L.E.A.P. Announces New Executive Director: Shelley Smith

L.E.A.P. (Learning, Employment, Assistance, Partnership), the community action agency for Washington County, is excited to announce the hiring of Shelley Smith to fill the Executive Director role at the organization. Shelley was previously the Director of Program Support at Open Door Mission and brings with her a multitude of experience in non-profit work within the Warren/Washington Counties community. Shelley recently led a well-received virtual, 'Bridges Out of Poverty' training for all L.E.A.P. Head Start and is a familiar face for many of the L.E.A.P. staff.

With experience in program development, strategic planning and community training, as well as a Master’s in Nonprofit Management from Northeastern University, Shelley brings a varied background of knowledge, leadership, human resources, and more to the role. Shelley is passionate about community sustainability and the importance of accessible resources.

The staff and community at L.E.A.P. are excited for this new chapter. Shelley began her role at L.E.A.P. on March 14th. Please take a moment to introduce yourself and welcome Shelley to the Community Action network!

Mental Health of New American Children

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased mental health concerns, including for young children. Mental health awareness is growing, and stigma against mental health conditions and seeking help is slowly decreasing. Yet new American families still face barriers accessing vital mental health resources, information, and services. On April 7, 2022, 2:30-4 p.m., the ONA Ramirez June Initiative webinar, “Understanding Trauma and Supporting the Resilience of New American Children,” will help service providers understand how early childhood experiences affect children’s growth and development. Attendees of this virtual training will learn how to strengthen the resilience of the new American families they serve, what resources are available, and how to get help. This webinar will feature the NY Act Early Ambassador to the CDC as well as the New York State Office of Mental Health. Register: [https://bit.ly/SupportingResilience](https://bit.ly/SupportingResilience)

Please practice social distancing and wear a mask whenever possible for your safety and the safety of others.
Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

This March we celebrate individuals with developmental disabilities. Since 2019, the Office for New Americans Ramirez June Initiative strives to help affirm the dignity, value, respect, contribution, and worth of all individuals with developmental disabilities (DD) by supporting immigrants with DD, a community that has faced barriers accessing the support they need. Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month has been celebrated since 1987. This year’s national theme for DD Awareness month is “World’s Imagined.” Our world is changing as we move beyond the pandemic and examine how individuals with DD are living longer and more productive lives. “Worlds Imagined,” inspires us to explore new and everchanging opportunities for individuals with DD and multiple cultural identities. The ONA Ramirez June Initiative offers supports directly to multi-lingual immigrant communities as well as to service providers in order to help immigrants with DD and their families connect with vital services that promote their well-being and full participation in their communities. If you would like to connect with the ONA Ramirez June Initiative, contact Cynthia.Stewart@dos.ny.gov. #DDawareness #DDAM2022 #WorldsImagined

Saving Lives and Improving Public Health

COVID-19 vaccines continue to save lives and improve public health for the entire community. However, vaccines only work when residents not only have equitable access, but also have accurate information from trusted sources and a feeling of comfort and safety when accessing health services.

Thanks to a grant from the New York Department of State, Neighbors Link ensures that immigrants across Westchester County have the resources they need to be supported during COVID-19 and to feel confident in receiving COVID-19 vaccines. A wide variety of health care providers have generously partnered with Neighbors Link to support the immigrant community in these efforts.

These trusted messengers have been critically important from the earliest days of scheduling immigrant essential workers for vaccines to pop-up clinics right now where children are receiving first doses alongside parents receiving boosters. As Rosemary, a Neighbors Link client, stated, “The option of getting the vaccine at Neighbors Link was very good because other places didn’t understand our work schedules and needs. The other places that offered the vaccine were not convenient for me and my son. We felt very good going to Neighbors Link.”

Throughout the pandemic, Neighbors Link has made nearly 2,000 vaccine appointments, held 23 vaccine clinics, and called nearly 5,000 people to provide accurate information about COVID-19 vaccines. As a result of this intensive outreach, over 90% of the immigrant population served has been vaccinated. Systemic health inequities remain a problem for immigrant communities, but lessons learned from the pandemic show that using trusted health care partners to build confidence in the immigrant community can successfully support public health goals.
Low Income Household Water Assistance Program

The Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) helps low-income households pay for the cost of water and sewer services. The program can assist households who have past due bills and can prevent water and sewer services from being shut off.

