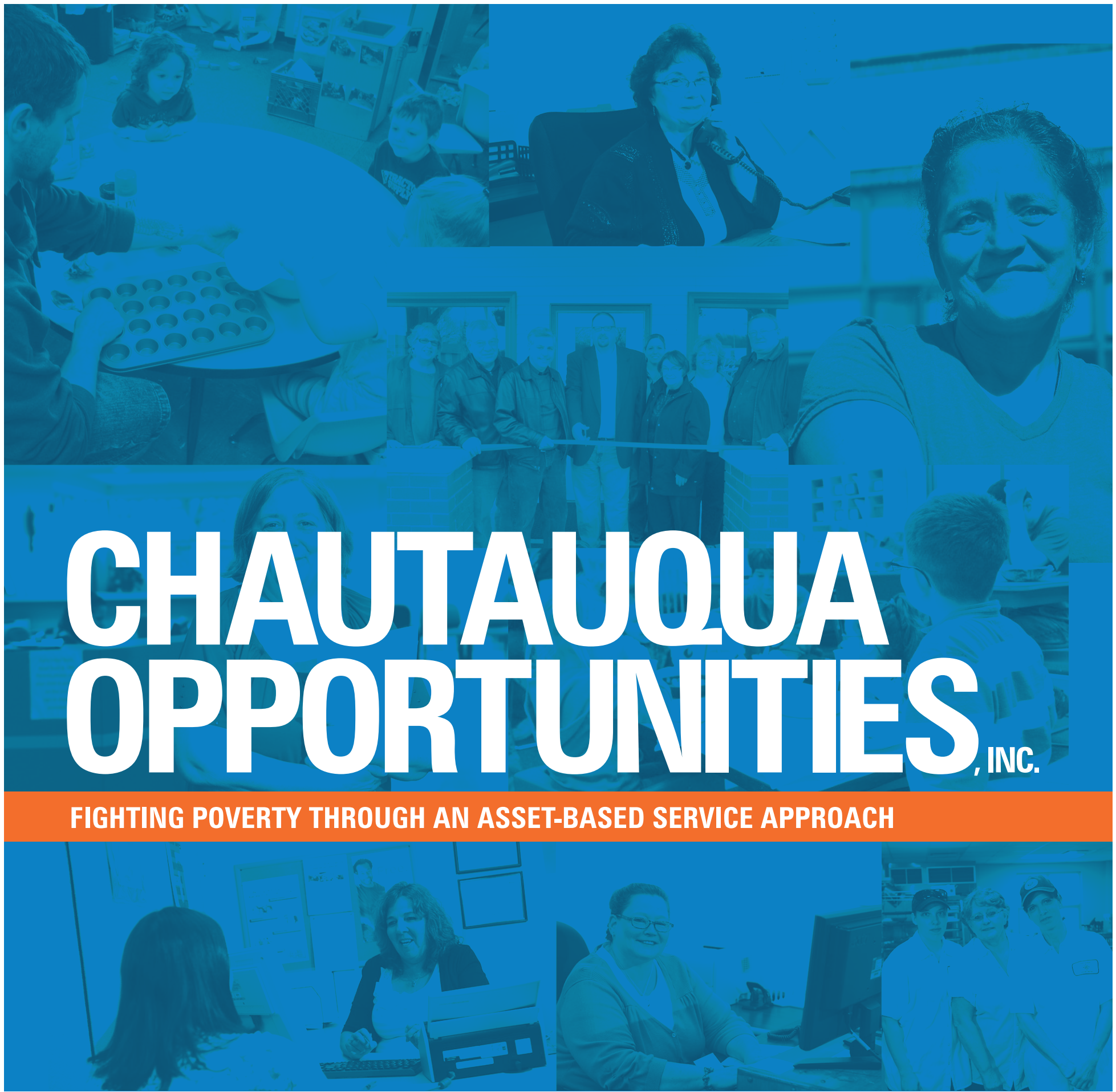




CHAUTAUQUA OPPORTUNITIES, INC.

