



# Community Action + COVID-19

Community Action Agencies are directly helping people impacted by the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. These are some of the countless stories from Missouri's Community Action Agencies.

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*Contact Missouri CAN at [communityaction.org](https://communityaction.org) for more information about Missouri Community Action Agencies' response to COVID-19.*

# Community Action Agency of Greater Kansas City (CAAGKC)

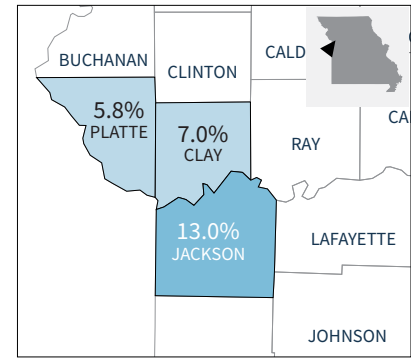
As COVID-19 emerged in Missouri, unemployment spiked, and many people in the Kansas City metro area lost the means to pay their bills and feed their children. Seeing these needs, Community Action Agency of Greater Kansas City developed an online emergency services portal for its customers to apply for rent and utility assistance as in-person appointments came to a halt. The digitization of rental and utility assistance procedures was an innovative for practice that came out of the pandemic for CAAGKC. Customer applications and service delivery were handled by phone or online with a secure portal through which private, sensitive customer information could be sent.

During the first full month of COVID-19, CAAGKC customers needed food and toiletries such as cleaning supplies and diapers. The agency partnered with several non-profits and organizations around Kansas City to meet these needs. CAAGKC continued to focus on community members' basic needs—food, toiletries, utilities, and housing—during the second full month of the pandemic and developed partnerships with area organizations to address the increasing needs beyond its food and toiletry pantries.

CAAGKC streamlined its processes so customers could apply for services without leaving their homes. All business was conducted online or by phone. Some events were held drive-through style, so the agency staff and customers could adhere to social distancing guidelines. At the same time, the agency put other programs and services on hold due to an inability to meet in person and enter customers' homes. Adapting these programs allowed the agency to focus resources on other initiatives. CAAGKC provided 32 of its University Academy families with \$100 gift cards for food and groceries. The agency's Youth Services Department addressed specific needs of PAVE The Way participants—an after-school and summer program that helps high school students develop leadership skills and explore career options. CAAGKC developed partnerships with several drive-through food distribution sites around the Kansas City metro.

CAAGKC creatively used existing financial resources and partnerships to address customer needs. The agency provided 60 furloughed airport employees and 44 furloughed Zona Rosa employees with up to \$100 for their families and provided more than \$50,000 in additional funding for pantries and established a new partnership with Platte Senior Center to deliver care packages to home-bound seniors. In collaboration with Total Man Community Development Corporation, CAAGKC provided up to \$100 cash assistance per family to 50 households. The agency delivered 180 boxes of food to seniors in their apartments in collaboration with Palestine Senior Center and worked with Truman Medical Center Mobile Market to provide families with fresh fruit and vegetables. CAAGKC helped residents with rent and utility bills, assisted with evictions of up to three months, and worked with school districts to address families' needs.

Many people who previously didn't meet eligibility requirements for CAAGKC's services are affected by COVID-19's economic impact in unexpected ways. CAAGKC is aware of the challenges these individuals and families face and continues to ensure they receive uninterrupted services during these unsure, untested, and certainly trying times.



**Agency Service Area  
and Poverty Rate by County**

*Areas of  
concern  
during  
COVID-19*



*“Our plan is to continue what we have been doing throughout the entire pandemic. We are ensuring that individuals and families continue to have access to professional, competent, and meaningful services.”*

*—Ashley Bianchino, Marketing and  
Special Projects Coordinator, CAAGKC*



# Community Action Agency of St. Louis County, Inc. (CAASTLC)

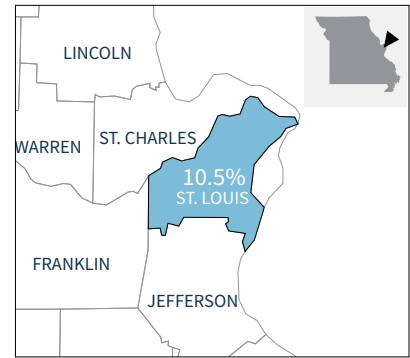
Community Action Agency of St. Louis County, Inc. customers were initially concerned about the agency's ability to provide timely services. The agency was also managing the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic as an organization. However, CAASTLC responded promptly and proactively to this concern and ensured customers the agency would still provide most of its regular services. When the office was closed to the public, CAASTLC allowed customers to pick up energy assistance applications just inside the front doors while following health and safety policies. The rate of Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) applications received remained steady during the pandemic, with the agency receiving up to 300 applications per day. All customer intake, assessment, and referrals are handled over the phone using electronic signatures when needed, and case managers routinely call their customers to check-in and talk about their concerns.

Food, utility assistance, and rent and mortgage assistance were the top needs across CAASTLC's service area as the outbreak began. The agency quickly assessed its capabilities to address these needs and implemented procedures to handle client needs by phone and online. During the second month of the COVID-19 pandemic, food, utility, and rent and mortgage assistance needs increased. CAASTLC pursued diverse funding opportunities and additional resources to continue delivering services to timely meet these urgent needs.

One central pivot the agency made was how to operate its food pantry. With food security a primary concern for the community, CAASTLC needed a safe way to operate its food pantry—a vital resource for customers during these difficult times. The result was a drive-through food pantry. The agency currently serves an average of 100 customers at the pantry every week. All CAASTLC staff members wear masks and gloves while distributing food, and customers remain in their vehicles during pick up. The pantry operates its drive-through service by appointment only.

Holding regularly scheduled in-person classes such as Anger Management and Drug and Alcohol were difficult for the agency. CAASTLC redesigned the courses for virtual spaces using the online meeting platforms Zoom and Google Meeting. This new approach allowed training in critical-need areas to continue for participants who rely on them, despite the limitations of COVID-19 and social distancing guidelines. The initial challenge of exploring new ways to deliver some programs and services under health guidelines has resulted in opportunities that CAASTLC believes will be a permanent part of its delivery process moving forward.

Despite COVID-19 challenges, CAASTLC's customer feedback has been overwhelmingly positive with phone calls and voice messages from clients expressing appreciation and encouragement. The agency sees this as a testament to staff determination and diligence.



