



Wisconsin Community Action Network Skills Enhancement Program

The Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP) is pleased to provide information on the Skills Enhancement Program, a high-impact initiative that is expanding economic opportunity in Wisconsin for the working poor. Eleven Community Action Agencies are operating the program and are in the process of enrolling 480 individuals in early 2006. The overall goal is to assist low-income workers to gain job skills that will result in significant increases in wages and access to employer-sponsored health insurance.

Over the past 14 years, the pilot project for the Skills Enhancement Program has established an impressive record of assisting low-income workers to increase their annual earned income by an average of \$8,756. The most recent data show that over 79% of those completing the program between 2000 and 2004 obtained access to employer-sponsored health insurance.

Wisconsin's Governor, Jim Doyle, released his *Grow Wisconsin* Economic Development Plan in fall of 2005, which announced a \$750,000 grant through the Department of Workforce Development to WISCAP for replication and expansion of the Skills Enhancement Program across much of the state. He recognized that the original program, created by CAP Services of Stevens Point, was achieving remarkable results increasing the earned incomes of working poor individuals.

The program was created by CAP Services in 1991 to address the difficulty low-income workers faced in successfully competing for living wage jobs with health insurance benefits. The agency was able to create a model that met the needs of these households for training and provided access to transportation, childcare and other supportive services so they could attend classes while remaining employed at least 20 hours per week. Eligible participants for the current program must have household income at or below 150% of the federal poverty level and commit to a realistic training plan that provides the skills needed to compete for living wage jobs.

Participants receive financial support (within program limits) to cover the cost of classes and training for a period averaging about 28 months in order to increase their marketability and employability. Staff members provide career counseling, job placement assistance and a variety of support and advocacy services that are family-focused and strength-based, recognizing the interrelationships between factors leading to self-sufficiency, including employment, income, education, academic skills, childcare, housing, transportation, mental and physical health, access to health care, legal issues and family stressors.

In addition to the benefits of increased income and enhanced economic sufficiency for participants, the program has been enthusiastically welcomed by employers, who obtain higher skilled and more productive workers at a time when there are workforce shortages in many areas. Taxpayers also benefit as the need for public assistance is reduced.

Community Action Agencies in Wisconsin are proud to offer this opportunity and continue to find innovative and cost-effective strategies to assist people to reach economic sufficiency.

Community Action Agencies Operating the Skills Enhancement Program in Wisconsin

ADVOCAP

CAP Services

Central Wisconsin CAC

Community Action, Inc.

Couleecap

NEWCAP

North Central CAP

Social Development Commission

Southwest CAP

West CAP

Western Dairyland EOC

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