



# Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency

SERVING BERRIEN, CASS, AND VAN BUREN COUNTIES

*Helping People. Changing Lives.*



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## **Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency Commemorates 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

**SMCAA Celebrates 40 Years of Providing Outstanding Programs and Services to the Vulnerable  
in Southwest Michigan**

On August 20, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act, effectively creating a variety of programs to take arms in his “War on Poverty”. This Act established the Community Action Network to help American families and communities overcome obstacles to poverty. Over 1,000 agencies across the country are working every day to create opportunities and transform the lives of their neighbors making communities stronger and helping families across the U.S. thrive.

Beginning October 1, 2021, SMCAA will be commemorating 40 years of servicing those in-need across Southwest Michigan. The Agency was established in 1982 to wage war on poverty in Van Buren County by promoting self-sufficiency for those of limited income, ensuring that all residents are able to live in dignity, implementing innovative and cost-effective programs to improve the lives and living conditions of the impoverished, providing support and instruction for everyone in need of assistance, and being a major voice of reason in establishing welfare system reforms. In 1986, the agency was incorporated and began providing human services to both Cass and Van Buren Counties. In 1992, Berrien County was officially added to its service delivery area.

For 40 years SMCAA has been dedicated to helping the low income communities in the tri-county region. Executive Director, Kim Smith Oldham, proudly states, “Community Action is successful every day in helping vulnerable individuals move towards economic security. SMCAA is able to use a range of resources and programs to meet the always-changing needs of our communities in a number of creative and impactful ways.”

Today, SMCAA offers over twenty programs and services which aid the low-income and otherwise disadvantaged residents of Southwest Michigan. Programs include senior and family food commodities, food pantries, emergency assistance (utility, housing, etc.), family homeless shelter, weatherization, and housing rehabilitation. “Every week is a new challenge,” says Community Services Manager, Yvonne Vidt, “Just yesterday SMCAA was called to action by the governor to disburse clean drinking water to the residents of the City of Benton Harbor after reports of high lead counts in the city’s water supply.”



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diverse people in need and supporting their journey towards economic security.*





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Despite experiencing budget cuts, shrinking resources, and increased demands for services following the economic hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, SMCAA has continued to make remarkable impact with assisting the low-income individuals and families of Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties. “This last year we have witnessed the critical and immediate need for services like rental assistance and utility assistance,” Operations Manager, Ashley Slack, says, “As an example, during our fiscal year 2020, SMCAA helped 226 households with emergency utility payments. In FY2021, we helped 1,059 households. That’s a 368% increase in numbers served!”

Every year, SMCAA serves nearly 5,000 individuals with necessary programs and services. In 2020, the Agency assisted 4,956 unduplicated individuals and 3,293 households with critically-needed services. This assistance included providing 2,047 night stays to families in the SMCAA homeless shelter, 424 rent payments to households facing eviction, and 54,634 food boxes to those suffering food insecurities.

SMCAA’s 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary offers employees, clients, and community partners an opportunity to reflect on the Agency’s impact and influence on the lives of those who’ve been served over the years. Looking forward, the future for SMCAA is bright. “Our staff is committed to the community we serve because it is right, it is wise, and, in our hearts and minds, we truly believe it is possible to conquer poverty. We are Community Action Strong.” attests Smith Oldham.

SMCAA will continue, as it always has, to focus on providing much-need programs and services in order to help people and change lives.

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The Southwest Michigan Community Action Agency (SMCAA) is a private, non-profit Community Action Agency - part of a state and national network. SMCAA brings together federal and state grants funds and donated dollars from local, private, and public sources. These resources are then directed into a number of core and special programs and service which aid the low income, vulnerable, and otherwise disadvantaged individuals and households residing in Southwest Michigan.

SMCAA is dedicated to empowering diverse people in need and supporting their journey towards economic security. Our Vision is to be a beacon of support in a strong, thriving community by helping people and changing lives.

Learn more about SMCAA at [www.smcaa.com](http://www.smcaa.com).



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