

2024 Annual Report

TCAction
58
years
TCAction
TCAction



Dear Community,

Over the past year, Tompkins Community Action (TCAction) has served thousands of families and individuals throughout Tompkins County, utilizing private donations and Federal, State, and local grant funding. We proudly celebrated our 58th year of service to our community.

This year also marks the 60th anniversary of Community Action nationwide—a milestone that invites us to reflect on the impact, resilience, and perseverance of Community Action organizations. In the early 1960s, President John F. Kennedy recognized the need for grassroots efforts to combat poverty, inequality, and social injustice. The Community Action Program was established as part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, with the goal of empowering local communities by providing resources, fostering self-reliance, and amplifying the voices of those often marginalized.

Over the past 60 years, Community Action Programs have worked to address the root causes and conditions of poverty by supporting families in their immediate needs while creating opportunities for long-term success. At Community Action, we recognize that with a network of support, a struggling family can transform into a thriving one.

Throughout these six decades, Community Action Programs have faced many challenges, including economic downturns, shifting political landscapes, and unforeseen crises. These tests have only strengthened the resilience of Community Action. Today, TCAction, alongside 1,000 other Community Action Agencies across the country, remains steadfast in our mission to collaborate with and serve communities with unwavering dedication. As we look ahead to 2025, we are prepared to continue this important work.

The success of our organization is only possible because of the dedication of our staff, who bring this mission to life every day. They work tirelessly to support families and individuals through challenges and celebrate their successes, no matter how big or small. Our team actively participates in community activities and meetings, striving to improve systems and build a network of support that creates opportunities for those we serve.

I hope you enjoy the highlights of our accomplishments as much as I do.

Sincerely,



Danielle Harrington

Executive Director





The staff of Tompkins Community Action at our annual summer event.

Community In Action

Each year, a dedicated team of staff volunteers gives back to the community by cleaning up roadside trash along a two-mile stretch of Bostwick Road in the Town of Ithaca, as part of the Adopt-a-Highway Program.



We also love celebrating TCAction by participating in the Ithaca Festival Parade and the Dryden Dairy Day Parade, marching alongside our Head Start families.



Community Action Governance: A Tradition of Inclusive Leadership

The Economic Opportunity Act established the framework for Community Action Agency Boards to include representation from all sectors of the community. It mandated that Boards be tripartite in composition, comprising one-third elected public officials, one-third representatives from the private and community sectors, and one-third representatives from the low-income sector. At the time, this approach was seen as a “community revolution,” ensuring that all community stakeholders, particularly low-income individuals, had a voice in shaping their future.

Our Board of Directors

Our Board of Directors reflects this inclusive approach and is integral to guiding our mission. Members include:

- **Jody Scriber** - *President*
- **Rick Alvord** - *Vice President*
- **Justin St. Juliana** - *Treasurer*
- **Kate Laux** - *Secretary*
- **Gary Evans**
- **Kevin Kelly**
- **Daniel Lichter**
- **Samantha Stevenson**
- **Kayla Matos**

This year, we bid farewell to **Tommy Miller**, who retired as Board President after serving the maximum term limit. We are deeply grateful for Tommy’s leadership, spirit, and sense of humor over the years.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to **Sally Dullea, Leslie Connors, JoAnn Encarnacion, and Seph Murtagh** for their years of service and unwavering dedication to our organization.

Head Start Policy Council

In alignment with Head Start program guidelines defined in 1965; our Head Start Policy Council ensures that low-income participants have opportunities to shape their vision for the future. The Council comprises past and current Head Start parents, offering valuable insights into the program.

Policy Council members include:

- **Chyna Britton** - *Chair*
- **Destiny Towns** - *Vice Chair*
- **Shyla Clemons** - *Treasurer*
- **Sheena Veney** - *Secretary*
- **Delena Brown**
- **Mika Hazzard**
- **Kara Landon**
- **Jessica Martin**
- **Danielle Tafel**
- **Frank VanPetten**

We also recognize the contributions of outgoing members **Stephanie Drake, Daniella Rin Hover, Dawn Lehto, JoAnn Encarnacion, Jessica Giannicchi-Harris, Meggan Munson, Dreena DiMaggio, Shawn Moyer, and Roberta Hardison**, whose time and expertise have been invaluable to the program's growth and success.

