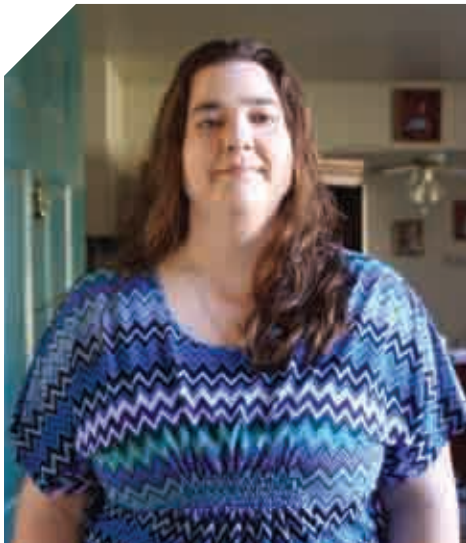




FINDING SUPPORT

in your community





THE CAMPAIGN FOR SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Community Action Agencies strive to get those in need on the right track

President Lyndon B. Johnson championed the Economic Opportunity Act nearly a half century ago, establishing an assortment of social programs as the arsenal of his “War on Poverty.”

Community Action Agencies continue to wage the campaign for self-sufficiency to this day, providing basic essentials like food, heating and job training to millions of Americans a year. The ongoing recession has only amplified the call for help, especially from families and individuals seeking out such services for the first time.

“In California, we have the new poor—people who were professionals, who were making middle-class, even upper-middle-class income who’ve lost their jobs, lost their homes and now have lost their unemployment,” said Tim Reese, executive director of the California/Nevada Community Action Partnership. “The safety net across the state is stretched very thin and is fraying.”

Community Action Agencies are nonprofit organizations, public or private, that operate to a large degree on federal and other government funding. In California, such agencies have experienced an average increase of 40 percent in demand for services since the economy’s precipitous slide in 2008, Reese said. In some of the rural counties north of Sacramento, the growth in demand has been even greater. That’s certainly the case for the Community Action Agency of Butte County and its counterparts in neighboring Glenn and Tehama counties.

“When the recession hit, and still to this day, we’re seeing a bunch of new folks,” said Thomas Tenorio, executive director of the Butte County agency, a non-profit organization which provides various forms of assistance to more than 10,000 people a year. “Our applications for some of our services have gone up by as much as 50 percent.”

The breadth of aid provided by the three agencies runs the gamut—hot-lunch programs, rent assistance and job training, to name a few—and more can be read about them in the pages that follow. The faces and stories of those in need of help are equally diverse, and often tinged with poignancy.

“They’re scared and, in some ways, they’re frustrated,” Tenorio explained. “When you’re now having to deal with bureaucracy, it really can be daunting. All these public agencies have their restrictions and requirements, yet all (those in need) want to know is how they can make sure their utilities aren’t turned off and that the family still has something to eat at the end of the week.”

It may not be a service that we provide, but we will be able to help people find services they didn’t even know existed.

No two Community Action Agencies offer the same menu of services. Each is organized and built from the ground up, angling to meet the needs of the immediate community instead of replicating efforts on a larger scale. That hallmark of flexibility has served the mission well over the years. Has a major employer left town, prompting a local spike in unemployment? Has a state-funded program been eliminated, leaving large numbers of dependents without certain services? Where government often moves ponderously in shifting gears, Community

Action Agencies are quick to respond to evolving needs.

“We can change direction in a matter of a few months, we can implement a program in a matter of a few weeks,” said Amanda Sharp, program manager for the Tehama County Community Action Agency. “We help fill the gaps in areas of [government-run] programs.”

Reese and others laud Community Action Agencies for their “holistic” approach in helping clients achieve long-term self-sufficiency. The caseworkers’ first step is to address their immediate needs. The second is to deal with the underlying issues that have prevented the individual or family in question from getting back on their feet, often steering them to additional local resources for support. The needs can be large or small, sometimes as simple as a hot meal and a bus ticket.

Sharp worked with one family recently that was struggling to reunify after months apart. They had secured an apartment and were ready to move in, but had no money left over to buy mattresses. The mom’s social worker called Sharp who, in turn, called around and found a furniture store that was willing to donate two mattresses.

