

WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH IN ACTION

Profiles of Agencies Creating Change

Two-Generation and Whole Family Approaches are designed to support family well-being and the opportunity for upward economic mobility by providing high-quality, comprehensive, and coordinated services that meet the needs of parents and children simultaneously. Highlighting Community Action Agencies who have successfully implemented a Whole Family Approach helps to support peer-to-peer learning and foster a deeper understanding of the foundational concepts of implementation, including the importance of coaching and building trusted working relationships with families, integrating services across multiple domains, leveraging funding opportunities, and building and strengthening strategic partnerships. The Community Action Agencies featured in this resource have successfully implemented economic mobility initiatives that operate through the lens of a Whole Family Approach which often requires changing organizational policies and practices. Each case study provides context on the agency's background, their implementation journey, the successes and challenges they encountered along the way, and the lessons they learned that can be applied within the context of other local communities.



Across the examples that follow, one lesson is clear: workforce development initiatives are stronger when they are paired with family-centered coaching and coordinated services to support the whole family. Each of the agencies demonstrate how Community Action Agencies can combine coaching, partnerships, training pathways, and wraparound services to help families move from short-term stability toward long-term economic mobility.

Workforce Development Initiatives

The implementation of robust and innovative workforce development strategies helps parents and caregivers of children access living wage job opportunities and improve economic mobility outcomes for multiple generations. Today's workforce is shaped by technological advancement and shifts away from traditional degree-based education models toward more skill-based training models. Employer engagement, demand-driven strategies, and sector-based approaches are essential to economic mobility because they align training programs with the specific hiring needs of local employers.

Community Action Agencies are uniquely positioned to respond to this need by coordinating with local employers and community partners to identify key industries experiencing growth, designing flexible pathways for career development, and

delivering services to support families in accessing and completing the required skills training for employment in these fields. Through coaching and case management services, Community Action Agencies can help families address barriers and navigate complex education and workforce development systems. Through pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs, Community Action Agencies can connect families with local employers, provide access to mentors and on-the-job work experience, and support participants as they move toward full-time employment in skilled careers with opportunities for growth and advancement. Additionally, providing childcare and other developmentally appropriate education enrichment opportunities to children helps parents meet their skill training and employment goals. By supporting the whole family during this process, Community Action Agencies can help families build long-term economic mobility while setting a strong example for the next generation to follow.



Coaching Models

Many agencies who implement a Whole Family Approach utilize a coaching model to work collaboratively with families and help them achieve their goals. Family-centered coaching starts with the belief that every family knows best what it needs. This model puts families in the driver's seat and incorporates a growth mindset to help them build on their strengths and develop the capacity to solve their own challenges. The coach's role is to provide a trusted working relationship to support the whole family in the process as they work to achieve their goals.

The coaching relationship is more intensive than service navigation or case management. It focuses on long-term solutions that go beyond a simple referral and provides active one-on-one guidance to help parents and caregivers become self-sufficient. While case management can help assess a family's needs, coordinate services, and monitor results – the coaching relationship features techniques for goal-setting and motivational interviewing to help families stay active and engaged as they see their goals through to completion. Family-centered coaching not only provides comprehensive and coordinated services that meet the needs of all family members, but it also offers a set of strategies, tools, and resources to help coaches shift how they engage with and help families accomplish their long-term goals for upward economic mobility.



WAYNE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY



Detroit, MI



Overview: Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency (Wayne Metro) uses a paid pre-apprenticeship model to help parents and caregivers earn early childhood education credentials, gain work experience in early childhood education centers, and access wraparound supports that reduce barriers to employment. Early childhood education is also available to help parents overcome childcare challenges and increase positive life outcomes for their children.



Key Results: Through Wayne Metro's LEAP to Teach model, 93% of participants have completed the requirements for a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, 61% have gained employment in an early childhood education center, and 49% were able to achieve a savings goal.



Application: Wayne Metro's experience shows that workforce development pathways are more accessible when agencies combine a cohort model, paid training, employer partnerships, and supportive services that respond to real-life barriers.



