



A Community Services Block Grant Program News Forum

"The will to succeed is important, but what's more important is the will to prepare" –Albert Einstein

Shout out to all! Community Action Plans and so many other items have been completed! Highlights to come. Thanks so much for all you do and for sharing with everyone!

Sincerely, Your State CSBG Team

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A little Competition Feeds Many: Overton County Food Pantry (UCHRA Overton) teams up with Overton County School System and the results are helping feed those in need in the community!

UCHRA** Upper Cumberland
Human Resource Agency



The Overton County Food pantry helps fight food insecurity by allowing Families in need to visit the Pantry once each month. In May, the pantry served 29 families and found itself facing a significantly low level of inventory until the Overton County School System partnered with Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency (UCHRA) Overton for the Help Feed Our Community initiative. Homerooms in each of the county's five schools competed to collect needed items. Participating students and teachers collected around 2,500 items to restock the pantry and the winning class in each school received a pizza party from UCHRA and Overton County Coordinator Renea Stover, on May 19, 2023. With help from Overton County School System focus group member Deanna Savage, the parties were delivered to each school with a huge thank you and big smiles.

To learn more reach out to: Renea Stover, RStover@uchra.com, 931-823-7323



VITA to the Rescue: The Big WIN

Note: Names Changed for Customer Privacy

Recently Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee's (CAC) Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program helped East Tennessee resident Marta Baker recover \$17,000 that she desperately needed to care for her grandchildren. As Knoxville's only source of free tax assistance, during the past 26 years, CAC's VIT program provided outstanding tax preparation service to low- to moderate-income Knox County residents. Throughout the year, CAC's dedicated VITA volunteers tackle returns of all types, from individual to small business filings including multi-year and amendments, EZ and the long Form 1040.

VITA also helps address tax fraud by helping consumers protect against dependent identity theft and provides outreach education on financial scams that victimize vulnerable populations. In tax season 2022 alone, almost 2.5 million dollars were returned to clients and the local economy. By close of day on April 18, 2023 CAC VITA volunteers processed over 2,500 tax returns, including the taxes of Marta Baker.

Ms. Baker was referred to VITA to take advantage of the advance Child Tax Credit offered as part of the 2021 American Rescue Plan. Upon filing for tax year 2020, Ms. Baker discovered that someone else had already claimed the three

grandchildren that she was raising. Unfortunately, conflicting dependent claims are common when child custody is involved. The IRS appeal process for disputed dependent claims is lengthy and can be confusing for consumers. Often, people do not know where to go to get help when their taxes get complicated. With tears in her eyes, frustration, and a sense of hopelessness, Ms. Baker disclosed her predicament during her session with VITA.

CAC VITA's long history of addressing situations involving disputed dependent claims allowed volunteers to expedite the process. The volunteers worked closely with Ms. Baker to pro-actively gather all of the necessary documentation before the IRS requested the information. Once the official request was received from the IRS, all documents and required paperwork were mailed in one shipment to the IRS, but Ms. Baker remained in financial distress.

In March of 2023, her situation became worse when her car's transmission failed making it difficult to get her disabled grandchild to his much-needed therapy sessions. That very day, however, persistence paid off: Ms. Baker received a big win—an award notification from the IRS and a check for \$17,000.00. She was ecstatic and filled with gratitude, to say the least. She used the money to purchase a reliable automobile that enabled her to continue helping her grandchildren in the ways in which they need most.



Mayor's Boot Camp: Using Fictional Family Situations to Navigate Obstacles

Approximately 60 local elected officials, community leaders, and support staff attended the 2023 Upper Cumberland Bootcamp Wednesday, May 17, 2023. This educational session provides an opportunity for the Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency (UCDD) and its sister agency, the Upper Cumberland Development District (UCDD), to inform attendees about the variety of services and supports available through both agencies. The four-hour event included a panel of seven program leaders representing both agencies and support staff from various departments; discussing four common scenarios seen by agency staff including families with multiple generations living in the household, homelessness, and substance abuse. By presenting these scenarios in a story format, the audience was able to walk alongside the fictional families as members of the panel provided information on available resources to navigate the obstacles they faced. This marks the second bootcamp session the agencies have held. Plans to hold future sessions are in the works.



Crossing the Technological Divide: Tech Smart Knox Seniors

Older adults today are living in a time of unprecedented technological change. Resources and support often fall behind, and barriers such as cost, and access have significant impact on those who are already isolated or disconnected.



In 2022, Tech Smart Knox Seniors was launched by the Office on Aging of the Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee (CAC) to address the technology divide experienced by seniors ages 60 and over. Tech Smart is free to participants and is led by a certified digital literacy coordinator and trained volunteers.

"I felt some actual 'hope' that there was a compassionate, available, supporting community-at-large that is capable of connecting with an individual such as myself. These laptop classes are not only knowledge and confidence builders, but they have also provided me with a new sense of connectedness," about recent graduate shared about the experience.