“It may not be a service that we provide, but we will be able to help people find services they didn’t even know existed,” Sharp said. “We do whatever we can.”

This project is funded in part by the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), administered by the State of California Department of Community Services and Development. www.csd.ca.gov



THE DREAM OF A BETTER LIFE

“I’m a grandma now,” Maria Nunez said with a smile, her face beaming with pride as she related the accomplishments of her four children, aged 10 to 22. The value she places on family is apparent speaking with her, as is the joy she gets from watching her children grow up.

The dream of a better life and raising a family brought Nunez to Northern California from Colima, near Manzanilla, Mexico, 24 years ago. She first followed her mother to Gerber, where she met and married her former husband. The young couple relocated to Corning, where Nunez has stayed since.

Doing what’s best for her family remains Nunez’s driving force: “I wanted us to be a better, healthier family,” she said of what brought her to the Corning Family Resource Center to participate in the food assistance program.

Nunez takes full advantage of nutrition education opportunities at the center. “They teach you what’s good to eat and bad to eat and how to apply it to my own family.

“Of course everyone knows that sugar, fat and salt are bad for you, but having someone pushing you to eat better and showing you how to do it really helps,” she said.

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Nunez is especially fond of the Food for Thought class.

“Not only do they give us a recipe and a lesson on how to cook it, but also the ingredients so you can take it home and make it yourself.

“They also teach us it’s important to exercise at least a half-hour to an hour a day,” she said. She added that fitness is not

only emphasized, but encouraged through classes she herself participates in every Tuesday and Thursday morning.

“They’re very helpful,” Nunez said of the Community Action Agency. “They have a lot of stuff people need. And if they don’t have what people need right there, they know where to go and how to get it.”

Nunez also uses the center for help with her English and computer training, and noted they help others with everything from obtaining health insurance to immigration issues. Though she only started coming a few months ago, she is so impressed by the services they provide that she became a volunteer.

“I volunteer now 20 hours a week, and I’m also learning the whole time so I can find a good job,” she said, still smiling. “I love helping people. I still need help with my pronunciation and everything, but I know more English than some other people and am able to teach them a little and help translate. I feel good when I’m able to help, and I’ve learned to do a lot. Now that I know what to do, some things I used to think were hard are easy.”

Fighting hunger in the North State

The North Valley is fertile ground, yet the region is no stranger to hunger. Food stamp applications in Tehama County—just one indicator of the need—have risen dramatically in recent years. Hot-lunch programs are thriving, and food banks and food closets are in ever-high demand.

“Every client who has a food need, we make sure they’re connected,” said Amanda Sharp of the Tehama County Community Action Agency. The same goes for the Community Action Partnership of Colusa, Glenn and Trinity counties and the Community Action Agency of Butte County. Programs include:

► NORTH STATE FOOD BANK

based in Oroville, this program is a cornerstone of the Community Action Agency of Butte County. It collects food from government, corporate and community groups for meal programs, food closets and other local initiatives in Butte, Glenn, Plumas, Sierra and Colusa Counties. (530) 538-7256

► WEEKDAY LUNCH PROGRAM

the Community Action Agency of Butte County, Inc. operates a weekday lunch program primarily targeted at adults age 60 and over. Menus are approved by a certified nutritionist and include a main dish, vegetable or salad, fruit or dessert, and beverages. The Senior Meals Program is hosted at eight different sites, from Chico to Wheatland. Home delivered meals are available to eligible residents.

► CALFRESH

the Community Action Partnership in Glenn, Colusa and Trinity counties; and CAA of Butte County, provide CalFresh outreach and education to low-income families, increasing access to the under-utilized Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and improving nutrition opportunities, reaching out particularly to the newly-unemployed and others who may now qualify for assistance.

► CORNING FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER

a partner agency to Tehama County CAA that provides food and educational programs to low income and vulnerable families. (530) 824-7670

► TEHAMA COUNTY SENIOR NUTRITION PROGRAM

home-delivered and congregate meals are available to qualified seniors through the following locations.

