

Advocate

Serving Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns Counties | **October 2008 - March 2009**

Executive Director briefs Senate and House leaders on poverty

John W. Edwards, Jr., the executive director of the Northeast Florida Community Action Agency (NFCAA), and chairman of the national Community Action Partnership, recently testified before the Joint Economic Committee of Congress in Washington, D.C. The Congressional hearing was entitled "Leave No Family Behind: How Can We Reduce the Rising Number of American Families Living in Poverty?"

One of five witnesses to speak to this prestigious committee, Edwards was invited because of his role as chairman of the Community Action Partnership, a national organization that represents the interests of 1,000 Community Action Agencies throughout the country. The partnership is a national forum for policy on poverty that serves its member agencies in addressing the issues and needs of the poor.

At the hearing, the Joint Economic Committee examined the effectiveness of current measurements of poverty and explored ideas designed to reduce its prevalence. The committee asked Edwards to provide his perspective on these issues as well as pertinent policy recommendations.



John Edwards pictured with Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney (D-NY), Vice-Chair of the Joint Economic Committee

In addition to discussing his experiences in working with the Community Action Partnership, Edwards described the effects of poverty in Northeast Florida and what he and his staff are doing to educate, empower and assist area families in becoming self-sufficient.

"The effects of poverty are absolutely devastating and widely unknown," said Edwards. "It is my goal to help these leaders recognize the depth of the problem and to assist them in finding more long-term solutions. Their support is vital to reducing poverty and promoting self-sufficiency in America."

Flagler County office relocates

The Northeast Florida Community Action Agency, Inc. (NFCAA) recently relocated its Flagler County office to 1003 East Moody Street, on the corner of Moody and Lemon. Office hours are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. To celebrate the new location, approximately 40 volunteers, community members and NFCAA staff gathered for facility tours, explanations of programs and refreshments at the facility's March 6th open house.

New hire to provide clients with increased financial support



Melba Furlow-Herrington, MPA, joined Northeast Florida Community Action Agency in January 2009 as an Asset Enhancement and Utilization Specialist. With a goal of helping clients become fiscally self-sufficient, she coordinates financial literacy training, credit counseling, tax preparation assistance, and matched savings account enrollments to help clients increase their financial assets and skills.

Northeast Florida Community Action Agency to assist more families with home energy costs, conservation repairs



Mayor John Peyton issued a Weatherization Day Proclamation for Duval County in honor of Northeast Florida Community Action Agency's effective weatherization program. Robert Myers, Housing Inspector (left) and Charles Baker, Housing Manager, (right) are pictured with the Mayor.

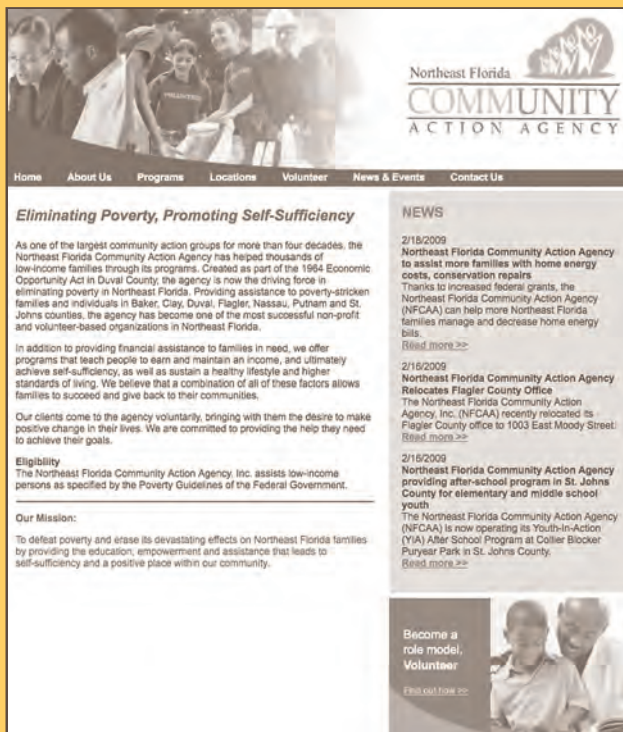
Thanks to increased federal grants, the Northeast Florida Community Action Agency (NFCAA) can help more Northeast Florida families manage and decrease home energy bills. With the \$7.1 million grants, dispersed through the Florida Department of Community Affairs' Low Income Home Energy Assistance and Weatherization Programs, NFCAA will be able to assist twice the number of eligible families needing home energy assistance and home repairs than it did in 2008.

