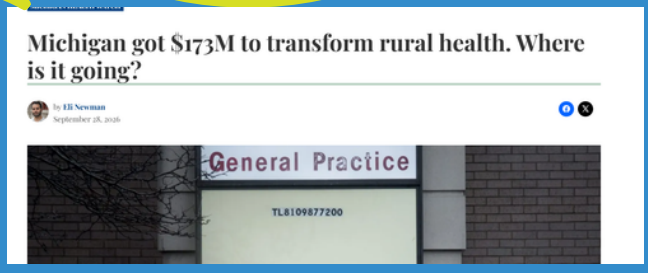
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

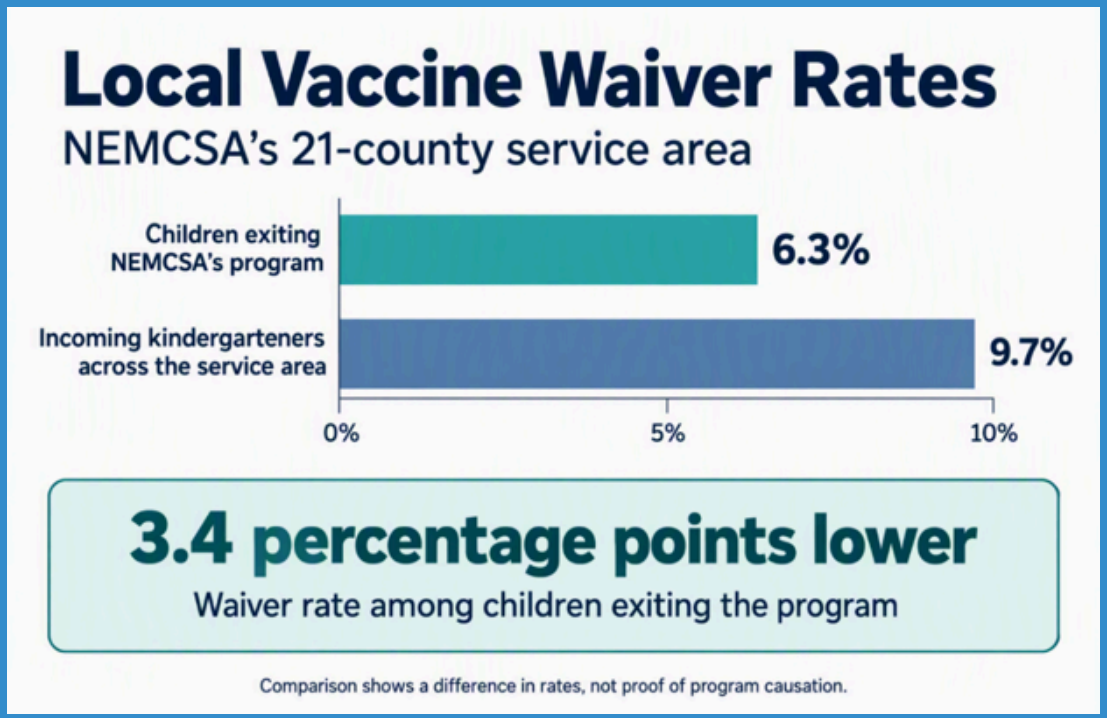
November 2026



Michigan has distributed more than $124 million of its $173 million Rural Health Transformation funding to community organizations working to improve rural health outcomes. While some concerns remain about transparency and whether enough funding is reaching rural hospitals directly, the program is designed to improve health by investing in community-based services and partnerships. NEMCSA's RHT-funded initiatives align with this goal by improving access to services, supporting independent living, and strengthening the health and well-being of rural residents.


Michigan got $173M to transform rural health. Where is it going?

by Eli Newman
September 28, 2026



According to a September 16, 2026 Bridge Michigan newsletter, nearly 8% of Michigan kindergartners received vaccination waivers, compared with 4.2% nationwide.

NEMCSA staff compared Early Childhood Services data to vaccination waiver rates among children exiting the program and incoming kindergarteners across NEMCSA's 21-county service area.

What Does This Mean?

The analysis found that 6.3% of children exiting the program had a vaccination waiver, compared with 9.7% of incoming kindergarteners across the service area - a difference of 3.4 percentage points. These findings are encouraging and reflect the context of Early Childhood Services' work with families to support informed decisions about their children's health. The comparison alone, however, does not establish what caused the difference in waiver rates.

