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Ohio Association of
Community Action Agencies

50 Years

Agency Happenings

CAAs Help the Uninsured Find Coverage

As described in the September 2013 issue of the *OACAA Briefing*, the Community Action Partnership of the Greater Dayton Area (CAP Dayton) and IMPACT Community Action in Columbus were selected to participate in a pilot project developed by the national Community Action Partnership and the Corporation for National Community Service (VISTA and Retired Senior Volunteer Program volunteers) to educate and enroll uninsured Americans through the Affordable Care Act. Now that the enrollment phase of the project has been completed, the agencies share the successes and challenges.

CAP Dayton



CAP Dayton Volunteer Bobbie Steverson (right) helps Serge Niyimbona (left) enroll

“The project reached out to approximately 12,000 people,” explained Deborah Ferguson, CAP Dayton’s director of Outreach and Social Services. “We made a difference for a lot of families. Honestly, I don’t think that most of them could have or would have enrolled without our help. We learned a great deal from the project.” She credits the success of the project to the leadership, commitment and hard work of their VISTA, Michelle Nelson.

During the program, CAP Dayton participated in several community outreach events, they developed flyers and brochures, had postings on their website and newsletter, created payroll stuffers for their staff, created a display and information table in their lobby, received 750 interest forms from 2014 HEAP customers, and did a mailing to 500 of their HEAP customers from last year who indicated on their CSBG intake form that they did not have health insurance. This list was generated for them by the Ohio Development Services Agency.

The enrollment process was extended from the original deadline of March 31 to April 15, so final numbers are still being determined, but CAP Dayton



VISTA Michelle Nelson at an outreach event

estimates they enrolled approximately 300 households. Thirty-five volunteers were recruited, 23 of whom became Certified Application Counselors (CACs). The volunteers worked 1,512 hours on the project! Deborah stated, “The project made a huge difference in the lives of the volunteers. Some of them truly felt they were doing something that was a part of history.” Michelle agreed stating, “I was impressed by their growth in confidence and self-esteem, as well as their sense of accomplishment.” One volunteer, JoAnn Moore, opened up to Michelle about the impact that being involved in this project had on her life and how rewarding the experience had been for her. This is an overall feeling shared by the volunteers as a whole Michelle said.

Another contribution to their success was the local Medicaid Outreach Consortium. This is a group that consists of healthcare advocates, other nonprofits and social workers that was originally formed to coordinate efforts for the Children Insurance Program (CHIP), whose primary focus became enrollment through the ACA. They organized a kick-off event and helped coordinate other outreach events. The public library was a part of the consortium and contributed greatly, inviting people to utilize their computer labs.

The design of the project was to utilize AmeriCorps VISTAs (Volunteers In Service To America) to coordinate

Agency Happenings

the projects at each of the eight participating CAAs throughout the country. The VISTAs would utilize volunteers through the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), who would become CACs.

One of the challenges the program faced was the withdrawal of supplemental funding from the federal government that would allow the agencies to hire a volunteer coordinator, requiring Michelle, to take a more hands-on role than anticipated. This coupled with delays in the volunteer recruitment caused some challenges, as well as working with seniors on a computer-based project. Time was also a challenge. It seemed as soon as things were up and running, it was over. There were also delays in training due to the weather. The problems with the Marketplace website were also a factor, and Ferguson felt that there could have been stronger coordination and support with the other pilot sites.

Despite the challenges, CAP Dayton helped many people get the health insurance they need to improve their quality of life. As an example, Certified Application Counselor Bobbie Steverson was able to help her client enroll through the Marketplace without a glitch! Her client didn't choose the health plan with the lowest premium of \$40, but instead chose a plan with a monthly premium of \$105 that better suited her needs. The client was eligible for a large tax credit and used all of that tax credit toward her premium, which allowed her to lower her costs, making it affordable for her. She left the agency that day enrolled in a healthcare plan, first monthly premium paid in full, and a smile on her face.

IMPACT Community Action

After the withdrawal of supplemental funding from the federal government, it became clear to IMPACT, that the strategy to enroll persons for affordable healthcare would require a three pronged approach. IMPACT focused its energy on an awareness campaign providing information dissemination to more than 8,000 customers over a 24-week period.

IMPACT conducted internal informational sessions providing literature and information to their clients in the Emergency Assistance Department waiting rooms: Work Force Development Employment Plus Program, Computer Literacy and Re-Entry Work Readiness classes. "Knowledge is power," was the thought Regina Clemmons, emergency assistance director, had for outreach efforts. "If we can provide a comprehensive understanding of the ACA, then our clients can make an informed decision."

This was the first approach. Second was partnering with other like-minded agencies to ensure enrollment. Because of the funding loss and the federal government's delay, their Americorp VISTA was re-assigned and seven volunteers were unable to participate. The loss of these two critical components severely hampered IMPACT's ability to provide the enrollment services. To meet the demand for services, IMPACT partnered with Columbus Neighborhood Health Centers to offer assistance with enrollment on Wednesdays and Fridays, holding walk-in hours at their offices. "All of those assisted were pleased to have the help," said Regina. "Many were excited to have someone assist them with using the website and to simply walk them through the process."

Despite these challenges, IMPACT was able to navigate thousands to the healthcare website for enrollment and enrolled more than 100 in the partnership workshops. The third step was to establish community partnerships and volunteers to build a strong team to gear up for open enrollment in the fall. "Overall, building the foundation of this pilot project has been a great learning experience and we look forward to continuous work towards future growth and expansion," Regina commented. "No one could have predicted the loss of funding, but we were still able to make an impact."