

March 1, 2024

# CAC FIRST FRIDAYS



## Monthly Strategy Updates from our President and CEO

**"It is our mission to end poverty by empowering and improving people's lives while building strong communities."**



Keith Pitts, President & CEO  
Community Action Committee of Pike County

**Good morning and Happy March!** As we begin our journey out of Winter into a new Spring I would like to take a moment and renew our commitment to the incredibly audacious mission of this organization, and let you know that I fully believe we can achieve it and sharing the roadmap that is emerging for this organization in 2024 and beyond.

***It is our mission to end poverty by empowering and improving people's lives while building strong communities.***

That one is pretty mind-blowing, right? We have chosen as our mission, the tremendous charge to end poverty... As we come in to work day after day, faced with the same sorts of issues that we faced yesterday, it can become pretty difficult to believe that we can end the suffering that we see in front of us.

### **IN THIS ISSUE: The Way Forward**

***But what if I told you that you were not being given the proper tools, mechanisms and programs to actually move the needle on ending poverty??*** By and large, most of our current programs are set up, not to end poverty, but to alleviate suffering. That in itself is a noble goal and absolutely worth doing,

***"There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about."***

~Margaret J. Wheatley

and we will continue to do it every day... but it is not our mission. Our mission is to END POVERTY!

As I mentioned above, we have become so focused on alleviating the suffering that is right in front of us that we (providers, administrators, funders) have let up on striving for the mission. Getting us there is going to require new ways of looking at the problem. In a quote generally credited to Albert Einstein, isn't doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result the very definition of insanity?

**1) Programs designed at the field level to address root causes of generational poverty** – this will not be the same everywhere. Unique environmental stressors and societal mores and folkways will require unique solutions – ***To this end, the Community Action Committee will be creating a partnership with an institution of higher learning to stand up a National Center for Poverty Research to spur innovative programs designed to end systemic, generational poverty.*** This National Laboratory will also be linked to the Community Development Finance Institution that David Bradley (National Community Action Foundation), Bob Halsch (Greater Bergen Community Action) and I have set up to serve as a green-bank for Community Action Network projects across the county. The Kresge Foundation is in talks to fund this initiative to the tune of approximately \$1.7 million. Our organization is ahead of the curve on this initiative.

**2) Holistic Service delivery that is not program-based, but rather person-based** – Comprehensive case management across departments is the only way that we are going to have deep impact on our clients' whole array of Social Determinants of Health, which will in turn improve their self-sufficiency. This organization is at the precipice of possibly the most impactful time in the history of the War on Poverty. Our unique structure and position in the community makes us ideally positioned to take advantage of the influx of programming and "new solutions" monies that are being made available by the administration and the reframing of many social services initiatives as Social Determinants of Health which are also recognized by our FQHC funders. Community Empowerment gives us the mechanism for engaging our clients holistically This is the direction the network is moving, we are just two years ahead of them.

**3) Opportunities in the local region** – Providing education and one-time opportunities obviously helps individuals, but for us to have ongoing impact in our communities we need to become a true economic driver. We create opportunities by simply existing (we are a major employer in our region), but I want us to go beyond that. If we want people to succeed and stay here we need to take an active role in creating jobs and careers outside of our umbrella. This is why ***the Community Action Committee of Pike County will be creating a Community and Economic Development initiative this calendar year.*** We know that if we are to be generationally successful with ending poverty that there have to be opportunities in our communities for our children and grandchildren to have careers without having to leave the area. With each child that moves away we lose a piece of our community's history and longevity.

**4) Policy Change** – The current structure of program delivery and program qualification makes it very difficult to truly achieve upward economic mobility in our society as the reality of the benefit cliff discourages a positive change in circumstances toward self-sufficiency. If I lose \$1,000 in benefits for making \$500 more dollars per year, that is a pretty easy math problem to solve. Advocacy at the local, state, and federal level is going to be a major focus as we move forward. We know our clients, and with the right structure and engagement we can design structures to help them succeed much better than politicians that have never had a client in need across from them wondering why the system has seemed to fail them. We need to take the messages that our clients share with us to the halls of power. We need to advocate for our clients as their voices can become lost. That is part of our charge.

As an organization and as part of a committed network, **we CAN and we WILL end poverty.** It may not happen on my watch, but I will continue to fight the good fight every day and get the next person that much closer to the goal!

Until next time...

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