

# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

March  
2026



*Congratulations, Lisa!*

Lisa Bolen has been reappointed by the governor to a second term on the Michigan Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity, continuing to represent community action agencies across the state. The Commission was created to provide an opportunity for low-income individuals to actively participate in the development of policies and programs to reduce poverty and also serves as a forum to address the needs and concerns of low-income individuals. Her new term runs from June 22, 2026, through June 21, 2029. This reappointment reflects the strong leadership and voice she brings for NEMCSA and the communities we serve at the state level.

# Success Stories

Each year, Michigan Community Action accepts nominations from local agencies statewide for their Volunteer and Client of the Year Awards. The awards are given to volunteers who go above and beyond, and clients who have shown determination and resilience.



Each story is unique, and is a testament to what happens when compassion meets commitment. They remind us why NEMCSA's work matters and how every effort—big or small—creates ripples of hope and possibility in someone's life. A sincere "Thank You" to the staff who have shown a willingness to pause, reflect, and share these moments, ensuring that the impact of the mission is seen, heard, and deeply felt by others. Stories range from first time home ownership to education advancement and more!



This year, NEMCSA staff nominated a total of nine clients and one volunteer for the awards. If chosen, volunteers and clients, along with NEMCSA staff, are invited to a day at the Capital in May to celebrate their achievements, share their stories, and receive their award. It is a truly impactful day - one that celebrates community action across the State. Awards are announced in March.

“THANK YOU” to the NEMCSA staff who submitted nominations!!

## Michigan Household Income

MLive recently shared a graphic showing the Michigan counties with the highest and lowest median incomes and three of the lowest - Oscoda, Montmorency, and Iosco - are within our core service area. This reinforces what we see every day: many of our neighbors are working hard to meet basic needs while facing significant economic challenges. It's a clear reminder of why our services and support are so critical in these communities.



# Program Impact

## AREA AGENCY ON AGING

Welcome to the Team!



**Ann Kochanski,**  
Options Counselor,  
MI Options Program



**Colleen Botos,**  
Supports Coordinator, RN



**Julie Cook,**  
Supports Coordinator, RN



**Amy Jackson,**  
Supports Coordinator, RN

**Medicare Advantage Plan Open Enrollment started January 1 and continues through March 31.** During this period, Medicare beneficiaries can evaluate their prescription costs/coverage/other benefits to enroll in a **new** advantage plan that best fits their healthcare needs. Additionally, the Special Enrollment Period (SEP) granted to Medicare beneficiaries whose BCBS Advantage plan ended on December 31, continues through February 28. This SEP is an opportunity "window" that allows beneficiaries to change from the advantage plan program to a Medigap without health underwriting to do so. Many times, health conditions may prevent enrollment in the Medigap program – the SEP means that beneficiaries have guaranteed acceptance in the Medigap plan they choose. Guaranteed Issue (SEP) ends February 28 for those beneficiaries that qualify. Contact your SHIP counselor/Commission on Aging for more information.

**REGION 9 AREA AGENCY ON AGING**  
**PUBLIC HEARINGS**  
The hearing will discuss the proposed Multi-Year Plan 2027-2029.

The plan will outline the use of funds and provisions of services under the Older Americans Act for the counties of Alcona, Alpena, Arenac, Cheboygan, Crawford, Iosco, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Oscoda, Otsego, Presque Isle and Roscommon.

**DATE:** May 6, 2026  
**TIME:** 1:00 p.m.  
**LOCATION:** Hale Senior Center  
310 North Washington Street  
Hale, MI 48739

**DATE:** May 18, 2026  
**TIME:** 1:00 p.m.  
**LOCATION:** NEMCSA Main Building  
2569 US-23 South  
Alpena, MI 49707

**TO REGISTER CONTACT CONNIE AT**  
989.358.4661 OR  
MCQUARRIEC@NEMCSA.ORG

**Have you completed the Aging Needs Assessment Survey Yet?** As part of its three-year planning process, Region 9 AAA is seeking input from the communities it serves. Make your voice heard by completing the survey. Click the link below to take the survey:  
<https://forms.office.com/r/MDRNCz1TKP>

