



FY22 & FY23

ANNUAL REPORTS



Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Community Action Agency

1401 Rockville Pike, Suite 320
Rockville, MD 20852
240-777-1697
montgomerycountymd.gov/communityaction

The mission of the Montgomery County Community Action Agency is to advance social and economic mobility among communities and neighbors through services, partnerships, and advocacy using an equity lens.

The Montgomery County Community Action Agency is the County's federally designated anti-poverty agency and is part of Montgomery County's Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Community Affairs. The agency includes:

- The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, which provides free tax assistance to low-to-moderate income Montgomery County households. Services are offered year-round.
- The Takoma-East Silver Spring (TESS) Community Action Center is a walk-in information and referral center located in the Long Branch community. Residents can learn about County and non-profit services and receive assistance applying for these services.
- The agency is the grantee for the County's Head Start program, with Montgomery County Public Schools serving as the delegate. Head Start provides high-quality early care and education to children in lower-income households.
- The agency monitors 50+ contracts, working with 31 County non-profit organizations. Organizations offer a wide variety of services, including food and nutrition assistance, clothing, community engagement, English classes, legal services, employment assistance, and more.
- The Community Action Board is the governing body for the Community Action Agency. Along with the Head Start Parent Policy Council, the board is also the governing body for Head Start. The board engages in advocacy work, supporting policies that can help lower-income residents move towards self-sufficiency. The board also facilitates a free advocacy training program for lower-income residents called the Community Advocacy Institute (CAI).

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MD RELAY: 711

Alternative formats of the Community Action Board Annual Report are available upon request. Please call 240-777-1697. TTY users, please call MD Relay (711).

The FY22 and FY23 combined annual reports were approved by the Community Action Board on January 7, 2025.



Community Action staff gathered for an in-person team-building program and celebration in June 2022.

INTRODUCTION

This report provides some key highlights of the Community Action Agency's work in Fiscal Year 22 (October 2021 – September 2022) and FY23 (October 2022 – September 2023). As the County and the country as a whole began to slowly transition back to “normal” following the COVID-19 pandemic, the agency also made adjustments to its services and programs in accordance with public health requirements.

FY22 HIGHLIGHTS

FY22 was a very busy and productive year for the Community Action Agency. It marked the TESS Community Action Center's move to a new office after more than 50 years at the Piney Branch Road location. Partway through the tax season, the VITA program returned to in-person services following the COVID-19 pandemic. A large-scale Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) outreach campaign highlighted expanded tax credits that could provide critical financial support to residents. The agency continued to monitor over 50 contracts at more than 30 nonprofit organizations, providing technical assistance and guidance. The Head Start program continued to support staff, families, and children during the transition back to in-person classes. The Community Action Board engaged in extensive advocacy efforts and successfully facilitated the sixth year of the Community Advocacy Institute, with 21 participants graduating.

Following the agency's extensive involvement in the department's development of its navigation practice, FY22 also marked the beginning of a County-funded Navigation program within the Community Action Agency. The Navigation team includes a Program Manager and three

Community Services Aides (Navigators). Navigators work at multiple locations throughout the County, connecting residents with critical programs. Community Action plays a key role in continuing to develop this model within the County, considered a best practice for human services across the country.

FY23 HIGHLIGHTS

In FY23, the agency continued efforts to expand in-person services and programs. TESS staff continued to work with families in need of critical services, adding a new diaper distribution program supported by a state-level grant. Navigators added additional sites in FY23 and a team member. VITA returned to in-person tax preparation services in Gaithersburg, Silver Spring, Rockville, and Wheaton, along with limited virtual services. Contract monitors continued to support partner organizations, including a return to the first in-person contract partners' meeting since 2019. Head Start served children and families throughout the County, also hosting a well-attended Head Start “Party in the Park” event in the spring. The Community Action Board continued its advocacy efforts on numerous bills and budget requests, including taking the lead on a sign-on letter to County Council requesting additional funding to ensure that the Working Families Income Supplement remain a 100% match of the state EITC. The Board's bilingual Community Advocacy Institute had another successful year with 21 participants graduating in May 2023.

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Also in FY23, the agency completed a triennial Community Needs Assessment, a requirement of CSBG-funded programs. The agency partnered with JG Research to complete the CNA. Consultants conducted extensive research about the County, including reviewing Census data, local reports, and findings from surveys of agency clients. Staff wrote several sections of the report about the agency's programs, contract partners, environmental justice, numerous local programs to which the agency refers clients, and the board's advocacy work and Community Advocacy Institute. A new feature of the CNA report was nine one-on-one interviews of CAA clients, which were conducted in English, Spanish, and Amharic by CAA staff. The final report includes key takeaways from these interviews. The CNA also includes a summary of current and emerging needs in the community. Following participation by Community Action Board members in the development of the CNA, the full Board approved the CNA on January 24, 2023. The full CNA, designed by a graphic artist, was later posted on the agency's website.

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/OCA/CommunityAction/Publications.html>

STRATEGIC PLAN

The agency also worked with a consultant in FY23 to develop a strategic plan. The strategic planning process included evaluation of the agency's programs, review of key priorities and recommendations of the Community Needs Assessment, a bilingual survey of Head Start parents, and surveys and interviews of agency staff that focused on evaluating the agency's

strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and unmet needs, and concerns. The final report includes recommendations about policy and infrastructure needs, along with key operational priorities for the agency. Both agency staff and the Community Action Board were briefed on the strategic plan following its completion.

A FOND FAREWELL TO SHARON STRAUSS ON HER RETIREMENT

FY23 also marked a major transition for the agency with the retirement of Executive Director Sharon Strauss in August 2023. Sharon worked for Montgomery County Government for over thirty years, spending fifteen years with the Community Action Agency, including serving as the Executive Director of the agency for the last ten years of her career. Sharon led the agency through numerous changes, including department

restructuring, implementation of database and client management systems, office moves, expanded programming and staffing, and the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sharon supervised dozens of CAA staff members over the years, providing mentoring, support, and guidance to her supervisees. Her leadership allowed the agency's small team to achieve so much, overseeing annual CSBG applications and reports, expanding VITA's tax services and EITC awareness campaigns, the creation of the board's Community Advocacy Institute, expanding language access within the agency, numerous expansions of the County's Pre-K program, updates to the Self-Sufficiency Standard, the creation of the agency's Navigation Team, and more.



Staff, board members, DHHS colleagues, and former board member County Councilmember Laurie-Anne Sayles celebrate Sharon Strauss's career and leadership at a retirement celebration in August 2023.

SECTION 1

Head Start

HEAD START IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY is a comprehensive program to prepare young children, ages 3-5, for success in school. Services are provided for low-income children and their families including developmentally appropriate pre-school education, health, dental, mental health, nutrition, and social services; services to children with disabilities; and parent and family engagement activities. The Community Action Agency (CAA) is the Grantee agency for the County's Head Start program. Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is the Delegate agency that provides direct services for eligible Head Start children and families.

During school years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, 694 young children were served in 34 classes at 30 schools.

READY FOR KINDERGARTEN

During both school years, MCPS Head Start teachers administered the Early Learning Assessment (ELA), the pre-school version of the Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA). ELA also aligns with the Head Start Early Learning Framework (ELOF) and supports teachers in developing individualized lesson plans for children. Both the ELA and KRA use age-appropriate performance tasks that measure specific skills and observations of children's work and play to determine what each entering kindergartener knows and is able to do in four specific domains: Language & Literacy, Mathematics, Physical Well-Being & Motor Development, and Social Foundations. The ELA measures the skills and behaviors that children learned prior to entering kindergarten.

School Readiness data reflects fall, winter, and spring child outcome assessments for the **FY2022** program year.

DOMAIN	GOAL	MONTGOMERY COUNTY HEAD START CHILDREN'S READINESS
Approaches to Learning	Children will manage actions, word and behaviors with increasing independence.	72.9% of four year olds and 47.9% of three year olds are demonstrating proficiency in Social Foundations/Approaches to learning and self regulation.
Social & Emotional Development	Children will manage emotions with increasing independence.	67.4% of four year olds and 49.7% of three year olds are demonstrating proficiency in Social Emotional Development, managing emotions, words and action with increasing independence.
Language & Literacy	Children will express self in increasingly long, detailed and sophisticated ways.	66.4% of 4 year olds are proficient in language/communication development and vocabulary, and 43.4% of 3 year olds are proficient in language/communication development and vocabulary. 66.1% of 4 year olds are proficient in identifying UC letters, 57.1% are proficient in identifying LC letters, 43.9% are proficient in identifying letter sounds, and 66.3% are proficient in emergent writing. 50.1% of 3 year olds are proficient in identifying UC letters, 36.2% are proficient in identifying LC letters and 23.6% in identifying letter sounds. 53% of 3 year olds are proficient in emergent writing.
Cognition	MATH: Children will know number names and the counting sequence.	MATH: 73.9% of four year olds were demonstrating proficiency in counting sequence. 62.4% of three year olds demonstrating counting sequence.
	Scientific Reasoning: Children will observe, describe observable phenomena (i.e. objects, materials, organisms and events).	SCIENCE: 60% of four year olds were demonstrating proficiency in scientific reasonings. 38.9% of three year olds were emerging in scientific reasoning.
Perceptual, Motor & Physical Development	Children will demonstrate personal hygiene and self-care skills.	78.8% of four year olds were demonstrating proficiency in personal care. 57% of three year olds were demonstrating proficiency in personal care.

School Readiness data reflects fall, winter, and spring child outcome assessments for the **FY2023** program year.

