

2012 Communitywide Strategic Plan and Needs Assessment

Executive Summary



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Introduction

The following report is the collection and analysis of information on the needs and characteristics of the service area of Salisbury Rowan Community Action Agency, Inc., North Carolina, as well as the resources available to meet these needs. Based on the Head Start Act of 2007, the name of the Community Assessment was changed to the *Communitywide Strategic Planning and Needs Assessment*, however, in this report it will still be referred to as the Community Assessment. In addition to meeting federal regulations for Head Start/Early Head Start Programs to prepare a comprehensive Community Assessment (CA) every three years, the following report is an integral part of the agency's planning process. The CA is the basis for designing plans, choosing community partners, forming essential collaborations, implementing comprehensive services to meet the needs of low-income children and families, and make decisions about changes needed in our program design and services.

Overall Description of the Agency

The Salisbury-Rowan Community Action Agency, Inc. (SRCAA, Inc.) is a responsible non-profit, Community Action Agency, committed to providing comprehensive and accountable services for economically disadvantaged individuals, children and families in its services area. These services are designed to enhance the quality of life and promote the opportunity to achieve self-sufficiency. The organization has a rich history in providing services to the community. During the later part of May 1965, the Office of Economic Opportunity officially approved the Salisbury-Rowan Community Services Council, Inc. as a Community Action Agency to operate its program with federal funds. In June 2007, the agency changed its name to the Salisbury-Rowan Community Action Agency, Inc. The SRCAA has approximately 300 employees and an annual budget of approximately \$14.3 million.

The SRCAA provides the following services to low income families:

HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START PROGRAM: designed to meet children and family needs, providing a solid foundation for the child and parent to grow together. The primary goals of the Head Start/Early Head Start programs are to provide the best child development practices for children birth to five years of age. Head Start provides a comprehensive child development program that addresses the physical, cognitive, mental, social and emotional development of prenatal, infants, toddlers, preschool participants. The program services Rowan, Davidson, Stanley, Montgomery and Moore counties.

FAMILY SERVICES: This Self-Sufficiency program assists those who choose to make a change in their life. For families and individuals enrolled in this program, the agency provides supportive services to help them overcome crisis for things like housing, utilities, childcare, education and training. Family Development Specialists provide comprehensive supportive services; each family or individual can focus on the problems and barriers they have encountered. Families and individuals complete this program in one to three years and during this time they: secure employment or increase their income, obtain education and /or vocational training, make better use of their income, obtain and maintain standard housing and build a strong work ethic.

WEATHERIZATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM: This federal program is managed by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and is designed to help Rowan County residents who meet the federal low-income guidelines to save energy and reduce expenses through the installation of energy conservation materials, the implementation of energy efficiency measures in their homes and energy education. The Weatherization program targets the elderly, individuals with disabilities and families with children.

HEATING & AIR REPAIR AND REPLACEMENT PROGRAM: Heating & Air Repair and Replacement works in conjunction with the Weatherization Assistance Program to repair and/or replace inefficient heating and air systems in the homes of low-income families.

CAREER AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES (FORMERLY WIA, WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT PROGRAM): This is a year-round program that provides services such as leadership development, adult mentoring, comprehensive guidance and counseling, tutoring and study skills training, internship, job shadowing, occupational skills training and on-the-job training.

Community Action Agencies (CAAs) are nonprofit private and public organizations established under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to fight America's War on Poverty. Community Action Agencies help people to help themselves in achieving self-sufficiency. Today there are approximately 1000 Community Action Agencies, serving the poor in every state as well as Puerto Rico and the Trust Territories.

CAAs are a primary source of direct support for the more than 34.5 million people who live in poverty in the United States. The majority of CAA program participants are extremely poor, with incomes below 75 percent of the federal poverty threshold, or \$9,735 for a family of three (the average family size for the client population).

Methodology

The community assessment focuses on three levels of analysis: statewide analysis, current Head Start Centers and analysis of future program projections and implementation plans. Here is a brief summary of the activities conducted to complete the Community Assessment:

1. The Salisbury Rowan CAA Management Team/Executive Staff participated in a capacity building training, facilitated by a consultant, to understand the process that would be used to complete the community assessment. The staff was given tools and information to use for the development of future community assessments.
2. Comprehensive interviews were also conducted with key community informants who provide direct services to children and families in the service areas. At least one person from each community was represented during the interview process, which was held over 3 or 4 days, but not consecutively. Facilitated by a consultant, the members of the community, such as former Head Start parents, small business owners, and employees from public health and the housing

authority, were interviewed during a “Lunch and Learn session.” A lunch and learn is an informal way to interview different community members, in a non-threatening way, to get information on relevant topics and concerns that affect the community. Key community informants honestly and openly discussed the strengths and weaknesses of their communities.