### Long-Term Care Ombudsman News

Michigan's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program has grown to a total of 38 Ombudsmen, 6 State Office Staff and 8 Volunteers thanks to additional funding. NEMCSA-Region 9 AAA's program now has two Ombudsmen. The local program is actively seeking volunteers to work within the program providing much needed advocacy, education, and support to licensed long-term care facility residents. In fiscal year 2025, there were 3,858 complaints that were investigated, verified, and resolved by the Region 9 AAA's Long-Term Care Ombudsmen. Most of the complaints were related to discharges and evictions. The State Resident Council is made up of residents of Long-Term Care Facilities all over the State of Michigan that meet virtually. This team of residents, along with the two Assistant State Ombudsmen, are working diligently to get legislation passed to increase the personal needs allowance. Currently, residents are allowed to keep \$60 a month of their income for personal needs. This rate has not changed since 1980. One resident stated "it is bad when you have to save months just to purchase your personal undergarments. The amount we receive each month for our personal needs does not even allow us a soda a day and our families have to pay for our cell phones, if we even have one." Advocacy with legislators is needed on this issue.

**REGION 9 AREA AGENCY ON AGING**

**COMMUNITY INPUT SESSIONS**  
COME PARTICIPATE IN AN INPUT SESSION FOCUSING ON THE NEEDS OF OLDER ADULTS IN NORTHEAST MICHIGAN.

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 2026**  
3:00 PM - 4:00 PM  
**ALCONA COUNTY COMMISSION ON AGING**  
807 North Barlow Road  
Lincoln, MI 48742

**THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 2026**  
12:30 PM - 1:30 PM  
**OSCODA COUNTY COUNCIL ON AGING**  
429 North Mt. Tom Road  
Mio, MI 48647

**CONTACT REGION 9 AREA AGENCY ON AGING AT**  
989.358.4661 OR EMAIL MCQUARRIEC@NEMCSA.ORG

# Program Impact

## EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

### Annual Head Start In-Service Training

Head Start and Child Care Licensing requires that staff receive professional development and training every year. This year, our Head Start program implemented a revised format for our annual in-service training. Rather than convening all staff in a single central location, we transitioned to a regional training model. This approach reduced travel time and associated costs while allowing staff to participate in professional development closer to the communities they serve.

The regional model proved to be both efficient and effective. Staff participation was strong across all locations, and the smaller group settings supported meaningful engagement and discussion.

Training content focused on key program priorities, including:

- Instructional practices for classrooms
- Screen-free music and movement for children
- Addressing challenging behaviors
- Software, AI, and other technology information
- Supporting families in building literacy skills
- Customer service

By hosting trainings regionally, discussions were more directly connected to local community contexts and service delivery needs. Staff were able to collaborate with colleagues within their geographic areas, strengthening communication and consistency across sites. The investment in high-quality professional development continues to support strong program implementation and positive outcomes for children and families.



# Program Impact

## BRIDGES OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY

### BOSS Program Success Story

“When I first met Amanda, she was very emotional. I could tell right away that she would take advantage of any opportunity that came her way. She had hope, but she wasn’t fully convinced that a program could truly help her overcome the barriers she faced. Amanda left her parents’ home as a teenager due to a rocky relationship with her mother. She had a job and a car, but her car was unreliable, and her job was cutting her hours. After fleeing domestic violence, Amanda moved in with a cousin. Her world revolved around her children, and she felt she was letting them down because of her circumstances. Although she was behind on all her bills, she constantly reached out to her creditors to let them know she was trying her best. Amanda reminded me of a bird with a broken wing—she planned on flying, but circumstances kept her grounded. She shared that she had struggled with substance use in the past but had been clean for quite some time. Once she entered the program, Amanda faced her barriers head-on and never looked back. With just a little support, she progressed quickly. The BOSS program helped pay to fix her car and assisted her in catching up on a couple of bills. Before she even realized it, Amanda was taking off on her own. She secured a great job in the medical field and began catching up on her bills with very little assistance. She even did DoorDash on the side to help cover expenses. Amanda then entered a serious relationship and planned to move in with her boyfriend. Their children got along well, and everything seemed perfect. Her boyfriend purchased property and began placing a home on it, and Amanda even helped lay the foundation. Once the house was set, she began moving her belongings in. Just when things seemed to be going so well, her boyfriend ended the relationship, feeling that things were moving too fast.