These dedicated groups of community members provide critical governance and insight, ensuring our programs align with our mission and continue to serve the community effectively.

2024 TCAction Staff Awards

The Coakley Award

The Coakley Award is presented to an employee who consistently demonstrates honesty, a strong work ethic, patience, and problem-solving skills in their work. Established in 2007 to honor former IT Director Ben Coakley, who embodied these qualities, the award recognizes those who exemplify these values in their daily efforts.

The 2024 Coakley Award winner is **Emilie Sherwood**, a Head Start Teacher. Emilie joined TCAction in August 2021 and was nominated for her steadfast commitment to the children and families in her classroom, even when faced with significant challenges. Emilie exemplifies the core qualities of the Coakley Award, demonstrating unwavering patience, honesty, creative and consistent problem-solving, and a remarkable work ethic.



Emilie Sherwood (center) with Family Services Director Michelle Blodgett and HR Director Cindy Martin.

The Leadership Award

The Leadership Award is presented annually to an employee who consistently demonstrates leadership, initiative, and dedication to the Agency's mission, vision, and values.

The 2024 Leadership Award winner is **Melissa Travis**, also a Head Start Teacher. Melissa has been with TCAction since August 2017 and was nominated for her proactive and solutions-oriented approach, exemplified by her question, "How can we make this work?" Melissa consistently steps up to meet the needs of the children and families we serve, while also supporting her colleagues. A natural leader, she leads by example, embracing plans that best serve the Agency's mission. Melissa strives to make a positive impact on everyone she interacts with, building on the strengths of children, families, and staff every day.



Melissa Travis (right) with HR Director Cindy Martin and Harriet Gianellis Childcare Center Director April Fletcher.

Joe Cassaniti Community Service Award

The Joe Cassaniti Community Service Award (JCCSA) was established in 1996 by Walter Gangl, an attorney and former Ithaca resident, to honor the contributions of local businessman and community activist, Joe Cassaniti. Known for his innovative and creative solutions to community challenges, Joe remains deeply committed to supporting young people and improving the welfare of others through action and advocacy.

In keeping with Joe's vision and dedication to the community, the JCCSA is awarded annually by TCAction to a high school senior in Tompkins County who has demonstrated exceptional commitment to the community through volunteerism.

The 2024 JCCSA Award winner is **Carterann Lower**, a 2023 high school senior at TST BOCES, where she participated in the Nurse Assisting & Health Occupations program. Carterann was nominated for this award by her teacher, Chanhom Green, who recognized her extraordinary spirit of compassion and selflessness.

Carterann exemplifies the core values of the JCCSA through her unwavering dedication to helping others. Beyond the classroom, she volunteers her time to uplift those in need—whether comforting patients or lending a helping hand to local organizations. Her big heart and commitment to making a difference shine in everything she does.



