ABC Combats Economic Recovery and Racial Equity

In January 2021, Action for a Better Community (ABC) hosted its virtual Signature Conference series, “Racism is a Public Health Crisis – Attacking the 2 Pandemics.” Many people are frustrated, by the lingering impact of COVID-1. Communities across the nation continue to struggle with the uneven impact of racial disparities and systemic inequality.

Progress is being made and hope can be seen in communities all over the United States. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts are under way in both the public and private sectors to combat these biases. Although the existing systems which allow systemic racism to thrive and perpetuate poverty based on one’s zip code remain largely unchanged. These inequities were the focus of our 2022 Signature Conference.

The theme for ABC’s 2022 virtual Signature Conference Series was “Economic Justice for an Inclusive Recovery.” The conference goals and objectives were as follows:

- Identify and discuss laws and policies that are barriers to, and perpetuate economic inequality for families living in poverty
- Advance sustainable and inclusive economic justice outcomes across multiple systems
- Promote laws and practices for Closing the Racial Wealth Gap
- Discuss actionable steps for municipalities, financial institutions to improve and prioritize strategies which deal with systemic inequality in communities of color
- Address Social Determinants of Health through the lens of Economic Justice

Held on January 13th and 20th, participants discussed possible pathways to repair and ameliorate the historical injustices resulting from racism, red lining, and other forms of economic marginalization. Ensuring that the physical and social health of all people is a categorical imperative. Economic Justice is at the core of the Social Determinants of Health.

Recently, the federal government has responded to these issues with legislation aimed to address the economic impact. The American Rescue Plan, CARES Act, and Infrastructure Bill intend to bring substantial funding to states and local governments. This funding creates multiple opportunities to make systemic changes which will promote equity.

The content discussed at ABC’s 2022 virtual Signature Conference were centered on the theme “Economic Justice for an Inclusive Recovery.” In the first panel discussion, Closing the Racial Wealth Gap, the term “Greenlining” was introduced into Rochester’s lexicon.

The bank presidents outlined their intent and the products they have and/or are developing to provide financing to people, who have for too long, have been marginalized. We also heard from members of the Black Physicians Network and the
Black Nurses Association that a BIPOC birthing center would be a significant step to reduce the disparities in infant mortality and adult morbidity. Two members of the New York State delegation (a Senator and an Assemblyman) spoke about the in-process legislation that will address these unacceptable realities. We heard from Rochester City Council members, Monroe County Legislators and Rochester City School District board members about their willingness and intent to work collaboratively to bring equity to all Monroe County residents.

There were two very moving addresses given at the conference. The first was by Simeon Banister of the Rochester Area Community Foundation, who outlined the inclusive recovery focus of the recently formed North Star Coalition. The second was from Professor PLO Lumumba, founder of the PLO Lumumba Foundation, who joined us virtually from Nairobi, Kenya. He shared his thoughts on how international collaboration can fuel the war against poverty. Both presentations complemented each other. As stated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. “injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere.” We at Action for a Better Community and the National Community Action Partnership stand in solidarity with anyone fighting for justice. We are justice workers.

Consistent with the conference theme, we want to emphasize that recovery efforts which are “race and place neutral” will not address the historical harm that is a primary antecedent to our economic conditions, primarily in the City of Rochester. To reiterate, justice is the premise. Harm has been done. That harm needs much more than recognition. It requires repair. The Signature Conference is part of ABC’s Social Justice Initiative. It is part of our work to seek the justice that has been denied so many. It is our work to advocate for the systemic change that will remove the foundation under which poverty proudly stands. Naturally, much follow up is required. We will keep the public informed as we do so.

On behalf of ABC’s staff and board of directors, we extend our gratitude and thanks to our presenters and panelists. ABC is also grateful to the sponsors and supporters of our Social Justice Initiative; M&T Bank; Key Bank; Excellus Blue Cross Blue Shield, the University of Rochester, the ESL Federal Credit Union; as well as our other sponsors: https://www.abcinfo.org/2022-signature-conference-videos/. To learn more about how ABC is engaged and committed to combatting Economic Recovery and Racial Equity contact Jerome H. Underwood (junderwood@abcinfo.org), President & CEO, Action for a Better Community, call (585) 325-5116 or visit www.abcinfo.org.

