

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

June
2026



MCA Legislative Day



Recently, leaders from NEMCSA traveled to Lansing to advocate for continued funding and support for vital community programs and services. During the visit, the team also proudly celebrated several NEMCSA Success Story clients who were recognized during the 2026 Community Action Awards and Legislative Day for their resilience, achievements, and inspiring journeys toward self-sufficiency. The event provided an important opportunity to highlight the positive impact of community action programs and the importance of continued investment in Michigan families and communities. [Check out the article by WILX featuring the event on their website.](#)

Book Report



[RE]Coding <America/> Why Government Is Failing in the Digital Age and How We Can Do Better By Jennifer Pahlka

In [RE]Coding <America/>, Jennifer Pahlka pulls back the curtain on a frustrating reality many Americans know all too well: government systems that are supposed to help often feel confusing, outdated, and almost impossible to navigate. What makes this book so compelling is that it goes beyond pointing out what is broken. Pahlka reveals how outdated policies, rigid bureaucracy, and failure to focus on implementation have left government trailing behind the digital world. At the same time, she offers a powerful sense of hope, arguing that real change is possible when systems are designed around people instead of procedures. The result is a thought-provoking and engaging call to rethink how government works, and how it could work far better. For those working with people in poverty, this book feels especially relevant because it shows how complicated systems can deepen hardship instead of relieving it. For the community action network, it is a strong reminder that services work best when they are designed around real people, not just rules and processes.



Serving as a Voice for NEMCSA: Building Connections at all Levels

Pictured above is Chanda Hillman, MHSA Executive Director, Lisa Bolen, Dr. Mona Hanna, Tricia Grifka and Brian McGrain, Michigan Community Action Association ED at the Mackinac Policy Conference. Dr. Hanna is the author of the Book, “What the Eyes Don’t See.” Her research exposed the Flint water crisis. She is also a champion of RX Kids.



Tricia Grifka, ECS Director, addresses the morning crowd at the Michigan Head Start Association (MHSA) assembly in East Lansing, representing both NEMCSA and acting as the MHSA President.

Our Strategic Plan at Work: Turning Goals into Real Results

The Executive Director Report June 2026 clearly demonstrates the Strategic Plan in action across all four goals. For Goal 2: Improved Client Outcomes, the report highlights meaningful results across programs, including families maintaining stable housing through shelter diversion, participants in the BOSS program increasing income and completing financial education, and strong family engagement in School Success and Early Childhood Services. These examples reflect key tactics such as strengthening family well-being, coordinating services, and using data to track progress and improve outcomes.

The report also advances Goal 3: Long-Term Sustainability and Goal 4: Collaborative Partnerships, through efforts such as Legislative Day advocacy, securing ongoing funding for School Success, and building relationships with schools, Consumers Energy, and other community partners. In addition, workforce development efforts—including staff training, conference participation, and student work-based learning—support Goal 1: A Stable and Highly Capable Workforce by strengthening staff skills and building future talent pipelines. Together, these activities show that day-to-day operations are intentionally aligned with the Strategic Plan’s goals and key tactics, including partnership development, funding advocacy, workforce development, and community engagement.

Program Impact

AREA AGENCY ON AGING



Amy Otto, Long-Term Care Ombudsman providing valuable information at the Roscommon County Commission on Aging's Elder Abuse Prevention Conference in Houghton Lake on May 15th.



The Health Management Association's annual State of Reform Health Policy Conference was May 5 in Lansing. Attending this year's event was Yvette Smigelski, Jaime Carney, and Laurie Sauer.



Older Michiganians' Day (OMD) was a resounding success despite the cold weather. There were 25 individuals representing the Region 9 service area. Legislative offices received packets of over 500 signed letters from constituents in support of the day's platform supporting older adult services.



Discussing the OMD platform with Rep. Hoadley's staff.

Congrats and Thank You, Chuck!

Michigan Community Action Volunteer of the Year—Chuck Corwin! For all you've done for so many years, Chuck, know that we are very grateful for your efforts.

Thank You

Program Impact

EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

Early Childhood Services Celebrates Student Success Through Work-Based Learning Partnership

Early Childhood Services (ECS) is proud to share exciting news from our ongoing collaboration with Bay City Public Schools. This year, ECS has been recognized as Student of the Year Employer through the district's Work-Based Learning Program, an honor that reflects the strength and impact of this growing partnership.

Since launching the collaboration in 2023 with just a handful of students, the program has expanded significantly. Today, ECS supports 5 to 6 students on a consistent basis, each dividing their day between working as Classroom Aides and attending their high school classes. Even more encouraging is the number of students who have chosen to return for a second year, demonstrating the meaningful experiences and lasting impressions created through this opportunity.