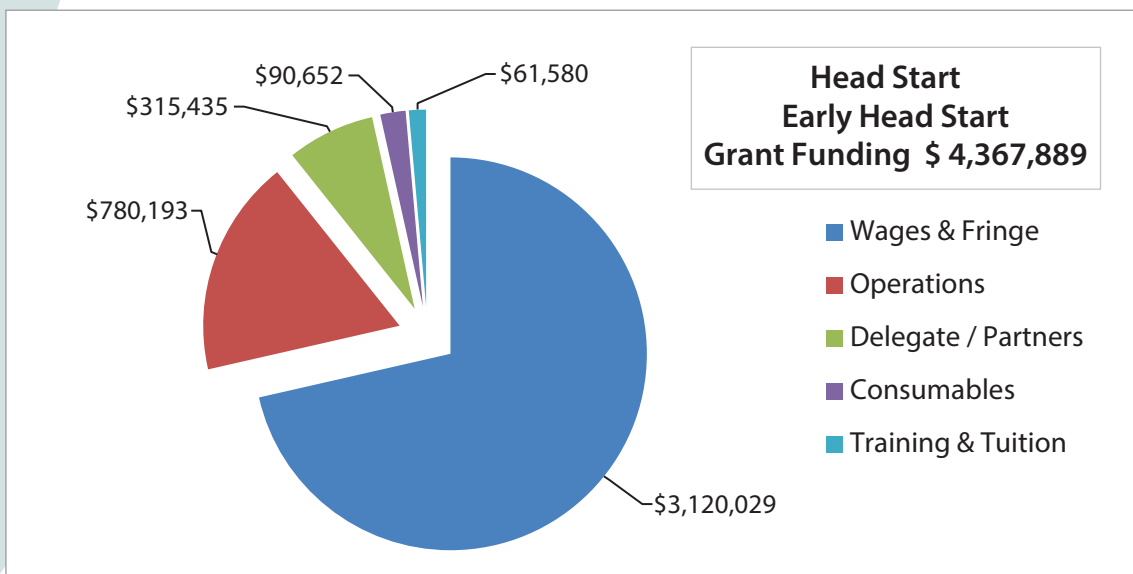
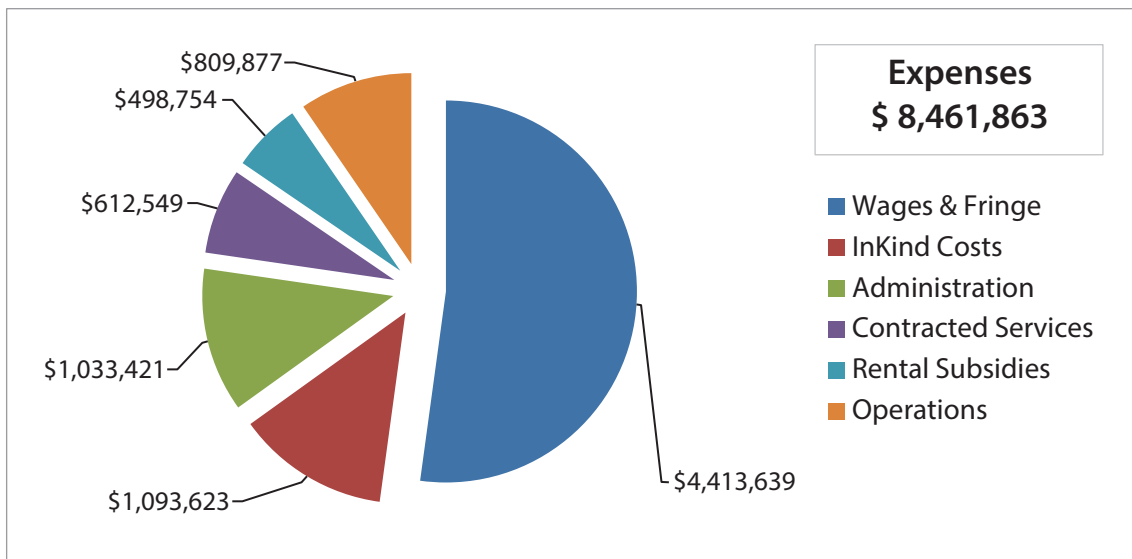
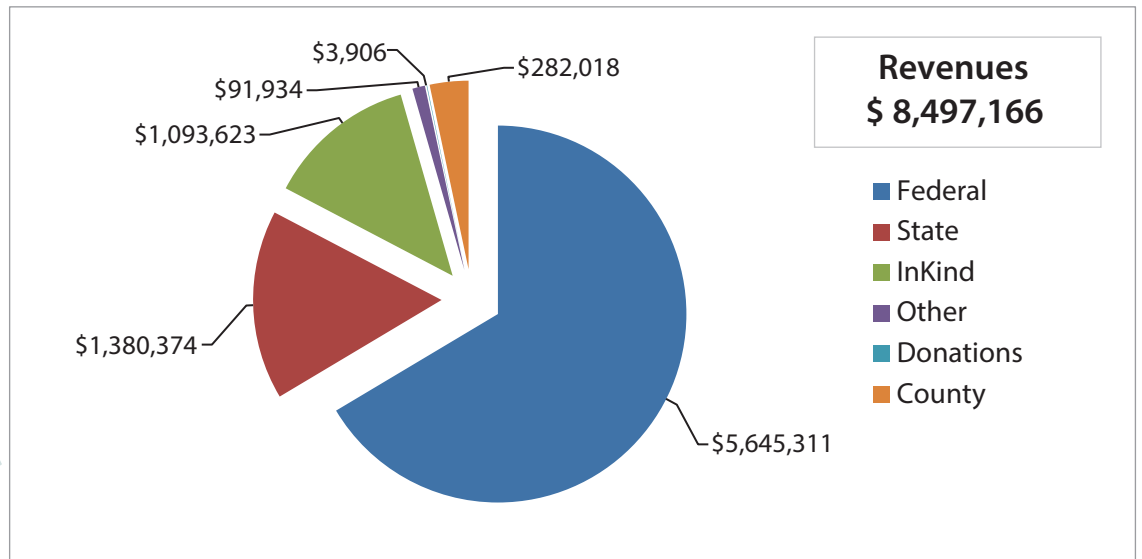
Carterann Lower



