

Head Start, 1988

A History of the Williamsburg-James City County Community Action Agency 1968 – 2018 “50 Years of People Helping People” By Camilla Tramuel

In 1964, Lyndon Baines Johnson, the 36th President of the United States from 1963 to 1969, signed **The Economic Opportunity Act**, authorizing the formation of the “Community Action Agency” (CAA) as part of the War on Poverty. The **Community Action Agencies (CAA)** are local private and public non-profit organizations that carry out the **Community Action Program (CAP)**, founded by the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act. In 1964, the poverty rate in the United States was 19% and steadily increasing.

As Vice President, President Johnson automatically assumed the office of the presidency after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. President Johnson quickly began to enact domestic programs to improve education, provide medical care for the aged, and eliminate poverty. His goal was to "end poverty and racial injustice."

The Williamsburg-James City County Community Action agency had its beginning in 1968 under Executive Director Mr. Albert Hill. Toano and Williamsburg-James City County joined to become the James River Community Action Agency located in the second story of the main Toano Post Office.

Mr. Wyatt Larry Trumbo was the Assistant Director of the James River CAA and when the WJCC CAA split from the James River CAA, he became the director of the WJCC CAA. John McCrimmon took over as Executive Director, followed by Reba Bolden, and the current director is Tressell Carter. The agency’s goal is to revitalize the neighborhood, one person at a time, one house at a time, one family at a time, and one community at a time. They involve the community to help improve the community, and create better opportunities for those who would otherwise have no chance.

WJCC CAA provides services that address the full range of family needs – from Head Start and other education and child development programs, to youth and adult employment and training, to services for seniors, the frail and the elderly. The ultimate goal of the Agency is to promote self-sufficiency. This is evident in the projects they have completed over the years.

Jackie Gardner, former director of the Head Start Program once stated that she could measure her success by the children she has taught. She says it was one of the most rewarding careers she has ever had. The agency has 50 employees they rely heavily on our whopping 645 volunteers who feel the same as Ms. Gardner. Volunteers donate their time for a worthy cause. More volunteers are always needed.

Community Outreach Programs Over the Years



The Agency's most well-known program is **Head Start**. The Head Start Program began in 1972. Since then, Head Start programs have been instituted at James River Elementary and Norge Elementary. The main campus location is the Messmer Historic Triangle Community Services Center on Waller Mill Road. The Agency has received the "Head Start Certification of Excellence", receiving a 100% rating on the state audit.

Turron Jones, the current Transportation Coordinator, remembers when she began Head Start through the WJCC CAA when Head Start was located at First Baptist Church, Scotland Street. Even her kids attended Head Start through the Action Agency. Now she's giving back what she learned. According to Felicia Norman, one of the Head Start teachers, genuine satisfaction is when your former students still remember you from way back.

The Lion's Club, Kiwanis Club and many local businesses and volunteers play a big part in the Head Start Program. The Lion's Club provide volunteers who donate their time and services to give free hearing tests, and local dentists provide dental check-ups, and free toothbrushes to the children. The Kiwanis Club takes the time to read to the children and donate books as part of the reading program. In 2016-17, 470 persons were served through Head Start and Family Services. This includes 154 pre-school children and their families.



Feed the Need Holiday Food Baskets is a program that is beginning to take shape now, as the holidays creep upon us. Each year, the Agency provides more than 500 food baskets to needy families during the Holiday season.



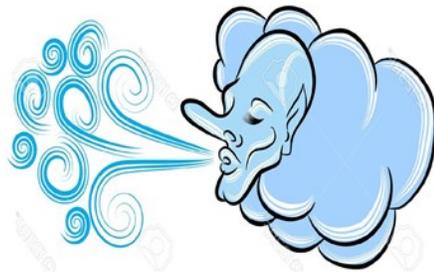
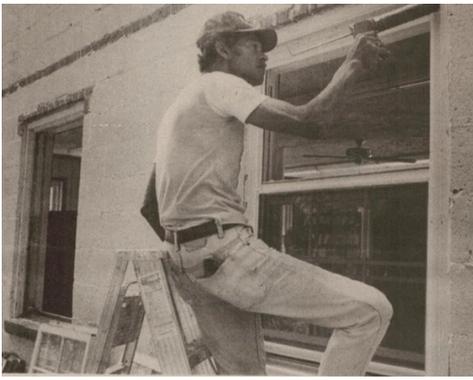
Project Discovery is a program for local high school graduates that will be the first person in their family to enter college and/or first person in their family to earn a college degree. There were 55 youths who participated in this program in 2016-17.