- RED BLUFF COMMUNITY/SENIOR CENTER
1500, South Jackson, (530) 247-2414
- LOS MOLINOS SENIOR CENTER
25199, Josephine, (530) 384-2100
- CORNING SENIOR CENTER
1015, 4th Avenue, (530) 824-4727



Establishing long-term living solutions

In these economic conditions, some people need help keeping the lights on. Others have more pressing concerns, like keeping a roof over their heads. Community Action Agencies across the North State are equipped to handle such diverse housing crises. Here's a look at a few of the available programs.

► ENERGY ASSISTANCE RELIEF

In many cases, families are eligible for energy assistance relief. The programs vary by name and conditions, and are generally available just once in a 12 or 18-month period. In some cases, applicants must demonstrate "an uncontrollable or unplanned change" in their ability to pay their utility bill.

► THE ESPLANADE HOUSE

The Community Action Agency of Butte County established the Esplanade House in Chico in 1991. The transitional program provides shelter and essential services for up to 60 homeless families at a time.

► RENTAL ASSISTANCE

Short-term rental payments and other homeless prevention services, such as utility deposits and case management, are available through the Tehama, Glenn, Trinity, and Colusa County Community Action Agencies.

► WEATHERIZATION ASSISTANCE

Low-income families and individuals can permanently reduce their utility bills by making their homes more energy efficient. Such weatherization assistance runs the gamut from repairing broken windows and installing weather stripping to adding insulation and replacing appliances.



COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES HELP IMPROVE LIVING SITUATION FOR RECOVERED ADDICT

Ten years ago, a 21-year old Candi Marsicano found herself addicted to meth, homeless, single and the mother of two toddler boys.

Marsicano's story of redemption and recovery is a prime example of someone who has benefited greatly from the Community Action Agency's home weatherization program and their Esplanade House program, both of which have since helped her get on her feet.

One day in 2002, Marsicano needed to run errands with her one year old and left her three-year-old to play in a friend's trailer park. Another neighbor was alarmed to see the child alone and called Child Protective Services. The police were brought in and placed her boy in a squad car. When Marsicano arrived, she realized the hopelessness of her irresponsible lifestyle and voluntarily surrendered both children for foster care.

"That was the breaking point," Marsicano said. "Even though it was the lowest point of my life, I thank God it happened because if it didn't, I wouldn't be in the blessed place I am today."

Marsicano turned to church and moved

into the CAA's Esplanade House, which houses homeless families as they seek to improve their circumstances. She stopped using meth, straightened out her life and earned her custody of both children.

"Thank God I was never arrested or went to jail," Marsicano said.

However, in her first month at the shelter, she received a scare. Because the program is designed for families, the Esplanade House requires a mother must regain guardianship of her children within her first month of residency or face eviction. A mere few days before the deadline, her children came for the night and she prayed that they wouldn't have to return to foster care. Within two hours of their arrival, Children and Family Services Division called and said her children were hers to keep.

"The programs at Esplanade House were a remarkable help," Marsicano said.

She eventually stayed there two years and took classes covering the basics for successful living, including parenting, budgeting, relapse prevention, conflict resolution and codependency. She was assigned a personal case manager and was able to move out on her own after receiving

credit counseling, driving lessons and computer skills. Marsicano now works for the CAA helping others in the program from which she graduated.

"The programs at Esplanade House were a remarkable help"

During her stay, she learned the CAA also helps with home weatherization through the PG&E Energy Saving Assistance Program, which helps low-income families like hers to live more comfortably and save money. She benefited from the service in two previous apartments and hopes to get the same assistance in her current home within the month.

The most notable improvements were weather stripping her doors and replacing her old glass windows, both of which helped keep her old apartments insulated and saved on energy bills.

"In my last place, I had single-pane windows that were very cold in the winter and leaked rain inside my window sills. It was horrible," Marsicano said.

Further help came in the form of new light fixtures with energy-efficient domes and new, water-saving shower heads. The program will also install smoke detectors in both bedrooms and her dining room to go with new sliding glass doors and insulation for her water heater.