Carterann is currently attending Keuka College to pursue a degree in Nursing. She and her nominator, Chanhom Green, joined us at the May Board of Directors meeting to celebrate this well-deserved honor.

Carterann is Community Action!

Revenues & Expenditures for 2024

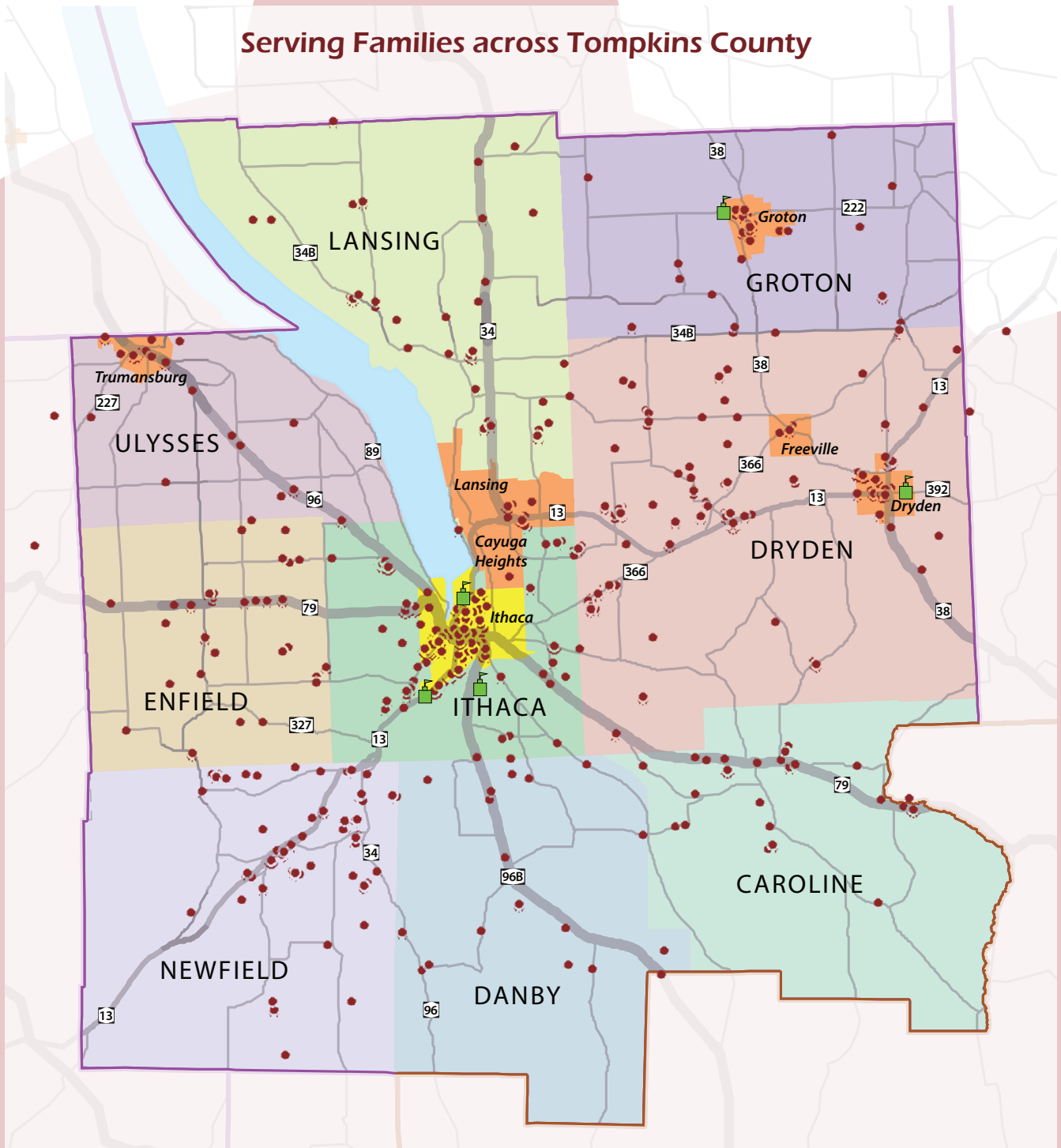


TCAction's Program Delivery

TCAction delivers its programs through three primary departments: **Family Services**, **Housing Services**, and **Community Services**. Our approach is guided by the Family Development Model, which transforms how health, education, and human services are provided to families.

This model shifts the focus from crisis-oriented, fragmented services to a comprehensive, support-based framework that fosters collaboration and empowerment. The Family Development Model emphasizes; strength-based partnerships, mutual respect, interagency collaboration and family-centered services. By adopting this holistic approach, TCAction ensures that families receive the support they need to achieve stability and long-term success.

Serving Families across Tompkins County



Family Services

This year, our Head Start and Early Head Start Programs served 300 children and their families, offering comprehensive services for pregnant women, newborns, and children up to five years old. Programs were delivered in classrooms and homes, with 31 classrooms located county-wide, including collaborations with the Ithaca City School District.



Children and families benefited from high-quality, developmentally appropriate education tailored to enhance learning while accessing essential community resources. Using the High-Scope Curriculum with a focus on school readiness, child assessments showed remarkable growth: Language and literacy skills increased by 22%, Social skills improved by 24%, Math and science skills increased by 25%. These academic achievements were further supported by the ECHOS science curriculum, implemented in partnership with the Sciencenter.

Throughout the year, families participated in activities such as socialization events, Parent Action Groups, trainings, and educational seminars. Our nutrition program provided 75,597 meals and snacks, integrating the LANA (Learning About Nutrition through Activities) curriculum to promote healthy eating at home.

Through a collaboration with Finger Lakes Community Health, children received dental screenings and cleanings, alongside oral health education and supplies for families. Transition-to-Kindergarten activities included visits to school cafeterias, libraries, and gymnasiums, easing the move to public school for our young learners.

