



WORCESTER COMMUNITY ACTION COUNCIL, INC.
484 Main Street, 2nd Floor ♦ Worcester ♦ Massachusetts ♦ 01608-1810
Telephone: 508.754.1176 ♦ Fax: 508.754.0203 ♦ Website: www.wcac.net

Chairwoman
Deborah Penta

Executive Director
Jill C. Dagilis

Deputy Director
Priscilla A. Holmes

**Earned Income Tax
Credit (EITC)**

Energy Conservation

Fuel Assistance

Head Start
Millbury
508.865.5037
Oxford/Webster
508.987.0829
Southbridge
508.765.9544
Southbridge/MacKinnon
508.765.4738
Spencer
508.885.5811

Early Head Start
Southbridge
508.765.4738

**Healthy Families of Southern
Worcester County**
Southbridge
508.909.0061

**Individual Development
Accounts (IDA)**

**South County Community
Partnership**
Oxford
508.987.0829

**Supplemental Nutrition
Assistance Program
(SNAP)**

**Worcester Community
Connections Coalition**
Resource & Referral Center

Youth Jobs & Education



Celebrating the 47th Anniversary of the Economic Opportunity Act and Community Action

Success Stories from Worcester Community Action Council, Inc. (WCAC)

Worcester Community Action Council, Inc. (WCAC), in collaboration with the City of Worcester's Youth Opportunities Office, the Central MA Workforce Investment Board, and Commonwealth Corporation are the proud sponsors of the state-funded YouthWorks Summer Youth Employment Program.

The Summer Jobs program provides meaningful job opportunities for income-limited, at-risk youth between the ages of 14-21 residing in Worcester, Milford, and Webster. This summer, WCAC was awarded \$791,969 in funding by Commonwealth Corporation and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security to provide 7 weeks of significant paid work experience for 516 youth. WCAC partners with 68 employers, community organizations, municipal departments, and corporate businesses who provide daily supervision and support.



"To stimulate change in the fundamental causes of poverty and to create and provide opportunities for economic self-sufficiency through services, partnerships, and advocacy"

In 2007, WCAC celebrated the first-ever Action Hero Awards Event established to recognize the agency's heroes: extraordinary community and business partners who have provided monetary contributions, in-kind goods and services, and advocacy to help WCAC fulfill its mission to move our customers from poverty to prosperity. On May 5, 2011 WCAC held its fifth Annual *Action Hero Awards* at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences honoring six individuals and organizations who had truly "paid it forward" during 2010.



Dr. Laurie Ross, Assistant Professor, Clark University - Dr. Laurie Ross, a respected Assistant Professor at Clark University, is well known for her years of work with and on behalf of youth. For two years, she assisted the Worcester Teen Housing Task Force with the planning and data collection for the First Point-In-Time Count of Homeless Youth in the City of Worcester. The compelling data resulted in the allocation of new resources to support transition-age youth and recommendations to reduce youth homelessness. While providing evaluations for WCAC's Summer Youth Employment programs, Dr. Ross' ability to be professionally objective and her knowledge of the community is instrumental in helping to improve programming.

Christopher Sawyer, Creative Designer - Christopher Sawyer brightens the experience of WCAC customers, staff, and all who walk through the Denholm building and past its glass-front windows on Main Street. Christopher, a native of Princeton, MA, and current Creative Director for Ralph Lauren in Boston, generously volunteered his talent and 20 years of experience in the luxury retail trade by redesigning the glass window displays of the Denholm building, originally home to the Denholm and McKay Company Department Store. Christopher has completed 10 elegant displays showcasing photos and historical artifacts, while helping to revitalize Worcester's downtown and WCAC's offices

Quinsigamond Community College, President Dr. Gail Carberry - When WCAC opened its Job and Education Center in 2009, QCC teachers provided work readiness training to the Center's out-of-school young adults, offered students the ability to participate in work readiness pre-testing, and enabled WCAC to use Accuplacer Placement Test practice tests at no cost to boost youths' abilities to pass the exam. The QCC Admissions Office provides financial aid presentations to youth, as well as waiving the application fee. QCC generously funded the Edward M. Kennedy Scholarship Program awarded to WCAC GED graduates seeking college degrees. Lastly, QCC is an important partner in WCAC's green jobs grant initiatives and program designs with the Worcester community.