Agency Context

Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency (Wayne Metro) is a private non-profit Community Action Agency in Detroit, Michigan. Since 1971, the agency has served over 75,000 low- and moderate-income households in the Wayne County service area. The agency has over 700 employees and provides services to the community through over 100 programs in the areas of Quality Housing, Family Stability, and Economic Opportunity. Program services include financial capability education, financial counseling, free tax preparation, homeownership workshops, housing counseling, utility assistance, foreclosure prevention, homeless services, early childhood education, General Education Development (GED) preparation, and workforce development. The agency is governed by a 21-person tripartite Board of Directors including representatives in the public, private, and community sectors and led by a 5-person leadership team including a Chief Executive Officer, Chief Administrative Officer,

Chief Programs Officer, Chief Financial Officer, and Chief Human Resources Officer. The annual operating budget is over \$100 million and includes federal, state, local, and private funding sources.

Implementation Context

Wayne Metro provides early childhood education services to over 900 children each year through Head Start and Early Head Start programs. In 2018, the Head Start Innovation Fund offered a competitive grant opportunity to improve the quality of Head Start programs through innovative models and collaborative partnerships. To address the shortage of early childhood education teachers in the Detroit Metropolitan area, the fund prioritized teacher recruitment and retention strategies. Through this opportunity, Wayne Metro received a one-year grant to pilot the Learn and Earn Apprenticeship Program, known as LEAP to Teach. The program was intentionally designed as a workforce development strategy to prepare participants for careers in early childhood education. Since the initial pilot, an additional \$800,000 has been secured through private donors, demonstrating funder confidence in the value of investing in teachers.

LEAP to Teach includes many components of a registered apprenticeship model. The program is designed to be completed in seven months, and participants earn a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential that prepares them to begin a career in early childhood education. In addition to classroom training, participants complete 480 hours of hands-on experience in a center-based Head Start classroom. Each participant is paired with a dedicated Mentor Teacher and participates in a cohort model,

creating both individualized guidance and peer support. To reduce barriers and create a debt-free experience, the program covers tuition, provides a monthly stipend, and supports participants with books, materials, and a laptop. Applications for Michigan TEACH scholarships are also built into the model to further reduce educational expenses.

LEAP to Teach applicants must have a high school diploma or equivalent, successfully complete a comprehensive background check, and pass physical, drug, and Tuberculosis (TB) screenings. To receive the CDA credential, participants complete six major steps: complete a high school diploma or equivalent and 120 hours of early childhood education coursework; complete 480 hours of early childhood experience; develop a professional portfolio that includes Family Questionnaires; identify a Professional Development Specialist and submit the CDA application; complete the verification visit and CDA exam; and await the credential decision. Presenting these requirements clearly helps participants understand the pathway from enrollment to credential completion.

Wayne Metro began implementing a Whole Family Approach in 2018 after participating in a Learning Community Group



through the National Community Action Partnership (NCAP). The Learning Community provided training and technical assistance to help Community Action Agencies deepen their understanding of two-generation approaches and build integrated service delivery systems that meet the needs of both parents and children. Wayne Metro uses the Whole Family Approach model with LEAP to Teach participants which helps them access wraparound supportive services such as housing assistance, utility and water assistance, digital literacy training, employment readiness support, and financial literacy training. Some of the participants had their own children enrolled in Head Start.

In order to ensure LEAP to Teach participants are ready for employment, they are required to complete additional trainings often required by childcare centers, including First Aid, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), and Automated External Defibrillator (AED), Michigan Registry Health and Safety, and Food Handler certifications. Participants also attend Wayne Metro's HighScope curriculum learning series and pre-service trainings. Through Northstar Digital Literacy, participants also have access to basic computer, software, and technology skills training.

Additionally, as part of Wayne Metro's employment services, participants also receive assistance with developing a resume, completing job applications, interview skills, and one-on-one coaching for job retention through the NextJob platform. Participants also have access to Wayne Metro's Financial Empowerment Center where they can

access financial education and counseling services. Through a "You Save, We Match" program, participants can save \$15-\$25 per month for six consecutive months, and Wayne Metro will match the savings up to \$200. This opportunity was designed to help participants address financial challenges, assist with budgeting, reduce debt, and build positive credit for long-term sustainability of financial wellness.