Agency Service Area  
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Areas of  
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*“There’s no doubt that COVID-19 has presented several challenges, but our commitment to serving customers has never wavered. We know that we will get through this keeping in mind that we are needed now more than ever.”*

—Cordell Whitlock,

Communications Director, CAASTLC



# Community Action Partnership of Greater St. Joseph (CAPSTJOE)

Through the local hospital, a Community Connect grant has funded a homeless shelter in the CAPSTJOE service area for several years. But when COVID-19 hit, all of the funding was pulled for the homeless shelter. An average of 35 individuals stays at the shelter every night. During winter, the average number of people each night increases to 70. The shelter is a low-barrier shelter—it is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. CAPSTJOE has long recognized the importance of the shelter and remembers a time when there was no homeless shelter in the community. With the influx of COVID-19 response funds, CAPSTJOE stepped in to take over the shelter during the pandemic. The agency will operate it for two years.

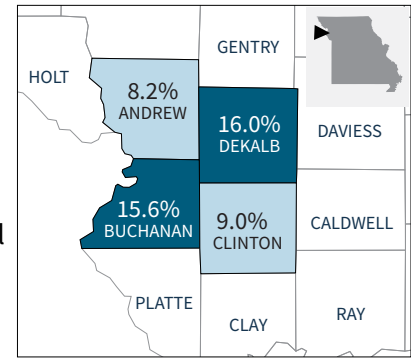
CAPSTJOE has seen a high need in many areas, such as utility assistance, because people were out of work. With extra federal funding for COVID-19 response, the agency allocated more dollars to help people with necessities. Throughout the pandemic, the agency has doubled-down on existing efforts that help people in need.

In addition to responding to the pandemic, the CAPSTJOE service area also recently experienced flooding. One hundred forty homes were affected by the floods in the southern part of the service area. Some people have lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 shutdown and then were impacted by the floods. CAPSTJOE reached out to every house that wasn't registered with Red Cross and completed a needs assessment for those homes. The agency created a caseload for managers, and a group of coordinators convened a weekly call to respond to the flooding. The agency operates on a four-day week, so on Friday's, staff volunteered to muck out houses, tear down damaged sections, and even deliver food to people impacted by the floods. About 20 agency staff volunteered on their Fridays when the agency was closed.

There was an overlap of the two disasters for many of CAPSTJOE's Head Start families, too. Making sure families with children had a safe place to live was important to the agency. CAPSTJOE organized food drops for these individuals and made sure the families received a meal bag. Churches and schools were involved in the coordinated flood response efforts, too, and CAPSTJOE used an available school building to create a family room while making homes safe for people to return.

Notably, CAPSTJOE did not close its Head Start center in the spring. Low-income families often work in industries that have either laid off employees or are jobs for which working remotely is not an option. The latter group still has to work but wouldn't have childcare if the Head Start centers were closed, as traditional daycares are unaffordable to them.

For people who were laid off, CAPSTJOE received many referrals to the SkillUP program. Through SkillUP, the agency provides resume assistance and connects people to skills and job training. During the pandemic's early months, people couldn't begin their training programs for new jobs because schools were closed. As schools and training programs have opened back up in August and September, the agency has seen an influx of individuals starting their training programs. CAPSTJOE is now actively connecting people who were laid off from their jobs with training programs. Fifteen people have begun a training program within the last week, and four people started Certified Nursing Assistant classes.



Agency Service Area and Poverty Rate by County

Areas of concern during COVID-19



*“There’s just been a lot of good things that have come out of a crappy situation. We’re just doing the best we can to bring a bit of normalcy to families during this time.” —Rachael Bittiker, Public Affairs and Community Development Director, CAPSTJOE*



# Community Action Partnership of North Central Missouri (CAPNCM)

As with many other agencies, Community Action Partnership of North Central Missouri had feelings of helplessness and a general sense of dread as the pandemic hit. But the agency staff quickly came together to refine its approach for assessing client needs more deliberately as it anticipated greater need across its service area.

The needs CAPNCM saw in its nine-county service area during April mirrored those of the country as a whole—a major need for food and household necessities. While stay-at-home orders were sweeping across the nation and state, these were not mirrored in northern Missouri. The area did not see its first COVID-19 cases until the end of April.

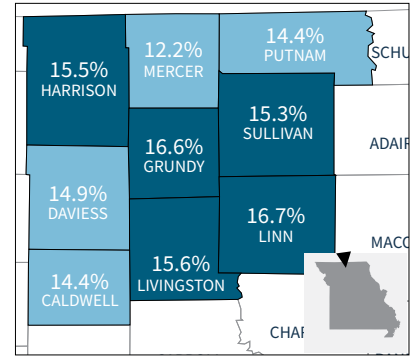
During May, the agency saw an uptick in food-related assistance requests and worked to provide more detailed information to clients regarding food access.

At the end of August, CAPNCM saw an increase in utility assistance needs now that most utilities are re-instituting shut-offs. In mid-August, the agency provided \$32,000 in Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) assistance in a single week to people in its service area. The small agency staff has only two people managing the LIHEAP program. The agency expects an increase in the need to continue into September and through November.

During this time, the agency expanded its case management for prior offenders coming directly out of incarcerations to coordinate employment assistance, housing referrals, and transportation options. The agency hired a new Offender Empowerment Case Manager, who is a former parole officer. Her expertise and networking connections have proven valuable in reinforcing the three critical components of re-entry: employment, transportation, and housing.

For operations, agency staff worked from home through March and April, with core employees staggering their in-office time. With this minor adaptation to processes, the agency as a whole maintained all services and outreach, with most program operations remaining unchanged.

Community Action Partnership of North Central Missouri used additional funds received from the Missouri Housing Development Commission (MHDC) to assist with monthly rents or mortgage payment assistance for some clients.



**Agency Service Area and Poverty Rate by County**

*Areas of concern during COVID-19*



*“Our little agency did \$32,000 in LIHEAP assistance last week and already this week through yesterday (Wednesday), we’ve done \$29,500. We only have two staff in LIHEAP, and they are just working themselves silly.”*

*—Christopher A. Small, Ph.D.,  
Executive Director, CAPNCM*



# Community Action Partnership of Northeast Missouri (CAPNEMO)

When COVID-19 first emerged in Missouri in March, Community Action Partnership of Northeast Missouri noticed the initial concerns within its service area. Customers and people in the community were worried about their finances and losing their jobs due to the virus.

During the first full month of the COVID-19 pandemic, people struggled to feed their families and had a new responsibility to assist their children with online learning from home. With business closures, many families were now unemployed.

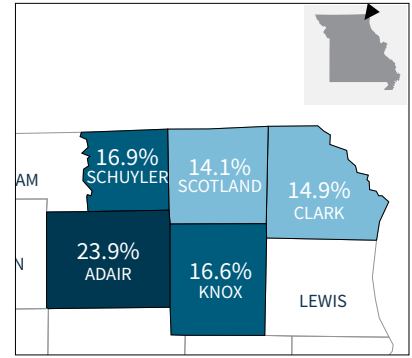
The agency sent out a COVID-19 needs survey on April 1. Responses indicated “health and safety,” “food and nutrition,” and “housing and utilities” as primary needs early in the pandemic. Following the survey, CAPNEMO contacted clients directly and helped them with whatever need was most pressing at the time.

