One Couples Success Story

Simon Cruz and Leila Aviles came to Community Action, Inc. in search of greater opportunities. They left with a strong command of English, and a group of classmates and teachers who showed them compassion, support and a renewed spirit.

Simon and Leila moved to Haverhill from Puerto Rico three years ago. Life in Puerto Rico was difficult due to a failing school system, high unemployment rates and little opportunity. They moved hoping to secure living wage jobs and improved educational opportunities for their three children.

Their strong work ethic and determination led them to entry level employment. A manager who recognized Simon’s management potential told him to work on his communication skills. Leila needed to improve her English speaking skills.

They came to Community Action where their advisor Eva Balogh and teacher Gene Schmidt worked with them over the course of a year. Eva helped Leila improve her interviewing skills which helped her get a job at Macy’s. Simon said of his advisor, “Eva is a good person. She likes to help people.” During that time, Simon was hired by a company that contracts with local Home Depots to set up their grill and patio departments.

Simon worked hard, both studying English and at Home Depot. His managers soon realized his skill sets and his improved communication and leadership skills and promoted him to department supervisor. He was able to hire Leila to assist him and now they manage the assembling of grills and patio sets at five local Home Depot stores.

They often return to Community Action to help staff and educators with new student registrations as their way “to give back to the people who helped us.” Simon and Leila translate registration forms for new students, answer questions and share their story of success and promise. Community Action educators gave Simon and Leila the tools they needed to succeed. And they now have the greater opportunities they were seeking when they first came to CAI.
Head Start Dad Becomes US Citizen

CAI Head Start Dad Isaias Garcia achieved his long time goal and became a US Citizen in February. Isaias and Laura Vasquez have two daughters in the CAI Early Head Start home-based program and both parents are very involved in all aspects of the program. Congratulations Isaias.

Pictured above: Isaias Garcia and Laura Vasquez with their daughters: Jazlin-Garcia-Vasquez and Aidalina Garcia-Vasquez.

WIC Offers “Try It Tuesdays” Whole Grain Recipes

To increase awareness of whole grain benefits, the CAI Northern Essex WIC program has implemented “Try It Tuesdays”. Each Tuesday WIC will feature a new recipe using the whole grains that are available to WIC clients. WIC participants receive a monthly benefit that includes five whole grain options: whole wheat bread, whole wheat or corn tortillas, brown rice or whole wheat pasta.

Debra Luther (pictured right), a WIC employee for more than 20 years, is developing the whole grain recipes. Whole grain health benefits include better weight maintenance and reduced risk of diseases, including coronary heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. WIC staff advises children and adults to have at least two–three servings of whole grains daily for optimal nutrition.

Head Start to Host STEAM Events in April

CAI Head Start will offer two separate STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) events this April. The events display the work that children, families, and teachers do for a chosen topic. CAI Head Start/Early Head Start Center classrooms, Early Head Start Homebased families, Family Child Care homes, the CAI Family & Community Connection and the International Child Care Center have contributed to STEAM this year.

CAI Head Start families, staff and CAI Board members are welcome to attend the Haverhill STEAM Event at the CAI Fox Center, 75 Elm St. in Haverhill on Thursday, April 13, from 5:30–7 p.m. and the Seacoast STEAM Event at the CAI Seacoast Center, 447 Merrimac St. in Newburyport on Thursday, April 27, from 5:30–7 p.m. Refreshments will be served at both events. For more information, please contact CAI Head Start, 978-372-5052.

Family & Community Connection Programs

Family & Community Connection (FCC) serves families with children from 0–8 years of age. There is NO FEE to participate & NO income guidelines. FCC is located at 346 Broadway in Haverhill. Call 978-914-7893 to register.

Infant/Toddler Playgroups (0–3) - Tues., 9:30–10:30 a.m and Seacoast Play - Mon., 9:30–10:30 a.m.

Parent/Child Open Playgroup (3–6) - Wed., 9:30–11 a.m.

Kindergarten Ready - Tue. & Thurs., 9:30–11:30 a.m.

Messy Monday - Mon., March 20, 1–2 p.m.

Catch a Leprechaun - Mon., March 13, 1–2 p.m.

Music Rocks - Miss Claudia - Tues., 11 a.m.–12 p.m. and in Newburyport (Brown School Youth Center) - Tues., 9–10 a.m.

