



2023: ANNUAL REPORT

HELPING PEOPLE.

CHANGING LIVES.



WEST CENTRAL MINNESOTA
Communities Action



WEST CENTRAL MINNESOTA
Communities Action



Our Mission **EMPOWERING PEOPLE**

while providing **SERVICES & RESOURCES**
that **IMPACT** individuals & communities.

Our Vision

PARTNERING to build
RESILIENCY in **Greater MINNESOTA.**



Our Values

RESPECT

We trust, honor & care for all.

INCLUSION

We accept all, while striving to eliminate injustice.

PASSION

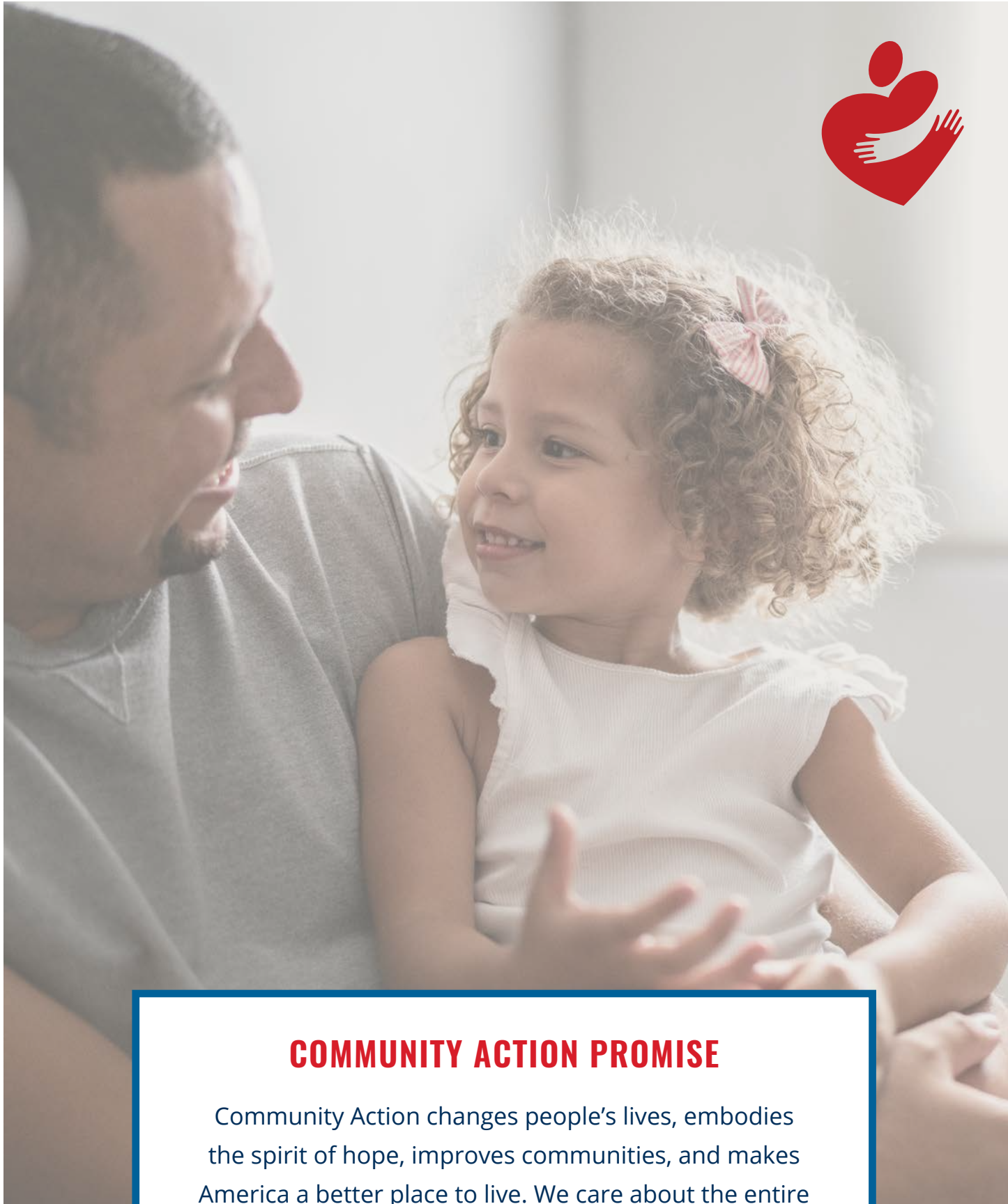
We strive for empathy & compassion.