"All those improvements helped me save about \$30 a month, which allowed extra money to put more meals on the table and even take a few special outings with my children," she said.



CAA'S WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM IS A WIN-WIN



Joann Rosas said the hard work really started after graduating from Butte College last May, when she found herself looking for her first job in a new field at age 53 to be discouraging.

"I put out applications everywhere," she recalled. "A lot of it is online these days, and nobody was calling me back."

Because she qualified for the CalWORKS program, she was eligible for job placement assistance through its Work Experience program. Now, she's enjoying her new position at Glenn Medical Center in Willows, using the skills she developed while earning associate's degrees in Office Administration and Medical Front Office.

Rosas grew up in Hamilton City and lived there more than 40 years while her children grew up. About a year ago she relocated to Butte City. She has worked a variety of jobs, most recently as a housekeeper before returning to college.

"I'm stuck," she remembered thinking to herself. "I'm not furthering my career. It was my second daughter who encouraged

me to jump in and start working on that."

Rosas enrolled at Butte College and completed its two-year program in office administration. "I then realized there were other degrees that were compatible with it, so I got another associate degree in Medical Front Office. That taught me more of the medical terminology."

Sitting side-by-side with students much younger was daunting at first, but she embraced it.

"Sure, I felt like a grandma, but I just realized I was more mature and had other life experience to offer," she said. "Working with people in their 20s is a new experience, but we get along really well."

After graduation, she was temporarily placed with the Department of Finance in Willows. Last October, she was offered an interview with her current employer at Glenn Medical Center in Willows.

"I met with my supervisor to review my qualifications, and they hired me," she said proudly.

Rosas is in a six-month temporary position which comes up for review at the end of May. She is hopeful she'll be hired on a permanent basis—which would include benefits—and feels she is in a good position to do so. The CAA Work Experience program opened doors for her that she couldn't have found by herself, she said.

"The program works really hard to get you employed, to put you in places you're best qualified. If it didn't work out, they'd keep trying to find you another place."

Rosas was eager to share her success story in hopes that other job-seekers and employers would benefit as well. Employers get six months of free work out of somebody with a specific degree in their field, while the employee gets six months of valuable experience. Thanks to the Work Experience program, Rosas said she feels optimistic about the direction she's going.

"The program works really hard to get you employed"

"I feel a lot better about things, really good. I have no problem going on from here. They try to get people like me in the workforce—people who have degrees, but no experience in their field. That's why this program is great," she said. "It would be great if more employers out there knew about it, because it is a win-win situation. I'd love to help get the word out, because it does help people get on their feet."

Changing with the job market

Layoffs and corporate downsizing have changed the shape of the job market since the recession took hold three years ago. North State Community Action Agencies, in response, have teamed up with private and public partners on job-related services ranging from paid work experience programs for youth to training for entrepreneurs:

► GLENN COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

students can get paid work experience and additional employment support, from resume preparation and interviewing skills to workplace conflict resolution.

► CAA OF TEHAMA COUNTY

makes referrals to the Red Bluff-based Job Training Center. The agency also partners with the state's CalWORKS program to provide job training. The most recent endeavor: helping adults become certified weatherization technicians and subsidizing their pay.

► CAP OF COLUSA-GLENN- TRINITY COUNTIES

undertakes similar efforts, with a recent focus on the wastewater and water treatment industry. Their emphasis is to find clients a living-wage job.

► CAA OF BUTTE COUNTY

offers one-on-one entrepreneurial training for existing small-business owners as well as those in the process of launching new ventures. Much of the counsel centers on creating business plans covering marketing strategies, setting sales and other financial benchmarks.

► CAA OF BUTTE COUNTY

operates a Self Sufficiency Loan Fund to provide qualifying families and individuals with access to up to \$2,500 in loans, which can be used for gaining and maintaining employment.