The LEAP to Teach program operates through strong partnerships with higher education institutions, community partners, and childcare providers. For the education experience, Wayne Metro partners with Wayne County Community College District (WCCCD). This partnership with the community college provides participants with the opportunity to complete 20 Early Childhood Education credits for a short-term certification. This certification can be completed virtually in three terms, with each term lasting 7.5 weeks. The certification then lays the foundation for participants to continue working towards an associate's degree which can be completed in 63 credits.

The partnership between Wayne Metro and Wayne County Community College District was established when LEAP to Teach launched in 2018 and has continued to strengthen over time. Wayne Metro leaders initiated the partnership by reaching out to the head of the Early Childhood Education department and presenting the program concept. From this initial meeting, the partners developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and established regular team meetings to coordinate cohort schedules, enrollment, orientations, and graduations.

For the hands-on work experience, participants are either placed internally at Wayne Metro Head Start centers, or externally through partnership with other local childcare providers. Wayne Metro has established partnership agreements with seven external childcare providers in Wayne and Macomb counties. These partnerships were established by reaching out to the program directors at the childcare centers, scheduling informational meetings, and creating collaborative agreements. From there, participants were interviewed, Mentor Teachers were identified, and stipends were provided for the staff agreeing to participate as Mentor Teachers.



Successes

Since the initial pilot, Wayne Metro has facilitated nine LEAP to Teach cohorts. Of 112 total participants, an impressive 93% have successfully completed the 120 hours required to obtain the CDA credential and 74% either already earned, or are actively in the process of completing, the additional CDA requirements. The program has helped fill vacant teaching positions with 68 participants gaining employment in an Early Childhood Education center. Six of those individuals were eventually promoted from a Teacher Assistant to a Teacher, and three participants also chose to

continue their education by advancing to obtain an associate degree in Early Childhood Education. One participant, who participated in the second LEAP to Teach cohort in 2018, has since gone on to earn her CDA, gain employment with Wayne Metro as a Teacher Assistant, complete her associate's degree in early childhood education, and receive a promotion to Teacher. She is still employed as a Teacher with the Wayne Metro Head Start program and actively shares her story to promote the program and help recruit more teachers by showing others what is possible. In addition to education and employment benefits, the program has also experienced success with other supportive services such as the "You Save, We Match" program, with 55 LEAP to Teach participants achieving a financial savings goal through the program.

The LEAP to Teach program helps improve opportunities for economic mobility through workforce development, high-quality education, and a whole family approach. It is not only beneficial as a workforce development strategy to improve employment outcomes for parents and caregivers, but also as a high-quality education strategy to improve outcomes for children. The early childhood years, between birth and five years old, are essential for brain development and lifelong learning.

Approximately 35% of all LEAP to Teach participants were also Head Start parents. This not only helped improve access to services by providing parents with the opportunity to learn and receive services alongside their children, but for these parents, the lessons learned in the classroom were also able to be applied at home. These Head Start parents were able to demonstrate the value of education by setting a



positive example for their children as they worked to accomplish their goals. Furthermore, as these Head Start parents became teachers, they were able to bring their lived experience into the new role.

Overall, the LEAP to Teach program has helped to build a strong and qualified Early Childhood Education workforce by promoting the value of teaching and helping cultivate a renewed interest in teaching. By reducing barriers to education and employment, the program has helped increase the number of individuals pursuing a career in early childhood education. It also helps ensure those pursuing a career in early childhood education are able to complete the educational requirements by providing supportive services to help navigate the complexities of the college system including admissions and enrollment, financial aid, and academic support.