DOMAIN	GOAL	MONTGOMERY COUNTY HEAD START CHILDREN'S READINESS
Approaches to Learning	Children will manage actions, word, and behaviors with increasing independence.	85% of four-year old's and 78.4% of three-year olds are demonstrating proficiency in Social Foundations/Approaches to learning and self-regulation. A 12% increase in overall school readiness for four-year old's and 15% increase in overall school readiness for three-year olds.
Social & Emotional Development	Children will manage emotions with increasing independence.	83.9% of four-year olds and 78.4% of three-year olds are demonstrating proficiency in Social Emotional Development, managing emotions, words and action with increasing independence.
Language & Literacy	Children will express self in increasingly long, detailed and sophisticated ways.	82% of four-year olds are proficient in language/communication development and vocabulary, and 69.4% of three-year olds are proficient in language/communication development and vocabulary. 89.9% of four-year olds are proficient in identifying UC letters, 90.5% are proficient in identifying LC letters, 82.1% are proficient in identifying letter sounds, and 83.1% are proficient in emergent writing. 75.6% of three-year olds are proficient in identifying UC letters, 79.6% are proficient in identifying LC letters and 68.5% in identifying letter sounds. 73.8% of three-year olds are proficient in emergent writing.
Cognition	MATH: Children will know number names and the counting sequence.	MATH: 88.3% of four-year olds were demonstrating proficiency in counting sequence. 75.9% of three-year old's demonstrating counting sequence.
	Scientific Reasoning: Children will observe, describe observable phenomena (i.e. objects, materials, organisms and events).	SCIENCE: 77% of four-year olds were demonstrating proficiency in scientific reasonings. 68.8% of three-year olds were emerging in scientific reasoning.
Perceptual, Motor & Physical Development	Children will demonstrate personal hygiene and self-care skills.	92.4% of four-year olds were demonstrating proficiency in personal care. 79% of three-year olds were demonstrating proficiency in personal care.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT WITH MONTGOMERY COUNTY'S HEAD START

The following data reflects the FY2022 program year (July 1, 2021 - January 31, 2022) Montgomery County Head Start's annual Program Information Report (PIR).

SERVICES RECEIVED BY HEAD START FAMILIES SY2022	
Emergency/crisis intervention (immediate needs for food, clothing or shelter)	337
Housing assistance (subsidies, utilities, repairs)	30
Mental health services	37
ESL	106
Adult education (including GED)	54
Job training	54
Substance abuse	2
Child abuse and neglect	0
Domestic violence	0
Child support assistance	0
Health education	42
Assistance to families of incarcerated individuals	1
Parenting education	73
Marriage education	9

The following data reflects the FY2023 program year (July 1, 2022 - January 31, 2023) Montgomery County Head Start's annual Program Information Report (PIR).

SERVICES RECEIVED BY HEAD START FAMILIES SY2023	
Emergency/crisis intervention (immediate needs for food, clothing or shelter)	683
Housing assistance (subsidies, utilities, repairs)	197
Mental health services	171
ESL	215
Asset Building (Financial Education & Debt Counseling)	58
Job training	154
Substance abuse	4
Involvement in discussing their child's screening and assessment results and their child's progress	108
Screening and Assessment	73
Supporting transitions between programs (i.e., EHS to HS, HS to kindergarten)	42
Health education	45
Assistance to families of incarcerated individuals	1
Father engagement	79
Marriage education	30

Head Start Enrollment: Head Start in Montgomery County is a school-based program, following the annual calendar of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), with a federally funded enrollment of 648.

HEAD START ENROLLMENT	TOTAL # SERVED SY 19-20	TOTAL # SERVED SY 20-21	TOTAL # SERVED SY 21-22	TOTAL # SERVED SY 22-23
September	646	537	615	629
October	648	648	634	641
November	648	575	640	642
December	648	648	636	641
January	648	648	638	637
February	648	648	648	642
March	648	645	640	643
April	648	606	641	640
May	648	605	638	634
June	648	605	638	634
Attendance Rate	91%	95%	98%	89%
Avg. Enrollment	648	587	585	484

**based on enrollment reported to the Office of Head Start the 5th day of each month.*

Enrollment figures over the past several years reflect a positive family attitude toward participating in the Head Start program. Teaching teams and family service workers collaborate with parents by providing support and problem-solving strategies to remove any barriers that may negatively affect enrollment.

TRENDS

In FY21 and FY22, Montgomery County Head Start transitioned from virtual learning to in-person learning. The program was challenged with maintaining full enrollment as parents' concerns for health and safety of the school environment during the continuation of COVID-19.

The five-week full-day extended-year program for Montgomery County Head Start students addressed all Early Learning Outcomes Framework indicators, with special attention to literacy and mathematics, science, and social foundations.

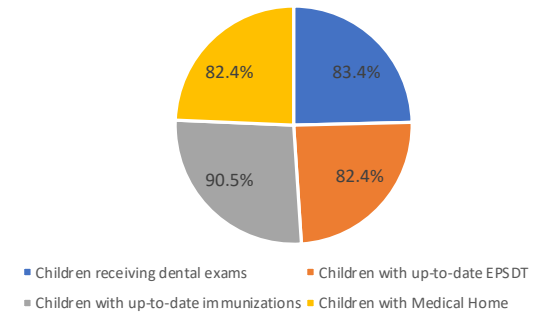
In FY23, the program was challenged with maintaining full enrollment as parents' concerns for health and safety of the school environment during the continuation of COVID-19.

During the first week of the six-week program, 77 percent of the students demonstrated readiness in the Letter Sounds. At the end of the program, 91 percent were demonstrating readiness.

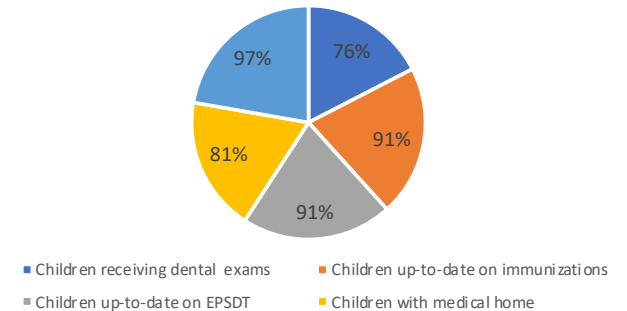
For Word Meanings (which has been linked to students demonstrating readiness on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment), 25 percent of students demonstrated readiness at the beginning of the program. By the end of the summer program, 80 percent of students were demonstrating readiness for Word Meanings.

During the first week of the six-week program, 28 percent of the students demonstrated readiness in the Social Foundations. At the end of the summer program, 82 percent were demonstrating readiness.

Percentage of Enrolled Children That Received Health and Dental Services in SY21-22



Percentage of Enrolled Children That Received Health and Dental Services in SY22-23



Head Start Budget Basics: School Year 2021-2022 (Fiscal Year 2022)

Montgomery County Head Start is supported by federal, state, and local funding. The Community Action Agency (CAA) is the grantee recipient of federal and state funds. Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is the delegate agency that provides direct services to Head Start children and families. In FY22, 78% of the federal grant and 94% of the state grant is allocated to MCPS. The County's Health and Human Services School Health division provides health and dental services to Head Start children and families. School Health received 12% of the federal grant and 6% of the state grant. DHHS Early Childhood Services (ECS) provides early childhood education support and receives 3% of the federal grant. CAA maintains 7% of the federal grant for administrative purposes and 0% of the state grant.

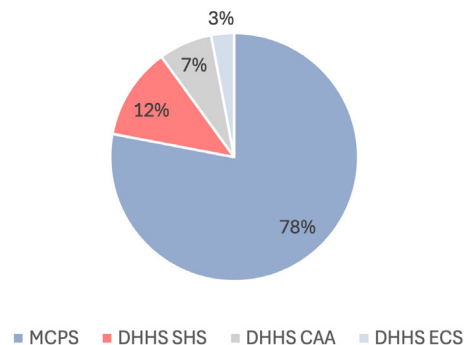
In FY23, 82% of the federal grant and 94% of the state grant is allocated to MCPS. The County's Health and Human Services School Health division provides health and dental services to Head Start children and families. School Health received 9% of the federal grant and 6% of the state grant. DHHS Early Childcare Support Services (ECS) provides early childhood education support and receives 3% of the federal grant. CAA maintains 6% of the federal grant for administrative purposes and 0% of the state grant.

Montgomery County Head Start Funding Sources FY22

SOURCE	AMOUNT
Federal	\$5,344,425
MSDE State Supplemental	\$ 207,160
TOTAL	\$5,551,585

FY22 Head Start Federal Budget Allocation

SOURCE	PERCENT	AMOUNT
Montgomery County Public School (MCPS)	78%	\$4,170,871
DHHS - School Health Services (SHS)	12%	\$ 617,140
DHHS - Community Action Agency (CAA)	7%	\$ 392,016
DHHS -Early Childhood Services (ECS)	3%	\$ 164,398
Total Budget for Federal Funds	100%	\$5,344,425

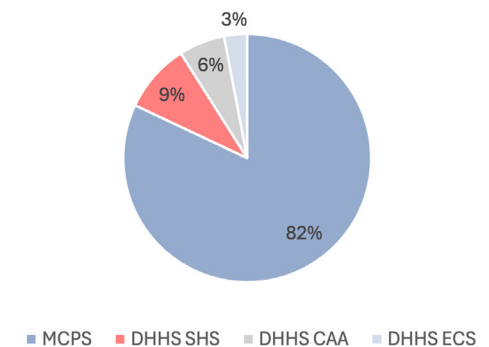


Montgomery County Head Start Funding Sources FY23

SOURCE	AMOUNT
Federal	\$5,343,130
MSDE State Supplemental	\$ 211,488
TOTAL	\$5,554,618

FY23 Head Start Federal Budget Allocation

SOURCE	PERCENT	AMOUNT
Montgomery County Public School (MCPS)	82%	\$5,505,360
DHHS - School Health Services (SHS)	9%	\$617,140
DHHS - Community Action Agency (CAA)	6%	\$392,015
DHHS -Early Childhood Services (ECS)	3%	\$164,398
Total Budget for Federal Funds	100%	\$6,678,913



FY22 COMPARISON OF HEAD START FEDERAL BUDGET AND EXPENDITURES & FY23 PROPOSED HEAD START FEDERAL

CATEGORY	FY22 BUDGET	FY22 EXPENDITURES	FY23 BUDGET
Personnel/Fringe Benefits	\$733,701	\$733,956	\$761,588
Travel	\$5,500	\$ 6,119	\$5,000
Supplies and Equipment	\$48,701	\$23,721	\$67,802
Contractual	\$4,228,372	\$4,174,073.18	\$4,331,035
Training*/Technical Assistance/Other	\$328,152	\$257,185.96	\$331,925
Subtotal Federal	\$5,344,426	\$ 5,195,056.00	\$5,497,350
Non-Federal Share	\$1,319,858	\$1,319,858.00	\$1,335,783
Total	\$6,664,284	\$6,514,914.00	\$6,833,133

**Included in variety of categories*

BUDGET

FY22 Budget: Includes annual 2 percent Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) and Quality Enhancement funding. In addition, Montgomery County Head Start received \$970,360 from the federal American in Recovery Program (ARP) to be expended by the FY2023 program year.

