



Eliminating Poverty, Promoting Self-Sufficiency

Northeast Florida Community Action Agency

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Eliminating poverty, promoting self-sufficiency

by Mike Blount

Since the Northeast Florida Community Action Agency was created in Duval County as part of the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act, it has helped thousands of low-income individuals and families by teaching self-sufficiency, promoting healthy and sustainable lifestyles, and providing essential services to those in need.

NFCAA's programs are continually recognized as being both effective and instrumental in eliminating poverty in Northeast Florida. In May 2013, NFCAA was selected for the Florida Association of Community Action's "Community Action Agency of the Year" award — the sixth time NFCAA has won during the award's seven-year history.

Because of their success, NFCAA has become one of the largest nonprofit, volunteer-based organizations in the region serving seven counties across Northeast

Florida, including Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns counties. By collaborating with community partners, NFCAA is able to empower families in Northeast Florida to achieve the goal of self-sufficiency through education, employment and advocacy.

NFCAA is governed by a board of directors from the private, public and low-income sectors, ensuring those in need will always have a voice regarding services in their community.

Without the vital programs that NFCAA provides, many would be without the means to have an equal chance in life and the ability to achieve economic independence for themselves and their families. By increasing economic independence, each community benefits by having members that are more productive, more responsible and more economically viable.



Photo courtesy of NFCAA

Members of the Client Advisory Board of Duval County

Our mission

To collaborate with community partners, empowering families in Northeast Florida to achieve self-sufficiency through education, employment and advocacy.

Community Action Promise:

Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

Note from a NFCAA volunteer,

It was my father that weaned me into the volunteer I am today. My father loved to take us all along to the local community center when he volunteered there working with other youth. And, as the oldest of six boys, it probably didn't hurt that together we were a ready-made team for basketball at the center.

As I got older, I made sure to remember the importance of giving back to the community just as my father had. When I joined the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office in 2005, I began to work with youth ages 8-12 in the area of Jacksonville that was hardest hit by gun crimes. NFCAA had many programs for youth in this area as well, and with funds from the Project Safe Neighborhoods Grant, I was able to help NFCAA fund some of their programs in this hard hit area.

This led to my involvement with the Client Advisory Board (CAB) in NFCAA, where I have now served as President for three years. While I have worked with the CAB, we were able to completely remodel the park behind the Emmet Reed Community Center. We have also held backpack giveaways for disadvantaged youth, giving them much needed school supplies before they start school in the fall. Currently, we are planning our second Day of Service event on Sept. 14th this year, to remember Sept. 11th and help teach local residents about emergency preparedness.

I find that Jacksonville is one of the top cities in the country for volunteers, and would recommend that anyone who has the time to contact NFCAA or one of the other great nonprofits in their area to get involved.

For me, volunteering lets me give a little back to my adopted hometown of Jacksonville. The people I have met through my volunteer services have been some of the most loyal friends I have. I hope that you will find time to volunteer and help make our community one of the best places to live and raise a family in this country.

Sincerely,

Lawrence Jefferson, President,
Client Advisory Board for Northeast
Florida Community Action Agency
in Duval County





"[Working at NFCAA] has tremendously changed my life for the better. Everyone here is so supportive and I just have a good feeling about the future and a lot of things."

Joyce Johnson, receptionist for NFCAA

Joyce Johnson was able to achieve her dream of owning her own home through NFCAA's IDA program.

Photos courtesy of NFCAA

A Place To Call Home

Woman's life is changed through financial literacy by Mike Blount

The dream of buying a house was always slightly out of reach for 70-year-old Joyce Johnson of Jacksonville. She worked two jobs and took care of her grandchildren. Johnson wanted better for herself and her family. Through the Northeast Florida Community Action Agency, she was able to realize her dream.

For seven years, she worked at a fast food restaurant during the day and as a manager for a hotel each night. Johnson says she always prided herself on her work ethic. But after an accident left her unable to work for a while, Johnson realized she needed a change. She could no longer work long hours standing and lifting heavy things. She needed to find work that suited her age.

Johnson went to an agency for seniors to find employment and was connected with NFCAA, where she was hired for a temporary position. She quickly took to her new job, learning everything she could about all of the programs that NFCAA offered.

"I learned about the Family Self-Sufficiency program and the Individual Development Account (IDA) program," Johnson says. "I didn't know they did all these things and I was just so happy to be working there."

After three years with NFCAA, Johnson was hired on part time. She began to take advantage of the

organization's financial literacy classes, taking part in the Money Smarts program and IDA program to learn about personal finance management and budgeting.