The **Emergency Assistance Program** helps those who have a one-time emergency situation that involves the need for food, rental assistance, or utility bill payment. In 2016-17, it helped 1,289 persons.



The Agency provided **Free Tax Preparation Service** to 607 persons in 2016-17.



The WJCC CAA **Weatherization Program** works in Communities as far away as Newport News, Poquoson, York County, Isle of Wight and the Eastern Shore. In 2016-17, there were 5,886 persons who benefited from work completed to their homes.



In 2016-17, the **Neighborhood Basketball League and Sports Camps** combined had 365 youths participate. These programs were originally envisioned to help keep teens off the streets and engaged in a productive activity.



Smart Money Management teaches budgeting, saving and managing a loan to help clients improve their credit score and access to a mortgage from a local bank or Habitat for Humanity.



All-Star Dads mentors and supports fathers to help them be involved in their children's lives and education.

Former Community Outreach Programs

The Action Agency's has offered many programs throughout its long history – some of which have unfortunately been eliminated due to budget cuts. These cuts not only trim the budget but they also trim the staff. Below are some of the worthwhile and meaningful programs which are no longer offered.



Cars for Work was a project that assists those who could not afford a vehicle. Only cars that can seem to provide reliable transportation with minimal repairs were accepted. Cars were donated, repairs made, and the vehicle was sold, not given away, for the costs of repairs to those who could not afford a car. If necessary, affordable payments were arranged. Buyers had to keep the car ensured and repaired. The costs of the cars were normally \$500 - \$600.



Adopt-A-House involved the renovation of homes for those who cannot afford the cost of repairs such as windows, doors, roofs, or a heating system.



Stephanie Sturge
Melissa Meekins, Shondell Gray, and Antoinette Brooks put the finishing touches on a "four-course" brick segment in Melvin Jones' bricklaying class.

"The Green Team" program provided teenagers with summer jobs with on-the-job training each summer. Once the teen was in the program, they were allowed to return each summer until they graduated from high school. This program not only kept kids off the street who had nothing to do, but it was a benefit to the teen, his or her family, and to society.

In Summary

As you have just read, the Williamsburg-James City County Community Action Agency is an agency worthy to be praised. It is made for helping people with support from our numerous volunteers. The Agency supports people by helping and encouraging children and youth, supporting the working poor, financial support for those who are facing a financial crisis, and to sustain and honor the elderly. They help to strengthen whole families while supporting the entire community.

Self-satisfaction and self-gratification comes from the completion of a project from a face that was once laden with worry, now smiling from ear to ear, with a tear in each eye. What blessings this organization has poured out to the community. They are like Angels with wings you cannot see!

If you would like to volunteer your time or make a donation, please contact the Agency.



Green Team 1996



Head Start teacher Ms. Norman, 1996



Delegate Rapp Beale visits Norge Head Start classroom, 2002

Executive Directors Through the Years

By Mary Miller, CAA staff member from 1976 to 2018

Albert Hill was the first Executive Director of the James River Community Action Agency, located in the second story of the Toano Post Office.

Larry Trumbo, Retired from the Military

Since Mr. Trumbo served in the military for 20 years, his style of management reflected his military discipline. Mr. Trumbo, interviewed and hired all staff. At the time of hire, he would review the agency's personnel policies with the new staff member. During his tenure, he was the supervisor for all of the staff. Under Mr. Trumbo, the Agency operated on the honor system. He had the confidence in his staff to perform their duties with very little oversight. He also, would not hesitate to terminate an employee if necessary. Mr. Trumbo and other Executive Directors from all over the country, spent many days and hours in Washington, DC lobbying for the continued funding for the Community Action Agencies.



CAA Locations:

Toano Post Office
Reverend Wales' House
Blayton Building
Parkway Building
Next to Queen Anne Dari
Messmer Community
Services Center

John McCrimmon, College Educated, PhD from Duke University

Mr. McCrimmon was a "people person". As a "people person", his style of management was to include all of the supervisors in the making of decisions for the Agency. He depended heavily on the supervisors to help run and maintain the daily functions of the Agency. The Agency continued to grow during Mr. McCrimmons tenure.