Meet the new Associate Director of Contract Processing

Division of Community Services (DCS) is thrilled to announce the promotion of Aimee Kollar. Aimee has been promoted to the Associate Director of Contracting Processing for DCS. Aimee joined the DCS team in August of 2017, as a Community Services Program Analyst (CSPA) 1, for the Administrative Review Unit. During her time as a CSPA 1, she was trained to review all CSBG funded contracts as well as to conduct routine monitoring.

In November 2019, Aimee was promoted to the Supervising Analyst of the Administrative Review Unit. In this position, Aimee has worked diligently with the CSBG Network and the Administrative team developing the contracts funded by CSBG. She provided oversight and guided the completion of the Annual Reports for DCS.

In the role as the Associate Director of Contract Processing, Aimee will continue to focus on developing CSBG contracts for discretionary projects aligned with the State Plan, processing contract and amendments, and provide training and technical assistance and support for the network in regard to contracting requirements. Prior to joining DCS, Aimee worked for Fulmont Community Action Agency, where she learned how valuable Community Action Agencies are in combating the causes and conditions of poverty. Aimee is looking forward to making an impact in her new role, and she is surrounded by a team of supportive professionals, who are passionate to see the great work of the Community Action Network continue.
NYSERDA Programs for Income-Eligible Residents

If you serve income-eligible New Yorkers, or own income-eligible rental property, New York State. (NYSERDA) can assist with finding ways to save money and energy. Many New Yorkers are eligible for programs, including:

- **Assisted Home Performance** – incentives and discounts offered on energy-efficient home upgrades. Get started with a no-cost home energy assessment, and income-eligible participants could receive discounts up to 50% off the cost to improve the homes energy efficiency. Improvements can include heating system upgrade, air sealing and insulation.

- **EmPower** – provides no-cost energy efficiency solutions to income-eligible participants. Whether the customer owns or rents, a participating contractor will assess the home for free energy upgrades, such as lighting installation and appliance replacement.

- **Solar for All** – homeowners and renters can benefit from solar and access clean energy. NYS is funding solar farms to save on their electricity bills, no up-front costs or installation hassle.

There are statewide programs available for multifamily property owners:

- **Multifamily Performance Program** – this program can increase the value of a building and lower operational cost, while providing comfort and satisfaction to tenants. NYSERDA could provide an incentive up to $3,500 per unit to make energy upgrades.

- **Retrofit** – building owners can partner with construction, design, and financial professionals to incorporate high-performance retrofit solutions for affordable multifamily buildings. Find out how the property can participate in an upcoming capital investment project.

To learn more about any of these programs visit: NYSERDA or subscribe to receive information and updates.

Office for New Americans: Ramirez June Initiative Webinar

This March, to commemorate Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, the ONA Ramirez June Initiative is hosting a webinar about child development and the early identification of disabilities to support service providers to assist new American families with young children.

The ONA Ramirez June Initiative webinar, “Empowering New American Parents in the Early Identification of Disabilities in Children,” will be held on Thursday, March 3, 2022, from 3-4 p.m. The ONA Ramirez June Initiative webinars will feature Dr. Romina Barros, Chief Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrician at NYU Langone - Long Island, who serves as the NYS Act Early Ambassador to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC’s “Learn the Signs. Act Early. (LTSAE)” campaign encourages parents and caregivers of children, ages 0-5, to track their child’s development and get help early if they have any concerns. The ONA Ramirez June Initiative is partnered with the NY Acts Project to expand the use of LTSAE to address the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic, which made it more difficult for families with young children to identify disabilities and get help early. In partnership with NY Acts, Service providers who join this virtual training will learn how to help the new American parents they serve to celebrate and track their children’s growth, access tools to identify early signs of disabilities, and know how to get help if they have a concern about their child’s development.