CAPNEMO followed guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control to ensure staff and children stayed safe. However, the agency wanted to meet the real and pressing needs of its community. CAPNEMO provided meals to children and packets of supplies for children to use for educational activities at home. Teachers prepared packages and food for children, and clients made appointments to pick up their supplies to keep all involved safe as the agency transitioned to an online learning environment. A key pivot for the agency was using video conferencing tools to maintain home visits despite social distancing limitations.

Although CAPNEMO’s operations have changed slightly, the agency remains the go-to for individuals and families with various needs. As essential workers, CAPNEMO provided seamless service throughout the pandemic. They were able to meet clients by appointment only, take applications through a dropbox, and make other small changes that did not impact its ability to serve clients efficiently.

Agency programs that require large gatherings or close contact have not been able to pivot during the pandemic. Other programs were able to continue with minor changes in process, such as handling more program work by email rather than in person.

CAPNEMO explores the possibility of a mental health program, as mental health issues were a consistent theme in the agency’s Community Needs Assessment before COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic, the agency has received reports of new or worsening mental health issues. In general, affordable mental health services are not available in the CAPNEMO service area.



**Agency Service Area and Poverty Rate by County**

*Areas of concern during COVID-19*



*“We remain the go-to for individuals and families with a variety of needs. They will come to us and we will address the needs as best we can—same as always.”*

*—Mary Turner, Outcomes/Quality Assurance Director, CAPNEMO*



# Central Missouri Community Action (CMCA)

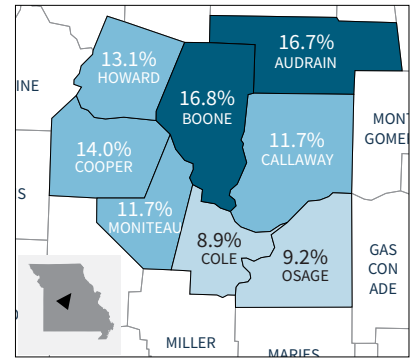
Central Missouri Community Action immediately recognized the concern of stopping the spread of COVID-19 and the virus's impact on children and their families. Initial needs in the CMCA service area were childcare for essential personnel and financial hardships affecting families.

Many families who utilize the CMCA childcare centers continued to work while the agency's center was closed while other families experienced layoffs and other financial hardships due to COVID-19. The agency addressed needs by not charging families for payments during the closure. Staff provided activity kits and educational materials to Head Start children and their families.

During May, Head Start continued to support its families through weekly contact via phone or virtually. CMCA is now fully open and back to regular working hours. The agency can again meet the childcare and Head Start needs within its community.

CMCA outlined plans for the future if an outbreak affects the childcare and Head Start centers. Staff increased cleaning and sanitation procedures to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. They have continued to address Head Start families' needs, even from home and through virtual contact.

Amidst the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic caused, CMCA used its resources creatively. The agency delivered books and classroom materials to its Head Start families to support the children's education during this time. CMCA delivered essential items such as diapers, wipes, and formula to families in need during the shutdown and continues to support its clients and customers in various ways.



**Agency Service Area  
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*“CMCA staff adapted well,  
although it was difficult to work  
full time from home with our  
own children and families.”*

*—Meghan Beauchem, Early Head Start  
Teacher, CMCA*



# Community Services, Inc. (CSI)

Food was a primary concern during the first full month of the pandemic for Community Services, Inc. customers. Agency staff called current clients in vulnerable situations to check on them, asking whether they needed any support. Most clients needed assistance with food.

CSI staff delivered food baskets to the people in need. Some clients were also lonesome from being home alone due to the social isolation of stay-at-home orders and wanted to talk with someone. The interactions with CSI staff helped assuage the social isolation.

In late April, CSI's community partner Second Harvest began food drops in smaller towns. As food security continued to be an issue for people in May, the agency added more food drops to its five-county area.

In addition to concerns about paying for food, community members were concerned about paying rent. CSI has helped as many people as it could with the limited funds available from a local grant. As the pandemic continues, the agency is still seeing more and more people who need help with rent and mortgage.

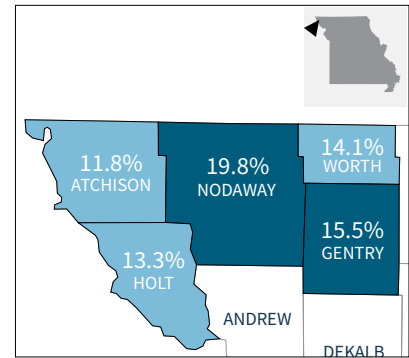
Additional Summer Energy Crisis Intervention Program (ECIP) funds have helped CSI address the increased request for utility assistance, but the agency foresees utilities to be a continuing issue. With deferred utility bills coming due, people need assistance as they are quite large.

CSI coordinated with community partners such as Home State Health to provide diapers and wipes to families. Food and essential household items such continue to be an issue for people in CSI's service area. Second Harvest helped the agency establish more food drop locations and add more product to the monthly commodities. The agency's Head Start program partnered with local schools to ensure lunches were available for the kids during the school months.

The agency provides tax filing assistance for low-income individuals and families. Although the tax deadline was extended, CSI continued to assist customers with filing. The agency worked with the social security office to obtain authorizations via fax, so staff could collect the information needed to complete taxes for its clients while maintaining contact-free service.

CSI moved its budgeting class online, allowing participants to attend class virtually and avoid face-to-face meetings. The agency also held its Community Needs Assessments focus groups by telephone and distributed surveys digitally. By sharing the survey on a local Facebook group centered around COVID-19 and community quarantine, the agency was able to ask COVID-specific questions and received a large amount of community feedback.

With offices closed to the public, CSI installed secure drop boxes at all office locations so clients could drop off paperwork. Agency staff have been available by phone, email, and text to address customer questions and needs.



Agency Service Area and Poverty Rate by County

Areas of concern during COVID-19



*“Food continued to be an issue. There have been more food drops happening in our 5 county area. Rent became the next big issue. We help as many as we can with the limited funds we have from a local grant.”*

—Carla Wetzel, Operations Director, CSI





# Delta Area Economic Opportunity Corporation (DAEOC)

As Head Start Centers were forced to close, Delta Area Economic Opportunity Corporation was determined to continue providing services to the 1,573 children enrolled. DAEOC invested in 50 cell phones and data plans to allow teachers to stay in touch with the families regularly. Education Specialists worked together to develop packets of learning materials and distributed these packets with meals at each of the centers via drive-through pickup. DAEOC's home-based programs delivered materials and food to their families while observing social distancing and other necessary precautions. Head Start staff also developed video content to share with their families, and teachers read to their classes virtually. Even DAEOC's President, Joel Evans, read a few of his favorite books to Head Start children.

