

# Montgomery County, Maryland COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY

## 60 Years of Helping People, Changing Lives

- On August 20, 1964, President Johnson established the Community Action Program through the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 – declaring “unconditional war on poverty.” This Community Action Program established Community Action Agencies (CAAs) throughout the United States to coordinate poverty relief programs. The Community Action approach emphasizes local priorities and maximum feasible participation – a requirement that individuals from communities-served be represented in the decision-making body of the agency. The Community Action Approach empowers struggling individuals through including them in the community’s problem-solving process and ensures a collaboration of all the community’s stakeholders in determining the community’s priorities and actions. Head Start programs are often administered by CAAs.
- CAAs serve 99 percent of counties in the United States. In Maryland, there are 17 community action agencies, 14 nonprofits, and three public agencies – in the City of Baltimore, in Frederick County, and in Montgomery County.
- The first **Community Action Agencies (CAA)** were established in 1965.
- **The Montgomery County Council appointed 29 members to serve on the Community Action Committee (CAC) in 1966**, when Montgomery County’s population was ~425,000, and 97 percent Caucasian.
- **Locally, Head Start initiated in 1965**, providing an early intervention, pre-kindergarten program for low-income children and their families.
- **Information and referral services** started, providing support to individuals who need personal assistance.
- CAC engaged in an advocacy campaign on behalf of families/individuals in need, to assure that eligible households received food stamps.
- CAC coordinated a “Quality of Life” seminar that led to the **establishment of the TESS Center in 1968**, directed by Frederick S. Anderson. Staff included four neighborhood workers, three information referral interviewers, a social services aide, a public health nurse, and a manpower aide.
- The **Transportation Demonstration Program** started providing low-income residents with access to social services, food stamps and medical care.
- Mobile Medical Care was established in Ken Gar in 1969. Low-income residents were provided with medical services within their own community.
- The **Neighborhood Youth Corps** was established. Youth ages 14 - 21 were provided with summer and out-of-school work experience.
- The **Holiday Food Basket Program** was initiated to provide food for Thanksgiving and December holidays to low-income families.
- CAC advocated for, and assisted in, the **rehabilitation of the Mt. Zion Day Care Center**, one of two area centers serving low-income families.
- CAA coordinated the use of an **emergency shelter** in a County-owned house for families who lost their homes.
- In 1969, a widow in Beallsville was the **first housing rehabilitation program recipient** from the Montgomery County Department of Community Development. To meet housing standards, work included repairing the roof, chimney, electrical work, floors, and installing railings.



