



OACAA News

Community Action Agencies Help Struggling Families After Severe Storms Hit Ohio

When severe storms hit Ohio on June 29 it left hundreds of thousands of Ohioans without power, causing many low-income families to struggle to survive. Community Action Agencies throughout the state stepped in to offer assistance with anything from generators to help paying for prescription medication, food and other necessities. Below are some examples of the assistance agencies provided:

Northwestern Ohio Community Action Commission

The Northwestern Ohio Community Action Commission (NOCAC) provides services to a six county area (Defiance, Fulton, Henry, Paulding, Van Wert and Williams) that was severely affected by the recent storms. Paulding and Van Wert received the most damage with 90 percent of Paulding County losing power. NOCAC stepped up to the challenge of helping the low-income families in the area that were struggling from the power outages while coping with power outages in their own office.

After conducting a needs assessment, NOCAC determined the best use of their Summer Crisis HEAP (Home Energy Assistance Program) funds was to provide gas vouchers for those operating generators to provide electricity to their homes. While many residents had generators, the cost of gasoline to run them was between \$35 to \$50 or more per day and after several days without power, many families were finding they couldn't afford it any more. NOCAC provided vouchers for one- to three-days-worth of gasoline to 19 households. They partnered with the local Emergency Management Agency, United Way and the Salvation Army to distribute information to families and to provide response to immediate needs.

For eight families that were medically fragile, they provided hotel rooms by using CSBG (Community Service Block Grant) funds and leveraging that with the Salvation Army. For one family, their five year old child had been hospitalized for pneumonia when the storms hit. After the child's release the family was still without electricity. NOCAC utilized emergency assistance funds to provide a hotel stay for the family so that the child could recover comfortably until electricity was restored to their home.

Another family of five had two children with severe autism that were experiencing escalated problems due to the distress of living without electricity for five days. The family had a very limited income and did not have any family members with whom they could stay. Shelter at a hotel in the community where the children attend the School for Autism was provided until power was restored to their home.

With most of the power restored in the community, NOCAC is now hearing from storm victims that they are still struggling to survive after spending so much money to sustain themselves through the power outages from purchasing non-perishable foods, replacing spoiled foods, buying ice or gasoline for generators. Many now do not have the money for food, prescriptions or other bills. NOCAC is using CSBG funds and leveraged funding from the Salvation Army to provide prescription medication assistance to those in need and referring those needing food to the Ohio Department of Jobs & Family Services and local food banks.

Hocking, Athens, Perry Community Action

Hocking, Athens, Perry Community Action (HAPCAP) was without power themselves after the storms, but managed to open for business and assist families with their Summer Cooling Program. They were also able to provide emergency meals through their Regional Food Center throughout the weekend and the following week. A total of 1,253 meals were provided to those affected by the storms at no cost. Meals included breakfast, lunch and dinner. HAPCAP opened up to provide these meals on the Saturday immediately after the power outages and provided services through Friday.

Washington Morgan Community Action

The Washington Morgan Community Action Agency used their experience gained from surviving multiple floods in the community to step in and assist the local emergency management center in Washington County. With 60 percent of the area without power, the emergency management center did not have enough help to man the phones during the crisis after the storm. Washington Morgan Community Action staff members helped answer phones, including the CFO. They took calls and guided those in need to services the agency could offer to help them. Several staff members also picked up ice from a station set up by FEMA and bagged it into smaller quantities and delivered ice and water throughout the county.

Community Action Committee of Pike County

The Community Action Committee of Pike County was ready to help out residents affected by the storm with their food pantry. Luckily, the agency had recently held a fundraiser and had leftovers of bread, peanut butter and bottled water to help sustain the additional numbers of people seeking assistance. CAC Pike County estimates that they served between 150 to 200 more people than they normally would due to the storm. They also utilized HEAP funds to provide gas to people using generators to power their homes. This was done by setting up an account with a gas company to provide the family with a 30-day gas supply or until their power came back on, although because of the length of time it took to establish the program many people had their power back before they were able to provide assistance. The community of Pike County really stepped up to help those in need and many people donated fans to the agency. Because of these donations, the agency was able to provide fans to people who would normally not be eligible for HEAP assistance.

IMPACT Community Action

IMPACT Community Action in Franklin County was also without power after the storms, but they worked hard to relocate their critical services to other nearby agencies so that their clients and those in need could continue to receive necessary services. The Central Ohio Workforce Investment Corporation (COWIC) housed IMPACT's HEAP Summer Crisis Program, PIPP Plus Program and emergency rental assistance service. Because of IMPACT's rapid response, these temporarily-relocated services helped more than 200 people with utility assistance and air conditioners in heat that was 100 degrees.

Similarly, IMPACT relocated three of its core empowerment services programs, Workforce Development (Employment Plus), Re-Entry Work Readiness and Computer Literacy between COWIC and the Columbus Public Health Department to ensure the combined 46 customers enrolled in those programs had the opportunity to meet the completion requirements for those curriculum-based training programs.

The COTA bus strike created transportation barriers for many IMPACT customers during the week, but IMPACT mobilized its agency vans and provided round-trip transportation to the partner agencies for its customers that needed transportation assistance. They also utilized generators from their Weatherization department to provide enough power to answer phones and customer inquiries.

If your agency was able to assist your community after the storms, we want to know about it! Contact Colleen Stoker at (614) 224-8500 or colleen@oacaa.org to share your story.