

Working to end poverty where we live



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Because of

CAAS Head Start, both Jessica Chodorowski and her four-year-old son, Aidan Guinane, can grow and learn this year. Jessica is studying at Lincoln Technical Institute to become a medical assistant. "With Aidan in Head Start, I don't have to worry about him when I'm in school," says Jessica. "I'm going to school to make a better life for me and him."

Jessica is enrolled in a full-day, ten-month program. Without reliable child care, she could not take this course and start building a career. Previously, Aidan had had only...



Jessica, her grandmother and son Aidan at Head Start Orientation.

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Remembering Dale Patterson

We

were shocked and saddened to hear of the sudden death of Dale Patterson in the last week of February. Dale served as Director of Planning at CAAS for over fifteen years before taking on a new challenge as Manager of Development Communications at the Boston Library Foundation in 2003. At CAAS, Dale was well-liked, both for his congenial personality and for his contributions to the success of the agency. Dale chaired the diversity committee at CAAS. He was a key figure in making CAAS the multi-lingual, multi-cultural organization it is today. Dale wrote important grant...

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The Good News and The Bad News....

A message from Executive Director Kimberly Smith-Cofield



CAAS and Somerville itself have endured and succeeded during the past couple of years, some of the toughest economically, socially and politically. However, with the budgetary pressures mounting at all levels of government, Community Action Agencies like CAAS are bearing the brunt of the turmoil. We are in a climate where there's discussion about how to dismantle resources that support the deeply affected members of our community. Legislators are proposing that funding for Community Action Agencies all across the nation be severely cut at a time when there's increased need for the support we give our communities.

"One in seven million Americans are 'officially' poor, having an annual income for a family of four of \$22,400. One of every eight Americans uses Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps). The 2009 Census Bureau count of 43.6 million people living in poverty is the largest number ever." (*The Promise*, Magazine of Community Action Partnership, Winter/Spring 2011, p.30)

Community Action works! It was 47 years ago, in the State of the Union Address, when President Lyndon B. Johnson first introduced legislation to address the national poverty rate. It became known as the *War on Poverty*. It allowed the federal government to administer the local application of federal funds targeted against poverty. In fact, it is still the only federal funding specifically focused on comprehensive services to fight poverty at the local level. Programs such as Medicaid, Medicare, environmental protection, Head Start, Work study, Job Corps, low-income housing units, job training for the unemployed and Food Stamps were some of the programs put in place and they actually continue today.

Since then we have seen many positive outcomes from these federally funded programs. However, despite the documented successes, they have never been met with as much opposition as at this time. In this year's State of the Union Address, President Obama announced that he would be proposing cuts to these programs in an effort to decrease the national debt and appease some of his opponents in the current national debate. What a surprise! In a budget of over \$4 trillion dollars, attacking the funding to Community Action Agencies only amounts to a cut of about \$395 million dollars--less than 1% of the national budget--not enough to effectively make a dent in the deficit. What's worse, it will negatively impact over 20.7 million individuals and families throughout the country. How could they cut back on aid to so many struggling people in areas such as fuel assistance, housing, job training, Head Start and other supportive services? We all understand that America is in a budget crisis. However, what we don't understand is why there is such a callous spirit now where legislators are so willing to sacrifice the interests of the most vulnerable members of our society.

Community Action Agencies (CAA), like CAAS, promote self-sufficiency, not dependency. Our agency is prepared to meet the greatest of needs in the area. Program design is driven by the residents. This funding allows for flexibility to provide the right set of services and assistance to encourage and empower individuals and families to become economically mobile. CAAS and other CAA's are able to respond to immediate most urgent needs as they arise. We are committed to ensuring that resources are integrated and can be used in combination with other services to solve community and individual problems. This

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The Good News and The Bad News

level of *flexibility, coordination and immediacy* has allowed CAAS to provide services for children and youth, support for the working poor, individuals and families in crisis, seniors, those with disabilities and neighborhoods in despair.