Our **Primary School Family Support Program** strengthened relationships between parents and school officials, supported children with special needs, and promoted positive family-school communication. Socialization events and celebrations enriched the experience for families and children alike.

As part of our literacy initiative, the **Family Home Library Program** provided 3,405 books and activities to families, funded by Reading Is Fundamental and the Park Foundation. Each family received program packets with new books, recipes, and activities aligned with classroom themes. By the end of the program year, every household had the foundation of a home library. Our Family Literacy Events, featuring book-themed activities, fostered a love of reading and supported school readiness.



In 2024, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services allocated \$4,367,889 to implement the Head Start Program, distributed as follows: \$3,120,029 for wages and benefits, \$780,193 for operations, \$315,435 for the Ithaca City School District collaboration, \$90,652 for classroom supplies and \$61,580 for staff and parent education and training.

Maguire Subaru and Operation Warm

In January 2024, Maguire Subaru Loves to Help / Operation Warm donated hundreds of new winter coats for Head Start and Supportive Housing families. These coats provided not only warmth but also comfort, security, and joy for children and their families. Families could redirect their resources toward other essentials, thanks to this generous support.

Maguire Subaru staff, led by Cory, were instrumental in organizing the coat giveaway event, ensuring each child received a perfectly fitting coat in their favorite color. The smiles and excitement on children's faces were priceless. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Maguire Subaru and Operation Warm for their generosity and dedication to our community.

excitement on children's faces were priceless. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Maguire Subaru and Operation Warm for their generosity and dedication to our community.



Community Services

Our **Emergency Food Pantry Program** provides households with three to four days' worth of food and personal care items every two weeks. Consumers can utilize our convenient online ordering system to select foods that best meet their family's dietary needs and preferences, as well as schedule a pickup time. For those needing accommodation, we continued to offer limited delivery services.

The pantry is a collaboration with several partners, including: the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, Friendship Donation Network, Food Distribution Network and local growers, businesses, and generous community member donations.

