

Ohio Urban Community Action Network



**2024
Annual
Report**



Yvonne Cherell, MPA
Chief Executive Officer

The catalyst for creating the Ohio Urban Community Action Network in 1985 was to provide a voice for those who didn't have a seat at the table. Our founders saw a need to support the agencies in the state who serve communities facing deep, generational and systemic issues.

Using a holistic, whole family approach, we serve everyone with dignity and respect. We serve the whole community from Head Start children to seniors on fixed incomes. And we're not just serving the community, we are a part of it and have been for decades. Our unique connections provide the secret sauce that drives us to create successful opportunities for all Ohioans.

Poverty is a policy choice. No one deserves to be in poverty. No one thinks poverty is going to happen to them. However, for many of us working in Community Action, poverty is part of our lived experience. That makes us passionate about helping others and allows us to connect to each other on a deeper level.

For nearly 40 years, OUCAN has used the strength of the pact to leverage funding and influence to spread assistance wider and deeper. We don't do it alone and we know we will continue to fight with your support. Thank you.

Thank You for Your Support

Let's be clear. No one wants to be poor. Yet, there are a number of people who have been struggling for decades. They work multiple jobs to care for themselves and their families.

Community Action does a number of things, but at the end of the day, our role is to help people who walk through our doors because they need our help. That's our why - to make their lives better any way we can. We are blessed to be a blessing.

As a network, we create important synergy by working together. We support each other in the work that each of us is doing to support our communities.

People who work in our agencies have very often been in the client's shoes. They have personally dealt with poverty or have a close friend or family member who has. This is not just a job, it's a calling. It's a heart issue for all of us.

Personally, I'm passionate about the work because I remember the days when I was poor. Remembering our why helps us retain our compassion and provide genuine help moving forward. Thank you for all you do.



Jacklyn Chisholm, Ph.D.
Board Chair

Mission Statement

10
member
agencies

The mission of the Ohio Urban Community Action Network (OUCAN) is to empower Ohio's urban Community Action Agencies through education and networking, and to advocate for policies that alleviate poverty and promote self-sufficiency.

40
years of
service

Our member agencies represent 56 percent of the state's total population and 62 percent of those households are living at or below the Federal Poverty Level.

56
percent of
Ohioans

OUCAN helps members maximize their impact by leveraging the unique aspects of our state. We help our member agencies more easily empower their teams and address issues collectively through education, networking and advocacy.

Because together, we can!

Happy Anniversary!



Across the nation, Community Action celebrates 60 years of service in 2024. In 2025, OUCAN will mark its 40th year of service to Ohio's urban agencies.


Our agencies are terrific at celebrating! Community Action Commission of Erie, Huron and Richland Counties held a fun Block Party, Stark County CAA held events each month both internally and externally. And a lot of public officials made proclamations!

Thank you to everyone who made this year extra special. We can't wait to see what you do next!



education

IMPACT COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES



Our Mission

Our mission is to empower Ohio's urban Community Action Agencies through education, networking, and advocating for policies that alleviate poverty and promote self-sufficiency.

www.ohioucan.com
info@ohioucan.com



Empowering Training

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In 2024, OUCAN reached new friends around the state with critical workshops that helped members and non-members comply with state and federal regulations.

Our two free online workshops on Purpose-Driven Board Leadership and Organizational Standards drew record attendance. We met in person in September and provided Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) training for 45 CAA leaders. Learning from each other helps us create change, not just provide services.



Dani Robbins from Board Source showed us how to create Purpose-Driven Boards, making sure they reflect the communities they serve. This focus centers the board's role in strategy and direction setting.

Robbins noted that 49% of chief executives say they don't have the right board members to establish trust in the communities they serve.

Only 25% of boards prioritize knowledge of the organization's work when recruiting new members and boards are notoriously *not* diverse.

"We want to tap the entire intellectual capital of everyone to get the right solutions," she said.

Trainers Keelie Gustin, Ike Hickman and Marilyn Montes emphasized the importance of documentation throughout the year as the critical step toward meeting Organizational Standards.

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Organizational Standards help CAAs in their compliance efforts. The standards are organized in three themes: maximum feasible

participation, vision and direction, and operations and accountability.

"We know that our client feedback is what makes community action different from other non-profits," Gustin said. "It's what has kept us motivated. It's our heartbeat - but it also needs to be documented."