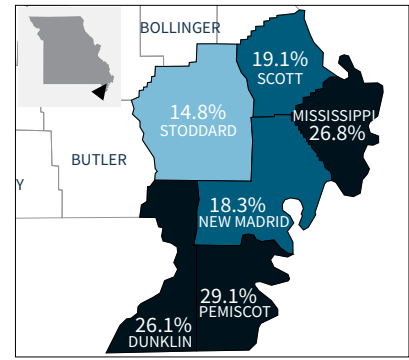
During the first full month of the pandemic, online learning became the norm for elementary and secondary kids throughout Southeast Missouri, but home internet access isn't available to all students. DAEOC created a visitor wifi profile at many of its facilities and moved the wireless routers to window locations nearest the parking lots. Staff posted signs in the windows stating free internet access would be available 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. seven days a week through the remainder of the school year. These "Drive-In Cyber Cafes" helped level the playing field for families without high-speed internet in the home.

Into the second month of the pandemic, DAEOC focused on food distribution. Many agency staff volunteered to distribute food through the Farmers to Families Program, which lasted six weeks. Staff from several departments volunteered to work Fridays for weeks picking up dairy and produce boxes in Sikeston and then distributing in Pemiscot and Dunklin Counties in the Missouri Bootheel. More than 1,000 pounds of produce, 1,000 dairy boxes, hundreds of half-gallon containers of milk, and at least two pallets of frozen chicken were distributed to families.

The idea of an adult learning center with online learning options had been in the works before the pandemic. This health crisis created a sense of urgency to develop a plan and submit an application for funding. DAEOC has received a \$1.2 million grant from the Department of Labor's Workforce Opportunity for Rural Communities Initiative to create an adult learning center in Portageville. It will offer various in-person and virtual programming.

The center will include classroom and virtual options for Life 101—an eight-week course on personal management designed to equip adults in areas such as job search, banking, and credit. The classroom will also be available as a platform for employer-specific training needs identified by the agency's industry partners. A computer lab will allow students to earn Microsoft Office Certifications through in-person and remote access classes.

A culinary lab will offer classes in healthy eating and food preparation on a budget and certification courses in food handling and hospitality management. The center will also be home to a digital media lab giving DAEOC the ability to produce and distribute a wide variety of content for people it serves. Meeting spaces will be available for partner agencies to offer wrap-around services, including health and mental health resources onsite. Telehealth connections will be developed with partners to give remote access to providers.



Agency Service Area and Poverty Rate by County

Areas of concern during COVID-19



*“Education Specialists worked diligently to create ways for the kids to continue learning through educational packets distributed contact free at the Head Start center.”*

—Reagan Collins, Strategic

Communications Specialist, DAEOC



# East Missouri Action Agency (EMAA)

As people were stocking up on food and supplies when COVID19 concerns arose, stores began limiting quantities. Families on a fixed income or larger families couldn't buy the food they needed. Items were either out of stock or limited by quantity for purchase.

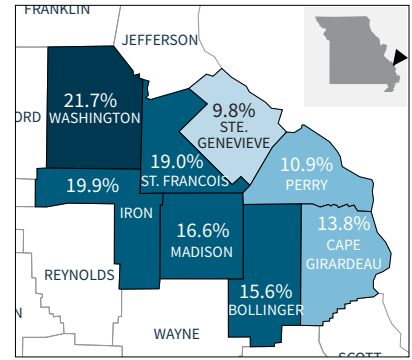
During the first month of the pandemic, East Missouri Action Agency saw more customers and people in their community without work. No work meant no income; people didn't have the means to feed their families. To address this need, EMMA started preparing lunches and snacks for anyone in the community. The agency sent boxes of non-perishable food items to families to help them make it through the weekends.

Into the second month, EMMA continued to provide lunches and snacks to the community and distributed food boxes for the weekends. Proffers Produce, a wholesale distributor in the area, donated fresh produce to the community, which EMMA volunteered to distribute. Today, Proffers Produce continues to donate fresh produce for the agency's Head Start staff to distribute to the community once a week.

To adapt to health and safety concerns and still meet client needs, agency staff worked every Tuesday and Thursday to prepare two meals and two snacks to pass out to those who needed it. EMMA allowed people to park and stay in their vehicles while staff with masks and gloves delivered meals to vehicles. EMMA staff also delivered their meals to people who did not have transportation.

To address the need for education to continue when the Head Start center was closed, EMMA took to social media. Staff posted videos of themselves reading books and other learning activities on the EMMA Facebook page so children could see their teachers and still learn a little while they were at home.

The agency took on a new initiative for children going into kindergarten because their time in the Head Start program was cut short. EMMA held a two-week summer program for children starting kindergarten in the fall to prepare them for this transition.



**Agency Service Area and Poverty Rate by County**

*Areas of concern during COVID-19*



*“Having a great team of workers that helped each other during the rough time was wonderful. We all came together to try to meet our kids family needs and the community as a whole.”*

*—Dorothy Moye, Head Cook, EMMA*



# Economic Security Corporation (ESC)

Like so many people all across our nation, Economic Security Corporation's North Joplin Head Start and South Joplin Head Start are working harder than ever to help their students and families during the pandemic. In particular, these Joplin Head Starts are ensuring the young children enrolled in the program and their families do not go hungry.

Agency staff coordinated with Joplin Public Schools to ensure Head Start children received meals while the Head Start center was closed.

"[The school] set it up to where we would be able to pick up meals and deliver to our families," said Amber Nichelson, a supervisor with South Joplin Head Start. "Between the North and South Joplin Head Starts, we are delivering 352 breakfasts and lunches each day."

The Head Start staff picked up the meals at lunchtime and then delivered lunch and the next day's breakfast at the same time. On Fridays, the staff delivered meals for Saturday and Sunday, so children received breakfasts and lunches every day of the week.

The agency's efforts have been crucial because many Head Start families have been laid-off or could not work without having childcare. Many families don't have transportation to pick up meals from the public schools during this time.

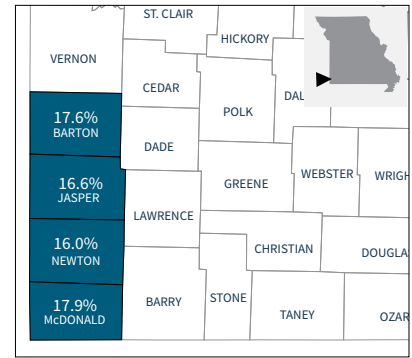
"Our families have been very appreciative of us keeping in touch with them and delivering meals," said Nichelson. "Families have told us how very hard it has been for them homeschooling four, five, and six children, and it's hard to even think about meals."

