

the **COMMUNICATOR**

SPRING INTO SUMMER 2023



BRACING FOR A FOOD CLIFF

SENIORS, FAMILIES TO BE AFFECTED



A WORD FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO

Dear Friends,

I am excited to share with you our Spring into Summer 2023 Newsletter. In this issue, we provide several updates on our programs and how your continued support helps fuel families who are trying to exit from poverty, and we will discuss how inflation is impacting our programs and services.

In April 2023, we will be seeing cuts to the federally funded CalFresh program, also known as food stamps. It is estimated that each month Orange County families will lose \$30 million worth of food benefits. We will do our best to pivot and adjust, but increasing costs of produce will have a negative impact on our budget. In fact, we're already seeing a 67% increase per pound of food we purchase through our Farm-2-Family program.

As we focus on the ripple effects from the endemic, we are still working hard to meet the immediate needs and provide the necessary tools and resources for individuals and families to thrive. We are proud to report that CAP OC processed over 10,800 Utility Assistance

applications last year. With a sharp demand in service and utility companies raising rates, this number will surely continue to grow in 2023, but we are confident that we will be able to meet the growing demand for assistance.

The past year has been filled with challenges, but your continued support has allowed us to provide vital services to our most vulnerable community members. Through your generosity, we have been able to provide essential resources such as food, rental and utility assistance, financial empowerment workshops, youth and family services, and job training programs to those struggling to make ends meet.

As we look toward the future, we are excited to build upon these accomplishments and to continue to serve our community. Your support and partnership play a critical role in our ability to do so, and we are grateful for your commitment to our mission. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of those we serve.

With Gratitude and In Service,



Gregory C. Scott
President & CEO
Community Action Partnership of Orange County

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PROVIDING IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE: **STARTING WITH A HEALTHY HOME**

After Juan stood up to his employer and exposed unfair labor practices, he found himself without a job. Struggling to pay his bills, Juan heard about CAP OC from one of our energy partners, Southern California Edison. With bills piling up, only a few dollars in his bank account, and a growing fear that he would lose access to running water, gas, and electricity, he reached out to us for help. Not only did CAP OC help Juan get caught up on his utility bills, but we also stepped in to weatherize his home. Juan had his windows and doors weatherproofed. His favorite weatherization measures were the change of the air conditioner and attic opening being fixed due to the current conditions not being safe.

He was also excited to receive a new refrigerator, washing machine, clothes dryer and microwave oven. “I came to CAP OC because I knew [you] could help me. I am very thankful for the CAP OC team. You are helping the community with difficult times, such as in my case, with getting behind on utility bills. I cannot believe CAP OC provides all of these services at no cost! It wasn’t until I began receiving the services that I realized that it was all true. Thank you, CAP OC team, for all that you do,” Juan shared.

Juan can now sleep better in a warm, healthy home and without the stress of unpaid bills. We are so happy that we were able to help Juan and so many others in similar situations.





CALFRESH CUTS THE IMPACT OF FUNDING LOSS

Orange County residents will see lower CalFresh benefits starting in April 2023 due to the federal government's enactment of the Fiscal Year 2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act. Emergency allotments are an extra benefit in addition to regular CalFresh amounts and accounted for roughly \$30 million a month for Orange County residents during the public health emergency.

As recipients are paid in arrears, their last emergency allotment was issued in March. CalFresh is a federal program that aids low-income individuals and families to help them purchase nutritious food. In Orange County alone, thousands of individuals rely on CalFresh to help put food on their tables each day. However, cuts to the program will result in reductions in benefits for many recipients, making it even more difficult for them to afford basic necessities. These cuts will impact the OC Food Bank particularly hard, as we enroll so many individuals to CalFresh at our OC Food Bank.

With less funding available, families will have to make tougher choices when it comes to using money for food, rent, or other necessities. Since the start of the pandemic, we have seen an increase in demand for our services as more people are struggling to make ends meet.