Challenges

Wayne Metro maintained flexibility and adjusted their approach as needed to respond to emerging needs and challenges. For example, in the beginning, they started with two cohorts per year. However, they found that the fast-paced approach was less effective for participants who needed additional time to manage the coursework while balancing other responsibilities. As a result of this feedback, Wayne Metro coordinated with staff at the community college and aligned with the college schedule to offer one cohort per year. Another significant pivot happened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, an instructor was coming on-site to provide in-person classes. However, during the pandemic,

they shifted to a virtual learning platform. This approach provided participants with more flexibility and convenience, and the classes have continued to be provided online.



Lessons Learned

For Community Action leaders looking to implement a similar approach in their local community, Wayne Metro's advice is simple. First, assess the needs of your local community. Identify employment gaps and strategize the ways your organization can help bridge the gap between employers and potential employees. The next step is to build strong collaborative partnerships. Look for the funding opportunities that are available, and the partners with supportive services your organization can come alongside and coordinate with to build a better system of support for parents and children. Create an outreach plan and start establishing a team of employers, educational institutions, mentor teachers, and evaluators to help make the vision become a reality. With this foundation in place, Community Action Agencies and their partners can take the next step to develop a process for outreach and communication, applications, information sessions, screenings, admissions, orientations, and outcome tracking. During this process, it is important to maintain flexibility and adjust as needed in response to the changing needs of the community. And finally, it is important to celebrate success along the way! Celebrate the success of your team – the small wins and progress made. Celebrate the success of your participants – the graduations, new jobs, and financial goals achieved. Every step is important, and every step deserves celebration.

HAMPTON ROADS COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM



Newport News, VA



Overview: Hampton Roads Community Action Program (HRCAP) integrates workforce development coaching with Whole Family Approach coaching to help parents and caregivers to complete credentials, access supportive services, and connect with local employment opportunities. Services are also available for children including childcare coordination, early childhood education, youth academic support, mentoring, and workforce development.



Key Results: HRCAP's integrated coaching model has contributed to 68% of participants gaining employment, 88% maintaining stable housing, and 22% achieving self-sufficiency with a household income over 200% of the federal poverty guidelines.



Application: HRCAP's model highlights the importance of pairing credential pathways with wraparound support, employer engagement, digital literacy, and data systems that improve both services and outcomes.



Agency Context

Hampton Roads Community Action Program (HRCAP) is a non-profit Community Action Agency based in Newport News, Virginia. The agency was founded in 1965 and serves areas in southeastern Virginia including Middle Peninsula, Hampton, Newport News, Portsmouth, Norfolk, Suffolk, Chesapeake, and Virginia Beach. HRCAP is guided by the vision of “a strong, vibrant community where all citizens are self-sufficient and empowered” and the mission “to improve lives by providing optimum services and mobilizing resources that strengthen our communities.” They aim to achieve this mission and vision through a variety of services including early childhood education, adult and youth workforce development, financial literacy, housing and community development, and community health initiatives.

HRCAP served 8,698 individuals and 4,060 households between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025. The annual budget is \$21.5 million with 91% of funds being directed to services and 9% being directed to administrative costs. Programs

are funded by over 60 public and private grants including Head Start and Early Head Start, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Veteran's Affairs, medical providers, and business partners. HRCAP is led by a 26-person tripartite Board of Directors including public, private, and community representatives and a six-person executive leadership team consisting of a Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Director of Administration, Senior Director of Early Childhood Education, and Director of Planning and Evaluation. The program and operations leadership team includes a Director of Program Innovation and Transformation, Director of Service Delivery and Quality Assurance, Assistant Director of Support Services, Director of Workforce Development, Program Manager for Housing and Financial Literacy Services, and in Head Start and Early Head Start a Program Services Team Leader, Program Operations Team Leader, Behavioral Specialist, and Community Education Director.



Implementation Context

HRCAP began the process of implementing a Whole Family Approach approximately six years ago through a [statewide Two-Generation pilot](#) with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding from the [Virginia Department of Social Services](#). Through this multi-year project, HRCAP has worked alongside five other Community Action Agencies across the state of Virginia and received ongoing training and technical assistance from the [Virginia Community Action Partnership](#) and the [National Community Action Partnership](#).

