ACAP receives support from private foundations to transform services for County families

PRESQUE ISLE – Thanks in large part to support from two private foundations, Aroostook County Action Program is working to transform the way it offers services to Aroostook County families. ACAP has received funding of nearly $100,000 from Elmina B. Sewall Foundation, as well as crucial assistance from the John T. Gorman Foundation, which is helping the agency revolutionize its approach to service with an innovative Two-Gen (or two-generation) model that focuses on providing a quality early childhood education to children, while simultaneously working with parents on their education goals and pathways to employment.

The Elmina B. Sewall Foundation supports work in Maine to improve the well-being of people, animals and the environment while fostering relationships that strive for social equity and community resilience. Elmina B. Sewall Foundation will distribute their recent grant award of $90,000 to ACAP over a period of two years in support of the agency’s Two-Gen Pilot Project which began in late August. The pilot project works with 15 families currently enrolled in Early Head Start and Head Start at either ACAP’s Caribou or Presque Isle Early Care and Education facilities.

“The generous support of the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation will allow us to move forward with our efforts to transform our work with Aroostook County families,” said Jason Parent, ACAP executive director and CEO. “We have launched a pilot program this fall with 15 families using the Two-Gen model that has been adopted by several leading Community Action Agencies and a handful of other organizations across the country. In essence, this approach involves working with the entire family to assess their comprehensive needs and working collaboratively to meet those needs and move families toward greater economic self-sufficiency. As we work through this pilot, we will also identify how we will make the necessary changes to our systems and structure to adopt this new approach agency wide moving forward.”

This pilot precedes an agency-wide refocus to a holistic approach to services by providing opportunities for and meeting the needs of children, their parents and families together, rather than in a fragmented fashion that meets either the needs of the parent or the child, often inadvertently resulting in leaving either the parent or the child behind. Through the pilot program, ACAP will work with families to empower them in making choices that improve not only their overall health, economic stability, educational and workforce development opportunities, but also places them in a position to ensure that their children have the best possible foundation for succeeding in life.

The concept of Two-Gen models of service delivery has received broad support from private foundations and government officials, including from U.S. Senator Susan Collins who has co-sponsored legislation supporting work around multi-generation families as an effective means of combatting poverty. ACAP has been engaged in the process of research and planning to implement a Two-Gen model for nearly two years, conversing regularly with Senator Collins’ staff and making connections with organizations that are at the forefront of Two-Gen approaches. Beyond family-wide
education focuses, Two-Gen models also work to strengthen other core components within a family unit, such as asset building, social capital and health and well-being.

ACAP has found another supporter in the initiative with the John T. Gorman Foundation which recently offered funding to provide for key ACAP personnel to travel to visit and learn from other CAP agencies in Strafford County, New Hampshire and Garrett County, Maryland that have already fully implemented Two-Gen programs.

The John T. Gorman Foundation advances ideas and opportunities that can improve the lives of disadvantaged people in Maine. Foundation members have kept in close contact with ACAP regarding their Two-Gen Pilot Project and subsequent agency-wide implementation of a Two-Gen model, set to take place in 2018, offering additional assistance in the form of guidance and referrals to resources. ACAP’s Executive Director/CEO Jason Parent is currently one of 12 nonprofit leaders in Maine participating in the Gorman Foundation Fellowship.

ACAP’s pilot project offers family coaching to parents (or caregivers) alongside their children and helps to navigate those families towards programs that will help them to succeed in multiple areas simultaneously, from needs assessments to goal setting and outlining and traversing a path to achieve those goals. Ultimately, an agency-wide change in practice would broaden the scope of the Two-Gen service approach to all ACAP customers, beginning with a central intake process.

Funding and program structures over the decades from various levels of federal, state and private sources, have inadvertently created a silo effect in agencies like ACAP that administer multiple programs, resulting in a sometimes cumbersome process for individuals seeking services. Prior methods of accessing multiple programs often required multiple applications, each with their own requirements for documenting things like income and assets and expenses. The time commitment alone for filling out separate applications or attending separate appointments for various services was sometimes an obstacle. A key part of ACAP’s Two-Gen model of service delivery would break down those silo barriers, creating a “no wrong door” approach. This means that any individual coming into the ACAP office for any service would go through a centralized intake process that would presumptively qualify that individual for any of ACAP’s more than 40 programs.

ACAP will monitor the outcomes of the Two-Gen Pilot Program with an assessment tool that evaluates where a family is on a five-point scale measuring from crisis to thriving in several categories, including food security, housing, employment and income, transportation, financial management, education and skills, family development and parent engagement, and childcare. A family coach will help the family assess where they fall in each of the categories, and that will serve as a benchmark for tracking the family’s success through the program.

In the upcoming year, ACAP will combine information and results gleaned from their pilot project with best practices from other agencies from around the country that are already engaged in Two-Gen work to forge an innovative path forward for the agency’s customers.

“We are tremendously grateful to the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation and the John T. Gorman Foundation for their partnership. We have been looking at incorporating the Two-Gen model into our work for several months and are now able to proceed with a pilot project that will provide us with valuable information and insight about how best expand
this approach agency-wide to meet the needs of Aroostook County families,” said Parent. “This is an exciting time in the 45-year history of Aroostook County Action Program.”

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ACAP is celebrating 45 Years of Making Life Better in Aroostook County! ACAP provides the people of Aroostook County with services and resources that help individuals and families achieve greater economic independence. As a leader, or in partnership with others, ACAP provides guidance to the community in responding to emerging human needs in the areas of community health, early care and education, energy and housing, and workforce development services. For more information on ACAP, or to make a tax-deductible contribution, please contact the agency at 771 Main Street, on the web at www.acap-me.org, or by calling 764-3721.