

2010

A Year in Review



MVAC — a community action agency that is for communities, not for profit — has served the people of south central Minnesota since 1965. We believe hard work should be valued and rewarded, that working people are struggling, and that we at MVAC provide opportunities for people and communities.

There is always so much that needs our attention on a daily basis that we don't often take the time to reflect on what we have collectively accomplished. On behalf of Minnesota Valley Action Council, Inc., I want to express my appreciation for the contributions you personally have made to MVAC's ability to facilitate opportunities for people and communities to secure affordable housing, viable transportation, employment, training for employment and educational opportunities for children.

Minnesota Valley Action Council learned long ago that no one can accomplish good things in isolation. It takes involvement and contributions from many people and many different sectors of our communities in order to produce positive outcomes in people's march towards self reliance.

Collectively, we — the MVAC staff, MVAC Board members, community partners, volunteers, elected officials and private employers and individuals — have:

- **Invested \$24,821,102** on behalf of people living in the nine counties of south central Minnesota, the majority of which has been spent in local businesses and with local contractors on behalf of people experiencing low income.
- Provided **direct employment for 220 people** in south central Minnesota.
- **Received over \$1,955,527 through in-kind donations** of services or products donated to assist our efforts on behalf of the more than 26,000 people still experiencing poverty in south central Minnesota. **The number of people living in poverty in this area has increased 22% in the last two years, and more than 61% since 2000, according to the Census Bureau.**
- Benefitted from **2,723 volunteers** who contributed their talents to serve south central Minnesota people struggling with poverty.
- Fielded at least **112,563 calls** from people seeking our assistance over the phone and 60,821 visits into our county-based offices.
- **Weatherized 582 homes** throughout south central Minnesota and spent \$2,927,883 at local businesses purchasing the materials to complete the weatherization itself. The number of houses weatherized represents a 93% increase from the 2009 figures.
- Assisted 9,071 people with their **heat bills**.
- **Paid \$1,828,469 to area fuel vendors** providing fuel to people receiving energy assistance.
- Assisted 290 households with **furnace repairs or replacement**. That equates to \$312,422 paid to local businesses specializing in furnace replacement/repairs.
- **Assisted 1,516 adults to gain employment** through our efforts in work force development.
- Provided 307 at-risk teenagers an opportunity to learn and earn during the **summer employment program**. In addition, 184 youth received employment readiness services year-round.
- Provided **employment services for 656 people** who had lost their jobs due to business/plant closings or downsizing.
- Assisted 487 households with services that **prevented them from joining the growing ranks of the homeless**, as well as screening an additional 1,471 other households applying for assistance.
- Assisted 95 people to **secure low-interest loans** so they could make needed improvements to their homes. Those loans have generated \$1,451,388 that has been spent at area businesses helping the local community's economy. We also assisted an additional 18 households recover from flood damage with Quick Start loans totaling \$197,794.
- Assisted 494 individuals with **reduced rental expenses** which allowed them to secure quality, safe, affordable housing.
- Assisted 5 communities with Small Cities Development Program grants, **rehabbing 39 homes and 2 commercial buildings**. This activity generated \$440,536 that has been spent at area businesses, helping the local economy.
- Provided 1,064 low-income children with **quality pre-school opportunities** through the efforts of Head Start.
- Ensured that **845 children were screened for vision and hearing** through Head Start.
- Ensured that **600 pre-school age children received a dental exam**, some for the very first time.