FY23 COMPARISON OF HEAD START FEDERAL BUDGET AND EXPENDITURES & FY24 PROPOSED HEAD START FEDERAL BUDGET

CATEGORY	FY23 BUDGET	FY23 EXPENDITURES	FY24 BUDGET
Personnel/Fringe Benefits	\$761,588	\$824,300.61	\$807,621.06
Travel	\$5,000	\$17,176.72	\$4,500
Supplies and Equipment	\$67,802	\$135,786.33	\$66,810
Contractual	\$4,331,035	\$4,693,163.00	\$6,124,839
Training*/Technical Assistance/Other	\$331,925	\$496,820.81	\$477,907.94
Subtotal Federal	\$5,497,350	\$6,167,247.47	\$7481,678
Non-Federal Share	\$1,335,783	\$1,365,907	\$1,496,336
Total	\$6,833,133	\$7,533,154.47	\$8,978,014

**Included in variety of categories*

FY23 Budget: Includes annual 5.6 percent Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) and Quality Enhancement funding. In addition, Montgomery County Head Start received \$970,360 from the federal American in Recovery Program (ARP) to be expended by the FY2023-24 program year.

Personnel for Head Start includes DHHS staffing: community health nurses, school health room aides, dental hygienist, nurse administrator, community services aide, Head Start program manager, Early Childhood education specialist, program aide, and administrative specialist.

Travel includes costs associated with reimbursing staff for travel to Head Start sites to provide health and dental services, and for staff and parents to attend trainings and national, regional, and state conferences.

Equipment and Supplies include Child and Family services supplies, instructional materials for Head Start classrooms- including literacy, mathematics, science, music and art materials, office supplies such as postage, paper products, printer supplies and other registration materials.

Contractual services include MCPS Head Start staff (e.g., teachers, paraeducators, speech pathologists, psychologists, social workers, social services assistants); MCPS' administrative service funds for the Audit Requirements of the OMB Uniformed Guidance Subpart F. Contractual health costs includes specialty dental treatment providers, not available through insurance or dental clinics, and Mobile Medical Care, Inc. to provide contractual Head Start Nurses. Under Community Action Agency (CAA) contractual services includes training for the Policy Council and Community Action Board on shared governance and methods to achieve board goals within a government structure.

Other funding within MCPS covers a variety of expenses including training & staff development, child liability insurance, parent services such as training, parent/child mathematics and literacy activities, bus transportation for classes to attend field trips, reimbursement of mileage for home visits

and parent meetings for teachers, paraeducators, special needs teacher, and social service assistants.

Other funding for CAA helps with costs for family related activities and supplies necessary to conduct various meetings. These funds provide a range of administrative supports to the Montgomery County, MD, Head Start Program such as local travel costs for contract and grant monitoring. Other funding



Staff attend the Head Start Party in the Park in June 2023. Pictured left to right: Jonathan Cartagena, Director of the Fatherhood Initiative Program at the Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County; Lisa Conlon, Head Start Social Services Specialist; Charlene Muhammad, Head Start Program Manager; and Nichelle Owens, Director I, Office of Curriculum and Instructional Programs, Division of Early Childhood, Title I Programs, and Recovery Program.

for School Health includes costs associated with continuing education and performance standard training for Head Start School Health Room nurses, technicians and hygienists and providing educational training experiences and materials for parents, students, and non-professional staff.

RESULTS OF THE MOST RECENT REVIEW FINANCIAL AUDIT.

Financial Audit: Montgomery County has an annual Independent Auditor's Report on Internal Control, Financial Reporting and on Compliance and Other Matters, based on an Audit of Financial Statements Performed in Accordance with the *OMB Uniform Administrative Requirement 2 CFR Chapter I, Chapter II, Part 200 et al.* A copy of the Audit for the year ending June 30, 2021, can be found at the County's website: <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/Finance/financial.html>. The most current Montgomery County MD Report on Expenditures of Federal Awards for Fiscal Year 2019 was performed for the County Council and County Executive by CliftonLarsonAllen LLP, Certified Public Accountants and Consultants.

SECTION 2

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program

The VITA program provides free tax help to low-to-moderate income households. Certified tax preparers ensure that filers receive all the tax credits for which they are eligible. The program works with other VITA sites throughout the County to offer services during the tax season (January – April), and the agency's program is the County's only year-round VITA site, offering appointments for prior year and amended returns during the summer and early fall. Community Action's VITA program offers help with Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) applications for workers who are not eligible for Social Security Numbers.

FY22 VITA PROGRAM

The FY22 VITA program began with virtual appointments due to concerns about the COVID-19 omicron variant. Later in the tax season, a hybrid model was adopted, and clients were served virtually or in-person in Rockville and Gaithersburg, as well as at special events at WorkSource Montgomery in Wheaton. The program linked clients with \$1,874,828 in Earned Income Tax Credits and \$768,353 in Child Tax Credits. 24 volunteers supported the program, serving 2,670 volunteer hours.

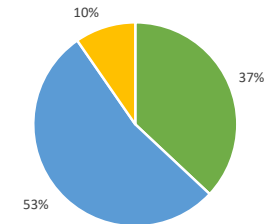
FY22 STATISTICS

Tax Returns prepared	1,463
Total Federal and State Refunded	\$3,187,641
Total EITC	\$1,874,828
Total CTC	\$768,353
Total free tax impact	\$6,246,314
Total Number of Volunteer Hours	2,670

FY22 CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

CLIENTS REPORTING THEIR GENDER

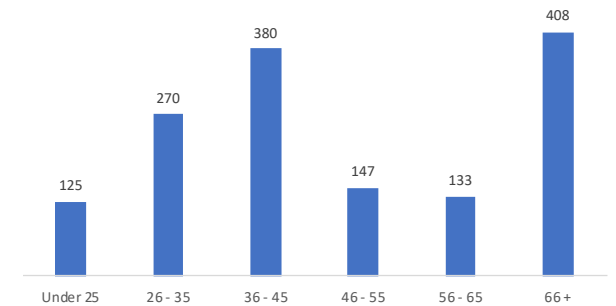
Male	541
Female	781
Married Couple filing jointly	141



■ Male filing individually ■ Female filing individually ■ Married couple filing jointly

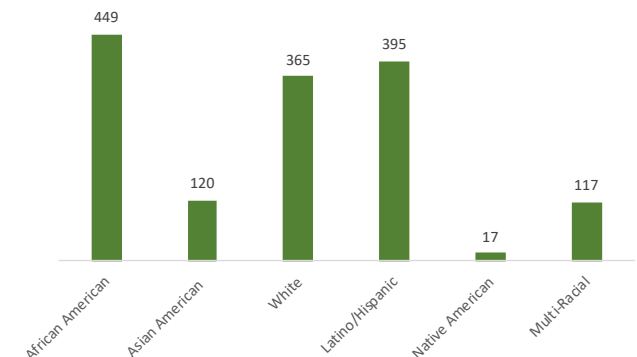
CLIENTS REPORTING THEIR AGE

Under 25	125	46 - 55	147
26 - 35	270	56 - 65	133
36 - 45	380	66 +	408



CLIENTS REPORTING THEIR RACE/ETHNICITY

African American	449	Latino/Hispanic	395
Asian American	120	Native American	17
White	365	Multi-Racial	117

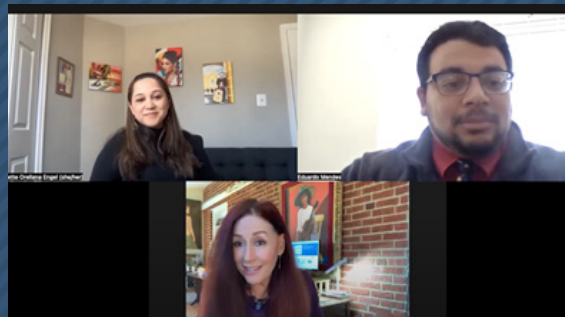




Digital outreach signs (English and Spanish) in County buildings focused on ITIN taxpayers.



Digital outreach signs (English and Spanish) in County buildings aimed to inform the public about valuable tax credits available to lower-income filers.



Board member Lisette Orellana Engel and VITA Program Specialist Eduardo Mendes spoke about VITA and the EITC/CTC on Montgomery *Al Día* with host Lorna Virgili.



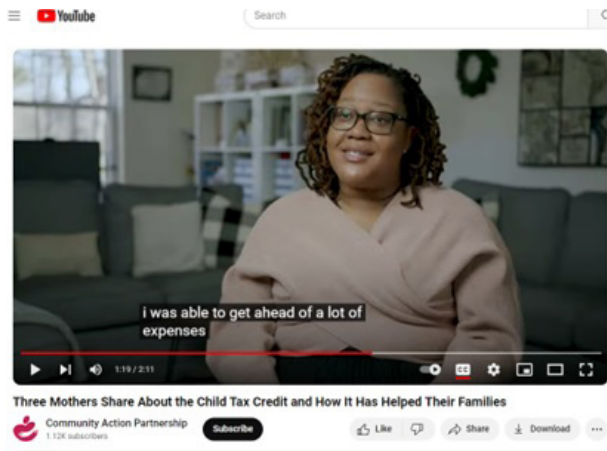
In March 2022, Community Action partnered with the Latino Health Initiative to host a Facebook Live in Spanish that focused on tax credits and VITA services. Featured guests included Pablo Blank, CASA, and The Honorable Gabe Albornoz, Montgomery County Council, joined host Marcela Rodriguez for this special event.

EITC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

In an effort to raise awareness about the newly expanded Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC), the VITA program engaged in extensive outreach throughout the year. Much of this outreach focused on ITIN taxpayers, who were eligible for the state EITC and County Working Families Income Supplement for the first time ever. Outreach included a VITA Partnership flier in seven languages, press releases, a targeted text messaging campaign to 67,000+ households, multilingual Ride-On bus signs, a bilingual article in the MCPS Quicknotes newsletter, digital monitor signs at County facilities, and appearances on local media, such as *Montgomery Al Día* and *En sintonía con el Consejo de Montgomery*, local Spanish-language radio and cable programs. The VITA program also collaborated with the Latino Health Initiative to host a widely viewed Facebook Live event about tax credits, which featured Pablo Blank from CASA and County Council President Gabe Albornoz.