Delivering the food to Head Start children has allowed teachers and staff to stay connected to their Head Start children.

"We get to see our children from the windows and wave at those smiling faces," said Nichelson. "It is a way our children know we are still here for them. What makes me so thrilled is the compassionate staff we have that is willing to do this."

When Missouri shut down, Head Start staff delivered these meals to ensure children didn't go hungry.

"We appreciate so much hearing the parents thank us daily for all the help we are giving them by doing this," said Nichelson. "It really touches my heart to see all four of our buses going out to deliver these meals every day and helping our families. There is a lot of passion with doing this, and it makes me so proud to be a part of it. I really love what we do with helping all of these children and their families."



**Agency Service Area and Poverty Rate by County**

*Areas of concern during COVID-19*



*"During this time of hardship, we've had a lot of our families laid off or they cannot work without having childcare. We also have families without any transportation to even go pick up meals from the public schools."*

*—Amber Nichelson, South Joplin Head Start Supervisor, ESC*



# Jefferson Franklin Community Action Corporation (JFCAC)

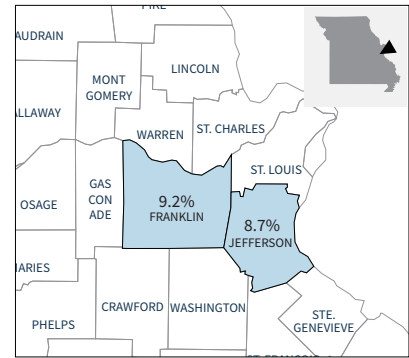
The initial concern Jefferson Franklin Community Action Corporation saw was the anxiety staff and customers had when schools and businesses closed their doors temporarily as the pandemic hit the area. The agency staff contacted current and former customers to ensure their needs could be met. In both Jefferson and Franklin Counties, staff participated in Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) meetings to stay informed of changing issues and resources to assist communities.

One of the most pressing needs during the first full month of the pandemic was brought to JFCAC's attention by Mercy Jefferson and Mercy Washington hospitals. The hospitals were concerned about homeless individuals who might contract COVID-19 and not have a place to quarantine during their recovery. A referral process was created through a collaboration of health and social service organizations, and a plan to assist homeless individuals during this challenging time was implemented. Each participating agency had a different role and services it would provide. After the hospital completed a referral, this information was sent to the health department and JFCAC to confirm the patient had been treated for COVID-19 symptoms and needed a safe place to quarantine. The health department worked with local EMT to transport the patient to a motel that had agreed to house the homeless person temporarily. JFCAC paid for the motel stay for up to 2 weeks so the individual could stay in one place and prevent the spread of the virus. Another organization provided meals to the people housed at the motel for quarantine to meet their nutritional needs.

In one case, Mercy Washington had a young mom who delivered her baby and did not have a place to go after being discharged. Before delivery, the mother and baby's father did not have their own home and temporarily stayed with a family member. Unfortunately, the family member contracted COVID-19, and the parents could not return to the house with their newborn. JFCAC was able to prevent this family from becoming homeless. The agency worked with the hospital and local motel to house the new family while applying for the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

Jefferson Franklin's Head Start staff also remained dedicated to meeting children's educational and social needs despite the pandemic. Usually, Head Start is only in session through May. The staff took an innovative approach by providing a virtual summer school session for children who enter kindergarten in the fall. The creation of this special summer session was a response to community needs. Family coaches continued to engage parents in their child's learning while providing food, hygiene, utilities, and employment resources.

JFCAC plans to facilitate the Community Trust process in both Jefferson and Franklin counties to address the community's new and ongoing needs. The agency plans to invite community members from all sectors to participate in this process to identify needs in their community and then create a plan to address them. The Community Trust process will bring together county government officials, school staff, mental health staff, health department staff, and low-income individuals to remove barriers people face and create solutions that help the community thrive. This combined effort will build strong leaders and create a renewed sense of community in an ever-changing world.



**Agency Service Area and Poverty Rate by County**

*Areas of concern during COVID-19*



*“JFCAC staff are resilient and continue to provide services and hope to customers at a very uncertain time. We are thankful for our community partners and know that we are all in it together.”—Paulette Hensley, Chief Community Development Officer/CSBG Director, JFCAC*



# Missouri Ozarks

## Community Action (MOCA)

The biggest concerns for Missouri Ozarks Community Action’s service area were safety and emergency services. Many people had lost their jobs or their work hours had been cut back significantly. People who had never requested assistance in the past were now reaching out to the agency.

There was a need for toiletries and hygiene items as there was limited availability of these items in local stores. MOCA responded by purchasing said items and reaching out to community partners to see what their customers needed. When families could not pay their utilities, the agency’s LIHEAP program secured additional funding. Community Services adjusted its budget to accommodate for other emergency support interventions.

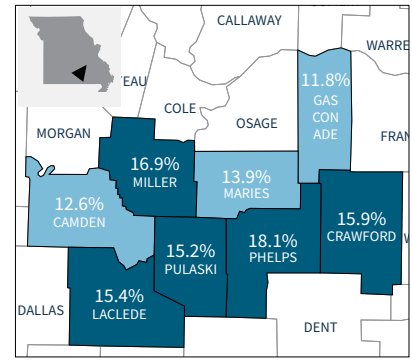
Families in rural areas could not get healthy foods from the local stores due to increased cost and their limited funds. Fresh meats, produce, and dairy were in low supply throughout the area. MOCA learned about the Farms to Families distribution program and reached out to local food pantries and schools to handle distributions.

Initially, food banks held food distributions in larger communities within MOCA’s service area to address need brought on by the pandemic. But smaller communities and rural areas needed this assistance as well. The agency compiled locations that could hold a distribution and had a list of families who were in need of nutritious foods. MOCA connected with Ozarks FoodHarvest, The Food Bank, and the St. Louis Food Bank to procure food boxes. The food banks were able to accommodate what agency customers needed. During this distribution, 3,994 pounds of food were distributed to 106 families, for a total of 408 individuals, in the communities of Conway and Phillipsburg. Food distribution was later held in Laquey, Eldridge, and Conway.

There was an influx of need in May because utility companies resumed issuing disconnect notices, and landlords resumed eviction notices for people behind on rent payments.

The Weatherization Department made changes to the structure of the building to make social distancing possible. The changes allowed operations to continue uninterrupted throughout the crisis.