Amanda was homeless again—but this didn’t stop her. If anything, it motivated her even more. She was able to rekindle her relationship with her mother and moved in with her briefly. Soon after, Amanda purchased a home of her own. Today, she is living there with her children and working full-time. Recently, Amanda experienced another car issue. She began to panic, but after talking with me, I could tell she realized she was capable of handling it on her own. She told me she had come too far to let another barrier break her. The very next day, she learned that the repair would cost much less than she expected. Amanda paid the bill herself and drove her car off the lot. When I shared this story with Amanda, she asked me to add one thing. She wanted anyone facing the crisis of poverty to know that deep down, she always believed in herself—but not having support kept her stuck. Sometimes, it only takes one helping hand to get over the hump. This birdie’s wing is fully healed now, and she is flying on her own.”

*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.*



Congrats  
Amanda!  
We are  
so proud  
of you!



Season two of the Empower & Strengthen Podcast now has three episodes. The most recent episode features Amanda from the success story above, be sure to check it out!



[CRC@NEMCSA.ORG](mailto:CRC@NEMCSA.ORG)



989-358-4757

# Program Impact

# SCHOOL SUCCESS



Leslie, SSP Liaison, received a donation from the First Congregational Church, Change is Good! Pictured are Marilyn Kitter, Bill Hasse, Pat Garant from First Congregational and Leslie Atkinson and Lisa Werth from SSP. The donation will go toward the upcoming Career and College Readiness trip in February that School Success is planning with Kirtland CC.



Jolene, SSP Liaison and Lisa, SSP Alpena Area Supervisor, accept a donation of winter gear from Starr Staffing in Alpena. Thank you, Holly and Starr, for making the holidays and frigid winter easier for students in need. Starr often donates generously to SSP and we are so grateful for their thoughtfulness and support.



The Zonta Club of Alpena recently partnered with SSP Liaisons Carson and Alisha to provide feminine hygiene products for students at Hillman and Atlanta schools. These essential supplies will help students feel comfortable, confident, and cared for throughout the school day. Both schools are deeply grateful for this generous donation and value the partnership that made it possible!

Thank you all. we greatly appreciate everything!



Madison, SSP Liaison, recently received a generous monetary donation from the Fraternal Order of Eagles in East Tawas to help stock the pantries at the Tawas and Oscoda campuses. This contribution has made it possible to provide essential food items to students who need them most. During a time when many families are facing uncertainty, this support has been especially meaningful. Having access to fully stocked pantries allows students to focus on their education without worrying about basic needs. The SSP Liaisons and the AEA are deeply grateful to the East Tawas Eagles for their generosity and ongoing commitment to supporting student success.



The School Success Partnership Program Team came together in January for a meaningful day of connection, learning, and collaboration. We were grateful to welcome our keynote speaker, Jim Ott, who delivered an engaging and insightful presentation on Emotional Realities. His message equipped our team with practical tools to better support students and helped reinforce our no-nonsense, relationship-centered approaches in our daily work.



# Program Impact

# HOUSING



## Housing Pathways for Young Adults

During the month of February, there were seven new enrollments in the Youth Rapid Rehousing Program, bringing the total number of currently enrolled participants to nineteen. We successfully established 2 additional Transitional Housing units, resulting in a total of eight occupied units. Our Street Outreach program currently has thirteen households enrolled who are actively seeking permanent housing or awaiting availability in a transitional housing unit. Additionally, eight youths are in the process of receiving a Fostering Youth to Independence (FYI) housing voucher, with one individual currently on the waitlist.

## Shelter Diversion Program

The Steps to Stability Grant opened on February 1 and has already demonstrated a strong early impact. Since launch, we have enrolled ten households into the program, providing targeted financial assistance and supportive services to promote housing stability. To date, five households have been fully diverted from experiencing homelessness, successfully maintaining or securing stable housing. We have utilized \$2,300 in grant funds thus far, strategically allocating resources to maximize immediate stabilization outcomes while continuing to support enrolled participants.

Tarin Sheffield, Housing Programs Supervisor and Elise Gapczynski, Youth and Young Adult Coordinator presented on NEMCSA Housing Programs at The Refuge of Otsego County's annual Town Hall. This discussion titled "Getting Real About Homelessness in Otsego County" brought together community partners to not only share information about the services they provide but also the truth about our unhoused neighbors. Tarin and Elise shared barriers to homelessness, such as lack of support from family, generational trauma, and rural community issues like availability of transportation and affordable housing options. These conversations are essential to eliminating the stigmas that homelessness carries, raising awareness of the need for safe and affordable housing, and creating access to wrap around supports to provide whole person systems of care.