Primarily serving the elderly, people with disabilities and households with young children, the Home Energy Assistance Program provides financial assistance to low-income families with high burden energy costs. To receive support, households are asked to participate in energy conservation classes to gain knowledge about ways to lower utility costs in the future.

Non-profit agency receives \$7.1 million in federal grants for assistance programs

Additionally, the Weatherization Program helps families reduce future energy costs by funding home repairs that improve energy efficiency and conservation. Based on energy audits and diagnostic testing, weatherization repairs include installing insulation, reducing air-infiltration, and performing heating and cooling tune-ups.

"While the Home Energy Assistance Program is designed as a short-term solution to a serious financial crisis, the Weatherization Program will result in long-term energy efficiency and health safety," said John W. Edwards, Jr., executive director, NFCAA. "Both programs, along with energy conservation classes, will be valuable resources for our community."



Northeast Florida Community Action Agency launches new Web site

nfcaa.org a valuable resource during struggling economic times

More and more, people use the Internet as their primary source for information. Keeping up with this, NFCAA recently launched a new Web site so clients, community members, partners, donors and other interested parties can learn more about the programs and services NFCAA provides.

Highlighting emergency assistance, self-sufficiency, community involvement, housing and youth programs, www.nfcaa.org will be a valuable resource for people who want to know more about current efforts being made to eliminate poverty in their community. In addition to offering visitors the opportunity to donate online, the site provides information on volunteer opportunities, office locations, recent news and developments.

New board members

Tracey Pierce

Tracey Pierce has a sixteen-year history with Florida State College at Jacksonville. As vice president of economic development and student success for the college, Mr. Pierce will be a valuable resource to NFCAA's various youth and self-sufficiency programs.

Nancy Kilgo, MBA

Currently director of local government relations for JEA, Nancy Kilgo brings nearly ten years of experience in economic development, legislative, policy and advocacy to NFCAA's board of directors. In addition to NFCAA, she is also a board member of Leadership Jacksonville and Northeast Florida Economic Development Board.

Summer youth program seeks corporate partnerships

Northeast Florida Community Action Agency is seeking partnerships with local corporations to support its Data Busters Program. Designed to teach 14- to 18-year-olds computer and work skills during the summer months, Data Busters arms youth with hands-on experience to help them develop into successful and career-driven adults. The top 10% of adolescents involved in this charter program receive computers. If you know of a business interested in donating new or used computers in support of Data Busters, call (904) 398-7472.

Area at-risk youth graduate from inaugural mentoring program

Forty Duval County teens graduated from the Northeast Florida Community Action Agency's first organized mentoring program, which is also sponsored by The Women's Center of Jacksonville and Rights of Passage II Manhood.

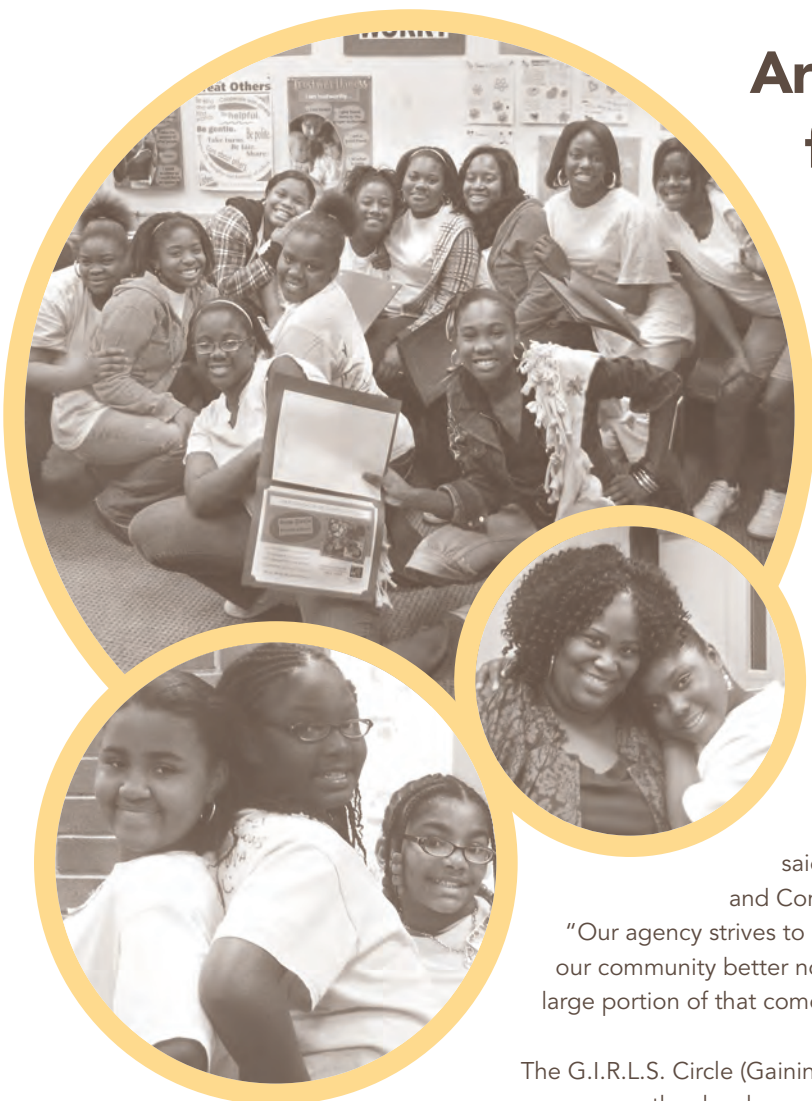
The programs are offered to area girls and boys ages eight to 17, mostly living on Jacksonville's Northside and Westside.