The Long Climb Toward a Better Life

"We will reach into all the pockets of poverty and help our people find their footing for a long climb toward a better way of life," Lyndon B. Johnson said in 1964 when he signed the Equal Opportunity Act into law. While financial literacy programs take different shapes among local Community Action Agencies and their clientele, they also strive to meet the mission laid out by President Johnson:

► VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE

a key component of the financial literacy efforts sponsored by the local Community Action Agencies, providing free on-site tax preparation to low-income families and individuals. VITA volunteers also help eligible clients secure Earned Income Tax Credits, which go unclaimed to the tune of \$2 million for Tehama County alone. The EITC is a refundable tax credit offered through the IRS to working families who earn less than federal guidelines.

► FINANCIAL EDUCATION CLASSES

teaching basic principles such as budgeting, savings and the proper use of credit. The workshops—offered online or in a classroom setting—also touch on repairing bad credit, budgeting and building assets by opening free or low-cost bank accounts.



A FINANCIAL FOUNDATION

Local gets on her feet with help from CAA

Jessica Bowman recently submitted her income taxes for the first time in seven years.

"The gentleman helping me prepare them kind of jokingly said, 'Sooo, tax evasion?'" she recalled, laughing. "I said, 'Nope. Professional addict, no longer practicing.'"

Bowman, now 22 months clean and sober, has a new lease on life but is still repairing damage done during her years of addiction; part of that damage is financial, and Bowman has found help with that aspect through the Community Action Agency's financial literacy program at Esplanade House.

"My financial background was never positive," she said. "And now I have so much financial wreckage to sort through. So this program is perfect for me, and it's helped a lot."

"We learned so much, everything from ways to save money better to what different types of loans are," she said of the program, which she took part in last summer. "Aaron Murphy, the instructor,

kept it interesting with things like balancing sample checkbooks and playing games, which is important because some people learn differently than others.

"The financial literacy program definitely gave me that foundation"

"I spend so much. I spend money frivolously sometimes," Bowman said of the financial habits she's still kicking. "But it's helped me to not take things for granted."

Bowman thought of a recent situation in which the training came in handy.

"I just recently got my nails done for the first time in a long, long time," she began. "But before I did, I decided I wouldn't let

myself do it if it interfered with my tithing to the church. It's really helped me prioritize things and think harder about what I need and what I don't."

This new-found financial awareness, coupled with Bowman's sobriety, has already had tangible benefits. She now attends Butte College and is a peer mentor for Butte County Behavioral Health where she helps women who've had experiences similar to her own. And since last summer's class she opened a new checking account, moved into her own apartment with her young son and is slowly repairing her credit.

As for her taxes—which she prepared with free help through the Community Action Agency—Bowman got a return that allowed her to pay rent for four months in advance.

"Maybe it's partly sobriety, or maybe it's the fact I'm getting older, but I would have never done that, or even been able to, before," she said. "The financial literacy program definitely gave me that foundation."





WHAT'S NEXT?

These are stories of real people going through real circumstances that negatively impact their lives and that of their families. Many are not prepared for these difficult circumstances, so hopefully these stories resonate with our readers. Those in need of the support offered by a local Community Action Agency will be relieved to find they can make a connection easily.

Each agency has a different approach to assisting residents, but they all strive to be as helpful as possible. They understand the challenge and stress that comes with finding a solution to deeply-rooted problems.

In most cases, staff will meet with clients to review their situation and determine whether referrals to other sources of assistance could be helpful. These sources may or may not be services provided by the Community Action Agency, but staff members do their best to find the most helpful resource for their clients.

In Butte County

Residents in Butte County can access service staff by calling (530) 712-2600. The Community Action Agency in Butte County has recently changed their phone system. Callers should choose "Energy Services" and then the option of Utility Assistance. Lisa Moyer or Jennifer Webb will work with callers to schedule times to discuss their situations and what is needed to complete applications.

Callers may be asked to leave call-back information because both Lisa and Jennifer could be sitting with a family or processing payments for assistance. Generally, call-backs take 24 to 48 hours. If immediate shut-offs are a concern, residents should make that clear to ensure a timely follow-up.