"One lesson I learned early on from the IDA program is how to save money effectively," Johnson says. "Based on my paycheck, I set up a limit of \$88.33 per pay period maximum that I could spend on myself. The rest I saved, and after two years, I had enough money saved for a down payment on a house."

Johnson applied for a home through her Habijax for Humanity chapter and put everything she saved toward construction of the house. Joyce saved \$2,000, which was matched by federal and private funds for a total of \$4,000, and put in more than 300 hours of labor on her home over the nine months it was being built.

Today, Johnson lives in her two-story, three bedroom, two bathroom home in a beautiful suburb of Jacksonville. She says she finally has a place she can call home for her and her family — and it was all possible because of her hard work and NFCAA. Her co-workers celebrated her achievement by throwing her a party.

"[Working at NFCAA] has tremendously changed my life for the better," Johnson says. "Everyone here is so supportive and I just have a good feeling about the future and a lot of things. This is the best job I've ever had and it's such a blessing."



Financial Literacy

Financial literacy is the foundation to economic independence. Northeast Florida Community Action Agency offers several financial literacy programs as part of the Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSSP). Through community partners, such as local banking institutions and the United Way, individuals and families can receive help with the Earned Income tax credit and tax preparation. For FSSP participants, Individual Development Accounts are available, which have the monthly service charges waived and provide \$2 in matching funds for every dollar saved. By helping individuals and families achieve economic independence, they will re-invest in the communities where they live and help build a better future.

Data Busters Helps Students Get Ahead

Giving young students their first job skills and experience

by Natasha von Kaenel

Brandon Mitchell wants to win.

Brandon grew up in Grand Park in Jacksonville with two sisters, Courtney and Micheaila. The three of them were raised single-handedly by their mother, Jeanette Mitchell.

While the college student says the community he grew up in wasn't the best neighborhood in town, it is a constant motivation for him to make something of himself. "Every time I go home, I am reminded that there are a lot of people that I used to play basketball with, play football with, and they are in the exact same position that they were when I left to go to college. The exact same position."

When he was 15, he applied to participate in NFCAA's Data Busters program, a summer youth program which gives high school students computer training and employment at a local business for the summer. Each week for six weeks, the students spend two days in the classroom learning Microsoft Office programs, two days working for local businesses, then each Friday, students listen to presentations from local leaders on topics like drug prevention, drunk driving and CPR training.

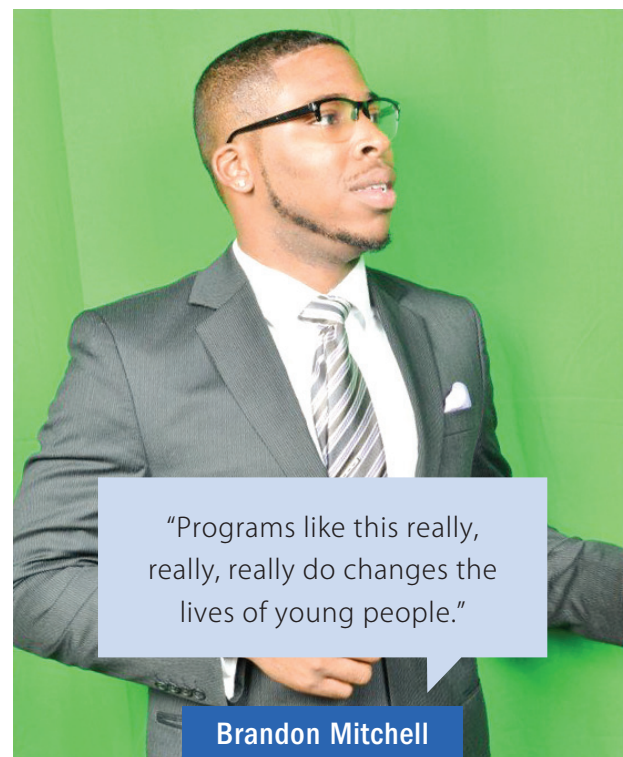
But Brandon says the best part of the program was "the competitive nature it instilled." Throughout the program, students improve their skills in PowerPoint, knowing that at the end of the six weeks, they will all face each other in a PowerPoint competition. The winner gets a new computer, flat screen monitor and a printer.

Brandon wanted to win. The first year, he scraped by with second place. His fervor wasn't about the prize, but about showing his peers what he could really do. "I didn't even need a computer. I had a laptop, so I could afford to give it to somebody who needed it." The next summer, he says, "I actually won."

