

Final Draft
October 15, 2010

ECHO Questions and Answers

20 Minute Conversation

"Community Action Minnesota"

Preface: For more than 45 years Community Action agencies have been fighting poverty. Their goal is to help people lift themselves out of poverty.

1. What is a Community Action Agency?

Sample Answer:

- It is a community-based organization with programs started in 1964 to fight poverty
- These agencies exist all over the United States
- In Minnesota we have 28 agencies serving all the counties – and they are on all tribal nations in our state
- Free services are offered to everyone who needs them – from infants to elders
- Low income community members serve on Community Action Boards to provide guidance on what is most important to help people help themselves.

2. How do you fight poverty?

Sample Answer:

- Our strategy is to help people to help themselves
- Our motto is: "Helping People, Changing Lives."
- We provide many services and training programs
- If a particular agency doesn't offer a service, we refer you to someone who does

3. Can you list the services you offer that help fight poverty?

Sample Answer:

- Yes, but each agency offers a different combination of services
 - If they don't have a service, they can refer you to another place that offers the service
- Here are some of our more common services:
 - Head Start
 - Energy Assistance
 - Weatherization
 - Housing assistance
 - Food support
 - Senior services
 - Financial fitness training
 - Tax preparation
 - Job support – such as transportation, child care etc.

4. Let's talk about your various services. Please explain Head Start.

Sample answer:

- Head Start is for preschool children ages 3 to 5 and their families
- Early Head Start serves newborn babies to 3-year-olds and pregnant mothers
- Head Start is a program designed to get these children ready to learn in school
- Head Start provides a variety of services:
 - Education
 - Health
 - Nutrition
 - Parent involvement and family support Do you have a program for even younger children?

5. Why should children start education program before kindergarten?

Sample Answer:

- Children will be more successful in school if they start early
- Healthy children have a better chance to be successful
- Learning begins the moment you are born

6. What is energy assistance?

Sample answer:

- Energy Assistance is help paying for heating costs
- The costs to heat your home get very high in winter in Minnesota
- Some agencies can help with energy-related repairs
 - For example – furnace repair

7. What is weatherization?

Sample answer:

- Our weatherization programs reduce energy costs – and make homes more energy efficient – warmer in the winter, cooler in the summer
 - Education – know where heat leaks from your home
 - Insulation – cracks near doors and windows
 - More efficient doors and windows

8. Tell me about housing assistance.

Sample answer:

- Services can include affordable housing development, rent assistance and other housing support
- Help fighting mortgage foreclosures
- Referrals to homeless shelters or services
- Legal services to help with landlord or lease problems

9. What is Food Support?

Sample Answer:

- Food Support is a government program to help low-income people get food
 - Used to be called “Food Stamps”
 - Now uses electronic payment card – EBT card
- Some Community Action agencies have food shelves
 - Or they can refer you to nearby food shelves

10. What services do you have for elderly people?

Sample Answer:

- Help staying in your home
 - Home chore services
- Assistance accessing health and other medical support services
- Food services
 - Congregate dining (group dining)
 - Meals delivered to homes

11. Tell me about financial fitness training

Sample Answer:

- Financial Fitness Training involves developing or improving the following skills:
 - Learning to budget and use money wisely
 - Avoiding debt and saving money
 - Building good credit or repairing bad credit
 - Understanding banks and credit unions
 - Avoiding predatory lending and financial scams
 - Stay away from check-cashing places
 - Tips for stretching a budget

12. Tell me about free services for low-income people to help prepare and file taxes

Sample Answer:

- Community action agencies often partner with other agencies to offer this free service
- Filing state and federal income taxes
- Accessing credits such as
 - Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for low-wage workers
 - Minnesota Working Families Credit
 - Renters Credit
 - And more
- Avoiding predatory products such as refund anticipation loans (RALs)
- Watch out for people – even those in your community – who want to charge a high price to help you do taxes
- Paying taxes is like paying dues

13. How can you help people who are looking for a job?

Sample Answer:

- Many of our agencies offer employment and training services
 - Help to get and keep a job
 - New job-related skills
 - Job support –
 - resume building
 - transportation
 - child care
 - We can also help you look for a better job

14. Who can get services at Community Action Agencies?

Sample Answer:

- People with low incomes
 - Different services have different guidelines of eligibility
- No geographical limits. Go to whatever agency is convenient for you.

15. Does immigration status affect ability to get services?

Sample Answer:

- Everyone should come to community action to ask for help
- Some services are available and some services are not available to undocumented immigrants
- Undocumented workers will not be turned away or turned in to authorities
- Community Action Agencies are not reporting agencies

16. A lot of Community Action Agencies in Minnesota can help you. You can find them listed on our website along with additional information and resources.

Sample answer:

- **HOSTS READ:** For more information on Community Action services, visit the website for Minnesota Community Action Partnership at www.minncap.org
- **HOSTS READ:** Or check ECHO's website at www.echominnesota.org.
- **GUESTS READ:** You can also call the information number "211" and ask for your nearest Community Action Agency.

17. Do you have anything else you'd like to add on this subject?

Sample answer:

- It is a good first stop – many services at one entry point
- Do not be afraid to seek help – people are friendly at Community Action and want to help
- A Community Action agency is near you

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