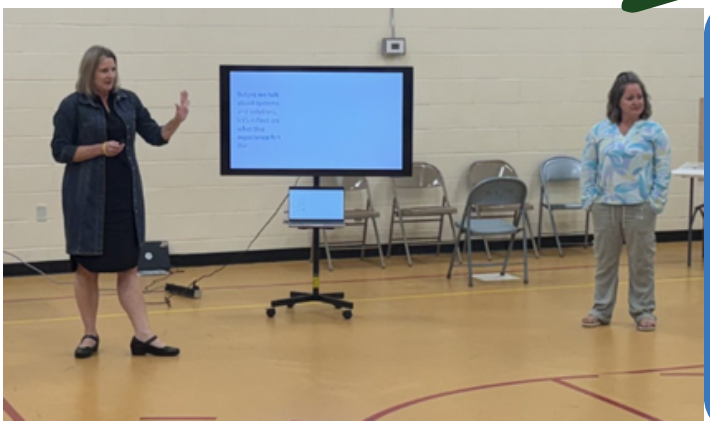
BodySource: https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/-/media/Project/Websites/mdhhs/Adult-and-Childrens-Services/Children-and-Families/Immunization-Information/School-Waiver-Information/Kindergarten-Immunization-Status-by-Building-2025.xlsx?rev=9fc29b4472b74fd6a7fe877ed59c5a11&hash=7A278DC10B51EB1629F058013CA2EF19



NEMCSA was invited by 8 CAP Community Action to participate in a Poverty Simulation last month. The simulation engaged approximately 20-30 participants and provided an opportunity for community leaders to experience the challenges faced by individuals and families living in poverty. NEMCSA facilitated the discussion, reflection, and debriefing portion of the event, helping participants connect their experience to the realities of poverty and its impact on communities.

Innovation Fund Grant Award

Poverty Simulation



NEMCSA received a $15,000 Michigan Community Action Innovation Fund grant to expand its Poverty Education Training across the state. The project will provide training and resources to Community Action Agencies throughout Michigan, helping staff, boards, and community partners better understand poverty and strengthen poverty-informed service delivery. The grant also creates an opportunity for NEMCSA to share its expertise statewide and contribute lessons learned back to the Community Action network.

Progress Toward Strategic Goals

Plainfield Township was named one of Michigan's nine 2026 Child Care Champions for its leadership in expanding local child care access. Through partnerships with providers, employers, schools, and regional organizations, the community is advancing two new child care providers that could create approximately 40 additional licensed child care spaces.



3B - Wednesday, September 30, 2026 — Iosco County's Source for Local News

LOCAL NEWS

State recognizes Plainfield as 2026 Child Care Champion

LANSING – From innovating vacant buildings and expanding child care capacity to investing in employer-supported care and bringing community partners together, nine organizations from across Michigan are being recognized as the 2026 Child Care Champions of Michigan for developing solutions that strengthen access to child care for families and support the state's workforce.

The 2026 Child Care Champions were recognized during an event in East Lansing on Sept. 24. This year's honorees include businesses, nonprofits, municipalities, and economic development organizations that are developing innovative approaches to address child care needs in communities across Michigan.

Among the recipients is Plainfield Township in Iosco County. The township made child care a community priority by working with providers, employers, schools, and regional partners to reduce barriers to new programs, with two prospective providers poised to add approximately 40 licensed child care spaces.

"Access to affordable, high-quality child care is essential to the success of children, families and communities," said Dr. Beverly Walker-Griffin, executive director of the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MILEAP). "The 2026 Child Care Champions are demonstrating how local leadership, strong partnerships, and creative investments can help address child care challenges and strengthen Michigan's early childhood system. Their work reflects the important role communities play in building solutions that support children and families while helping employers and the state's economy thrive."

The Child Care Champions are recognized by the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC), Pulse at the W.E. Upjohn Institute and MILEAP for demonstrating how employers, local governments, organizations, and community partners can work together to address child care challenges. ECIC works to increase public and private investment and strengthen Michigan's early childhood system; Pulse brings data, research, and collaboration to help communities develop solutions; and MILEAP works to expand access to high-quality early learning and care while supporting children, families and the early childhood workforce.

The other eight recipients are:

• Northern Lakes Economic Alliance and Manthei Group (Northern Michigan) – Partnered to secure approximately $500,000 to purchase and renovate a vacant Petoskey church, leading to the opening of Little Rivets Childcare with two centers and 36 new licensed spaces for children from 6 weeks through age 5.