HRCAP has integrated workforce development initiatives into the Whole Family Approach by

automatically enrolling participants and connecting them with both a Whole Family Approach coach and a Workforce Development coach. HRCAP offers workforce development services for both adults (over age 18) and youth (ages 14-17) through a cohort model that includes career planning and summer internships. The agency has a team of Workforce Development professionals to provide coaching services. Additional workforce development services include online courses, soft skills training, and social entrepreneurship. Participants enrolled in Workforce Development programs receive wraparound services for up to one year to help address employment barriers, as well as paid job shadowing and mentoring services for up to two weeks.

The Whole Family Approach helps strengthen Workforce Development initiatives by removing barriers to participation and improving outcomes for participants. HRCAP has learned that credentials are more attainable when families receive wraparound support such as transportation assistance, childcare coordination, housing stabilization, financial coaching, behavioral health referrals, digital access and devices, and clothing and work supplies. Whole Family Approach coaches can identify these needs and provide the necessary support to reduce potential crisis interruptions and increase the rates of training completion. This approach is beneficial both for parents and children, because parents are equipped with the necessary skills to feel confident and accomplish their goals. As parents increase their skills and earned income increases, material hardship can be reduced for children which protects children from harmful outcomes driven by a lack of food, healthcare, or educational enrichment.

This approach is also beneficial for employers who are able to connect with potential employees who have demonstrated reliability, preparedness, and qualified skills to complete the work requirements. The selection process to participate in HRCAP's workforce development programs is based on an individual's readiness and capability to successfully complete the program and achieve the intended outcomes. This is measured through a Household Assessment which includes a Job Skill Inventory Assessment. If someone applies for the program and is not selected, they are provided with the opportunity to go through additional training to receive foundational credentials to prepare for the workforce, including [ACT WorkKeys](#), [National Career Readiness Certificate \(NCRC\)](#), [NorthStar Digital Literacy Certifications](#), and [Industry Credentials](#).

Through this process, HRCAP aims to equip participants with trusted, industry-recognized credentials to help them demonstrate the practical skills employers need and value. The available career pathways include shipyard workers, dental assistants, healthcare, skilled trades such as plumbing and appliance repair, restaurants, and weatherization. These careers are based on the needs of local employers, key



industries experiencing growth, and living wage job opportunities. For example, in the Hampton Roads area, shipyard workers are in high demand, and the positions can pay up to \$25 per hour. There is also a significant need for healthcare workers because of the many Veteran Affairs facilities in the area. HRCAP has a partnership with four healthcare facilities, who are consistently hiring participants working towards certification completions.

Strategic partnerships have played a key role in the success of HRCAP's workforce development initiatives. HRCAP partners with local universities, colleges, and trade schools and serves as a bridge by monitoring registration, providing supportive services, and helping participants make career connections. The agency has also developed an Employer Task Force to strengthen partnerships with local employers, including Amazon, shipyards, and other facilities.

Successes

By integrating workforce development and whole family approach initiatives, HRCAP experienced many successful impacts including strong enrollment and completion momentum, higher job placement rates, increased family income, more stable households, and significant return on investment for funders and employers. In the most recent program year, 68% of HRCAP participants obtained employment, 88% maintained stable housing for over six months, and 22% achieved self-sufficiency with a household income over 200% or above the federal poverty guideline.

In one example of success, a single mother with three young sons joined HRCAP's Whole Family Approach project. At that time, her resources were limited, and she was facing many challenges, but she was determined to build a better future for her children. Through support from a Whole Family Approach coach, she was able to earn her credential as a Certified Medical Assistant (CMA) and later as a Certified Clinical Medical Assistant (CCMA). She then continued working towards another significant academic and professional achievement: completing nursing school to become a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). For this mother, these are more than goals completed, certifications attained, or workplace promotions – these are the indicators of a legacy she is leaving for her children and the steps to a better future on which they can build their own dreams.