INTEGRITY

We expect honesty & accountability.

TEAMWORK

We are stronger when we work together.



WCMCA LEADERSHIP

WCMCA LEADERSHIP TEAM

Missy Becker-Cook
Chief Executive Officer

Heather Carlson
Fiscal Services Director

Danie St. John
Director of Administration

Paige Carlson
Aging Well & Asset
Development Director

Andrea Goeden
Energy Assistance Director

Amber Holmstrom
Family & Community
Services Director

Jim Haugen
Head Start Director

Joe Niehaus
Housing Director

Dave Snyder
Statewide FAIM Director

Toby Weigand
Weatherization Director

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Teresa Gustafson — Chair
Traverse County, Low-Income Rep

Ken Johnson — Vice Chair
Grant County, Co Commissioner

Bob Staples — Treasurer
Stevens County, Private Sector

Jessica Boyer — Secretary
Douglas County, Private Sector

Donny Wohlers — Past Chair
Stevens County, Co Commissioner

BOARD MEMBERS

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Douglas County, Low-Income Rep

Marlene Cihlar
Pope County, Low-Income Rep

Keith Englund
Douglas County, Co Commissioner

Larry Lindor
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Robin McNamar
Grant County, Low-Income Rep

Janel Mendoza
Pope County, Private Sector

Hannah Michaelson
Stevens County, Low-Income Rep

Jerrel Olson
Traverse County, Co Commissioner

Michelle Rinke
Traverse County, Private Sector

Keith Swanson
Grant County, Private Sector

COMMUNITY ACTION PROMISE
Community Action changes people’s lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.



A LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP



To the board members, colleagues, staff, and friends of West Central MN Communities Action, Inc.,

Community Action is 60 years strong! Sixty years ago, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a War on Poverty, saying:

“Unfortunately, many Americans live on the outskirts of hope—some because of their poverty, and some because of their color, and all too many because of both. Our task is to help replace their despair with opportunity. This Administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty, in America. I urge this Congress and all Americans to join with me in that effort. It will not be a short or easy struggle, no single weapon or strategy will suffice, but we shall not rest until that war is won. The richest Nation on earth can afford to win it. We cannot afford to lose it.

– President Lyndon B. Johnson State of the Union, January 8, 1964

President Johnson called on Congress to do something never done before: set an aim not only to relieve the symptoms of poverty, but also to cure it, and above all to prevent it. We reflect on this, and while we certainly have not “won the war,” WCMCA, Inc. programs certainly reduce the effects of poverty from Energy Assistance to help heat homes and Weatherization to make homes warmer and more energy efficient, to homeless programs to house individuals and families to early childhood education with Head Start. We work hard to eliminate the effects of poverty and all our programs are meant to fit the Community Action Promise (see page 4).

WCMCA, Inc. is proud of our volunteer Board of Directors – who continue to show up when asked. They are engaged and committed to making Minnesota a better place to live! With a supportive Board of Directors, we would not be as successful in our communities, they really are the backbone of the Agency. They are articulate and engaged. Of course, we could not do this work without an excellent staff who carry out our mission with respect, care, and compassion to those we serve. It is not easy to ask for help, and our job is to empower, teach, care for, and build up our clients. We are very proud of our staff who truly go above and beyond; we are grateful.

2023 has been an exciting year at WCMCA, Inc! Our agency was chosen to administer the Family Assets in Minnesota (FAIM) Grant for the entire state. We have administered this grant in the past, but the exciting part is the state of Minnesota funded this grant at \$3.4 million! This grant will help Minnesotans save for the purchase of a home, higher education, or an automobile, or the start of a business. New to the program this year is an emergency savings account, where participants can save a maximum of \$4,000 to be matched 3-to-1, potentially providing \$16,000 more to purchase the asset. This grant spans over two years and we have added two new staff members to the program, and the team is doing a great job. The statewide kickoff event was held in February 2024 and training for new coaches across the state is now happening!

