

Couleecap's Innovative Strategies to Combat Poverty

Community Action Programs were the original “go local” movement. In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson declared an unconditional War on Poverty. His goal was to provide opportunity for every American to enjoy the benefits of this great nation. His strategy was to designate resources that community organizations would use to address local issues. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 established a network of these local organizations, known as Community Action Agencies. Since that time, these local Community Action Agencies have pioneered innovative, community-based, effective programs that have lifted millions out of poverty by “giving a hand-up, not a handout.”

Couleecap, created in 1966 and your local community action agency, develops and implements innovative anti-poverty strategies. Each year, Couleecap helps more than 17,000 families -- including 37,000 people -- in our region achieve self-sufficiency, by providing:

- The basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing.
- The tools for living healthy, safe, and independent lives.
- The support for building a better future.

A few of Couleecap's innovative anti-poverty strategies:

- **Work-n-Wheels:** provides zero interest vehicle loans and vehicle repair assistance to qualified low-income households. Vehicle purchase and/or repair must be related to employment. Program participants must agree to participate in ride share when possible. This program serves residents in Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties.
- **Local foods Farmers Market vouchers:** Couleecap participates in the “Crawford Markets Care” initiative. Local food pantries distribute coupons worth \$5 of fresh locally grown food to be redeemed at the local Farmers’ Markets in Prairie du Chien, Ferryville, and Gays Mills.
- **State of the art home weatherization services:** such as attic, sidewall and foundation insulation; repair or replace furnaces and water heaters; showerheads and aerators; health and safety inspection and energy education. This program serves Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon county residents.
- **Next Step Housing:** is re-designed manufactured housing that is attractive, energy-efficient, and uses standard construction materials while complying with the HUD Manufactured Housing Code. Couleecap is a regional distributor of this housing.
- **Coulee Community Land Trust:** provides homebuyers the ability to purchase permanently affordable housing in select communities at 50-60% of market prices. Designed to be high-quality, energy-efficient, and attractive, these homes that can be sold at a price that working families and individuals can afford.
- **Coulee Community Realty:** all Couleecap-owned homes are sold through Couleecap’s non-profit real estate brokerage. The brokerage was formed in February 2011 to assist our land trust buyers with their closings.
- **Job and Business Development:** For low-income entrepreneurs, the program coordinator provides training on financial literacy, budgeting, marketing and feasibility studies and assists with development of a business plan. This program serves residents in Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties.
- **People Helping People Fund:** assists with client needs which cannot be covered by grant funds. These needs are often small, but vital to a person achieving success and overcoming their situation. Assistance available in Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties. Donations are always needed.

Couleecap unites the diverse voices of the Coulee Region, low-income individuals, elected officials, and representatives from grassroots community organizations, to fight poverty in our community. **“It’s not only about giving homes to the homeless; it’s about giving hope to the hopeless,”** said Amanda Hartley, Couleecap client and the 2011 Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP) Self-Sufficiency Award recipient.

WISCAP and Couleecap believe that all of us could experience poverty and that the costs and consequences of poverty have significant effects on everybody, whether poor or not. Poverty is the cause of unnecessary and preventable suffering among millions of Americans and thousands of Wisconsinites of all ages. The economic and social costs are enormous. We believe there are cost-effective, innovative solutions to poverty. Through efforts that create jobs that pay living wages with benefits, safe and affordable housing, accessible healthcare, and education we can eliminate poverty.

Making a Difference

Cindy Rockette had never relied on any government or other agency help before. She graduated from Tomah High School and went to a technical college in La Crosse while she raised her two daughters. Cindy has always worked for a living, making sure that the payment on her vehicle is up-to-date and that her rent is current. She takes care of her one daughter still at home and keeps up with her older daughter. She lives close to the financial edge, but she makes it work. That is, it worked until something out of her control went wrong.

One cold January day in 2011, the furnace in her rental home was malfunctioning, filling her home with carbon monoxide and needed to be shut down immediately. It couldn’t be fixed and it needed to be replaced. The landlord refused to fix the furnace and refused to help pay the energy bill that was over \$400 for fifteen days due to the faulty furnace. Cindy and her daughter were told to move out in five days and were homeless.

For a few months after being forced to move, they lived with her parents and then she remembered hearing from several people with good experiences with Couleecap, and that the organization had all kinds of ways to help people, so she did some checking. What she found was an organization designed to help people in just her kind of situation. Cindy wasn’t sure what kind of help she would find, but she figured she would ask. She got more than she expected.

Couleecap’s People Helping People Initiative gave her a list of people who had rentals and had worked with Couleecap in the past. Finding a place was streamlined. Couleecap also provided financial help with the first couple months of rent once Cindy had secured a place. And finally, Couleecap was able to help her by paying a portion of the heating bill. **“A lot of people have the impression that if you have to ask for help, there’s something really wrong with you. Couleecap doesn’t make you feel like a failure, like you’re worthless. They just help you.”**

Couleecap, Inc. is a private non-profit 501(c)3 charitable organization created in 1966. Our mission is to fight poverty and promote self-sufficiency for people in the Coulee Region. We identify needs, mobilize resources, and provide quality services to people and communities in four counties of western Wisconsin: Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon. We currently implement more than 50 contracts in the areas of housing, emergency assistance, child and family development, business development, employment, transportation, and health. Each year, Couleecap helps more than 17,000 families work towards self-sufficiency.

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