• Gentex Corporation, in partnership with the ODC Network (Zeeland/West Michigan) – Invested in a 43,000-square-foot, nature-based early learning center on its Zeeland campus serving infants through preschoolers, including infant care and second-shift care to support manufacturing employees and other families with nontraditional schedules.

• United Way of Bay County (Bay City/Great Lakes Bay Region) – Is using community partnerships, employer input, and philanthropy to address the region's child care shortage and redevelop a downtown Bay City site for a center expected to serve approximately 40 to 50 children, with a focus on infants and toddlers.

• Luper County Medical Care Facility & Suncrest Daycare (Luper) – Provides licensed infant, toddler, and preschool care while covering 50% of employees' child care costs and investing in facility improvements, early childhood workforce initiatives, and additional Great Start Readiness Program classrooms.

• Wacousta Cooperative Preschool and Grand Ledge Public Schools (Eagle/Grand Ledge) – Transformed an underused former elementary school into Wacousta Commons, adding 33 child care spaces and 25 before- and after-school spaces while bringing together educational and community resources in rural Clinton County.

• City of Kalamazoo (Kalamazoo) – Has treated child care as essential community and economic infrastructure by supporting small business child care providers through training and grants, participating in the MI Tri-Share pilot, and advancing regional child care planning and innovative local solutions.

• Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation (Ann Arbor/Washtenaw County) – Provided a $750,000 loan and $100,000 in grants to Apple Playschools to expand operations, adding 47 child care spaces and 12 jobs while demonstrating how impact investment can support child care capacity.

• Detroit Regional Partnership/Henry Ford Health Detroit Committee (Detroit/Southeast Michigan) – Brought major health care employers together to identify child care barriers for workers with nontraditional schedules and used those insights to develop an Employer Child Care Taskforce playbook that provides a framework for other employers.

Nominations for the 2026 Child Care Champions come from the state's Regional Child Care Coalitions and represent different approaches to strengthening child care, reflecting the unique needs and opportunities of communities across Michigan. Some are investing directly in child care for employees, while others are bringing together community partners, supporting child care providers, investing in local solutions, or making child care part of broader workforce and economic development strategies.

Courtesy photo

STATEWIDE AWARD – Gloria Brooks, former president of Develop Iosco and current president/treasurer of Child Care Back Office, right, accepted the award on behalf of Plainfield Township during the Sept. 24 ceremony in East Lansing. Sarah Fuglesang, chief executive officer of Child Care Back Office, left, presented the award. Plainfield Township was one of just nine honorees recognized statewide this year.

Program Impact
Early Childhood Services

Policy Council Mentorship

This year, our Policy Council is introducing a new Member Support Program to help welcome new Policy Council members. Each new member will be paired with an experienced Policy Council member who will serve as a mentor, helping them learn about their role and the council's responsibilities.

Policy Council elections are being held throughout October across all 5 regions. Parents from our Head Start and Early Head Start programs will have the opportunity to elect the Policy Council representative for their region at their local parent meetings.



MHSA 2026 Fall Assembly

Last month, several NEMCSA staff and Policy Council members attended the Michigan Head Start Association's 2026 Fall Assembly in Traverse City.

Leaders shared updates and insights with the conference attendees, including our Early Childhood Services Director and MHSA Board President, Tricia Grifka, who delivered remarks. Area Manager Stephanie Robison led a workshop on site management, and Policy Council members Nikki Sprague and Starr Dixon led an impromptu workshop on Head Start parent advocacy.





Program Impact:
Area Agency on Aging

Medicare Open Enrollment Starts Oct 15 - with lots of changes.

Open Enrollment is happening now through December 7. It is the time each year when beneficiaries can make changes to their Medicare Part D insurance coverage. Changes made during Open Enrollment are effective January 1, 2027.

Medicare Part D Changes for 2027:

1. Only eleven Part D drug plans are available for Region 9's twelve counties,
2. No $0 premium plans,
3. All plans now have a monthly premium ranging from $5.30 to $136.70 per month plus the Rx copays.

Medicare Advantage Changes for 2027:

1. There are only 21 Medicare Advantage plans available,
2. These are the companies approved for the My Michigan Hospital Network: Blue Care Network (HMO), Plus Blue (PPO), Priority Health (HMO/PPO) and Health Alliance Plan aka HAP (HMO/PPO).
3. Premiums range from $0 up to $299.30 per month. Many have added deductibles and higher out of pocket maximums.

