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## Berry to take lead of Community Action Agency

Toby Berry is the new head of the agency that serves Lenawee, Hillsdale and Jackson counties.

A woman who said she has felt a calling to help people since she was growing up in Michigan Center has been picked to lead the Community Action Agency in Jackson, Lenawee and Hillsdale counties. "I think I've always wanted to be able to help people," said Toby Berry, 38.

Since joining CAA 13 years ago she has been finding plenty of ways to lend a hand to people in need in the agency's three counties. She has been in charge of a variety of programs to help the homeless find housing, the low-income to develop assets and security, and to revitalize neighborhoods. "Every time I say I've been here 13 years I can't believe it. Every couple of years I have found something different to do," Berry said. "It's ever-changing, based on the needs in your community."

The CAA's board announced Friday it chose Berry from 33 applicants to replace Marsha Kreucher who is retiring at the end of this year. She has served as the agency's CEO since 1988.

"We are sad to see Marsha Kreucher retire after her wonderful years of service," CAA board chairman David Stimpson, a Tecumseh attorney and Lenawee County commissioner, said in a news release. "However, she leaves the agency in good hands with Ms. Berry as she is an experienced leader with a passion for service and a creativity that will inspire and assist others in the future."

Stimpson said Berry combines idealism and practicality. "She has a genuine love of people and wants to help them, but has a firm belief in accountability," he said. Berry has also shown an ability to quickly respond as rules and programs change. "You need to be able to roll with the punches," Stimpson said. Berry has the skills and personal talents to succeed in an environment of change, he said.

"I have had to do a lot of that," Berry said. "We're always hopping when things change." Berry said there is a need for CAA leadership to keep in touch with the communities it serves to keep programs relevant to local needs and coordinated with what other agencies are doing. Representatives from all three counties are currently involved in updating the agency's strategic plan, she said.

CAA is different in each county, according to the agency's news release. In Jackson, Head Start leads the way. In Lenawee the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program is the flagship. And in Hillsdale, Head Start and housing programs anchor the agency.

Kruecher said she believes Berry is the right choice to lead the agency. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology from Kalamazoo College and a master's degree in urban planning from Wayne State University. "Toby's experience speaks for itself. She is well-versed and understands what the agency stands for, what the history is in each county we serve," Kruecher said in the news release. "Toby is the right person at the right time to lead Community Action into the future."