Reba Bolden, College Educated, Masters Degree

Reba was the epitome of the qualifications for an Executive Director for a Community Action Agency. Reba had the personality, the presence, and the compassion to relate to and empathize with all class of people. Reba's style of management was to have an OPEN Door Policy. The OPEN DOOR policy, not only for the staff, but also, for the Agency's clients. Reba, followed the three "F's" rule.



Be fair, be firm, be flexible. The Agency functioned extremely well under Ms. Bolden's short tenure.



Reba Bolden served as Executive Director from 2004 to 2017.

Staff Field Trip, 2005

CAA Board and Staff Members: “Why I Serve”

Carolyn Baker, Board Chair

I first got connected with the Community Action Agency through the Head Start program 45 years ago. At that time Natalie, my daughter, was three years old. I wanted so much to get Natalie into the Head Start program, but my neighbor Bishop Isaac Parker, who was on the Board, told me I didn't qualify, and I was so mad, because I knew it was such a great program. I didn't know what I would do with Natalie, so my cousin babysat Natalie when she was three, then she went to the public school program at age 4, but I really wanted her in Head Start.

I've been involved with the CAA Board for about 30 years, and I've spent seven years as Board Chair. Reverend Moody served on the Board for 25 years, serving the same area that I serve: Lightfoot-Mooretown road. When he left the Board he asked that I come on.

I've seen so many changes. The growth of the agency has been just amazing – the new programs, and then to see the employees come and go: Reverend Randall, Mary Miller, Linda Wallace-Cody. Linda and I knew Tressell Carter, our new Executive Director, when she was with Neighborhood Connections and we took part in the Neighborhood Connections spring conference with the target communities.

What I like about being on the Board and being the Chair, is that I am a part of how everything in the CAA comes together: the Parent Policy Council, the Board committees and how they connect to the Board, and how this connection integrates with the Executive Director and how the ED integrates everything with the staff. I like seeing how it all intertwines to make the whole organization work.

Felicia Norman, Head Start Teacher

My story is really seeing that parent in Walmart who comes running up to me saying 'Miss Norman, Miss Norman!'. They still remember me. Even if their child is twelve years old now, they still remember, and that's how I know I've had impact. Lauren Merritt is an example of that. Lauren was in my Head Start classroom in 1994 and now she's working at the USDA in Washington D.C. She told me that she chose VSU because she remembered that I went there. Those are the kinds of stories that let me know I know I have had impact.

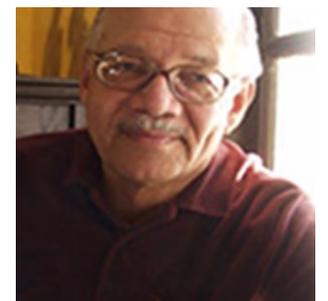
Bobby Braxton, Board Member

When I first ran into the Head Start kids, and I didn't know they were as well behaved and as nice as they were. I had no idea. I thought they would be just a little bunch of kids running around but they take excellent care of them and they're bright. The program is extremely good- I don't think a lot of people understand how great it really is.



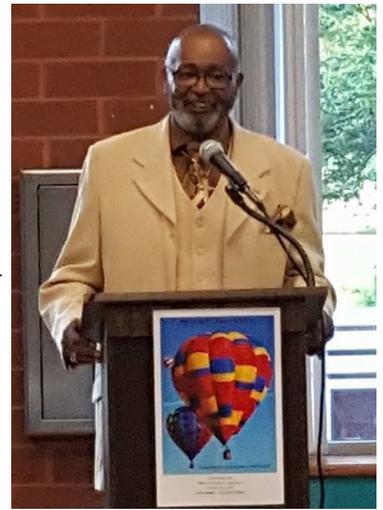
Carolyn Baker, president of the Lightfoot Mooretown Protective and Improvement League, in front of the Beautiful Temple Lodge on Mooretown Road. Work will begin later this month to improve the lodge building. Kenneth D. Lyons/Daily Press

Volunteer gets things done
“Community Action is really my passion because helping people is my passion”



Reverend Morris Randall, Prior Transportation Coordinator and Fatherhood Specialist

There are so many beautiful stories, but one program that really made a difference was “Cars for Work”, when I was Transportation Director. It was part of the “From Welfare to Reform” program. If someone wanted to donate a car to us, they’d get a tax write-off and we would give it to a family who needed transportation. I would pay for the title, taxes and tags and whatever repairs were needed, and we would charge the client \$25 a month, and once they had paid off the expenses, we would sign the title over to them. I enjoyed that program because we helped so many parents and single mothers. At the time, Social Services was trying to put people back to work, but if they had no transportation they couldn’t get themselves to the job site, so “Cars for Work” made sense.



