

*Working to end poverty where we live*



## Inside This Issue

### How to Make a Difference this December

a message from the Executive Director

2

### CAAS Annual Meeting Pictures

3 & 4

## CAAS' Work Gets Community Support

### CPCU Credit Union Scares Up Cash for CAAS



*Thanks to all the characters at CPCU who raised funds for CAAS!*

**CPCU** Credit Union employees dressed up in their Halloween costumes on Monday, October 31st to raise money for the homelessness prevention program at CAAS. CPCU raised \$217 at their branches and then matched the donation for a total of \$434. "Donations from CPCU and its members will help

keep families in their homes, with the lights and heat turned on and the rent paid," said Kimberly Smith-Cofield, CAAS Executive Director.

### Eastern Bank Supports Homelessness Prevention at CAAS

**CAAS** received a \$10,000 grant from the Eastern Bank Charitable Foundation to support its work in homelessness prevention. Executive Director Kimberly Smith

*(Continued on page 5)*

## Making It in Massachusetts, Thanks to CAAS

**Johane** Predin is on the right track, and she gives a lot of the credit to CAAS. "I came here with nothing," says Johane, "but with CAAS' help, I have made a few steps, and I am so grateful."

In October 2010, Johane left Florida and what she describes as a "really complicated marriage" and arrived in Massachusetts. At first she and her three children (ages 7, 5 and 2-1/2) stayed with a friend, but that was

*(Continued on page 5)*

# How to Make a Difference this December

A message from

Executive Director Kimberly Smith-Cofield



What difference does it make when you support a group like CAAS? From my own life story, I can tell you that it makes all the difference in the world.

It was Christmas season 1988 in Westborough, MA. I was the mother of a five-year-old boy, with a second child on the way, when my husband left me. Around the same time, my grandmother and my father-in-law both died, and my world was sent reeling. Unemployed, with few resources of my own, I faced eviction and possible homelessness.

A friend told me I should apply to the Housing Authority for help. At the time, although I grew up in the United States, spoke English as my native language, and had graduated from college, I didn't even know there was a Housing Authority! I walked to their offices, holding my son by the hand, and applied for subsidized housing. The case worker there heard my story and made my family an emergency priority. Within two weeks, I had an apartment in a new building for the affordable rent of \$87/month. It may not have been a mansion, but to me, it was a beautiful place. I was lucky, and I felt grateful for my good fortune.

If I had lived in Somerville then, CAAS would have helped me apply for housing. CAAS would also have helped me find the other resources I needed, which back then I had to search out for myself.

- ♦ **Food for my children.** CAAS provides people with emergency food, and we bring the food stamp bureaucracy right here to Somerville to serve people at the CAAS office.
- ♦ **Child care and after-school programs.** I was happy to get a voucher so that Corey could join children his age at the YMCA. In Somerville, children his age can come to CAAS Head Start,

a high-quality program that prepares them to succeed in school.

- ♦ **Health care.** CAAS works closely with the Cambridge Health Alliance to make sure families like mine get medical attention at community health centers like Union Square Family Health and Broadway Health Center.

When you are in the middle class, you tend to consider poor people to be different from what you consider yourself to be. Sometimes people don't believe poor people use resources like CAAS to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. Living on a low income was a huge eye-opener for me. I came to realize how difficult it was for me to support my family, how much I needed help. I had to search for it in many directions. Sometimes, just searching for help seemed like an overwhelming task.

  
"Help CAAS to be  
there for people  
like me"

As a Community Action Agency, it is CAAS' business to be the hub, to make the connections between low-income families and all these other places that provide the necessities of life. We make it easier for people to set their sights on a better future. As Johane Predin, a young mother like I used to be, says elsewhere in this issue: at CAAS, "Even if they cannot help you, they will find the resource somehow."

Help us continue to be there for the Johanes—and Kimberlys—of the Somerville community. At this time of year, when we are all trying to make our charitable dollars go as far as they can, please consider how much difference you can make by donating to CAAS. Your donation will help a family, and it will help CAAS end poverty where we live.