Thank you for taking time to learn about WCMCA, Inc. in our 2023 Annual Report. We are HELPING PEOPLE, CHANGING LIVES each and every day!

Missy Becker-Cook
Chief Executive Officer

Teresa Gustafson
Board Chairperson



**RECENT HIGHLIGHT:
GOVERNOR WALZ VISITS
HEAD START PROGRAM**

CLIENT TESTIMONIAL:

"I was in the market looking for a home with a realtor. With the current market, it was nearly impossible to find a home that fit my needs, budget, and location. This was extremely hard on me emotionally and left me feeling overwhelmed and hopeless.

Shortly after I gave up on finding a home, I saw a flyer for WCMCA's Affordable Houses. Their team helped me look at one of the builds in Milona. Joe Niehaus (pictured right) met me at the home and I discussed my physical disability and struggles with him, explaining how the right place for me had to accommodate my condition. Joe expressed his understanding and said that he could make the necessary adjustments to make this the right home for me.

Things moved quickly, Joe kept me in the loop as the home was being built – it was an amazing experience. Joe has an incredible team to make this all happen. Dan, the contractor and construction lead, has a heart of gold; he teaches the home building trade to local inmates to help aid them into achieving a better life. He is truly the heart and soul of this program, and you can see it in every home built and the lives which are changed forever! I love my new home, and love that during the process it impacted so many lives along the way. Thank you for believing in people and truly helping them in so many ways!"

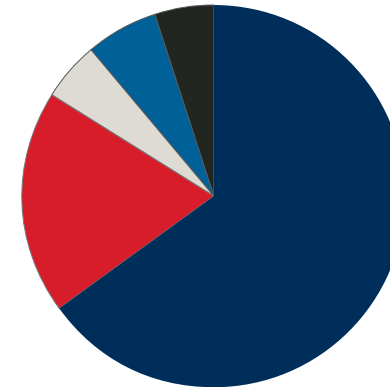
- Melissa M., Affordable Housing Homebuyer



FINANCIALS

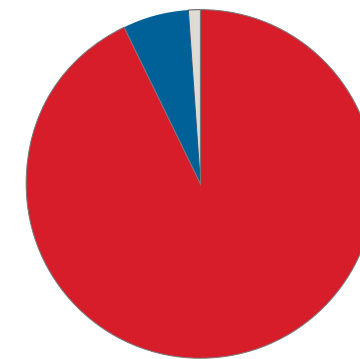
A YEAR IN REVIEW

REVENUE – \$12,872,324



- Federal Grants – 65%
- State Grants – 19%
- Affordable Home Sales – 5%
- In-Kind Contributions – 6%
- Other – 5%

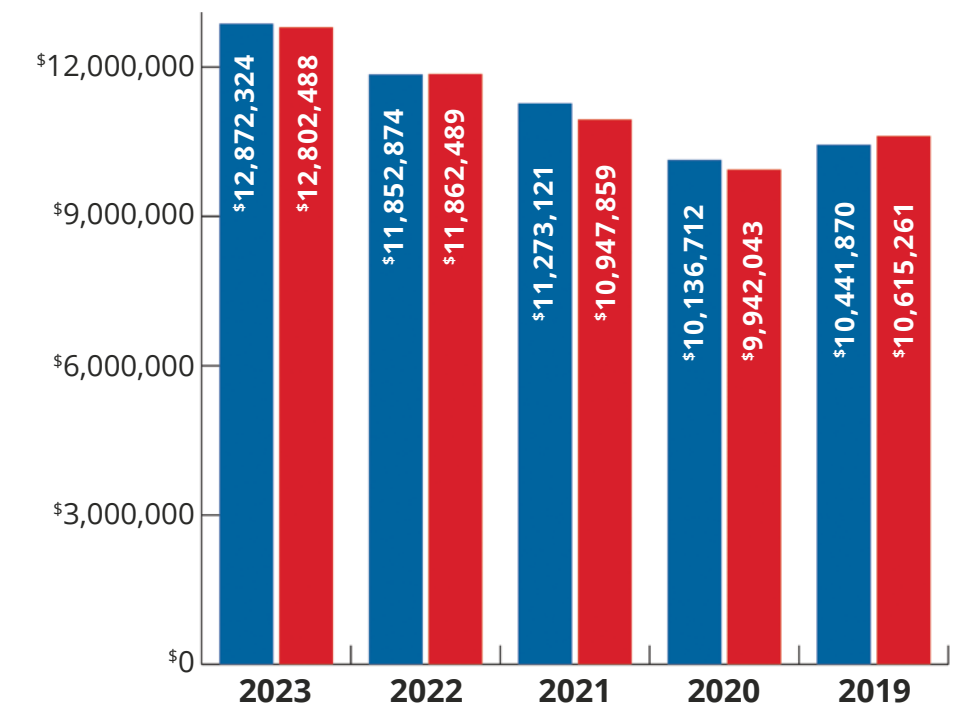
FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES – \$12,802,488



