Self-Sufficiency
Awards
A Measure of Success

Red Lion Hotel - Harrisburg
April 20, 2016
Welcome

**Self-Sufficiency** is a journey; a journey filled with pitfalls, dreams, hopes, adversity, disappointments, and joy. The following stories reveal focused determination and exceptional deeds of those who have faced this journey head on. They chronicle the lives of people who have overcome seemingly insurmountable odds. At some point in their lives, these individuals faced one or more life challenges that many people never have to encounter. It took a strong personal and community support network, in addition to extraordinary personal determination, to elevate themselves back to self-sufficiency.

This is the 19th year that the Community Action Association of Pennsylvania has presented the Self-Sufficiency Awards. CAAP is proud to recognize eight individuals who represent astonishing resilience as well as two individuals who exhibit outstanding progress towards self-sufficiency.

For over 50 years, Community Action Agencies (CAAs) have been moving people in financially distressed situations to self-sufficiency through flexible programming tailored to their communities. CAAs evaluate the needs of their communities and provide individualized services that community members need to succeed. That ability to shape services to fit specific and evolving demands is the extraordinary legacy of Community Action.

In Pennsylvania, 43 CAAs provide extensive services for low-income families in all 67 counties. CAAs are working to empower the 1.3 million Pennsylvanians living at or below the federal poverty line and give them the opportunity to gain skills and opportunities needed to succeed.

Each CAA is firmly embedded in its community as it works to empower individuals and their families. As you read each success story, you’ll see how widespread, far-reaching, and creative our member agencies are when it comes to helping their clients reach a family sustaining income. They identify community assets, stretch dollars, forge partnerships, gather resources, encourage volunteerism, and tap into valuable resources in many, many ways. You will come to realize that Community Action Agencies are not intimidated by complex problems or formidable obstacles as they help people achieve their goals. Self-sufficiency is a measure of how much income is needed for a family to adequately meet its basic needs – without public or private assistance. The following 10 award winners are the very definition of – **A Measure of Success!**

CAAP Staff

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## 2016 Award Recipients

### Self-Sufficiency Award Recipients

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<tr>
<td>Allegheny County Department of Human Services</td>
<td>Bharat Rai</td>
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<td>Berks Community Action Program</td>
<td>Elizabeth and Jason Witters</td>
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<td>Bucks County Opportunity Council</td>
<td>Theresa Snider</td>
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<td>Commission on Economic Opportunity</td>
<td>Laura Lee Lucas</td>
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<td>Community Action Southwest</td>
<td>Paul Gray, Jr.</td>
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<td>Northern Tier Community Action Corporation</td>
<td>Martie Warren</td>
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<td>Scranton-Lackawanna Human Development Agency, Inc.</td>
<td>Jamie Rollison</td>
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<td>South Central Community Action Programs</td>
<td>Rochelle Plummer</td>
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### Self-Sufficiency Progress Award Recipients

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<tr>
<td>PathStone Corporation</td>
<td>Latia Reed</td>
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<td>Westmoreland Community Action</td>
<td>Anna Joyner</td>
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### CAAP Self-Sufficiency Awards Committee

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<th>Committee Member</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nancy Boudreau, Berks Community Action Program</td>
<td>Deborah Fontaine, Community Action Association of Pennsylvania</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dawn White, Chester County Department of Community Development</td>
<td>Steven Martinez, Community Action Association of Pennsylvania</td>
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<tr>
<td>Danielle Wismer-Bowers, Community Action Partnership for Somerset County (Committee Chair)</td>
<td>Evelyn Rodriguez, PathStone Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karen Shaw, Community Action Partnership for Somerset County</td>
<td>Rosemary Procopio, Union-Snyder Community Action Agency</td>
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Prior to their arrival to the United States, Bharat and his wife, Dalamo, lived in a Nepalese refugee camp after being driven from their Bhutanese homes in 1990. Bharat’s family was forced to seek sanctuary from the oppression and violence present in Bhutan. Historically, the Druk (an ethnic community of Bhutan) and the Lhotsampas lived peacefully, but an increase in the Lhotsampas population led the Druk to enforce their culture on the people of Bhutan through government regulation, violence, and eviction. With nowhere to go, Bharat and his family remained in a refugee camp in Nepal, where their oldest son, BiPan, was born. On March 28, 2012 Bharat and his family were awarded refugee status in the United States.

