



The Action

The newsletter of The Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association

October 2014

Rose Adams, ACAA Executive Director Since 2000, Reveals Plans for Pending Retirement

Rose Adams, executive director of the Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association, announced at the Wednesday, August 13, meeting of the association's board of directors her plans to retire from her position before the end of the year. "It's hard to step away from the people and from the work," she said, "but after 14 years of service, the time has come for me to start a new chapter in my life."



ACAAA's Adams

Adams' announcement came only days after the anniversary of her having begun in the position in August of 2000, an occasion that was heralded at the time by the association recommending committee which enthused over the then-new director's "visionary leadership, experience, education, knowledge of community action agencies and attitude." The intervening years would only confirm the wisdom of their selection as Adams' efforts during her stewardship of the association have been indispensable in the advancement of the mission of community action in Arkansas.

Adams was nevertheless humble when addressing the attendees of the association board meeting—whose members' heartfelt congratulations were tempered by their visibly conflicted emotions at the prospect of her departure—emphasizing that "no one is irreplaceable" and reassuring those gathered that the agencies' cause would forever be essential in her heart and that she would

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Hunger statistics in Arkansas are grim. Every day, Community Action is marshaling its forces to push back.

Some people don't like the expression "war on poverty."

Some would prefer that a humanitarian effort not be characterized in martial terms. Some think that the concept creates an inaccurate standard of success: Witness the naysayers who greeted this year's 50th anniversary of President Lyndon Johnson's Economic Opportunity Act with accusations that, since poverty had not been eliminated in the intervening years, this meant that the massive, tireless, heartfelt outpouring of five decades' effort towards the cause of human justice was somehow the equivalent of a military "defeat."

Such semantic arguments aside, surely there can be little doubt that those who find themselves on the proverbial "front lines"—indeed, the temptation to slip into the soldier's idiom is almost irresistible—must feel that they are struggling against an enormous foe. September saw the release of new U.S. Census poverty figures that were cause for cautious long-term national optimism but were only the slightest balm on the sobering day-to-day realities faced in Arkansas by those—

the state's community action agencies forefront among them—who, yes, fight the Good Fight. Fight against an opponent that is deeply entrenched, in a campaign that is forbiddingly complex, in a conflict whose stubborn unwillingness to be resolved could tax even the most stalwart—but fight on they do.

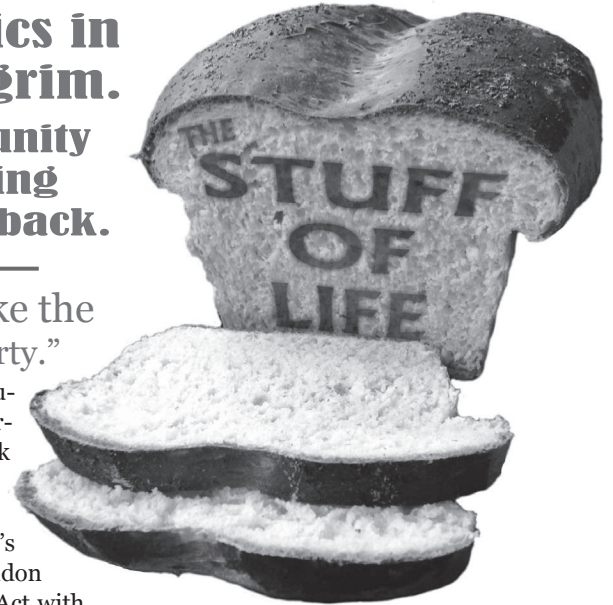
And one of the chief fronts in this ongoing battle is against hunger.

September was not only the occasion for newly released Census data but was also "Hunger Action Month"—a nationwide awareness campaign that was originated by the Feeding America food bank network but which has particular, painful relevance in Arkansas, a state that continues to earn dubious distinctions atop lists of the country's most dire, hunger-related measurements.