Heery International, Inc., Thomas Ellis - In 2010, Thomas E. Ellis, New England Operation Manager at Heery International, contacted WCAC expressing the company's interest in a community service project. Learning about the need for a shaded play space for children, a team from Heery International and their families, with assistance from Head Start staff and their families, constructed a beautiful and practical gazebo at the WCAC Head Start

"To stimulate change in the fundamental causes of poverty and to create and provide opportunities for economic self-sufficiency through services, partnerships, and advocacy"

building in North Oxford in May 2010. This generous contribution has given Head Start children an outdoor place to play, as well as a resource for holding parent and Policy Council meetings.

Kellie Moats, Together By Heart Photography - For two years, co-owner Kellie Moats of Together By Heart Photography has provided free photography services for the young families of the Healthy Families of Southern Worcester County program. Kellie provided free copies of each family's portraits to all program participants. Kellie's generosity and respect for families, many of whom had never had their portraits taken, has enabled families to capture memories through quality services they otherwise may not have access to. The poignant images provide the program with an educational tool about meaningful parenting interventions and support for the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

CHAMPION OF SUSTAINABILITY, Unum – Unum has been an extraordinary partner to WCAC and its customers for many reasons. Unum employees provided lunch for WCAC's GED students and talked with them about career pathways, how to dress for success on the job, and workplace etiquette. Unum is planning the 3rd annual GED graduation for this June at Tuckerman Hall for GED students and their families, allowing them the opportunity to celebrate their success. For the past three years, over 20 Unum employee volunteers became qualified tax preparers to participate in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program at WCAC that provides free tax preparation to income-eligible consumers.

WCAC's 45th Anniversary Event

Worcester Community Action Council, Inc. (WCAC) held its 45th Anniversary Celebration Event on April 28, 2010 at Mechanics Hall, Worcester, MA. WCAC's 45th Event celebrated the many organizations that have helped to contribute to WCAC's achievements over the years, along with key action heroes. This year's Action Heroes recognized included: Unum, Seven Hills Foundation, Main South Community Development Corporation, Center of Hope, Energy All Stars, Smith & Jones, NSTAR Electric & Gas Corporation, Webster Five Cents Savings Bank, Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce and Education Foundation, Greater Worcester Community Foundation, and Charter-TV3.

At the same time, WCAC was thrilled to announce the establishment of the Senator Edward M. Kennedy Education Scholarship Program that was generously sponsored by National Grid and Quinsigamond Community College Foundation. The Scholarship Program will assist young people graduating from WCAC's GED and Job & Education Center programs, as they pursue higher education. WCAC also recognized the late Senator Edward M. Kennedy; his support and advocacy have been invaluable to our success over the past 45 years. We were honored that Mrs. Victoria Reggie Kennedy served as our keynote speaker and accepted an award on the late Senator's behalf.



Executive Director Jill C. Dagilis with Mrs. Victoria Reggie Kennedy

Community Success Story: Tom Dubay



Tom Dubay lived in Rhode Island with his mother and sister. His parents divorced when he was 12, and his Dad moved to Worcester and remarried. Tom kept company with the wrong crowd, didn't go to school, and got into trouble. The divorce was unsettling: although his sister "got it together" and graduated high school, Tom ended up in Truancy Court, while he was repeating the 7th grade. In a short time, he had the reputation of being a "bad kid." He lived at the Rhode Island Training School (a juvenile detention center) for about 6-7 months, when he was 17. Within 2 months of getting out, he was back hanging out with the same people and violated his probation; new charges were filed. The judge offered him two choices: spend his remaining 3 ½ years probation in a correctional institution with the new adult charges dropped (R.I. can charge 17 year-olds as adults) or relocate to Worcester to live with his father and stepmother.

Working with local attorneys, Tom's father and stepmother had his case transferred to Worcester. At age 18, Tom was allowed to move in with them, and he felt this would give him "a start to a whole new life." His probation charges required him to complete school and one year of house arrest with an electronic monitoring device. Tom entered the Worcester Public School's Gerald Creamer Center: "I wasn't there to make friends...didn't want to get involved with anyone...I wanted to get the work done." The staff and teachers were friendly, and their acceptance of him made him work even harder. "Everyone has a story," he said of the other students at the Creamer Center. He worked hard, finished his required course work, and graduated on May 22, 2009, as Class Valedictorian. "I started doing things right as time went on, and I noticed that relationships and networks got better." Tom started volunteering at the Worcester Senior Center helping with landscaping, general cleaning, and setting up and breaking down events.