With the help of a resettlement agency, Bharat, Dalamo, and BiPan were moved to Pittsburgh, PA. They were quickly referred to North Hills Community Outreach (NHCO), where they were enrolled in the Family Development Program, which is funded by the Community Service Block Grant. Bharat says that when his family moved to the United States, they felt alone, fearful, and confused about the new culture. He was unsure how to provide for his family’s basic needs. Over time, the Rai family started to feel like members of their community. They were connected with available community resources and received emotional support along the way.

While enrolled in the Family Development Program, the Rai family learned about the American system of finance, acquired budgeting skills, attended financial literacy workshops, and met with a financial counselor. Bharat learned to create and maintain a budget, pay bills, set up and track checking and saving accounts, and plan for the future. While starting a new job, Bharat utilized NHCO assistance grants to help maintain housing. He received household items and furniture for his family. Bharat and his Family Development caseworker collaborated together to enroll BiPan in summer camp and educational programs to help him learn English and excel in school. The Rai family registered with a local food pantry and received assistance through NHCO Sharing Project distributions of winter coats, Thanksgiving meal items, holiday gifts, and school supplies. Bharat and his caseworker worked together to apply for LIHEAP, Dollar Energy, the utility Customer Assistance Program, public assistance benefits, and resources for the children. Bharat received employment search assistance and obtained full-time employment. He attended English classes, NHCO computer classes, and regular meetings with his caseworker. In addition to paying off his resettlement loan, Bharat was able to purchase a vehicle.

Bharat has maintained full-time employment since July of 2012 and receives medical benefits for his family. Bharat is free from subsidies, has a balanced budget and a savings account, pays his bills on time, and is able to send money to extended family members still residing in the refugee camp in Nepal. Bharat lives in safe, affordable housing in his preferred community. In January 2016, Bharat started classes at the Community College of Allegheny County towards his goal of becoming a nurse. Bharat has plans to give back to the community by starting a cross-cultural educational program for children and families in his neighborhood. Bharat and his family’s determination to overcome adversity, invest strongly in their family relationships, and pursue their dreams is truly inspiring. Bharat shares, “Our North Hills neighbors were with us when we needed them most. They helped us financially, mentally, and emotionally. Now, we’re in a position to help our neighbors and other people in need like we were.”
Elizabeth and Jason Witters

Berks Community Action Program

Liz and Jason Witters first became acquainted with the Berks Community Action Program (BCAP) through the Head Start Policy Council. As a new representative to the Policy Council, Liz Witters had one child in Head Start and one in diapers. She was an enthusiastic Policy Council representative who frequently asked what she could do to help. Jason Witters often helped his wife with her Policy Council duties and became a frequent classroom volunteer and a very active part of the Head Start Fatherhood Initiative.

It soon became evident that Liz and Jason came as a package. Both parents were incredibly active in their son’s Head Start classroom and dedicated to Policy Council. Before long, Liz was elected Policy Council Chair and served as a Head Start Representative on the BCAP Board. She was never afraid to voice her opinions on BCAP programs and often shared her own experiences and insight. The entire Witters family was often spotted at BCAP events as volunteers and participants.

With two small children and caregiving duties for aging parents, full time employment was not an option for Liz. She was able to budget household finances very carefully and earn extra money to contribute to the family budget. Jason was having a harder time with his job search. Soon he landed a position with Hershey Entertainment which brought more stability to their family and chocolate donations for Policy Council and BCAP.

Liz and Jason served Head Start with enormous dedication for five years. Throughout their son’s time in Head Start, Liz was able to develop her natural leadership and organizational skills. Jason was able to use his good humor and people skills to relate to other fathers in the program and encourage them to get involved.