- **Provided 150 picture and story books** for the children in our 0-5 High Risk Home Base program. The books were courtesy of a grant from SMIF (Southern MN Initiative Foundation).
- Collaborated with Minnesota Reading Corps to secure 5 Member slots in the Fairmont, Mankato and Waseca classrooms. Members serve for one year as a Literacy Tutor, **helping children develop literacy skills**. Minnesota Reading Corps is a statewide initiative to help every Minnesota child become a successful reader. MRC is an AmeriCorps program, often called the “domestic Peace Corps.”
- Provided 4 Social/Emotional AmeriCorps Members – through a collaboration between Head Start and Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation – to help children in the classrooms in St. James, St. Peter, New Ulm and Waseca. The AmeriCorps Members **work with children to build social/emotional skills** to prepare them for Kindergarten, by helping them learn how to regulate their emotions and behaviors.
- Received 10 IBM Little Tykes Young Explorer computer systems for Head Starts classroom sites as part of an exciting venture to **promote technology and early learning** from SMIF (Southern MN Initiative Foundation). Classroom sites that received the computers this year included Mankato, Winthrop, Fairmont, Wells, New Ulm, Sleepy Eye, LeCenter and St. Peter.
- Provided 26 people **the opportunity to save** for the purchase of a home, post-secondary training or starting up a small business through the FAIM initiative (Family Assets for Independence in MN). Through FAIM, 396 hours of **intensive financial literacy** was provided. The 26 people saved \$9,672 of their own earned income, which will be matched by \$29,016 from private, state and federal sources.
- Provided 156 people with the opportunity to **secure their own transportation** through our Wheel Get There initiative.
- Received **141 cars donated** to Wheel Get There.
- Purchased 16 American-made cars with the help of over \$200,000 of ARRA stimulus funds and established a revolving fund that **leases those cars to low-income people** for \$165 a month. This opportunity will be self-sustaining and allow additional people to lease new cars in the future through the monthly lease payments returned to the loan fund.
- Provided more than 8,000 people with **car information assistance** through Wheel Get There.
- Concluded our seventh year of operations for our **social enterprise AGAIN Thrift & More Store**. AGAIN received \$371,225 in donated product from the community, and provided training opportunities for 402 people who contributed over 16,385 hours of labor. AGAIN produced \$109,361 in revenue over expenses which will be used to assist this area’s low-wage workers.
- Provided **free tax preparation services** and filed 463 tax returns, which resulted in \$976,618 in tax refunds and credits for low-income households in south central Minnesota.
- In an environment of well-published financial fraud and abuse by large corporations, MVAC’s annual audit cited **no areas of non-compliance**, which is similar to receiving an A+.
- Provided **fiscal services** for two other organizations that have brought in \$177,382 to help offset the cost of fiscal and support services for the agency. This saved individual programs from paying those expenses.
- Provided 15,560 **rides for primarily elderly and disabled people** in Waseca County through the Waseca Transportation Program, a 6% increase over 2009 ridership
- Provided 51,064 **bus rides** to children in center, combination and home-based programs through Head Start.
- Benefited from **588 hours volunteered by MVAC Board members** assisting MVAC to achieve our mission of developing resources and opportunities, which empower people and communities.
- Provided \$773,255 to area landlords for **rental assistance payments** on behalf of people experiencing low income.
- A family whose furnace was replaced and who received energy assistance wrote: “Our family cannot find the words to express how thankful we are for programs like this. MVAC is answering prayers! Thank you so much for helping our family stay warm.”
- A person who purchased a vehicle through our Wheel Get There initiative wrote: “I am so very thankful for you helping my family! Thank you and the donor of the Dodge Caravan. I was able to go back to work, do street outreach and attend church and doctor’s appointments and much more. Thank you!”
- A person receiving energy assistance wrote: “I am grateful for the heating assistance I received from your organization. It is greatly appreciated as I have been on a medical leave of absence and unable to work.”

Although it’s been more than 40 years since President Kennedy issued his challenge to America to assist the poor, it could have been issued today. The fact is there are more people joining the ranks of the financially struggling every day. We are hearing from people who have said that they used to donate to charities and now they feel humbled that they need to request assistance from them. What they need is what our collective efforts have provided them. When people are drowning, the biggest impact you can make is to provide them a life jacket. That’s what you are doing, that’s what you are accomplishing.

We collectively have accomplished much during 2010. Thank you for your contribution and I hope you take pride in what you have done.

We at MVAC are people helping people to help themselves. The year 2011 promises to be full of more opportunities to provide opportunities for people and communities through out south-central Minnesota.

Respectfully,

John T Woodwick

MVAC Executive Director