Creamer Center teachers referred Tom to WCAC and Bob Morrison, Summer Jobs Developer. Tom met Bob early in 2008, while he was still a student and volunteering at the Worcester Senior Center. Bob enrolled him in the state-funded YouthWorks program that summer, and Tom was able to get paid for his work at the Senior Center. When Tom was allowed by the courts to leave the house during non-school hours, he was then referred to WCAC's Start Our Success (SOS) program, a program in partnership with the Worcester Police Department. The SOS targets court-involved young adults ages 16-24 who want a "second chance." The state-funded program supports subsidized employment, case management, and other wraparound services. Through the SOS and help from WCAC job developers, Tom continued work after school at the Worcester Senior Center in building services 2-3 hours each day. When the SOS program funding expired, Tom was then hired by the Senior Center, and he continued there until February of 2010.

In September 2009, WCAC opened a Job and Education Center with one-year federal stimulus funds, and 100 young adults seeking education, employment skills, or job placement enrolled. Tom entered a 5-week "Fast Track" pre-employment program that allowed him to hone his job skills. "It was excellent," he said. "They [the JEC staff] taught me—not through textbooks—how to interview, how to make eye contact and shake hands. It sounds like basic things, but I learned that those [skills] are very important. I would do anything in the long run to learn. I paid attention."

"To stimulate change in the fundamental causes of poverty and to create and provide opportunities for economic self-sufficiency through services, partnerships, and advocacy"

Bob Morrison connected Tom with Imperial Distributors in Auburn in February 2010. He went on multiple interviews, went through drug screening tests, and on his 20th birthday, he was offered a shipping position where he stacked and counted inventory and cleaned the warehouse.

When a new second-shift supervisory position opened a short time later, Tom was offered the position. His supervisor said, "Tom showed a tremendous work ethic, displayed passion for working hard, and possessed innate leadership qualities, which are quite unusual. The management's decision to promote him was unanimous. Tom's potential is limitless." The team approach is embraced by Imperial Distributors, and Tom now oversees about 14 young people ages 18-23. "I talk to these "kids" as their supervisor. I don't cross the line. They have a problem, I tell them to come to me. This is a great company, and they have rules. They expect people to learn the work and do well."

Tom's style certainly has impressed Imperial and the people with whom he comes in contact. His supervisor said it is not an easy shift to run: it has complicated orders and complex shipments, but Tom raises the work standards for himself and his peer group. Tom represents Imperial well, and the management is quite proud of him—"He's a good face for the company."

Tom often works double shifts and fills in when people are on vacation or out sick. He completed two semesters at Quinsigamond Community College, but has taken the summer off. He intends to finish his coursework in criminal justice, when he balances his work situation. Tom knows the criminal justice system and wants to work with juveniles. "We all have stories," he reiterates. "They (young people) can get out of bad situations if they want to. They can change; they just need the right motivation."

When Tom sees people or young adults struggling with their situations, he sits with them and talks about what they want in life and how they plan on achieving their goals. He believes that goals should always be set high; he "aims" for the stars knowing they are out of reach for the moment, but one day he will have exactly what he wants from life.

"I tell the kids that it's not about what you can't do or what's impossible; it's how to do it. The only thing that is not possible is failure. I don't like to use that word. Failure is a word that will break down somebody's dream in an instant. I like to call "failure" a lesson learned; it shows you what not to do next time around. People tell these kids, "why try"? I say, block everybody out. Do whatever you can. What are you doing to make your life better? I don't let bad choices or the wrong people get in the way of my life. I know what I know and where I want to be."

Staff Recognition: Olga Lopez-Hill



A long-time inspirational community leader and supporter for Latino students to further their education beyond high school, Olga Lopez-Hill also advocates for children and families. She joined WCAC in 2006 as a part-time family advocate through the Worcester Community Connections Coalition's Parent Center. In the advocacy position, Olga made referrals to other agencies so that children and families received appropriate services.

Working with Worcester Public School adjustment counselors and families of students, Olga ensured that families understood what the young people needed to succeed. She made home visits, accompanied families to housing court, and attended parent/school meetings when parents needed encouragement. "I did whatever I could. In some instances, students had medical issues (for example, diabetes), and parents must understand what is needed to keep students healthy and to support their children in keeping themselves well. I helped a client pack her apartment when

she needed to move, and I went to a food pantry with a client, because she was afraid to ask for help," Olga remarked.

Olga and other staff attend numerous trainings to learn about the new resources available so they are better able to make referrals to other agencies. "The needs are always different. We see many people with basic needs that we can help here at WCAC—food stamps, fuel assistance, GED—but issues involving domestic violence, housing, and hunger need to be referred to other agencies. Childcare is a big need." She noted that many more people are losing their jobs resulting in home foreclosure. It is a competitive job market with younger people having better skills.