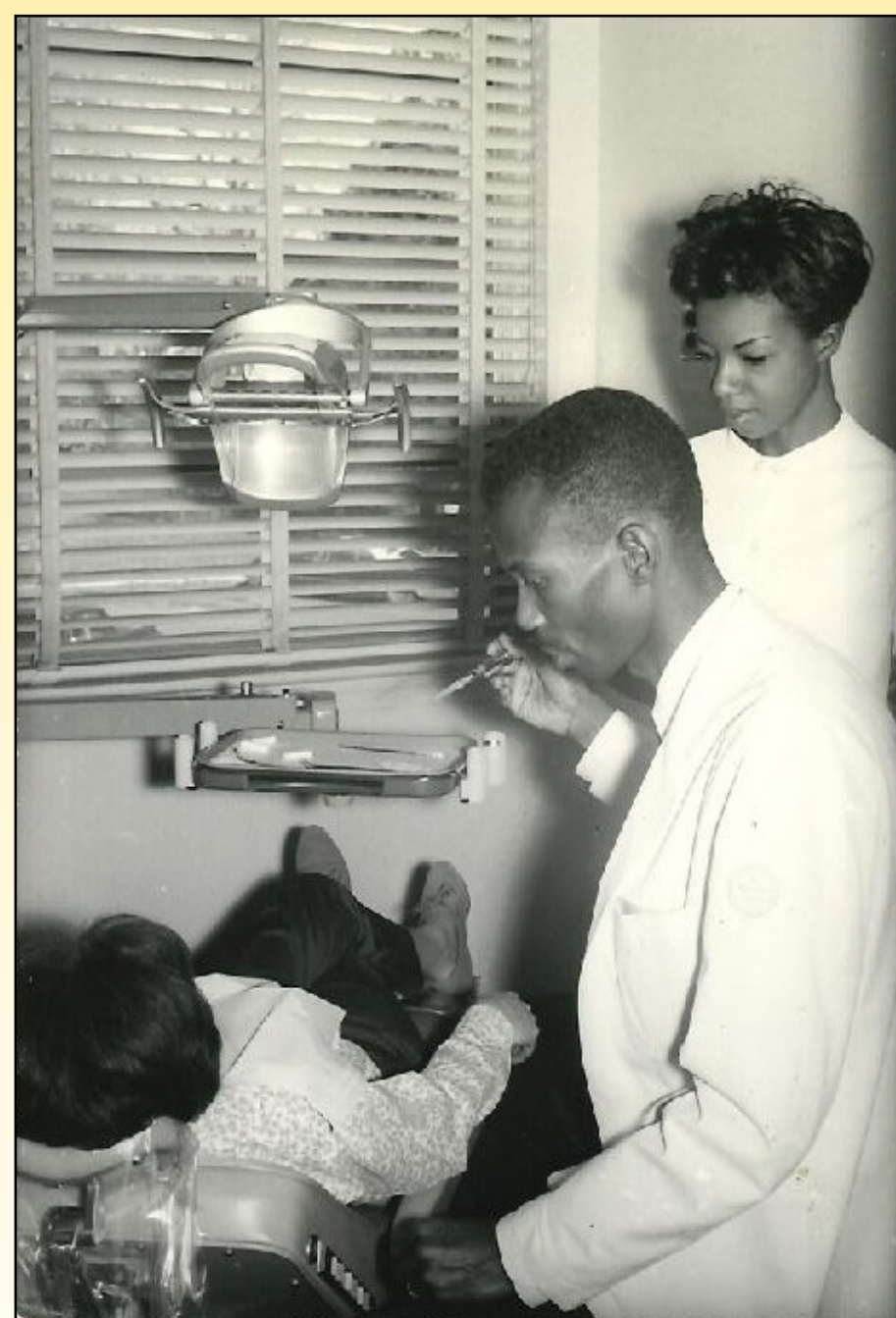
# 1960s





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- The Community Action Committee is formally designated as the “Community Action Agency.”
- With the Maryland Bar Association, legal aid clinics began providing free legal advice to low-income individuals in Rockville and Takoma Park.
- Twenty-six low-income housing units were built in Tobytown. This federally subsidized housing project provided sanitary and safe housing to original settlers of Montgomery County.
- Summer jobs and the “Opportunities Industrialization Center” program were initiated.
- Summer meals programs initiated, serving 51,000 free and reduced summer lunches to eligible children at 28 recreation centers and schools.
- The Maryland Energy Assistance Program was initiated to provide assistance with fuel bills to low-income citizens.
- The Scotland Neighborhood Center opened to provide a central place for community activities and recreational programs.
- The Weatherization Program was initiated, installing storm windows, weather stripping, and insulating eligible low-income citizens’ homes.
- The Leadership Development Unit conducted workshops and forums to train individuals exhibiting leadership potential in community organization, resource identification, voter education, and parental stress management.
- Community organization programs were initiated, offering technical assistance to tenant/civic associations in low-income communities to redress their problems in Emory Grove, Sandy Spring, Poolesville, Rockville, Ken Gar, Lyttonsville, Mt. Zion, Stewartown, and Good Hope.
- The CAA Job Mobile traveled into neighborhoods in various parts of the County with a year-round job training, recruitment and counseling service.
- CAA played an important role in the Emory Grove Urban Renewal Project.
- The Transportation Demonstration Program grew with County support into the beginning of the Ride-On system.