On such scales as the prevalence of "food insecurity"—the anxiety that one's budget may not be adequate to cover one's food needs (or, more simply put, not knowing for certain where your next meal is coming from)—Arkansas, at roughly 20%, either has the highest such percentage in the U.S. or, depending

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remain always at the ready to lend her assistance wherever possible. She made clear her desire that the transition of the position to her ultimate successor be as smooth as possible. Said Toby Atkinson, executive director of Ozark Opportunities, Inc. (OOI) and president of the ACAA board of directors, "It is with sadness that we accept her decision to retire as Rose is a friend and trusted resource for the Arkansas and national community action network."

During her time with the association, Adams has played a fundamental role in working with the states' agencies and their partners to better coordinate utility assistance programs for Arkansas's low-income citizens and to expand the state's weatherization assistance efforts—a success that would merit well-earned national recognition—just as her dedication could be seen equally reflected in her contributions to the enhancement of training and other professional development efforts in the community action network. Accolades such as Entergy's "Making Things Brighter Award" and the Charles F. Cunningham Community Action Leadership Award were tokens of appreciation from a community grateful for both her compassion and her commitment in her role as ACAA's executive director. "We appreciate the professionalism, time, energy, knowledge, and passion she has shared with our agencies," said ACAA board president Atkinson. "Rose Adams has been a tireless supporter of community action."

Adams' oversight of the association has been the culmination of a career—or what might better be described as a calling—in the service of social and economic justice. Her

pursuits have included roles as a Head Start director, a principal in a school for children and adults with developmental disabilities, and the director of a child welfare agency. She worked in a variety of positions with two community action agencies in Central Arkansas, spent time as a grant writer and as a vice-president with a national consulting firm, and has for the past 35 years been an unyielding advocate for those in need through her service on such boards as the Arkansas Hunger Coalition, the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, and the Arkansas Single Parent Scholarship Fund, the latter two as president.

Noting that she had been involved in public service in some various form or fashion since the age of fourteen, Adams told the board of directors that she was looking forward in her retirement to a schedule somewhat less demanding



Adams is pictured above with Governor Mike Beebe at a news conference for Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) Awareness Day.

than that required by the work of community action—a field surely as exacting as it is rewarding—although she did say that she anticipated continuing her team-teaching with the undergraduate Poverty Studies program at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), supplementing her career as an educator after three previous years spent on the inaugural faculty of the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service.

All of which only goes to show that, in the war on poverty and injustice—even in retirement—you can take the soldier out of the fight, but you can't take the fight out of the soldier.

Thank you to William Green, former ACAA communications director, upon whose previous reporting portions of this article relied.

The Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association represents the 16 private, nonprofit community action agencies in the state, providing them with information, training, technical assistance, and other support. The agencies are among more than 1,000 throughout the country established under the national landmark legislation approved by Congress in 1964 to eliminate "the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty." The newsletter is funded, in part, with a grant from the state Office of Community Services of the Arkansas Department of Human Services. The Association office is at 300 South Spring, Suite 1020, Little Rock, AR 72201. Telephone: (501) 372-0807; FAX: (501) 372-0891; e-mail: info@acaaa.org

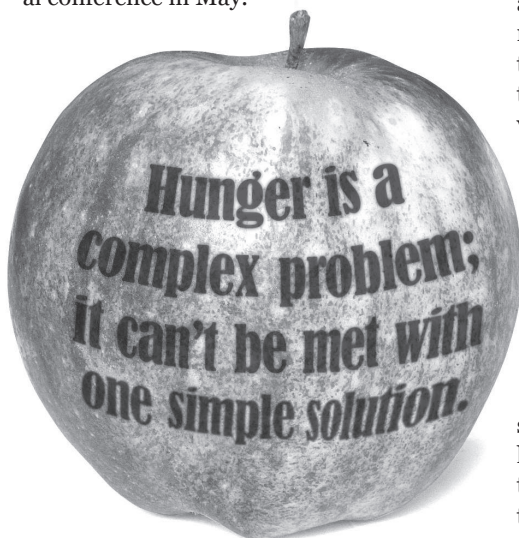
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on one's statistical interpretation, is vying for that top slot with its sadly regular companion at the unhappiest end of so many such orderings, Mississippi. In such related measures as "very low food security"—the point at which one's meals are irregular and infrequent and, likely in the eyes of many, inappropriate—Arkansas's approximately 8% places it, again, among the top, if not at Number 1, in a contest that no one should ever want to win.