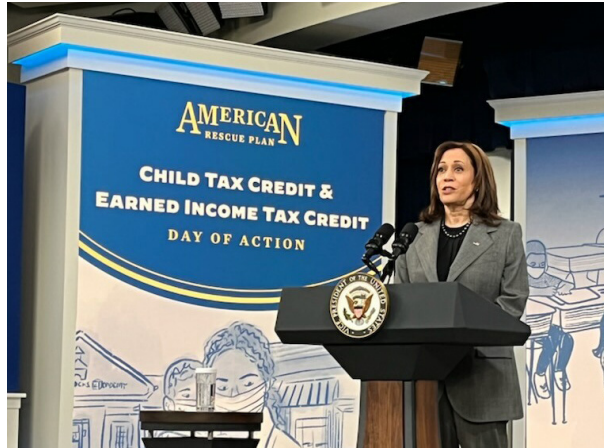
CHILD TAX CREDIT OUTREACH

The Advance Child Tax Credit was also a focus of the agency's outreach efforts. A new webpage was added to the CASHBACK website that provided information and Frequently Asked Questions about the CTC. Two graduates of the Community Action Board's Community Advocacy Institute were featured in a National Community Action Partnership CTC video, speaking about how the Child Tax Credit helped them and their families.



Vanessa Pierre was one of two program graduates who were featured in a National Community Action Partnership CTC outreach video.

On February 8, 2022, Community Action was honored to be invited to a special event at the White House highlighting the expanded Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit. Sharon Strauss, Community Action's Executive Director, and Sharron Holquin, a longtime VITA volunteer and contractor, attended the event, which was hosted by Vice President Kamala Harris. Ms. Holquin spoke at the event about the importance of tax credits and VITA programs.



Vice President Kamala Harris speaking at the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit Day of Action..



VITA volunteer and contractor Sharron Holquin speaking at the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit Day of Action.

Throughout the year, the CASHBACK website is regularly updated with the latest information about tax credits and free tax help. During the FY22 tax season alone, the CASHBACK website analytics reflected 5,066 unique pageviews for the scheduling page, and 20,038 pageviews to the full website.

FY23 VITA PROGRAM

In FY23, Community Action's VITA program offered in-person free tax help in Rockville, Gaithersburg, Silver Spring, and Wheaton, along with virtual appointments one day per week. Throughout the year, the program completed 1,946 returns with a total free tax impact of \$6.9 million. The program linked clients with \$2,375,603 in Earned Income Tax Credits and \$757,849 in Child Tax Credits. 56 volunteers supported the program, serving 2,820 volunteer hours.

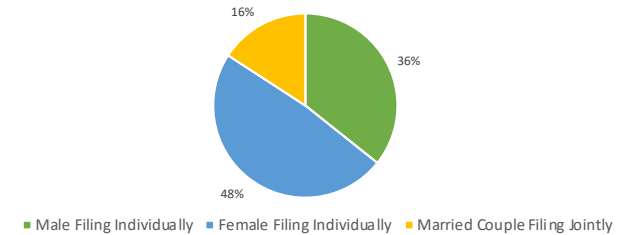
FY22 STATISTICS

Tax Returns prepared	1,946
Total Federal and State Refunded	\$3,269,404
Total EITC	\$2,375,603
Total CTC	\$757,849
Total free tax impact	\$6,955,520
Total Number of Volunteer Hours	2,820

FY23 CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

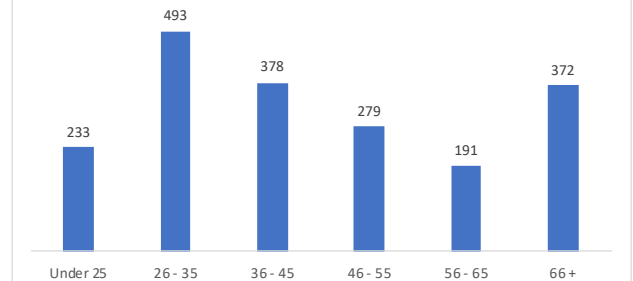
CLIENTS REPORTING THEIR GENDER

Male	695
Female	943
Married Couple filing jointly	308



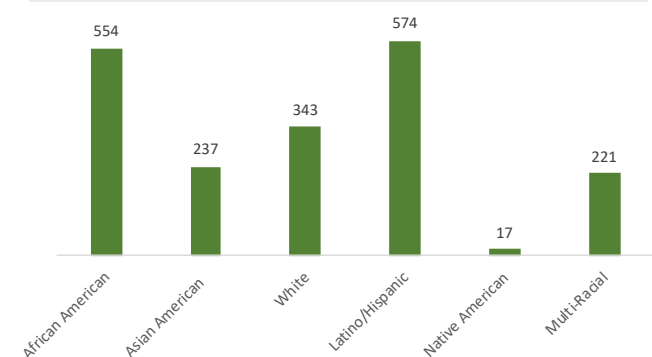
CLIENTS REPORTING THEIR AGE

Under 25	233	46 - 55	279
26 - 35	493	56 - 65	191
36 - 45	378	66 +	372



CLIENTS REPORTING THEIR RACE/ETHNICITY

African American	554	Latino/Hispanic	574
Asian American	237	Native American	17
White	343	Multi-Racial	221



EITC AWARENESS

The VITA program continued its efforts to raise awareness about the Earned Income Tax Credit and County's Working Families Income Supplement (WFIS). "Get All Your Tax Credits" outreach signs were posted on Ride On buses in English, Spanish, French, Amharic, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese. Messages in English and Spanish were included in scrolling text displayed on digital monitors in County buildings and libraries. Some of text was focused primarily on ITIN filers who were newly eligible for the state EITC and County WFIS. EITC outreach also included radio and TV interviews, Community Action Agency newsletter alerts, and social media posts.

In January 2023, the Community Action Agency cosponsored an EITC Awareness Day event hosted by VITA partner, The Equity Center. The special event included remarks from Maryland Comptroller Brooke Lierman, County Councilmember Laurie-Anne Sayles, a VITA volunteer and VITA client, and Community Action Board Chair Dr. Jeffery Johnson, among others. The special event helped to draw attention to VITA services and to the expanded Maryland EITC and County WFIS and encourage residents, including ITIN taxpayers, to claim these valuable credits.

VITA HIGHLIGHTED NATIONALLY

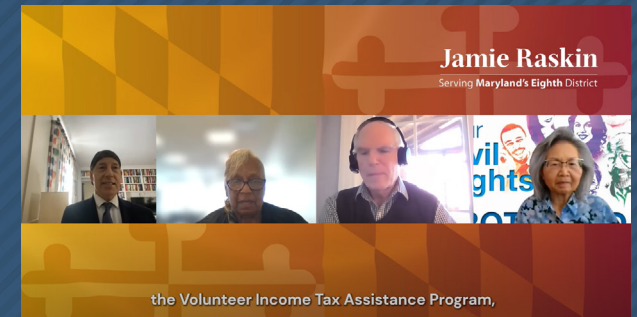
Community Action's VITA program was featured in Congressman Jamie Raskin's online series, *Hometown Heroes*. Congressman Raskin interviewed Program Specialist Taunya Johnson and VITA volunteers Chiali Tsai and Jeffrey Komarow for the special program. The program, which was shared widely on social media, focused on VITA services and the program's impact on local residents.



VITA Volunteers and staff attend a celebration at the end the 2023 tax season.



VITA Program Specialist Eduardo Mendes (third from right) joins VITA partners from the CASH Campaign of Maryland, CASA, the Equity Center, the Gaithersburg Financial Empowerment Center, and the Chinese Culture and Community Service Center at the EITC Awareness Day event in January 2023.



*Community Action's VITA program was featured in Congressman Jamie Raskin's online series, *Hometown Heroes*.*



Left to right: Ameha Dessie, Maureen Larenas, and Gabriela Salazar at the Long Branch Festival in September 2022.



Board of Elections staff hosted a table at TESS for National Voter Registration Day.

SECTION 4

Takoma-East Silver Spring (TESS) Community Action Center and Community Action Navigation Unit

The Takoma-East Silver Spring (TESS) Community Action Center is a walk-in DHHS office. Based in the Long Branch community for over 50 years, residents come to TESS to request help with a wide range of issues. The highly trained staff help clients apply for numerous programs, including food and nutrition programs, emergency energy and rental assistance, Medicaid, Medicare, child care subsidies, housing vouchers, and more. TESS was at the forefront of utilizing the whole family approach, ensuring the needs of all family members can be addressed in one location. Staff members and contractors provide culturally competent, bilingual services (English and Spanish; English and Amharic). During FY22, TESS provided in-person

services, with a brief return to virtual services during the surge in COVID-19 cases in December 2021.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS AT TESS FOR FY22

During the COVID-19 emergency, Community Services Block Grant-funded agencies across the country were granted CARES Act funding to help meet increased needs of residents. As part of the agency's CARES funding, new Navigators were hired to link residents with services for children, adults, and seniors. CARES Navigators received extensive training and were placed at agencies and nonprofits around the County. Navigators assist clients to apply for a wide range of public and private programs and services.

Community Action was excited to once again participate in National Voter Registration Day on September 20, 2022. The Board of Elections staffed an information table at TESS where residents could register to vote, learn about serving as an election worker, and/or request a mail-in ballot for the upcoming election.

Throughout the year, TESS staff and contractors continued to assist residents in need of critical services, serving over 2,000 individual clients. The top three issues that TESS clients sought assistance with were food, medical (healthcare), and housing/utilities assistance. Additionally, 25 clients were served by the Groceries-To-Go program, receiving 300 grocery packages throughout the year, a partnership with the Capital Area Food Bank, and 188 residents received gifts and food through the Holiday Giving program.