*Best wishes for a better new year, for all of us!*



# CAAS Annual Meeting 2011

Incoming Board President Suzanne Bremer (left) and outgoing President Roberta Bauer.



Fabia Oliveira, once a CAAS Head Start student, today works at CAAS.

Executive Director Kim Smith-Cofield, family, and friends.



Advocacy Director, Melissa McWhinney and NSTAR's Bill Van Dam.



Kathy Orrick helps CAAS keep the lights on in Somerville Homes.



Board Members Alice Mello, Sonja Darai and Suzanne Bremer enjoy the event.



# CAAS' Work Gets Community Support

(Continued from page 1)



-Cofield (front row, right) and Director of Advocacy & Community Services Melissa McWhinney (back row, second from right) accepted the award at the Wainwright Social Justice Award event on Wednesday, November 9. Eastern Bank acquired Wainwright Bank in 2011, including the branch office in Davis Square.

## Cambridge Recognizes CAAS Head Start Teachers

**Nine** CAAS Head Start teachers were recognized for their twenty years or more of service to the children of Cambridge by the Blue Ribbon Commission on Early Childhood Education on Monday, November 9, at Cambridge City Hall.

The Commission is co-chaired by City Councilor Marjorie Decker and School Committee member Mack McGovern.



*Kathy Smith receives an award from the City of Cambridge.*

## Making It in Massachusetts, Thanks to CAAS

(Continued from page 1)

only temporary. By February 2011, the Predins had to sleep in a homeless shelter.

Johane came to CAAS looking for assistance finding housing, “but they helped me with a lot more than that,” she says. With aid from Housing & Benefits Advocate Daniel Dessin, Johane successfully applied for public housing. Daniel also assisted her to get furniture, including a refrigerator, for her new apartment. With CAAS’ help, Johane obtained emergency food and then successfully applied for food stamps so she could give her children nutritious meals. Daniel showed her how to place them in school and helped her obtain winter coats for the children—not something they had needed in Florida.

“One day, I asked Daniel: do they help people with *everything* here?” Johane recalls. “CAAS is a very great source for the community. Even if they cannot help you, they will find the resource somehow.”

One year after arriving here “with nothing,” Johane and her children have permanent housing, with a subsidy that makes it affordable to her. Johane has just graduated from Lincoln Technical Institute with a certificate in medical administration. After an externship at Cambridge Health Alliance, she is seeking a job in the billing or Human Resources department of a hospital. She stays in touch with CAAS. Johane hopes to volunteer her time to help other people who need help. “I’d like to give something back,” she says. “You don’t know when something’s going to come up and you’ll need advice.”

Community Action Agency  
of Somerville, Inc

66–70 Union Square  
Somerville, MA 02143

For more information visit our website:  
[www.caasomerville.org](http://www.caasomerville.org) or  
Email: [dfischman@caasomerville.org](mailto:dfischman@caasomerville.org)



*Working to End Poverty  
Where We Live*

---

## Who's Living in Poverty? The U.S. Census tells us:

- ◆ **If you're in a room with ten other Somerville residents, two of them are likely to be poor.** vs. 14.1%).
- ◆ 18.1% of Somerville residents lived below the poverty level in 2010— over 13,000 people.
- ◆ Most people living in poverty in Somerville are white and English-speaking— because most people in Somerville are white and English-speaking— but if you're Latino, the chances that you're poor are almost twice as high (28.4% as
- ◆ The typical size of a Somerville family in poverty was 2, 3, or 4 people. Fewer than 10% of families in poverty were larger than four persons.
- ◆ The federal poverty level for family of four is \$22,350. So, if you earn more than that, Washington thinks you're not poor. Try living on that in Massachusetts!

**CAAS helps people bridge the gap between what they earn and what they need.** We are working to end poverty where we live, in Somerville and surrounding communities.

*Thank you for supporting CAAS!*

Would you like to receive CAAS News on your personal computer? Save a tree! To get this newsletter by e-mail, please write to [dfischman@caasomerville.org](mailto:dfischman@caasomerville.org).