Data Busters gave Brandon his first paid job. He says, most importantly, it gave him an idea of what is expected in a professional setting and, "that has helped me with every job that came thereafter." Now, he is in his final year at Florida A&M University, working toward a B.S. in Business Administration. He is currently employed as a leasing agent for Off Campus Housing LLC in Tallahassee, and hopes to work as a sales representative for a pharmaceutical firm after he graduates.

Brandon encourages all youth in the area to apply for Data Busters and emphasizes that financial support for these programs should remain a priority. "Programs like this really, really, really do change the lives of young people." But he adds that each kid's success depends on "whether or not they are ready to wake up and smell the roses at that point in their life, or whether they just want to stay asleep."

It is support from the community and programs like Data Busters that help wake up even the drowsiest of kids. And Brandon hasn't left his past behind, "I'm actually coming to speak [the Data Busters] about the positive things I have been doing in life since then." And so, with Brandon, the program has really come full circle.



"Programs like this really, really, really do changes the lives of young people."

Brandon Mitchell



Photos courtesy of NFCAA

Youth Programs Get Kids Into The Community

For two decades, NFCAA has worked with our local youth, giving them the tools they need to make a difference in our community. NFCAA's Youth in Action program helps students after school with homework assistance and encourages them to volunteer locally in the community. Recently, students worked with their hands, tending a community garden and harvesting more than 100 bushels of fruits and

vegetables that were donated to the area's food banks. For students that excel in their studies, the Jaguars Honor Rows Program rewards youth with free tickets to a Jaguar's football game in the exclusive Honor Row Section. Students must complete a book report and presentation, and hundreds of youth have been able to attend the Jaguar football games with the help of this program.



Photo courtesy of NFCAA

A Welcomed Weatherization

Helping families reduce high utility bills

by Natasha von Kaenel

Kera Heydon lives in an unusual house that has indoor terrariums in the foyer. “We have big areas of the house that have no foundation. And we have plants growing, kind of like an indoor garden,” she says. “Kind of weird. It’s cool, though.”

That house is home to her and her husband, John, two daughters, Astrid, 13, and Emilee, 16, and their two rescue dogs, Daisy and Duke.

The family purchased their home in December 2012 with assistance of the Head Start to Home Ownership Program provided by the City of Jacksonville. With only John providing income for the family, keeping costs down was of utmost importance, especially since the utility bill at their previous home could be as high as \$400 a month during summer. When looking for ways to lower her utility costs, she found out about NFCAA’s Weatherization Program, which helps homeowners struggling with high utility bills make their home more energy efficient. She immediately applied for the program.

In January 2013, NFCAA started weatherization services in Heydon’s home, including wrapping the water heater, insulating the water lines, installing exterior solar screens, insulating the attic and sealing the home’s duct system. Heydon estimates that NFCAA spent roughly \$3,000 on weatherization for her home, and says that, “It was a lot more than I ever would have expected or asked for.”

After the work was finished, Kera says her home was noticeably more comfortable. The electric bill was \$280 in January and has dropped to \$241 in June. “And right now it’s probably 93 degrees and 80 percent humidity.”

Kera encourages others to apply for programs like this one, and she says, “I realize how difficult it is to go from being average Joe to having absolutely nothing. And it’s devastating.” But she says programs like this one can help people get back up on their feet. Kera says with the savings on her energy costs and her mortgage payments things are really looking up. “We’re not destitute anymore. And that’s a very nice feeling.”

Comfortable, Safe Homes

As it gets hotter, keeping your home comfortable is usually the biggest use of energy. Weatherization measures, like solar screens and attic insulation, can trap in winter warmth and shield the home from the summer sun, saving hundreds of dollars in energy costs. NFCAA partnered with local energy providers to hold Savings without Sacrifice classes, a workshop for families that educates them about steps they can take to reduce energy consumption in their home. Typically, low-income households spend 17 percent of their total annual income on energy. The weatherization measures installed provide long-term relief for low-income families and protect them against future fluctuations in energy costs by reducing energy consumption. Additionally, as estimated by the U.S. Department of Energy, these weatherization services save customers an average of \$358 annually and return an average of \$2.69 in energy and non-energy benefits for every dollar invested.

Finding Hope

Woman fighting cancer inspired to give back by Mike Blount

Almost two decades ago, 63-year-old Grace Conner came to Northeast Florida Community Action Agency for help paying her utility bill when she became overwhelmed with medical bills. She was diagnosed with emphysema, a long-term lung cancer, in 1993, and was struggling to make ends meet as a single mother raising two children.

"I had always worked full time in retail, but all of a sudden I had to go to the emergency room all the time and I didn't have health insurance," Conner says.