Anne Bureau, Director of the Resource and Referral Center said, "Olga is the heart and soul of the WCCC Resource and Referral Center – beloved by both staff and parents alike. Her passion and caring for the work we do and for the people she works with is infectious. She consistently goes above and beyond and sets the standard for a great employee".

Recently, WCAC's Community Connections Coalition reorganized the Parent Center into a multi-faceted Resource and Referral Center. Olga, now Coordinator of General Operations, oversees six staff and seven volunteers with whom she loves to work. "It doesn't seem like much help, but in that person's life, it's a lot—food stamps, advocacy, fuel to heat their homes, GED classes...it's such a great need, and we see it every day."

Community Success Story: Winnie Octave

"WCAC saved my life and saved my children's lives. WCAC prevents people from falling on their faces....it gives them strength to walk again," exclaims Winnie Octave, board member and Parent Center volunteer. After moving to Worcester from New Jersey with her three children in 1995, Winnie secured a job with Ellis & Ellis. When the business closed in 1999, she was referred to WCAC for computer training by Workforce Central. Here she learned Microsoft Office software; received pre-employment training such as participating in mock interviews, learning how to dress for the business world, and working as a team player; and met with business representatives who were brought in to interview candidates who successfully completed the program. In 2000, Winnie was hired full time by Chapter 13 Trustee, and at the same time, she was invited to join the WCAC Board of Directors. During this timeframe, Winnie's rented condo was sold, and she had trouble finding a rent for her family. Winnie has never been afraid to ask for help. When Tim Murray was appointed to the WCAC board in 2002, she told him about her needing a house, and he was able to make calls to the East Side Community Development Corporation on her behalf. Winnie was fortunate; she purchased her home through the First-time Homeowner's program and is still excited about being a homeowner of her spacious and lovely home.

Winnie beams when she recounts all of her awards: in 2003, she received a letter from Congressman Jim McGovern congratulating her on her WCAC Warm Friends Award. Later that year, as a committed WCAC board member, she was invited by Senator Edward M. Kennedy to testify before the Senate Subcommittee Hearing asking that federal Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funding be reauthorized to support children and families. This funding is extremely important to the agency and supports WCAC's many programs and services. Winnie had the distinct pleasure of meeting with the Senator one-on-one: "We sat on a bench in the hallway; just me and the Senator talking about children...he was real!" While she was in Washington, she met Hillary Clinton and supported her efforts to increase wages. In the same year, Winnie received the MASSCAP Self-Sufficiency Award for working in the community, taking care of children, having a full-time job, and purchasing a first-time home. support she has received over the past 10 years.

"WCAC is the husband I don't have, and all the support I have been given are like little branches," she says. I'm happy to do whatever I can...I believe that I must always give back. It's the best way to enjoy life. WCAC gave so much....and still gives so much to me." Winnie loves to talk about the support WCAC has given her. Winnie's parting words for everyone—"Broaden your territory! Meet all different people...branch out! Get to know people, ask questions, and life becomes much better!"

Staff Recognition: Mayra Nieves

A WCAC staff member for more than 10 years, Mayra Nieves is described by co-workers and volunteers as "caring, dedicated, empathetic, and strong." Mayra is the agency's expert on nutrition assistance, an intake specialist for the

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program, and a highly-respected Parent Advocate in the Worcester Community Connections Coalition (WCCC) Program. Mayra has helped hundreds of low-income, at-risk and under-served families in Worcester access hard-to-reach community resources.

Mayra is the sole Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program--SNAP (formerly Food Stamps)--worker for WCAC and WCCC and, in 2010, served over 450 families. She was recently promoted to working full-time for WCAC in that capacity. Mayra was noted as being one of the most knowledgeable and skilled food stamp workers in the state by Project Bread in Boston--a former funding source for WCAC's SNAP program. Anne Bureau, Director of WCCC said, "Despite many changes in program demands over the years, she has always maintained her positive attitude, calmness, adaptability, and excellent client-service skills."

Mayra began her involvement with WCAC as a volunteer working with the Lakeside Housing Development. Before settling into her role current role, Mayra has held various positions including: Department of Youth Services, formerly Department of Children and Families, Department of Revenue Court Advocate, Family Advocate, Social Security Income Advocate and Housing Advocate. The ability to come to work everyday and help clients through a crisis or with daily needs continues to motivate Mayra. "I make sure clients get everything they need when they are here. I provide them with resources for housing, advocacy, shelters, food pantries and food stamps. I am very happy to be here." said Mayra.

