



# The CAANH Advance

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Four years ago I arrived to work at the Community Action Agency of New Haven (CAANH), a place that was filled with turmoil and uncertainty. After completing my fourth year, I am pleased to say that the halls, offices, and rooms are filled with enthusiasm and excitement. Staff have rededicated themselves to new levels of service quality, and have generated an unyielding desire to maintain strong, productive collaborations. For example, all of our 14 field sites are connected via computer, and lines of communication are open which enables faster, more effective working relationships across the five towns. Given the breadth and depth of progress, it is fitting that we highlight accomplishments in this issue of the *CAANH Advance*.

Effective collaborations and partnerships produce tangible results for our clients. Results Based Accountability (RBA) requires us to examine at the beginning what results are intended and one part of the important work is around creating appropriate measures of performance for individuals and the group. Another important piece of the work of achieving results for clients, community, and the organization is related to collecting and analyzing data. The question before us is whether establishing effective collaborations make a difference for the people we serve. What we are learning is that where effective measures of performance are established, clients benefit.

Our perspective is that collaborations must produce discernable results for clients, community, and funders. Anything less is a waste of time, money, and resources. We are investing in our staff through better training. We are committed to preparing staff to meet new, expanded, and shifting needs of our clients. It is for these reasons that the next phase of our work will be to create direct linkage to colleges and universities.

These new linkages will build on the work that we are already doing with Gateway Community College.

**Our Board** - When we think of the concept of collaborations, we examine the matter from an internal and external perspective beginning with our Board of Directors. We have a group of board members whose skill sets and interests align with the goals of the organization and the needs to be addressed in the community. We have active and engaged board members who are educators, finance experts, and others with experience in the legal profession. We have members with experience in community outreach, community engagement, advocacy, and non-profit administration. CAANH needed competent integral-based leadership on the Board because that is where it all begins. The Board has been and remains our first and most effective partnership.

**Our Staff** - We have experienced many changes in the past four years that enabled us to gather a robust staff, all of whom are dedicated to the best outcomes for clients. Staff performance has improved and we are seeing better results for clients. Our staff understands what it means to serve and lead. We are now seeing that work flow, production, and willingness to seek greater impact became a shared goal for everyone.

How did we do this? CAANH mounted a vigorous training and professional development program for our staff, and they are responding. We are taking stock of failures as well as our successes and learning from them all.

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Amos L. Smith, MSW, LCSW  
CAANH President and CEO



## A Message from our Board by Ronald M. Bender



It is my firm's belief that a balanced, problem solving mind set is the ideal approach to representing our client's best interest. Our "best practices" strategy delivers professional expertise to our clients in the most effective manner possible. The firm is a collaboration of lawyers and stays current with trends in the law and offers practical solutions. We promote community and responsible leadership in the associations and communities we serve. Our approach is to blend our individual viewpoints and perspectives to find the best solutions for our clients. It is this ideal method of practice that has allowed us to be successful in what we provide to our clients.

**Ron Bender** is an attorney at Bender, Anderson and Barba, P.C. who has practiced law for 34 years. He is also the CAANH Board secretary. In his role as an attorney, working together with the Individual Development Accounts program here at CAANH, he is providing pro bono work for low-income participants who are closing on their homes.

*CAANH offers pathways to prosperity to those in poverty in the Greater New Haven area.*

◆Service ◆Collaboration ◆Advocacy ◆Knowledge Generation

## Welcome [continued from p. 1]

Our Board contributed guidance and expertise in finance and our clients were anxiously awaiting a real opportunity for someone to extend a hand up, instead of a handout. We are finally working together for the best interests of all of our stakeholders.

In 2008-2009 we doubled our budget and it allowed us to serve more clients and connect them with our partners through better collaborations and partnerships. This year 2009-2010 we served over 15,000 families. Compared to four years ago, we have approximately 50 new partners all of whom are working for the best interests of our shared clients. We are all working to ensure that individuals and families are “better off,” and can realize their path to self-sufficiency. Our success is allowing us to hire, train and retain staff for results and accountability.



CAANH Staff at 2010 Diversity Day

I want to thank our Board, staff, and community partners for all that they have given to ensure our success. We thank our funders and friends at DSS, United Illuminating, Southern Connecticut Gas, CAFCA, The Community Foundation, New Opportunities, CL&P, Webster Bank, and The Annie E. Casey Foundation for their generous support over these four years.

We must thank CAANH staff for all they do to change, adjust, and respond to new demands of clients. When we analyze the data our staff has been willing to move with the changes because of the promise of success, and improvements for clients. We are working to assess our clients' experiences and strengthen our ties to these essential partners.

We hope you enjoy this edition of *CAANH Advance* and identify with the shared experiences of the people, places, and progress presented. Please refer to our website [www.caanh.net](http://www.caanh.net) for contact information about these programs.