	CLIENTS SERVED	UNDUPLICATED CLIENTS (NEW CLIENTS)	CASE MANAGEMENT	GROCERIES TO GO	HOLIDAY GIVING
FY22	8,246	1,895	1,068	300	248

SENIORS

Throughout the year, TESS continued to offer special programs for seniors while maintaining COVID-19 health and safety protocols. In partnership with the Capital Area Food Bank, 25 seniors participated in the Groceries to Go program, receiving boxes of groceries on designated distribution days. With support from the Department of Recreation, DHHS Aging and Disability Services, CASA, and the Jewish Council on Aging, TESS hosted a holiday party for several seniors at the Margaret Schweinhaut Senior Center. Following TESS's move to their new office, TESS staff hosted a small group of seniors to tour the new office and pick up their Groceries To Go boxes.



OPPORTUNITY COACH

TESS has been utilizing a whole family/"2-Gen" approach for decades. This approach includes multigenerational services to address the needs of the entire household and to serve the whole family's goals towards self-sufficiency. <https://communityactionpartnership.com/community-action-economic-mobility/> Utilizing whole family funding provided by the state, the TESS Center added an Opportunity Coaching program in FY22.

The initiative set out to serve 25 low-income Long Branch area families with young children. The Opportunity Coach works in partnership with TESS staff and Navigators to strengthen participating families, collaborating within the DHHS and with community-based nonprofit partners to deliver services and support families' short- and long-term goals. The Opportunity Coach follows a similar model to the one utilized by DHHS partnerships funded by the Kresge Foundation, engaging with parents/caregivers to increase economic security, nurturing partnerships with early learning and childcare, supporting educational and training goals, building social connections, and enhancing health and well-being across generations.

The Opportunity Coach started as a one-year project, delivered as part of the Whole Family/2-Gen pilot with Maryland Community Action Partnership (MCAP) and the Maryland Department of Human Services, with federal funding from Community Action's Community Services Block Grant. As part of the pilot cohort, the team also received technical assistance through MCAP, and staff are enrolled in MCAP's Whole Family "master" coaching training to strengthen service delivery.

TESS MOVES TO A NEW LOCATION

A major transition for TESS occurred in FY22 when the Center moved from its location on Piney Branch Road, where the Center had been located since the late 1960s, to a new location around the corner on Flower Avenue. The move required years of planning. The transition culminated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on August 2, 2022. The special event included remarks from County Executive Marc Elrich, DHHS Director Dr. Raymond Crowel, Community Action Board Chair Dr. Jeffery Johnson,



Participants in the TESS Senior Social program attend a holiday party.



Left to right: Sharon Strauss, Community Action Agency's Executive Director; Valeria Carranza, Montgomery County Council staff; Jacob Newman, Silver Spring Regional Services Director; The Honorable Will Jawando, Montgomery County Councilmember; The Honorable Marc Elrich, Montgomery County Executive; Community Action Board Chair Dr. Jeffery Johnson; Maureen Larenas, TESS Manager; and Dr. Raymond Crowel, DHHS Director.



TESS staff and Navigators celebrated the opening of the new TESS office with DHHS Director Dr. Raymond Crowel.

Community Action Executive Director Sharon Strauss, TESS Manager Maureen Larenas, and Navigation Team Manager Monica Rivera-Goldberg.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

In FY22, the TESS team continued to provide emergency response services. The TESS team's extensive knowledge of County services is extremely effective in connecting residents with critical services following a fire or other mass care situation. The County's emergency response program calls on TESS immediately following every situation where residents may be in need of shelter and other services.

Throughout the year, TESS staff and members of the Navigation team continued to play an integral part in emergency response efforts in the County. These efforts included assisting the sixty-three families who were displaced by the Flower Branch Apartments fire in January 2022. With extensive experience in responding to such emergencies and a culturally-competent, multilingual staff, TESS team members joined colleagues from the DHHS Office of Emergency Preparedness, Response and Mass Care and the American Red Cross to provide interpretation, registration, and intake for twelve families that were transferred to a hotel for temporary housing. Staff continued to provide case management services to displaced residents until housing could be secured for these families.

At the same time, TESS and the Navigators assisted three additional households that were displaced by a fire in Gaithersburg. In March, TESS and the Navigators assisted survivors of an explosion at the Friendly Gardens Apartments in Silver Spring. The team joined colleagues from DHHS, Montgomery Housing Partnership, the Housing Initiative

Partnership, and numerous other agencies and organizations to provide case management to the forty people who lost their homes in the explosion.

Also of note, in partnership with the County's Emergency Response and Mass Care Operations teams and other public and nonprofit partners, TESS staff developed an online tracking system to improve coordination to serve residents recently affected by fires and flooding emergencies. The system was developed based on the team's on-site response to multiple incidents and has facilitated case management and the distribution of community donations to affected residents.



TESS staff celebrating the opening of their new office on Flower Avenue.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS AT TESS FOR FY23

Throughout FY23, TESS staff continued to connect residents with services from the new TESS office location. The new office offers a beautiful new facility, however, it is smaller than the previous location. As a result, certain programs requiring more space, such as the Judy Center Jump Bunch, have been discontinued. TESS was able to assist former partners in exploring new venues and continued to offer onsite services such as VITA tax preparation and pro bono legal services.

Throughout the year, TESS provided 10,305 client services to 2,950 unduplicated clients.

TESS hosted several special events for seniors in the Long Branch community throughout the year. In November 2022, TESS worked with the Department of Recreation to host a Thanksgiving celebration for seniors. TESS staff also hosted a coffee hour for a small group of seniors at the TESS office in December. Several seniors participated in a tour of the Long Branch Library and Senior Center in April, which was organized by TESS staff. TESS senior also had the opportunity to participate in a Long Branch Fashion Show in May.

On May 9, the TESS Community Action Center hosted a site visit for representatives from the state and federal levels. The 25 guests included Charisse Johnson, director of the Division of Community Assistance and several members of her team in the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration of Child and Families, along with staff representatives from Montgomery County's four Congressional offices, and Hermine Williams, Project Manager with the Office of Community Services, Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Division of Neighborhood

Revitalization Programs. The event highlighted local anti-poverty efforts anchored by the federal Community Services Block Grant and leveraged by local funding and partnerships. Dr. James C. Bridgers, Jr., DHHS Director, Sharon Strauss, and Monica Rivera-Goldberg shared remarks and presentations during the event. Participants also had the opportunity to tour the Center.

In celebration of National Voter Registration Day on September 19th, Community Action welcomed Dr. Gilberto Zelaya, Community Engagement/Public Relations Officer for the Board of Elections, to TESS. Dr. Zelaya answered residents' questions and shared information about voter registration, serving as an election judge, and/or volunteer opportunities for youth during the upcoming election season.

NAVIGATION TEAM HIGHLIGHTS

In FY22, the Navigation program was launched as a pilot initiative with four Navigators. The primary objective of this program is to implement the service integration model to assist families in accessing wrap around services within DHHS and the Montgomery County community. Navigators apply a trauma-informed care approach to be a "one-stop shop" by providing application assistance, referral services, case coordination, and program education to ensure families have access to all services for which they are eligible and interested within the DHHS continuum of care. During its pilot



From Left to Right: Monica Rivera-Goldberg, Maureen Larenas, Hermine Williams, and Sharon Strauss.



Dr. Gilberto Zelaya, Community Engagement/Public Relations Officer for the Board of Elections, supports the TESS Center's National Voter Registration Day event on September 19, 2023.

	CLIENTS SERVED	UNDUPLICATED CLIENTS (NEW CLIENTS)	CASE MANAGEMENT	GROCERIES TO GO	HOLIDAY GIVING
FY22	10,305	2,950	1,427	111 (the program ended at TESS in 2/2023)	173

year, the program's focus was on hiring, training, and developing the Navigators to effectively carry out their roles and support families in need.

In FY23, the Navigation program expanded to add another Navigator and a Program coordinator. The Navigation program began to provide services at the locations of trusted community partners and food consolidation hubs to meet community residents. Four sites were chosen throughout East-County, Down-County, Mid-County and Up-County. During FY23, the Navigation team began collaborating with the DHHS Mass Care Department, applying Mass Care's service integration model to the recovery process for families displaced due to emergencies such as floods, fires and explosions. The Navigation team assists families with long-term case management, providing wrap-around services and assistance with finding new homes. In FY23 the Navigators responded to 11 Mass Care Recovery events.

SECTION 5

Contract Partners

The contracts' scopes of services for the fifty contracts and agreements with thirty-one non-profit organizations range from coordinating volunteer projects; food, clothing, and diaper distribution; case management; interpretation and translation services; leadership training to address racial inequities; neighborhood and community networking; legal assistance and advice—from brief advice clinics to full representation of unaccompanied minors and their guardians; employment and education services, including basic digital literacy; and academic support for middle school youth. As contractors adapted to the fast-changing pandemic conditions, the contracts team focused on core values and skills:

- Contract monitoring, training, and technical assistance
- Contractors' work to promote racial equity, and
- Collaborative efforts to strengthen communities.

Contract Monitoring, Training, and Technical Assistance:

The CAA Annual Contract Partners' meeting is a best practice for sharing updates between the County and contractors and networking. On November 15, 2021, the meeting was held virtually for the second year. Due to high staff turnover among contractors, the agenda focused on CAA programs. Sharon Strauss, Executive Director, welcomed over forty participants. Leah Goldfine, CAA liaison to the Community Action Board, introduced Board Vice-President Lisette Orellana Engel, who highlighted the CAB's role in advocating for Montgomery County's low- and moderate-income families and polled contract partners for their input into CAB priorities. The topics of highest interest were access to services, navigation, and delivering holistic services in one location; and employment with self-sufficient wages and work supports (e.g., paid sick leave); followed by immigration, affordable housing, food and nutrition programs, early childcare and education, and tax credits.

Presentations at the annual contract partners' meeting were also provided by Community Advocacy Institute alumnus Vanessa Pierre; Taunya Johnson of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program; and Charlene Muhammad of Head Start with Lisa Conlon, the MCPS delegate to the Board and the Social Services Specialist for pre-K and Head Start. Sharon Strauss introduced new DHHS navigation team, four Navigators bolstering services at [COVID-19 food distribution and service consolidation hubs](#) and TESS Community Action Center.

Contract partners' updates included [Manna Food Center](#) working with [Unite Us](#) to find available health and social services, [KindWorks](#) furnishing homes for families newly arriving from Afghanistan, [IMPACT Silver Spring](#) developing economic opportunities



Representatives from the agency's contract partners joined staff at the annual Contract Partners' Meeting on November 15, 2022 at WorkSource Montgomery.