Benefits per Household

- Up to a maximum of $2,500 per water and sewer provider, or
- $5,000 if water and sewer services are combined
- Paid directly to the household’s water and/or sewer provider(s)

Eligibility is based on:

- Income,
- Household Size,
- Citizenship/Immigration Status, and
- Amount owed to water and/or service provider(s)

To learn more about LIHWAP, eligibility, income limits, and benefits, click here or call 833-690-0208.

Water and/or Sewer Providers: In order to receive LIHWAP payments on behalf of eligible households, providers can go to the NYS LIHWAP Vendor Portal and complete:

- NYS LIHWAP Vendor Registration
- Upload a Substitute W9 form, and
- Sign the NYS LIHWAP Vendor Agreement

Payments are issued directly to providers through the NYS Office of the State Comptroller (OCS). Please contact the LIHWAP Bureau at 518-486-4786 or NYSLIHWAP.vendor@otda.ny.gov for more information.

2022 Dr. King Career Fair

The 2022 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Career Fair, sponsored by the New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL), will be held in-person at the Empire State Plaza Convention Center in Albany on April 7, 2022, from 11:00AM-3:00PM.

The Dr. King Career Fair will feature the following services:

- Networking with hiring businesses
- Resume review
- On-site interviews and
- Pop-up Career Center.

Pre-registration is strongly encouraged. Interested job seekers should register at https://webapps.labor.ny.gov/dews/job-fair/.

Free Online Tool for Citizenship Applications – Training on Citizenshipworks

On Thursday, April 7, from 11am – 12pm, the New York State Office for New Americans (ONA) will be hosting a training webinar, in partnership with Immigration Advocates Network (IAN), on helping immigrants complete their naturalization form using Citizenshipworks, a free, online tool that makes applying for citizenship easy and accessible to all.

This webinar is open to all CAAs. Join this training to learn how you can refer clients to their nearest ONA Opportunity Center to access Citizenshipworks, and how your agency can plug into ONA’s “Virtual” Opportunity Center to connect applicants in need of citizenship assistance. Presenters will also share best practices from Citizenshipworks Partners who use Citizenshipworks to provide citizenship assistance to their communities.

ONA is excited to share this training opportunity and information on how IAN can help you build a program that provides legal and technological resources to promote citizenship in your community.

Register here: https://forms.office.com/g/GW4eQRsGPz
Travel Smart with Division of Consumer Protection!

Warmer weather is here, and with it, peak travel season. With pandemic-era restrictions gradually being lifted, many New Yorkers are excited to take trips with their loved ones. The novel coronavirus pandemic caused major disruptions in travel patterns, but also taught consumers valuable lessons about traveling responsibly. Consumers can be better prepared to navigate the marketplace and spend responsibly in the aftermath of the pandemic.

SHOPPING SMART FOR TRAVEL

• **Do your research.** Consumers should always weigh in the factors of a trip before purchase, including price, location, availability of activities and cancellation policies. Also consider whether the location has any Covid-19 restrictions in place, such as testing or vaccination status, prior to booking the trip.

• **Get all confirmations in writing.** To safeguard against scams via changes in agreements, consumers should always get confirmation of plans in writing, whether booking online, over the phone, or in person. Retailers are required to disclose terms and conditions to consumers—always receive a copy of the agreement and save it for reference.

• **Beware of “all inclusive” offers.** All-inclusive offers sound great but can have hidden charges and fees in their terms and conditions. Always inquire about mandatory fees that may not appear in the advertised price, such as resort fees and taxes, and be sure to read the fine print when taking advantage of an “all-inclusive” offer.

• **Try to pay with a credit card, if you can.** Credit cards often offer more protection than paying by cash or check and can even offer perks like trip insurance or concierge service.

• **Review your travel agreements.** Travel agents and promoters MUST send full written disclosures of all travel services to consumers within five days of purchase or agreement, according to the New York State Truth in Travel Act (NY GBL Article 10-A, specifically NY GBL §157-a). Always read through travel agreements to ensure you are receiving the services you expect—consumers can choose to cancel up to midnight on the third business day after receipt of the agreements.

• **Use reputable travel agents/tour companies:** Travel agents and tour companies are not licensed in New York State, so consumers should research thoroughly when choosing an agent or company to work with. Keep track of arrangements and contracts, and review terms and conditions, especially the cancellation and refund policies.