"Everyone in the agency should be familiar with the standards because they are all serving them," Montes said. "Developing a system is critical to getting one hundred percent. It has to be a team effort."

IMPACT Community Action Agency in Columbus hosted the ROMA training, facilitated by IMPACT resident trainers Teresa Gary and Shameikia Smith.

Attendees appreciated the interactive presentation and the innovative ways the difficult material was made "digestible and understandable" to improve their ability to accurately report their work.



137

Total trainees attended statewide events



Organizations represented at events

54



Women's Leadership Symposium



OUCAN's third annual Women's Leadership Symposium brought together women from across the state to discuss the magic that happens When We Lead.

Keynote speakers State Rep. Juanita Brent and Emily Campbell, President and CEO of the Center for Community Solutions kicked off a day packed with supportive connections.

Twenty women leaders across industries representing entrepreneurship, executive management and OUCAN board leaders came together to share their SHEroes, struggles and dreams. A variety of breakout speakers offered perspectives from multiple generations.

We wrapped the day learning about how women gathering for tea has helped change the world. We sampled some delights from Posh Tea Time and had fun dressing the part.

When We Lead we make a big difference! Thank you for joining us!

57 Attendees

13 Organizations

8 Breakouts

The OUCAN network is led by a female CEO and women board members in top executive offices.

We employ nearly 2,000 staff and engage female consultants and entrepreneurs.

We serve 56% of Ohio's low-income households, a substantial portion of which are female led.



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OUCAN Advocacy Priorities

Affordable Housing

Too many Ohioans struggle to afford a safe, comfortable home. The Ohio Housing Needs Assessment reports a high housing cost burden in urban Ohio, with households spending at least 30% of their income on housing and related costs.

OUCAN supports programs and policies that prioritize safe, affordable and lead-free housing while reducing the gap in homeownership for underserved buyers.



Workforce Development

Low-income Ohioans too often work in low-paying, sometimes unstable jobs.

OUCAN supports programs and policies that reduce racial disparities in wages and occupational clustering.

Through innovative, certified career programs, OUCAN agencies matched 1,701 skilled workers to higher paying career pathways in 2023. Our agencies are direct workforce pipeline partners in their local communities.



Childcare and Education

Ohioans deserve quality and safe childcare they can afford which will allow them to accept jobs that break the cycle of poverty.

Head Start and Early Head Start are among the nation's oldest programs serving low-income families. In 2023, OUCAN member agencies served more than 6,000 families.

OUCAN supports programs and policies designed to address access to childcare and early childhood education as well as quality and equitable funding for both.



Working for You

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Joining Coalitions



As a leading anti-poverty network, OUCAN supports policies that alleviate poverty and promote

self-sufficiency. We work to leverage our influence and relationships by joining forces with other advocacy groups around the state.

Our work with economic support programs ranging from utility assistance to eviction prevention helped hundreds of thousands of Ohioans in 2023 (see page 10). That makes us a natural fit to join the Economic Mobility Alliance of Ohio (EMAO), a new group focused on issues that trap Ohioans in poverty.

EMAO advocates for positive solutions to mitigate and eliminate benefits cliffs, reduce disincentives to work and create a more seamless pathway to economic stability.

By the end of 2024, EMAO had built a foundation for action in the 2025 budget by fostering increased discourse and interest in initiating solutions at the Statehouse.

Providing Testimony

CEO Yvonne Cherell frequently appears as an expert testifying before the General Assembly or as part of DEI panels.

This year, Cherell testified before the General Assembly in favor of House Bill 178. The Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural hair or CROWN Act



would eliminate discrimination against Black people and/or people of color with textured natural hair and culturally significant styles.

She joined current and former representatives and members of the National Council of Negro Women.

For Cherell, the CROWN act is personal since chemicals used to relax natural Black hair have been found to cause cancer. Cherell is a breast cancer survivor.

Getting Out The Vote

For the critical 2024 General Election, OUCAN provided member agencies with several resources to encourage their communities to get out and vote.



Staff members across the network created 6 different videos describing all the voting options available to Ohioans and reminding them of critical deadlines.

In all 22 social media posts and 11 graphics were provided. Each set of graphics was customized for each member agency to use on their social media, newsletters and other communications pieces.

