

# CAPSH COMMUNICATOR



A Publication of Community Action Partnership of Suburban Hennepin (CAPSH)

## 2006 TAX ASSISTANCE PROGRAM BEGINS

### CAPSH Program Gives Low-Income Families Free Assistance



Community Developer Opheouse Randall helps a client prepare her income taxes.

Tax season is in full swing at CAPSH.

February 3<sup>rd</sup> marked the beginning of the 2006 Tax Assistance Program. In cooperation with Accountability Minnesota, CAPSH offers free tax assistance to eligible individuals and families in suburban Hennepin County. Income eligibility is \$28,000 for individuals and \$38,000 for families. Taxes are electronically prepared and e-filed free of charge by skilled volunteers and tax practitioners.

With 16 sessions in nine locations throughout suburban Hennepin County, CAPSH strives to meet the tax preparation needs of low-income families in the community. With four sessions in the season completed, over \$250,000 has already been refunded to individuals and families.

“CAPSH’s tax program helps people become aware of Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC), of which they might not be aware they qualify,” explains Opheouse Randall, Senior Community Developer for CAPSH. “This can be a significant increase in a family’s income, and a boost to help them become more financially secure.”

Changing Lives,  
Improving Communities.

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Accountability Minnesota is a nonprofit agency dedicated to providing tax preparation and accounting services to individuals and small businesses with limited resources by leveraging volunteer resources.

For more information on the tax assistance program, please contact Opheouse Randall at 952-933-9639 ext. 211.

### 2005 TAX PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- CAPSH provided **12** tax assistance sessions at seven locations in suburban Hennepin County during February, March and April.
- Federal, state and property refunds for taxpayers totaled **\$428,200**.
- **208** households received tax services.
- The average household refund was **\$2058.65**.
- **40%** of households received the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER



Welcome to the closing days of winter and the hopeful time of a new spring season with all of its potential for new growth. In the community action world, this means a new challenge to find even better ways to help people and organizations who are working with issues of poverty and the increasing numbers of impoverished people here in suburban Hennepin County.

In his work, *Inferno II*, Dante Alighieri advises, "Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate." ("Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.") This certainly is not a state of being that any of us wishes to experience and yet, what of our neighbors and fellow community members who may feel that this sentiment is appropriate in their current daily lives. Do we watch for signs of despair and the resulting symptoms of desperation in those we pass or meet every day? Should we? Must we? Why, of course—we should and we must. We must understand that our fellow travelers in this place at this time can have a great impact upon the experience that we enjoy or fail to enjoy. People help people. There is nothing else available to any of us.

All of our communities are experiencing new record numbers of homeless people, households in foreclosure, people who are using up their savings on health care and normal living costs and have no place else to turn. This certainly is not a new recital and yet, every day we meet people who do not wish to address this constant reality of the "have-nots". Please start paying closer attention to those you encounter each day and ask yourself if there is some selfless thing that you can do to help someone put hope back into their day and their lives. It really can be a very simple thing if we just slow down, observe and act. Without action nothing is ever accomplished.

In return for this small effort, we are here to help in any way that we can. Give us a call and a chance to partner with you to make a difference in the life of your fellow human beings and your community. You will be surprised how this will enrich your life and add a growing sense of renewed hope into everything that you experience in this life. Thank you for taking a moment to consider the plight of those less fortunate than yourself and those for who you may do something to make a difference.

*Richard Zierdt*

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## HENNEPIN COUNTY VOTES PROGRAM ENCOURAGES PEOPLE TO GET OUT THE VOTE

In a mid-term election year, civic involvement is critical.

CAPSH's *Hennepin County Votes* program educates, registers and encourages historically underrepresented groups to become civically involved by voting and ensuring their voices are heard.

This year, CAPSH participated in several events around suburban Hennepin County, educating the community on voting rights and voter registration information. Over 190 people took part in voter registration and education activities. "In a mid-term election year, that is quite a reasonable number," said Troy Reynolds, Community Developer for CAPSH.

In addition to *Hennepin County Votes*, several CAPSH employees participated in Election Day activities, including the Minnesota Participation Project's (MPP) nonpartisan Get Out The Vote drive. MPP provides CAPSH with various resources and is a partner in voter education. MPP's purpose is to support, encourage and expand the capacity of nonprofit organizations to engage in voter mobilization efforts. On Election Day, those efforts included making phone calls, knocking on doors, giving rides to the polls and being visible in the public.