• **Consider trip insurance and whether you need a 'Cancel for Any Reason' policy:** Travel insurance can offer consumers relief in case of emergency before or during their trip, but they do not cover all events. Read through trip insurance policies carefully and inquire about what events may not be covered before purchase. Also consider adding ‘Cancel for Any Reason’ coverage at an additional cost—just note that those policies are usually more expensive and do not cover the full cost of the trip.

Increased spending also results in bad actors taking advantage of consumers. If you come across one of these deals, you may be looking at a scam, according to the Federal Trade Commission:

• **You have “won” a free vacation.** Scammers will sometimes entice consumers with a free trip, but then disclose fees or deposits to get access. A prize should not include spending money and is likely a scam.

• **The details of your trip are vague.** Consumers may be offered a stay in a five-star hotel or on a luxury cruise line, but then few details about the trip are presented. Always confirm and review the name of the company and location of the trip details.

• **You have limited time to accept the offer.** Scammers often pressure consumers to make quick decisions about a deal, making it likely that the consumer will not have time to investigate the offer. Never feel pressured to agree to any terms you have not reviewed on your own.
• **You must pay in an uncommon way.** Cryptocurrency, wire transfer, and gift cards are difficult to trace and perfect for scammers looking to take advantage of consumers, who will not be able to recoup their losses if they pay this way. If a travel company insists that you pay in one of these ways, decline the offer and report the company.

The New York State Division of Consumer Protection provides voluntary mediation between a consumer and a business when a consumer has been unsuccessful at reaching a resolution on their own. 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 [www.dos.ny.gov/consumerprotection](http://www.dos.ny.gov/consumerprotection).

Travel insurance is regulated by the Department of Financial Services. New Yorkers with complaints about a travel insurance policy or ‘Cancel for Any Reason’ coverage should contact DFS at [www.dfs.ny.gov/complaint](http://www.dfs.ny.gov/complaint) or through the DFS Consumer Hotline at (212) 480-6400 or (518) 474-6600 (Monday through Friday, 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM).

For more consumer protection tips, follow the Division on social media at Twitter: [@NYSConsumer](https://twitter.com/NYSConsumer) and Facebook: [www.facebook.com/nysconsumer](http://www.facebook.com/nysconsumer).

**Experience Women’s History in NYS**

To highlight iconic women in history in New York and their impact, from Susan B. Anthony's Suffrage movement to Eleanor Roosevelt's human rights work to Lucille Ball's entertainment industry firsts, below are eight places to experience women’s history in New York.

Remember to social distance and wear a mask as required by state guidelines. Call ahead and check websites and social media to make sure attractions are open and available. Click on the links below for more information:

- [Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site](http://www.nps.gov/erri/index.htm)
- [National Women's Hall of Fame](http://www.nwhof.org)
- [Lucille Ball Desi Arnas Museum](http://www.southbaymuseum.com)
- [National Susan B. Anthony Museum & House](http://www.susanbanthonyhouse.org)
- [Women’s Rights National Historical Park](http://www.nps.gov/worh/index.htm)
- [Matilda Joslyn Gage House](http://www.mjgh.org)
- [Harriet Tubman National Historical Park](http://www.nps.gov/haut/index.htm)
- [Alice Austen House](http://www.aicha.org)

**Up to $1 Million Awarded to Existing Opioid Treatment Program**

On March 18, 2022, Governor Kathy Hochul announced the availability of up to $1 million in funding for Opioid Treatment Program (OTP) Providers to establish additional locations outside of their current facilities. This initiative is designed to help bring these services to currently underserved locations, and to address the growing need for OTP services across New York State.

Office of Addiction Services and Supports Commissioner Chinazo Cunningham said, "Treatment and other resources offered by opioid treatment programs in New York State are vital in addressing the ongoing overdose crisis and saving lives. Treatment is safe, effective, and life-saving, and with this funding we are helping more people across the state access the care that they need."

Up to five currently operating OTP providers will receive one-time awards of up to $200,000 to establish additional OTP locations. These facilities are established as part of an existing OASAS-certified OTP but are not in the same location, and there are no minimum or maximum distance requirements from the original OTP. Funding awarded can be used for building repairs and maintenance, including renovations, medical supplies and equipment, and furniture.