This success would not be possible without the dedication and relationship-building efforts of Area Managers Tera Keller and Heidi Klender, along with Education Specialist Andrea Hall. Their leadership has been instrumental in creating supportive, hands-on learning environments where students can explore careers in early childhood education.

We also recognize Kim Henry, Professional Development Coordinator, whose efforts have been instrumental in establishing and sustaining this partnership with Bay City Public Schools. Her commitment has helped ensure the program's continued growth and success.

This collaboration continues to be a win for everyone involved, including ECS, Bay City Public Schools, and most importantly, the students who are gaining valuable skills and insight as they explore their future in Early Childhood Education.



Parent Leadership



Five Policy Council parents recently had the opportunity to attend the Michigan Head Start Spring Assembly, where they participated in a variety of engaging and informative sessions. Topics included updates from the National Head Start Association, strategies for navigating life's challenges, approaches for managing screen time in young children, and opportunities to strengthen parent leadership skills. Parents also explored a physical activity toolkit designed to support healthy habits at home. The experience provided valuable knowledge, practical resources, and inspiration that parents can bring back to their families and communities.

Program Impact

SCHOOL SUCCESS



Chris Kasuba has dedicated 23 years to NEMCSA, serving in the School Success Program. As the liaison for Posen Consolidated Schools, she is a strong and trusted presence within both the school and the broader community. Chris is widely respected as an expert in her role, and we are incredibly lucky to have her as part of our team. "I am a teacher at Posen Schools and have been working with Chris for the last three years. I just wanted to say how important she is to this entire building. The students trust her and feel comfortable going to her for anything. If there is a need in our building, she is usually one of the first to jump in and help, and/or try to figure out how to help and fill the need. Staff all feel comfortable going to her if a student seems to be in need, and see if she is able to help or has ideas as to how we can help. She is truly irreplaceable!" -Julie McCallum

Recently, School Success staff were invited to reflect on family engagement by responding to a simple question: "What is one small thing that has helped you build stronger connections with families?" Their responses were insightful, thoughtful, and truly inspiring. The reflections below highlight the power of small, intentional actions—and showcase a team that excels at collective sharing, learning, and supporting one another in service of SSP families.

- "Respect is number one."
- "One thing that has helped me build connections with families is listening and responding without judgement. Sometimes it is so easy to think about what we would do, but we have to remember there is no cookie cutter way something must be done. Every situation is different and the approach is different as well. So, listening to the family where they are and responding in that conversation without judgement is a great way to build those connections."
- "I think using multiple ways to connect with parents such as emails, apps, texts etc. and sharing the good news about their child helps build family engagement. Also, I truly believe if the parent knows that you have their child's best interest at heart, it opens the parent up to feeling comfortable in building a true connection."
- "My advice, just "show up"...be visible and available. Building a connection with the parent has helped when it comes to having those difficult conversations. Building a relationship is not something that's done in a week. It sometimes can take years to build trust. One effort at a time."
- "If a parent has shared that they are struggling in any way, I also offer them an ear to talk to for a few minutes about their situation or find resources that can help them overcome their barrier, no judgment or silly questions asked....parents are very thankful for that."

The School Success Leadership Team continues its advocacy efforts to secure ongoing funding for the program. We recently held a strategic meeting with state Representatives alongside Robb Kennedy from Capitol Affairs to strengthen our approach and messaging. This meeting focused on reinforcing the impact of the School Success Partnership Program, highlighting measurable outcomes in attendance, academic performance, and family engagement. With Robb Kennedy's guidance, we are refining our legislative strategy and building stronger connections with key decision-makers to support continued investment in School Success. Our advocacy remains active and focused as we work to ensure sustainable funding for the students and communities we serve.



Program Impact

FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT

There is one participant from the Family Self-Sufficiency Program that is successfully graduating and there are two new participants in the program. Ashley, Financial Sustainability Coordinator, met with Hope Shores Alliance to get financial counseling set up with their participants and possibly get some additional participants for the Family Self-Sufficiency Program.

Ashley also attended and was able to set up a booth at the Regional Housing Summit in Grayling. She was able to hear from some great speakers along with getting introduced to ORSA Credit Union who the program will hopefully be partnering with.