Mayra conducted extensive community outreach efforts, as well as participated on several committees to improve the lives of Worcester residents. When Lakeside Housing Development residents needed a stronger voice and greater access to community resources, she assisted in the organization of the Lakeside Interagency Task Force. Mayra also coordinated a program called "Paint the Future" in collaboration with *Worcester Shines* to beautify the Lakeside area by painting murals over graffiti. She is extremely proud that, to this day, there has not been any graffiti over their efforts. In 2005, Mayra, along with other staff and volunteers, embarked on an educational campaign promoting nutrition assistance that reached over 400 community agencies and businesses. Their efforts significantly contributed to the over 100% increase of SNAP enrollments. She was also a member of the founding committee for the WCCC Parent Center that opened in February 2008.

Staff, Coalition Members, and agency customers sincerely enjoy working with Mayra who always places clients' needs as her number one priority. One Parent Center Volunteer describes Mayra as, "...sensitive to the needs of families. She makes you feel comfortable — not bad for trying to get services. She even takes the extra step to help you get the other services you need besides food stamps." Mayra is truly one of WCAC's shining stars!

Volunteer Hero: James Booker

James Booker is the dedicated, quiet, and easy-going unsung volunteer hero at WCAC. James has been a volunteer in the Fuel Assistance Program, since his retirement from NSTAR in 2007. James began his 33-year career at NSTAR as a meter reader; from there he transitioned to dispatch and finally to the distribution department, from which he retired.

During this leisure time, James' wife, Linda Booker, WCAC's Assistant Director of Fuel Assistance, had other plans for him. She expressed the need for additional help within the department. After working for over 30 years, it was not in James' nature to be inactive, so he enthusiastically began volunteering 3-4 days per week! James jokes that he sometimes feels like a full-time employee rather than a volunteer, because he is at WCAC so often!

One long-term staff member describes James as "...the best volunteer I have ever worked with. He is here every day. He is terrific man and is very conscientious about his work."

James is always willing to take on any assignment that will assist the fuel staff and the department. From stuffing envelopes with benefit notifications to opening thousands of pieces of fuel mail, James is hard-working and thoughtful in his efforts. He is never afraid to ask questions and never minds when his "office" or assignments change. He is flexible, pleasant, and always eager to help.

Volunteering at WCAC has been a very different and interesting experience for James from his time working at NSTAR. "You meet a lot of different people. You get to learn a lot about people and you realize that a lot of people

need help," smiles James. His words to live by are worth noting, "You have to plan. You have to have an education and some luck to go with it!" James has been lucky, but WCAC has been even luckier to have such an outstanding volunteer.

Staff Recognition: Fatima Mohamed



One of Fatima Mohamed's dreams has come true: to help African refugees become self-sufficient. What began as a "kitchen outreach" project in her own home, has now become a 501(c)(3) East African Community Outreach (EACO) program housed at WCAC for over a year.

Traveling from Kenya, Africa, Fatima joined her husband in the United States in 1994, where they have been raising three children, now 10, 12, and 14 years old. "All my life, I have felt I have to help refugees. I put myself in their situation."

Fatima left college without completing her Business Administration degree to work for the United Nations in Somalia. After two years, she worked for USAID in Mogadishu and Somalia. Currently, she helps people from Somalia, Iraq, Burundi, Ghana, Liberia, Kenya, Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda.

After her move to Worcester, Lutheran Social Services hired Fatima as a case worker for Somali and Burundi populations. Many of the people she has helped have lived in refugee camps, some for 20-30 years.

Early last year, Kaska Yawo and Fatima approached the WCAC administration about providing outreach services to Africans. Given the magnitude of African refugees in Worcester and the number who arrive at WCAC for services, it was readily agreed that the volunteer group could operate out of the agency. The EACO is staffed by 7 full- and part-time volunteers who speak many of the African languages. Fatima and her team assist over 10-14 families a day with translation, housing, school, landlord, transportation, court, and job issues. "They need to learn to speak English; they need to be able to speak for themselves to become self-sufficient."

"People are in need, and I believe we can help each other, no matter what. I always look for solutions, ask for advice," Fatima remarked. "I don't hesitate to help without getting paid...as long as I help them."

Someday, Fatima will go back to school to get her final courses in bookkeeping. "I would love to continue to complete my education. When my children are a bit older, I will get my degree in Business Administration." But, for now, Fatima works long hours connecting Africans with services they so desperately need. "I do enjoy this work," smiled Fatima.