CAAS supports one of the most successful Head Start programs in the Greater Boston area, providing parenting, nutritional, health, dental, educational, domestic violence and substance abuse assessments as well as stability to the entire family. We have provided housing advocacy and legal services for individuals and families in the midst of foreclosure or eviction processes, as well as housing benefits, financial management services and job training opportunities for those who suddenly find themselves unemployed and unable to meet their families' basic needs. We have taken seriously our commitment to help those facing tremendous obstacles learn new behaviors and skills in order to build self-sufficiency. For the past 30 years, CAAS has provided a reliable structure in the community to mediate difficult situations, advocate for individual rights, connect residents to services throughout the city and mobilize community-wide resources for the benefit of all of its members in the Somerville community. For many, accomplishing the "American Dream" means sacrifice and struggle in order to make one's dream come true. **CAAS has helped low-wage families transform their struggles into successes, serving over 28,560 individuals and 12,400 families during the course of the last three decades.**

Our fear is that those who have the ability to make these horrendous changes to such a successful program will not only decimate the services that CAAS provides to the Greater Somerville community, but break the linkages and partnerships that have been designed to expand the city's capacity to provide services, setting the community back economically and socially. This is unreasonable and unacceptable. We cannot let that happen.

No doubt: these are the most challenging times facing our elected leaders. But they must realize that all our work is to reduce poverty in this city and that there is a human cost to such decisions. It is vitally important that they understand the powerful and positive impact these programs have on people's lives... and the potential for disaster that may occur if they are indeed eliminated or drastically reduced. If you believe in the work of CAAS, we need your help so that we can continue to help our neighbors in their time of need. Please write, call or fax your elected officials and let them know how you feel about the presence of Community Action. Ask them to recommend full funding of the Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) for next year FY 2012. Contact information is available at www.house.gov and www.senate.gov.

We are so grateful for the continued support provided by our community!

Remembering Dale Patterson

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proposals that brought money to CAAS and the Somerville community to prevent substance abuse, including control of tobacco. He started an East Somerville Service Initiative that focused the attention of city agencies and community organizations on the most under-served section of the city. Dale also co-

chaired the Somerville Grant writers and Fundraisers Group, and he was an active member of the Somerville Progressive Alliance. He was constantly on the lookout for ways that Somerville could strive as one for the resources that would make this a better city for all. Our sympathies are with Dale's widow, Cecilia Sosa-Patterson, and her children, at this time of grief. ♦

CAAS' Perez Named Unsung Heroine of 2011



Alba Perez, Family Advocate Supervisor at CAAS Head Start, has been selected by the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women as one of the Commonwealth's 100 "Unsung Heroines of 2011." She was honored at a State House ceremony on Wednesday, May 18, when she received a citation from Governor Deval Patrick.

Alba (Abby) Perez has worked at the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS) Head Start program for almost 17 years, starting as a Family Advocate. For the last 15 years, she has supervised a team of Family Advocates and an Enrollment Specialist who help more than 350 low-income families in Somerville and Cambridge improve their lives. Parents turn to Perez and her team for resources

like food and clothing, access to health care, nutrition education, and English for Speakers of Other Languages.

"No one could deserve this award more than Abby," said Kimberly Smith-Cofield, Executive Director of CAAS." She perfectly fits the description of an unsung heroine: a woman who doesn't make the news, but makes the difference. We at CAAS are extremely proud of Abby and happy for this public recognition of her work at CAAS."

Perez was previously honored as Family Advocate Role Model of 1999 by Parents Plus and the Boston Parents' Paper. Then and now, it was the staff she supervised who nominated her for the award. Perez has a Bachelor's Degree in Human Services from Cambridge College. She is also a Licensed Social Worker, Justice of the Peace, and Notary Public. ♦

A Better Life for Mother and Son Through CAAS Head Start

(Continued from page 1)

part-day care through a home-based daycare center. Having him at CAAS Head Start helps both Jessica and her son. "He's learning a lot more now," Jessica says. "He can use a computer by himself. He plays educational games with other kids."

An only child, Aidan has become a lot more social since starting at CAAS Head Start. "He is getting a lot more articulate, and he gets along with other kids more," according to Jessica. "Head Start teaches kids to get used to sharing." Being invited to the Christmas party sponsored by the Kiwanis Club of Somerville was a big moment for Aidan. Recently, when he celebrated his fourth birthday, he invited some of his Head Start classmates to the party.

Jessica recommends CAAS Head Start. "I just think it's a great program for any parent-it's really interactive with kids, and kids need that, especially if they have a single parent." This fall, Jessica will graduate from Lincoln Tech and begin a six-week externship in her field. She hopes that will lead to an offer of a full-time job. Meanwhile, Aidan will come back to the familiar setting of CAAS Head Start. ♦

CAAS Thanks All The Generous Donors Who Supported Our Work in The Past Year!