"We chose these young men and women to be a part of Girls Circle and Rights of Passage to encourage strength and determination," said Gerrie Ford, NFCAA Family and Community Services Manager.

"Our agency strives to make the lives of every member of our community better no matter what resources they have. We believe a large portion of that comes from the stronger development of our youth."

The G.I.R.L.S. Circle (Gaining Independence, Respect, Learning Self-Awareness) encourages the development of strength, courage, confidence, honesty and communication skills while the boys groups focus mainly on positive development and values in young men.

Teens benefit from open forums on alcohol, drugs, sex and other issues



Winning essay brings YIA participant to presidential inauguration

An essay written by Brandon Moore, President of NFCAA's Youth in Action core group of officers, enabled him to travel to Washington, D.C., for Barack Obama's presidential inauguration. Open to all Ribault High School students, winners of the essay contest, called "A New Birth of Freedom," were given the opportunity to witness the historical event.

Moore's commitment to excellence is exemplified through his involvement with Youth in Action, dedication to learning and willingness to exceed all expectations. "Finally we (African Americans) see that if we reach for the stars and do not settle for less than we are worth we can accomplish greatness," Moore wrote in his essay.

The mission of Northeast Florida Community Action Agency is to defeat poverty and erase its devastating effects on Northeast Florida families by providing the education, empowerment and assistance that leads to self-sufficiency and a positive place within our community. Produced periodically, *The Advocate* highlights NFCAA's current efforts helping individuals and families living in Baker, Duval, Clay, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns Counties.

For more information, call (904) 398-7472 or visit www.nfcaa.org.



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Recent food distribution helps in times of crisis

From February 26 through March 6, 1,752 households from Duval, Nassau, Baker and St. Johns counties received free meats, starches, juice, vegetables and dairy products thanks to The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). Through TEFAP and NFCAA's partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, more than 100 volunteers at various sites throughout these counties distributed groceries to eligible households. To receive assistance, the average income for a household of four cannot exceed \$27,560.

New after-school program in St. Johns County for elementary and middle school youth

The Northeast Florida Community Action Agency (NFCAA) is now operating its Youth-In-Action (YIA) After School Program at Collier Blocker Puryear Park in St. Johns County.

The after school program operates Monday through Friday from 1:30 p.m. until 5:30 p.m., providing structured classes and activities to 30-50 elementary and middle school students. Themes such as life skills, crime prevention, career exploration, and arts and culture along with homework assistance, nutrition education, sports, fitness, and recreation provide a complete approach to development. All activities are designed to offer youth opportunities to learn and grow.

"Our program has a hands on approach to helping youth succeed," said Vicky Elmore, St. Johns County family and community services manager, NFCAA. "By tracking academic progress and working one-on-one with participants, concerned tutors get to know each student's personality and learning style. At the same time, they constantly encourage parents to stay or become actively involved in their child's education and future."