## Homeless Prevention



Community Resource Coordinator Madson Shamel and Street Outreach Coordinator Chad Lytle teamed up to distribute supplies and data sheets to Point-In-Time (PIT) Count volunteers in all eleven counties that Housing covers. PIT occurs on the last Wednesday of January every year and provides essential data on the homeless population throughout the region for both study and funding purposes. PIT is not just a regional or Michigan specific study and is conducted nationally. Volunteers meet with our unhoused neighbors where they are staying in tents, cars and other places not meant for human habitation to collect information on their homeless situations within a 24-hour period.

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

# Program Impact

## FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT

Financial empowerment staff were able to attend the Head Start family night to discuss our financial empowerment classes and first time homebuyer courses, along with showing off the budget binder that everyone receives who does a budgeting class. We also have started our financial empowerment classes at the Alpena County Jail. These classes are part of the ELITE program that is run through the jail that teaches job readiness and re-entry into our communities. Staff are working with over twenty individuals for six weeks, they are one hour classes run every Monday. Discussions will range from credit repair, learning the parts of credit report, budgeting, meeting and planning financial goals along with discussing the programs within NEMCSA that can assist these individuals upon release.

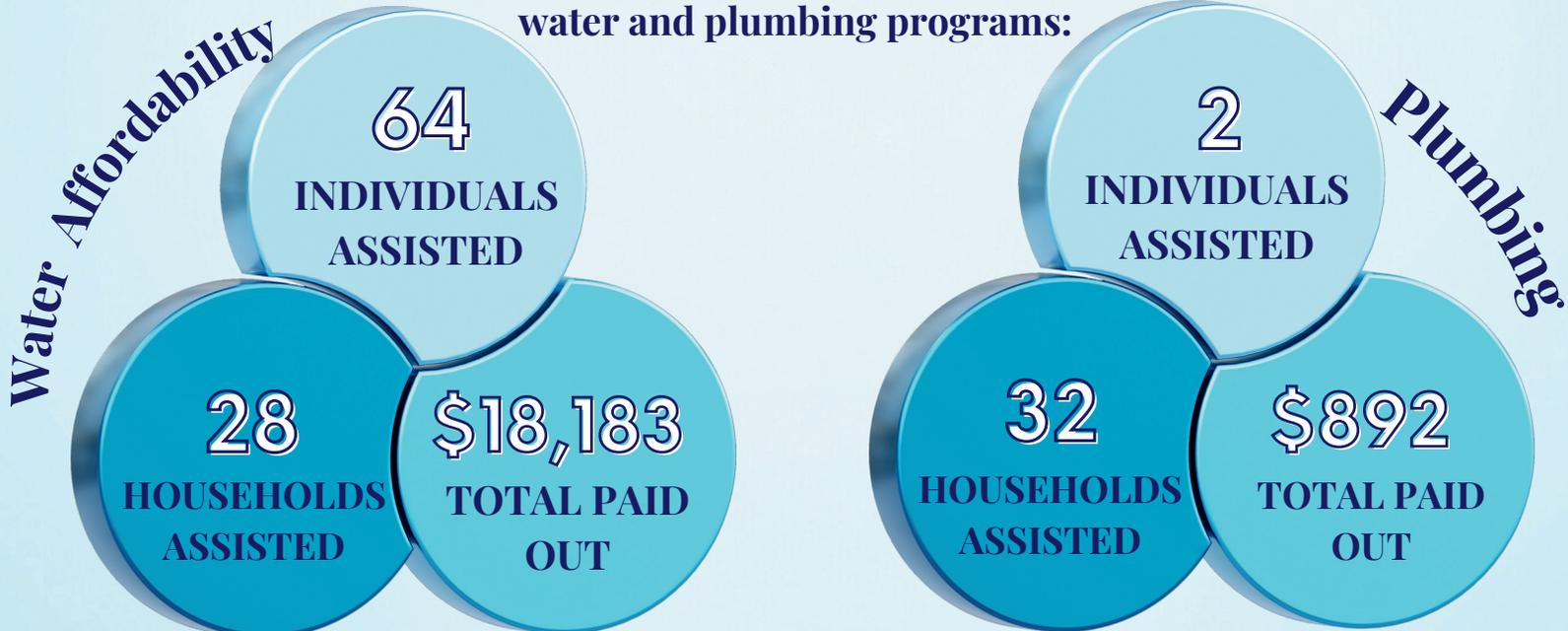
**BUDGET  
+ FOR +  
SUCCESS**



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

## WATER PROGRAM

In the month of February, the Water Affordability Program successfully 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