⚠ Challenges

Throughout the implementation journey, HRCAP has continued to adjust programs and services in response to participant needs. When participants experienced difficulties in the workplace, the agency incorporated soft skills training to help them both gain and maintain employment. When participants needed more exposure to workplace expectations, HRCAP added job shadowing and mentoring. When digital literacy barriers affected online learning, job applications, and workplace success, the agency strengthened broadband access and computer training. These adjustments demonstrate the value of using participant experience to refine program design.



Lessons Learned

Since starting this journey in 2021, HRCAP has learned many valuable lessons. First, helping remove barriers for families accelerates their success in job training programs. Second, providing coaching services helps families stay focused on their goals and maintain momentum as they move forward. Third, providing services to improve digital literacy helps build confidence and job readiness. And finally, credentialing pathways are strengthened when paired with supportive service for the whole family. Throughout this journey, HRCAP has focused on data to drive decisions. They established a unified household database, kept their performance indicators simple and actionable, and aligned data systems across programs. This data was not just used to report on outcome progress, but to improve coaching services and program design for long-term impact and sustainability.

COMMUNITY ACTION IN AROOSTOOK, WASHINGTON, AND HANCOCK COUNTIES

 Presque Isle, ME



Overview: Community Action in Aroostook, Washington, and Hancock Counties (CAAWHC) transformed its service delivery model by moving from program-specific silos to a coordinated coaching structure that helps families access integrated supports across rural communities.



Key Results: CAAWHC integrated a coaching model to help reduce barriers, improve staff retention, and coordinate services for families across the areas of housing, education, employment, health, and financial stability. In 2025, outcomes included 214 participants improving mental health and well-being, 22 advancing their careers through better benefits, 31 advancing their careers through increased wages, and 279 avoiding eviction or foreclosure.



Application: CAAWHC's experience shows that lasting transformation requires leadership commitment, staff input, integrated data and service systems, clear communication, and the use of a coaching model that helps families define and pursue their own goals.



Agency Context

Community Action in Aroostook, Washington, and Hancock Counties (CAAWHC) serves over 25,000 households in Maine. The three-county service area covers approximately 35% of the state's total land mass and includes the northeastern corner bordering Canada, Downeast coastal communities, and numerous small towns scattered between. The area is characterized by economic challenges including vast rural distances, aging populations, and limited transportation options.

The agency employs a geographically distributed team of experienced professionals and provides over 40 integrated programs and services in early childhood education, energy, housing, social services, public health, and workforce development. These programs and services play a critical role in addressing poverty, improving health and education outcomes, supporting independent living, and strengthening economic opportunities. Through a mobile outreach model, the agency is also able to extend its reach in rural communities and ensure residents have access to services that support economic mobility.

Implementation Context

The transformation to a Whole Family Approach at CAAWHC began nearly a decade ago. At the time, they did not have a name or a formal model for it, but they recognized that by structuring their delivery model around individual programs they were unintentionally limiting their impact and ability to meet the full needs of a household. While the programs and services were still effective in many ways, staff often shared that they wished they could do more to help families. In the Fall of 2015, the agency's new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) dedicated time to listening to and shadowing staff members to learn more about their experiences. This included sitting with teachers and children in early childhood education classrooms and going into homes where Weatherization technicians were conducting energy audits.

By intentionally listening to direct service staff, agency leadership learned that opportunities to improve outcomes were often missed because the agency operated in silos. Program rules limited staff members' ability to help families access more than one program, and customers often had to repeat their story multiple times to receive services from different teams. This experience also revealed staff retention challenges. The agency employed high-quality staff in a variety of helping professions, but those staff members were more likely to leave when their experience did not align with their expectation of being able to help families in a comprehensive and sustainable way.

From this starting point, the agency began building a culture to support innovation. They invested in learning, encouraged staff to share

ideas, and cultivated the space for honest conversations about what was working and what needed to change. This culture shift positioned them for significant transformation. In 2017, they hired their first coach and piloted their Whole Family Approach. With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, they were selected as one of ten Community Action Agencies to participate in the National Community Action Partnership's Whole Family Approach Community of Practice.