“At the same time as consumers are experiencing the highest inflation in over 40 years, low-income recipients of the CalFresh program will see their food benefits reduced substantially beginning April 1. The average household will see their benefits reduced by \$261 per month. Combined, vulnerable Orange County families will lose \$30 million worth of food benefits monthly. This is huge and the hole is too big for Food Banks and food pantries to fill alone. Where possible, the emergency food network will be working to connect families with other supportive services to help mitigate the negative impact of these cuts,” shares Mark Lowry, Director of the OC Food Bank.

If you would like to help support our efforts, there are several ways you can get involved. You can simply spread the word about the importance of these programs to your friends and family, volunteer your time, or make a donation to our OC Food Bank at capoc.org/give-today.

YOUR IMPACT IN 2022



**7.3 million
diapers distributed**



**2,899
backpacks distributed**



**26.4 million pounds of
food distributed**



**over 10,800 utility assistance
applications processed**

QUICK NEWS AT CAP OC



CAP OC was awarded \$331,605 from USDA to launch its three-year pilot OC Produce Prescription Program in collaboration with Ponderosa Health Clinic to provide adults with “out of control” diabetes fresh produce boxes and grocery vouchers courtesy of Northgate Markets to help lower patients A1C levels.



CAP OC wishes two of its longtime members of its Leadership Team a happy retirement. Malcolm Brown, Chief Financial Officer and Dolores Barrett, Director of Community Partnerships & Services served the OC community for more than 30 years combined.



Letter Carriers’ Stamp out Hunger Food Drive returns on Saturday May 13, 2023. You can donate canned and boxed goods to your postal person this weekend using the Stamp out Hunger food bag. This food drive will benefit the OC Food Bank and other local food banks.



PROVIDING TAX SUPPORT WITH HELP FROM AMERICORPS

Under our service innovations pillar, CAP OC is in its second year as an AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (ANCCC) host. ANCCC is a team oriented, federally funded service program for young adults, that partners with compatible non-profits across the country to serve in times of disaster, aid environmental stewardship, and promote healthy futures that may also enhance local economies.

The hosting process is by invitation and project application. Unique to CAP OC's application was the VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) program. CAP OC supported AmeriCorps NCCC's proposal to expand its participants service development by providing the team the opportunity to participate in the IRS sponsored Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) tax preparation certification program.

The success of being awarded as an AmeriCorps NCCC host, as the country was emerging from the pandemic, in 2022, was critical

for the agency's contribution to bringing more than \$14 million of refunds and tax credits into moderate and low-income Orange County communities.

This partnership augments CAP OC's capacity to educate and inform thousands more qualified families, seniors and individuals of the credit benefits and cost savings of free tax preparation. Team members are assigned to one of CAP OC's three family resource centers or CAP OC's main office and are available to share services through attending school events, conducting neighborhood door-to-door canvassing, attending county and municipal festivals and providing educational literature at the 70 senior food distribution sites and 225 community-partner food pantries.

Engaging AmeriCorps to support the VITA program at all four sites was the initial innovative partnership. New

for us this 2023 VITA season are site presentations and the 'pop-up' service. CAP OC, with AmeriCorps support and through coordination with Innovative Housing Opportunities (IHO), participated in financial and tax literacy workshops with IHO residents in Irvine and Anaheim. Many IHO residents shared that they don't have access to reliable transportation, are without childcare, and some seniors no longer have the capacity to drive.

This partnership is critical to such an important program and we are forever grateful for it.



MEETING INCREASED NEED: WATER PROGRAM

In our previous newsletter, we were thrilled to share with you that CAP OC can now start paying for qualified residents' water utility bills through the first federal water assistance program - Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP). Water districts across Orange County make this program possible, and there are currently 24 out of over 30 county water providers enrolled in LIHWAP.

Through this important program, income-qualified applicants who are behind on their bill, will receive a one-time benefit for drinking water, wastewater, sewer, or stormwater payments. If the applicant has past-due water bills and has been or will be soon disconnected, they are eligible for a \$2,000 benefit, or if the applicant's account is current, they will receive assistance to help pay down the outstanding debt - the amount of assistance for this option depends on household size and income. This service comes at a critical time as everyone in Orange County is feeling the effects of the massive surge in the cost of basic needs. This is evidenced by the rise we see in applications, the line of people in need of help stretching from our lobby to the parking lot, and with the volume of calls up nearly 500% from the previous year!