It is to the everlasting credit of all those who engage in the mission of community action that they face this challenge with a mix of compassion, resolve, and creativity. Hunger is a complex problem; it cannot be met with one simple solution: Arkansas's community action agencies engage the issue of food insecurity at every level. Whether it is on the macro scale of millions of pounds of food being processed through a food bank for distribution or on the micro scale of a Head Start staff member having a teaching moment with a single parent on the importance of good nutrition—community action is committed to the challenge of feeding Arkansans.

"It's quite a bit of work, but we don't mind doing it," says Deborah Gilmer, Cleburne County's Community Services Coordinator with the Community Action Program for Central Arkansas (CAPCA). This is her self-deprecating response to a question about CAPCA's award-nominated "Holiday Food Box Distribution"—the year's most highly-touted hunger-related community action program at the 2014 "CAPPY Awards," held as part of the Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association's annual conference in May.



The program—which provided Thanksgiving food boxes (turkeys included) to hundreds of needy Cleburne County families before the holidays—is a classic case of a community action endeavor that weaves together multiple strands of federally-provided commodities, monetary contributions from local businesses, and community donations garnered through hour upon hour of staff and volunteer pavement-pounding and doorbell-ringing. ("We reach out to our community," says Gilmer, "but it goes back to the community.") Community action is never not *leveraging*—never not in the process of spinning straw into gold by parlaying federal contributions four- and five-fold with the addition of state, local, and private sources.

'You know they're going to pay their bills first, then whatever's left they use for food to get to the next month.'

—MDCS's Senior Citizens Coordinator Birdie Knowlton, on the hard choices that many older Arkansans are forced to make—often resulting in poor nutrition

The commodities in question are provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through a program known as TEFAP—a.k.a. The Emergency Food Assistance Program (the "T" once stood for "temporary" until 1990, when Congress decided to make it permanent). The program embodies a clever win-win balancing act: In order to ensure the ongoing stability of the American farmer, the USDA purchases surplus commodities, which might otherwise destabilize national consumer food prices, and transfers those commodities instead to state distributing agencies. Almost all of Arkansas's community action agencies are installed in these important roles, administering the food's dispensation in their respective areas—together, they oversee a combined amount of food valued at more than \$2 million annually.

"TEFAP distributions are usually done in two ways," says Jim Ponzini, Program Administrator for the Department of Human Services' Division of County Operations Commodity Distribution Unit, "mass distribution and food pantries. CSO in Hot Springs"—Garland County's Community Services Office—"has a distribution that sees somewhere between 700 and 1,000 families in a single day." In their typically adaptive fashion—the very thing that makes them such effective local players, i.e., their

changeability in the face of specific community needs—each of Arkansas's participating agencies tailor their distributions as required. Like CSO, Pine Bluff Jefferson County Economic Opportunities Commission (PBJCEOC) has held large-scale distribution events, with people lined around the block to receive goods at a stadium. CAPCA holds their own distributions on a monthly basis in the individual counties they serve, for example, while the Central Arkansas Development Council (CADC) recently

staged a nine-site, single-day distribution across a network of churches and civic institutions.