I also was Fatherhood Specialist for about 10 years, up until I left, three years ago. I enjoyed teaching young fathers how to become dads or be better dads. Lots of times the father didn’t live with the family and that was fine. It wasn’t about the mama and him, it was about dads taking responsibility. I got a dad to head up the program, and I coached them - whatever they needed I provided. So it was really their program. I’d like to get involved in that program again, as a coach or mentor.

Yaitzel Barrientos, Human Resources Support

We moved from Fort Bragg, North Carolina in 2005 and I was looking for a preschool program. I got information about Head Start and I came in, and I remember Ms. Rosalind. I registered by second daughter, Jaylinn, who is 18 years old now. I wasn’t working, so I decided to get involved because it was such a big transition for her... when I left her each day she would cry and cry! At that time Ms. Favors was Family Services Coordinator. She encouraged me to join the Parent Policy Council. I decided to be a full-time volunteer because I’m bilingual (I’m from Panama), so I could help the Hispanic families.



Ms. Favors asked me if I’d like to be an employee, so I became a Teaching Assistant with Miss Norman. The job description required a Commercial Driver’s License (for the buses) – and everyone gave me a lot of encouragement and I passed the test. I went to the DMV 21 times for that test!

Ms. Justis came on board and she encouraged me to take classes at TNCC in early childhood education, which helped me to understand being in the classroom: children’s cognitive skills, etc. The Family Services Coordinator at the time watched me and saw how I encouraged the Hispanic families and children. She stopped me one day and said, “I want you to be a part of my team.” And that’s how I became part of Family Services. Dr. Whitehead was Head Start Director at that time.

In my time at Family Services we won 2nd place in the Christmas Parade – we had a lot of participation and we were so proud. Two of my children did Head Start – one is now studying pharmacy and the other, who is still in high school, is interested in a medical career. I always believe that preschool is a good base for everything. Without that strong foundation, children would struggle in school.

Rosalind Dodd, Weatherization Office Manager

I served with the agency, in many different capacities, for 38 years, plus summers I spent as a teenager working as an assistant in a Norge Head Start classroom that was running a summer pilot program. One of my favorite stories starts with the Green Team. The Green Team was a program funded by Anheuser Busch because they wanted to do something good in the community. Each summer we chose eight teenage boys and girls who would work on the house of someone who needed help. We hired Coach Melvin Jones as the mentor who taught them construction, how to lay bricks, do repairs and do landscaping. The program lasted over a decade; Coach was 70 years old when he left. They usually worked on an elderly person's home, and the teenagers got paid, learned skills, and learned to give back. Coach taught the girls to be young ladies and the boys to be young men. He'd never let one of those young ladies open a door for herself if there was a young man in the vicinity.



As usual, you would get at least one or two rowdy kids. This one young fellow was one of the rowdy ones who did not like to take direction from anyone – not Coach, me, nor his mom. He responded to the program, though, and before the end of the summer his whole attitude had changed. And then I lost track of him for at least 15 to 20 years. I saw him about two years ago. What really got me was that he thanked me for staying on him at the time. He said, "If it wasn't for you always on my back, I wouldn't be where I am now." He has a house, he's gotten married, he had kids and he has a good job. You never know the impact you are going to have at the agency.

Turron Jones, Transportation Coordinator

My Head Start story really starts with myself. I went to Head Start here at the CAA when it was at First Baptist Church – my transition ceremony was in 1976. When I lived in Louisiana, my kids went to Head Start there. I made sure when I moved back home my kids were also enrolled in the Head Start program. Ms. Sharp (currently Head Start secretary) and her twin had one year in Louisiana and one year in the Norge Head Start classroom. My son went to Head Start two years in Louisiana, and my other daughter had one year in Louisiana and one year here. She is now a second grade teacher in Franklin, and her love of school and wanting to do the best definitely started in Head Start. She volunteered here in Head Start when she was in High School - the program made her love the smaller children and choose a career working with them. And the same goes for Ms. Sharp – she loves working with the Head Start kids.