# 1970s



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- On behalf of low-income County residents, **MCCAA promoted human service coordination** of advocacy, policy development, contract management, program monitoring, and brokering services to assist the underemployed and unemployed.
- Coordinated, monitored, and provided technical assistance to human service contracts, including **Head Start, Hire-One Project, Manna Food Center, Inc., Legal Aid Project, Grant Assistance Program, CMMC/Truck Program, Interfaith Clothing Center, Foreign Student Assistance Program, Summer Food Program, C-4 Clothes Closet, Shepherd's Table Soup Kitchen, and Emergency Community Service Homeless Grant (ECSHG)/Stuart B. McKinney Act.**
- **In 1981, the Economic Opportunity Act, along with its Community Services Administration expired. Congress authorized the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG),** the federal funding for community action agencies, through the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1981, consolidating 77 existing anti-poverty grants into nine. Community services programs were moved to the Office of Community Services, Administration for Children and Families in the United States Department of Health and Human Services. **Maryland's Department of Housing and Community Development** administers and monitors CSBG funding, and supports technical assistance to its grantees.
- In 1989, **Head Start** serves **1,100** children and their families, including County-funded Head Start classes.
- In 1985 an **Educational Task Force of the CAB** examined "problems facing socio-economically disadvantaged students in the school system" and made 14 recommendations for improvement.
- Coordinated the County-wide **employment and training** efforts, including teen summer jobs fairs and the employment and training directory.
- Designed various programs including **preventing early pregnancy, early fatherhood, AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse, and related social health.**
- Continued to **advocate and provide technical assistance** to low-income areas, including: **Wheaton/Connecticut Avenue Estates, Quince Orchard (Fellowship Lane), Damascus Gardens.**
- Offered a series of human services workshops/conferences, including **Annual SERV Symposium for Volunteers, employment and training workshops, and the Children in Poverty and Women in Poverty Conferences.**
- Offered a series of **training workshops**, to address housing, health, voter education, consumer rights, parenting, sensitivity awareness, and welfare.
- Pioneered activities which benefit the low-income **multicultural communities** throughout the County.
- **Monitored legislation** and its effects on low-income workers of Montgomery County.
- Coordinated the deliberations and report of the County Executive-appointed "**Special Committee on Hunger.**"
- **Initiated the County's emergency food efforts through the coordination of FISH and HELP groups, churches, Manna food boxes, USDA Surplus Food Distribution and the weekly surplus food program.**
- Developed the **Helping a Neighborhood Develop (HAND) Program**, recruiting low-income residents for training to serve as neighborhood counselors in their respective communities, i.e.: **Emory Grove, Sandy Spring and Tobytown.**
- Established **Citizens Actively Developing Resourceful Empowerment (CADRE)** to train grassroots individuals exhibiting leadership potential and ability to advocate for programs and services in their communities, such as substance abuse prevention activities and resource identification.
- Researched and published the first **Minimum Standard of Need Report**, detailing the actual dollars needed to sustain a family of four in Montgomery County.