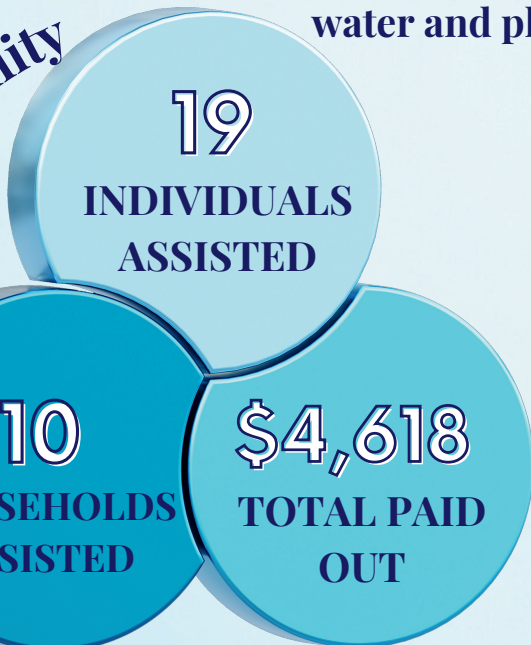
At the end of April, Ashley was able to attend the NE MI Community Corrections Advisory Board meeting and explain the jail program we started here in Alpena in hopes that we can get something started in other jails in the service area.

To find out more about the Financial Empowerment Programs, Call: 989-358-4627.

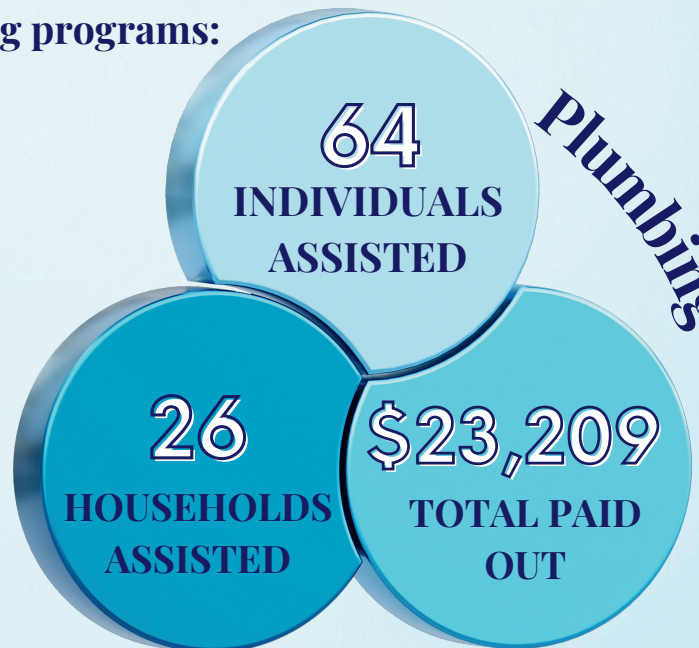
WATER PROGRAM

In the month of May, the Water Affordability Program successfully provided the following assistance through both the water and plumbing programs:

Water Affordability



Plumbing



To find out more about the Water Program, Call: 989-358-4675.

Program Impact

FGP/SCP VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

NEMCSA's AmeriCorps Seniors programs brought together their volunteers, family, teachers, and partners for a Recognition Luncheon May 12th. This event marked the 51st year of the Foster Grandparent Program and the 41st year of the Senior Companion Program. The event was very well attended and provided the opportunity to recognize our volunteers for their years of service. This year's theme is Guardians of Hope, Protectors of Hearts, embodying the volunteer's resilience and optimism during the funding crisis of last year and is representative of the impact they have on the students and clients they serve.

The highlight of the event was Senior Companion volunteer Helen Johnson who was honored for her 20 years of service providing companionship to the residents of Medilodge of Alpena and Grandview, and having served her in-home client for going on 19 years. Jenifer Ordway, Region 9 Area Agency on Aging Community Based Care Supervisor, presented Helen with her plaque. Helen is pictured alongside FGP/SCP Project Director Heidi Powers.

Our guest speakers for this year's event were Elizabeth Skiba, NEMCSA School Success Partnership Program Area Manager, who very eloquently demonstrated how our AmeriCorps Seniors Volunteers embody NEMCSA's mission. Jennifer Altman, Medilodge of Rogers City Activities Director, brought many to tears reflecting on the service of our Senior Companions with the reading of two of Linda Evans poems The Dash Between and Living Your Dash. Lastly, we were graced by NEMCSA Board Member Dr. Lisa Hilberg reflecting on the service of our Foster Grandparents channeling her experience of hosting two of our Foster Grandparents when she was principal of Wilson Elementary School.

We are very grateful for the service and dedication of our volunteers and the many partners, friends and peers who made this event a true celebration!