FIGHTING POVERTY THROUGH AN ASSET-BASED SERVICE APPROACH

a special advertising supplement

A Different Approach

Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. offers customer-driven service model

BY MIKE BLOUNT

Since 1965, Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. (COI) has been serving the low income population of Chautauqua County in New York, providing an essential safety net for individuals and families in need. Created as part of the first wave of Community Action Agencies in response to Lyndon B. Johnson's Economic Opportunity Act, COI aims to use its services to guide customers toward self-sufficiency and economic stability.

customers is evaluated at the beginning of service and progress is tracked throughout to measure the effectiveness of the resources provided. Customers are re-assessed every six months (or at a major life change point if that change occurs sooner than six months). COI developed and copyrighted the Self-Sufficiency Continuum®, which measures its customers through 26 life domains, including housing, employment, money management,

Assets lead to wealth and economic security ... income alone does not.

Using an asset-based, holistic approach, COI provides its customers with services in housing and community development, health care, early education and family services, youth services, and financial services. But for the last few years, COI has concentrated on implementing an asset-focused, anti-poverty model that provides permanent solutions for individuals and families. Assets lead to wealth and economic security ... income alone does not.

This model is unique in that each of COI's

family relationships, parenting and other life skills. These tools are certified by the University at Buffalo, the State University of New York, to be evidence-based tools with 99.7 percent reliability.

In 2004, COI implemented a centralized, electronic intake for its customers that uses a customized software package developed exclusively for COI by CAPSYS, a leading database software developer. This software longitudinally tracks customers across all service modalities, giving COI's life coaches



Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. has been serving the low-income population of Chautauqua County since 1965.

PHOTO BY JON ELDER

more tools for finding holistic solutions to a customer's needs.

By compiling data and using it to evaluate each customer's progress, life coaches can determine what's working and what's not working. All COI case managers are certified in financial social work and use a strength-based model. Services at COI are not duplicated and are centralized wherever possible.

Once COI begins a relationship with a customer, a life plan is developed to help them

make a positive change. Customers at COI are encouraged to assess how they got where they are and how choices continually impact their lives, their families and their community. This way of thinking helps them connect the dots and learn how to find solutions to their problems that are realistic and attainable. This customer-driven model is cost-effective, more efficient and has statistical data proving it is a viable solution to generational poverty.

Creating Your Own Success

Agency helps woman leave behind life of crime

BY KENDALL FIELDS

Twelve years ago Concepcion Dibini was living in New York City, entrenched in a fast life of drugs and crime. Dibini was HIV-positive and had maxed out all of her credit cards looking for a way to get high. It wasn't until she became a grandmother that she decided it was time to turn her life around. She left the city for a fresh start and moved to western New York with a friend.

Dibini went to agency after agency for help, each one only addressing a few of her issues. She turned to her roommate, who worked for Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc., for guidance. She started to read the pamphlets her friend brought home from work and soon realized COI might be able to help her.

When Dibini went to COI she made a plan to get off welfare and fix her finances. COI started by helping her with rent and gave her pointers on how to pay off her debt and repair her bad credit. "My life was immediately better from the moment I came to COI," she says.

"I had tried to go to other agencies in the community and each helped me out a little bit, but nothing like how COI did. These people become your family," Dibini says, adding that even the director of the organization makes it a point to connect with customers and counsel them on how to repair their lives.

Dibini says the system at COI is better than the other agencies because staff make customers take an honest look at what it takes to be self-sufficient. It's what COI refers to as self-reflective change theory.

A COI life coach helped Dibini gain control of her finances through financial coaching. Dibini says COI's programs educate customers

so they can change the habits that got them to a point of crisis — from managing finances to improving mental health.

"At COI you have to do your own footwork if you want to succeed," Dibini says of the system that encourages clients to set goals and map out ways to achieve them. "If you want it, you've got to move." This aligns with the agency's promotion of cognitive behavioral change and development of customer-driven goals.

"At COI you have to do your own footwork if you want to succeed."

CONCEPCION DIBINI, CUSTOMER,
CHAUTAUQUA OPPORTUNITIES, INC.

Today, Dibini says she is a woman her daughter and grandson can be proud of. She says she finally has respect for herself and others. She owns a home with her boyfriend and frequently attends COI community council meetings to hear what is going on in the community and how she can help. COI community council provides a forum for the community to participate in agency processes, substance and advocacy. It develops civic responsibility in customers while connecting the organization to all its constituents.