STEAM (Rainbow Slime) - Mon., March 27, 1–2 p.m.

YMCA Learn & Move Gym Time - Haverhill YMCA - Wed. & Fri., 1–2 p.m.

Donuts with Dads Story Time - Ages 0–8 - Haverhill (Scared Hearts Parish) - Sat., March 25, 9–10 a.m.

Library Programs - Dr. Seuss on the Loose - West Newbury Library - Fri., March 3, 11 a.m.–12:30 p.m.; Haverhill Library - Mon., March 6, 1–2 p.m.; Amesbury Library - Fri., March 10, 10:30–11:30 a.m.; Groveland Library - Fri., March 17, 10:15–11:15 a.m.; Merrimac Library - Fri., March 24, 10:30–11:30 a.m.; Georgetown Library - Fri., March 31, 1–2 p.m.
ESOL Waitlist Registration in April

The CAI Adult Learning Center will hold Waitlist Registration for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes on Tuesday, April 25, 10 a.m.–12 p.m. at 3 Washington Square, 3rd Floor in Haverhill. Please arrive on time. For more information contact: Eva Balogh, ESOL Advisor; 978-373-1971 ext. 264 or ebalogh@communityactioninc.org.

HiSET Waitlist Registration in April

Want to get your Diploma? (It was called GED, now it is the HiSET). The CAI Adult Learning Center offers free High School Equivalency Prep classes. The next waitlist registration will be held on Thursday, April 6 at 10 a.m., 3 Washington Square, 3rd floor in Haverhill. Please arrive on time and plan to stay until noon. Registration is for classes that begin in September.

For questions and more information, please contact: Alisa Povenmire, Career and Education Advisor; 978-373-1971, ext. 216 or apovenmire@communityactioninc.org. For Online Class option, contact Milissa Duncan at mduncan@communityactioninc.org.

First Time Home Buyer Training Offered

The Community Action Inc. (CAI) First Time Homebuyer Education Program will offer first time homebuyer education classes for area residents beginning Thursday, April 6 from 6 to 9 pm in the Presidential Gardens Community Room, 140 Evergreen Drive, Bradford.

A Massachusetts Homeownership Collaborative approved certificate is awarded after completion of the three-night course. The program is also approved by MassHousing. The dates for the course are Thursday, April 6, Tuesday, April 11 and Thursday, April 13. The cost is $60 per household. There are no income requirements to take the training.

The workshop is sponsored by Wells Fargo Bank. For more information contact Richard Lynch at 978-373-1971 or Susan Collins at 978-317-8998.

Adult Education Student Passes HiSET Exam

Congratulations to Emma Costanzo, who passed the HiSET high school equivalency exam in February 2017 after attending HiSET classes for 6 months at CAI’s Adult Learning Center.

Emma left high school as a freshman because of troublesome medical issues. It would be 6 years before Emma was well enough to focus on school work again. Emma researched high school equivalency programs and found that Community Action offered the most convenient location for her to study. She enrolled in CAI’s HiSET program in September 2016 and she hit the ground running.

Emma was nervous when she first enrolled. She says she had to push through the first two or three weeks before she became comfortable with the school experience again. She realized that she really enjoyed the classroom environment at Community Action, where students are encouraged to learn about and discuss current events as part of their preparation for the HiSET exam. “In a regular high school, students are too afraid to ask questions and really participate in class. In the HiSET class, all opinions are welcome and the conversations are great.” Emma also appreciated the individualized attention and tutoring she received.

Emma says that the most challenging aspect of preparing for the HiSET is doing school work outside of the classroom. It can be hard to be motivated but she feels strongly that doing homework is what really helped her to move toward her goal of passing the HiSET. The homework helped to keep the skills and knowledge accessible for the next class, the next lesson. Emma committed to a daily schedule of studying for 30-60 minutes per day – outside of class time. Emma’s commitment and method paid off. Within six months, she was ready to test with confidence.

Emma plans to enroll at Northern Essex Community College in the fall. She wants to study accounting and ultimately transfer to a four year college to earn her Bachelor’s Degree.