- Program Services – 93%
- Management & General – 6%
- Fundraising – 1%

REVENUE VS. EXPENSES

- Revenue
- Expenses



WCMCA received a clear audit with no significant findings for the 17th year in a row!

CLT in Brandon, Minnesota



HOUSING ASSISTANCE

Offering a full spectrum of housing services, from emergency housing and rent assistance, to rehab and new single family home construction and many services in between

264

HOUSEHOLDS ASSISTED WITH RENT
Both short- and long-term programs

28

HOUSEHOLDS USED PRE-PURCHASE HOMEBUYER COUNSELING

3

NEW HOMES BUILT BY THE ICW CREW

COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

A Community Land Trust, providing affordable homeownership, buys or receives donated land and builds new homes and / or acquires and rehabilitates existing homes, and makes these homes available for sale to limited-income homebuyers, writing down the purchase price to an affordable level through the use of public and/or private subsidies.

The CLT sells the home at an affordable price to an eligible, qualified homebuyer household, but retains ownership of the land parcel on which the home sits, leasing the parcel to the homeowner through a 99-year, inheritable, renewable ground lease.



CLT in Miltona, Minnesota

The West Central Community Land Trust Program will have placed:

6 HOMES IN THE TRUST

4 ADDITIONAL HOMES THROUGH FALL OF 2024

These homes include new construction, acquisition rehab, and two Habitat for Humanity homes.



LAUNCH PAD TEMPORARY SHELTER HOUSING

Above: This new Launch Pad unit was completed in June 2023. Another duplex will be ready in Spring 2024.

The households utilize the time in Launch Pad to accomplish goals created by the client with the assistance of their case manager, during intensive case management required of the program.

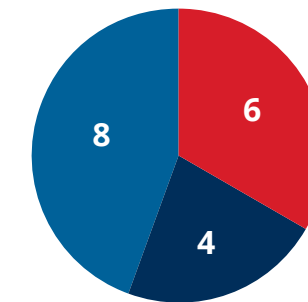
Goals may include but are not limited to:

- Securing or increasing employment/income
- Securing daycare
- Applying for benefits such as SNAP, MFIP, Medical Assistance, and daycare assistance
- Reinstating a driver's license
- Paying off fines
- Searching for safe, stable, and affordable housing, in whatever capacity that may be.

There is no set amount of time households are able to stay, as long as they are working toward completing their goal plan.

46 TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS
June 2020 – Sept. 2023

18 HOUSEHOLDS THIS YEAR
Current fiscal year



HOUSEHOLD EXITS

- 6 – Subsidized Housing
- 4 – Unsubsidized Rental
- 8 – Subsidized Program through WCMCA

PROGRAMS COMPLETED IN 2023:

7 REHABILITATION LOAN PROGRAM → **\$202,414** SPENT

2 EMERGENCY LOAN PROGRAM → **\$27,251** SPENT



ENHANCE ALEXANDRIA

Ten grant applications were approved by the Alexandria City Council to non-profits and governmental agencies within the Alexandria area to utilize American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

The program was named Enhance Alexandria, and the purpose of the funding was to address housing, arts, or other needs including, but not limited, to senior citizens, student housing, and childcare.

\$300,000 in total funds were distributed, including \$75,000 to WCMCA.

Our funds were dedicated to preventing and ending homelessness, including providing hotel vouchers to homeless households, rental assistance to prevent or end homelessness, and to support us in the launch of our third Launch Pad unit, along with supportive service dollars for our housing clients.