Reynolds and Brooke Gullikson, Communications Coordinator for CAPSH, took part in Election Day activities by door-knocking in areas with historically low voter turnout. "The people in the community were really receptive to the message, understanding the importance of voting and how it can impact their lives," said Reynolds. "People in the community definitely appreciated the extra encouragement to get out and vote, especially coming from a nonpartisan standpoint," said Gullikson.



Reynolds educates a group of Hennepin County Technical College students on the U.S. Constitution.



Brooke Gullikson, Troy Reynolds and Marcy Harris all took part in Election Day activities.

It's through efforts like these that make Minnesota a shining example for the nation. According to a CBS News report, Minnesota has one of the highest voter turnout rates in the country. In 2002 mid-term elections, voter turnout in the state was 64%—25% more than the national average. In the 2004 presidential election, Minnesota had a 77% turnout rate, compared to the 60% national average.

## CAPSH PARTNERS WITH THE SALVATION ARMY FOR MARS PROGRAM

When Tom McCutchen retired from Minnegasco, his first reason for volunteering was simple.

“My wife made me.”

Eighteen years later, McCutchen is a leader in the Minnesota Active Retirees Service program (MARS), a volunteer program made up of former Minnegasco technicians that offer their skills and expertise in repairing furnaces for low-income homeowners.

Started by The Salvation Army, CAPSH was asked to help with the program when The Salvation Army had a hard time finding clients. “MARS volunteers prefer to work in the beginning of the heating season, and The Salvation Army doesn’t see many people for utility bill payments until the end of the season, so we stepped in to help,” explains Scott Zemke, Director of Operations for CAPSH. “This season, we’ve sent them around 180 clients.”

Mike McGlone, HeatShare Director for The Salvation Army, sees the partnership as a benefit to all parties involved. “It’s a beautiful blend of private, public and corporate charities coming together to help those in need. Clients might get energy assistance, but if their furnace isn’t working, it’s really a matter of life and death.”

And it’s volunteers like McCutchen and his team, Howie Haeg and Marv Larson, that are making a difference in people’s lives, simply by repairing their furnaces. With a combined 46 years involved in the MARS program, the retired Minnegasco technicians start working in October and work through the heating season.



*Haeg and Larson inspect a furnace.*



*Howie Haeg and Marv Larson are part of MARS, a volunteer program that helps low-income individuals and families with furnace repairs.*

And although their initial reason for getting involved with MARS may have been their wives, they have stayed with the program for so long because, as Larson explains, “We all like to do volunteer work.”

For more information on the MARS program, please contact The Salvation Army at 651-746-3400.

## ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM UPDATE

The Energy Assistance Team has been busy this year.

With applications up almost 20% from 2005, the Energy Assistance Program (EAP) is facing the cold reality of depleted funds for their program.

EAP is CAPSH's federally-funded program that helps low-income households with their heating bills. The program assists families who would otherwise be unable to pay the cost of their home heating.

"Funds are quickly running out, and people are encouraged to turn in their applications immediately," says Scott Zemke, Director of Operations for CAPSH. "If funds run out for programs like EAP, thousands of families in suburban Hennepin County face disconnection."

In the 2005-2006 heating season, CAPSH served over 9,500 households in suburban Hennepin County. As of February in the 2006-2007 heating season, CAPSH had already served over 6,700 households, with three full months left in the season.

For more information on the Energy Assistance Program, please call 952-930-3541.



*The Energy Assistance Team enjoys a brand-new office, which underwent remodeling last fall.*

## spreading hope, one neighbor at a time.

They're your next door neighbors. Your co-workers. The person behind you in line at the grocery store or the man sitting beside you at church. They live in your neighborhood. And they need your help.

Community Action Partnership empowers people to improve their lives through foreclosure prevention, asset development, employment counseling, energy programs and community outreach.

Please consider a donation to Community Action Partnership, so we can continue to improve the lives of those that live in your community.



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**changing lives and  
improving communities.**

## ICA FIGHTS HOMELESSNESS WITH ANNUAL CAMPAIGN

### VOLUNTEER SLEEPS OUT TO RAISE AWARENESS

It all started six years ago, when Annette Marie Poeschel, Executive Director of Intercongregation Communities Association (ICA), started receiving an average of 26 phone calls a day from families in desperate need of housing. “Families in our communities needed help with housing, but we didn’t have the funding for it,” said Poeschel. “I realized we needed a fundraiser to help our families stay in their homes.”

Poeschel came up with the idea of having someone sleep outside in order to raise money for and awareness of the housing crisis in suburban Hennepin County. She approached volunteer John Kokesh to help. “She asked me if I liked camping and I told her I hated it,” said Kokesh. Kokesh told Poeschel he needed some time to think about it. “I thought to myself, if it’s meant to be, it’ll happen,” said Poeschel. “Six months later, he came to me and said yes.”

