

LENAWEE UNITED WAY

# Community Action Agency

## CAA's 'Gettin' Ahead' program promotes self-sufficiency

**By Burt Fenby**

Community Action Agency and the Lenawee County United Way have long been charged with the task of helping people meet basic needs but share a vision of also helping our clients reach self-sufficiency.

Early in our relationship we realized that to help people meet self-sufficiency standards we



needed to develop a comprehensive plan that utilizes all family resources and community resources.

Community Action Agency established the "Complete Approach to Self-Sufficiency" or CASS program, an initiative with a wrap-around approach designed to provide a personalized family plan to asset development. CASS provides short term services but also provides long-term goal setting to help families reach self-sufficiency.

Dr. Donna Beegle, a leading scholar, herself a victim of generational poverty, states that having a caring person in one's life is an important factor to escaping poverty. CASS provides that caring person who helps participants address and overcome their barriers to self-sufficiency.



**This group of students graduated from the Community Action Agency's "Gettin' Ahead" program in July 2015.** SUBMITTED PHOTO

Through the CASS program clients are exposed to budget counseling, credit counseling, financial coaching, financial literacy classes and homeownership classes as well as our Individual Development Accounts. These accounts are a matched savings plan to purchase a home, continue education, start or expand a business.

In the last two years, Community Action Agency has added the "Gettin' Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World" program to the CASS curriculum which is also funded by the Lenawee United Way. The Gettin' Ahead program, created by Philip DeVol, offers

educational support to individuals "stuck" in generational or situational poverty. It is based on a framework of understanding that people in poverty are the experts in their own situation and are problem solvers who have unique skills, talents and knowledge that can help them in any setting.

The program provides a relevant, respectful, challenging and empowering experience that introduces methods to build self-sufficiency through the development of financial, social, spiritual, and emotional resources.

Over the last two years, 74 individuals have graduated from the program and have changed

their priorities to move themselves out of poverty. They now have a more positive attitude, improved relationships, make better life decisions, and spend quality time with their children and/or grandchildren.

We would like to extend our thanks to the Lenawee United Way for its continued support for these very important programs that serve our county in such a dynamic way.

*Burt Fenby is the director of the Community Action Agency, a United Way agency. For more information on Lenawee United Way visit [lenaweeway.org](http://lenaweeway.org).*