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HISTORY

For many years, social services in Ulster County had been in a highly uncoordinated state. As a result, some agencies' services often overlapped, while other services were not available. In late 1964 and 1965, a group of citizens appointed by the County Board of Supervisors closely associated with the Community Chest, formed the Citizens Survey Committee to study and recommend changes to improve services in Ulster County. Part of this Committee formed the nucleus of the first Board of Directors.

While the Citizens Survey Committee was forming, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act, which gave communities a chance to qualify for the Community Action Program of Economic Opportunity Act, the Ulster County Community Action Committee was formed and laid the groundwork for a concerted attack on the roots of poverty in Ulster County. However, there was misconception that there were not enough poor people in the County. The primary objective was "Self-Help" on the part of the individual and the community to achieve economic well-being.

Ulster County Community Action Committee (UCCAC) was incorporated in October 1965 and received an initial planning and development grant in the spring of 1966.

For the first time, not only were the agencies and community leaders involved in planning, but the poor, who were to receive these services, were also involved.

The first phase of the program development was identification of those areas in the county where there was a particular concentration of poverty families. As a result of these studies, the Rondout area of Kingston and the Ellenville area of Wawarsing were pinpointed as the target areas. About one-third of the poverty families in Ulster County were in these areas.

A part-time community organizer was assigned to each area to help form indigenous groups which would formulate community action programs and identify needs.

Local groups in other sections of the county contacted Ulster County Community Action and presented their problems and needs.

As a result of research, discussion and pooling ideas from local groups, social agencies and public bodies, a basic community action program was evolved.

In order to be able to serve people throughout the County with these programs, the UCCAC developed a network of service centers and outreach stations.

Proposals were submitted for service centers in Rondout and Wawarsing, and Outreach stations in Shandaken, Highland and Saugerties.

Ulster County Community Action opened its first Outreach offices in September 1, 1966. These offices were in the Rondout area of Kingston and in Ellenville.

Kingston was undergoing the ravages of Urban Renewal, with Rondout as the prime target. Kingston's story was a duplicate of many other communities around the country – families dislocated from properties that could have been rehabilitated, businesses uprooted and streets torn up.

One of the first organizing triumphs was the installing of more street lights in the Rondout area. The second was the groundbreaking and subsequent building of the Rondout Recreation Center. This Center became the permanent home of the Rondout Head Start Program and the Martin Luther King Senior Citizen Club.

The Rondout office became the training site for other Outreach staff, who opened offices in the other areas of the county. Rondout was also headquarters for prototypes of programs that later branched out to other agencies.

In February 1967 offices opened in Saugerties, Highland, Phoenicia and Wallkill. Through these offices we started a county-wide survey that pointed out the large number of hidden poor people in Ulster County, particularly senior citizens. Because we found so many senior citizens who lived alone and isolated, the Outreach staff aided by a corp of volunteers organized the first senior citizens club. The clubs joined together with other senior citizens clubs around New York State and organized the New York State Senior Citizens Alliance. UCCAC

became the leaders in advocacy for poor seniors in the State. Several years later, UCCAC assumed responsibility for making formal application and received a grant for a New York State-Wide Senior Action Council.

Beginning in July 1967, UCCAC conducted in conjunction with the school districts of Ellenville, Kingston and Onteora, three Summer Head Start Programs. Approximately 150 youngsters and families benefited from the Summer Head Start Program.

Our Full Year Head Start Program opened at St. Mark's Parish House on Wurts Street in Kingston in September 1967, with an enrollment of 34 children. It grew from one center to six centers spread out over the county. The Centers were located in Ellenville, Saugerties and Plattekill.

In 1971 the Outreach staff began organizing the youth and formed the first Youth Councils. In Saugerties, the first drug hotline in our area was started by volunteers from Ulster County Community Action.

Also, in 1971, we organized the first Emergency Food Closets. These closets are still functioning today.

Each area of the County had its own specific problems. In Highland, there were serious problems with the Migrant Farm Worker Program. We applied and received a grant to run the Ulster County Migrant Program in 1971. UCCAC ran this program until such time the program was re-organized at the State level in 1974.

Our Outreach programs continued and grew until 1974, when the first barrage of program cuts hit us. That was the year we were forced to close two Outreach Centers. Since the future of Community Action was uncertain, we initiated meetings within the Mid-Hudson area of other CAP agencies. From these meetings came the development of the Multi-County Community Development Corporation.

In 1974 UCCAC formed the first County-Wide Energy Council consisting of Town Supervisors, Fuel Dealers, the Red Cross and the Department of Social Services. This Council helped reduce the number of fuel and utility cut-offs long before the State-Wide Council was formed.

In 1978, we updated our county-wide needs assessment, and decided to relocate our New Paltz office back to Highland. We also started a Hispanic Outreach Program. From the Hispanic Outreach Program we opened a Head Start Program, a Senior Nutrition Program and an Outreach Office in Plattekill. These three sites served a large Hispanic population.

Since funding was still a major problem, we decided to close the Rondout Office and move the Community Coordinator into the Administrative Office. By then our Administrative Office was close enough to the Rondout area to be accessible to our clients.

Despite budget cuts and reduction in staff size, Ulster County Community Action continues to serve low-income families and remains a strong voice in the community.

Programs we initiated that were spun off:

- 1967 - Summer Youth Work Experience
- 1968 - Job Training and Development
- 1970 - Youth Councils
 - Drug Hot Line
 - Migrant Program
 - Emergency Food
 - Energy Hot Line & Energy Taskforce
 - Youth Councils
- 1971 - Senior Citizens Alliance
- 1972 - Foster Grandparent Program
 - Mid-Hudson Community Development Corporation
 - New York State Senior Action Council
- 1975 - Mid-Hudson Legal Services
- 1978 - Language Enrichment Program
- 1979 - Wood-For-Fuel Program
- 1980 - Rural Ulster Preservation Company
- 1983 - Resource for Accessible Living