Beneficiaries can get free assistance from a Medicare-certified counselor at a local Council/Commission on Aging (Senior Center) or by calling the statewide 1-800-803-7174.

Brain Booster Grant Successful!

Thanks to a grant from Community Foundation of Northeast Michigan, Region 9 AAA was able to distribute "Gardening Brain Booster Boxes" across four counties. Participants engaged in gardening, painting, matching, lacing, and learning about plants. The activities encouraged reminiscence, creativity, coordination, and conversation while providing a sense of accomplishment. Feedback showed participants were highly engaged and enjoyed sharing memories, learning about plants, and increased confidence in their dexterity with the activities.



Medicare Part D Open Enrollment
Period for 2027 coverage runs from October 15 through December 7, 2026.
Call for Assistance:
1-800-803-7174

National Consumer Voice Conference

Region 9 Long-Term Care Ombudsmen, Tammy Dean and Amy Cook-Otto attended the annual National Consumer Voice Conference in September held in St Louis, MO. Sessions provided valuable information such as Different Wants and Needs: Advocacy Strategies for People Under 65 in Long Term Care; CMS Updates, Nursing Home Division, Quality and Safety, Understanding and Advocating for Residents with Mental and Behavioral Needs, Helping Residents Return to the Community, Resident Empowerment, Moving on from Illegal and Outdated Locked Door Dementia Care, Unlocking the Power of Care Conferences, How the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Can Empower Residents to Speak Up, Self Advocating, and more.





2026 Home and Community-Based Conference

In August, three staff members from the Aging Division (Yvette Smigelski, Director of Business/Financial Resources-Aging; Rebecca Tousigna, Community Based Care Supervisor; and Meghan Winterstein, Case Manager) attended the 2026 Home and Community-Based Conference in Baltimore, Maryland. It proved to be a valuable opportunity to gain knowledge, explore best practices, and learn about new approaches to supporting individuals in home and community-based settings. The knowledge and insights gained will help strengthen services, enhance support, and promote positive outcomes for the individuals and communities served.

Attendance at this conference reflects an ongoing commitment to professional growth and continuous improvement in home and community-based services.

Program Impact:
School Success



Each year, generous local donors, including Cliff Anschuetz Chevrolet in Alpena, Star Staffing in Alpena and St. Paul Lutheran of Hubbard Lake, partner with NEMCSA to provide hundreds of pairs of shoes to local students in need from Pre-K through 5th grade. This annual program, known as Shoe Palooza, helps ensure local youth have what they need to learn, grow, and succeed both in and out of the classroom.



For the 2026-2027 school year, Lisa Werth, School Success Alpena Area Supervisor and School Success Liaison, coordinated this important initiative, helping connect children and families with properly fitting footwear that support school readiness and student success. We are grateful for the continued generosity of our community partners and donors, whose support helps make a meaningful difference in the lives of local children each year.

"The School Success Program is dedicated to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to reach their full potential. We provide personalized support, mentorship, and a nurturing environment designed to foster academic success and personal growth. Our commitment is to remove barriers to learning, promote good attendance, and actively involve families in their child's education journey and life goals, ensuring a holistic approach to each student's development, happy, healthy and ready to learn."

School Success Partnership Program Mission Statement:

Top Three Reasons for Referral to the Program:

- Academic
- Behavior
- Attendance

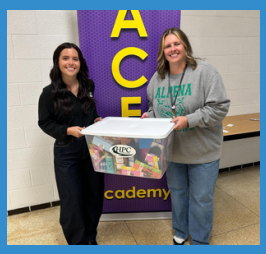


School Success Program staff recently participated in training through a partnership with MiFamily Engagement Region 3. The session focused on the HOPE Framework, ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences), and PCES (Positive Childhood Experiences), providing staff with valuable insight into trauma-informed approaches and the importance of fostering positive childhood experiences. We appreciate this partnership and the meaningful learning opportunities that help us better serve students and families. https://positiveexperience.org/