While the stay-at-home orders were in place, MOCA Head Start formulated a plan that would best serve it families and staff. Staff worked from home to care for their own children who were also not attending school due to the shutdown. Weekly learning packets were created for the centers and were consistent, so the teaching staff could concentrate on contacting families and connecting them with resources as needed. The packets were designed to provide connection activities. The agency’s in-depth training through Trauma Smart (Crittenton Children’s Center) has taught staff that children--and adults--need connection to feel safe during difficult times. The connection activities were created for multi-ability levels and could easily be completed by the entire family. MOCA maintained 100% enrollment in Early Head Start and 99% enrollment in Head Start with active participation during this time. Staff delivered and picked up learning packets, while maintaining social distancing.



Agency Service Area and Poverty Rate by County

Areas of concern during COVID-19



*“We plan to update our technology to better serve clients in the new normal. Our organization is seeking to purchase mobile offices to be more visible and available in our rural areas.”*

—Mary Mullins, CSBG Director, MOCA



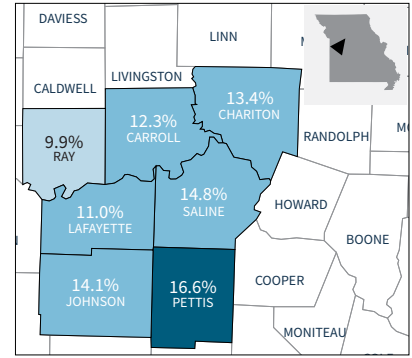
# Missouri Valley Community Action Agency (MVCAA)

Although COVID-19 has presented many challenges, Missouri Valley Community Action Agency feels this pandemic has allowed the opportunity to think outside the box about how the agency can provide services to families. The agency knows families have felt the stress—this has been a difficult time with many unanswered questions for people.

Missouri Valley Community Action Agency’s Head Start program wanted to find ways to reduce the stress families were feeling. The agency provided a six-week summer program for Head Start children. Staff informed Head Start families of health and safety measures that would be put in place to protect children from COVID-19 while attending the summer program.

Many working parents took advantage of the six-hour program, which alleviated the stress of finding child care for many families. The special summer program provided activities for the children and gave parents a break during the day. One hundred and sixty-five children participated in the program.

The agency also provided a summer snack program for all Head Start and Early Head Start families. The program included nutritious snacks that could be shared with all the children in the household. During a time of social distancing, staff especially enjoyed seeing the children’s faces as they collected their snack bags.



**Agency Service Area and Poverty Rate by County**

*Areas of concern during COVID-19*



*“COVID-19 has been a challenge in many ways, but it has also been a blessing as we work together with communities for the sake of all families and children.”*

*—Susan Huffmon,*

*Head Start Director, MVCAA*



# North East Community Action Corporation (NECAC)

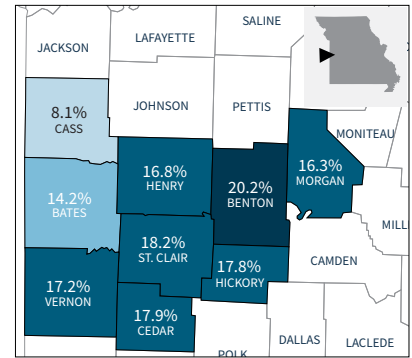
No two families are the same. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted individuals and families in different ways. These four stories highlight the unique circumstances of four different families North East Community Action Corporation recently helped.

Mary came into the Lincoln County NECAC office seeking help with her past-due electric bill. As a recently divorced woman, she was having difficulty paying bills on her alimony and disability check. Mary received resources from the agency's food pantries and completed a Summer Energy Crisis Intervention Program (ECIP) application. She made an appointment to return and receive help with online applications for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid. Mary also received support to create a personal email account and is now on her way to financial stability and health.

Staff worked with an elderly woman referred from DHHS for housing. She had been brought to the area by a family member and left in the community without any support. NECAC helped the client fill out applications for assistance and submitted those applications to area low-income housing locations. The agency housed the client in a motel for three weeks with funding from MHDC, while waiting for an available apartment. NECAC assisted with the first month's rent, security deposit, and utility deposit, which totaled \$1,050, for the woman's new apartment. The woman was finally able to have stable housing and now has a brighter outlook on life.

By bundling services with Section 8 Housing, a client who had entered the mainstream program was able to become stably housed. She had experienced abuse and homelessness numerous times. Without the financial assistance to cover a housing deposit, this client would have remained homeless. Unfortunately, the woman's dog got ahold of her removable partial dental and ruined it beyond use. The client was too embarrassed by her appearance to go to work. NECAC staff immediately partnered with several agencies to help obtain a new removable partial dental and secure Medicaid assistance, including behavioral health.

A family of nine seeking energy assistance learned about the SkillUP program and how it could help the parents obtain employment. They immediately decided the program was right for them as they had had no income other than a child's SSI for over a month and could not make ends meet and provide for their family. Both parents enrolled in SkillUP. With the assistance of work-related expenses and transportation-related Expenses from the SkillUP program, both parents obtained employment within two weeks in the program and no longer need help.



**Agency Service Area and Poverty Rate by County**

*Areas of concern during COVID-19*



# Ozark Action Community Action Corporation (OACAC)

Many people with low-incomes fall into high-risk categories for COVID-19. The people OACAC serves don't have the resources to stock up on food, hygiene, and cleaning products like many people did at the start of the pandemic, and many of these supplies were depleted from stores. Initial concerns in OACAC's service area included safety and wellbeing for the people the agency serves.

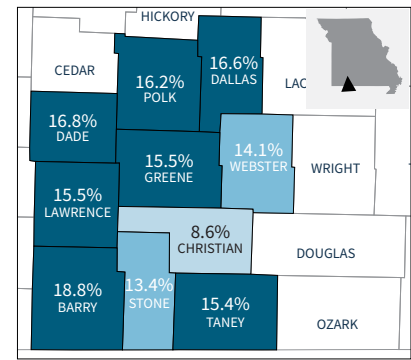
During the first full month of the pandemic, food security, employment, and childcare needs were top priorities in the OACAC service area. The agency continued its core programs to address these needs and secured additional grant funding to help meet the community's changing needs. Addressing childcare and early-childhood education required creativity.

OACAC's Head Start center in Hollister started a private Facebook group for its classroom teachers and students to stay connected while the center was closed. Each day Head Start staff provided activities centered around a weekly theme for Head Start families. A favorite activity among students was "flat teachers"—a play on Flat Stanley, a children's book character that travels places. Each child received a paper-doll-like cut out of their teacher. Parents took pictures of their children holding the flat teacher while doing various school activities, and students shared photos within the agency's Facebook group. Daily Flat Teacher challenges were available for the children to try.

One daily Flat Teacher challenge was "build something taller than Flat Teacher" and kids shared photos of stacked blocks. Some kiddos took Flat Teacher on their adventures. One child shared a picture of her family's garden with Flat Teacher. Parents said it was helpful for their child to have a picture of their teachers to stay connected with Head Start and child development.

