



# Community Action Solutions

March-April 2008

## Federal Tax Returns Filed By CAAs Jumps 50% Over '07

Community Action Agencies electronically filed 16,592 federal tax returns for low and moderate income residents during the 2008 filing period that brought \$15.5 million in refunds back into the state.

Returns filed by the 17 participating agencies increased 50 percent above the 2007 tax filing season. Total refunds were 20 percent higher.

Tax filers qualified for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) increased by one-third to 5,307 this year. They received \$6.9 million -- up from \$5.6 million last year. The EITC is a special tax benefit for working people who earn low or moderate incomes.

Senior citizens served, age 60 or over, increased 106 percent due in part to the stimulus filings prepared by the agencies.



Promoting Great Plains Improvement Foundation's tax preparation program are (left to right) Shaundra Bronson, Ben Hodson, Bea Perez, John Ruring, Sharon Roper, Linnie Baker, Paulette Fesler, Virginia Spencer, Mary Laird, Sheryl Smith, Shawna Silva and Oleta Butler.

Agency	Federal Returns Filed	Qualified for EITC	EITC	Total Refunds
Big Five Community Services	2,544	877	\$1,204,833	\$2,795,461
Central Oklahoma Community Action Agency	957	203	\$231,744	\$539,320
Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City & Oklahoma/Canadian Counties	3,725	1,424	\$2,055,177	\$4,450,362
Community Action Development Corporation	499	195	\$185,883	\$444,071
Community Action Resource and Development	1,246	306	\$416,612	\$1,097,809
Community Development Support Association	272	55	\$38,680	\$149,871
Cookson Hills Community Action Foundation	294	66	\$98,553	\$204,332
Deep Fork Community Action Foundation	928	349	\$357,220	\$687,319
Delta Community Action Foundation	376	205	\$73,669	\$153,919
Great Plains Improvement Foundation	279	113	\$179,028	\$320,858
INCA Community Services	578	223	\$268,223	\$574,901
KI BOIS Community Action Foundation	1,194	296	\$339,681	\$844,579
Little Dixie Community Action Agency	1,549	327	\$442,434	\$945,516
Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency	1,086	320	\$506,120	\$1,166,165
Opportunities, Inc.	428	95	\$106,799	\$317,379
Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group	253	116	\$180,540	\$319,153
Washita Valley Community Action Council	384	137	\$219,456	\$498,056



*Oklahoma Department of Commerce Secretary Natalie Shirley speaks during the Communities of Excellence Day observance in the State Capitol building. Commerce and the Oklahoma Community Institute sponsored the event.*



*Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group Executive Director Neil Montgomery (right) chats with State Rep. David Braddock (D-Altus) in front of the agency's display.*

## SOCAG Cited at Communities of Excellence Day

Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group (SOCAG) was recognized along with nine municipalities during the Communities of Excellence Day held in the Capitol building on March 13.

Oklahoma Department of Commerce Secretary Natalie Shirley said Commerce recently named SOCAG Outstanding Community Action Agency for its excellent administration of programs that daily touch the lives of Oklahomans. The agency along with its community partner of Altus had exhibit booths in the Capitol.

Other award-winning communities showcased were Boswell, Durant, Goldsby, Hobart, Kingston, Mangum, Owasso and Sperry.

The participants had all been recognized by other partners of Commerce including the Oklahoma Community Institute, Keep Oklahoma Beautiful, Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils and Oklahoma Main Street.

Shirley stated that planned, focused development improves quality of life, strengthens the economy and prepares us to meet the challenges of Oklahoma's next 100 years.

"We are excited to celebrate the successes of these communities and give them the opportunity to tell their story," said Vaughn Clark, Director of Development of the Commerce Community Development Division. "Strengthening these communities – from infrastructure to a better trained workforce – is vital for bringing good jobs to these smaller cities."

Communities of Excellence Day was launched to help promote community development.

## Closing Cost Assistance Funds Awarded

Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency's (OHFA) Board of Trustees approved during its March meeting Home Investment Partnerships Program contracts to provide homebuyer assistance to Oklahomans.

Community Development Support Association received \$149,850 to provide down payment and closing cost assistance to homebuyers in Grant and Garfield Counties. It also received an administrative award of \$5,994.

Community Action Resource & Development received \$250,000 to provide down payment and closing cost assistance to homebuyers in Mayes, Nowata, Rogers, Wagoner and Washington Counties. It also received an administrative award of \$10,000.

OHFA is a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development designated state Participating Jurisdiction.

# CDSA is Lead Agency for 2-1-1 in North Central Oklahoma

Community Development Support Association (CDSA) is the lead agency of a collaboration to provide the 3-digit information and referral hotline, 2-1-1, in North Central Oklahoma. United Ways in Enid, Ponca City and Stillwater are the other partners.

## New Community Action Web Site

United Community Action Program has a new web site at:

[www.ucapinc.org](http://www.ucapinc.org)

## Contact Us

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This newsletter was produced with funds from the  
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

The 2-1-1 call center serves Garfield, Grant, Kay, Noble, Osage, Payne and Pawnee counties.

Trained CDSA staff specialists are available to answer the number 24 hours a day, seven days a week to give free health and human services information.

The collaborative effort was launched on April 1 to give more than 213,000 residents in the seven counties a number to call "when you don't know who to call" for health and human services information.

2-1-1 is an easy-to-remember number that keeps people from making six to eight calls to find help from government agencies, non-profit or faith-based groups.

The specialists have access to translators for 150 different languages and a computer database that includes local, state, regional and national contacts. Within three to six minutes, the 2-1-1 operator can offer callers multiple local referrals plus information on eligibility and required documentation.

This one central phone number helps get people in touch with health and human services agencies providing everything from basic human needs resources such as shelter to employment supports like job training programs.

CDSA Executive Director Cheri Ezzell said examples of calls received in the first month included:

- A caller who could not get down her driveway after heavy rains in Pawnee was looking for help to repair it.

- A caller who was seeking substance abuse treatment in Stillwater.

- A caller whose electric service was scheduled to be cut off was seeking financial assistance.

- A caller who was having problems with her landlord and wondered what her rights were.

The North Central Oklahoma 211 web site is [www.ncok211.org](http://www.ncok211.org).

CDSA has for 25 years provided information and referral service in Enid through its helpline.



*The North Central Oklahoma 2-1-1 Steering Committee is a collaboration of non-profit agencies, state agencies and community volunteers including (front row) Natalea Watkins-Stillwater community volunteer, Sharon Bruce and Helene Schwartz-United Way of Ponca City. (Back row, left to right) Allan McCobb-United Way of Enid and NW Oklahoma, Cheri Ezzell-CDSA, Shelley Ricker-Stillwater Area United Way, Lisa Cundiff-Payne, Noble and Kay County Health Departments, Tom Wade-Northern Oklahoma Development Authority, Tricia Mitchell-YWCA Enid, Debi Boyle-North Central OK 2-1-1, and Carrie DeWeese-Statewide Coordinator OK 2-1-1.*





*Bill Havron, Weatherization Director from Great Plains Improvement Foundation, questions Michael Gettings from Oak Ridge National Laboratory during an in-depth training session on the energy audit software used in the Weatherization Assistance Program.*



*Deep Fork Community Action Foundation Executive Director Jeff Schuman (left) talks about agency programs with with Sen. Roger Ballenger (D-Okmulgee) and Rep. Dale Turner (D-Holdenville) in the House Chamber of the Capitol building.*



*Dr. Walt Davis from the Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties offers ideas to Head Start staff on how to effectively assist families.*



*About 135 persons attended the Legislative Conference held March 24-26 in Oklahoma City.*