# 1980s

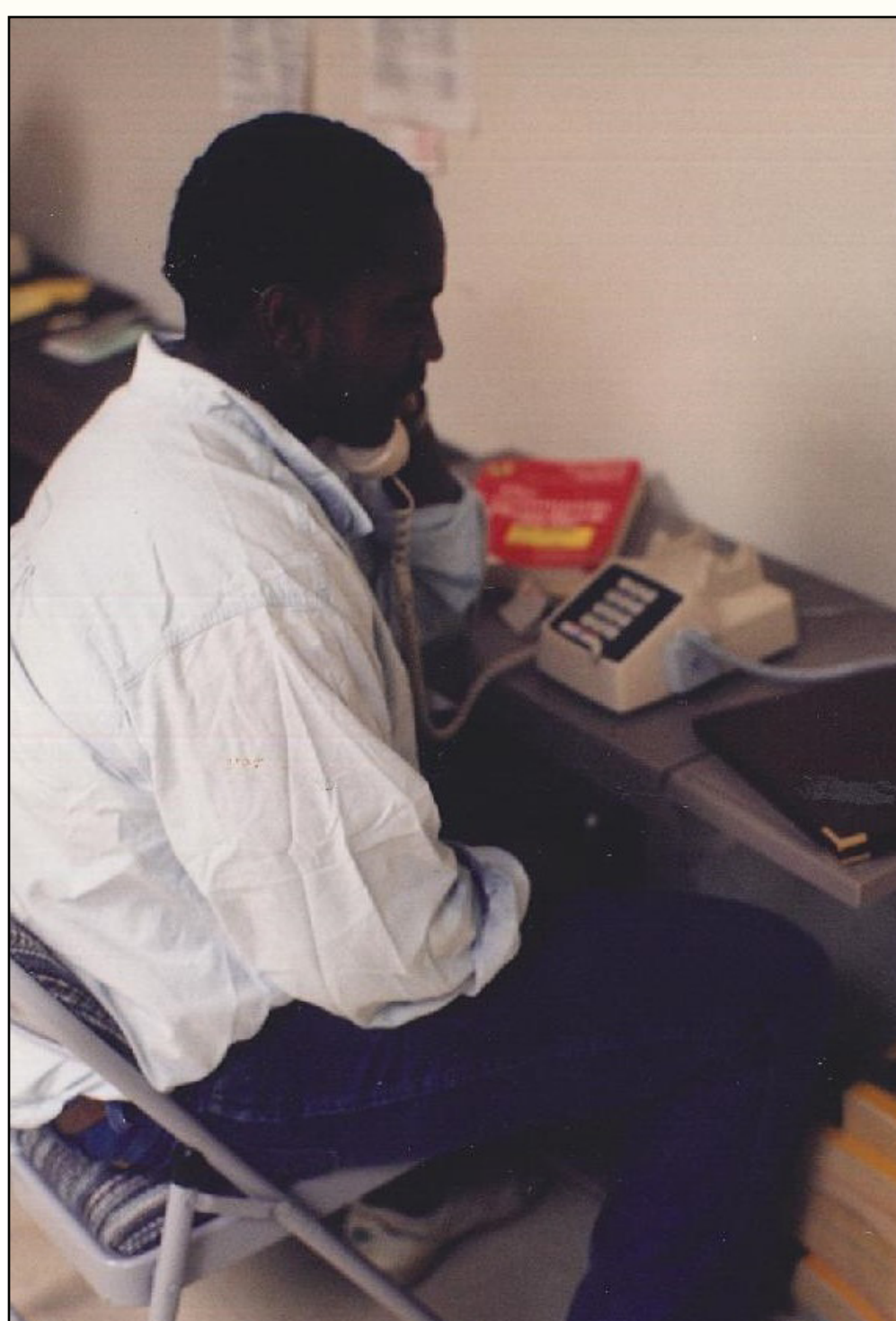




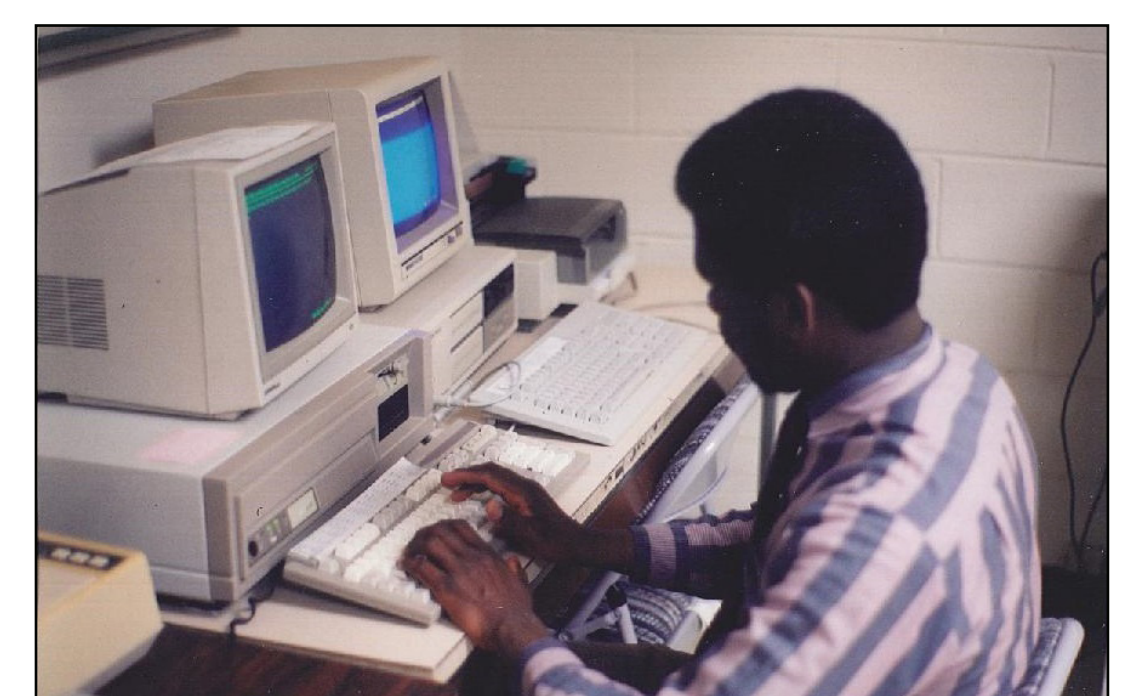
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- With the **1989 - 1993 recession, the low-income population increased and became more diverse.** Middle class and working poor families lost earning power. Low-income minority and multicultural persons, mostly Spanish-speaking, moved into Montgomery County at the highest rate of all counties in Maryland, and lacked work, education, and language skills to thrive in an increasingly competitive & technical society.
- **MCCAA initiated quarterly poverty statistics reports to the County Government and residents in 1990.** County cases for AFDC, food stamps and Medicaid increased 24% 1989 - 1993, then stayed level in 1994. Children eligible for FARMS increased from 13,000 in 1989 to 25,000 in 1994.
- In 1991, produced the first **Minimum Standard of Need (MSON)** report for a family of 3, and updated for a family of 4. The **MSON** was updated again in 1994. With the Commission on Aging, CAA produced a **MSON for the Elderly (MSON-E)** for a 2-person household.
- In 1991, federal funds were awarded to CAA for the MCPS and Montgomery County School Health, to implement the **Head Start Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project** to assist a group of children of low-income families in the early grades of elementary school. The project was one of 32 in the nation.
- In cooperation with the Montgomery County Public Schools, the Head Start Parent Policy Council and the Head Start staff, conducted a **“Head Start Needs Assessment.”** As a result, the federal Head Start Office increased **Head Start** slots to **1,469 children and their families** in 1995, including County-funded classes. The children were placed in **99 classes in 60 locations** throughout the County.
- CAA received a State grant to provide all day, all year Head Start for **an additional six weeks** to 75 children with critical needs.
- The Community Action staff and CAB continued to support **Citizens Actively Developing Resourceful Empowerment (CADRE) and Helping a Neighborhood Develop (HAND)** projects for low-income residents’ advocacy training and work skills development. In 1995, CADRE members focused on community empowerment & voter education met with State legislators to voice concerns about Welfare Reform.
