

People achieving more
by working together

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A Tale of Two Cities: CAAS Head Start Expands

In 2007, CAAS Head Start became a Somerville and Cambridge program. CAAS Head Start has offered high-quality child care and early education to preschool children from low-income families in Somerville for over twenty-five years. Head Start teachers and Family Advocates work together to measure what children learn. The Health Services department makes sure the children get appropriate medical care. Child Development specialists make sure the children's mental, social, and behavioral growth is on track.

The program has served parents, too. Many parents have learned English or computer skills while their children were enrolled in Head Start. Over half of the staff of CAAS Head Start began as parents in the program—including Head Start Director Donna Cabral. Head Start helps parents of preschool children find a way out of poverty.

CAAS Head Start is recognized as a leader in the field. When the contract to provide Head Start services in Cambridge came up for bid, Cambridge organizations and officials encouraged CAAS to apply.

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Cambridge children learn and grow at CAAS Head Start. New classrooms opened at Windsor Street, Roosevelt Towers, Frisoli Center, and Jefferson Park in 2007.



A Year of Changes for the Better

a message from
Executive Director
Jack Hamilton

2007 was an exciting and very challenging year for the Community Action Agency. We were awarded a contract to take over administration of the Cambridge Head Start Program and to merge it into one with our Somerville Program. CAAS was very clear from the very beginning that we wanted to run one program and one program only.

Under the leadership of our Head Start Director, Donna Cabral, the senior Head Start staff of Somerville worked tirelessly to prepare for the new program. Now, during school year 2007-2008, we have roughly double the number of students and families in Head Start, and double the number of teachers. The process of melding the two programs into one went very smoothly, and the school year has gone along very well. A lot of very dedicated staff are responsible for making this happen.

The other major change this year is that our former Fiscal Officer (Cheryl Gerrior) left after many years. She has been replaced by our long-time Bookkeeper and Assistant Fiscal Officer, Maureen Corrigan. This was a significant transition, but things are going well.

Finally, I need to say that our clients were the first to feel the effects of the recession. Poor people suffer the most when the basics get more expensive. Each of our Housing and Benefits Advocates has been seeing three or four new clients on average every week. Head Start Family Advocates have been

scrambling to help their 346 families find money for essentials.

CAAS now needs more money to meet

those client needs (food costs, prescription costs and clothing) for which the government will not pay. We will be relying more on community support to cover these costs. Please be generous.

"Help meet client needs for which government will not pay."

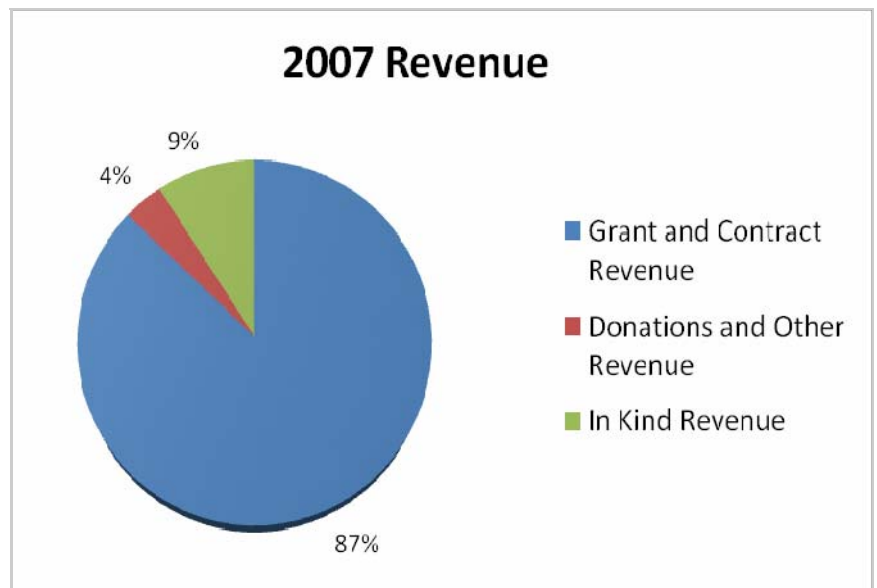
All things considered, it was a good year for CAAS. We appreciate your support in 2007, and we will make good use of it again in 2008. Peace!!!! ♦

Growing Programs & Growing Needs CAAS Finances, 2007

Nearly all of CAAS' funding comes from federal, state, or local government. The Head Start program is the biggest program at CAAS. It brings in about 90% of CAAS' revenue and employs over 90% of CAAS' staff. In 2007, Head Start grew from eleven classrooms in three locations to eighteen classrooms in seven locations. CAAS' budget rose to almost \$4.5 million.