TEFAP offers a variety of foods—"frozen meats, turkey, chicken, pork, sausage, canned fruit, canned vegetables," Ponzini itemizes—although the wares are still perceived by some as bearing the stigma of a handout. "The irony is that the USDA food is generally of higher nutritional value than what you would find in a grocery store," says Sam Carr, Division of County Operations Program Manager for the National School Lunch Program and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. "They also abide by more rigorous safety standards," she notes, pointing to the USDA's attempts to move away from the use of the clinical term "commodities" and towards the more everyday "food" as an effort to mitigate this unfortunate reputation.

"We're trying to give them a good round of good food that will last them a while," says Donald Caldwell, CAPCA's Food Pantry Coordinator, who stresses the importance of both nutrition and variety: "The USDA has a website with recipes that match the items they give away as commodities; we try to match them to things we haven't recently given out. I like to keep up with the nutrition news—anything new that I learn, I try to pass on to the clients through the food boxes."

Just as one agency might try to inject a bit of variety into its food pantry menu to meet the needs of its clients, another agency—showing off that always-flexible community action spirit—might inject a bit of variety into the food pantry concept itself, such as in the case of the exclusively



DCO's Jim Ponzini

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65-and-up pantry begun in May of this year in Helena-West Helena by Mid-Delta Community Services (MDCS). “We have three or four pantries in this town,” says Birdie Knowlton, MDCS Senior Citizens Coordinator, “but they have no age limit for their pantries.” Depicting the bustle of a regular facility with a touch of rueful humor—“when you’re old, you don’t want to be bothered with young people breaking line in front of you”—she recounts that MDCS nevertheless recognized that there was a serious need for a seniors-only facility, the response to which so far has been wholly enthusiastic: “They call, they come back—it’s been fantastic.”

While many of the state’s agencies operate pantries—Crowley’s Ridge Development Council (CRDC) has one in each of Cross, Greene, Jackson, Poinsett, and Woodruff Counties, while neighboring Black River Area Development Corporation (BRAD) likewise has a pantry in Greene as well one apiece in the other counties it serves, Clay and Randolph—other agencies instead maintain affiliations with like-minded organizations, such as in the relationship between the Economic Opportunity Agency of Washington County (EOAWC) and The Bread of Life, an area food pantry operated by the Springdale

United Methodist Church that handles EOAWC’s commodity distributions. If community action is never not leveraging, it is also never not *networking*—just as no man is an island, no agency is ever less than intricately interconnected within a dense weave of fellow-institutions all bound together by their shared philanthropic impulse.



Community action is her bag, baby! Volunteer Tadashi Green is pictured in front of a veritable wall of bagged items as she prepares food for donation as part of a CADC commodity distribution in Columbia County.

Much in this same spirit are the two food banks operated in Arkansas by community action agencies—one an independent food bank overseen by Arkansas River Valley Area Council (ARVAC), the other a food bank affiliated with Feeding America and overseen by Crawford-Sebastian Community Development Council (C-SCDC). In their respective communities, these food banks—although the terms “food pantry” and “food bank” are sometimes used interchangeably, food pantries generally serve individual clients while food banks provide commodities in bulk to other organizations for distribution—are centralized community hubs out from which radiate networks of food distribution to area churches, support shelters, soup kitchens, rehab facilities, and other entities. Such food banks can administer quantities of food that number in the millions of pounds annually.

In happy news, C-SCDC has recently experienced twin strokes of good fortune: The Walmart Foundation’s State Giving Program provided a \$150,000 grant to increase the food bank’s refrigerated pick up capacity, while the agency was also the recipient of a grant from a local foundation that will significantly move forward plans for the agency and its food bank—whose full name is the River Valley Regional Food Bank—to relocate into substantially larger

facilities. The Walmart contribution, which was greeted as “nothing short of a miracle from heaven” by Ted Clemons, the food bank’s director, will greatly assist with receiving retail store donations, while the foundation offering serves as the culmination of a renovation initiated two years ago with the donation of a large vacant building in Fort Smith that was given the agency by a Little Rock family to serve as the new home for C-SCDC’s central offices and food warehouse.