## Emergency Housing Comes Together

The CAANH Emergency Housing Assistance Program provides immediate assistance to families who are already homeless or at risk of homelessness. Our Emergency Housing Program started in November 2009, and since then we have provided rental assistance, security deposits, and mortgage assistance. In addition, CAANH has coordinated support services around the immediate needs of the families by referring customers to CT Works, subsidized housing, Section 8, Energy Assistance, Operation Fuel, GED preparation, Open Choice Food Pantry, Diaper Bank, Manage Your Future, and S.M.A.R.T. Women.

We have worked in collaboration with a host of other agencies in the Greater New Haven area including Housing Court, Community Mediation, Greater New Haven Community Loan Fund, Continuum of Care, Life Haven, Christian Community Action Agency, New Haven Home Recovery, Keefe Community Center, and the Veterans Administration Vash program.

The CAANH Emergency Housing assistance program prides itself on moving customers through pathways to prosperity and self-sufficiency. It is our mission to assist our community based on resources and the knowledge of referral services.

## S.M.A.R.T Women Making a Difference by Randi McCray, S.M.A.R.T. Women Coordinator

The Single Mothers Actively Reaching the Top (S.M.A.R.T.) Women program establishes a support network for single mothers who share the common goal of moving from poverty to prosperity. Participants are provided with the opportunity to save toward a goal, increase their assets, and stabilize their families through personal development, parenting skills, development of positive attitudes and behaviors in family and nutritional health.

S.M.A.R.T. operates on the premise that there are several common factors in the daily lives of single mothers. Many single mothers are operating their households with low incomes, financial stress, and ability to manage hectic schedules, lack of time to spend with their children, and challenges in providing healthy food choices, in addition to others. These challenges often create an environment in which single mothers are so focused on the challenges that they are unable to explore opportunities and ways to change the very conditions that are inhibiting their growth and

## S.M.A.R.T. Women [Continued from P. 2]

progress. We believe that many of the participants' lives can be changed with support and opportunity, as well as introducing ways to change their position.

The S.M.A.R.T. participants meet weekly for workshops on: financial education, personal development, parenting, health and nutrition. Financial Education uses the FDIC Money SMART curriculum. Upon successful completion of the financial education courses, participants open an Individual Development Account (IDA). The IDA account is a custodial account in which only deposits can be made by the account holder. Participants can save up to \$500 and have it matched 2:1 towards the purchase of an asset related to education, transportation, and home rental/ownership. Once the participant is ready to make the asset purchase, funds are paid directly to the vendor.

## Manage Your Future: Watch Your Money Grow by Louis Hutcherson, MYF Coordinator

Manage Your Future is designed to help economically disadvantaged adolescent youth from 14-18 years of age in the greater New Haven Area. The program teaches students financial education, work experience, and job readiness skills. By providing educational workshops, we improve participants' job readiness qualities such as attitude, behavior, attire and work place diversity. Each student is asked to complete a career assessment. Participants are introduced to a set of strategies that embody what we call Employment by Design, where we match the skills of the participants with an employer. These services and supports help youth narrow down their career objectives. Based on their career choice, we develop partnerships throughout the community that can be used as work sites. Participants are placed at these sites to work during the summer for 20 hours a week.

The financial education workshops teach our students the basics of credit, budgeting, and investments. We offer each student a 1:1 matched savings plan of up to \$500 for educational purposes. Each student is required to open a savings account with New Alliance Bank, our business partner. Every pay period the students are asked to deposit \$50 into their savings account. By the end of the



Manage Your Future Students Meet

program, the students should have a minimum of \$300 saved. The financial education piece is being taught using the FDIC Money Smart for Young Adults curriculum.

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**According to Ashley Fuentes, age 15, "the best thing about this program is that we learn about saving money and it teaches us to be independent."**

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## RBA: The Road To Results by John Hamilton, Family Income and Improvement Coach

In many workplaces, an evaluation is used as the basis of the employee's performance throughout the year. Our work with Results Based Accountability (RBA) is an ideal approach to increasing positive performance results. The work of RBA begins with the end results in mind and works backwards to a means. With the end result firmly fixed in view, the efforts that are seen as most beneficial are those which will achieve that goal.

A key component to RBA is "performance measures" which answer the questions: What did we do? How well did we do it? Who is better off?

It is our goal at CAANH to center our attention on the most important area, that is, the impact our work has on the population we serve. Making an impact is accomplished through effectively building relationships and partnerships. A relationship describes what we are: a community of people bound together by our common goal and purpose. We strive to build constructive bonds and collaborate with community partners such as The Annie E. Casey Foundation who share our vision and desire to help those in poverty in the City of New Haven.

**A partnership describes how we are related to each other in that relationship: we are partners in an enterprise and calling in which we are to work together in a common purpose to obtain common objectives for the good of the community we serve.** This is what makes RBA vitally important to our agency and any agency wanting to raise the level of productivity in their organizations.