10 Members Advocate Daily

Community Action Agencies are designed to meet the needs of their local communities. Those needs - of our cities and our members - inform the advocacy priorities of OUCAN. Our three advocacy pillars represent 100% of the services provided by our member agencies to address the issues we strive to influence.



Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is one of our community's most critical needs. Unhoused people can't work toward self-sufficiency. OUCAN members support housing in a variety of ways.

General housing programs served 14,327 households this year. Other housing related programs racked up high service numbers.

Energy Services: 118,074

Weatherization/Home Repair: 2,595

The Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) and the Home Relief Grant (HRG) program were established during the pandemic to assist Ohioans with rent and utilities. Across the network, 9,263 households were served in these programs.

Workforce Development

Community Action Agencies are designed to move people out of poverty and into self-sufficiency. By providing supportive services such as transportation, food and other assistance, CAA workforce programs allow clients to move forward from dead end jobs toward prosperity.

In all, 5,555 Ohioans were served by OUCAN member agency workforce, career or financial wellness programs.

Early Childhood Education/Care

Community Action's best known early childhood program is Head Start. In addition to serving more than 6,000 families with Head Start or Early Head Start programs, agencies served residents through Pathways HUBs, diaper banks and other programs that impact the entire family.

Steady Services, New Centers

OUCAN members provide services for all ages, including seniors on fixed incomes. This year, MYCAP opened a brand new Senior Center in Youngstown.

Other programs specifically for seniors include providing food or hot meals, managing senior housing complexes and emergency home repairs.

In all, agencies which provide senior services reached 4,792 Ohioans this year.



Sharing Successes, Challenges

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OUCAN member agencies are headed by genuine, effective leaders who know how to speak up for the people they serve. Our CEOs and executive staff members meet regularly with state and federal lawmakers, hold receptions and work to get out the vote. Doing so keeps the fight against poverty in the spotlight and maintains support for anti-poverty policies and funding that benefits Ohio's urban communities and families.



Ohio's Urban Community Action Agencies were created to represent the needs and interests of Ohio's urban poor families and residents. Programs and services aren't going to solve poverty, however. It's going to take advocacy. It's going to take reform.

OUCAN's advocacy priorities include more affordable, safe, lead-free housing; robust workforce development where skilled workers are matched with employers in their community; and critically important universal child care. Currently, OUCAN supports the passage of HB 39 which would reduce the cost of poverty by implementing the partially refundable Earned Income Tax Credit at 10 percent. This would provide poverty relief for an additional 748,000 low-income, eligible Ohioans.

Advocating means speaking for those who cannot speak for themselves. OUCAN's advocacy committee is constantly looking at policies in Ohio. We have our finger on the pulse and work to monitor poor legislation that does not serve low-income families.

We will continue to be the voice of low-income Ohioans to ensure they receive real assistance and genuine opportunities that inspire hope.



Robert "Bo" Chilton
Advocacy Chair

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MYCAP Assists After Explosion

Housing Success Story

Mahoning Youngstown Community Action Partnership helped house residents displaced by a May 28 explosion in downtown Youngstown.

After an explosion in the basement of the Realty Towers killed an employee of the bank on site, neighboring International Towers, an income-based building for those 62 or older or with disabilities, needed to be evacuated. Some residents found alternatives on their own but by the end of June, MYCAP was supporting 55 people who were either Towers residents or employees of impacted businesses.

“When I arrived at International Towers, I thought there was no way we were going to be able to help these people,” said Youngstown Health Commissioner and MYCAP Board Member Erin Bishop. “I wish everyone could have seen the looks on everyone’s faces when they finally knew they would have a place to stay.”

MYCAP CEO Sheila Triplett contacted the Office of Community Assistance at the Ohio Department of Development for emergency funding for housing, food, transportation and other necessities. Rent was paid for everyone up to Dec. 1.



Additionally, \$150 Wal-Mart gift cards were provided to 175 people. MYCAP has also paid for celebratory dinners.

“I’m so proud of the way these organizations came together as a cohesive team to do what was necessary to help these residents and continue to be there to ensure their health and safety,” Triplett said.

Towers residents were able to return home August 21 with transportation help from MYCAP. A few were rehoused to different locations and many are still connected. Three pregnant women received diapers, cribs and more through the agency.

“The relationship that was built in the face of extreme adversity will never be broken,” said Cirell Howard, Director of Senior Services and Community Engagement. “The residents trust us and continue to reach out daily for any assistance.”