"COI has your back," Dibini says. "They are there when you have problems and there when you have good times."



Concepcion Dibini went from crisis to a more safe environment with the help of Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc.

WHAT IS THE INTAKE PROCEDURE?

At Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc., intake involves a centralized, electronic intake and risk assessment which generates all eligible services to support a family's movement from crisis to thriving. When a customer first comes to COI they are able to do the initial appointment in a 7- to 10-minute visit or phone call, in which a COI staffer collects basic demographic information and verification. A discussion follows about family need, interests and direction. This is the basis for the early phases of the family plan. This information is put into COI's software system to assess risks and eligibility for all of COI's services. At this point, the system determines pre-eligibility for services. The customer is encouraged to engage in a variety of services that provide a holistic, integrated methodology for life changes. Once the customer decides what services he/she is interested in, he/she is enrolled. COI staff provides basic education about asset development and economic security to develop initial family goals, both short and long term. Finally, appointments with services are coordinated to facilitate rapid service delivery. **KF**

Self-Sufficiency Continuum

BY KENDALL FIELDS

The Self-Sufficiency Continuum tracks customer progress through five life status levels. Each level takes into account quality of life factors such as housing, employment, mental and physical health, family connections and access to food. Here's a sampling of some of the indicators for each level in the Continuum.

IN CRISIS

An individual who is classified as "in crisis" is struggling to achieve the basic needs of life, such as food, shelter and clothing. Some indicators of an in-crisis individual include:

- Homelessness
- Foreclosure
- Isolation
- High debt
- Hunger
- Physical and emotional abuse
- High-risk health problems without ability to receive care

VULNERABLE

An individual who is classified as "vulnerable" is not struggling to achieve basic living needs, but rather to maintain a healthy, safe life and meet basic living needs continuously. Some indicators of a vulnerable individual include:

- Unaffordable housing
- No health insurance
- Sporadic unemployment
- Substance abuse
- Minimal family connections

STABLE

An individual who is classified as "stable" is no longer in jeopardy of meeting basic living needs and is working toward security with assistance. Some indicators of a stable individual include:

- Substandard or unaffordable housing
- Adequate and nutritious food
- Government-paid health insurance
- Stable/regular employment
- Basic family connections
- Early stages of community awareness and connectivity
- Assesses risks to control behaviors

SAFE

An individual who is classified as "safe" has all basic needs met and is working toward complete self-sufficiency with limited or minimal assistance. Some indicators of a safe individual include:

- Health insurance
- Balanced diet
- Contractual child care
- Medical home
- Appropriate debt-to-income ratio
- Emotionally self-regulating
- Employed with signs of promotability.
- Affordable, safe housing of choice

THRIVING

An individual who is classified as "thriving" has all needs met and is able to create a plan to maintain a healthy lifestyle and succeed. Some indicators of a thriving individual include:

- Community involvement
- Homeowner or stable renter
- Does not engage in risky behaviors
- Good nutrition
- No debt
- Emotionally stable
- Continuous medical care for whole family's needs
- Strong family connections
- Planning for and investing in the future

Raquel Spears, director of family services, helps a customer find employment, which is one of the factors considered when assessing a customer on the Self-Sufficiency Continuum.



A Roadmap To Stability

Continuum measures customers' progress

BY KENDALL FIELDS

Poverty that spans generations seems insurmountable to those affected by it. A single mother who grew up in a low-income household with parents who grew up in struggling families may wonder how she can ever make a better life for her family.

Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. makes this generational poverty less intimidating through its Self-Sufficiency Continuum®, which gives individuals and families a roadmap for getting from a state of crisis to a state of stability.

The Continuum is a picture that lets someone look at the life status of a family or an individual. That person can place themselves in one of five levels: "In Crisis," "Vulnerable," "Stable," "Safe" and "Thriving." The customer's status on that spectrum is based on life indicators in certain categories, such as housing, job skills and health. Both staff and customers use the Continuum to determine

which services would most benefit customers and what goals should be set to move the household to the next level of the continuum.

The type of services applied depend on the customer's life status — COI will have a completely different approach to an individual "in crisis" as they would to an individual who is "stable." For instance, those in crisis have a more immediate need for basic life services, such as food and shelter or access to health care.