The Witters family have endured hardships along their path to self-sufficiency. With the help of community agencies, focused determination, a strong foundational marriage, and positive family values, the Witters family is now a shining success for Community Action. Both parents are now working. Liz works as a lunch aide in the Schuylkill Valley School District and a Crossing Guard in the Hamburg School District. Jason works for Redner’s Warehouse Markets in one of their warehouses and substitutes as a crossing guard when needed. Both parents have advanced in their jobs and have been given additional responsibilities. Liz earned the “Serve Safe Certification” through her employer and volunteer activities.

They own their own home and have reliable transportation, bank accounts, and a family budget that is reviewed often. Through hard work and careful spending, the family is able to afford luxuries like season passes to Hershey Park, vacations, and dinners out. They are united in the importance of giving back to their community.

The Witters family is now very involved with the Boy Scouts of America. Jason serves as Scoutmaster, and Liz coordinates scout fundraising efforts. BCAP was able to provide their troop with a $500 mini-grant in 2015 to help fund overnight camp expenses. Today both boys are good students in school and good examples of caring young men. The whole family continues to help out with BCAP projects and events.
Theresa Snider
Bucks County Opportunity Council

Terri’s first encounter with Bucks County Opportunity Council (BCOC) occurred in December 2001 when she came to the Quakertown Office for holiday assistance. Over the course of the next several years, Terri would have intermittent contact with BCOC, mostly for holiday assistance, emergency assistance for utilities, and assistance completing and faxing various forms. Terri maintained part-time employment and would often speak about her family and the struggle to make ends meet. She consistently demonstrated strength and resolve. Terri continued to work and managed the household budget with frugality.

In 2007, during one of her visits to the office, Terri mentioned that she had started school part-time. Her ultimate goal was to become a Registered Nurse. Terri stated, however, that her goal would take a “very long time” due to her responsibilities as a wife, mother, and part-time employee. Soon, Terri came to the realization that her struggles in life would not ease until she made a commitment to seek and prioritize her education and training. Terri knew deep down that the only person she could depend on was herself.

In May of 2011, Terri was accepted into the RN Program at Bucks County Community College. Shortly after, Terri enrolled in the Bucks County Opportunity Council’s Economic Self-Sufficiency (ES) Program. It took ten years since the first time Terri came to BCOC to sign a Participant Agreement and enroll in the ES Program. Shortly after her enrollment, Terri received the Robert and Lore Eichfeld Nursing Scholarship and was on her way to realizing her dream.

As with many students, Nursing 3 seemed an insurmountable challenge, and, unfortunately, Terri did not pass on her first attempt. Again, demonstrating her strength and resolve, she did not give up. Instead, Terri chose to retake Nursing 3 and apply for re-admission to the program. The next hurdle was to pass the NCLEX exam. After three attempts, Terri was successful, and she is now gainfully employed as a Registered Nurse. Terri graduated from the Nursing Program in May of 2014, seven years after starting part-time at Bucks in 2007! To celebrate her hard work, Terri recently purchased her first new car.

Due to Terri’s persistence, strength, and “never give up” attitude, Terri is a Community Action Association of Pennsylvania’s Self-Sufficiency winner and is thrilled to celebrate her achievements with her BCOC coach.
Laura Lucas, a twenty-seven-year-old mother of two, did not have the smoothest path in life. Losing both of her parents in her teens left Laura feeling alone and vulnerable. When she found herself pregnant at 17, even more responsibility was thrust upon her. The difficult task of raising a child on her own quickly added to the depression that she was already facing. Not long after the passing of her mother, Laura found herself pregnant again. During her pregnancy, the child developed serious health issues which could not be fully identified or treated until birth. When her son Conner was born, doctors discovered that he was born with only one kidney. During Conner’s over two month stay in the NICU, he was diagnosed with several other medical issues including Pierre Robin Syndrome and a chromosome 6 abnormality. His doctors stated that they had never witnessed a case such as his. They were unsure if Conner would survive from day to day.