The remaining funds were allocated to administrative and operational costs, staff personnel, and fringe.

\$10,043
HOTEL VOUCHERS

14
VOUCHERS

\$19,935
PREVENTION RENT

17
HOUSEHOLDS

\$3,350
HOMELESS RENT

5
HOUSEHOLDS

\$20,597
TOTAL OPERATIONAL COSTS



2023 CARDBOARD BRIGADE FOR HOMELESSNESS AWARENESS

On November 14, 2023, the Family and Community Services Department along with volunteers from other departments, partnering agencies, community members, and agency clients held our annual Cardboard Brigade in Alexandria, MN.

This event is held yearly during National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness week.

From 3:30-5:00pm, those partaking in the Cardboard Brigade held statistics about hunger and homelessness along the busy Broadway Street. Some stopped to read our signs, some thanked us for the work we do and awareness we were spreading, while others were not as friendly.

This event is extremely eye opening every year and gives a very slight glimpse at the treatment of our homeless community members.

In 2021, we began a homeless drive for needed items for the homeless households we serve. We collect winter hats and gloves, winter jackets, hand warmers, non-perishable food items, personal hygiene items, and monetary donations.

"I wanted to say thank you for everything that you did for me through one of the toughest times in my life. I don't know what I would have ended up doing if my granddaughter didn't find you guys! Thank you for making sure I was fed and homed."

- Hope Haven client, 2023



38

HOTEL VOUCHERS
July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023

11

HOPE HAVEN HOUSEHOLDS
Partnership with United way that provided shelter, food and hope for individuals faced with homelessness during winter months

21%

HOUSING ASSISTANCE CLIENTS
are escaping
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