The agency held its regular back-to-school fairs to ensure students and families received quality resource information, yet moved to a drive-through event for health and safety. In addition to school supplies, each family that registered for back to school assistance was provided with video content on back-to-school topics such as college planning, community services, family assistance, health information, and youth services.

OACAC also expanded its existing People's Pantry initiative, initially launched in 2017 to address food insecurity, during the pandemic when food insecurity increased substantially. The pantries are located outside and are accessible to community members at all hours of the day. Community members are encouraged to replenish items in the pantries. Adopting the motto of "take what you need, give what you can," the agency's original plan was to create 10 People's Pantries in the OACAC service area throughout the next fiscal year. However, due to COVID-19, the need for accessible food rose. Volunteers responded quickly to design, build, and stock the pantries. Volunteers of all ages and communities donated materials, created blueprints, and spent more than 95 hours building, painting, and delivering pantries to their locations. Because of community members' and staff's fantastic response and hard work, there are now 21 People's Pantries serving communities within OACAC's service area.



**Agency Service Area  
and Poverty Rate by County**

*Areas of  
concern  
during  
COVID-19*



*"We have made strong connections with our kiddos and to be apart for weeks at a time was hard. [Flat Teacher] was a way we could still be involved with the kids daily but at a distance."*

*—Lindsey Dumas-Bell, Resource Development Manager, OACAC*





# Ozark Action Inc. (OAI)

West Plains and the surrounding service area did not institute community shut down until April. As businesses closed, Ozark Action, Inc. received many calls from people who were concerned about how they would be able to pay rent and utilities for the upcoming months. People were laid-off from their jobs but were not receiving unemployment benefits yet.

Ozark Action, Inc. used Homeless COVID-19 funds and Salvation Army funds to focus on those needs. The agency also had some winter Energy Crisis Intervention Program (ECIP) funds remaining to assist families with utility costs.

There was an increased need for housing, utility bills support, and essential household items during May. OAI used Homeless COVID-19 funds, MHDC funds, and Salvation Army funds to focus on those needs. The remaining Energy Crisis Intervention Program (ECIP) helped families with utility costs.

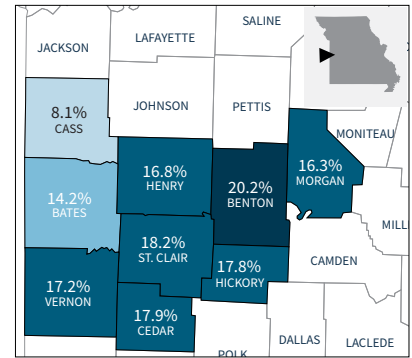
To address the community's ongoing needs, OAI plans to use the CSBG COVID-19 funds for ongoing needs in its service area, including rent, mortgage, utilities, and essential household items. The agency is looking into partnering with other community organizations to help fund their needs to serve individuals.

Recently, utility companies began shutting off service for individuals that deferred utility payment since the pandemic started. Some of those bills are more than the \$600 maximum that the summer Energy Crisis Intervention Program (ECIP) can cover.

In addition to assisting community members through these challenges, the agency adjusted its operations to keep staff and customers safe. Hours of operation were reduced to 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday. The agency closed Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. By closing the office for 85 hours between Thursday afternoon and Monday morning, OAI could maintain a healthier work environment.

The agency created a foyer inside the main door and was available for people to drop off or pick up paperwork, applications, or other information.

Head Start developed virtual learning plans for their students and also delivered meals daily to Head Start families. OAI received donations from various community partners to distribute essential household goods to people in the community.



**Agency Service Area and Poverty Rate by County**

*Areas of concern during COVID-19*



# People's Community Action Corporation (PCAC)

When disaster strikes, people living in poverty are often disproportionately affected. A lack of resources limits a low-income family's ability to prepare for emergencies and to recover. Families with low incomes have been significantly impacted as COVID-19 spread.

The pandemic brought many challenges to people in the City of St. Louis—People's Community Action Corporation's service area—who were already struggling to make ends meet. The City of St. Louis is among the ten counties with the highest poverty rate in Missouri. The most significant challenge PCAC saw its community members face during the pandemic was how to maintain housing when income is gone. The story of a woman we'll call Ms. Reynolds is one of many similar circumstances PCAC has addressed.

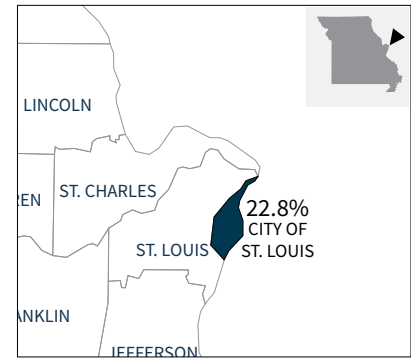
Ms. Reynolds lost her job and her housing almost overnight due to COVID-19. Her place of employment ceased operations, and she was now without a job. At the time, she was boarding a single room in a house. Yet when her college student daughter came to live with Ms. Reynolds after the college closed and sent students home, Ms. Reynolds was asked to vacate her boarding room.

Before COVID-19, Ms. Reynolds was in the process of stabilizing her life. She worked to improve her rental history and save money, but this job and housing loss left few options and a feeling of hopelessness. Without any other support, Ms. Reynolds and her daughter checked into a hotel. The cost of food while living in a hotel, the weekly room rate, and transportation costs consumed her pandemic aid each week. She was unable to save for a deposit on an apartment of her own.

When Ms. Reynolds came to PCAC, she had found a landlord considering taking a chance on her despite the lack of rental history, but he was still reluctant. PCAC staff reassured the landlord when he learned of the agency's involvement in securing housing for Ms. Reynolds. With this reassurance, the property owner was open to renting. PCAC secured the apartment for Ms. Reynolds by paying the deposit and two months' rent. Ms. Reynolds paid for an additional month using the pandemic funds as she was no longer paying the weekly hotel rate. The two women are now in their new apartment and say it is starting to feel like home. If her current place of employment does not reopen soon, Ms. Reynolds plans to work with PCAC to secure a new job.

In addition to addressing individual circumstances, PCAC has a new community resource food program underway in the St. Louis metropolitan area for residents impacted by COVID-19. In partnership with People's Family of Corporations and the St. Louis Area Foodbank, PCAC held drive-through food distributions every Friday in May. Each week more than 150 vehicles (families) received approximately 40 pounds of food. Ms. Reynolds and her daughter were among the people who utilized PCAC's food distribution. The food boxes included fresh fruits, vegetables, canned goods, and other shelf-stable food items.

The weekly drive-through food distribution was in addition to People's KIPP School partnership, which provided breakfast and lunch to families with students and children Monday through Friday each morning. The breakfast and lunch program provided lunches to more than 100 daily.