- As the MCCAA staff decreased, **volunteers and partnerships with other private and public agencies** enabled MCCAA and CAB to serve the increased number and diversity of the County’s low-income population, including contracts with: **Manna Food Center, Inc.; Shepherd’s Table, Bethesda Cares and other emergency shelters for the homeless; C-4 Clothes Closet and Interfaith Clothing; grant assistance by Community Ministries and HOC furniture; and the Holiday Basket Program** serving ~1,000 residents.
- **Established the Kensington Career Center (KCC)** to assist people who were homeless in obtaining jobs and gaining skills, so that they could leave the shelters for more permanent housing.
- **Established the East Silver Spring Employment and Training Center (ESSE&TC)** to help day labor minority/multicultural men & women obtain work and education to become self-sufficient.
- In 1994, community action agencies began utilizing a **Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA)** framework to improve services and to communicate outcomes.
- In 1996, **CAA relocated** from 401 Fleet Street in Rockville to 8210 Colonial Lane - **Progress Place**, in Silver Spring.
- In 1996, the **CAB organized a Dialogue on Poverty**, led by Karla Hoffman, Chair, and Marcia Plater, Executive Director, with **106 participants**.
- In 1997, the **Rosemary Hills Foreign Student Center** was established to register young adult foreign students for classes/workshops on adjusting to American culture. 2,546 individuals were served.
- In 1998, Welfare Reform/Regionalization: **DHHS Welfare Reform Initiative, Community Vision.**
- In 1998, the CAB supported increasing the eligibility cap for **Working Parents Assistance** to \$35,000 (first adjustment since establishing in 1986).
- In 1999, CAB testified about Maryland’s **Extended Elementary Ed program (EEEP)** being placed under Head Start and supported **the Collaboration Council’s Children’s Agenda.**
- In 1999, MCCAA staff provided services at **Quebec Terrace.**



