

Winning the War on Poverty

By James Bellamy

When someone mentions January, a few things come to mind, New Year's resolutions, the MLK holiday, and the drastic weather changes in Saint Louis. It might be 10°F when you wake up but 65°F when you get home. But there's also a date in January that most people forget, a date that changed the lives of untold generations of Americans. On January 8th 1964, during the State of the Union address, President Johnson declared a "War on Poverty". Unlike the politicians of our time President Johnson kept his word. Later that year he signed legislation for the Food Stamp Act, and the Economic Opportunity Act which established Community Action Agencies like The Community Action Agency of St. Louis County, (CAASTLC). In the following year President Johnson signed the Social Security Act of 1965, which created the popular programs Medicare and Medicaid. These programs covered the majority of the poor and elderly, Americans took a huge step towards Universal Healthcare. Besides the Children's Health Insurance Program few steps were taken towards the march to Universal Healthcare until March 23, 2010, when President Obama signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

The bill faced heavy resistance before and after it was signed into law. By 2012 opponents of the law took to the Supreme Court to challenge the law's constitutionality. On June 28th 2012, the Supreme Court ruled that the Individual Mandate was constitutional, but states had the right to opt out of the Medicaid expansion. The Missouri Legislation rejected the Medicaid expansion, in which the federal government would pay 100% for the 1st three years and 90% afterward.

In response to 800,000 uninsured Missourians, The Missouri Foundation for Health created the Cover Missouri Coalition. CAASTLC was selected as a hub for the Saint Louis area, and received a grant, based largely on its proven track record as participants in the "War on Poverty." As Regional Hub, CAASTLC holds monthly conferences with local non profits, and community agencies in the Saint Louis region to coordinate outreach efforts. Since September CAASTLC has trained 13 Certified Application Counselors. In an effort to inform the public about the Affordable Care Act. CAASTLC has already presented several enrollment events, an Open House, and routinely staffs area libraries to answer questions and enroll the public. On January 18th CAASTLC held an open house and health fair at the south county office, located at Mid-East Area Agency on Aging, 225 Lemay Ferry Rd. Several residents attended the successful

informational/ enrollment event. CAASTLC has partnered with Saint Louis Regional Arts Commission and enrolled 10 artists.

Several enrollment events were held through February and March. CAASTLC staff are constantly engaging the public, whether it's talking to consumers in Delmar or providing information to small businesses along Lemay Ferry Road.

In conclusion to our efforts were a success there were over 7 million people signed up nationally, these consumers are saving money that they can now use for food and housing and other expenses. It looks like we might have finally turned a corner with the "War on Poverty."