If the hunger statistics for the state’s overall population are grim, the news becomes no less chilling when broken down by category. The situation for Arkansas’s seniors? In a word: “Terrible,” says CAPCA’s Gilmer. In recent years, estimates have varied about which

state’s elder citizens bore the burden of the nation’s highest level of food insecurity, but the Arkansas Department of Human Services has of late confirmed the Natural State’s ranking as “#1 in Senior Hunger in the United States.”

It is tragic to contemplate that one’s later years, after a lifetime of work, might be troubled still by anxieties over basic necessities, but this unfortunate reality is one that community action must regularly address with its assistance.

One form such aid takes is called the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and, in a gratifying reversal, it showcases Arkansas at the top of a *good* list, thanks to the three agencies who implement the program in the state—ARVAC, CADC, and the Mississippi County Arkansas Economic Opportunity Commission (MCAEOC)—who are performing at a nationally-recognized level of 100% utilization. “Those agencies do a wonderful job,” says County Operation’s Ponzini; “they’re the reason we”—DCO’s Commodity Distribution Unit—“look so good.”

The program, which began in Arkansas only a few years ago, provides for monthly food allotments from the USDA to in-need residents over 60—supplies that include canned fruit and vegetables, juice, meat, cereal, milk, rice, peanut butter—“even cheese,” says Ponzini, referring wryly to the foodstuff whose very name was once synonymous with government assistance. Although the CSFP caseload is—in keep-



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ing with the newness of the program—still modest at just under 3,000 participants, the agencies' combined efforts convey over a million pounds of food a year to seniors in

benefits of continued recreational activity among a group whose options for socialization may have narrowed, but also giving necessary sustenance to many whose means of faring for themselves may have become equally limited.

"Our centers provide a regular noon meal," says OHC executive director Susan Moore; "the breakfast schedule varies according to the center—in some cases it's daily, in some it's weekly."

In the case of the centers' home-delivered meals program, geography and logistics become factors:

"In the areas we can

ral areas not only because of the difficulty getting transportation to grocery stores that aren't close," says DCO's Ponzini, "but also because the prices can be so high at those stores since they don't have any nearby competition." It can be a wrenching sight to see dignity precariously maintained even in the face of circumstance that conspires to undercut it: "I make home visits to the home-delivered meal clients that we serve," reports MDSC's Knowlton; "they might have two or three crackers, a cup of tea or a cup of coffee, and they usually call that 'supper.' You know they're going to pay their bills first, and then whatever's left they use for food to get to the next month."

Here, once again, community action must apply ingenuity and collaboration to overcome the problematic particulars: "We work with White River Area Aging," says CAPCA's Gilmer; "they help us get applications from homebound seniors to receive our food boxes. And we've got volunteers to help us with some of the clients who are in the far north area of the county—and the Health Department helps, too. We feel that's a major accomplishment, reaching out to the elderly people out in the country that have no transportation."

Among the most heartening news from September's Census report was a slight but noticeable decrease in the child poverty rate. Certainly any such trend would be welcome news in Arkansas, which—although enjoying the cold comfort of being, not first, but only seventh among the nation's most severe statewide cases of child hunger—still sees over a quarter of its youngest and most vulnerable residents confronted with the specter of malnutrition.

It could be said that many of community action's hunger relief efforts—in that

Community action in the news & online



ARVAC executive director Stephanie Ellis (left) was featured in a recent KARK TV news segment that highlighted the efforts of one its volunteers, Boyd Foster, delivering food as part of the Commodity

Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). Visit arkansasmatters.com and check it out or—to get to the story even more directly—do a Google search for [kark pay it forward foster](http://karkpayitforwardfoster.com).

need, work that Ponzini emphasizes is both labor-intensive and requiring of strict accuracy in order to abide by its federal guidelines.