Special thanks to the most magnanimous donors of \$500 or more



*Macy Coffey
Nancy Roach*





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CAAS Thanks All The Generous Donors Who Supported Our Work in The Past Year!

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Success Stories from the Advocacy & Community Services Program

Jeannette (not her real name) grew up in Somerville. She was living out of state when her husband started beating her. The Department of Children and Families in that state sent her and her four children into shelter in Somerville on an emergency basis. Jeannette and her children arrived with nothing: no food, no money, not even a box of Pampers for the infant. CAAS employees sprang into action. Housing & Benefits Advocate Glennys Acosta accompanied Jeannette to the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance in Revere to get food stamps right away. She obtained a gift certificate from Market Basket so Jeannette could buy diapers and other necessities that food stamps would not cover. Over time, working with colleagues at Somerville Community Corporation, CAAS was able to get Jeannette a subsidized apartment at the Clarendon Hill Towers. Glennys got furniture donated, and she persuaded U-Haul to pick it up, waiving its usual fees. She also helped Jeannette apply for health insurance. Today, Jeannette and her family are safe. The older children are in school, and Jeannette herself is planning on going to college.

The City of Somerville condemned the house where Cathy (not her real name) and her three children were living. It had flooded, and they had lost access to gas and electricity for days. The house was full of mold, and cockroaches, and the stove was old and threatened to set the house on fire. The landlord made no repairs. Eventually, he lost the house in a foreclosure, and the federal agency Fannie Mae took it over but failed to improve living conditions there. CAAS helped Cathy's family stay in a hotel for a couple days. Glennys found a private lawyer who represented Cathy at a low rate. The lawyer got Fannie Mae to compensate Cathy and her family for \$12,500: enough to pay first and last month's rent and a security deposit on a new apartment and give the family something to live on. Cathy is working more than full time these days to make sure she can keep her apartment. Glennys has taught her to keep good financial records, copies of all her checks, and she paperwork she needs to make sure she always has a home. ♦

For Over Twenty Years, Saving Homes in Somerville

2011 is CAAS' 30th Anniversary. This is the first in a series of articles about those 30 years.



Mary Louise Daly and CAAS Executive Director, Kimberly Smith-Cofield

“CAAS is the reason I was able to keep my home,” says Mary Louise Daly. Mary Louise lives at the Clarendon Hill Towers, on the border of Somerville and Arlington. Federal money helped build the Towers in the 1960's, and people of modest means were supposed to be able to rent apartments there. By the late 1980's, however, the developers had nearly reached the end of their twenty-year obligation to the federal government. They were considering selling the whole building off to be converted to condominiums. Mary Louise and her neighbors feared they would be put out on the street.

CAAS helped residents at Clarendon Hill Towers organize themselves into a tenants' association. For three years, they gathered the know-how and the money. Finally, in 1990, the tenant association bought the apartment buildings itself. The people who live at the Towers still rent their apartments: from a management company their association hires, at a rate each tenant can afford. From this victory, tenants learned that they have the power to determine where and how they live. For many years, Mary Louise was a member of the tenant association board.

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Community Action Agency
of Somerville, Inc

66-70 Union Square
Somerville, MA 02143

For more information visit our website:
Www.caasomerville.org or
Email: dfischman@caasomerville.org



*Working to End Poverty
Where We Live*

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For Over Twenty Years, Saving Homes in Somerville

From 1990 to 2009, she was also a member and (for five years) a president of the Board of CAAS. “Alderman Cathy O’Dea called me up and asked me to represent Ward 7 on the CAAS Board,” Mary Louise recalls. “I was such a novice at housing, I was just amazed when she called. But I made up my mind to get involved, to pay back in some small way.” Mary Louise was Board President when the Jack Hamilton Head Start Center was built on Allen Street in Somerville (and later named after CAAS’ longtime executive director). She took part in search committees that hired three of the five senior managers still working at CAAS.



Mary Louise is especially proud of her part in organizing the annual Save Our Homes Walk, now in its eighth year. Save Our Homes is a pledge walk that raises emergency funds for people at risk of homelessness. This year, the walk was held on May 15. It has already raised more than \$25,000– but you can still contribute. Please make your check payable to “Save Our Homes” and sent to Dennis Fischman, Director of Planning, Community Action Agency of Somerville, 66-70 Union Square # 104, Somerville, MA 02143. Thank you!

Keep Mary Louise’s legacy alive at 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.