits and developed goals for moving forward. She has set her sights on purchasing a vehicle in the near future and would like to further her education, possibly to pursue a Doctorate in Clinical Neuropsychology or a graduate Nursing Program.

Tina feels she had advantages others were not afforded. She says of her resolve and success: "I was naïve enough not to lose hope, stubborn enough not to quit, and loved enough to believe in myself." Tina recognized the influence of her SCA Case Manager, Jon Miller, stating "if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't have felt comfortable addressing my issues and sharing my story."

Mr. Miller added, "Since her enrollment into the Rapid Rehousing Program, Tina has displayed determination and tenacity and has kept a positive attitude regardless of her current housing situation. She is dedicated to improving her life and helping others along the way."

# FAWN CONTRERAS

SCRANTON-LACKAWANNA HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AGENCY, INC.



Fawn Contreras and her husband, Raul, have two children: Tala MaryLouise, age 10, and Delilah Angel, age 6. In 2012, after learning of the Head Start Program from her aunt, Fawn enrolled her first child in the Scranton-Lackawanna Human Development Agency Head Start Program and later enrolled as a pregnant mom for the Early Head Start Program.

In 2013, Fawn's family moved to North Carolina for a job opportunity offered to Raul. Unfortunately, he lost his job the week before Christmas. The Contreras moved back to Pennsylvania, where they would live with family until Raul found employment. At that time, Fawn re-enrolled both children in Head Start.

Early Head Start and Head Start gave Tala MaryLouise and Delilah Angel an education that would otherwise have been unavailable to them. The program supported Fawn in getting her children Medical Insurance through Medical Assistance, and Speech Services through the Local Intermediate Unit.

Head Start also helped the family when times were tough during the holidays with presents for the children. There were numerable Parent Educators, Family Engagement Workers and Coordinators, Teachers, Aides, the Program Director and the Transportation Coordinator who worked with Fawn's children and family to help them remove barriers and set their goals for the future.

Fawn served on the Policy Council as Treasurer and Board Liaison, which gave her the confidence to believe in herself and do more for her family. Fawn attended the Pennsylvania Head Start Conference and realized she wanted to be more involved with the program. In 2017, she was hired as a part-time employee. "The people at Head Start were wonderful and pushed me to keep moving forward inspiring me to make new goals for myself. Though [there was] a lot of crying at times, [I was] determine[ed] [and] I persisted."

The Contreras dreamed of owning their own home and affording their bills. The family found a "Rent to Own" home, but the landlord did not uphold his side of the agreement and evicted them from the home. Fawn and Raul found another "Rent to Own" home, but it did not pass inspection. Finally, in 2017, with the help of Raul's good credit, they found a home they were able to purchase.

Fawn's passion for books and literacy led her to begin writing children's books and find full-time employment at the Valley Community Library.

Now, Fawn is in a place where she can provide for her family, afford a home and two cars, and is free of all public assistance. Fawn is incredibly proud of where she is today.

Fawn has set a goal to return to school for a master's degree in Library Science and attend workshops and conferences to sharpen her writing skills to fulfill her dream of becoming an author. She would also love one day to own a farm.



# BETSY CORREA

SOUTH CENTRAL COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMS, INC.

Betsy Correa, her husband Frankie, and their two sons came to SCCAP's Franklin County Homeless Shelter in November of 2014. Frankie had lost his full-time job and the family moved to Chambersburg to find sustainable employment. They stayed with Betsy's friend while they looked for work, but after a week the landlord said they had to move. With no family in Pennsylvania and no other friends in the area, they showed up at the Homeless shelter.

The staff at the shelter welcomed and worked to support them as they got back on their feet. The couple worked on barriers and budgets, and searched for employment. Frankie found work and the couple found housing in January. The shelter program assisted with the security deposit and first month's rent. During their last week at the shelter, the family was invited to an informational meeting to talk about the Circles program. Intrigued by the program, Betsy and Frankie decided to sign up.



Betsy thrived in the Getting Ahead classes. She loved thinking outside of the box and contributed a lot to the class. She worked hard to develop a future story, set goals, and she and Frankie worked hard to meet them: "Support Circles and the Getting Ahead classes were an eye opener for me," said Betsy, "I saw possibilities that I did not know were there. With everyone else around I knew I wasn't alone. It still feels like an extended family for me."

At graduation from Getting Ahead, Betsy did a beautiful mental model that shows the up and down nature of poverty; she is a creative and gifted artist! Betsy was matched with allies (community volunteers who offer emotional support and increased networks) but Betsy was also a support to other families. Still life was hard. The family did not have transportation and when Betsy found work, she had to walk.

"I can remember a long, difficult season where Betsy would walk all the way across town to be able to get to work in unbearable weather," said Jon Raber, the Support Circles Coordinator, "you could see the tired exhaustion when stopping in at Circles weekly meetings, and yet she would continue to face things head on, always keeping hope, always staying positive. Still today that is the attitude she has. She is someone who inspires that in all of us."

As Betsy and Frankie worked their goals, life began to improve. Their sons enrolled in soccer and Betsy got a position at the local Federally Qualified Health Clinic as a bilingual front office translator. Due to Betsy's work ethic and skills, she has continued to move up and receive salary increases. Their life stabilized, but then Frankie became ill. His health began to deteriorate. After lots of tests, they found Frankie has a degenerative disease, a terrible blow to the young family. Betsy worked with her employer to be able to take time off work to get him the care and support he needs.

Being a caregiver and working full-time is tough, but Betsy is thankful to be able to provide for her family and provide a happy home for her husband and children. She has found that she can rely on others when needed and receives a tremendous amount of emotional support from her mother. Betsy and Frankie face incredible challenges and adversity yet have the resilience that inspires many.