Anthony Featherstone, Executive Director of WorkSource Montgomery, with Contracts Program Manager Aizat Oladapo, Program Specialist Melissa E. Ferguson, Executive Director Sharon Strauss, and contractor representatives (November 15, 2022).



Outreach services by the Korean Community Service Center of Greater Washington.

for immigrant families through cooperatives, and the Community Health and Empowerment through Education and Research ([CHEER](#)) organizing volunteers for food distribution through the service consolidation hubs.

On November 15, 2022, the CAA Annual Contract Partners' meeting was held in-person for the first time since 2019. The event was held at WorkSource Montgomery in Wheaton. Twenty non-profit contract partner organizations were represented; information was shared later with the eleven organizations that did not send a representative. Executive Director Sharon Strauss shared best practices on using a whole-family approach, including information on Community Action's navigation team for disaster response and the Opportunity Coach, as well as highlights from the Interactive Self-Sufficiency Standard (with 2022 data) and the Community Needs Assessment. Anthony Featherstone, Executive Director of WorkSource Montgomery, shared information on programs including the Mobile Job Center, the community assets map, and partnership opportunities. Participants were grateful to meet in person, and all contract partner organizations were sent the PowerPoint slides and information presented at the meeting.

Each year, contract monitors complete DHHS monitoring reports for contract records and submission with renewal documentation. As needed, contracts' scopes were updated regarding online or phone-based service delivery during periods of disruption such as high rates of COVID-19. As these are cost-reimbursement contracts' budgets are drafted when the County's annual budget is approved, changes in program staff or operating costs are later addressed by budget modifications as needed. Frequently, DHHS contracts receive annual

inflationary adjustments of two to three percent.

In FFY22 all contracts monitored by the CAA—including "Community Grants" (Non-Departmental Accounts)—were awarded eight percent inflationary adjustments to help address increased costs. Community Grants were also automatically renewed without requiring new applications, which helped stabilize CAA contract partners' services. In FFY23, Community Grants were automatically renewed at the funding level received the prior year and base budget contracts were given three percent inflationary adjustments.

In addition, in FFY23, two contract partners, Manna Food Center and Women Who Care Ministries, were awarded significant mid-year funds for food security programs to address the economic needs of that year. Manna was awarded additional increments of \$350,000 and \$150,000 for the Farm to Food Bank program to allow for purchases from farmers and to provide grants to farmers of up to \$10,000 each for infrastructure and/or equipment to allow for the increased volume and/or extension of the season to produce more crops. Manna also was awarded a \$575,000 increase for the Food for Families program, which supported staffing and agency infrastructure. Women Who Care Ministries was awarded \$455,802.14 over the FFY22 award due to the increase in the numbers of MCPS students needing weekend bags to address food insecurity.

The DHHS, Division of Planning, Analytics, and Customer Service (PACS), offers survey templates in several languages, in shorter and longer versions, and at a third-grade reading level—including facial images to indicate the customers' level of pleasure/displeasure with services, with space for customers' suggestions or comments. Contract partners may also develop their own surveys and share them via

email, text, or phone calls. Contract partners are also encouraged to track program outcomes following ROMA guidelines, such as individuals or families' changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, ability, or behavior; and/or agency and community changes such as organization effectiveness.

For contract partners new to contracting with the County, or which have experienced turnover of key program and administrative staff or Board membership, two Nonprofit Montgomery training opportunities designed for County-funded services, FIRM, the Financial Reporting and Management Institute, and MORE: Metrics, Outcomes, and Responsible Evaluation are recommended. FIRM provides valuable budgeting and other financial management guidance for more effective contract administration. MORE teaches nonprofits how to track and demonstrate the value of their services, which may strengthen their ability to attract funding.

Promoting Equity: Many CAA contracts promote equitable access to services for speakers of languages other than English, including the Korean Community Service Center of Greater Washington, African Communities Together, and the Caribbean Help Center, where the staff speaks English, French-Creole, and French. Two contractors, IMPACT Silver Spring and the Leadership Montgomery Education Foundation, have incorporated their own training by the Racial Equity Institute (REI) of Greensboro, North Carolina into leadership programs designed to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in health and well-being in alignment with the [Montgomery County Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice](#).

IMPACT Silver Spring's mission is to advance racial equity, justice, and liberation by working for change in individuals, communities, organizations, and systems. IMPACT applied the Truth, Trust, and Transformation

(T3) initiative to strengthen capacity at the individual, neighborhood, and systems levels to break down barriers. This is reflected in all [IMPACT programs](#), including viewing and discussing films on equity and social justice issues, leadership training, Women Empowerment workshops, ESOL classes, a Workers Cooperative, and the Weaver Learning Lab focused on awareness of racial disparities and solutions for change. In FY21, four virtual Weaver Learning Lab sessions drew 26 – 30 participants each (100+ total participants) and alumni continue the discussions. IMPACT also organizes and facilitates meetings and provides interpretation for the [Montgomery County Racial Equity \(MORE\) Network Initiative](#), which seeks to ensure that Montgomery County develops policies that make concrete, tangible, and measurable changes to eliminate racial inequities and injustices in our communities. As of Fall 2021, the MORE Network was comprised of 280 community members, grassroots organizations, non-profits, and other stakeholders working towards racial equity and its intersections in Montgomery County.

The Leadership Montgomery Education Foundation's mission is to educate, inspire, convene, and connect leaders to advance Montgomery County. With REI, Leadership Montgomery developed a two-day [Racial Equity Institute \(REI\) training](#) and an eight-month [Racial Equity Action Leadership \(REAL\) Inclusion training program](#). Participating community and non-profit leaders learn how to address systemic beliefs, practices, and policies that have perpetuated racial inequities. In FFY2021, 260 people participated in the two-day Racial Equity Institute and 41 people participated in the eight-month REAL Inclusion program.

The County's food distribution programs directly address socio-economic disparities. Collaborating

with MCPS, the [COVID-19 food distribution and service consolidation hubs](#), and other agencies to address food insecurity, the Weekend Bag Program run by three partners—Manna Food Center, Kids in Need Distributors (KIND) and Women Who Care Ministries—

served 9,778 students with snacks for the weekends in FFY22. In FFY23, the Weekend Bag Program served 8,288 students. The decrease in students served may reflect the emergence of other food programs in MCPS, such as food pantries and pop-up pantries where families receive produce and groceries.

Each December for over thirty years, the DHHS [Holiday Giving Project](#) has provided low-income families with opportunities to choose a gift for each family member from among donated toys, technology accessories popular with older children (e.g., earphones), or gift cards. DHHS programs and community-based providers refer participants and waitlists are common, particularly during economic downturns. The TESS Community Action Center and CAA contract partners also distribute donations for the school year, Thanksgiving, and/or December holidays.

- In December 2021, the [Colesville Council of Community Congregations \(C-4\) Clothes Closet](#), gave toys to over 800 children (ages twelve and under) from over 470 families. Donors included C-4 members, civic groups, and private individuals. At the end of the FFY22 and FFY23 school years, C-4 gave away over 800 backpacks each year that were filled with supplies for grades K - 12. From July to December 2022, C-4 had served 184 new clients out of 3,163 people to date that fiscal year. C-4 distributes canned food donations year-round to East County families in need.



Manna Food Center participated in a community event in Gaithersburg on October 29, 2022.



Interfaith Works hosted a volunteer fair on May 6, 2023.

- Each month, the [Caribbean Help Center](#) of Silver Spring provides staples for Haitian families' kitchens, such as rice and beans. In November 2021, the CHC distributed extra donated food for Thanksgiving, serving 59 households with 960 lbs. of food. In November 2022, the CHC distributed 750 lbs. of food to 44 households.
- For several years at Thanksgiving, the [YMCA of Metropolitan Washington](#) has partnered with St. Constantine & Helen Orthodox Church of Darnestown to provide food and grocery gifts cards to families with students enrolled in the YMCA's Benchmarks program at Silver Creek Middle School. In the months of November 2021 and 2022, packages were available for pick-up from SCMS or the Coffield Recreation Center in Silver Spring's Rosemary Hills neighborhood.
- In November 2021, 264 [KindWorks](#) volunteers boxed food for 1,500 families (6,000 individuals) at two service consolidation hubs; 41 volunteers cooked 329.5 quarts of soup for 660 people served by four service consolidation hubs; and 34 volunteers baked 60 single-serving casseroles and banana bread for 60 Gaithersburg seniors. In November 2022, 183 volunteers supported 1,000 families (5,000 individuals) at two service consolidation hubs; 50 volunteers cooked 384.25 quarts of soup for 768 people staying in shelters, served by distribution hubs, or newly resettled from Afghanistan into the County; and 48 volunteers made "grab and go" meals for 24 people at the MoCo Reconnects Center in Silver Spring.

Collaborative efforts to strengthen communities:

CAA contracts often play critical roles in communities' survival, as demonstrated by Long Branch Partners and the Montgomery County Maryland Bar Foundation's Pro Bono Legal Advice program. Long Branch Partners includes CAA contract partners CHEER, CASA, IMPACT Silver Spring, and the

Spanish-Speaking Community of Maryland, as well as additional nonprofits and local government, including TESS. After significant efforts to track the community's assets, resources, and needs Long Branch Partners has formed a COAD, or [Community Organizations Active in Disasters](#). Their plans, communications, and partnerships fostered the distribution of food and emergency supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as trail walks and celebratory outdoor festivals.

In FFY23, as discussed elsewhere, the Community Action Agency built upon the above efforts to secure funding for a year-round Navigation Team, which not only provides long-term case management for County residents displaced by disasters, but by FFY23 has revived the potential for County service providers (Navigators) to co-locate with contract partners to collaboratively address families' needs, akin to the program formerly known as the Neighborhood Opportunity Networks (2009 – 2020).

At TESS and in Gaithersburg and Wheaton at [Montgomery County's Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Centers](#), the Bar Foundation's Pro Bono clinics provide free access to an attorney to discuss whether legal assistance is needed. The program is for County residents who meet income guidelines and connects to Pro Bono legal representation as needed. In 2020, the Pro Bono program pivoted to a phone-based program as the hosting sites closed in-person services. In 2022 the Pro Bono advice clinics began returning to in-person services, two evenings a month at the three sites, with phone services continuing to serve residents in eastern Montgomery County. In FFY22, by December 2021, 91 cases had been opened since July, including 71 advised at the legal clinics. In FFY23, by December 2022, 74 cases had been opened since July, including 68 advised at the legal clinics.