George Drummond, Board Member

I had just gotten on the Board and the school system wanted to take over the Head Start program. That had to have been over 20 years ago. And that was really our main source of income. So I voted against it, and said they just can't take it, they would have to take our grant. I got a bunch of people to vote against it.





Our Success Stories: Lauren Merritt

Lauren’s journey with the WJCC Community Action Agency began twenty-four years ago with Head Start, when she was a precious Head Start preschooler in Miss Norman’s class.

In middle school she joined the Project Discovery program where she participated in college visits, which, as she says,

“open your mind to so many possibilities - I had no idea at the time”.

Lauren was involved in WJCC CAA activities year round: in the summers she was part of our Green Team, where Coach Mel Jones taught her to lay bricks, prime and paint homes and do landscaping.

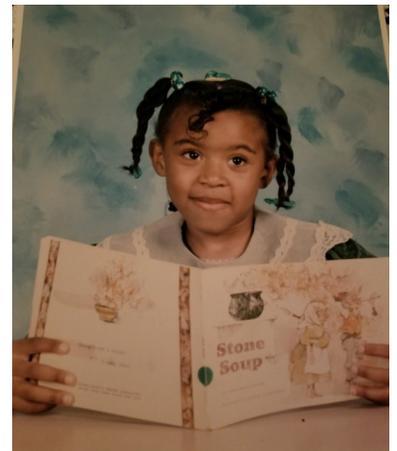
Lauren went on to attend Virginia State University in Petersburg where she earned a B.A. in English Language and Literature with a minor in Mass Communications, and she continued studying to earn an M.A. in English.

Today Lauren is a successful Federal Writer/Editor at the U.S. Department of Agriculture outside Washington, D.C. She explains, “The CAA is an amazing organization – it has been around for so long and helped so many



Jesika Penny, Head Start Teacher

“Head Start taught me how to socialize so I would know what to do once I got to Kindergarten. At the time, Ms. Rose was my teacher and I had home-based Head Start, where she came out to my house and prepared me for Kindergarten. Then I was in Project Discovery. If it wasn’t for Project Discovery, I’d have probably never even thought of going to college. At the time I wasn’t thinking much beyond high school. I saw people working out in the community, in restaurants and around town, and that was really what I saw for my future. But in Project Discovery I realized I could go to college. They also gave us vouchers to sign up for the SAT and helped out with application fees too. We all applied to different colleges, but three of us, myself, Lauren and Keisha all ended up getting accepted to Virginia State University. So we went from Williamsburg to Petersburg together, and we’re still really close friends today!”



Head Start teacher Ms. Penny was a 5-year-old Head Start student in 1995!



Jesika (pictured at the right), was in Project Discovery with Lauren Merritt (center) and Keisha Pressey (left).



Jesika today.

Our Success Stories: Iyanla and Novian XO

For siblings Iyanla and Novian, Project Discovery has opened doors to the future. Iyanla joined the program as an eighth grader and quickly began to learn about career options and gain skills for college applications. Then came the college visits. “VCU was the first college trip I took with Project Discovery and the first college I had ever been to. We split up by major to tour the school and the day was really fun because there was a pep rally going on. Ever since then I knew I wanted to go to VCU. I knew I was going to go to VCU if I got accepted.” And she did! Iyanla also applied for dozens of scholarships using skills honed in Project Discovery, and she won four, including \$1,000 from the NAACP and \$500 from the Community Action Agency.

Iyanla is now a rising sophomore at VCU studying Mass Communications and Public relations, and working at the radio station. She plans to become a Program Director of a radio station.



Project Discovery and its partnership with the Youth Aeronautics Educational Foundation (YAEF) transformed Novian’s life as well. “That definitely helped put together a lot of career options and helped set up what I wanted to do,” he says. He attended the YAEF Ground School on Saturday mornings, passed the FAA written knowledge exam, and recently completed his first solo flight at the age of 17! Novian received a \$1,000 scholarship from Project Discovery, and a \$500 scholarship from the Williamsburg Moose Lodge 757 to help towards tuition and college expenses. Novian is attending Elizabeth City State University, an HBCU in North Carolina located near the largest US Coast Guard aviation base. He is in the Honors Program, studying Aviation Science, and plans to become a Coast Guard pilot.