Housing Wins Across the Network

- Pathway, Inc. and co-developer Pivotal Development LLC received authorization from the Ohio Housing Finance Agency to issue \$15 million in bonds to develop 70 new low-income housing units in Toledo.
- IMPACT Community Action is working with the City of Columbus to turn the American Addition neighborhood into the city’s first with net-zero emissions. A combination of solar arrays and weatherization work will help the historic Black neighborhood modernize and reduce energy burdens.
- 50 clients received items from the Essentials Closet at Community Action Commission of Erie, Huron and Richland Counties. The closet provides personal hygiene items and household cleaning products. Additional items are offered as they are available.
- 347 residents were helped with property taxes through Save the Dream by LCCAA.



ODOD Director Visits MVCAP Training Center

Miami Valley Community Action Partnership (MVCAP) and the Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development (COAD) proudly hosted Ohio Department of Development Director Lydia Mihalik for a tour of the Ohio Weatherization Training Center's Southwest Hub Tuesday, May 7.

The Department of Development administers federal funding for MVCAP and Community Action Agencies across the state. Director Mihalik's visit coincided with Community Action Month, celebrated each May, as well as the Community Action Network's 60th Anniversary. Additionally, May 6 through 10 is In Demand Jobs Week in the State of Ohio.

The event included a tour of MVCAP's "prop house" inside which students can practice skills and techniques in a unique, hands-on environment.

Since 2022, MVCAP and COAD have partnered to train crew members in how to weatherize homes throughout the state of Ohio. MVCAP's nine crews serve nine counties working on nearly 600 homes every year.

"These projects not only improve someone's quality of life, but they also take major steps in supporting economic and workforce development," Mihalik said. "Your efforts are going to help build a safer and healthier future for all Ohioans."

In addition to the tour, Mihalik heard from current students in the program as well as clients who have had their homes weatherized by MVCAP crews.

Rosalind Leininger of Huber Heights described her experience saying the crews were very respectful of her home. Since receiving a new furnace, she no longer needs to use a space heater to make part of her home more comfortable and she has seen a dramatic reduction in her utility bills.

"Everybody I worked with was marvelous," added Washington Township resident Malcolm Laurie, whose heat pump broke down shortly after he applied for the program. "They explained everything. They were very, very professional. I can't tell you how grateful I am."

Weatherization lowers utility bills by as much as 30%, according to clients.

Every dollar spent on weatherization yields \$4 in benefits related to energy use, health and workforce development.

Security Guard Builds Business

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Workforce Success Story



Sherwin Clark has been greeting Step Forward clients at the Central Neighborhood Opportunity Center for several years, first as a temporary employee and then as a business owner.

After watching others take advantage of the agency's services, Clark decided to take advantage of the professional development program and start his own business, Ohio City Security.

"I would get the materials and read them, and I just started getting into it! Like, oh, this is easy, I can do this!" Clark said. "It tells you how to get your credit together, how to do your resume and how to talk to people. I just started reading it and reading it. Then, it tells you how to get your license, so I started getting my licenses. Anything I didn't know; I would just ask."

After completing the classes and receiving his business license, staff encouraged Clark to bid on the agency's security contract for all eight of its facilities. In hiring for his new company, Clark tapped other Step Forward clients who were looking for a new career.

Clark was born on a farm in Lynchburg, Virginia. "We didn't have much," he said. "I came from a very humble position. In my life, we were poor."

Clark knew early on that farming wasn't his passion. Instead, he joined the job corps and learned a trade. In 1986, he enlisted in the military and afterward moved to Cleveland.

After trying jobs in several industries, he found his passion in security detail. He started at Step Forward's office in 2016.

Today, Clark occupies an office on the south side of the Central NOC, greeting all visitors with his trademark smile.

"I want to be recognized as somebody who helped people and to be loved by somebody," he says. "They'll say, 'Oh, I remember him!'"

Clark's work includes watching surveillance monitors and patrolling the property as well as managing other security staff members.

"I went from a security guard at 47, 50-something, making \$10 or \$12 an hour, to maximizing \$10,000 every two weeks," he said.

Clark navigated his new business, Ohio City Security, through the pandemic. Now, he says, he wants to give back.