Agency Service Area  
and Poverty Rate by County

Areas of  
concern  
during  
COVID-19



*"In partnership with the KIPP School, our BJK Peoples Delmar site served as a food pick-up location for needy families to receive the School Program lunches for their children during this crisis, to ensure that our children receive healthy lunches each day." —Dwayne Butler, CEO, PCAC*



# South Central Missouri Community Action Agency (SCMCAA)

South Central Missouri Community Action Agency received an increase in requests for basic needs assistance—rent, food, essential supplies, utility assistance—as the pandemic first hit Missouri in March. The agency proactively addressed the needs of its community and maintained the health and safety of its staff. SCMCAA had access to discretionary funds initially intended for employment and education programs. However, clients struggled with more immediate needs due to the pandemic; therefore, the agency moved quickly to assist with these basic needs.

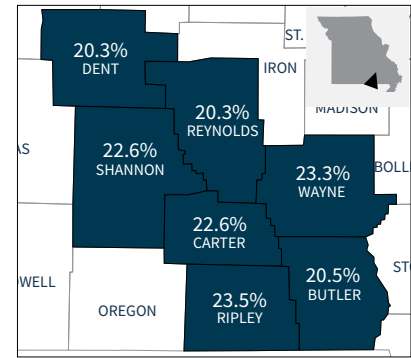
As the pandemic moved into the second month, the agency saw fewer direct requests for food assistance. Food banks and other organizations began distributing groceries to people in need, which helped address the area’s overall need. SCMCAA updated its agency resource guide so staff could make appropriate referrals to clients contacting its offices for food assistance.

When businesses closed in May, a family contacted SCMCAA with a unique situation. The wife just began work yet was laid off due to COVID-19. She was ineligible for unemployment benefits due to a lack of work history as she only worked five weeks before the layoff. Her husband was unable to work due to his health. He was in the appeal process for disability, but this came to a halt due to the pandemic. The wife resorted to picking up cans on the side of the road to make money, only to find out the place to turn them in was closed due to the pandemic. When the family found SCMCAA, the agency was able to pay two months of rent for the family using discretionary funds and has paid their electric bill with Energy Crisis Intervention Program (ECIP) funds. The wife has since returned to work, and they are waiting on the husband’s disability hearing.

The agency plans to increase its community involvement and utilize additional CSBG funds from the CARES Act to move to a Whole Family Case Management model. This new model would include expanding employment and training services in rural counties to stabilize workers and help local employers develop a more dependable workforce. The agency also plans to develop licensed, in-home daycare providers for rural counties in its service area without reliable childcare options.

Staff adapted quickly to continue serving clients while adhering to CDC guidelines. When the office was closed to the public, staff completed intake over the phone and utilized physical drop boxes, faxes, and email for documentation. The agency limited the number of staff in some locations, which meant that centers with more than 10 staff had to develop strict schedules of 10 staff members or less, each day. The agency utilized laptops so some staff could work remotely. SCMCAA began using Zoom platforms, Go to Meeting, and conference calls to stay in touch, for staff meetings and leadership meetings.

A major change for SCMCAA was to adopt a different service delivery model for its programs, which was accomplished by allowing for drop off, mail-in, and emailed documents.



Agency Service Area and Poverty Rate by County

Areas of concern during COVID-19



*“We really just tried to ramp up our efforts at direct service assistance, which was something that we have always felt was important”*

*—Ginger Hill, Community Services Director/LIHEAP Director, SCMCAA*



# West Central Missouri Community Action Agency (WCMCAA)

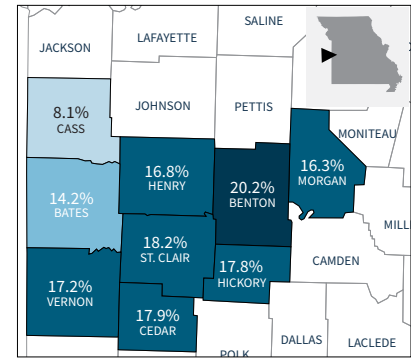
West Central Missouri Community Action quickly assembled an emergency response team as the COVID-19 pandemic hit Missouri. Food insecurity was a top concern identified by the team, so helping customers find food was a priority. Within the two weeks of the region's shutdown, West Central assembled a nine-county guide to emergency food resources. The food resource guide lists 56 community, school, and retail programs ranging from sheriffs' departments partnering with grocers on deliveries to schools organizing grab-and-go meals for children in quarantine. The guide is updated weekly and shared widely as new food assistance is available in the area.

The agency's Food Systems Project is also making fresh and healthy local food more affordable and easier to access. Development of wholesale farm-to-fork supply chains has been a focus of this work in tandem with West Central's affiliated community development corporation New Growth. However, during the pandemic, restaurants, and other wholesale customers, such as schools, shut their doors. More consumers began looking to buy food directly from farms as breakdowns in the global food supply chain left grocery shelves empty. West Central's Food Systems Project and New Growth continue to work with buyers and food suppliers to identify and develop opportunities for bringing local farm foods to communities, including emergency food response situations.

To further address food insecurity, two West Central food pantries transitioned to drive-through distribution during the shutdown. The agency's Raymore food pantry in more urbanized Cass County experienced significant growth. The number of families accessing food at the Raymore pantry increased from a pre-pandemic average of 200 to more than 450. The Raymore food pantry also delivered food to senior residents of West Central's nearby multifamily housing properties to assist in serving fixed-income and limited mobility customers during the ongoing pandemic.

West Central owns and operates 11 multifamily housing properties with 411 units in seven counties. Most of the residents are seniors and individuals with disabilities. Agency staff organized outreach and support activities, such as conducting weekly mental health check-in calls with each resident. The agency provided mental health packets and face masks to each resident. Monthly meals were delivered to individual residences instead of regular group meals.

The agency saw a spike in participation for the Housing Assistance Program. It was able to move people from its waiting list and into affordable housing by issuing more housing choice vouchers. Staff conducted program work over the phone and via the Internet to issue vouchers for affordable housing and work with landlords for that housing. By navigating this process online, customers without access to transportation did not have to find a ride to an in-person appointment or make extra time and arrangements for that travel. West Central expedited the lease process with landlords through a self-certification process for initial housing quality inspection, which federal regulators allowed during the pandemic. Housing Assistance Program staff also located affordable housing for customers who could not search for housing due to the shutdown and fewer apartment managers showing available rentals.



Agency Service Area and Poverty Rate by County

Areas of concern during COVID-19



*“West Central also celebrated the accomplishments of its customers during this unprecedented time. Family Self-Sufficiency celebrated three graduates during the pandemic.”*

*—Patty Cantrell, Community Wealth Building Director, West Central's New Growth CDC*