# 1990s





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- In 2000, Head Start served 1,700 families, including County-funded classes. Partners included **Silver Spring Presbyterian Children's Center, the YMCA, Maryland Child Services and Montgomery College**. Dozens of child-care partners provided before & after care, and summer services.
- In 2003, the CAB led a **Head Start/Early Childhood Town Hall**. Federally-funded Head Start students was reduced from **831 to 648**, the current enrollment level. At that time, County-funded "Head Start" served an additional 862 children ages 3 and 4 and their families, for a total of 1,693 children served. The County program pre-dated the current State-funded pre-kindergarten program. A Housing Town Hall was also held.
- From 2001 – 2009, the **CAA East County office** delivered emergency services, information and referral, immunization clinic, and assistance with child care subsidy and Rental Assistance applications. On-site partners included the **People's Community Wellness Center, Mobile Medical Care, and Manna Food Center, and other HHS agencies**. CAA's Community Services Aides partnered with **Montgomery Housing Partnership** by providing outreach at East County's **Good Hope Homes Community Center**. Services discontinued in 2009 with budget cuts to staffing.
- In 2002, CAB member **Ann Byrne** is volunteer of the year. Founder of the Parent Connection and its Washington Parent newspaper, and the Board's representative from the Crossway Community, co-chair of the Montgomery County Early Childhood Initiative to improve school readiness.
- In 2003, CAA replaced the Minimum Standard of Need through a partnership with **Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW)** and later with the **University of Washington**, to obtain data to internally update Montgomery **Self-Sufficiency Standard Report**, used by CAB, advocates and policymakers to advance initiatives on behalf of low-income people.
- In 2005, the **"Walk a Mile"** project paired policymakers and low-income families for a month of "walking in each others' shoes." Participants included Congressman Chris Van Hollen; State Senator Leonard Teitelbaum; Delegates Jean Cryor, Henry Heller, Sheila Hixson, Anne Kaiser, Adrienne Mandel, and Karen Montgomery; Director of HHS Carolyn Colvin; and MCPS board member Dr. Charles Haughey. The project was also conducted in 2008, with Maryland Senator Richard Madaleno and staff of Representative Chris Van Hollen.
- CAA partnered with Georgetown University Medical Center to create the **Community-Based Services for Low-Income Trauma Survivors**. The focus is placed on developing models of detection and care for trauma related mental health needs of low-income women.
- CAA staff assisted with training the residents of **Connecticut Avenue Estates** to resolve conflicts between long standing residents and the newly arrived immigrants by partnering with the Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County.
- In 2005, CAB presented **"The Face of Poverty in Montgomery County, MD: Bringing Poverty in View: Faces & Facts"** to the **Community Ministries' Annual Caregivers Conference**.
- In 2005, CAA assigned a full-time staff member to provide direct support through resource and referral counseling to **Hurricane Katrina survivors**.
- In 2007, **VITA expands to a second site**, serving a total of 676 residents at TESS and Progress Place, and yielding \$1M (combined) to customers through federal and state refunds, including EITC. In 2009 and 2010, the Cities of Rockville and Gaithersburg join as partners. Through a collaboration with **University of Maryland School of Social Work and Maryland CASH, student Community Fellows** enhance capacity.
- In 2008, CAB and CAA participated in **Interfaith Works' "Conversations on Poverty."** Staff and Board contributed to the **"Call to Action"** response with DHHS. MCCA co-lead the data group, and produced a comprehensive **"Faces of Poverty"** report in 2009. The work led to the development in 2009 of three **Neighborhood Services Centers**, later known as **Neighborhood Opportunity Network** sites in high-need zip codes, including **Gaithersburg (at Family Services, Inc.), Wheaton (at Catholic Charities), and the TESS Center (with Mary's Center)**.
- In 2008, hosted Understanding the **Roots of Poverty**, with author Fr. Clarence Williams discussing "Poverty and Racism: Overlapping Threats to the Common Good."
- **The Great Recession of 2007 – 2009 leads Montgomery County into 2010 with its highest poverty rate in two decades, at 7.5 per cent.**