2026 AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent & Senior Companion Volunteers Years of Service Red = FGP SCP = Green		
23 Years Donna Mackey	10 Years RaxAnn Adams Deborah Bankes Barbara Selesky Helen Teegarden	2 Years Mary Antcliff Wanda Caron DeAnn Gardyszewski Laura Halsey Alice Hiler
20 Years Helen Johnson	9 Years Erick Erickson Madeline Hibner	Diane Macreno Dorothy Mirasolo Ruth Ormsbee
17 Years Helen Eagleson	13 Years Valerie Erickson	New Volunteers Mary Bailey Carolyn Bard Kimberly Komst Carol Lepard Barbara Richmond Bonnie Troupe
12 Years Karen Sylvester	7 Years Michael Carroll Connie Lucas Doreen Parish	3 Years Kevin Hill Janet Kernstock Linda Uchwal Scott Ulery

We ♥ our Volunteers



Program Impact

BRIDGES OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY



BOSS Program – Families Moving Toward Self-Sufficiency

The families across Northeast Michigan continue to make strides toward financial independence and personal growth. Recent participant milestones include:

- **Career Advancement:**

- May brought exciting employment news across the BOSS caseload. One participant landed a position with the Michigan DNR, beginning her new role this month, a significant career milestone that reflects her dedication and growth in the program. Another participant celebrated a well-earned raise at work, increasing her income and strengthening her financial foundation.
- In a testament to resourcefulness and community connection, one participant took initiative by networking to locate someone who could repair her vehicle, removing a transportation barrier that could have stood in the way of her continued employment and progress.
- Additionally, two BOSS participants were approved for SSDI benefits this month, and both continue to work, demonstrating remarkable resilience and commitment to self-sufficiency.

- **Financial Wins:**

- Financial growth was a standout theme this month. One participant made several proactive, thoughtful decisions with her tax refund, putting her financial literacy learning into real-world action. Another participant purchased a new vehicle for herself, a meaningful step toward independence and stability.
- Perhaps the most impactful financial story this month: one participant had not planned to file taxes, but after guidance from her mentor, she did, and she and her family are receiving \$10,000 back in a refund this year. This moment illustrates exactly the kind of life-changing impact that mentorship and education can have.

- **Education Milestones:**

- One BOSS participant successfully completed the financial literacy course this month, adding a critical set of tools to her personal and financial development. BOSS participants continue to build knowledge and confidence through the program's structured monthly coursework.

- **Program Growth & Skill Building:**

- May was a milestone month for program activity. A BOSS graduation took place. A new BOSS orientation also took place, and one participant completed her orientation, welcoming the next chapter of her journey in the program.
- Participants across the caseload continue to strengthen their resilience and stability by completing monthly topic courses, consistently showing up for themselves and their families, including one participant who is navigating serious health challenges yet remains present and engaged at work.
- Two participants are being awarded next week at client of the year award recipient's from Michigan Community Action & here is [Amanda's impact video](#)

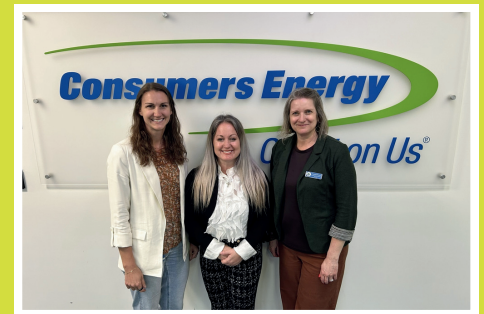
This project was supported, in whole or in part, by federal award number SLFRF4951 awarded to The State of Michigan by the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

Program Impact

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Community Engagement & Collaboration

- Ongoing weekly collaboration with IRESA Adult Education, including regular meetings and shared support for BOSS families
- Participation in the monthly HSCC meetings and ongoing communications
- Conversations on the Couch video series have recorded their first sessions and you can watch those published so far, here: <https://www.youtube.com/@nemcsa1585> these episodes are also shared on our social media pages.
- Amanda & Madison attended the 2026 Region 9 AAA caregiver conference in Lincoln, MI.
- Amanda & Madison attended the 1st Belong conference in Gaylord.



Poverty Action Team:

NEMCSA's Poverty Action Team members, Frances Ommani, and Amanda Bergeron, had the privilege of delivering NEMCSA's full-day Poverty Training to Consumers Energy staff in Jackson, MI, and they didn't stop there. Amanda and Fran then traveled to South Haven to continue with a half-day training for additional Consumers Energy team members. A special thank you to Kristen Goodman, Manager of Energy Assistance Programs at Consumers Energy, whose vision and dedication made this partnership possible. Kristen truly is the heartbeat behind bringing this work to Consumers Energy. Both days were filled with powerful conversations, meaningful tools, raw emotions, and real growth. That's what poverty training does: it changes the way we see, and the way we serve. Frances and Amanda were so grateful for this opportunity and for the Consumers Energy team's openness and commitment to better understanding the communities they serve. Together, we can do more.



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WEATHERIZATION

Weatherization currently has 96 jobs out to contractors; with 97 approved homes waiting for an inspection and 196 potential clients waiting on an application. The program did recently receive additional LIHEAP funding and intends on having that spent out in September 2026. The team has also been conducting interviews for a new weatherization inspector, preparing for the onsite and file monitoring and advancing data collection by introducing Power BI to the program.



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**Weatherization
Works**