After raising \$50,000 that first year, Kokesh decided to stick with the fundraiser. Six years and hundreds of thousands of dollars later, Kokesh has made camping an annual event, sleeping outside each year for as long as it takes ICA to reach their fundraising goal.

In addition to sleeping outside, Kokesh writes letters to the editors of local newspapers and emails local television stations, in order to increase interest and publicity in the campaign.

In 2006, ICA had a goal of \$193,000. Kokesh started sleeping outside on November 13, and didn’t come back inside until ICA reached their goal on January 3, sleeping outside for a total of 50 nights.



*John Kokesh stands by the tent he calls home during ICA’s Housing Awareness Fundraiser. Last year, Kokesh spent 48 nights in the tent to raise awareness on the housing crisis.*

#### DID YOU KNOW...

- Over 1,000 people were turned away from shelter programs on a November night in Minnesota. The majority were children.
- Children with three or more moves scored 20 points lower in reading than those who had stable housing.
- Projections state that by 2010, more than 330,000 metro households will be living in homes they cannot afford.

Why does Kokesh continue a tradition of sleeping outside when he never liked camping to begin with?

“For everything you give away, you get something back,” said Kokesh. “That’s true for me.”

With the help of Kokesh, ICA is able to give something back to the community each year, in terms of housing assistance. “There’s such a gap between wages and rent—mortgages keep going up and our families don’t have funding for the basic needs—food, gas and energy,” explained Poeschel. “That’s why this program is so crucial.”

## HIRED'S M-POWERED PROGRAM CREATES SUCCESS WITH COLLABORATION

When HIRED's M-Powered program started a year and a half ago, there was a great need for a collaboration program within the industry.

Workforce development organization and CAPSH partner HIRED recognized that need and started the M-Powered program, designed to connect all aspects of the training, hiring and employment process within the manufacturing industry. The program assists low-income individuals in receiving the education needed to work in the manufacturing industry, and it helps them get and stay on a successful career path.

Judy Swanson, Project Manager for HIRED, was appointed the manager for the M-Powered program, and began working with Hennepin Technical College and several workforce development agencies and manufacturing companies within the metro area.

"I am the connection piece between the college, students, employers and agencies," explains Swanson.

In addition to providing a connection, Swanson counsels people throughout the entire process. "The main reason people don't have success in their careers is because they have a lot of difficult life circumstances," explains Swanson. She helps them identify their main barriers to success and helps them find positive ways to deal with them. She also provides resources and works with the college the entire time to facilitate the process.

After people have successfully completed their college courses and are hired on to the manufacturing industry, Swanson continues to act as a mediator and holds semi-monthly meetings with manufacturing company executives. "Manufacturing is a high-demand industry and we're the only program with this unique combination with community partners," says Swanson. "The key to making this work is collaboration."



*Parents and friends of M-Powered graduates get a tour of the manufacturing labs at Hennepin Technical College.*



*M-Powered graduation ceremony*

And it is working. 87% of students who started the M-Powered program completed it and are now in the manufacturing workforce.

The M-Powered program receives many grants to cover tuition costs for participants, but Swanson has yet to find an organization that covers the infrastructure. "For this type of a strong collaboration to work, infrastructure funding must be in place," says Swanson. HIRED is currently actively searching for this type of funding.

For more information on the M-Powered Program, contact Judy Swanson at [jswanson@hired.org](mailto:jswanson@hired.org).



Susan, a married mother of two, had a history of overspending on credit cards. In an effort to pay the debt off, Susan and her husband had refinanced their home several times.

After racking up \$50,000 worth of credit card debt and being unable to refinance their home again due to zero equity, Susan and her husband found themselves at a dead end.

Hearing about CAPSH partner Lutheran Social Services (LSS) Financial Counseling through a friend, Susan and her husband made an appointment with a financial counselor.

During the appointment, the counselor reviewed their household income, expenses and most current balances on Susan's credit cards. The counselor was able to create a realistic household budget and put Susan on a Debt Management Plan with a reasonable monthly payment.

Through the Debt Management Plan, Susan is able to make one monthly payment to all her creditors through LSS. With consistent and on-time payments she will have successfully paid off \$50,000 worth of credit card debt in less than five years.

CAPSH partners with organizations like LSS to help maximize our efforts in mitigating the effects of poverty in suburban Hennepin County and help people like Susan and her family regain their self-sufficiency.

To get financial counseling services, please call 952-933-9639.

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