► Find your CAA online:

In Butte:
www.buttecaa.com

In Tehama:
www.tehamacountycaa.org

In Colusa, Glenn or Trinity County:
www.cgtcap.org

All other California Counties:
www.cal-neva.org

Counties Nationwide:
www.communityactionpartnership.com

In Colusa, Glenn or Trinity County:

Residents in Colusa, Glenn or Trinity County can access service staff by calling or (530) 865-6129 or 1-800-287-8711. When using the 1-800 number, callers can press "1" and then "6129." Our friendly staff will work with callers to schedule times to discuss their situations and what is needed to complete applications. For more information on available programs in Colusa, Glenn, and Trinity Counties, residents can visit www.cgtcap.org.

Callers may be asked to leave a message and call-back information. Call-backs occur within 24 – 48 hours.

In Tehama County

Residents in Tehama County can reach service staff by calling (530) 527-6159. Again, callers may be asked to leave contact information and a representative will get back to you. Residents can also access services and information through their website at www.tehamacountycaa.org.

REGIONAL COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY PROGRAMS

**Community Action Agency
of Butte County, Inc.**
530.712.2600

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

- Weatherization
- Utility Assistance
- PG&E Assistance
- Wood, Propane, Heating Oil
- Energy Efficiency Training Academy

ESPLANADE HOUSE

- Transitional Housing for Homeless Families
- Permanent Supportive Housing for Families

FOOD AND NUTRITION

- Senior Nutrition
- Congregate Meals
- Home-Delivered Meals
- Regional Food Bank
- Surplus Commodities

ASSET BUILDING

- Financial Education
- Volunteers in Tax Assistance

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- Affordable Housing
- Community/Commercial Facilities

**Tehama County
Community Action Agency**
530.528.6159

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

- Weatherization
- Utility Assistance
- PG&E Assistance

HOUSING

- Housing vouchers for qualified low income individuals and families
- Emergency response housing assistance and referrals
- Referrals to shelters and housing services

FOOD AND NUTRITION

- Senior Nutrition
 - Congregate Meals
 - Home delivered meals
- Nutrition Education programs
- Assistance with CalFresh applications
- FoodShare Coalition - assistance and referral to local food pantries and feeding sites
- Food Drives

ASSET BUILDING

- Financial Education
- Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)
- Family Loan counseling

FAMILY SUPPORT

- Program referrals to partner agencies
- Wraparound services to at-risk youth
- Anti-violence program and shelter referrals

**Colusa-Glenn-Trinity
Community Action
Partnership** 530.865.6129

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

- Weatherization
- Utility Payment Assistance
- Wood, Oil & Propane Assistance

HOUSING

- Housing Rehabilitation
- Homeownership Assistance Program
- Homeless Prevention
- Rental Assistance
- Referrals to shelters and housing services
- Financial Literacy & Credit Counseling

ASSET BUILDING

- Community Development
- Non-Profit Assistance
- Budgeting, Credit Repair and Financial Literacy Workshops
- Volunteer Income Tax Assistance
- Micro-Business Start Up Assistance

FOOD AND NUTRITION

- Nutrition Education programs
- Assistance with CalFresh applications
- Food Bank

FAMILY SUPPORT

- Resource and Referrals to partner agencies
- Victim Witness Assistance
- Child Abuse Treatment Services
- Counseling, Family Coaching and Advocacy Assistance

WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS ASSISTANCE

- Employment Training and Supportive Services
- Job Search Assistance
- Business Assistance Services
- Community

**Appeal to
Volunteers**

Community action agencies need the assistance and involvement of volunteers and donors in order to make the mixture of services work most efficiently and effectively. For many people, volunteering has provided a rich and satisfying experience, leaving you with the feeling that you are helping make the world a better place one person at a time.

The nature of the work allows opportunities for people to get involved in a variety of ways, often tapping experience and expertise that people have accumulated through their profession or hobbies.

People are encouraged to contact the local Community Action Agency to inquire about volunteer opportunities so they can determine whether the opportunity matches their interests.

Even with grant funding, Community Action Agencies are always challenged to provide sufficient services to meet the growing need. If people are interested in making financial donations, they are encouraged to do so. Donations can be of any amount and may be "restricted," which means they can be used only for a specified intended purpose like childcare classroom material or a space to conduct an afterschool program.

Furthermore, many services delivered by Community Action Agencies is through experienced, committed staff, and donations to assist in support of community services are always welcome.