**Sign Up for a Free Copy of Voyage**

*Voyage* is a resource book which helps new American families learn about children’s growth and identify signs of disabilities early. This multi-lingual resource book was developed by the ONA Ramirez June Initiative in partnership with *NY Acts* and features illustrations by Pat Standish who led Community Action Angels and was made in collaboration with writer and publisher Vinnie Taylor.

Service providers engaging new American families can sign up to receive free copies of *Voyage*, as well as multi-lingual informational material developed by the CDC, mailed to them at no cost by the ONA Ramirez June Initiative in partnership with *NY Acts*. Free informational material about child development is available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Bengali, Haitian Creole, Korean, Arabic, and Somali.


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**Celebrate National Consumer Protection Week with DCP**

Every year, consumer advocates and educators recognize National Consumer Protection Week. During the first full week of March, NYS Division of Consumer Protection (DCP) focuses on raising consumer awareness of their rights, as well as make them aware of current frauds and scams to avoid. From March 6th through March 12th, 2022, look for ways to learn how to be a smart consumer and educate the community.

What should you look for? Consumers may be interested to learn the top consumer complaints in their respective states and learn more about ways to avoid common consumer issues. DCP shares some of these complaints and offers advice on how to respond. See some of these concerns and remedies below:

**Top Consumer Complaints to DCP in 2021:**

- **Orders/Deliveries:** Hundreds of New Yorkers submitted complaints about their orders and deliveries. Remember to always shop on trusted sites to do online shopping. Review return policies prior to purchase and keep track of receipts just in case. Learn about the Federal Mail, Internet, or Telephone Order Merchandise Rule of 1975, which requires retailers to ship products ordered by mail, phone, or online in a reasonable timeframe.

- **Merchandise/Product:** Sometimes the product a consumer receives falls short of expectations. Consumers should always read product specifications to be sure of the product they expect to receive. When shopping for children, check that products are age-appropriate for their safety—manufacturers are required to provide this information on the packaging. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) updates consumers regularly on product recalls, a great tool to use to shop safely.

- **Covid-19 Related Issues:** The coronavirus pandemic continued to impact consumers in 2021, leading to hundreds of complaints. Many of the complaints focused on entertainment and/or travel. As these industries continue to rebound from the pandemic, consumers should review contracts carefully, especially cancellation and refund policies. Consider purchasing trip insurance to protect your losses and be sure to review the terms and conditions to see what trip insurance does and does not cover. Ticket sellers are required to refund the cost of the ticket if an event is canceled, but consumers should review the ticket policy in the event of a postponement.

- **Throughout National Consumer Protection Week,** consumers are encouraged to engage and learn more about their rights and responsibilities as consumers.
The NYS Division of Consumer Protection is committed to supporting and advocating for consumers year-round. For more tips, check out the Division of Consumer Protection website at: https://dos.ny.gov/consumer-protection.

DCP is available to speak with consumers and assist in resolving concerns. The Consumer Assistance Helpline 1-800-697-1220 is available Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm, excluding State Holidays, and consumer complaints can be filed at any time at https://dos.ny.gov/file-consumer-complaint.

Connect with the Division of Consumer Protection on social media for more information regarding National Consumer Protection Week. Follow DCP via Twitter at @NYSConsumer or Facebook at www.facebook.com/nysconsumer.

Did you Know...

**Reminder: Annual Report due March 8, 2022**

The Division of Community Services appreciates your efforts in working to complete your Annual Report submissions by March 8, 2022. By accurately completing the Annual Report, you help to put an even brighter spotlight on the important work that Community Action Agencies do each day. Outlined below are a few reminders and common errors to avoid.