Raquel Spears, who has been employed with COI since 2004 and works as the director of Family Services, says the Continuum works so well because it uniquely reflects each customer's life. "[The Continuum] allows for a 'wrap around,' holistic approach with attention to many life constructs and how they interplay," Spears says.

"[The Continuum] allows for a 'wrap around,' holistic approach with attention to many life constructs and how they interplay."

RAQUEL SPEARS, DIRECTOR OF FAMILY SERVICES

The Continuum, which is based on Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) and the National Standards and Indicators of Self-Sufficiency, allows customers to examine their own characteristics and generate a visual representation of their life status. This visual helps customers identify

the patterns that have led them to be in a chronic state of crisis and "connect the dots" between their actions and their life situation. A customer who lacks education can see why this has led to unemployment. Or a customer who can't make rent can see why this has led to homelessness or unsafe housing options.

Seeing these patterns helps individuals and families identify their own path to economic security, using the Continuum as their roadmap. COI provides education and services through an asset-based approach with the goal to move away from government assistance. Their progress, from attaining education to safe housing, is measured against the Continuum. Families can make incremental progress along the Continuum, knowing each step is creating real change in their lives.

Youth Finds Success With Help From Chautauqua

Transitional Independent Living Program provides support for disadvantaged youth

BY AMANDA CARAWAY

Paul Overturf was in the first grade when he encountered a police officer for the first time. A social worker had come to collect Overturf and his siblings from an abusive home and when his stepfather tried to interfere the officer stepped in.

"I was so scared," Overturf recalls. "The officer moved me behind him and stood up to my stepdad. It was the first time in my life I remember feeling safe. I want to bring that feeling of safety to others."

He's dreamed of being a law enforcement officer ever since. But, life interfered with this illusive dream. When Overturf turned 17 he dropped out of high school and fled the abuse he continued to suffer at home. He eventually found himself at the Safe House of Chautauqua Opportunities. A counselor there told him about the Transitional Independent Living Program (TILP).

"At first I turned it down because of pride and it just sounded too good to be true," Overturf says. "Eventually I realized the program could help me finish high school and get back on track. I am so glad I went."

Part of Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc., TILP offers safe housing for displaced youth ages 16–21 who have no alternative. Participants receive life skills training and education in a structured environment that promotes success.

Through TILP, Overturf had access to financial literacy classes that taught him about budgeting and financial planning. Advisers helped him with his applications for college and the Educational Development Program, which provides academic support and financial assistance for under-prepared and



Paul Overturf just finished his first year of college, where he serves as a student ambassador. He found help through a safe housing and transitional living program at Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc.

financially disadvantaged students. Most importantly, Overturf found a support system and had access to educated people to serve as mentors.

"I met a different class of people than I was used to and they showed me what life could be," Overturf says. "I knew there was more to life than what I had been living. The staff and volunteers provided great models of what to strive for."

Overturf mapped out a life plan that included a bulleted list of things he wanted to accomplish. After only six months in the program he received an internship as a household Resident Adviser. He graduated from high school in January 2012 and has just finished his first year at the State University of New

York, Fredonia, where he is on the Dean's List and pursuing a degree in sociology.

"I like analyzing and observing people," he says. "People always tell me that I am wiser than my years, but the truth is I had to be in order to survive."

Overturf is registered to take the state trooper exam in October and is well on track to achieving his ultimate goal of joining the FBI, followed by a career as the chief of police in his district.

"This program has done so much for me," he says. "People need to know about the COI and the wonderful things that they do."

"I knew there was more to life than what I had been living. The staff and volunteers [at Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc.] provided great models of what to strive for."