Jay, another SCCAP employee, described the couple: "Betsy and Frankie - their joy, their strength, the palpable love they have for one another and their family - exemplify ways we all want to live. We should all pay attention and learn from them."

# KATHI JOHNSON

## WESTMORELAND COMMUNITY ACTION



In August 2000, Kathi Johnson enrolled her daughter, Shayna, in Westmoreland Community Action (WCA)'s home-based Head Start program. Kathi was involved in Shayna's education and the program. Kathi also received weekly visits from a Home Visitor.

Kathi decided to move to the City of Jeannette where Shayna was enrolled in the Head Start Center and a new Home Visitor, Elizabeth Clark, was assigned. In September 2001, Kathi's world began to crumble as her husband began an affair and subsequently took her children from her. Kathi became distraught, suicidal, and homicidal towards her husband. With Elizabeth's help, Kathi admitted herself to the Westmoreland Hospital Mental Health Unit for 72-hours. Kathi took a two-week break to sort out her life with Elizabeth's help. Kathi's children were returned to her and a plan for the children was developed.

In November 2001, Kathi moved to Youngwood. Shayna was enrolled in the home-based Head Start option and they were assigned another Home Visitor, Lynne Golembiewski. Shayna returned to the center-based Head Start option when an opening became available. Lynne states, "Kathi was always cooperative with home visits and never cancelled. She was always involved with her children, especially with their education and development." Shayna completed the program in May 2002.

In July 2002, Kathi moved to Belle Vernon where her youngest daughter, Jami, started in the Mon Valley Head Start home-based program. In the fall of 2003, Jami enrolled in the center-based program and Donna Deluca was assigned as their Home Visitor. Kathi had begun to get on her feet financially and met her current husband, Scott. At Donna's suggestion, Kathi invested more time with the program and became a member of the Policy Council that September. Jami completed the program in May 2004.

Kathi applied for a job at Head Start and was hired as a substitute classroom aide. When a regular Classroom Aide position opened, she applied and was offered the job. In February 2005, with the encouragement of Patty Berkey, who helped Kathi complete the application, Kathi secured a Home Visitor position. Patty says, "I was the training coordinator at the time and I saw potential in Kathi. As a former Head Start parent, she was clearly an excellent role model for other parents so I encouraged her to apply."

In November 2005, Kathi and her family moved to Ruffs Dale. Kathi remained a Home Visitor at Mon Valley until she transferred to the Head Start center closer to home the following year in August 2006. Over the years, Kathi has taken on various positions within Head Start, including as a Transportation Aide, Center Support Staff and a Family Service Worker. Kathi is currently a Family Advocate.

It is Kathi's dream to continue to advance within the agency. Kathi says, "Throughout my involvement with WCA Head Start I have been driven to succeed and always wanted my children to have a normal, successful life where they can reach their goals. I was given power, confidence, and support. It made me a better parent and a leader."

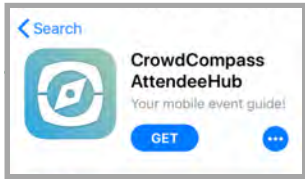
Kathi and Scott have three thriving daughters. The eldest, Kathi's stepdaughter, Heather, 23, whom she raised since Heather was four, works as a Therapeutic Support Staff and attends graduate school at Pitt. Shayna, 22, is a college student studying Social Work and Human Services. Jami, 20, works as an Emergency Vet Tech for Pittsburgh Veterinary Specialty and Emergency Center. The family is happy and living out their dreams with the help of Westmoreland Community Action.

Kathi has been involved with WCA for 19 years and has been employed with the agency for 15. She has proven that she can overcome obstacles and barriers that are standing in her way and be self-sufficient.



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# ABOUT COMMUNITY ACTION

*Community Action* is a 55 year old antipoverty program that is community designed and governed. The 42-member agencies of the **Community Action Association of Pennsylvania (CAAP)** serve 66 counties in Pennsylvania. There are more than 1,000 Community Action Agencies in the United States. Community Action Agencies throughout Pennsylvania are the lead anti-poverty agency in each local service area. The national Community Action program is administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services - Office of Community Services (OCS). Within the Commonwealth of PA, program oversight is conducted by the Department of Community and Economic Develop

A significant source of CAA funding is provided by the federal Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) Act. Agencies leverage CSBG funding to attract other financial support and resources to continue the fight against poverty. The CSBG statute outlines eight worthy goals: securing and maintaining employment, securing adequate education, better income management, securing adequate housing, providing emergency services, improving nutrition, creating linkages among antipoverty programs, and achieving self-sufficiency. There is no typical Community Action Agency. No two Community Action Agencies are exactly alike because each is guided by the unique needs of its local community. Each agency is governed by a local, community-based tripartite board of directors comprised of low-income representatives, public officials, and private sector individuals.

Though no two agencies are alike, there is a typical Community Action approach to reducing poverty and helping families obtain self-sufficiency. Local agencies typically offer a variety of programs that serve low-income children, families, veterans, and seniors. Services may include emergency assistance, weatherization services, youth programs, senior centers, or transportation assistance.

Community Action Agencies often provide or refer clients to job training opportunities, GED preparation courses, and vocational education programs. They provide services addressing poverty related problems ranging from income management and credit counseling to entrepreneurial development and small business incubators; from domestic violence crisis assistance to family development programs and parenting classes; from food pantries to emergency shelters to low-income housing development and community revitalization projects. In doing so, Community Action offers opportunities for people to lessen dependence on stop-gap aid. Community Action Agencies work closely with local human services agencies, the private sector, and the public sector to help people in need. A major goal of Community Action is to enable people to become independent of any public or private assistance.

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