Who is better off because of our work as an organization with RBA? Internally, our staff is more aware and sensitive to the role they play in the lives of the clients they serve. Externally, our clients are better off. RBA produces a change in their behavior which is altered by a difference in their thinking and attitude. This allows clients to experience a change in their circumstances. Our staff is also able to see life changes in the clients served. Finally, RBA focuses our efforts to equip clients with knowledge and skills which serve as their passport to prosperity carrying them throughout their lives. RBA positively affects attitudes which not only **gives those in poverty a fish, but teaches them how to fish, thus** improving the overall quality of their lives.

## Learning through Partnerships

Funded through the Federal ARRA Grant, the Computer Literacy and Adult Education (CLAE) program was formed in early 2010 to help those living in poverty gain the skills and education they need to improve their employment status and prospects. Programs and services are offered with a focus on flexibility, practicality, and responsiveness to the individual and collective needs of those served.

In an effort to maximize effectiveness and broaden their reach, CLAE has partnered with Knowledge Network (K-Net) and Christian Community Action (CCA), two organizations with a long-standing commitment to serving at risk and impoverished families in the New Haven area. K-Net is contracted to provide Basic Computer Literacy and Microsoft Word Certification classes, with the goal of helping customers improve skills to obtain employment. Christian Community Action provides emergency food, housing and support and is a leader in the New Haven area, promoting community building and social change. CLAE's Workforce Development initiative benefits from a partnership with CCA, helping those in the community to attain valuable paid internships in New Haven area businesses.

### CLAE Offers:

**Basic Computer Literacy** - three weeks of hands-on training for those who have little to no experience. Students gain a basic understanding of hardware and software, improve their typing skills, are introduced to Microsoft Word, and the Internet.

**Microsoft Word Certification** - is taught on-site at K-NET, where students receive a more in-depth, seven week program, culminating with the opportunity to test for their Microsoft Word Certification.

**GED Preparation** - 4-6 months of instruction in Math, Science, Reading, Writing, and History in preparation for the GED examination. Classes are small, with an average teacher to student ratio of 1:3, allowing for a personalized and flexible educational experience. The program uses a nationally recognized Adult Education curriculum and students are provided with all materials necessary to gain the competencies needed to attain their GED.

**Workforce Development** - in partnership with CCA we offer a limited number of paid internships in local businesses. This opportunity provides individuals with valuable experience which can lead to increased employment opportunities.

CLAE classes are scheduled with an emphasis on flexibility, creating day and evening classes at times that are convenient to the students. Quality is maintained through open communication and a commitment to continually adapt programs to better promote the goals of the agency and to meet the individual and collective needs of those served. Quality surveys have indicated consistently high customer satisfaction.

To date, CLAE has assisted over 80 qualified individuals move toward greater independence by providing high-quality, results-oriented services, with an emphasis on adaptability, flexibility, and responsiveness.



## Collaboration in the Asset Building Program by Isadora DelVecchio, Business Development

This unique program uses a curriculum that integrates basic financial literacy skills and competencies with cultural financial realities. It offers 25 classes with a small stipend paid to participants for their attendance. All participants must be TANF eligible, low-income families from the Greater New Haven region. Participants agree to open a bank account, save towards a goal, and spend that savings on education, a rental security deposit, or transportation.

This program offers low-income individuals and families a chance to develop essential skills and knowledge that will help them manage their personal financial resources. Intensive case management is provided to help eliminate barriers that might impede a participant's successes.

Charise's story is a good example - Charise was referred to Asset Building by our Energy Assistance program. Just as she enrolled, she lost her job and was not able to pay her bills. The Asset Building Case Manager supported her through the stress of her job search, helping with resources, referrals, interviewing techniques, and encouragement. Charise was able to quickly obtain employment, started paying her bills and saving toward her asset goal.

**The value of the collaborative effort is that our program has become more efficient and effective while customers are having a more satisfying experience.**

A key component to the success of this program has been our partner at the New Haven Family Alliance (NHFA). At this partner site, CAANH has placed a case worker who recruits, advises, and participates in asset building classes at NHFA. This partnership has increased our capacity by leveraging our resources, expanding our customer pool, and increasing the visibility of the program.

An example of the benefits of this collaborative is that NHFA has been a resource for targeting non-custodial fathers as participants. These fathers can now focus on building relationships with their children and their children's mothers by getting their financial lives in order.

Currently, there are 77 participants in the program. To date, 49 participants have completed the program, 27 have reached or exceeded the savings goal, 20 have finalized an asset purchase, and 29 are in the process of purchasing an asset. Participants are experiencing positive outcomes. Derrick Howard, a participant who successfully completed the program, says "my positive outcome is being around people who are goal oriented."

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