NEMCSA School Success Partnership









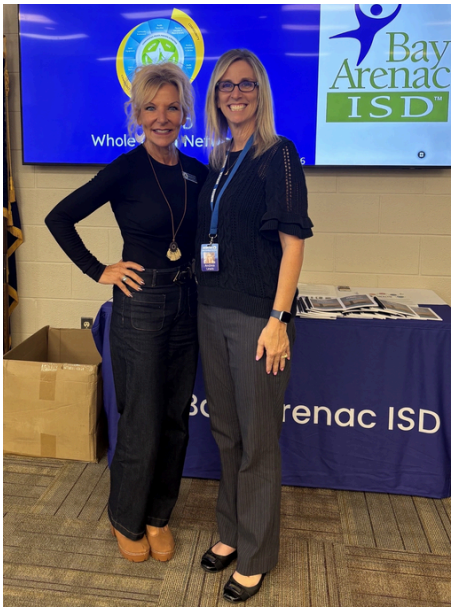
A BIG Thank You to HPC Credit Union!

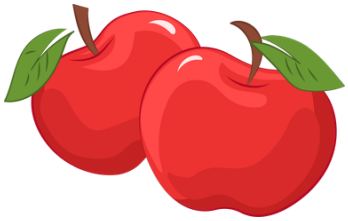
A huge thank you to HPC Credit Union for their incredible support and generous donations to our NEMCSA School Success Partnership Program and the kiddos we serve! Your generosity helps us continue to support students, remove barriers to success, and ensure our children have the resources they need to thrive.

A special thank you to Ellie Hoes, VP of Marketing, Mary Schmidt, Marketing, and the many dedicated HPC staff members who helped deliver donations to numerous elementary schools throughout the Alpena Public Schools (APS) district. We appreciate you taking the time to make a difference in the lives of our students and families! It truly takes a community working together to help our children be happy, healthy, and ready to learn! Thank you, HPC Credit Union, for being such a wonderful community partner and investing in our kiddos!

Bay-Arenac ISD Presentation

Dorothy Pintar, Community Programs Director, and Andrea Lewis, Regional Manager of Head Start, participated in and presented information about NEMCSA and the services our agency provides at Bay-Arenac ISD recently. The presentation was delivered to the Whole Family Network Community Partnership and focused primarily on program offerings and highlighting the resources and supports available to children, families, and communities throughout our service area. In addition, we gained valuable insight from community partners regarding the primary barriers they are seeing to school success and attendance, helping to inform future collaboration and strategies to better support families and students.





SSP Program Impact:

"Our Liaison does an amazing job. I hope to continue to work with her in the future, my boys are thriving since working with her and are more confident in themselves and their school future."

Program Impact: Housing

Homeless Prevention

The Otsego County Chamber of Commerce and State Savings Bank co-sponsored NEMCSA's Homeless and Prevention Program at their business after hours event in September. The event was held at Big Buck Brewery in Gaylord, where approximately 60 community members attended to show their support. The items donated included toiletries, blankets, kitchen supplies, tarps, bathroom supplies, laundry detergent, and much more. We also had a generous community member, Kip Driver, who sat down with staff to learn more about our services and present a donation of $350. The event had a great turnout and provided an excellent opportunity for our agency to network and share information about our services.



Left to right: Ashley Gagnon, Camille Kenyon, Simone Latuszek, Elise Gapczynski, Jaime Gabriel

Alpena Community Collaboration

On September 23, 2026, approximately 20 Alpena-area agencies came together to discuss barriers faced when individuals experiencing homelessness present at their doors seeking assistance. A key concern identified was that agencies are eager to help but are often unsure what questions to ask, what resources are available, and where to direct individuals for specific needs. Partners also recognized that repeated referrals can become overwhelming for both participants and staff. To create a more coordinated community response, the group agreed to meet monthly to discuss barriers, resources, and service gaps, distribute an Alpena community resource guide, develop a flowchart to help staff quickly identify appropriate services, create a standardized triage questionnaire for those experiencing homelessness, explore a universal release of information to improve coordination between participating agencies and establish a partner email group for real-time collaboration when agencies need assistance identifying resources. This overall goal is to create a more consistent and coordinated response so that regardless of which agency door an individual walks through, staff are better equipped to help identify the next appropriate step.

Agreed Upon Action Steps:

- Monthly Meetings
- Establish a Partner Email Group
- Distribute Resource Guide
- Explore a Universal Release of Information
- Create A Triage Questionnaire
- Create Flowchart to Help Staff Identify Resources

To find out more about Homeless & Prevention Services, call: 989-358-4678.

