

MEDIA RELEASE

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Source: Community Action Partnership

Rachel McCoy, Director of Development and Communications

(816) 233-8281, ext. 143; (816) 244-2662 (cell)

rmccoy@endpov.com

www.endpov.com

Community Action Partnership to Send Nearly 90 Employees to Healthy Communities Summit; Education and Local Poverty Partnerships on Forefront of Agenda (Oct. 23, 2007)

(Oct. 23, 2007 – St. Joseph, Mo.) Let's talk poverty. And together, let's fight it.

That's the message Dave Leyland, executive director for Community Action Partnership, hopes will resonate with the nearly 90 members of the partnership's staff who will attend the Healthy Communities Summit on Oct. 26.

Sponsored by the Heartland Foundation, renowned keynote speaker and author Ruby Payne will address stumbling blocks individuals face to move from poverty into a higher social class – especially the education-based barriers placed on children.

Community Action Partnership of Greater St Joseph, part of a national program whose core mission is to end poverty, represents the largest registration to the summit from local employers. A pivotal program directed by Community Action Partnership is Head Start, a child development program for pregnant women and children ages zero to five years of age who meet federal income guidelines. The program serves more than 500 low-income preschool-aged students in Andrew, Buchanan, Clinton and DeKalb counties.

“If we don't address the needs of children in poverty at a very young age, from the physical to the educational to the emotional, they often fall irreparably behind upon entering the school system,” says Leyland. “Through programs like Head Start and the ongoing assistance we offer to low-income families, we are seeing real results at empowering individuals to move upward.”

Between 2000 and 2005, the percent of Missouri children living in poverty worsened by 19 percent. During 2006, nearly one-fifth of Missouri children (18 percent) were living in poverty. Of these children, 22 percent were less than six years old. (Source: Kid's Count Missouri, a program of Citizen's for Missouri's Children). A lack of cognitive development strategies is one of the most crippling effects of poverty on children, as described by Payne in featured book *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*.

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Payne targets developmental preschool programs as one key response for countering the lack of developmental strategies that plagues low-income students, describing these strategies as “handicaps in every aspect of life the individual who does not have them.”

Registering most of the agency’s 135 employees for the summit, including several from the Head Start division, represents a commitment by Community Action Partnership to form new partnerships that end poverty in Northwest Missouri. On a broader scope, Leyland believes attendance at the summit is one aspect of helping staff consistently engage in higher levels of thinking about poverty.

“Locally, levels of poverty could intensify soon due to cuts in government funding, loss of jobs, increases in grocery and utility costs, among other causes. When you consider poverty, you have to consider that it’s not just a third-world or national issue, but a genuine community-wide problem,” Leyland says. “We’re very fortunate to have a renowned keynote speaker on the topic of poverty, and to work together as citizens and community organizations to address solutions.”

Community Action Partnership of Greater St. Joseph is one of 19 Community Action Agencies in Missouri and one of the 1,000 Community Action Agencies in the U.S. working to fight poverty at the local level. Services offered by Community Action Partnership of Greater St. Joseph to low-income individuals in Buchanan, Clinton, Andrew and DeKalb counties include Head Start, offering comprehensive educational, nutritional and emotional support for children ages birth to five; housing and rent assistance; energy crisis and utility assistance; leadership and life skills training; assistance with college entrance; and employment and workforce training programs through the Missouri Career Center.

The national network of Community Action Agencies, established in 1971 as Community Action Partnership, continues to be guided by its founding goals of “*Helping People-Changing Lives*” and ending poverty.

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