# 2000 - 2009



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- CAA relocated from Progress Place to the Mid-County Regional Services Center in Wheaton in 2010, and to 1401 Rockville Pike in 2016.
- In 2010, ARRA funding expanded CAA's VITA to 4 sites, serving 2,749 households receiving refunds and tax credits totaling \$8.2M; piloted a financial education program, serving 339 residents through 69 free financial education classes (English/Spanish), which became incorporated into Maryland CASH Campaign's online CASH Academy; and provided consultations to 106 customers with intensive needs.
- ARRA funding supported a partnership with Montgomery College to train 63 TANF participants in the Pharmacy Tech and Physical Therapy Aide programs. To address rising family homelessness, ARRA supported DHHS placements at the National Center for Children and Families.
- In 2011, MCCA joins public and nonprofit partners and volunteers to create the Coalition for the Advancement of Financial Education (CAFE) Montgomery MD.
- In 2012, CAB's enabling legislation is changed, reducing the Community Action Board to no more than 24 members, nor less than 12 members.
- In 2012 and 2016, MCCA collaborated with the Maryland Community Action Partnership and the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development to fund the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Maryland, produced by the Center for Women's Welfare at the University of Washington. In 2018, MCCA released the Self-Sufficiency Standard Montgomery County MDt, also with the University of Washington, and engaged CountyStat analysts to generate the Interactive Self-Sufficiency Standard online, integrating Census population data.
- The Montgomery County Food Council launched in February 2012. Its 25 Council Members include chef restaurateurs, food entrepreneurs, and representatives of non-profits, business, and local government including CAA managers. The Food Security advisory board mirrors the CAB.
- In 2014, TESS partnered with MCPS to become a summer meal site, serving over 1,000 meals each year to children.
- From 2015-2018, MCCA partnered with Volunteer Maryland to engage an AmeriCorps member in VITA and SNAP outreach. In 2016, the agency receives the prestigious Volunteer Service Award from the Governor.
- On 8/10/2016, TESS staff joined the DHHS emergency response team, the American Red Cross, the Dept. of Recreation, Adventist Community Services, Montgomery Housing Partnership (MHP), and CASA de Maryland and other providers to deliver and coordinate services following the devastating explosion and fire at Flower Branch Apartments. With MHP, MCCA engaged CAFE Montgomery, the Comptroller of Maryland, and the VITA team to provide financial and tax information to survivors. TESS staff provided case management, housing and mental health services and continues supporting survivors and the community.
- Following the 2016 EITC Roundtable, MCCA launches the County's CASHBACK website and expands EITC and free tax awareness through a National Association of Counties (NACo) award-winning comprehensive multi-media campaign, including Ride-On ads and electronic signage, earning. By 2018, through a United Way grant, information for all 8 of the county's free tax partners is produced in five languages.
- In 2016, MCCA Head Start served 648 children whose families speak 60 languages. The VITA program filed tax returns for 2,204 county households at five community locations, for \$5M in total refunds and credits; 7,250 Long Branch client visits to TESS. With other DHHS sites, TESS begins utilizing the electronic Integrated Case Management system (eICM); and MCCA staff monitored contracts with 27 non-profit partners totaling \$3.8 million.
- In 2017, the CAB piloted the NACo award-winning Leadership Development Institute, renamed the Community Advocacy Institute in 2018.
- In 2017, MCCA begins its partnership with WorkSource Montgomery; in-kind services include financial education and tax preparation.
- In 2019, the Standby Guardianship program collaborates with TESS to provide free family safety planning assistance for parents/guardians at risk of serious health issues, as well as being in danger of detainment or deportation.
- In 2017-2018, MCCA celebrates its 50th anniversary of services to Montgomery County's poor and working poor families, within a network of 17 Community Action Agencies in Maryland serving 221,453 low-income individuals and leveraging \$160,894,735 of non-CSBG funding.
- In 2018, Montgomery County has over 1.1 million residents, with a "minority majority" population.
- In 2019, the annual Head Start Day in the Park commences. By 2023, attendance at the annual event tops 500 children and families.