Program Impact:
Steps to Stability

The Shelter Diversion Program helps households resolve a housing crisis before they enter the homeless response system. Through problem-solving, resource connections, landlord negotiations, and limited financial assistance when available, we help families find alternatives to emergency shelter.

We are currently serving 44 households. With emergency shelter costing approximately $18,000 per household compared to just $1,400 for diversion, preventing homelessness can save an estimated $16,600 per household.

By investing in prevention instead of crisis response, we can help families stay housed, preserve shelter capacity, and make our limited resources go further.
Know someone who needs help? 989-358-4678











Housing Pathways for Young Adults

After experiencing homelessness, Taylor entered the Youth and Young Adult Program determined to build a stable future for herself and her young son, who has autism. With consistent support and her own perseverance, she maintained steady employment, stayed current on her bills, and graduated from high school.

Taylor also completed a driver's education course and earned her license, increasing her independence, access to work, school, and her son's services. After qualifying for a housing choice voucher through MSHDA, she successfully relocated to a safe, stable home for her and her son. Taylor's next goal is to attend college.

To find out more about Homeless & Prevention Services, call: 989-358-4678.

Program Impact: Financial Empowerment

For the past five weeks, we have been facilitating a Financial Empowerment Course at the Alpena County Jail. Our final session will take place next week, and we anticipate graduating approximately 30 inmates from the program.

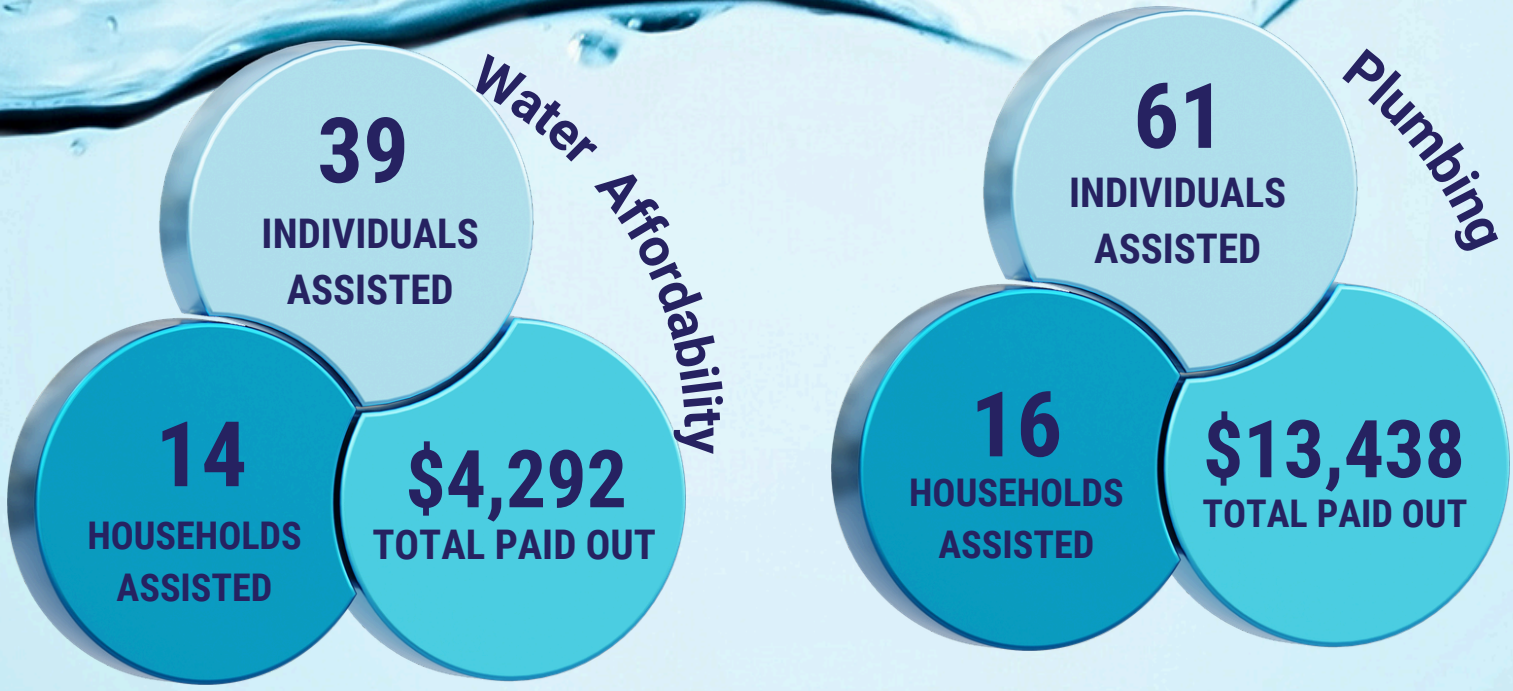
Throughout the course, participants have received education on a variety of topics, including understanding credit reports and their components, available NEMCSA and local community resources, distinguishing between wants and needs, creating and maintaining a budget, understanding the elements of an apartment application, and exploring potential employment opportunities for individuals with criminal backgrounds. We have also provided guidance and answered questions related to homeownership, home buying, and available housing options.