Nor has the nationally distinguished program gone unrecognized locally, either, as a recent KARK TV News segment highlighted one of ARVAC's program volunteers in the network's "Pay It 4Ward" feature, which focuses on Arkansans giving back to their communities. In the broadcast, volunteer Boyd Foster was profiled as he delivered CSFP groceries from the ARVAC office to the occupants of the Dardanelle Housing Authority, a residence that he once himself called home. The segment (easily found online with a Google search of "kark pay it forward foster") also included an interview with ARVAC executive director Stephanie Ellis, who had the opportunity to salute Foster—a once-recipient of aid now giving help to others—as a community action success story and an exemplar, in her words, of the agency's "hand up"—not "hand out"—approach."

The more traditional means by which Arkansas's community action agencies help to address the issue of food insecurity among the state's older residents are the meals served at the many senior centers operated across the state—not to mention the meals home-delivered to those elders unable to leave their residences. Combined, Northcentral Arkansas Development Council in Batesville (NADC), Office of Human Concern in Rogers (OHC), and Southwest Arkansas Development Council in Texarkana (SWADC)—along with BRAD, CADC, CRDC, and MDSC—administer over 50 such centers, affording not just the salutary

get to, we bring a hot meal for lunch during the week, then frozen meals for the weekend"—whereas for some of the clients in more rural areas, "we might deliver seven frozen meals for the entire week; we try to strike a balance between what works for them and what works for us." Helping to navigate that balance—as well as the bumpier roads in some of their clients' more far-flung locales—are the "Hot Shot" trucks belonging to many of the centers, specially modified vehicles with beds adapted into separate compartments to allow for transport of cold and hot food. "You'd have to see them," says Moore with a laugh. Between home-delivered meals and the congregate meals provided in the centers, she estimates that OHC serves in the neighborhood of 145,000 meals a year.

Moore's descriptions of the complications inherent in providing assistance to those in more outlying areas echo concerns voiced by others: "Hunger among seniors is more complex in ru-



OHC's Susan Moore



Above, an Office of Human Concern senior center plays host to a Christmas lunch.

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they are delivering food into the hands of adults, a significant number of whom are assumed to be parents—have an ultimate goal of putting food onto children's plates, but some address the problem more directly—in particular, through meals served at the many Head Start centers currently operated by 11 of the state's 16 agencies. Among its Head Start, Early Head Start, and Migrant Head Start programs, community action oversees over 125 such centers in Arkansas—providing a range of services to more than 4,500 youth from low-income families. Not only are these children—ranging from infants and toddlers up through age five—given invaluable educational and emotional guidance in their critical formative years, they are given literal nourishment that might not otherwise be available to them.

"In a day with us, a child receives up to two-thirds of their daily recommended needs," says Rhonda Ahrent, Program Director, BRAD Child Development Programs. "Each child receives a breakfast, a lunch, and an afternoon snack daily." With eight such centers in three counties, BRAD's Head Start program alone distributes over 135,000 meals and snacks in a single year. (Statewide, community action agency Head Start programs together prepare an amazing near-1.5 million total servings for young Arkansans in need annually.) "Because of an agreement on a federal level, all Head Start children are eligible for the free lunch program," says Ahrent. "We receive reimbursement for part of the cost of feeding the children through CACFP—the child nutrition program through the USDA—and then we absorb the rest of it."

As is always the case in community action's efforts to fight hunger, food alone is not enough—nutrition is ever of critical importance. Head Start meals are largely funded by the aforementioned Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and, "as part of that program, all our meals must meet their regulations," explains Wanda Nelson, Licensing, Safety, Nutrition & Facilities Coordinator with Ozark Opportunities, Inc. (OOI). As for what's served, Ahrent adds, "the parents have input, and our program also has a registered dietitian as a consultant that reviews the menus." Nor, says Ahrent, is a Head Start meal simply about filling the stomach—every opportunity is a learning opportunity: "The children see the nutrition staff as part of the teachers. They're taught table manners; they're taught where food comes from and what's nutritious." Sometimes it's the staff that's doing the learning: "When you have a bunch of children at the table for a family-style meal, you'd be surprised what you can find out!" says Nelson.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program plays another role in two of the state's community action agencies to address food insecurity among children. Jonesboro's CRDC and Fort Smith's C-SCDC are CACFP administrators for a subset of the program that provides reimbursement to child day care homes and centers that serve meals and snacks meeting USDA nutrition guidelines. Between the two sponsoring agencies, over 100 such homes and centers are serviced, with over 3,000 children receiving the assistance—together, over a million nutritional meals in a year are supplemented.