By law, Head Start serves only low-income families with children ages 3-5.

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Ending Poverty Where We Live: CAAS Advocacy Program Makes Home, Work, College Safe and Affordable

Valeria (not her real name), was born in El Salvador. A single mother of a baby girl, she had been homeless off and on for two years when she came to CAAS. She had fled a home where she was the victim of domestic violence. During that time, she lived in shelters, sometimes leaving her baby in the care of a friend in order to be admitted. Valeria spoke limited English. When she left a shelter to be with her child again, she had no way of knowing that she had to do the proper paperwork or be considered to have “abandoned” her shelter slot. Valeria

meeting, Valeria proudly moved into an apartment in a Boston Housing Authority complex.

Wiggins is a lawyer by training. “I never would have been able to stay with a client like this when I worked at Legal Services,” she says. “We would have

CAAS keeps families in their homes, or helps find places they can afford to live.



CAAS co-sponsors the Save Our Homes Walk, raising \$28,000 to help families pay rent and utilities.

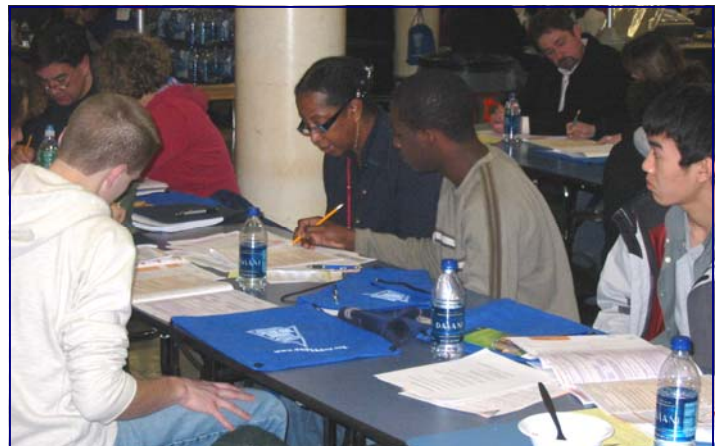
found herself ineligible for public shelter for the next twelve months, not knowing what to do next.

Valeria looked for help from the **CAAS Eviction Prevention Project**, one of the core elements of the CAAS Advocacy Program. Valeria spoke in Spanish with CAAS’ Tobey Wiggins. Wiggins helped Valeria apply for a voucher for subsidized housing on an emergency basis. She proved that Valeria was suffering from domestic violence and its after-effects and needed housing immediately. A year from their first

addressed one problem, and then closed the case.” The CAAS Advocacy Program allowed Valeria and her baby girl to move from homelessness to safe, affordable housing.

In 2007, the Advocacy Program helped 230 people like Valeria. With legal assistance and help obtaining food, medical care, and emergency payments to landlords and utilities, CAAS kept three out of four families in their current homes, and helped the rest to find places they could afford to live.

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Parents discover how to fill in the Free Application for Federal Student Aid during College Goal Sunday, January 24.

A Tale of Two Cities

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In May 2007, the Administration for Children and Families awarded the Cambridge contract to CAAS Head Start. By June, CAAS was already running a summer program in Cambridge. By September, the full program was up and running. It now serves 346 children with classrooms in seven locations throughout Somerville and Cambridge. ♦



“I see you!” Children make friends at Head Start.



Use computers free at the Parent/Staff Resource Center.



Little hands make beautiful art.

Head Start Highlights of 2007

In October, CAAS Head Start opened a Parent/Staff Resource Center at Roosevelt Towers, in Cambridge, just over the Somerville line. Computers and parenting resources are available whenever the Center is open. Center staff have organized cooking and flower arranging activities for parents. They have also created the “Purple Hat Club,” bringing the elderly residents of the building together for activities, sometimes with children.

CAAS Head Start continued its tradition of promoting from within. The expanded program created the need for new specialists in health, child development, enrollment, and building management. Former teachers and bus drivers filled many of these positions.

The hallmark of CAAS since the 1980’s has been diversity. The expanded Head Start staff adds more speakers of Asian and African languages to CAAS’ already diverse staff. Over half the people who work at CAAS are bilingual.