When most parents are worried about building a crib or changing diapers, Laura was tasked with learning how to change her infant son’s feeding tube. Conner was able to come home, but his stay would be brief. Due to constant sicknesses and infections, it became apparent that Conner would not be able to stay in his mother’s home much longer. This led Laura to make the hardest decision of her life. She placed her son in a child care facility where he would receive the care he needed. This decision greatly affected Laura, throwing her into a deep depression.

Sitting at home, depressed and lonely for her son, Laura made a decision for herself. She could continue to lay around at home, going from one TANF check to the next, or she could do something to better her life and the lives of her sons. Tyler, her oldest and a constant driving force in her life, was her biggest cheerleader. Tyler encouraged Laura everyday as she worked to improve their circumstances. She waived her exemption from the County Assistance Office and asked to be placed in an employment program. The CAO referred her to the Work Ready program operated by the Commission on Economic Opportunity. She arrived for her first day in the program nervous, but optimistic that this would be the beginning of a new life and a fresh start.

While in the program, Laura threw herself into every course and workshop available. She took typing courses until she mastered the levels, and she excelled in Microsoft Suite. Eventually, Laura reached out to her caseworker who found Laura a volunteer opportunity with CEO, helping in the PPL OnTrack program. Laura excelled. She answered phones, assisted clients, and filed paperwork. Originally meant to be a resume builder and on-the-job training, Laura quickly grew to love what she was doing. She was encouraged by her coworkers to apply for a paid position with CEO and was offered a permanent position as the Intake Assistant for the PPL OnTrack program. In her own words, Laura says that this was, “one of the happiest moments of my life. To feel I accomplished something and was good at it. The Work Ready Program gave me the confidence I needed.”

Laura has maintained employment with CEO for over a year and is still “in love” with her job. As Laura put it, “My life is completely different than I had ever imagined it would be, and I owe it all to the Work Ready program.” Who knew that from those difficult days of reading the pages of Conner’s book, she would be completely rewriting the next few chapters of her own.
Paul Gray, Jr.

Community Action Southwest

On March 4, 2014, Paul Gray, Jr. was referred to Community Action Southwest (CAS) by the local PA CareerLink office. Paul met with CAS Case Worker Eric Braun to learn about homeless assistance programs in the community. During their initial meeting, Eric learned that Paul was homeless and living in his car after recently moving back to Greene County. Paul’s plan was to find work in the coal mining industry; he formerly lived in Greene County and worked as a coal miner until he quit his job and moved to Ohio to care for his aging parents prior to their deaths.

Since there are no homeless shelters in Greene County, Paul was not interested in being placed at an out-of-county shelter. Eric helped Paul identify a friend he could stay with from time-to-time until he could obtain a job and locate permanent housing. Eric and Paul completed Paul’s individual Family Development Plan. Soon after, Paul was contacted by two different employers to schedule interviews. Eric began to work with Paul to help him review his work history and goals in order to prepare for his interviews.

Eric then accessed CAS’s Chevron & PNC Bank Barrier Elimination Funds to provide Paul with a gift card for gasoline so that he could get to and from his interviews. Eric also contacted the Salvation Army who provided Paul with a box of food that would last him a few days. Paul spent additional time in the office contacting landlords in the community. Paul found a one-bedroom apartment available within his price range should he be hired for one of the positions for which he interviewed. Eric spoke with the landlord and asked him to hold the apartment for Paul.

Paul was hired for a full-time job with benefits by Burrell Mining Products as a laborer. Eric immediately contacted Greene County Human Services to access their housing assistance funds for Paul so that he could rent the apartment they had found. Eric attended the meeting with Paul. Paul was deemed eligible for assistance and received his first month’s rent. Eric continued to advocate for Paul and worked with the landlord on a monthly payment plan so that Paul could pay a portion of his security deposit each month until it was paid in full.