More doors opened for Iyanla and Novian through Project Discovery: “Miss Linda definitely makes you get involved and volunteer and it opens up a lot of opportunities to become involved,” Iyanla says. Iyanla and Novian volunteered with the local chapter of the Youth NAACP, becoming Secretary and President respectively. They also volunteered with the James City County Rec Connect program for three years, and this turned into their first paying job!

You might just find Iyanla, Novian and their two siblings volunteering at a local program or event. Novian may be focused on his career, but he remembers something different when he thinks back on his Project Discovery experience. Volunteering! “That’s my favorite part,” he says.

“Participating in ‘Feed the Need’, when everybody’s working together in the auditorium to pack up the food. And giving away the turkeys. I like that holiday spirit.”

Families Served

In FY 16-17 WJCC CAA provided 8,672 services:

- 470 persons were served through Head Start and Family Services: 154 preschool children and their families.
- 365 youths participated in Neighborhood Basketball League and Sports Camp.
- 55 youths participated in Project Discovery for first-generation college-bound students.
- 5,886 persons in our Weatherization service area benefitted from work on their homes.
- 1,289 people received one-time emergency food, rent or utility bill assistance.
- 607 persons benefitted from free tax preparation services.

645 volunteers helped make our work possible! The percentage of administrative costs to total revenues for FY 16-17 for the WJCC-CAA is 10%; 90% of the funds we receive are spent on programs and the clients we serve.

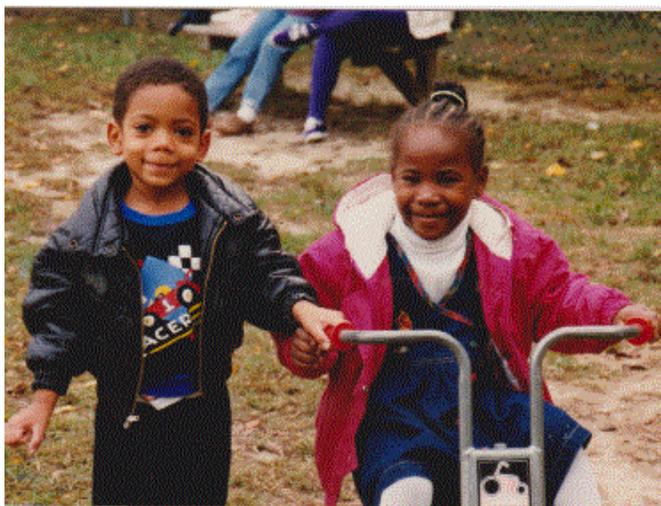
Stephen Orange, Bus Driver and Building Custodian

I've worked here 21 years doing all kinds of jobs. Sometimes I worked in the classrooms when they were short a teacher. One of my most memorable times was helping a child write their name forwards. They were always writing it backwards. So I wrote the letter A to Z and showed them how I pick out the letters for my name. Then they picked out their letters and wrote their name forwards!

Then there were times when kids needed some special attention because they would distract the other kids. So I would get a big paper and lay down on the floor with the crayons and I would make big rainbows with the child. Pretty soon all the other kids would join in and lay down and draw too!

I remember one child – he would come in all sloppy, and the other kids would notice. This particular day I happened to be in the classroom and I saw that I had the same clothes on as him. So we went into the bathroom and I stood him in front of the mirror and rolled up his cuffs on his jeans, tucked his shirt tails in and put his suspenders on. Then I went to his box and got out his comb and combed his hair. Then I stood behind him and we looked in the mirror together and I said, "We look like big brothers and little brothers!" Just fixing up his appearance helped that child a lot.

I love the people I work with because they allow me to be myself. When they come to me with what they need that makes me feel appreciated. If they don't come to me and a whole day goes by, I feel alone. Like I said when I was an Action Star for the Community of Stars, when everyone is here I feel armored, but if someone is missing I don't feel 100%. I am eternally grateful to be here.



Current Head Start parent Mr. Picket as a Head Start student way back!