3. Supported by staff, all departments administered a Head Start Parental Needs Assessment Survey to identify needs and strength of the families and participants in the program. The survey results were calculated and analyzed to determine the most current information regarding the children and families of the program.
4. An independent consultant reviewed all the data, analyzed the trends and examined past Community Assessment results, particularly those recommendations and priorities established in recent reports. The data was compiled and finalized in a report.

The CA results are reviewed by the Management Team/Executive Staff in order to define program objectives and establish budget decisions before the beginning of the program year. A final version of the CA is then presented to Policy Council to approve and submit to the board members, based on the Head Start Act of 2007.

Findings/Trends

Based on the 2012 Community Assessment, the following recommendations and implications may be followed to design plans, make decisions about changes needed in the program, and implementing services to meet the needs of children and families:

1. The increasing Hispanic population seems to be the most significant trend that will need to be addressed by the program. The Hispanic population is growing steadily every year. There is an obvious need and opportunity to recruit and retain bilingual staff members with Early Childhood Education degrees to stay in compliance with Head Start Performance Standards. Hispanic children enrolled in the program are typically dual language learners. In order to support the monolingual and bilingual children and families, the program will probably have to institute a language policy that requires family service staff and at least one person in each classroom to be occupationally fluent or bilingual in Spanish. This policy complies with Head Start Performance Standards but more importantly allows for effective service delivery to the high-risk, limited English population. According to the US Census Bureau, there are 7.9% Hispanics in Rowan County as compared to the 8.6% of Hispanics in the state of North Carolina.
2. The increasing Hispanic population will also impact the ERSEA process (Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment and Attendance) for Head Start. Staff must be prepared to review North Carolina’s evolving immigration laws, as well as verification of age and family income requirements.

3. Employment and adult education is another focus area for the agency. Employment has a direct impact on program services. For instance, Head Start/Early Head Start full day services can only be provided to families who are working or enrolled in school in order to stay in compliance with Head Start Performance Standards. Program staff must consider networking or developing partnerships with corporations to have a significant impact on their communities to enhance job creation. For example, Census Bureau data shows there are 107,723 over the age of 16 in the labor force, but there are only 67,242 people employed in Rowan County. There are 67,338 unemployed citizens in Rowan County. The rest are considered not to be in the labor force or in the armed forces. The program must remain flexible in its practices and maintain focus on preparing parents and clients for working in an increasingly competitive environment. Suggested trainings include education attainment (GED and ESOL), literacy skills, and workforce preparation.
4. Safe, decent and affordable housing is another priority for the service area to help improve the quality of life for children and families. Family Well-being is one of the family outcomes of the Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework. Since family engagement is an integral part of Head Start's School Readiness plan, as well as one of the goals for Community Action Agencies, program staff must begin to look at housing differently. For example, one of the agency's partners is Stanly Habitat, but that partnership only serves one county. Establishing or helping the other counties with Habitat for Humanity would be one way for Salisbury Rowan to explore other housing opportunities. It should also be noted that Head Start/Early Head Start served 16 homeless families and all 16 families acquired housing during the enrollment year according to 2011 PIR data.
5. Based on the data collected, the agency overall is doing an excellent job of providing quality comprehensive services, such as Head Start, Early Head Start, family engagement, youth employment, training, and weatherization, to the children and families in their service area. Access to healthcare seemed to be an issue for the some of the more rural counties in the service area, but the Head Start/Early Head Program was successful in providing services for children. The program insured that every child had a medical and dental home. However, in order to remain successful, the agency must continue to identify trends and make changes accordingly. The full community assessment document contains the facts and data to support the above mentioned findings and trends.
6. Finally, with the current climate and the possibility of new federal leadership, the agency should stay abreast of new initiatives and funding for expanding and enhancing services to be prepared for grant applications. Continuing to seek out funds and partners is the best way to continue providing services for children and families in their service area.