Within the Family Self-Sufficiency Program, we continue to actively recruit new participants. Since our last update, we have celebrated one program graduate and welcomed a new enrollee. Additionally, several current participants were able to receive assistance with vehicle repairs, helping them maintain reliable transportation and continue progressing toward their self-sufficiency goals.

For more information regarding this homeownership opportunity, please contact Ashley Smart at 989-358-4702 or smarta@nemcsa.org.

Water Program

The Water Affordability Programsuccessfully provided the following assistance through both the water and plumbing programs:



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

Program Impact:
FGP/SCP VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

AmeriCorps Seniors Programs Grow

AmeriCorps Seniors welcomed six new volunteers in October, including three Foster Grandparents and three Senior Companions. The expansion will reconnect Besser Elementary in Alpena with a Foster Grandparent for the first time since the pandemic and grow Senior Companion services in Oscoda County through a new partnership.



From left to right: FGP/SCP Project Director Heidi Powers; Senior Companion Tiffany Ware; Senior Companion Robin McDonough, in the back; Foster Grandparent Bobbi Markowiak; Senior Companion Janet Morency.

Back row includes Foster Grandparent Sheryl Gohl; and FGP/SCP Services Coordinator Hayley Kortman. Foster Grandparent Jenny Carpenter-McDonald is not pictured.

Weatherization

WEATHERIZATION@NEMCSA.ORG

989-358-4700



Meet Teila, Weatherization Inspector!

She enjoys meeting people, hearing their stories, and knowing the program is making homes safer, warmer, and more affordable. Teila loves staying active through workouts, pickleball, music, and dancing. She also manages a wedding venue and recently traveled to Gabon, Africa, on a mission trip to help build a church.

Teila believes in helping others wherever she can and making a positive impact through kindness, compassion, and service.

Program Impact:
BOSS Program

BRIDGES OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY
BOSS PROGRAM

The BOSS Program continues to create opportunities for families to build greater stability and self-sufficiency. Through individualized coaching, goal setting, financial education, and ongoing support, participants are making meaningful progress toward long-term economic mobility and independence. During the reporting period, participants achieved several significant milestones:

- Secured employment after extended periods of unemployment
- Obtained reliable transportation, eliminating a major barrier to work and daily activities
- Increased savings and financial stability
- Resolved housing and utility challenges
- Demonstrated greater confidence and independence in navigating community resources and solving problems on their own

One participant saved $1,400 to overcome a utility barrier and move closer to work and community resources. The program also celebrated the graduation of a family that strengthened its financial stability through employment advancement, entrepreneurship, and goal-focused coaching. These milestones demonstrate how BOSS helps families build lasting stability and economic mobility.

Advocacy for Sustainable Funding

NEMCSA also continues to advocate for investments that support long-term economic mobility. Frances Ommani and Amanda Bergeron met with state representatives and committee leaders to share the impact of the BOSS Program across Northeast Michigan and discuss future funding opportunities that would allow more families to benefit from services designed to move households from crisis toward lasting stability and success.

Community Connections & Partnerships

The Community Resource Team remained actively engaged throughout the region, connecting residents to resources and strengthening community partnerships.

Highlights included:

- Participation in Cheboygan County Project Connect
- Support of a dementia awareness event hosted by Region 9 AAA
- Presentation for AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers
- Assistance with an 8CAP Poverty Simulation debrief
- Attendance at a regional homeless support meeting
- Ongoing involvement in Human Services Coordinating Council (HSCC) initiatives
- Local radio outreach to promote community resources and events



Through these activities, the team continues to expand awareness of services, foster collaboration, and strengthen connections that improve quality of life throughout Northeast Michigan.