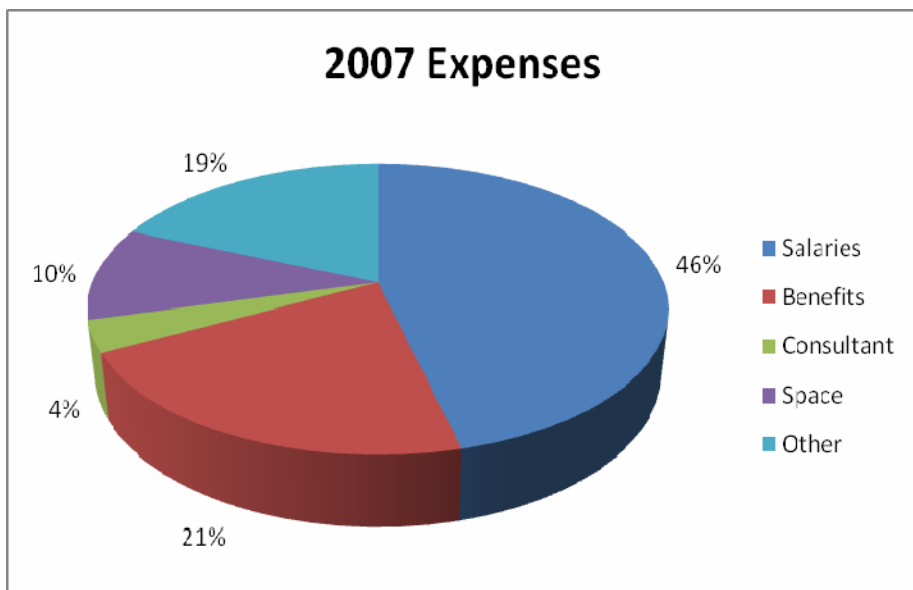
Growing Programs

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In 2007, CAAS Head Start began serving 346 families in Somerville and Cambridge—up from 204 in 2006.

People who are not eligible for Head Start find the help they need through the CAAS Advocacy Program. Last year, the Advocacy Program provided eviction prevention services and housing and benefit advocacy to 230 families. It also ran a Latino youth group, began a community organizing initiative, and held a college access program—on a budget of about \$400,000.

In 2008, as the economy slows and more people need help, CAAS will need your help more than ever. Both the Advocacy and the Head Start programs depend on generous grants and donations from our friends in the community. Your philanthropy lets CAAS try new ideas. You support



things Somerville needs that government won't pay for. Thank you for supporting CAAS! For a full statement of 2007 income and expenses, please see www.caasomerville.org/about/annual_report/. ♦

Ending Poverty Where We Live

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The **Jovenes Latinos** youth leadership program helped make workplaces safe for immigrant laborers. The Jovenes surveyed immigrants about health and safety conditions at work. They referred workers with occupational illnesses or injuries to a specialized clinic at Cambridge Hospital. The Jovenes presented their work as a model at a national conference in Boston. Their collaboration with Tufts University, in its third year, continues in 2008.



The Jovenes Latinos with Executive Director Jack Hamilton.

The Advocacy Program also helped to organize:

- Response to immigration raids in Somerville. CAAS distributed information about non-citizens' legal rights.
- Enrollment in the Commonwealth Health Connector. The new mandatory health insurance requirement went into effect in 2007.
- College Goal Sunday, bringing students, parents, and financial

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Would you like to receive *CAAS News* on your personal computer? Save a tree! To get this newsletter by e-mail, please write to dfischman@caasomerville.org.

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*People Achieving More
By Working Together*

Ending Poverty Where We Live

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aid professionals together to make sure
Somerville students apply for the scholar-
ships they need. ♦



*81 families learned how to apply for financial aid
on College Goal Sunday.*

Advocacy Highlights of 2007

The CAAS Advocacy Program obtained free tax preparation for 98 low-income clients from National Student Partnerships—Somerville. These families got money back from Uncle Sam, over \$1,400 per household. That's the equivalent of month's rent!

Advocacy Director Melissa McWhinney published "Foreclosure 101" in the *Somerville Journal*. Read it on the CAAS website, at:

<http://www.caasomerville.org/about/data>.

Through advocacy work, CAAS brought the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) back to Somerville—in the CAAS office! Residents who need to apply for food stamps or cash assistance no longer have to travel to DTA offices in Revere. They can make a Wednesday appointment and come to CAAS, instead, saving time and money.