Paul moved into his apartment prior to his first day on the job since he had documented income in-place to sustain monthly rent (including utilities). Eric once again accessed CAS’ Chevron & PNC Bank Barrier Elimination Funds to provide Paul with additional gift cards for gasoline so that he could get to and from work until he received his first paycheck. Following Paul’s second day on the job, he stopped by CAS’ office to let Eric know that he had just finished working an 11-hour day and that his boss told him he would have the opportunity for additional overtime. Within his first two weeks on the job, Paul received a $2/hour raise. A little over a month later, Paul was given another hourly rate increase.

Today, Paul works up to 80 hours per week. Burrell Mining Products has talked with Paul about advancement opportunities within the company. Paul is now renting a three-bedroom house from the same landlord. Paul and Eric keep in bi-monthly contact where they discuss Paul’s budget and his future.
Martie Warren

Northern Tier Community Action Corporation

Martha (Martie) Warren first came to Northern Tier Community Action Corporation (NTCAC) for housing assistance through the Potter County Homeless Prevention Program (PCHPP) in September 2014. Martie had been self-sufficient until 2011 when she lost her full-time job. She found herself unable to pay all of her housing expenses. Martie’s landlord was trying to work with her, but the amount owed continued to grow even though she was paying all she could.

Martie connected with Case Manager Lisa Harris at Potter County Human Services. Lisa helped Martie obtain assistance with a portion of her rental arrears and helped Martie avoid eviction. Lisa was also able to assist Martie with bringing her up-to-date on utility payments. Lisa helped Martie with budgeting and obtaining assistance through the Housing Assistance Program and Coudersport Ministerium. Lisa encouraged Martie to attend and successfully complete Financial Peace University Classes and NTCAC’s Rural Families Economic Success programs. Martie now wants to facilitate the classes to help others, so NTCAC provided Martie with a Leadership Kit.

Martie was hired full-time at Potter County Human Services, which provided benefits and health insurance. Unfortunately, Martie experienced some health issues that forced her to exhaust her sick leave and take off additional time without pay. She drastically cut her expenses but eventually had to ask for additional assistance. Lisa helped Martie apply for partial rent assistance through PCHPP until her income stabilized. Lisa also assisted Martie with applications for LIHEAP and Weatherization support.

Today, Martie is no longer receiving any form of assistance. She continues to work fulltime as a County Case Aid in Coordinated Services at Potter County Human Services. She has applied for early retirement benefits through Social Security. Martie has entered into a purchase agreement to buy a mobile home, which is located about 20 minutes from work.

Northern Tier Community Action Corporation’s case management helped Martie flourish and become self-sufficient. Martie is determined to give back through her work with Potter County Human Services through the Medical Assistance Transportation Program and coordinating food bank deliveries in Potter County. Martie is also reaching out to families in need of financial counseling through the Rural Families Economic Success Program.

When asked how Northern Tier Community Action Corporation affected her life, Martie replied, “Northern Tier gave me hope! I struggled for so long, trying as hard as I could to find work and to pay my rent and utilities. They helped take the financial pressure off of my shoulders. All of the services I received from Northern Tier Community Action helped me, but the one that got me fired up the most was the Rural Families Economic Success Program. As soon as I began taking the course, I knew I wanted to share this teaching with other people. The financial support provided me with breathing room. It relieved the pressure and stress I was under. It freed me up to move into my own home. Self-sufficiency means being able to live within my budget and not have to ask for outside help. In the future, through my work, I want to try and help as many people as I can who have been in my situation.”
Jamie Rollison

Scranton-Lackawanna Human Development Agency

Jamie came to Scranton-Lackawanna Human Development Agency (SLHDA) as an EARN (Employment Advancement and Retention Network) client in 2005. Going through EARN was a humbling experience which really helped Jamie hone her career perspective. Each day, Jamie had to arrive at SLHDA at 9:00AM which meant taking a ten-mile bus ride that left early in the morning. Jamie also attended a job search and preparation class at CareerLink where she received help with resume development. CareerLink also helped Jamie prepare for interviews and strategize for her future career. Jamie’s caseworker, Gary, pushed her to work hard, and soon Jamie gained temporary employment at a telemarketing company.

