

People achieving more
by working together

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CAAS has worked to end poverty in Somerville since its founding in 1981. Every day of those twenty-five years, staff at CAAS have helped families in Somerville pay the rent, buy food, keep the lights on, and get excellent child care and education for their young children. Each of those is a victory.

Certain of CAAS' achievements over those twenty-five years have made life better, not just for one individual or one family, but for all of us. CAAS is committed to the idea that people achieve more working together. Here are three stories that dramatically show what we mean by *community action*.

"CAAS is the reason I was able to keep my home," says Mary Louise Daly.

Mary Louise lives at the Clarendon Hill Towers, on the border of Somerville and Arlington. Federal money helped build the Towers in the 1960's, and people of modest means were supposed to be able to rent apartments there. By the late 1980's, however, the developers had nearly reached



Then Governor Michael Dukakis addresses the tenants at Clarendon Hill Towers

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LATINO YOUTH LEARNS TO LEAD AT CAAS

What difference does CAAS make in the life of Somerville youth? Ask Carolina Contreras.

Carolina Contreras took part in CAAS' youth leaders group, Jovenes Latinos, in her freshman and sophomore year of high school. Already, she stood out. She was the only girl in the group at the time, but everyone noticed that the boys turned to her for ideas — and whenever public speaking was called for, everyone looked at Carolina.

"I can honestly say what I did at CAAS affected the rest of my life," Carolina told us in a recent interview. Carolina remembers most of the work the Jovenes did to get people involved in civic issues and change policies. The group worked to ban indoor smoking in public buildings in Somerville. It helped register many residents to vote, especially immigrants and Latinos.

"A true leader gets other people to do things for themselves," says Carolina Contreras.

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Keep on Keeping On
 a message from
 Executive Director
 Jack Hamilton

It has become a truism that children are the ones most victimized by war. We are bombarded by the electronic and print media on a daily basis with terrible pictures and accounts of wounded, maimed, killed, and starving children. The scenes from the Middle East, East Africa, and Afghanistan bring tears to most people's eyes.

What is not so widely covered by the media is the harm that war does to our own children. Clearly, our children are not suffering to the same degree as those who live in the war zones, but they are still suffering unnecessarily.

The federal government now finances its military adventures by borrowing and by cutting back on domestic programs. This is a double whammy for

“ what is not so widely covered . . . is the harm that war does to our own children ”

our children. First, as they grow up, they will be added with an enormous national debt. Second, they are being deprived now of much needed services.

A small local example is our own Head Start Program. Over the past three years, there have been no increases in its budget, and, in fact, one year it had to cope with a 1% decrease. The future looks no better.

While the children and others suffer, oil companies and defense (or offense) contractors are prospering obscenely, as Derrick Jackson (*Boston Globe*, 9/1/06) and United for a Fair Economy remind us.

www.faireconomy.org

The answer, of course, is to keep on keeping on, working for a world with non-violent solutions for conflicts, where governments work for the health and safety of all their residents, and full human rights are truly honored.

Here at CAAS, we will not stop struggling to improve the lives of the poor and suffering amongst us. The odds may be against us, but we **will** keep on.

Peace!

The Sweet Smell of Victory: Success Stories from CAAS' first 25 years

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the end of their twenty-year obligation to the federal government. They were considering selling the whole building off to be converted to condominiums. Mary Louise and her neighbors feared they would be put out on the street.

CAAS helped residents at Clarendon Hill Towers organize themselves into a tenants' association. For three years, they gathered the know-how and the money. Finally, in 1990, the tenant association bought the apartment buildings itself. The people who live at the Towers still rent their apartments: from the association, at a rate they can afford. From this victory, tenants learned that they have the power to determine where and how they live. Today, Mary Louise is not only a member of the tenant association board, she is also a member and former president of the Board of CAAS.



CAAS helped tenants buy Clarendon Hill Towers and keep it affordable.

“From the former Latino Youth Organizer Aru Manrique, who is now the City of Somerville’s Director of Multi-Cultural Affairs, and Latino Program Director Ismael Vasquez, Carolina learned how to define leadership. “A true leader gets other people to do things for themselves,” she says.