Our Food Pantry strives to provide fresh vegetables, fruits, and bread whenever possible. We also offer cleaning supplies, personal hygiene products, and pet food as available. This year, the pantry distributed 4,581 food boxes to community members.

Through our partnership with the Food Bank of the Southern Tier, we also operate a Diaper Program, which provides diapers in infant, toddler, and adult sizes to those in need.

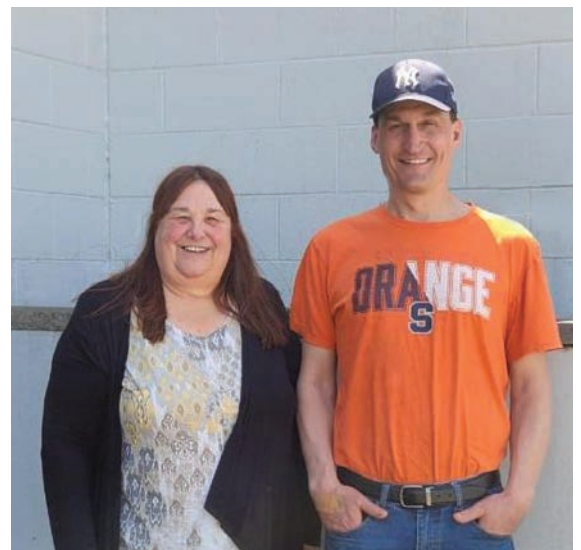


Neil and a helper from Cornell bringing in the plants for the Victory Garden.

In May, we hosted the **Victory Garden Project**, distributing starter vegetable and herb plants to 181 households. These included tomatoes, peppers, basil, cilantro, and more, empowering families to grow their own food at home or in community garden spaces. Since 2010, this event has been made possible by the generous support of the Cornell University Horticulture Department, which provides a beautiful selection of plants.

The success of this event was further enhanced by the hard work of Cargill volunteers, who assisted with setup, plant packing, and loading cars. Their efforts ensured a smooth and enjoyable event for all participants.

We are deeply grateful for the dedication of our community volunteers who make the Food Pantry Program possible. This year, we'd like to recognize **Keith Chapin**, who has been a committed and invaluable volunteer. Keith's hard work and positive attitude have made a significant impact, and we sincerely thank him for his service!



Glenda Abbey, Community Services, with volunteer Keith Chapin

Housing Services

We provided rental assistance through the **Housing Choice Voucher Program** to 1,214 households, resulting in \$10,823,785 in rental subsidies issued to landlords by NYS Homes & Community Renewal.

Sixty-eight households participated in the **Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS)**. Many participants earned escrow in a savings account due to increases in their earned income.



This year, the **Home Ownership Option** celebrated one closing in Tompkins County, helping a first-time homebuyer achieve their dream of owning a home.

We assisted 13 households experiencing homelessness in securing and stabilizing new rental housing through the **Tenant-Based Rental Assistance Program**. Funded by NYS Homes and Community Renewal, this program supports chronically homeless households using a housing-first approach. It provides rental assistance and supportive services in a scattered-site model across Tompkins County.

Our **Supportive Housing Programs** provide permanent housing with rental assistance and supportive services for individuals experiencing homelessness. These programs focus on helping residents build life and housing stability skills while pursuing other personal goals. All residents with children are connected to our Early Head Start/Head Start programming.