## RSVP VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Thank  
you



As the RSVP program comes to an end on March 31, 2026, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all our dedicated volunteers and volunteer stations who have generously given their time, talents, and service. Your commitment has made a meaningful difference in our communities, and we are deeply grateful for the compassion, reliability, and support you have shared throughout the years. Your service has truly embodied the spirit of volunteerism, and the impact of your work will continue to be felt long after the program concludes.

**-Amy Otto, RSVP Project Director**

## FGP/SCP VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

### Foster Grandparent Volunteer Spotlight

Allow us to introduce Foster Grandparent volunteer Connie Lucas who volunteers at Posen Elementary school 28 hours per week. Grandma Connie was drawn to being a school grandma having witnessed the positive influence of the program with her own children who she says helped them achieve their goals.

Connie began volunteering in 2019 and has no intention of retiring anytime soon! She loves how she's able to help her second graders achieve their goals and improve their skills. Her current students started the school year behind grade level and social skills below those of their peers and is proud of how much they've achieved in just a few months. She is constantly amazed at how a little extra help can accomplish so much improvement.

The staff and students at Posen Elementary have shared how much they enjoy having Grandma Connie at school and the program benefits the students.



“

Feedback from Students:  
I LOVE HER!  
She's my favorite!  
She helps you a lot and makes us happy!

”

# Weatherization

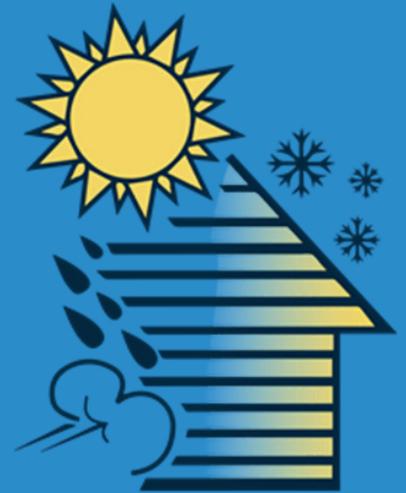
Weatherization Inspectors and contractors are currently working in 120 client homes. There are 80 potential clients waiting for applications and we are gathering documentation and scheduling home visits and prescreen inspections on 50 client homes. Staff are excited to announce an additional \$ 106,000.00 awarded in LIHEAP funding (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) this now gives us a total allocation of \$452,152 for year. Program staff look forward to what this additional funding will do for the program and the communities served.

## Agency Shout Out



- NEMCSA has been a pleasure to work with so far, Doug T. and agency staff are very quick to respond to monitor requests and feedback, making the monitoring process go much smoother. They display an eagerness to always learn and adapt to the everchanging world of Weatherization and correct any issues with the monitoring process. I look forward to working with them more in the future.

A well-deserved shout out from MDHHS for our amazing Weatherization team! We hear positive feedback about this team often, and it's wonderful to see their hard work recognized - every bit of it is earned.



*Weatherization Works*

# PACE

PACE Northeast Michigan began serving their first participants in February 2026. Enrollment for February was on budget, and March enrollment will bring a second wave of new participants. PACE NEMI is seeing extremely strong community support, with referrals to the program from the Hospital, senior housing communities, area primary care providers, and even directly from MDHHS. The program is already seeing the impact of PACE services to our participants, with some current enrollee's bringing "word of mouth" referrals as they share their satisfaction with our program to their peers in the community. The initial team expanded in February to welcome a driver/transportation aide. This critical role is assisting PACE Participants with "through door" service to get them from their home on and off the bus. Within the first week, this new driver was navigating winter weather to safely transport our participants to and from medical appointments. The PACE NEMI continues to be grateful to the NEMCSA board for their support of this essential new service in Northeast Michigan. PACE NEMI recently received recognition from the National PACE Association for being the 200<sup>th</sup> PACE organization in the country!