SECTION 6

Community Action Board

The Community Action Board (CAB) serves in an advisory capacity to the County Executive and County Council, and as an advocate on behalf of lower-income County residents. CAB also serves as the governing body for the Community Action Agency and Head Start, along with the Head Start Policy Council.

CAB'S WORK IN FY22

FY22 was a very busy year for the Community Action Board. The CAB engaged in extensive advocacy work, including submitting written testimony regarding 18 state-level bills and matters and eight County Council bills and matters. CAB members also testified at seven public hearings throughout the year.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CAB'S ADVOCACY WORK IN FY22

The CAB supported several County Council Bills and addressed County-level matters:

- Council Bill 38-21, which established a child care grants programs.
- Council HHS Committee Worksession for BCCs with CAB testimony focusing on agency priorities
- Council Bill 42-21, which established a coordinating entity to oversee early childhood education in the County.
- CAB submitted a letter to the County Council HHS Committee requesting that the ARPA funds previously promised to the CAA VITA program be allocated immediately.
- Council Budget hearing for FY23 with CAB focusing on agency priorities and CAB priority issues.
- Council Bill 10 – 22, which provided paid parental leave for County employees
- Council Bill 11 – 22, which required lactation rooms in most County buildings.

The CAB also submitted testimony regarding numerous state-level bills:

- HB 282/SB316 - Sales and Use Tax - Diapers - Exemption
- HB8/SB275 - Time to Care Act of 2022
- HB29/SB105 - Vehicle Laws - Failure to Pay Video Toll - Penalties
- SB29/HB83 - Family Law - Emancipation of a Minor and Authorization to Marry
- HB 57 - Motor Vehicle Insurance - Rate Filings - Trade Secrets and Factors Used to Establish Rates
- HB 252/SB369 - Income Tax - Return Preparation Assistance Program for Low-Income Families
- SB279/HB571 - Access to Counsel in Evictions Special Fund

- HB588 - Local Health Departments and Community Action Agencies - Feminine Hygiene Products
- HB456 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - State Supplement
- SB404/HB422 - Working Marylanders Tax Relief (CAB opposed)
- HB919/SB805 - Income Tax – Child Tax Credit – Alterations and Sunset Extension
- HB992 - Income Tax - Earned Income Tax Credit - Alteration and Sunset Repeal
- HB1027/SB921 - Food Supplement Benefits - Students - Eligibility (SNAP for Students)

Starting in March 2022, the CAB collaborated with the Head Start Policy Council regarding concerns about the impact of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future on Head Start/Pre-K in the County. The two groups submitted a letter to the Board of Education explaining that wrap-around services, which are required for Head Start programs, such as medical and dental programs and Family Service Workers, are also offered to Pre-K students to ensure equity of services. However, with the addition of 200-300 new Pre-K spots, as is outlined in the Blueprint Plan, staff simply would not be able to address the needs of all students. The two groups recommended hiring at least one new school nurse, eight FSWs, and the reinstatement of the Head Start coordinator position. Board and Policy Council leadership later met with Board of Education Member Scott Joftus to discuss these concerns further. A meeting with Nichelle Owens and Verna Washington from MCPS allowed the two groups to discuss their concerns. MCPS was responsive to the CAB's and Policy Council's recommendations and reported that there were plans to address these concerns.

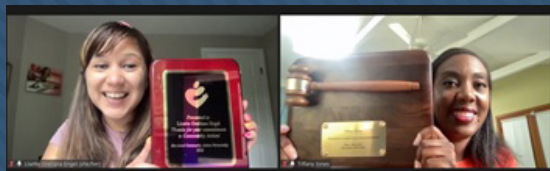
Outside of advocacy work, the CAB engaged in several important governance activities throughout the year.



Board Vice Chair Lisette Orellana Engel testified for the Board at the November 17th County Council HHS Committee Worksession for Boards, Committees, and Commissions.



CAB Members at the TESS Ribbon Cutting Ceremony (left to right): Zelda Wafer-Jones, Dr. Jeffery Johnson, Lisette Orellana Engel, Lisa Conlon, and Pamela Luckett.



FY22 Board Vice Chair Lisette Orellana Engel and Chair Tiffany Jones were honored for their exceptional leadership at the June 2022 Community Action Board meeting.

The Board's Recruitment Committee interviewed applicants for four vacancies in the private sector of the CAB and selected four new Board members to recommend for appointment. A Bylaws Committee was established to review the board's bylaws and recommend updates. On March 22, 2022, the CAB approved updated bylaws. A Community Needs Assessment Committee reviewed the CNA draft and provided helpful feedback during the process.

The CAB continued to collaborate with other groups in FY22 and participated in several important activities. Board members participated in the

Women's Legislative Briefing in January, hosted by the Commission for Women. CAB member Pamela Luckett led an advocacy training workshop for the NAACP Parents' Council. CAB member Zelda Wafer-Jones led a presentation about the Board's Community Advocacy Institute at the National Community Action Partnership's Annual Convention in New York. The workshop focused on leadership programs at Community Action Agencies and also included CAI graduate June Henderson. Several CAB members attended the TESS Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony at their new location on August 2, 2022, with Dr. Jeffery Johnson sharing remarks from the CAB.

COMMUNITY ACTION BOARD MEMBERS IN FY22

Chair: Tiffany Jones

Vice Chair: Lisette Orellana Engel

Elaine Carballo
EveryMind

Valerie Chatfield-Smith
*Representative of the Low-Income Community,
Gaithersburg*

Lisa Conlon
Board of Education

Erika Conner
*Representative of the Low-Income Community,
Burtonsville*

Denise Fredericks
Mercy Health Clinic

Candace Groudine
Human Rights Commission

Jeffery Johnson
People's Community Baptist Church

Tiffany Jones
*Representative of the Head Start Policy Council and the
Low-Income Community, Rockville*

Will Kenlaw
Department of Transportation

Dannette Lawrence
Housing Opportunities Commission

Pamela Luckett
County Council Designee

Eneshal Miller
Everyday Canvassing

Lisette Orellana Engel
*Representative of the Low-Income Community,
Germantown*

Myriam Paul
Representative of the Low-Income Community, Rockville

Timothy Robinson
Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity

Claudia Simmons
Hughes United Methodist Church

Michael Subin
County Executive's Designee

Zelda Wafer-Jones
*Representative of the Head Start Policy Council and the
Low-Income Community, Wheaton*

CAB'S WORK IN FY23

The board's extensive advocacy efforts continued in FY23, with the board submitting testimony regarding 22 state-level bills. CAB also submitted written testimony or testified in person before the County Council six times.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CAB'S ADVOCACY WORK IN FY23

The CAB supported several County Council Bills and addressed County-level matters:

- CAB submitted testimony to the County Council in support of a Special Appropriation that would add funding for food distribution by increasing funds for Manna Food Center and the Capital Area Food Bank.
- CAB Chair Dr. Jeffery Johnson shared the CAB's priorities at a County Council HHS Committee meeting for Boards, Committees, and Commissions. The Board's priorities focused on staffing needs at TESS, expanding navigation, staff support for VITA, and a contractor for the CAI.
- Dr. Johnson testified at the County Council budget hearing in support of CAB priorities, focusing on staffing needs for the agency.
- CAB supported Council Bill 16-23 – The HOME Act, which would limit annual rent increases to 3%.

The CAB also submitted testimony regarding numerous state-level bills:

- HB 0108 - Human Services - Universal Basic Income for Transition-Age Youth – Establishment (support with recommended amendment)
- HB 0087/SB52 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs - Waiver - Diapers and Menstrual Hygiene Products
- HB111/SB26 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program, Maryland Children's Health Program, and Social Services Programs - Eligibility & Enrollment

- SB160 - Human Services - TCA - Calculation of Benefits
- SB420/HB562 - Human Services – Temporary Cash Assistance – Housing Allowance
- SB552/HB547 - Family Prosperity Act of 2023
- HB323 - Social Services Programs - Eligibility and Enrollment
- SB893/HB1219 - Maryland Educator Shortage Act of 2023
- SB562 - Maryland Small Food Banks Grant Program – Establishment
- SB756/HB1050 - Access to Counsel in Evictions – Funding
- HB988 - Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – Modifications
- SB970 - Fire Protection and Prevention – Sprinkler Systems and Smoke Alarms – Requirements (Melanie Diaz Sprinklers Save Lives Act)

In the spring of 2023, the CAB developed and led a sign-on letter to the County Council in support of returning the Working Families Income Supplement to a 100% match of the state Earned Income Tax Credit. With a very quick turnaround time, fourteen organizations joined the sign-on letter.

The board's governance activities continued throughout the year. The board approved numerous important items, including the CSBG Budget, the Community Needs Assessment, CSBG Organizational Standards Report, and the Head Start Grant application. The board also established ad hoc committees to address needs that emerged throughout the year. These included the Affordable Housing Committee, Recruitment Committee, Nominating Committee, and Strategic Planning Committee.

FY23 also included several training opportunities for the board members. The Board received several presentations about a wide variety of topics, including



Board members Evelyn Okutu, Lisa Conlon, and Claudia Simmons (left to right) participated in the Maryland Community Action Partnership's annual conference in May 2022.



Board Vice Chair Zelda Wafer-Jones and Board member Denise Fredericks with Dr. James Bridgers, DHHS Director, at a "Meet and Greet" in May 2023 for members of Boards, Committees, and Commissions.



FY23 Board Vice Chair Zelda Wafer-Jones and Board Chair Dr. Jeffery Johnson.

renters' insurance, proposed rent stabilization bills, Linkages to Learning, and Head Start School Readiness data. Board members also participated in numerous conferences and special events, including the Minority Legislative Breakfast, EITC Awareness Day/VITA Kick-Off event, Women's Legislative Briefing and the Maryland Community Action Partnership's Human Services Conference.