Tech Smart Knox Seniors program goals:

- Expand digital knowledge to our senior population
- Provide seniors affordable access to technology
- Encourage inclusiveness and a broader sense of community while reducing feelings of isolation.

Tech Smart is also exploring how seniors can use technology to access telehealth services. Lisa and Melinda are two of the 324 seniors who have completed Tech Smart. Lisa recently began working for a home health agency and part of her responsibilities include remote charting of patient notes. Without her own laptop or computer, Lisa was concerned that she might have to leave her position because charting patient notes on her cell phone was very difficult. Tech Smart training has allowed Lisa to not only build confidence in her digital knowledge but has also offered her an opportunity to purchase an affordable Chromebook, which will make charting patient notes much easier.

During the weeklong training, Lisa and Melinda became friends. Their newfound computer skills will allow them stay in touch with each other and their families using technology such as e-mail, conference calling, and cloud-based texting.

To date, 407 seniors have completed the free workshop series, purchased a digital device, and received in-home internet-connectivity counseling. Over 30 classes have been offered at 17 unique locations throughout Knox County. Tech Smart Knox Seniors has been a positive, confidence-building change for all of its participants, and has opened the door to greater empowerment and less isolation.

Project Empower- ACE Empowers Their Members

Appalachian Electric Cooperative asked for help to demonstrate and showcase the impact of services like Project Empower, a utility assistance program, and other partnerships initiatives with organizations like Douglas-Cherokee and public servants like Kim Paxton. View the video below.



Success Stories

Connecting to Help Feed Tennesseans in Need

Sometimes you have to pull in all the resources available, but it works and pull from multiple contacts to help clients move toward stability. A good example of partnership in action came when transit operators recommended UCHRA services to Jeffery, a dialysis patient with vision and mobility disabilities who struggled with food insecurity.

"The client was so hungry. The client was asking for food and something to drink. He said he was starving" said members of staff who met Jeffery on his first visit to the Warren County Office. The staff gave Jeffery everything they could find to eat in the office and began making calls to UCDD and TDHS to explore Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) options. It was late afternoon, so the staff left messages and gave Jeffery a food voucher for the local food bank and free bus passes for the bus to the food bank. Once TDHS was reached, they offered to mail Jeffery an application or process the application online. Warren County office advocated for Jeffrey and reiterated to TDHS staff that Jeffery's vision impairment was a barrier and collaborated to help Jeffery find tools and options appropriate for Jeffery's needs. Warren County office staff contacted Special Games, a local food bank for Tennesseans with disabilities and later transportation arrangements were made to ensure Jeffery could take the bus to get a food box. Jeffery's story is an illustration of good partnership practices. He received immediate assistance, but UCHRA also connected him to resources to address his ongoing needs.

Hope Foundation Partnership Gives a New Found Hope to a Family in Need

Carol Watson, UCHRA's Fentress County Coordinator submitted the following success story:



"I served a young man who worked for 911 dispatch. He caught COVID, developed a blood clot, and then had his leg amputated. He had been out of work for several months. I was able to assist him with Crisis LIHEAP and worked with the Hope Foundation to help with a car payment to prevent him from losing his vehicle. The vehicle was needed for his partner to take him to work and Dr. visits."

They have three children and his partner said she has been having a hard time. She told Carol that this assistance will help their family SO MUCH!"

Thank You Card from Client

Donna Griffith, Macon County Community Services Specialist, said "just when you wonder whether you make a difference or not you receive this... blessed my heart to know I was of help to her."

Submit Your Agency's Win

Has your agency broken new ground, increased services, achieved a milestone, or created an innovative experience? Our "Agency Wins" column spotlights innovative programs, services, achievements, community awards, and accomplishments from agencies across the state. If there's an activity or agency accomplishment you're proud of, we want to hear from you. Your story can inspire others.

[Submit Your Agency Win](#)

The Best Play Book

Taking Advantage of Great Opportunities for Spotlighting Your Services

One way to build awareness around your agency's work is to find places and settings to connect with advocates, partners and potential customers. Warren County UCHRA Staff Carrie Baker, Naoma Parsley, and Rebekah Acre attended their local Chamber's red tape cutting for Prosperity Point.

Prosperity Point has eight tiny homes in their community, focused on bridging the gap on poverty and homelessness. UCHRA is a partner with HOME- "Bridging the Gap", providing transportation services and valuable resource linkages to those in need. UCHRA Warren County staff also talked to 150 people about LIHEAP, Ensure, Transportation Services, and Commodities at the recent Warren County Fair.

To further highlight the value of the Commodities program, Heather Thomas, UCHRA Putnam County Coordinator, partnered with UT Extension office to create meals participants can cook for their families from food distributed during commodities events. UT Extension staff Makayla Ledford from the Putnam County Extension office also gave a cooking demonstration at the Empower Circles' meeting for the single parents and this was a big success. Heather encourages others to make this connection. [Click here to view recipes.](#)



Above: Certificate of appreciation presented to Carrie Baker and UCHRA

Below: UCHRA at the County Fair



Partnerships-Knowing Who to Call When All Options Are Exhausted

Clay County UCHRA partners with the Celina Methodist Church to address the needs of Clay County residents when

an emergency such as a food shortage; electric bill disconnect, emergency clothing requirement or basic necessity needs occur. When all options have been exhausted for UCHRA, the staff contacts the Benevolence Committee at the Church for additional assistance.