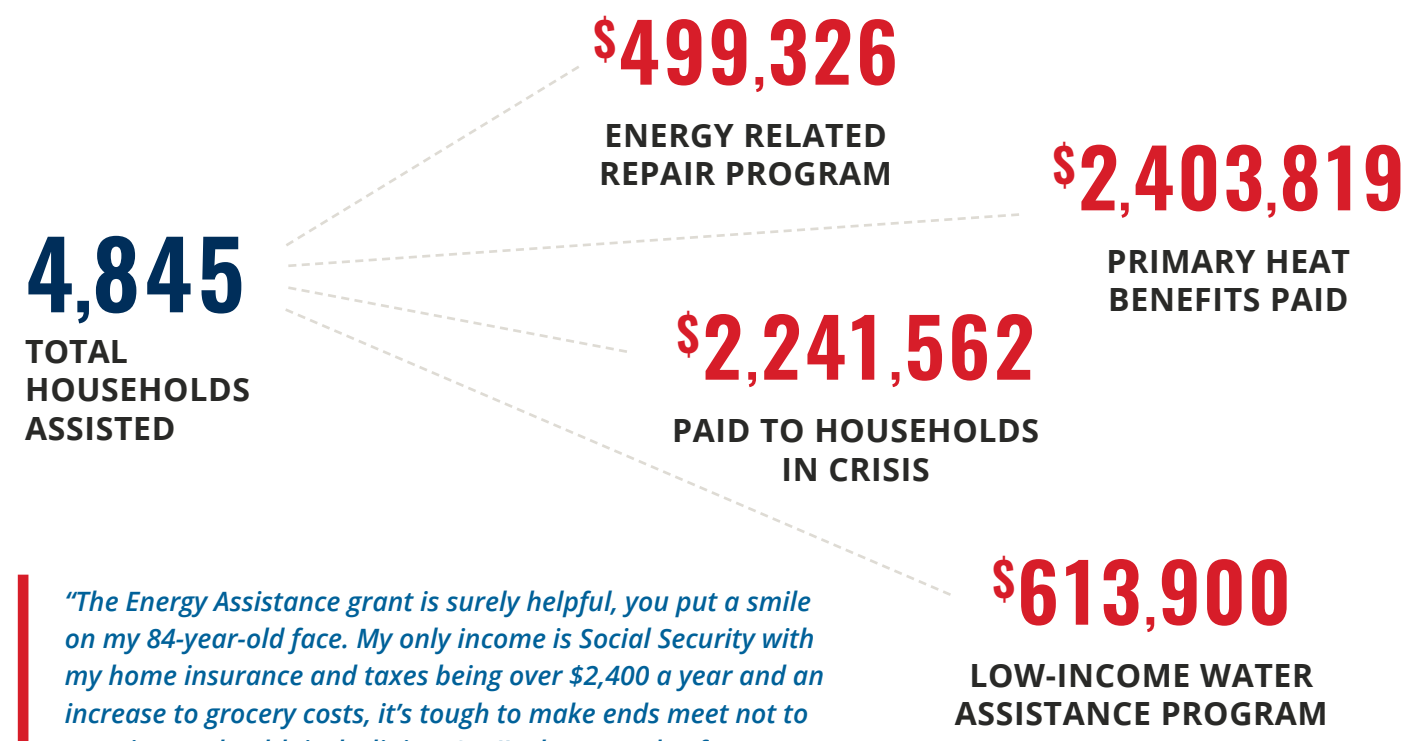
**1 IN 6 CHILDREN
LIVE IN POVERTY**



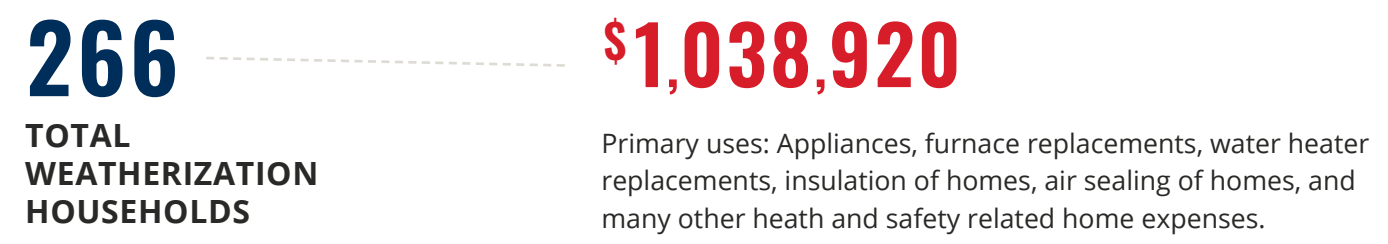
ENERGY ASSISTANCE & WEATHERIZATION



Helping eligible households maintain affordable, continuous and safe home energy through bill payment assistance, home energy crisis intervention and more.



"The Energy Assistance grant is surely helpful, you put a smile on my 84-year-old face. My only income is Social Security with my home insurance and taxes being over \$2,400 a year and an increase to grocery costs, it's tough to make ends meet not to mention my health is declining. So, I'm happy today for your help paying for some of my heating bills."
 - F.H. energy assistance client, 2023



The amazing volunteers of our Ready Ride driver program collectively had 60,593 miles added to their personal vehicles this year. These added miles provided adults living in our 5-county area, transportation to non-emergency medical appointments, grocery shopping, visiting family and social opportunities throughout their communities and the state.

60,593 MILES DRIVEN



Homemaking and Chore services assist adults with light maintenance items, cleaning, yard maintenance or basic household chores. On-staff service providers and volunteers provided homemaking and chores services to 62 clients in our 5-county area.

62 CLIENTS SERVED

IN-HOME MODIFICATION PROGRAM

In-Home Modification Program helps adults aged 60 and over purchase items that will help improve the safety of their home environment. In 2023, the In-Home program helped 79 adults purchase things like carbon monoxide and smoke detectors, handrails, appliance replacements, grab bars and minor electrical repairs.

79 CLIENTS SERVED

"After my husband died, I wasn't going to be able to live in my home alone. This program is truly life changing because I have been in my home for 40 years and still here today."
 - A 2023 Home Care & Repair client



CHILDREN & EDUCATION



THE HEAD START APPROACH

WCMCA Head Start supports children's growth from birth to age five through services that support early learning and development, health, and family well-being. Head Start staff actively engage parents, recognizing family participation throughout the program as a key to strong child outcomes.

103

HOME-BASED EARLY HEAD START

Pregnant women & children (Prenatal to 3-years old)

270

CENTER-BASED HEAD START PRESCHOOL

(Children Ages 3-5)

490

PARENT VOLUNTEERS

Head Start & Early Head Start

17,742

VOLUNTEER HOURS

From parent volunteers

PROGRAM SUCCESSES

87%

Of 4-year-old Head Start children met or exceeded expectations for Kindergarten readiness.