Funding is being provided through the Federal Substance Abuse Prevention & Treatment Block Grant Supplemental award and is being administered through the NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports. The RFA for this project and other information is available [here](http://www.dos.ny.gov/).
Over $500 Million in Pandemic Relief Distributed to NYS Small Businesses

Governor Kathy Hochul announced that nearly 29,000 small and micro businesses throughout New York State have been awarded over $500 million in grant funds through the COVID-19 Pandemic Small Business Recovery Grant Program. The program was created to provide flexible grant assistance to small businesses, micro-businesses and for-profit independent arts and cultural organizations in the State of New York who have experienced economic hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Small Businesses are the backbone of our state’s economy, and in order to truly recover from the COVID-19 crisis our small businesses need a helping hand," Governor Hochul said. "It is imperative that we continue to move funding out efficiently and quickly so businesses can get back on their feet and get back to business."

Governor Hochul is committed to continuing to support small businesses. She has advanced a proposal to provide up to $200 million to support early-stage small businesses to ensure they are successful long term as New York recovers from the effects of COVID-19.

Micro-businesses—those with ten employees or less—have received 98% of these awards, and businesses that are woman or minority owned have received 90% of awards. These are businesses that have been hit the hardest by the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, and often times have the least access to resources. The average grant award is approximately $17,425.

Funding is still available for the program. One-on-one assistance, webinars, a call center that has already logged nearly 295,000 calls and materials in 14 languages are examples of support available through Empire State Development, to help small businesses access this critical funding.

To learn more about this and other COVID-19 relief programs, visit https://esd.ny.gov/business-pandemic-recovery-initiative. Empire State Development has a network of partner organizations that provide instruction, training, technical assistance, and support services to entrepreneurs and small businesses statewide that will provide assistance with New York State and federal pandemic relief grant and loan applications. For more information visit https://esd.ny.gov/organizations-available-assist-businesses.

Did you Know...

CARES Spending Reminder

The New York State Division of Community Services recognizes the great efforts all Community Action Agencies have made to spend down their CARES allocations. As of 3/2/2022 over 70 million dollars of CARES funding has been spent. However, around seven million dollars in CARES funding remains unexpended. **This is a reminder that all CARES funds must be spent by September 30, 2022.** The CARES grant award stipulates that there will be **no carry over of CARES funding**, any remaining funds will be forfeited. If you require technical assistance, wish to initiate an amendment, or want to discuss your CARES funding in more detail, please reach out to your assigned program analyst.
Consolidated Appropriations Act 2022

The Consolidated Appropriations Act 2022 was signed by President Biden on March 15, 2022, extending the 200% FPL eligibility. This means agencies can continue to serve customers using the 200% FPL until September 30, 2022. The language applies to FFY 2021, CARES and FFY 2022 funds made available October 1, 2021, through September 30, 2022. For further information and to view the signed bill, please visit: https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/legislation/2022/03/15/bill-signed-h-r-2471/

Please reach out to our office if you have any questions.

FREE Risk Management Training and Toolkit: Building Organizational Resilience!

National Community Action Partnership (NCAP) in partnership with the Nonprofit Risk Management Center (NRMC) is offering free registration to all Community Action network staff to the upcoming 2022 Virtual Risk Summit. This training is geared towards agencies in the nonprofit sector and will showcase innovations in risk management.

The 2022 Virtual Risk Summit will be held on April 5th, July 20th, and October 13th. To register for this training, please click here.

NCAP and NRMC also partnered to create the Toolkit for Building Organizational Resilience. This toolkit can help agencies with the following:

- Understand what makes an organization resilient
- Recognize the importance of data equity.
- Develop or update systems that lead to ongoing resilience as an organization.
- And more!

Click here to learn more to get a glimpse of what is included in the toolkit.

Questions About the CTC / EITC / VITA? We Have Answers on How to Help Customers Get Their Money

Tuesday, March 29, at 2 PM ET | 1 PM CT | 12 PM MT | 11 AM PT

Do you have questions about the Child Tax Credit, Earned Income Tax Credit or VITA sites? Do you have customers who need information about how to get their refunds? Are you working with a family who has a very specific issue filing their taxes and you need some help finding a solution? If so, here is your chance to get answers! NCAP is hosting “office hours” where you can join our staff and the experts from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) to get the answers you and your customers need. Click here to register.

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.
Additional Resources for the CSBG Network

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.

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/child tax credit 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.

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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