PAUL OVERTURF, YOUTH PARTICIPANT IN THE TRANSITIONAL INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

A Holistic Approach

COI's approach is an efficient way to fight poverty

BY SUKHI BRAR

If there is one thing that can be said about Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc.'s model it's that it is an efficient and holistic approach to ending poverty. Here's why:

- **Centralized Intake** — Once a customer arrives at COI, a highly trained intake specialist uses the CAPTAIN system to determine all services available to the customer. The electronic system also eliminates the need for multiple applications for different programs.
- **Risk Assessment** — The centralized intake includes a risk assessment where the intake specialist asks a series of questions. Based on the answers, the CAPTAIN system will rank a customer's risk as high, moderate or low.
- **Life Plan** — Customers develop goals toward self-sufficiency, community involvement and economic security, thus creating a life plan. The customer enrolls in services that are used as tools to assist in achieving short- and long-term goals.
- **Asset-Focused** — Life coaches assess each customer's strengths, knowing that assets such as an education, family relationships and a vehicle are as valuable as income for customers on the path toward self-sufficiency.
- **Personal Responsibility** — COI encourages individuals to accept responsibility and accountability for personal choices. Customers are provided a wide range of information, allowing them to make informed choices.



PHOTO BY JON ELDER

Using a centralized intake model, Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc. reduces costs and improves efficiencies for both the agency and its customers.

THE PROOF IS IN THE DATA

COI keeps track of customer success

Keeping track of the customer's success is integral to Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc.'s unique model. COI is an evidence-based agency, which means it monitors and measures customer progress longitudinally through the use of continuums, matrices, and centralized, electronic intake.

Logic models embedded in COI's CAPTAIN system gives the organization the ability to

do this. It can also look at costs per client and determine how much of an impact tax dollars are having.

The agency can trust that its data is accurate, too, thanks to certification from the University of Buffalo's School of Social Work Program Evaluation Center, which has scored its data at 99.7 percent reliability.

The agency first collects demographic data from each customer when they first come in, establishing a baseline for that individual's success. This is called the "entry baseline." From there, critical areas are identified including an individual's housing situation, income and employment, physical health and education level.

Success in these areas are measured by tracking the accomplishment of goals set in the customer's life plan across multiple service modalities. Assessments are conducted at regular intervals using a mapping system that demonstrates progress and visually conveys to the customer the steps they have taken toward self-sufficiency. **SB**

Helping You Serve Better

COI model can track success in your community

BY MIKE BLOUNT

One of the most important things a Community Action Agency can have is a comprehensive anti-poverty model. Having that model to follow allows CAAs to evaluate their programs, measure their effectiveness, increase their efficiency and — most importantly — help their customers succeed in life.

Chautauqua Opportunities Inc. has spent the last 10 years implementing a proprietary model that can help other organizations develop a comprehensive anti-poverty model that is evidence based.

Using customized, web-based software called CAPTAIN (Community Action Program Total Automated Information Network), COI collects and tracks data starting with a centralized, electronic intake. This intake process provides an initial risk assessment for each customer using customized questions and specific eligibility criteria embedded in the software regarding each specific service.

With the data collected, life coaches have more information available to help them engage the customer using a strength-based approach. Life coaches can encourage customers to develop short and long term goals related to their areas of risk, but also aligned with the model's continuum of care. Customers are coached to understand personal accountability and responsibility, and think in terms of growing their personal strengths and bettering their lives.

The CAPTAIN database generates all eligible referrals and is used to track customer service longitudinally across all domains. Additionally, it can be used to determine what's effective, and how long it takes each customer to get where they want to be.

If an agency decides to develop such a model, COI is available to provide technical assistance as they implement the new model, up to and including the sale of their evidence-based materials. This is a proven model for success in moving people from crisis or vulnerability to self-sufficiency and economic security. For more information on COI's unique customer-driven model and how to purchase the software and materials, please contact COI's Central Administrative Offices at:



CHAUTAUQUA OPPORTUNITIES, INC.

17 West Courtney St. Dunkirk, NY 14048
(716) 366-3333 (office) • (716) 366-7366 (fax)
www.chautauquaopportunities.com



Roberta Keller is the executive director for Chautauqua Opportunities, Inc.

TESTIMONIAL

"The COI continuum of care is the only system that I have seen in 35 years in this field that addresses and drills down to the rudimentary issues that challenge families to become sustainable and successful. Their years of analyzing and developing software and matching it to their continuum system ensures that other community stakeholders and family or family members have a clear track for continuous improvement of their quality of life."

MIKE CALABRESE,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF OPPORTUNITIES INDUSTRIALIZATION CENTER OF CLARK COUNTY, OHIO