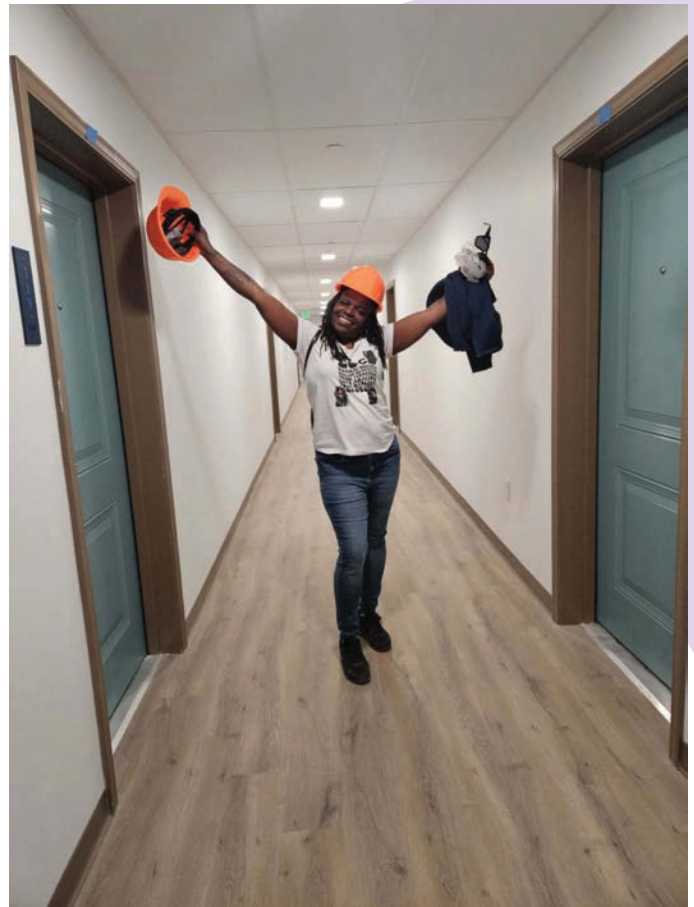
Locations

- **Chartwell House**—Serves 12 residents in a single-room occupancy (SRO) setting
- **Magnolia House**—Serves 14 residents in studio apartments
- **Amici House and Corn Street Apartments**—Provide 29 apartments for young adults aged 18–25

Partnerships

- At **Ithaca Arthaus**, we provide supportive services for 40 units dedicated to young adults aged 18–25. Developed and operated by the Vecino Group, TCAAction staff maintain offices on-site to assist residents.
- At **Asteri Ithaca**, another property owned and operated by the Vecino Group, we added 40 additional units of permanent supportive housing for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.

The goal of our Supportive Housing Program is to eliminate barriers to resources and prevent a return to homelessness.



Tiffany Wallace, Supportive Housing, at the opening of Asteri Ithaca.

New Program Highlight

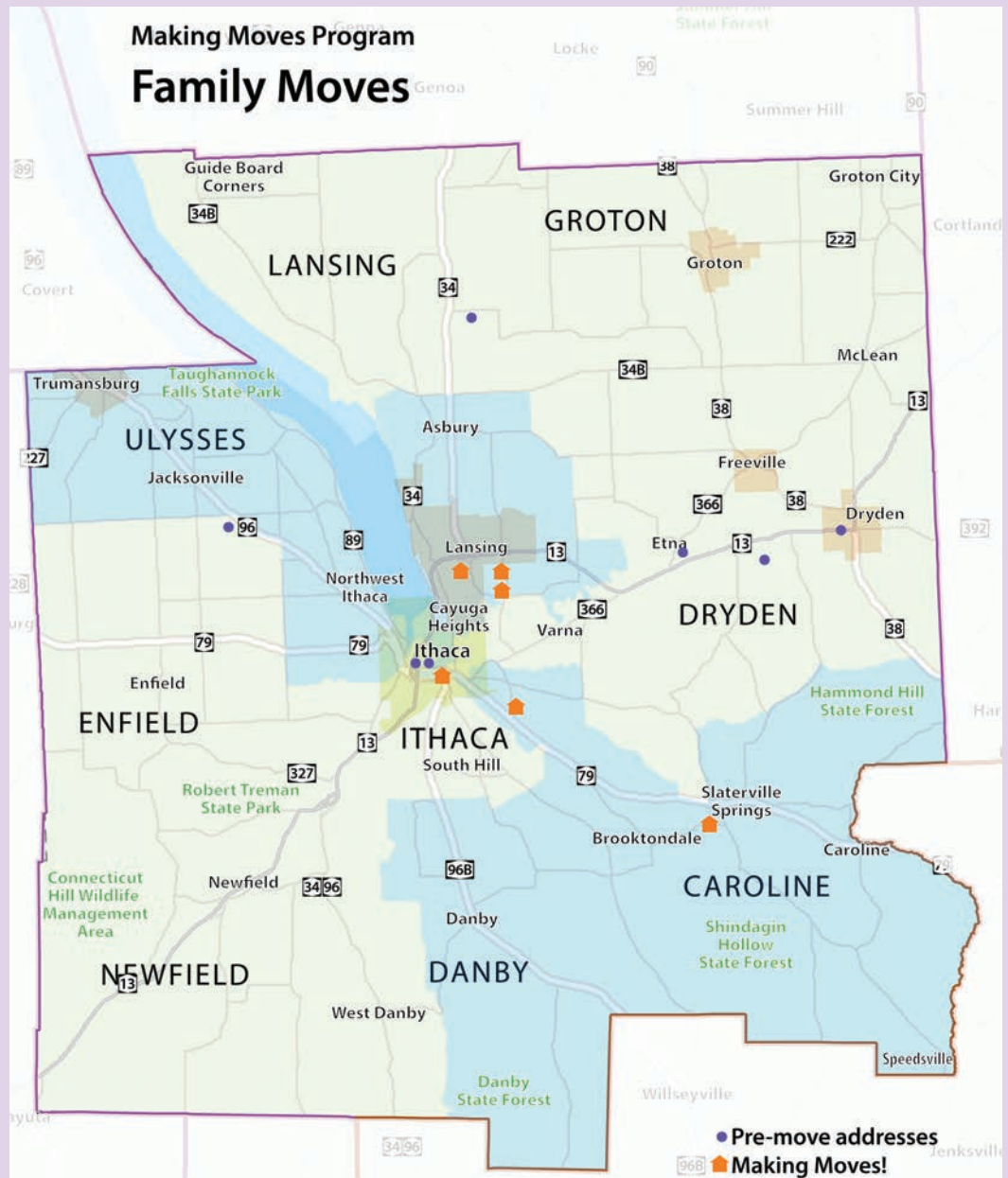
Making Moves- a Housing Mobility Program