Restarting her career was difficult, especially with two small children – but her children kept Jamie motivated. With the help of her grandfather, Jamie was able to purchase her first car for $1,000 which made the job search easier. Her caseworker Gary helped Jamie with car repair issues and with obtaining car insurance through the resources provided by EARN.

Jamie’s involvement in EARN was on-going for about two years as she gained experience working with temp agencies and sometimes balancing multiple jobs to keep up with heating costs and other household expenses. One day, Gary mentioned to Jamie that a position requiring bilingual skills had opened up in SLHDA’s Crisis Program. Jamie was familiar with and very appreciative of the Crisis Program since it had assisted her a few times in the past. Jamie interviewed and was hired for the position in July 2007. Jamie says, “I felt lucky to have people around to support and help me the way they did in EARN. Involvement in EARN was very rewarding.”

Jamie quickly built wonderful relationships with all of her co-workers at SLHDA. In July 2010, Jamie applied for and received a position within Head Start as a bilingual Family Engagement Aide. Working with Head Start and Early Head Start was an incredibly enriching experience for Jamie as an individual, as a mother, and as a professional. She recommends Head Start and Early Head Start to everyone she encounters.

In April 2015, Jamie applied for and received a position in SLHDA’s energy department. When asked how the agency has affected her life, Jamie said that, “it has helped me develop into the person that I am today. I honor the esteem, encouragement, responsibility, and vision that SLHDA has instilled in me.” Jamie wholeheartedly appreciates the support and opportunity that her caseworker Gary has provided. Jamie says, “I wouldn’t be here now if it wasn’t for him.”

Jamie Rollison is now a mother of three (Lucas – 13, Zaira – 12, and Lennox – 3). She has been on a progressive path to self-sufficiency and is now stable and very happy. Jamie is proud to say that alongside her husband Carlos, a carpenter, she has been able to support her family without government assistance. Jamie’s plans for the future include buying a home, opening a furniture business with Carlos, and celebrating the journey that lies ahead.
Rochelle Plummer

South Central Community Action Programs

Rochelle Plummer comes from generational poverty. Neither of her parents completed high school. Rochelle’s mother gave birth to her at the age of 18. Rochelle’s father was a drug addict and abusive to both mother and children. Unable to defend herself, Rochelle’s mother allowed her father to take the children away. During this time, Rochelle and her two siblings lived a life of unimaginable poverty – often crying themselves to sleep from pure hunger. They moved from shelter to shelter with all of their belongings shoved into trash bags. Following in her mother’s footsteps, Rochelle gave birth to her first child at the age of 15. At that time, she had only completed the sixth grade.

Determined to have her daughter live a different life, Rochelle began to study for her G.E.D. She obtained employment and attended driving school at night. At the age of 17, she successfully earned her G.E.D. By 18 years of age, she married and enrolled in college, now with three children. No matter how hard Rochelle tried, she could not sustain her family. Life was a spiraling whirlwind, which often spun backwards. However, she continued her education, even as her family grew. Finally, eight years later, she earned her Associate’s Degree. Now with six children, (including three with special needs), and only one modest income, their living conditions declined drastically. Her husband made too much money for assistance but not enough money to care for their family. It was at this time that Rochelle was at her breaking point.

Desperate for a way out, she learned about the Support Circles program at South Central Community Action Programs (SCCAP). After speaking with the program facilitator, she immediately joined. Although very intelligent (she was working on her B.A. degree at the time), Rochelle was stressed and mentally unstable, although she hid it well. She had no family or friends in PA, and she felt like no matter how hard she tried there was no escaping poverty. She began coming to Circles, attending weekly and actively participating. She was very vocal, and though she seemed like she had it under control, her marriage was declining, and she struggled to stay on top of her schoolwork. Circles, for Rochelle, was a sanctuary. The group was a refuge from the realities of her world, which consisted of an unhealthy marriage, debt, and lack of provisions to care for her children. Nonetheless, Rochelle continued to be involved in Circles and completed her undergraduate education, earning a B.A. in English.