Conner was able to receive disability payments, but it was not nearly enough to cover all of her regular expenses and medical bills. She was making less than half what she normally brought home in a month. Then a friend told her about NFCAA and some of the programs they offered to people in need in the community.

"I had no idea that they were helping so many people in so many ways," Conner says. "I wanted to help, too, so I just asked about volunteering, and they got me started putting double bags on groceries that are handed out."

Conner volunteers for the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program distributing food for

individuals and families in need. Conner even recruited her twin sister, Patricia Smith, to come volunteer with her. Both sisters have been volunteering for TEFAP for 10 years.

Despite her health getting worse over the years, Conner still tries to find the strength to come and volunteer whenever she can. In 2007, she was admitted to the hospital for 14 days after she was having trouble swallowing. She was diagnosed with pneumonia and the added complications exacerbated her emphysema. At one point she was even placed on life support, but she was able to recover. Conner says she feels much healthier today.

Conner says she appreciates everything NFCAA has done for her and her family. She even made a fruit cake to thank the staff members she volunteers with. By volunteering her time, Conner says she hopes that more people will realize the great work that NFCAA is doing and be inspired to volunteer their time as well.

"A lot of hard work goes into getting those bags of food ready for people every three months," Conner says. "It takes a lot of work and a lot of volunteers, but it is rewarding work. I think everybody that does it feels the same way and it's such a good feeling."



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Grace Conner, TEFAP volunteer



Photos courtesy of NFCAA

Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program

With assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Northeast Florida Community Action Agency provides eligible families and individuals with necessary food assistance during a time of crisis. Food items distributed include dairy products, fresh produce, bakery goods, meats, beverages, frozen foods, dried peas, beans, rice and pasta. In 2011-2012, TEFAP served

2,818 individuals by distributing more than 10,000 bags of food to families in Duval, Baker, Nassau, and St. Johns counties. Distributions are made through a partnership with Second Harvest Food Bank, Florida's largest food bank on a quarterly basis, allowing those in need to live healthy and productive lives.



Photo courtesy of NFCAA

"A lot of people just don't know what to do when a crisis situation happens."

Willie Cooper Jr., volunteer coordinator

NFCAA's Day Of Service And Remembrance

Honoring 9/11 and helping prepare you for any crisis situation by Natasha von Kaenel

Everyone can remember where they were the morning of Sept. 11, 2001. Twelve years later, NFCAA's Day of Community Service and Remembrance event honors those that lost their lives in 9/11 and helps residents learn how to prepare if a crisis situation happened in their own neighborhood.

The inaugural event, which was held in seven different counties in Northeast Florida, gave the community information regarding disaster preparedness

and healthy lifestyle choices, including on-site cooking demonstrations, and blood pressure and diabetes check-ups. A mobile police station van and fire truck are on site for visitors to tour.

But according to Willie Cooper Jr., the lead coordinator of the Solomon Calhoun Community Center, what really drew people was the on-site helicopter. He says people expected it to just be waiting there when they showed up, but, "We had the event going on and then the helicopter

flew in. He made a grand entrance, did a couple laps, did a couple circles, it was pretty neat."

Willie adds the helicopter's grand entrance wasn't the only thing people were excited about. "We also had some giveaways," and he adds with a laugh in his voice, "People love free stuff." And Willie says, "NFCAA gave away free first-aid kits, portable flashlight radios with sirens and tote bags ... a bunch of free, nice little gifts for a crisis situation."

In order to make an event like this happen, NFCAA and the event organizers rely on support from community volunteers. And take Willie's word for it, volunteers get to have the most fun. "They get to go in the helicopter first, they get to see the command post, they get to see the fire trucks. They get to experience it first, so when a volunteer or a participant comes up and says, 'Oh, what is this?' They have a little more insight of what exactly is going on."

Events like this help communities move forward and learn from the tragedies of the past. When a disaster strikes, it is important to act quickly and know where to go or what to do to stay safe. And Willie says, this event helps the community be prepared, especially now that hurricane season is fast approaching. "It was a great event. You know, it was one of those events that a lot of people need to encounter, because a lot of people just don't know what to do when a crisis situation happens. A lot of people do not know what the Red Cross number is or where the shelter is, so I think it's one of the events that needs to happen."