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Shown in the Picture is from left to right: Donna Smith-Benevolence Coordinator, and Tonya Spears-Clay County Coordinator-UCHRA.

Additionally, the Church is a partner with Second Harvest Food to provide community outreach four times per year at the Fairgrounds to distribute food items to those in need. The Church also has a Blessing Box that is filled with food daily that helps meet immediate food needs.

To learn more contact: Tonya Spears, Clay County Coordinator, tspears@uchra.com

Tell Us Your Best Plays!

We want to know what the best practices are for your agency's service delivery/administration or if there is advice you'd like to share with others as they work to serve communities in our state.

Share a Best Play

Team Highlights

TAHRA Celebrates 50 Years of Service

Human Resources Agencies throughout Tennessee came together to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Tennessee Association of Human Resources Agencies.

Topics and activities included:

- Program Roundtables
- Leadership
- Motivation
- Breakout Sessions

- Poverty Simulation

With TDHS as sponsors Assistant Commissioner, Jude White addressed the agencies and CSBG Department Director and Coordinators were present to celebrate and show support as well. It was a great experience for all!



Policy Updates You Should Know

Just in Case You Missed It:

October 1, 2023, agencies will be able to utilize 200% according to poverty guidelines for FY23 Carryover funds *only*. We have not received updated guidance for FY24 funds, therefore agencies should plan to use 125% for FY24 Regular funds as we have previously communicated. Below are links for the federal poverty guidelines. As a reminder, beginning October 1, 2023, all agencies should adhere to the guidelines for 2023.

More information regarding the federal poverty guidelines can be found [here](#).

The specific guidelines for 125% and 200% can be found [here](#).

If you have questions regarding this guidance, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lindsay.Whittin@tn.gov

Happenings in Tennessee

Gov. Lee Launches Tennessee Strong Families Grant Program

Governor Bill Lee announced that applications are now open for the [Tennessee Strong Families Grant Program](#), which dedicates \$20 million to improve access to maternal healthcare and boost critical resources for mothers, children and families by supporting local nonprofits across the state, including pregnancy centers. Application materials for the grants are available [online](#) where applicants may view webinars and access training and technical assistance.

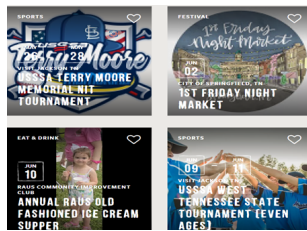
Please help us share via email – and social media: [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

To learn more about the ALICE Essentials Index, to read the National Report, and to explore national, regional, and state-level inflation using the online dashboards, visit UnitedForALICE.org/Essentials-Index.

Tennessee Emergency Management Trainings

[Click Here to view upcoming trainings.](#)

[Events from Tennessee State Parks and Department of Tourist Development](#)



Have an upcoming happening? Please share!

Share an UpcomingHappening



Ask the Community

Community Impact in Action is meant to not only provide answers from the TDHS CSBG Office but also act as a “crowd-sourcing” forum. This column is an opportunity for agencies to pose questions to both the CSBG team and other agencies. Agency staff members are encouraged to both ask questions and respond directly to questions from other agencies in the “Ask the Community” column.

Have a Questions for the Community?

Have a question for the TDHS CSBG team, want to know how other CSBG members are handling a problem, or are curious about a particular topic?

[Submit a Question to the CSBG Network](#)

About Community Impact in Action

Community Impact in Action is a quarterly e-newsletter that connects the Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) network in Tennessee. The newsletter is designed to amplify agency voices across the state and increase communication and peer sharing opportunities. The CSBG network can use this newsletter as a forum to share information with each other and the Tennessee Department of Human Services CSBG team.

Who can make a submission to Community Impact in Action?

Any agency representative can create and submit content for “Agency Wins, The Best Play Book, Ask the Community or Community Events” articles and we look forward to reading and sharing your submissions. However, we strongly recommend that agencies establish an internal approval process for submitting content to Community Impact in Action. TDHS reserves the right to edit content and a representative may contact content contributors for additional information.

When to Make Submissions

Community Impact in Action is published on a quarterly basis (January, April, July, October) and submissions for the next newsletter should be submitted no later than the 15th day of the last month in the quarter. This is especially true for upcoming event submissions. For example, an event scheduled to take place in April, May or June should be submitted no later than March 15th. However, in some cases, events may be shared on the TDHS online event calendar or social media calendar without being shared in the newsletter. These events should be submitted no later than four weeks prior to the event.

Have questions about *Community Impact in Action* or related topics? Email the Tennessee Department of Human Services CSBG Office at CSBG.DHS@tn.gov with the subject line "Community Impact in Action Newsletter."

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