Within the past few years, Rochelle has seen many dreams become a reality. She helped her children either successfully graduate from high school or thrive in school. Rochelle is no longer in an unhealthy marriage, which has provided peace of mind. She has earned her M.S. degree, and will graduate in the spring with a second Master’s degree. She has been employed for almost two years as the assistant to the Vice President and Dean at Wilson College. Recently, Rochelle was approved for a Habitat for Humanity home. Construction began in March 2016.

From her initial entry into the program, Rochelle has become a voice for others who are in poverty. Rochelle joined a poverty simulation to help inspire others to get involved and find community wide solutions. She’s becoming a Circles Ally. For the past year, Rochelle has been an active SCCAP board member. Ultimately, her goal is help others overcome poverty. Rochelle says the impact of Circles was, “Life changing. I wanted to get out of poverty, but I didn’t know how. Life was exasperating. Circles not only pointed me in the right direction, but the program gave me personal guides – my Allies, Circle Leaders, employees, and volunteers.”
Latia Reed

PathStone Corporation

Latia moved to Pennsylvania in 2011 from Washington D.C. with her husband and child. At that time, she had been employed with a company called First Data Merchant Services for five years. Latia had her second child in 2013. Due to complications with the birth, she used all of the FMLA time and was let go from her position. Latia went through a tough time after having her baby, and eventually she and her husband divorced. Latia felt she had lost everything she worked so hard for and quickly fell into a deep depression. She needed to focus on herself and improving her life and the lives of her children. Latia enrolled at Kaplan University to take her mind off the pain of the divorce and to begin her fresh start.

Latia found it hard to work and attend school while raising two small children. She went to her local County Assistance Office and asked for help. Latia admits that asking for help was very difficult. She almost quit school just to work and pay bills. Latia knew she and her children would sacrifice a lot so that she could gain an education.

Latia first connected with PathStone through the Work Ready Training and Employment program in December 2014. She was already enrolled in school and needed assistance with stable employment.

Latia created a resume and worked with a PathStone caseworker to practice interview questions. In addition to email correspondence support, Latia’s caseworker met with her every other week in person. Shortly thereafter, Latia obtained a job with the local H&R Block office as a Tax Advisor. After working there for just one month, Latia was promoted to Office Manager and was assigned her own office. Recently, Latia flew to Las Vegas to attend H&R Block’s Annual Conference. Latia utilized the lessons she learned from her PathStone caseworker about networking and took advantage of the opportunity while attending the conference.

Latia is still enrolled in school and is now working on her Bachelor’s Degree in Social Services. Latia’s dream is to one day be a Caseworker. She wants to help people like herself become independent and remain great examples for their own children.

Latia is proud to say that, “PathStone has supported me with developing a plan and setting goals. I have accomplished every goal created since being enrolled in their programs. My caseworker was fantastic, always able and willing to be a support system as needed. She made sure I was able to obtain and keep employment”.

A MEASURE OF SUCCESS
Anna Joyner graduated from high school in the top 5% of her class. She was admitted into the Physician’s Assistant fast track program at Seton Hill University in the fall of 2007. By the fall of 2010, Anna, taking full advantage of the freedom and independence of college, decided to take a leave of absence. It was then that her life began on a downhill spiral. She began using drugs, drinking heavily, and hanging out with the wrong crowd. In the summer of 2011, she became pregnant. Unfortunately, that did not stop her from making poor choices. By the spring of 2012 life caught up with Anna. She was arrested at eight months pregnant. She spent the last month of her pregnancy in jail, looking at a lengthy prison sentence and a bail too high to afford. In May 2012, with the help of her parents, she was released on house arrest. Five days later her son Isaiah was born.

With the help and encouragement of her probation officer, Anna began taking online courses at the local community college and began employment at the local Target. Her trial was not scheduled anytime in the foreseeable future, nor was the District Attorney budging on the mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines. Anna remained positive, excelling at school, her job, and raising her son.