# 2010 - 2019



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- On March 13, 2020, Montgomery County Government shifts the majority of office workers to temporary telework “for two weeks” as the COVID-19 pandemic numbers rise across the U.S. Aside from the MCCA contracts team, which participated in a MCG pilot teleworking program since 2016, remote work was new to many colleagues and required needed new equipment and protocols. With IRS approval, VITA staff and volunteers served taxpayers virtually for the first time. Both VITA and TESS exchanged paperwork with customers through a “contactless” drop-off system to reduce COVID-19 transmission. Head Start and all MCPS classes were provided virtually.
- Nonprofit partners and DHHS together open seven food distribution hubs across the County to address the economic impacts of the pandemic. By 2023, the hubs have added distribution of essentials such as hygiene products as well as case management.
- The Emergency Response unit in TESS grew with 2021 CARES funding into a new Navigation unit to support Public Health’s Mass Cares efforts during emergencies and through post-emergency case management for essential needs (housing, food, clothing, connection to behavioral health and other services). By FY23, the Navigation program assisted 342 separate households regain housing after 11 Mass Care events. That same year, the County established a permanent Navigation Unit, which was allotted three full-time Community Services Aide positions and one Program Manager. CSAs work from TESS, CAA’s Rockville office, and partnering sites (incl. Regional Service Centers & food distribution hubs).
- In 2022, using funding received through a statewide Whole Family/2Gen Pilot Program, the agency created the Opportunity Coach position at TESS. The Opportunity Coach provides long-term case management to families; in 2024, a diaper distribution program was added with a state grant.
- In 2022, TESS moved to 8703 Flower Avenue, Silver Spring, around the corner from the Piney Branch location occupied since the 1968 inception of TESS. The smaller space required the relocation of onsite Judy Center services, while partnerships such as the Pro Bono legal advice program continue. Staff speak English, Spanish, and Amharic.
- The County’s Office of Grants Management opens in 2022 and assumes management of the Community Grants program from the County Executive and County Council offices. While Legacy grants continue through FY2025, new Community Grants are also issued for the first time.
- The County’s Office of Food Systems Resilience was launched in 2023 based on the recommendations of the County’s Food Security Task Force (FSTF), formed during the COVID-19 pandemic to address the County’s food-related issues. The OFSR partners with CAA to address food security issues through contracts, navigation, and outreach.
- In FY22, staff received a request from DHHS colleagues who were working with Spanish-speaking parents of children in the Linkages to Learning program who wanted to participate in the Community Advocacy Institute. This request led to the CAI becoming a completely bilingual program. All workshops continue to include simultaneous interpretation and all written materials are available in both English and Spanish. 140 participants have graduated from the CAI in the first eight years of the program.
- In FY22, the agency completed its triennial Community Needs Assessment (FY22 – FY25), highlighting community needs and demographics, agency and department services, and incorporating surveys and program evaluations. For the first time, one-on-one interviews with CAA program participants were included; interviews were conducted by CAA staff in English, Spanish, and Amharic.
- Partnering with researchers at the Center for Women’s Welfare at the University of Washington School of Social Work, CAA staff updated the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Montgomery County, releasing a comprehensive report in the fall of 2023. The agency partnered with CountyStat to update the Interactive Self-Sufficiency Standard to reflect 2023 data.
- The MCCA monthly e-newsletter subscription list reaches 5,000 subscribers.



# 2020 - Present