When asked what advice she would give to incoming students, Emma says, “You really have to want to succeed. Ask for extra help if you need it. Commit to doing the work inside and outside of class. It really prepares you for the test.”
Our Programs serve the following Massachusetts cities and towns: Amesbury, Boxford, Georgetown, Groveland, Haverhill, Merrimac, Newbury, Newburyport, Rowley, Salisbury, and West Newbury. Some CAI programs also serve Beverly, Essex, Gloucester, Hamilton, Ipswich, Lawrence, Manchester, Rockport, Topsfield and Wenham.

Help CAI Determine Needs

CAI is conducting an anonymous survey to better understand the needs of the residents who live in the cities and towns that CAI serves. If you reside or work in CAI’s service area please take a moment to provide your input. Our service area includes: Amesbury, Boxford, Georgetown, Groveland, Haverhill, Merrimac, Newbury, Newburyport, Rowley, Salisbury, and West Newbury. Some CAI programs also serve Beverly, Essex, Gloucester, Hamilton, Ipswich, Lawrence, Manchester, Rockport, Topsfield and Wenham.

Your input is critical to understanding the needs in our community and planning future programming. We thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Take Online Survey (survey available through 3/31/17):
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BXBBSST

For hard copies or more information, please contact:
Kerri Perry, Director of Planning & Development
978-373-1971, ext. 447
kperry@communityactioninc.org

Visit us on the web: www.CommunityActionInc.org
This is the third in a series of six articles on questions from the files of the CAI Consumer Protection Program. This free program provides information on consumer rights and helps to resolve disputes between consumers and merchants and landlords and tenants. Today’s article deals with tenant rights and responsibilities.

Q: I moved out of my apartment two months ago but my landlord still hasn’t given me back my security deposit. I have heard I can get triple damages. Is it true? – George P., Ipswich

A: A landlord must return the security deposit, or the balance of the deposit after deductions, within 30 days of the termination of tenancy. If deductions are made from the security deposit, an itemized list of the damages with costs or estimates for their repair must be supplied within 30 days as well. Deductions may be made for damages caused by you, your pets or people who have been on the premises with your permission. Unpaid rent may be deducted from the security deposit as well. If you do not receive this list, you are entitled to receive the return of the full deposit without any deductions for damages. If the security deposit was not placed in a separate account in a Massachusetts bank or if the amount you are due is not paid within 30 days, you may receive a refund of the entire deposit, plus triple damages and court costs.

Q: My landlord knocked on my door unexpectedly tonight and wanted to look around my apartment. Did I have to let him in? – Beverly G., Haverhill

A: A landlord may enter an apartment at a reasonable time and with reasonable notice for the following reasons only: to inspect it, to show it to prospective tenants or buyers, to make repairs, with a court order or if it appears to be abandoned.

Q: My landlady wants to raise my rent 25% next month. Can she do that? – Ralph S., Groveland

A: Your landlady may increase the rent by any amount she chooses but the law determines when rent changes may be made. If you have a lease, the rent cannot be raised until the lease term expires. If you are a tenant at will, you must be given notice of one full rental period, but not less than 30 days, before it becomes effective.

Q: I contacted the Board of Health about the condition of my apartment last month. I was just given a 30-notice to vacate the premises. Is this legal? – George R., Georgetown

A: If you have a lease, you cannot be asked to leave before the end of the lease term without a judge’s order. If you are a tenant at will, the landlord may give you a 30-day notice at any time without reason. However, if this is done within six months of a complaint being filed, it is viewed as being done in retaliation and, unless the landlord can prove otherwise, is not legal.

Q: I am considering renting an apartment in an older home. I have two cats and the owner said I would have to pay a pet damage deposit. Is this allowable? – Dianne B., West Newbury

A: A landlord may only collect first and last month’s rent and a security deposit that is no more than one month’s rent before you move into an apartment. The only other thing you can be charged at the beginning of your tenancy is the cost to install a new lock. A larger deposit may not be charged to you because you have pets.

Q: I have decided to move in with my boyfriend but I have seven months left on my lease. May I break the lease and not have to pay rent? – Olivia S, Amesbury

A: You are responsible for paying your rent each month until the end of the lease. If you move out early, the landlord has a duty to reduce your damages by looking for a tenant to replace you.

If you need help resolving a conflict with a landlord, visit the Consumer Protection Program, located at Community Action, Inc., 3 Washington Square, Haverhill or call 978-373-1971. The program is funded through the Massachusetts Office of the Attorney General.