

# The BRAVO Newsletter



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## What Is Community Action?

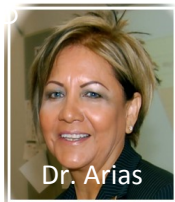
Community Action Agencies (CAAs) promote self-sufficiency and support individuals and families striving to become economically secure while investing in the future of their local communities. This national network of 1060 agencies, funded in part by the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), serves approximately 7 million families, totaling 16 million low-income persons each year. More than two-thirds have incomes at or below the federal poverty guideline.

To achieve the goal of reducing poverty, the CAA staffs manage a mix of public and private resources averaging \$11 billion annually. Almost one third of this money comes from non-federal sources, including more than a billion dollars of private funding. CAAs mobilize hundreds of thousands of local volunteers to enact positive change in their communities every year.

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## Board Optimism Reigns as 2012 Begins

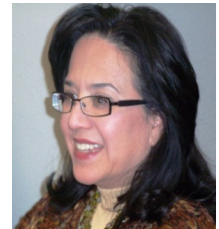
As 2012 gets underway, members of the Project BRAVO Board of Directors are expressing confidence they will continue making positive strides in their governance of El Paso County's Community Action Agency. During 2011, the 15-member board made significant oversight improvements following a 2010 state report that at times questioned its ability to govern. "We were not sure we would be allowed to continue to exist," said Board Chair **Dr. Maria Arias** during a recent board meeting. Arias is credited with carefully guiding the board through numerous state-recommended actions designed to ensure Project BRAVO would continue to effectively serve low-income residents of El Paso County well into the future. In the past 20-months, the board of directors met quorum at every single board meeting. The board also implemented numerous governing policies that met or exceeded state standards for board performance. Among the key decisions made by the board was the hiring of **Laura Ponce** as executive director and the filling of several board vacancies with highly-qualified members from the public and private sectors of the El Paso community. As 2012 began, board members were expressing pride in the agency's ability to meet all of its goals and projections in the year ahead.



Dr. Arias

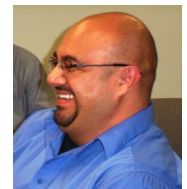
## Meet Your New Board Members

**Laura Christopherson** is an assistant El Paso County Attorney in charge of the Juvenile Unit who will serve as a Public Sector representative on the Project BRAVO Board of Directors.



**Rey Moreno** is a training employment specialist with AARP who represents low-income residents in South El Paso. He served in the U.S. Army and is a Viet Nam War veteran.

**Samuel Leyva** is a mortgage credit and customer services representative. On the Project BRAVO Board of Directors, he will represent low-income residents in El Paso's Upper Valley.



## Employment Staff Goes Above and Beyond To Help Client

Project BRAVO client **Coco Smith** was ecstatic when Employment Counselor **Liliana Carrillo** finally found a good-paying job for her. Smith's new job as a Certified Nursing Assistant was perfect, but one single



Carrillo

obstacle stood in the way. Smith's CPR certification, a requirement for her new job, had recently expired. The single mother of one who had long-struggled to get back on her feet after being unemployed for several months had no money. Without the nominal \$35 CPR renewal fee, Smith's new job was suddenly in jeopardy. Carrillo was not deterred. She spent the

rest of her afternoon asking her fellow staff members to contribute whatever amount of money they could to help pay for Smith's CPR renewal. Within just a few hours, Carrillo happily handed Smith an envelope containing more than enough money. Smith was overjoyed. Today, she is once again gainfully employed and grateful to the kindness of Project BRAVO staffers.



## Weatherization Department Touts Successes

When Project BRAVO client **Raul Macias** applied for weatherization services for his home last year, he wasn't sure he would qualify. To his surprise, his home was deemed a good candidate to receive the full range of weatherization services that have helped him save thousands of dollars in energy use. "A few months after they finished the work, my water heater stopped working and Project BRAVO arranged to have it replaced," said Macias, who retired from the El Paso County Clerk's Office several years ago. Having a functioning water heater was critical for Macias and his older brother, both of whom suffer from serious illnesses.



Macias is one of more than 1,500 El Paso County residents who have benefitted from the federal government's Weather Assistance Program (WAP) adminis-

tered in El Paso County by Project BRAVO through the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA). Under the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the U.S. Congress dedicated a total of \$5 billion in stimulus funds to help create jobs while helping low-income residents cut their energy bills by as much as 30-percent. According to government figures, as many as 90,000 workers participated in weatherization activities during the height of the program. In El Paso County, Project BRAVO was awarded \$8.7 million to provide weatherization services to low-income residents. As the WAP/ARRA program wound down at the end of 2011, a total of 1,515 homes had been weatherized by Project BRAVO and an average of \$6,500 had been spent on each home that qualified for weatherization services.

Project BRAVO Executive Director **Laura Ponce** expressed satisfaction with the performance of the Weatherization team. "The Weatherization team faced many challenges along the way such as preparing and responding to seven monitor-

ings, increasing the number of staff, doubling their work space, improving their communication with contractors, procuring new contractors midway to increase capacity, completing state mandated staff trainings, and bettering their responsiveness to customers."

Ponce emphasized the importance of ensuring El Paso residents benefit fully from the federal weatherization appropriation. "I am very proud of the work of the Weatherization team and I hope that they know what a great service they have provided to our community," she said.



### Message from TDHCA Executive Director

Dear ARRA Weatherization Assistance Program providers, I wanted you to know that TDHCA is so proud of what you have accomplished through the ARRA Weatherization Assistance Program. To date, the network has weatherized more than 50,000 homes of low-income Texans. Incredible work! We also realize that even though it will mean some significant personal sacrifices over the holiday season, we hope you

will maintain your incredibly focused efforts, doing everything within your power to achieve the full, timely, and proper use of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. What you accomplish over these last few months of ARRA will be a happy holiday reminder for years to come as low-income families enjoy the benefits of weatherized homes, reduced utility costs, and enhanced health and safety. Your efforts will be an enduring testimonial



to the spirit of giving. Thank you very much.

On Behalf of TDHCA, Tim Irvine, Executive Director

(What is Community Action? continued from page 1) In 2010, the network expanded to meet the needs of America's many unemployed and underemployed families. Last year, CAAs served 20.3 million individuals using more than \$16 billion, including resources from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). In 2010, the network expanded to meet the ballooning needs of America's many unemployed and underemployed families. Last year, CAAs served 20.3 million individuals using more than \$16 billion, including resources from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). **CAAs address causes of poverty, not the symptoms**, which means that: CAAs work to ensure their community offers everyone opportunities to become economically secure, and they invest in individuals and their families who are striving to develop their skills. (This article was reprinted from NCAF.org)