When Volunteering Every Minute Counts

Every minute working with youth, every minute preparing and distributing food to those in need, every minute fundraising and organizing events is important. In 2011-2012, more than 300 volunteers donated 954,840 minutes of their time to help make this community better. Last Easter, volunteers distributed shopping bags of ham, vegetables, rolls and desserts to 155 families that couldn't afford food for their Easter dinner. And it didn't feel like work. Roland Gauthier, a local organizer for the event, shares that, "I spend days and days making labels for these bags, but I know it's a good thing. I think people like to volunteer for this

program because you are not thinking about yourself, you are thinking about people less fortunate than you. And that's a nice feeling." Thousands of North Florida families rely on NFCAA every week for help with weatherization assistance, energy education, youth activities, and more, and that is only possible through the dedication and support of volunteers.

You can find out more about volunteering at www.nfcaa.net/volunteer/volunteer.asp, or by calling the main office at (904) 398-7472. Donations can be sent through the mail or made online at www.nfcaa.net/volunteer/donate.asp.

Give Your Neighbor A Helping Hand

Volunteering is just as rewarding
for the volunteer

by Natasha von Kaenel



A family stares at an empty Easter table. A young girl has no notebooks for starting school. Her mother skips dinner, their income sucked dry by high energy bills. A boy has never had a computer in his home and is struggling to keep up in school. Volunteers and generous donations are helping to make these situations

a thing of the past in the North Florida community. Thousands of families in our area rely on NFCAA for support and assistance when they most need it. Give some time or make a donation to your neighbors to help them get by, you never know when it could be you that just needs a little help to get back up on your feet.

Find out more about how to volunteer at www.nfcaa.org/volunteer/volunteer.asp or by calling your local office. Donations can be made through the mail or online at www.nfcaa.org/volunteer/donate.asp.

Q&A With John W. Edwards, Jr. Executive Director, NFCAA

by Mike Blount

How did you get started with Northeast Florida Community Action Agency?

My entrance into community action came as an elected, low-income board member because I was active in the community in a rural part of Gainesville. I moved to Jacksonville in 1981, and in 1983 I took a job with the governor's office working with the Workforce Board. In particular, I was active in trying to get the parents of low-income households to enroll their children in Head Start programs and I became a little bit more familiar with the work community action agencies were doing. I saw community action agencies help break the cycle of poverty and help people become more self-sufficient, and I was intrigued by the opportunity of two organizations working together to do good in the community. I eventually took a job with NFCAA and I've been there ever since.

How is the work NFCAA is doing impacting the community?

After 20 years in this capacity, we've clearly seen tremendous impact. We've seen entire city neighborhoods transformed. Natural disasters, like hurricanes and high winds, are something we're accustomed to, and the work we've done has helped entire communities rebuild. The response we've gotten back is just tremendous. With programs like Data Busters, kid's lives are transformed. They're graduating from high school and starting their own businesses. We've helped a number of people who were unemployed, and are now working in the tech industry or as LPNs. We've made repairs to over 2,000 homes after the Weatherization Act was passed — replacing doors and adding new central heat and air units to homes. We've operated programs for first-time home buyers and helped people continue their education through post-secondary



Photo courtesy of NFCAA

education programs. I feel good about all of those things we're doing. It's gratifying to help people in the community.

What are some struggles the NFCAA is facing?

Funding. We lost \$1 million in funding from budget cuts. We don't operate a Youth in Action program anymore because of it. That was my baby because I started it in 1993 as an after-school tutorial and crime-prevention program — helping teens manage their anger and say "no" to drugs. A number of things like that have been impacted and kids involved in those programs were better off when they left than when they came in.

Locations

Administrative Office/Weatherization (all counties):

4070 Boulevard Center Drive
Building 4500, Suite 200
Jacksonville, Florida 32207
(904) 398-7472

Baker County:

84 W. Lowder Street, Suite B
Macclenny, Florida 32063
(904) 259-4481

Clay County:

Green Cove Springs

321 Walnut Street
Green Cove Springs, Florida 32043
(904) 529-2200

Orange Park

1543 Kingsley Ave., Suite 10
Orange Park, Florida 32073
(904) 592-4838

Duval County:

Emmett Reed Center

1093 W. 6th Street, Suite 212
Jacksonville, Florida 32209
(904) 632-1470

Robert F. Kennedy Center

1133 Ionia Street, Suite 212
Jacksonville, Florida 32206
(904) 632-1461

Flagler County:

4750 East Moody Blvd.
Bunnell, Florida 32110
(386) 313-2506

Nassau County:

1303 Jasmine Street, Suite 100
Fernandina Beach, Florida 32034
(904) 261-0801

Putnam County:

1201 Madison Avenue, Suite 102
Palatka, Florida 32177
(386) 385-3954

St. Johns County:

1300 Duval Street
St. Augustine, Florida 32084
Phone (904) 824-0978