While the educational setting is a great place to reach youth in need with such efforts as ARVAC's backpack programs fund-

ed in local Pope and Yell County schools, combating child hunger can't end at the end of the school day—witness EOAWC's Head Start participants and Children's House treatment patients given extra "snack-packs" to take home with them over the weekend—any more than it can end at the end of the school year: Various summer food programs have begun to spring up among the agencies, often reflective of the

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collaborative spirit that fuels so many of the most successful such undertakings.

In Malvern, CADC has recently begun working with the St. Paul United Methodist Church in order to distribute summer fare made available through the USDA Summer Food Service—in a classic bit of community action synergy, the food is prepared at CADC's Malvern Senior Activity Center and transported to the site by volunteers. Applying a similar strategy is OHC—"We've got the senior center kitchens and the means of transportation, so it seems like a natural fit," says executive director Moore, who reports that she is hopeful their own program, which they have now done for the past two summers, will soon be expanding. In the town of Elaine, MDSCS is also completing the second year of its new summer food program prototype, done in conjunction with an organization out of Memphis in yet another example of need meeting opportunity: "We had a local volunteer who wanted to give back to her community," explains MDSCS's Head Start Director Cheryl Denson; "she wanted to serve meals out of her area church, but they had no kitchen equipment." And who did have kitchen equipment? MDSCS's Elaine Head Start center—so beginning another proverbial "beautiful friendship" of the sort that sees community action engaging in partnerships across the state, the better to fulfill its calling to service.

The Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association is a proud member of the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance



The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance is a state association of food banks, relief agencies, volunteers, and corporate partners committed to providing programs, food resources, education, and advocacy to feed Arkansas's hungry. Please visit their website at

www.arhungeralliance.org

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When it comes to all the ways that community action provides food assistance and hunger relief to Arkansas, perhaps a cheerier analogy than those of warfare and combat would be that of the pot luck. The pot luck is a communal effort intended to feed an abundance, and just as a pot luck may have its main courses—such as the TEFAP federal commodity distributions and the Head Start meals in which most of the state's community action agencies participate—it will also have its smaller side dishes, which may assume a less prominent place on the table but are still essential to the richness of the menu.

What image could be quite so symbolic of growth, renewal, and solidarity as that of the community garden? In Blytheville, located behind a Head Start center operated by MCAEOC, is a special spot where can be found purple hull peas, okra, squash, peppers, cantaloupes—even first-place-at-the-county-fair award-winning watermelons—all lovingly tended with water from its own well and harvested for canning into Mason jars and delivery to older residents in need. “We try to teach the community about self-sufficiency and eating healthy,” says Dedric Davis, who is not only a Physical Education Coordinator with MCAEOC, but also the plot's official overseer and a certified “Master Gardener” as well. The Head Start students, as it turns out, can benefit from the education, too: “Kids think vegetables and fruits come from the store,” Davis laughs.

In a similar vein is ARVAC's Garden Seed project, which distributes seed to low-income households in order to mea-

sure the effectiveness of home horticulture in defraying grocery costs. And while rainy days may be good for gardens, severe weather and other sorts of natural disasters can often find Arkansas's lower-income residents in even more difficult financial straits than normal. To crises such as these, many of the state's community action agencies stand ready to respond through administration of the Emergency Food and Shelter Program—a national relief

effort coordinated through FEMA in conjunction with numerous humanitarian organizations such as the United Way. As explains Carolyn Davis, CSBG Program Director with Southeast Arkansas Community Action Corporation (SEACAC), a certain percentage of all such grant money is earmarked for area pantries to supply special food assistance in times of county-wide emergency—yet another illustration of how community action is one of the central linchpins in an interlocking system of contributors—federal, state, county, volunteer—working together to provide relief in times of trial.