COMMUNITY ACTION BOARD MEMBERS IN FY23

Chair: Dr. Jeffery Johnson

Vice Chair: Zelda Wafer-Jones

Elaine Carballo
EveryMind

Valerie Chatfield-Smith
*Representative of the Low-Income Community,
Gaithersburg*

Lisa Conlon
Board of Education

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Hughes United Methodist Church

Michael Subin
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Zelda Wafer-Jones
*Representative of the Head Start Policy Council and
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Community Advocacy Institute

The Community Action Board established the Community Advocacy Institute (CAI) in 2016 to teach lower-income residents how to be advocates for their own communities. Participants attend monthly workshops on a variety of topics, including how to work with elected officials, storytelling, research, developing testimony, and key advocacy issues for low-income residents. Board members facilitate all of the workshops and welcome guest speakers, including local and state elected officials, issue experts, and experienced advocates. Participants must live in Montgomery County and meet income eligibility requirements. Successful completion of the CAI includes participation in all workshops throughout the eight-month program and completion of an advocacy project.

The FY22 CAI included virtual workshops, two in-person networking sessions, and two virtual testimony practice sessions. To fulfill the advocacy project requirement, thirteen participants testified before County Council at budget hearings and eight submitted written testimony.

An in-person graduation ceremony was held on May 24, 2022 at Bohrer Park in Gaithersburg. Twenty-one graduates were honored at the special ceremony. Community Action Board Chair Tiffany Jones led the ceremony, with Board member Valerie Chatfield-Smith presenting graduates with their certificates. The program included remarks from Betty Lam, Chief of the DHHS Office of Community Affairs, and Sharon Strauss, Executive Director of the Community Action

Agency. Several elected officials spoke at the event, including County Executive Marc Elrich, County Council President Gabe Alborno, County Council Vice President Evan Glass, County Councilmember Sidney Katz, and City of Gaithersburg Councilmember Laurie-Anne-Sayles. At the conclusion of the program, each graduate read a personal statement about what the program meant to them and what they plan to do with the advocacy skills they learned.



Community Action Board members join CAI Ambassadors to celebrate the 2022 CAI graduation.

FY22 CAI GRADUATES:

Asaati Ahmad	Henrietta Jones
Mayra Alvarado	Guisela Lopez
Angela Hughes Byrd	Sherlene Lucas
Iris Carlo	Theresa Marajh
Reba Carruth	Yessenia Nolasco
Teresa Privado Castillo	Evelyn Okutu
Jhenncy Centeno	Connie Robinson
Jeneba Daramy	Ahmad Shehadeh
Valarie Davis	Enku Taye
Julia Díaz	Daisy Thompson
Donna Gabriel	



2022 CAI Graduate Asaati Ahmad is congratulated by Community Action Board member Myriam Paul.



2022 CAI Graduates Guisela Lopez and Mayra Alvarado celebrate at the CAI graduation held at Bohrer Park.



Left to right: FY23 CAI participants Dadrina Davis, Evelyn Hoey, Marie Sloan, Tracy Washington Craig, and Tamara King at the CAI orientation session.



2023 CAI participants, CAI Committee members, CAI Ambassadors, CAA staff, and special guest County Councilmember Laurie-Anne Sayles pose for a picture at the County Council Office Building before a CAI testimony practice session.



2023 CAI participants Robyn Olivo and Jacqueline Guevara at the County Council Office Building, where they both testified at an annual budget hearing.

The FY22 CAI program included two new components. First, the CAI became a completely bilingual program in English and Spanish. Every workshop and session included simultaneous interpretation and all written materials were available in English and Spanish. Participants submitted assignments in Spanish and testified before County Council in Spanish. Three participants who utilized Spanish interpretation graduated from the program in May.

Also in FY22, CAI graduates had the opportunity to apply to serve as CAI Ambassadors. These volunteers helped to plan the program and led special sessions for the participants. Seven CAI Ambassadors supported the program throughout the year: Sara Abeldkhalek, Mandy Dalton, Ramata Diop, Odessa Davis, William Hegwood, Samira Hussein, and Vanessa Pierre.

The CAI continued to include a mentoring component, where participants were paired with a Community Action Board member or Ambassador who checked in with them throughout the program and provided feedback on their testimony. The FY22 CAI mentors were Mary Bennett, Matt Green, Tiffany Jones, Lisette Orellana Engel, Myriam Paul, Vanessa Pierre, Mike Subin, and Zelda Wafer-Jones.

Another ongoing component of the CAI is the alumni group. All participants who successfully complete the CAI become members of the CAI Alumni Group. This group receives regular updates on community events, employment and volunteer opportunities, and helpful resources in the County. The group also meets every three – four months for alumni workshops focused on topics of interest to the group. In FY22, alumni workshops focused on criminal records expungement; serving on County boards, committees, and commissions; and mental health resources.

The Montgomery County Community Action Board Presents



Community Advocacy Institute

La Junta de Acción Comunitaria del Condado de Montgomery Presenta



Instituto de Abogacía Comunitaria

The FY23 CAI program was redesigned to include a mix of in-person and virtual sessions. This allowed for more interaction and collaboration between the participants but also accommodated participants who preferred virtual sessions due to health and safety concerns, child care needs, or transportation challenges. The program continued to be completely bilingual in English and Spanish. All workshops included simultaneous interpretation and all written materials were available in both English and Spanish. The FY23 CAI Ambassadors were Mayra Alvarado, Angela Hughes Byrd, Jeneba Daramy, Ramata Diop, Theresa Marajh, Evelyn Okutu, and Enku Taye. The FY23 CAI mentors were Mary Bennett, Elaine Carballo, Lisette Orellana Engel, Tiffany Jones, Agnes Leshner, Myriam Paul, Mike Subin, and Zelda Wafer-Jones.

As in previous years, all participants were required to develop original and share their testimony at testimony practice sessions held in March. Nine participants later testified before the County Council during budget hearings in April, while twelve participants submitted written testimony to complete their advocacy projects. Participants' testimony addressed numerous community issues, including affordable housing, service for children with special needs, and mental health services.

On May 23, 2023, an in-person graduation ceremony was held at Bohrer Park in Gaithersburg, with twenty-one participants graduating from the program. The ceremony included a Joint County Executive and County Council Proclamation, remarks from County Executive Marc Elrich, County Councilmembers, and DHHS leaders. All graduates had the opportunity to read their personal statements, which highlighted what the CAI meant to them, what they plan to do with the skills they learned, and which advocacy issues they planned to focus on.



CAI graduates pose for a picture at the graduation ceremony in May 2023.

FY23 CAI GRADUATES:

Celeste Banda	Tamara King
Tracy Washington Craig	Nubia Ladino
Datrina Davis	Mabel Lozano
Luisa Espinoza	Eleanore Musaga
Violeta Fernández	Robyn Olivo
Jacqueline Guevara	Gi Gi Parris
Carol Guzmán	Monserath Polo
Terence Hill	Marie Sloan
Evelyn Hoey	Karen Ticona
Laissa Jemea	Joni Washington-Stahl
Stephen Tao Jiang	



CAI graduate Luisa Espinoza reads her personal statement during the graduation ceremony in 2023.

FY23 also included three CAI alumni workshops where graduates of the program could come together for virtual sessions focused on topics of interest to the group. Alumni workshops focused on Action in Montgomery's advocacy model, immigration legal issues, and services for young children.



During the year, the Community Action Board was excited to have five CAI graduates participate in the County's Climate Stories Ambassadors Program. Participants in this program recorded their own stories about how climate change impacts their lives and their communities. On February 23, 2023, CAI graduates Ramata Diop and Lynnette Hamrick participated in a special screening of a compilation of the stories called *Our Grain of Sand: Climate Stories Film Festival*, which was held at the AFI Silver Theatre & Cultural Center. Ms. Diop participated in a panel discussion at the event, highlighting her personal experience in the program and her perspective on how to address climate change.



CAI Graduate Joni Washington-Stahl
1956 – 2023

During the FY23 CAI program, Community Action was devastated to learn of the passing of CAI participant Joni Washington-Stahl, an enthusiastic participant who was deeply committed to numerous important community issues. Ms. Washington-Stahl attended every workshop and was looking forward to sharing her testimony, which focused on food insecurity, with the County Council. Ms. Washington-Stahl was honored at the CAI graduation, where her husband received her graduation certificates and shared a personal statement that he wrote for her.

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NOTES

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COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY STAFF AND CONTRACTORS FY22 & FY23

Sharon Strauss,
Executive Director

Marwan Abdelmoniem,
Administrative Specialist, Head Start

Birtucan Assres,
*Community Connector,
TESS Community Action Center*

Karey Bell
*CARES Navigator,
TESS Community Action Center*

Josue Canas,
*Office Services Coordinator,
TESS Community Action Center*

Benoit Codija,
CASH Fellow and VITA Contactor

Ameha Dessie,
*CARES Navigator, TESS Community Action
Center*

Melissa E. Ferguson,
Program Specialist, Contracts

Oluseun Finnih,
Head Start Contractor

Leah Goldfine,
Program Manager, CAB Liaison

Mikayla Green,
FY23 CASH Fellow, VITA Program

Victoria Hall,
*Contractor,
TESS Community Action Center*

Aminullah Hamidi
Navigator, TESS Community Action Center

Sharron Holquin,
VITA Contractor

Jessica Huitz
Program Aide, Head Start

Maria Lorena Jarrin,
Office Services Coordinator

Taunya Johnson,
Program Specialist, VITA Program

Maureen Larenas-Rivas,
*Program Specialist,
TESS Community Action Center*

Janet Lee,
VITA Contractor

Paola Lopez,
*CARES Navigator,
TESS Community Action Center*

Ziel Luna,
*CARES Navigator,
TESS Community Action Center*

Pamela Medina,
*CARES Navigator,
TESS Community Action Center*

Eduardo Mendes,
Program Specialist, VITA Program

Charlene Muhammad,
Program Manager, Head Start

Yessenia Nolasco,
*Opportunity Coach,
TESS Community Action Center*

Aizat Oladapo,
Program Manager, Contracts

Maria Quiroga,
Contractor, TESS Community Action Center

Khadija Riaz,
FY22 CASH Fellow, VITA Program

Monica Rivera-Goldberg,
*CARES Program Manager,
TESS Community Action Center*

Gabriela Salazar,
*CARES Navigator,
TESS Community Action Center*

Claudia Werner,
*Community Services Aide,
TESS Community Action Center*

THE PROMISE OF COMMUNITY ACTION

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.

