



Shine the Light Campaign

As part of Community Action Month, NYSCAA's "**Shine the Light**" campaign highlights the fantastic CAA staff from all over New York and their stories about the work they do in Community Action! We are honored to be able to share these amazing stories!



BARBARA ALEXANDER
TOMPKINS COMMUNITY ACTION

I started my journey working for community action when I became a single parent of 2 boys. My sons were enrolled into the HS program and a month later I started working for the same agency, TCAction. I have now been employed with TCActoin for 16 years and 10 months. I have grown so much personally and

professionally. I have been able to continue my education and meet my professional goals. I started as a classroom support aid and now the Supportive Services Director.

RUTH BAGLEY
CORTLAND COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM (CAPCO)

In 1990 I was a single mom to two young girls. I wanted them to attend a preschool. I had only been living in the area for a couple of years so I was unfamiliar with what this area had to offer. We lived in a small village in the northern part of the county so I didn't get into the city very often.



One day I made a phone call to Head Start and they called me back. Soon after that my daughters were signed up for preschool. During this time, I volunteered for the program. In September 1991, I began to substitute for the kitchen position. I subsequently applied for a permanent position. I was hired. The Head Start program was under the Community Action Program umbrella. I was given the opportunity to continue my education and get a degree. I advanced through the agency and held a few different positions within the education portion to the family advocate position where I am currently. I have been able to be a part of various committees and felt like a valuable part of the team/work family. I am now able to support other families and help them navigate through some of the challenges they are facing. I am happy to say I have been an employee for nearly 33 years!

ASHLEY DREYER
CORTLAND COUNTY COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM (CAPCO)

Even as a young child I've always had a passion for helping people and knew I would have a career in this line of work. I've volunteered my time in numerous ways, including soup kitchens, community outreach through multiple companies I've worked for and was involved in a group focused on Teen Reproductive Health in my teen years. I went to college to study Human Services to start my career to further assist those in need in one way or another. I have worked in the Human Services field since 2013 through many programs focused on helping people help themselves. I started working for Chenango County WIC November of 2023 and assist families by helping provide nutritional food options through supplemental monthly benefits. My position here is unique in that fact that I utilize the WIC program for my family so I am able to see both sides of the operation as a staff and participant. I find such joy in helping families with the help of my team, who all work very hard to help families help themselves. WIC is such an important program for our community and I'm honored to be a part of it.



HANNAH PIERCE
COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMS OF CAYUGA / SENECA

I am grateful for how far I have come and have a strong desire to continue my journey and become the Director of a not-for-profit agency someday. Within two years of working for the Community Action Program of Cayuga/Seneca,

I was promoted from an Employment Case Manager to

Program Coordinator of Employment Services. My experience in Community Action has taught me that poverty is not always a choice, and some people have no resources, help, or guidance to progress in their lives. Along my journey, I have helped many people, and I hope to help as many people as possible in my lifetime.



CHARLENE RELYEA
MOHAWK VALLEY COMMUNITY
ACTION AGENCY

I have always had a passion for teaching and caring for young children since I was 14yrs old. In High school, I took courses for child care. I did my internship at Head Start in 2002-2004. Then when my son started going to Head Start in 2015 I figured that it was my calling to work for this company taking teaching and caring for children. Unfortunately I had to leave the company in 2016 due to pregnancy issues I wasn't able to return to the company until 2022. The company welcomed me back and now I'm teachers aid. I do see my self working for this company as my life time career.

KRISTIN SHERMAN
TIOGA OPPORTUNITIES, INC.

Growing up in Tioga County, the importance of community and helping others was deeply ingrained in the values of our family. Despite finding success in advertising sales and non-profit donor recruitment, I felt a calling for more meaningful work, a career that would directly impact and revitalize the communities I called home. In November of 2014, I joined the team at TOI and over the past 10 years, I've lost count of the number of customers who have overcome the most challenging obstacles and adversity to better their lives and well-being. To be surrounded by an incredible team of dedicated "Doers" who live and value the Community Action Promise has made an incredible impact on my career and life. My favorite aspect of working at TOI has been the chance to reconnect with customers who are not just clients, but lifelong friends, neighbors, and integral members of our community, many of whom I've served and worked with over the years. At the end of the day, I know that our team makes a difference, that we are helping people and changing lives in ways that I could sometimes never imagine. I'm so proud to be part of Tioga Opportunities, Inc., and even more proud to know that in a small way I'm part of the amazing 60-year legacy of Community Action.



MARGARET SWEENEY
CORTLAND COUNTY COMMUNITY
ACTION PROGRAM (CAPCO)

I started out at CAPCO eight years ago this September. I work with as Head Start and Early Head Start Program Support Assistant. My favorite part about working in Community Action is going into the classrooms and seeing and working with the Children and seeing their smiling faces every day. The people i work with are wonderful and hard working doing their best to help all families that need assistance in the community.



JOY TREACY
CORTLAND COUNTY COMMUNITY
ACTION PROGRAM (CAPCO)

My journey with CAPCO started when I found out I was pregnant for my first baby and was referred to them through my OB-GYN. My mom also encouraged me to sign up for WIC (Woman Infant Child). It was the best thing I did! The Farmer's Market Vouchers also allowed me to teach my children where food comes from and that we have choices. After getting WIC for a few years, I was told about Head Start. I was able to put an application to Head Start right at the WIC office. It was super convenient. When my child was accepted into Head Start, an initial home visit with the teachers immediately made me feel comfortable and allowed me to talk with them without anyone else around. My children's teachers were the best! They were thoughtful, nonjudgmental, welcoming, trustworthy and my children absolutely blossomed in their care. I, then, was called to work for Early Head Start , after working in a daycare center for a few years. This program changed my life just as much as it did my children's. It immediately felt like I was home. Supervisors actually showed up, mentored, understood and appreciated my work. Learning what the program is all about made it clear that I indeed made the right decision. The leaders at CAPCO aren't perfect but that's the beauty of it! They are just like you and I. They are willing to make changes as need be and always willing to hear EVERYONE out!



PATTI WESTFALL

TIOGA OPPORTUNITIES, INC.

I started at TOI because I had heard that they helped our community. This made me want to be a part of this organization. My favorite part of working in a Community Action Agency is the mission that we have. I want to help people change their lives for the better and to help them become more self-sufficient.