Nearing the end of her academic career and approaching graduation, in the fall of 2013 Anna met with Tay Waltenbaugh, Chief Executive Officer of Westmoreland Community Action. Tay informed Anna about some of their programs that could potentially help, including the Mothers Making More (M3) program and Next Steps Supportive Housing. Ultimately, the next two years were life changing. After 18 months of being a single mother, Anna reconciled with her son’s father. Several months later, she took a plea of three years’ probation to one felony (she was charged with 22 and facing a potential 10 – 20-year prison sentence). Anna graduated with an Associate’s Degree in Human Services in May 2014. Yet the path was still not easy. Anna and John (her significant other) were felons, struggling to find housing and trying to make ends meet. Utilizing the information she received from Next Steps Supportive Housing, Anna applied to the Westmoreland County Housing Authority Homeless Assistance Program for Rental Assistance. They were able to find affordable housing and a place to call home.

In March 2015, Anna received an unexpected message from Tim Phillips, Westmoreland Community Action’s Supervisor of Community Prevention Services, about a job opportunity in their Head Start Program. She applied and interviewed in April 2015. Much to her delight, she was hired! By May 2015, Anna became a permanent employee of Westmoreland Community Action. Anna and John were married in July of 2015, and in August they moved into a new rent to own home.

Anna says that, “If it wasn’t for the faith that Tay, Tim, and my supervisor, Lori Brooks, had in me there is no way I would be where I am today. Through my employment with Westmoreland Community Action, my family has health insurance, a steady income, and a forever home. My son spent long hours and days in a daycare, while I worked full-time, went to school, and completed my internship. Now I am home on holidays, weekends, and every night by 6:00PM, and that is a gift and privilege I can’t put a price tag on. I love my job and those I work with and I am blessed and fortunate that although my past is not the best, they looked beyond that and gave me the opportunity to excel and give back to my community. They gave me a second chance at life – I am forever grateful.”
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About Community Action

_Co ммunity Action_ is a locally designed and implemented anti-poverty effort performed by Community Action Agencies (CAAs). The 41 member agencies of the _Community Action Association of Pennsylvania (CAAP)_ serve 64 counties in Pennsylvania. There are more than 1,000 Community Action Agencies in the United States. Community Action Agencies throughout Pennsylvania are designated as the lead anti-poverty agency in each local service area by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Office of Community Services (OCS) and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

A significant source of CAA funding is provided by the federal Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) Act. Agencies leverage CSBG funding to attract other financial support and resources to continue the fight against poverty. The CSBG statute outlines eight worthy goals: securing and maintaining employment, securing adequate education, better income management, securing adequate housing, providing emergency services, improving nutrition, creating linkages among anti-poverty programs, and achieving self-sufficiency. There is no typical Community Action Agency. No two Community Action Agencies are exactly alike because each is guided by the unique needs of its local community. Each agency is governed by a local, community-based tripartite board of directors comprised of low-income representatives, public officials, and private sector individuals.

Though no two agencies are alike, there is a typical Community Action approach to reducing poverty and helping families obtain self-sufficiency. Local agencies typically offer a variety of programs that serve low-income children, families, and seniors. Services may include emergency assistance, weatherization services, youth programs, senior centers, or transportation assistance.

Community Action Agencies often provide or refer clients to job training opportunities, GED preparation courses, and vocational education programs. They provide services addressing poverty related problems ranging from income management and credit counseling to entrepreneurial development and small business incubators; from domestic violence crisis assistance to family development programs and parenting classes; from food pantries to emergency shelters to low-income housing development and community revitalization projects. In doing so, Community Action introduces opportunities for people to lessen dependence on stop-gap aid. Community Action Agencies work closely with local human services agencies, the private sector, and public sector to help people in need. A major goal of Community Action is to enable people to become independent of any public or charitable assistance. This goal of self-sufficiency, above all else, is our _Measure of Success_.

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Thank you!

Thank you so much for joining us this year at the Self-Sufficiency Awards.

See you in 2017!

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