CAP OC distributes millions of dollars each year in federal utility assistance programs, including LIHWAP, and is the only California organization to spend 100% of its contracted funds for 2022 and is recognized as a Grade A Provider by the California Department of

Community Services & Development (CSD). Last year, we distributed nearly \$6 million in utility benefits to OC households. Since we have been able to help so many, CAP OC was allotted an additional \$4.2 million to also provide water bill assistance; the first time the federal government has issued this type of benefit.

While we have been able to provide nearly \$500,000 to vulnerable households, we still have \$3.7 million of uncommitted funds to use before September 30. If the remaining funds aren't spent, we risk losing these valuable federal dollars in Orange County. Which means, thousands of families and individuals (many being seniors) will be unable to keep running water in their homes. Since many live in multi-family dwellings with landlord-managed utilities, they are at great risk of being evicted.

One of the driving factors for so little being spent is people not being aware of the program or believing they don't qualify. In addition, helping water districts and landlords understand the benefit of enrolling in the program serves to ensure that everyone has access to water, helps to keep individuals and families housed and prevents them from ending up on the street or in a shelter. One hundred percent of county participation would make a big difference - please spread the word, and visit www.capoc.org/water/ to see if you're eligible for LIHWAP.



EGG PRICE HIKE AFFECTS FARM 2 FAMILY PROGRAM

Our Farm 2 Family (F2F) program helps to increase access to fresh, healthy, and locally-grown produce for low-income families and individuals in Orange County. The program aims to address food insecurity and improve nutrition by connecting families with local farmers and providing them with the resources they need to make healthy food choices.

However, the recent increase in the cost of produce has had some negative effects on the program. Egg prices started at about \$7.50 per dozen this year (compared to \$2.25 a dozen in January 2022).

"Outside of bird flu being the major factor in pricing spikes, there certainly has been inflationary cost increases

to production, material, labor, and other operating costs," shares Tim Pontius of Hidden Villa Ranch. These factors have ripple effects on the entire produce market, driving up the price on nearly everything.

"Pre-covid we paid approximately .09/lb on average for F2F produce, and now it's .15/lb (a 67% increase)," shares Kristin Kvesic, Donated Food Manager at CAP OC. As inflation looms, funding being cut in some avenues, and budgets stretched thin, it continues to grow more difficult to meet the ever growing need of the community.

Please consider making a donation at capoc.org/give-today.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Contributions listed are from **September 1st, 2022 – March 31st, 2023** and are \$250 and above. The Philanthropy department has done our best to ensure accuracy. If you have questions or concerns, please contact LMaze@capoc.org.

Thank you for your incredible support of Community Action Partnership of Orange County!

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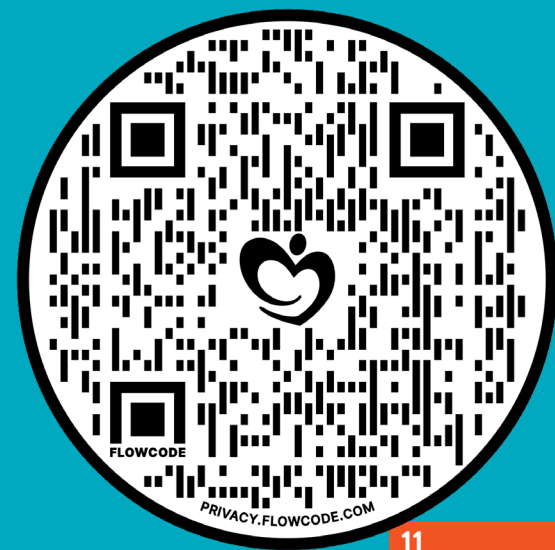
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capoc.org/monthly-recurring

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THIS IS WHERE POVERTY ENDS

mission

We seek to **end and prevent poverty** by stabilizing, sustaining and empowering people with the resources they need **when they need them**. By forging strategic partnerships, we form a powerful force to improve our community.

vision

We see generations of healthy communities where **poverty ceases to exist**.

HELP US TO END POVERTY IN ORANGE COUNTY. VISIT CAPOC.ORG TODAY AND HELP WHERE YOU CAN.