**Reminders:**
- **DO NOT** rename the Smart Forms, it will lead to submission errors in the upload process
- **CARES Annual Report** data should be limited to CARES funded outcomes, services, and clients for **FFY 2021**
- **Regular CSBG Annual Report** data should include both CSBG and CARES funded outcomes, services, and clients for **FFY 2021**
- **ALL** submissions need to be directed to dosDCSNetInfo@dos.ny.gov. **DO NOT** submit Smart Forms or Narratives to your Program Analyst

**Common Errors to Avoid:**
- When reporting on NPIs in Module 4, your “Actual Results” cannot exceed you “Number of Individuals Served”
- Before editing a Smart Form, make sure you have clicked “Enable Content”. If you do not click this, the form won’t save properly, and additional errors might incorrectly display
- When saving the Smart From, **DO NOT** save it as a different type of Excel File, the Smart Form should be saved as a .XLSM. When the file extension is changed, it can generate error/warning messages which may be incorrect
- Where possible, please make sure you are reporting unduplicated counts. An unduplicated count in the CSBG Annual Report is counting one person one time for any given service, outcome, or demographic regardless of the number of times they received a service or obtained an outcome

Should you have any questions, please submit them to the dosDCSNetInfo@dos.ny.gov mailbox and our staff will respond to your question. Our staff are available to setup meetings to resolve any issues you might encounter. The sooner we catch the error, the easier the submission process will be for everyone.

**Organizational Self-Assessment: A Strategy to Build Capacity**

**Wednesday, March 30, at 2 PM ET | 1 PM CT | 12 PM MT | 11 AM PT**

Is your organization looking to move to the next level, but unsure where to start? The National Community Action Partnership is excited to launch a new Organizational Self-Assessment tool that is designed in partnership with the Nonprofit Risk Management Center specifically for Community Action Agencies to gain critical insight into key areas of organizational operation and strategy. This insight can help inform and focus agency action to strengthen practice and build capacity. This webinar will discuss the new tool, its use, and how to utilize the results to plan operational improvements to move your CAA towards excellence.

[Click here](#) to register.
Condolences to the Loved Ones of Iris A. Johnson

It is with great sadness and deepest condolences to announce the passing of Iris A. Johnson, Chief Executive Office of the Economic Opportunity Commission of Nassau County, Inc. Ms. Johnson was a visionary and leader who inspired many throughout Nassau County, Suffolk County and other areas of New York State. She demonstrated a purpose-driven leadership, a passion for high standards of excellence, and a champion for women, children, and families. The Division of Community Services wishes her family, friends, and colleagues, peace, comfort, and support during these difficult times.

Additional Resources for the CSBG Network

Child Tax Credit (CTC)
The Office of Community Services recently released a Dear Colleague Letter regarding the expansion of the Child Tax Credit (CTC) in the American Rescue Plan, signed into law by President Joe Biden on March 11, 2021. Visit whitehouse.gov/childtaxcredit for more information.

Check out the new videos released to help people understand CTC and how to get their refund.

- **File Your Taxes to Get Your Child Tax Credit** — This one-minute animated video explains what the CTC is and that the only way to get the credit is to file taxes. It also tells how to find free tax filing sites.

- **Three Mothers Share About the Child Tax Credit and How It Has Helped Their Families** — This two-minute video features three mothers who share why it is so important to file your taxes to get your refund and how the CTC has improved their lives.

Emergency Broadband Benefit

The Emergency Broadband Benefit is a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) program created to help families and households who cannot afford or are struggling to afford internet service. This new benefit will connect eligible households to jobs, critical healthcare services, virtual classrooms, and more.

For more information, including eligibility requirements, visit: https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit.

Outreach kits are available in multiple languages: https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-broadband-benefit-outreach-toolkit.

It is important to note that the program runs as long as there are funds to support it. All eligible participants are encouraged to apply ASAP!

Reach out to Gregg Collar (Gregg.collar@dos.ny.gov) from the NYS Department of State, Division of Consumer Protection, who will be able to provide you with further direction and answer any specific questions you might have regarding the Emergency Broadband Benefit.

Resources for Responding to COVID-19

- Community Action Partnership: COVID-19 Community Needs Assessment
- CAPLAW: Coronavirus Updates for the Community Action Network
- NASCSP Coronavirus Resources
- NYSCAA Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resources
- Food Pantries across New York State
- New York State Department of Health

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