"I want to give back like I have seen Step Forward give back," he said. "All the things Step Forward has stood for, and they say they do, they do. I love everything about Step Forward because they help people. They genuinely help people."

Clark encourages others to sign up for Step Forward's professional development programs.

"It only takes a little determination and a little commitment. You just have to do it! You have to have the initiative to do it, want to do it, and your life will change," he said.



Workforce Wins Across the Network

- An injury had left Kenneth disabled and unable to continue his work operating heavy equipment. He discovered IMPACT's Building Futures program while living in a men's shelter. Staff encouraged him saying his years of experience made him more qualified than most of the students. The program paid the fee to reinstate his union membership and provided him with new tools. He also received new housing through the Community Shelter Board. "I was back to a place I thought I had lost," he said.
- Trumbull Community Action Partnership collaborated with several partners with the first ever Warren Work Advance cohort, preparing participants for manufacturing careers. TCAP also continues to work with the Oak Hill Collaborative to assist with connectivity and computer skills in the community.
- Jabez completed Lorain County Community



Action Agency's Youth Services program with flying colors helping convert the agency's bike shop into a produce center. Jabez then passed the exam required to join Pipefitters Local 120 in Cleveland as a welder.

- MVCAP's Legal Clinic helps job seekers remove barriers to employment or promotions. This includes reducing fines and reinstating driver's licenses.

Early Childhood Wins Across the Network



- LCCAA opened its seventh directly operated Head Start center. An expansion grant won prior to the pandemic funds another 20 slots for children in the Elyria building which has a long history as a community center.
- Stark County Community Action Agency's Pathways HUB received a \$280,000 grant, part of \$5 million allocated throughout the state from the Ohio Department of Health and the Department of Children and Youth. The Stark HUB also celebrated its fourth annual Community Baby Shower and two newly certified Community Health Workers.
- Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency has conducted regular Diaper Drops throughout the year. In partnership with Sweet Cheeks Diaper Bank, a half million diapers have been distributed to 2,000 families.
- MYCAP's Diaper Bank, started during the COVID-19 pandemic, served 1,477 clients in 2023-2024.
- More than 6,000 families were served in network Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Program Creates Co-Parenting Success

Early Childhood Success Story

Pathway, Inc. has helped thousands of men and women learn how to co-parent and raise thriving children.

Avis Files, Director of Family and Supportive Services, started Brothers United 10 years ago. After hearing from fathers that the women in their children's lives could use similar help, Sisters United was born four years ago. To date, the agency has helped nearly 3,000 fathers, almost 400 mothers, and close to 9,000 children.

Over the decade, the programs have evolved to meet participants' needs, while maintaining the original purpose.

"We try to get in on the front end, especially when the baby is little, and figure out how we can help them navigate some things," Files said. "We shaped our program around what people need help with."

Currently, there are four different programs making a difference for Lucas County children.

The original Brothers United program helps fathers establish paternity, navigate child support and manage mediation and visitation. Funded by the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, BU serves fathers as well as male teens ages 12 to 17 who are not fathers. Fathers can be custodial or non or even grandfathers.



The program includes a two-week cohort using the evidence-based Fatherhood and Healthy Relationships curriculum. Additional training on soft work skills is also available.

Sisters United has two components: one for mothers with children ages 0 to 17 months and one for mothers with children 17 years old or younger. Virtual workshops and support groups are offered. Those with older children also receive one-on-one case management.

A co-parenting program is operated in partnership with the Lucas County Health Department's Healthy Starts program. In addition to the same services offered by the other programs, Healthy Starts focuses on combating infant mortality.

Files is especially proud of the program's relationship with Lucas County Children's Services working to reunite fathers with their children.

Participants report improved communication with their co-parents, cultivation of greater patience, and increased respect for different parenting styles. A majority of participants acknowledge that the improved cooperation is healthier for their children, and that the children can tell the difference.

"Kids need their parents," Files said. "We care. We have a genuineness and authenticity and we don't quit. We are going to keep calling you."