Now entering her sophomore year at Ursinus College in Pennsylvania, Carolina will try to put that model of leadership into practice. She is an intern with her college’s Bridge Program, helping orient new students (especially students of color) to the college environment. Carolina was also responsible for inviting former State Representative and Boston mayoral candidate Mel King to speak at Ursinus. “He is the person I hope to one day become,” Carolina enthuses.

Carolina Contreras is the daughter of Dominican immigrants. They came to this country to work. With encouragement from one of her teachers, Mrs. Bonnell, the Contrerases became U.S. citizens in 1997. Carolina plans to go back to visit the Dominican Republic in December, and next summer, she hopes to teach English and do community service in Uruguay and Peru. After graduation, her plan is to spend a year with Teach for America. “A lot of people go out of the country to teach. I want to help people in my own country.”

CAAS salutes Carolina Contreras and the other young men and women who are learning leadership in Somerville. If you know someone special aged 13-18 who should join Jovenes Latinos, please call Ismael Vasquez, (617) 623-7370, x 118.



Carolina Contreras of CAAS’ Jovenes Latino program, celebrating her high school graduation in 2005.

Success Stories... continued from previous page.

The changing face of Somerville

In the 1980’s and early 1990’s Somerville began to change. It had been a city of immigrants from Ireland and Italy, Portugal and Greece. Now, the newcomers started arriving from El Salvador, Haiti, Brazil, Vietnam, and dozens of other countries. The number of immigrants was greater than it had been for decades. And not everyone liked that. Some residents circulated a petition to put an anti-immigrant question on the election ballot. “The petition was so broadly worded, it was like asking whether you were for or against immigration,” recalls CAAS Executive Director Jack Hamilton.

CAAS hired a handwriting expert to prove that many of the signatures on the petition were forged.



“It was very suspicious when everyone on a certain street was at home to sign the petition, and they all signed in alphabetical order — the way they were listed on the voter rolls!” Hamilton laughs. Somerville residents showed their appreciation by contributing more than \$6,000 to help pay for the handwriting analysis. In the end, CAAS succeeded in throwing the petition off the ballot. This victory helped keep Somerville a friendly place for new Americans.

A state of the art facility for Head Start

CAAS Head Start provides outstanding early education, childcare, and services to over 200 children and their families. Only a few years ago, Head Start Director Donna Cabral recalls, “We were wondering where we were going to put them all.” Three-, four-, and five-year-olds need very special classroom space. CAAS was renting rooms in five separate locations...and the rent kept going up.

CAAS bought land and built a state-of-the-art Head Start Center on Allen Street in Somerville’s Union Square. The Center opened in 2005. It houses eight of CAAS’ eleven classrooms, with windows the right height for three-year-old eyes to peer out of, and desks and chairs and computers and bathroom facilities the right size for pre-schoolers to use. More than 150 students are coming to the Center this September .



Everything fits the children at this CAAS Head Start classroom.

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*People Achieving More
By Working Together*

Did You Know?

- ◆ If you live in a four-person household, and your household income is below \$20,000, you are living in poverty.
- ◆ In Somerville, one out of every eight households falls below the poverty line.
- ◆ The Women's Union, in Boston, says we should talk about getting families out of poverty and then up to the self-sufficiency standard. The self-sufficiency standard for a Somerville family of four is more than \$45,000.
- ◆ How many people working full time at the state minimum wage does it take to earn \$45,000? At the current minimum wage: 3 1/2 full-time workers — or, one person working two jobs and another working one and a half.
- ◆ When the state minimum wage rises to \$8.00 an hour, it will still take 3 full-time workers to support a family of four at the self-sufficiency standard — and that is if there is no inflation.
- ◆ The self-sufficiency standard allows a family to pay for food, clothing, shelter, transportation, childcare, and routine medical expenses. It does not allow the family to save for emergencies, or for college, or retirement. People cannot get ahead on a self-sufficiency income. They can only barely stay even.
- ◆ **Low-income families cannot earn their way out of poverty all by themselves. If we want to live in a city where everyone has enough, then everyone will have to do their part.**

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