Tompkins County offers over 2,000 Housing Choice Vouchers, many of which are used by households to secure housing in areas with high concentrations of poverty. The Making Moves Program assists interested voucher families at TCAAction or the Ithaca Housing Authority in overcoming barriers to relocating to well-resourced neighborhoods, expanding their access to economic mobility, high-performing schools, job opportunities, and other positive long-term outcomes. The program is committed to affirmatively furthering fair housing and works actively to address housing discrimination in partnership with LawNY and CNY Fair Housing, ensuring that concerns and complaints are addressed. The Making Moves Program takes a whole family approach, aiming to build housing stability and long-term success for families relocating to opportunity areas.

TCAAction staff work alongside families and community partners to reduce and remove barriers to housing stability in designated opportunity areas. Program staff collaborate with enrolled families to identify preferred neighborhoods for relocation, create rental cover letters, attend unit viewings and review rental applications.

Ongoing workshops and educational opportunities are provided by TCAAction and community partners. These workshops include the housing search process, financial education and tenant education topics. LawNY provides tenant's rights education and legal support workshops. Alternatives Federal Credit Union offers financial education on credit repair, budgeting, and goal setting tailored to the participating families.

This is one of only four Making Moves Programs in New York State. We are proud to offer this program that supports our agency's mission.



Partner Highlight- Racker

TCAction and Racker have a long history of successful collaboration. Recently, we expanded our partnership by adding an Early Head Start Program option to Racker's Wilkins Road location, furthering our shared commitment to support the community's youngest learners.

Racker has served the Tompkins County community for 75 years, providing residential services, educational programming, and consulting services for adults and children with disabilities. For many years,

Racker has been conducting speech screenings for both our Head Start and Early Head Start children, ensuring early identification and support for speech and language development.



Together TCAction and Racker bring Early Head Start (EHS) Program Family Engagement components such as the establishment of

Parent Action Group and supporting Family Goals. With Racker's experience and host of service providers at their Ithaca facility, EHS children enrolled at Racker will have the added benefit of therapists regularly supporting classroom staff and children, meeting education and development goals as well as any Early Intervention mandates.

Additionally, this partnership provides joint training and professional development opportunities for staff, further strengthening our ability to support families and children effectively.





**The strength of Community Action comes from our dedicated staff team, community partners, and collaborators
“Because an Active Community Can Produce Powerful Change”**



58
years

Tompkins Community Action

Main Office
701 Spencer Road
Ithaca, New York 14850

Phone: 607-273-8816
Fax: 607-273-3293

tcaction.org