Leadership and Members



OUCAN 2025 Board Officers

President Jacklyn Chisholm, Ph.D., CEO of Step Forward

Vice President Sheila Triplett, CEO of Mahoning-Youngstown CAP

Secretary Janice Warner, CEO of CAC Erie, Huron, Richland

Treasurer Van Nelson, Jr., CEO of Trumbull CAP

Board Members

Mark Lawson, CEO, Community Action Agency of Cincinnati and Hamilton County
 Janice Warner, CEO, Community Action Commission of Erie, Huron and Richland Counties
 Robert "Bo" Chilton, CEO, IMPACT Community Action (Franklin County)
 Shauna Matelski, Ed.D., CEO, Lorain County Community Action Agency
 Erin Jeffries, CEO, Miami Valley Community Action Partnership
 Sheila Triplett, CEO, Mahoning-Youngstown Community Action Partnership
 Cynthia Savage, CEO, Pathway, Inc. (Lucas County)
 Rodney Reasonover, CEO, Stark County Community Action Agency
 Dr. Jacklyn Chisholm, CEO, Step Forward (Cuyahoga County)
 Van Nelson, Jr., CEO, Trumbull Community Action Program

Staff

Yvonne Cherell, MPA, CEO
 Sharon Bengel, Communications Manager
 Sarah Matthews, Fiscal Consultant

Financial Statement

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OUCAN is a fiscally responsible Training and Technical Assistance grantee for the Ohio Department of Development's Office of Community Assistance. We help Community Action Agencies in Ohio meet the needs of individuals in urban areas. This includes education and training, research on issues, legislative reporting, and ensuring member agencies are included in future funding opportunities.

OUCAN Financial Summary 2023

As of 12/31/23:

Total Assets - \$230,601

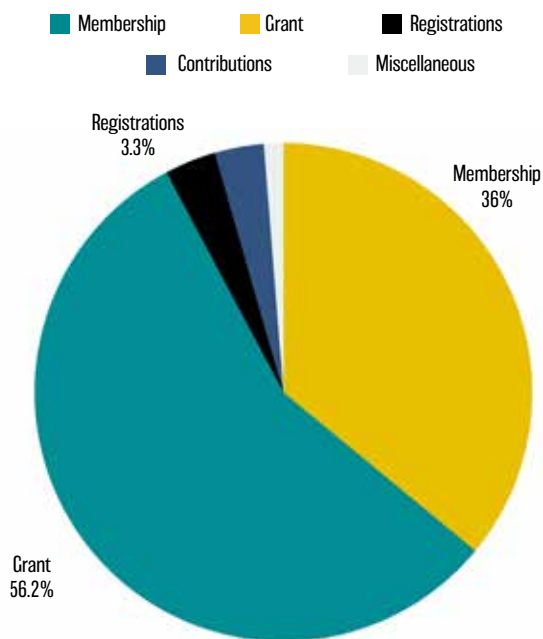
Total Liabilities - \$6,140

Total Net Assets - \$236,741

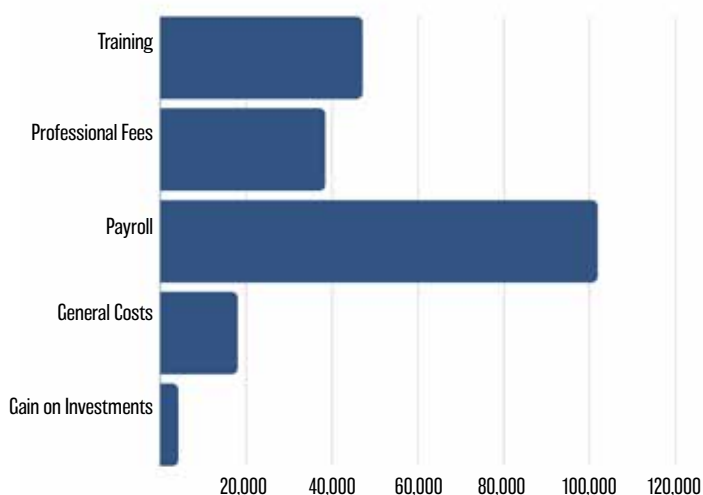
Reported by Kaiser Consulting



Revenues

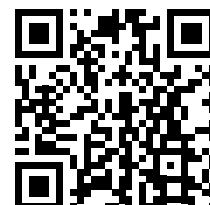


Program Expenses



Thousands of Ohioans are struggling to feed, house and support their families. OUCAN member agencies are on the front lines, offering the support people need to become self-sufficient.

Every dollar donated supports advocacy and programming on behalf of Ohio's urban communities. Give today by scanning the QR code or visiting www.ohioucan.com.





Learn more at www.ohioucan.com.