Implementing a Whole Family Approach required a complete redesign of their internal structure. They shifted from a program-centered model to a coordinated coaching model that focused on entire households. They invested in staff training, aligned their data systems, and created a new organizational structure that supported comprehensive service delivery. One coach has now grown into a team of 20 coaches who are trained to assist families with education, housing, nutrition, employment, financial stability, and health-related needs. CAAWHC utilized the Family-Centered Coaching model from The Prosperity Agenda to train and equip staff with the tools and resources to strengthen their coaching skills. This work has been supported by leveraging multiple funding sources including Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) capacity building resources, philanthropic investments, and program specific funding. The funds have been utilized to build the coaching team and support the infrastructure while maintaining low administrative costs and expanding the impact on families.



Successes

In 2025, CAAWHC's coaching services resulted in 214 participants improving mental health and well-being, 22 advancing their careers through better benefits, 31 advancing their careers through increased wages, and 279 avoiding eviction or foreclosure. Partnerships were also strengthened with 40 local employers partnering to provide work experience, job placements, and employment opportunities. CAAWHC's new mobile service unit also completed its first full season in 2025. Over 56 service days, the unit visited 25 rural communities, traveled more than 1,200 miles, and completed 460 applications across programs such as early childhood education and home energy assistance.

The impact of this work is best demonstrated through the real stories of families who have received services. In one example, a young mother relocated to Maine from across the country. She was pregnant, unfamiliar with local resources, and unsure of her next steps. Through connection with a Whole Family coach, she was able to secure housing, repair her vehicle, obtain health insurance, enroll in college, gain full-time employment, strengthen financial management skills, and welcome a healthy baby. In another example, a customer came to the agency after incarceration. Through coaching, they were able to rebuild their life by achieving financial stability, securing housing, and eventually gaining employment within the agency to help others in similar situations. The progress both these individuals achieved reflect positive gains in confidence, family stability, and economic mobility that can have long-term impact across generations.

Challenges

This has not been an easy journey. The multi-year restructuring process was guided by staff input, leadership planning, and external expertise. The agency held full-day work sessions, conducted agency-wide surveys, and engaged the Board of Directors in strategic discussions. Throughout this process, they applied the principles of rapid-cycle learning and Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA). They adopted a matrix-informed structure that aligned programs with shared customers and common goals. They created new leadership roles, clarified responsibilities, and strengthened communication channels to better support families. Ultimately, they were able to navigate the challenges and build trust by maintaining clear, consistent, and frequent communication with staff, partners, and the community. These lessons were then able to be applied to future iterations, including the development of a Comprehensive Service Delivery Model for households without children.





Lessons Learned

In the process of implementing a Whole Family Approach, CAAWHC learned by listening – listening to the staff providing services and listening to the families receiving services. The agency learned the value of innovation, accountability, collaboration, and responsiveness. They learned that families value having one trusted point of contact to coach and guide them towards their goals. They appreciated having someone to help break down overwhelming challenges into manageable steps. They wanted clear goals, consistent follow-up, and support that adapted with their changing circumstances. The coaching model became the foundation of success for the Whole Family Approach, because families were more likely to stay engaged when they felt someone was there who believed in them and supported their goals. CAAWHC saw their role as developing the roadmap to economic mobility, while families drove the change in their own lives forward.



CONCLUSION

Together, these case studies show that a Whole Family Approach is not a single program model, but a way of organizing services around the goals, strengths, and barriers of families. Across urban, regional, and rural contexts, successful implementation depended on several shared practices: listening to families and staff, aligning workforce pathways with employer demand, building trusted coaching relationships, integrating supportive services, using data to guide decisions, and maintaining flexibility as needs changed. These examples also demonstrate that economic mobility is strengthened when parents and caregivers can pursue education and employment goals while their children receive coordinated support. For Community Action Agencies seeking to implement these approaches, the most

important takeaway is to begin with local needs, build strong partnerships, invest in staff capacity, and create service systems that help families move from crisis response toward long-term economic mobility.



THE COLLABORATIVE ON ECONOMIC MOBILITY

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