To meet Head Start Performance Standards, and optimal school readiness, Head Start ensured 87% of enrolled children participated in timely, well-child exams and health screenings (developmental, mental health, hearing/vision) with community providers and 82% established dental care exams.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: TANAYA MURDOCK, A HEAD START HERO

Parent engagement has been a cornerstone of Head Start since its inception.

West Central Minnesota Communities Action, Inc. Head Start remains committed to fulfilling the promise of supporting parents with their personal journey of resiliency and perseverance. Through personal testimonies of their Head Start experience, parents epitomize the Head Start program mission and inspire others in their search for lifelong success.

One of our many WCMCA Head Start Heroes is Tanaya Murdock, a resilient single mother of three. Seeking a stabilizing support system and overcoming personal adversity, Tanaya has not only looked to give back by completing a recent internship with the West Central Minnesota Chapter of Safe Families for Children, but now also dedicates her time to Alexandria Head Start and the preschool classrooms at Alexandria Community and Technical College.

In addition, she currently serves as an elected Head Start Policy Council parent representative. Tanaya's story demonstrates the transformative impact of Head Start, reinforcing our commitment to engaging and empowering parents on their unique journeys.



Serving children and their families in the counties of Douglas, Morrison, Pope, Stearns and Todd along with 28 surrounding counties, and the states of North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

64

FAMILIES SERVED

77

CHILDREN SERVED

74

SAFE EXCHANGES

474

SUPERVISED PARENTING TIMES

55 Zoom Parenting Times

1,125

TOTAL PARENTING TIME HOURS

60 Transport Hours



FAMILY ASSETS FOR INDEPENDENCE IN MINNESOTA

WCMCA is proud to have been selected by the MN Office of Economic Opportunity to administer the statewide Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota (FAIM) program, with a new allocation of \$3.4M from the state legislature during the 2023 session.

These funds will allow us to administer 250 triple matched savings accounts through our network of partner organizations in every corner of the state, while providing our partners with a higher level of funding to defray staffing expenses.

The revised state statute also expands the set of allowable assets for participants to acquire, along with general financial education and asset specific education during the two years they are enrolled in the program. Participants can commit to saving to purchase a home, a vehicle, capitalize a small business, pay for college tuition or open a college savings account for a dependent, or create an emergency savings account.

WCMCA was also able to use the funding to expand the FAIM team to include Dave Snyder as statewide director and Paige Carlson as Asset Development Director, alongside Sue Thoennes, our statewide program administrator.

The team has worked hard to update materials, convene the FAIM advisory council, devise and execute a new system of account slot allocation to decrease the pressure on agencies to enroll participants who may not be ready, and to reach out and establish new partnerships with organizations to ensure we reach the full geographical and cultural breadth of our state.



A matched savings project that helps Minnesota resident low-wage earners build assets.

Participant savings may be matched by the program at a rate of 3:1.

We're thrilled to announce formal partnerships with:

- The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
- City of Lakes Community Land Trust
- The Mni Sota Fund
- Seeds of Justice Worthington
- MN8 (serving the Asian American & Pacific Islander communities)
- African Career Education Resource, Inc.
- Big River Farms, a small farmer business incubator

HEALTH & FINANCES



94 PEOPLE ASSISTED BY MNSURE NAVIGATORS

FREE TAX PREPARATION

1,142
FEDERAL TAX RETURNS

1,106
STATE TAX RETURNS

852
PROPERTY TAX REFUNDS

\$947,400

BACK TO THE COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT MN RURAL ECONOMY



LOOKING TO VOLUNTEER?

Home Care & Repair Volunteers Needed!

Older adults have a great need for help with basic chores and homemaking services, so they can remain living safely in their home. Make a difference in their life and experience the joy of giving back!

CALL: 218-685-7008

Ready Ride Volunteers Needed!

As a Volunteer Driver, you pick your driving schedule and choose where you would like to drive. You will receive mileage reimbursement for all miles driven.

CALL: 218-685-7433



WEST CENTRAL MINNESOTA
Communities Action

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