



Opportunity Rising

economic opportunity e-update

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USDA Grant to Improve Food Support Outreach

by Tikki Brown, OEO

In August, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) awarded a three-year \$911,900 grant to the Minnesota Department of Human Services to simplify the application and eligibility system and, ultimately, increase access to the Food Support program for eligible Minnesotans with low incomes.

Initially the department will work with the Minnesota Community Action Association and Semcac and Olmsted Community Action Agencies.



The agencies in the first phase hope the improved process will boost Food Support participation among seniors. Mina Wilson of Olmsted Community Action points out that the overall participation level for Food

Support in Olmsted is 82% of eligible people, whereas among seniors it is only 28%.

By the third year, all of the state's 28 Community Action Agencies will have the opportunity to become involved.

Agencies will use a new statewide computer system to improve integration of the social services delivery system. This allows a simple and effective means for clients to apply for multiple programs including Food Support.

"We are excited to have another avenue to provide resources to clients," said Wendy Todd of Semcac. For more information contact Tikki Brown at OEO.

New Website Promotes Financial Education

by Emily Larson, OEO

As a part of its ongoing commitment to financial education, the Minnesota Community Action Association (MCAA) unveiled a new website earlier this year, www.helpmnsave.org. The site is made possible through funding from the McKnight Foundation and OEO.



"We are excited to offer this website as a starting place for sharing resources on economic literacy and asset development with our statewide partners," said MCAA's Pam Johnson. "We think that there is great potential for this site as a 'hub' for the ever-evolving work that is happening in Minnesota around these important issues."

According to Johnson, the goal of the site is to assist staff who do face-to-face work with low income people seeking greater financial independence. The *Four Cornerstones of Financial Literacy* curriculum and training manual are available for free download on the site, along with the Hmong and Latino cultural adaptations of the curriculum, *Becoming a Part of Wealth in America*. Another popular site

feature is Ask a Financial Counselor, where site visitors can enter questions which are posted and answered by a certified financial counselor.

Please visit the site and contact MCAA with your feedback!

Connie's Corner

by Connie Greer, OEO Director

Although this past legislative session was difficult, most OEO programs saw level state funding after being identified by the Governor as essential in the partial government shut down. Fortunately Community Action, Food Shelves, and Emergency Services will see the same funding for 2006-07 as in the previous biennium. Transitional Housing will have reduced general funds, and additional funds from TANF resources.

We will continue to rely on our strong partnerships with grantees, foundations, and advocacy organizations in the coming year to guide our work together to end poverty in Minnesota.

Video Helps Food Shelves Get the Message Out by Ty Morris, OEO

For years food shelf directors and advocates have called for a video on food shelves to use for presentations and volunteer orientation. OEO now has such a video, "Minnesota Food Shelves", to help raise awareness of food shelves and their impact on the lives of people in Minnesota. The video was made possible through the annual USDA Community Food and Nutrition grant.

soundtrack from the band G.B. Leighton. Interviews filmed at food shelves around the state tell the stories of people who use food shelves today – a family in the Metro suburbs, a disabled person, a senior citizen and a family on the Iron Range. The soundtrack, along with the "true stories" make the video emotionally powerful and inspiring.



Photo taken at Groveland Emergency Food Shelf in Minneapolis

The video was produced with the help of Diversified Media Productions in St. Cloud and features an original

OEO will distribute the video this fall to food shelves, regional food banks and Community Action Agencies. For more information please contact Ty Morris.

Upcoming Events

- Sept 19**— Follow-up training for *Four Cornerstones of Financial Literacy*, St. John's University, Collegeville.
- Oct 10-11**— *Our Future Without Homelessness* Conference, Arrowwood Resort, Alexandria. Co-sponsored by MN Youth Service Association and MN Coalition for the Homeless, www.mnhomelesscoalition.org.
- Oct 23-25**— MN Head Start Association Parent Training Conference, Cragun's, Brainerd.
- Oct 27**— *Breaking the Debt Cycle: How to Counsel Clients about Debt Problems*, sponsored by National Consumer Law Center, Minneapolis. www.helpmnsave.org
- August through October**— Hunger Partners Mini-Conferences. For more info call Hunger Solutions at (651) 486-9860.



Shelter Survey at a Glance

On the night of February 24 2005, a total of 6,764 people were housed in emergency shelters and other homeless programs across the state. 37% of these people were children. Another 1,129 people were turned away from shelter that night.

For more information on the survey, or to join our email distribution list for survey results, contact Pat Leary.

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