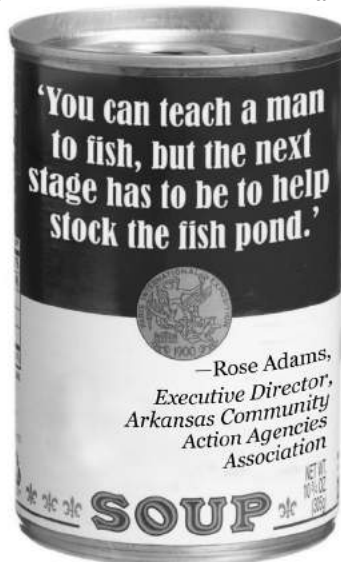
The “big picture” of how Arkansas's community action agencies supply food assistance and hunger relief to the state's in-need citizens is a very big picture, indeed—a panorama of programs and services de-

signed to address deprivation in the many shapes it takes. But there's an even bigger picture—or, perhaps better put, an even longer view to be taken. As says Rose Adams, executive director of the Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association (ACAAA), “First you give a man a fish. Then you teach him how to fish. But the next stage has to be to help stock the fish pond to make sure that future generations will be able to fish there and eat, as well.”

The long-term success of any community action program can be measured through a system known as Results-Oriented Management and Accountability—a.k.a. “ROMA.” Terry Bearden, ACAA's ROMA Coordinator, explains that, while every act of assistance has a short-term *output* (give a man a meal and he will not go to bed hungry), what is truly significant is the resulting longer-term *outcome* (relieve a man's food anxiety and he will better be able to focus on securing or maintaining employment). It

is with this in mind that one can see how the simple act of providing food can blossom into a chain of beneficial outcomes—the child no longer wracked with hunger can now better attend to his learning; the young mother no longer desperate to feed her children can concentrate on pursuing adult education or job training; the elderly gentleman no longer stranded without a network of support can now preserve his independent living status. (A full chart of food assistance-related ROMA measures appears on page 8.)

Whether you call it a war or not—the enormity of the task, to contest against poverty in general, and against hunger in particular, is no doubt intimidating, no doubt even demoralizing at times. But the men and women who embody the mission of community action in Arkansas soldier on still, knowing that each single act has the potential to multiply, like loaves and fishes, and that the Good Fight is worth fighting, no matter the odds. When Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has”—surely she could have been speaking about the lifework of community action.



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Community Action's Fight Against Hunger: By The Numbers

Using a management system known as "ROMA"—Results-Oriented Management & Accountability—community action seeks to measure more than just the short-term effects of its hunger relief efforts: ROMA measures the outcomes of providing food assistance (and other services) and the deeper changes that they can effect in recipients' lives. Below are figures from fiscal year 2013, as reported in the annual Community Services Block Grant Information Systems Survey (FY 2013 CSBG IS Survey).



41,572 Arkansans—of employable age and able-bodied status—received food assistance, which helps to **reduce barriers to obtaining or maintaining employment**

52,450 Arkansas senior citizens, people with disabilities, and their caretakers received food assistance through a variety of programs, including congregate meals at senior centers and home-delivered meals, to



increase household stability and support their ability to maintain an independent living status



13,412 Arkansas children in programs like Head Start and home-based childcare centers had **improved health and physical development** as a result of adequate nutrition

During fiscal year 2013, Arkansas community action agencies distributed over **8 million pounds of food** to local organizations, such as church food pantries, to **support their abilities to reduce hunger**



— **Terry Bearden, NCRT, ROMA Coordinator,**
Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association, Inc.

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