

# COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY OF SOMERVILLE

Meeting this moment,  
together

2022  
Annual Report



# In This Report

- 3 Greetings from Leadership
- 4 Our Mission & Vision
- 5 Meeting Our Community's Needs

- 6 What We Accomplished Together
- 7 Head Start
- 10 Housing Advocacy Program
- 13 Community Organizing & Advocacy

- 16 VITA
- 17 Special Project: Evicted
- 17 2022 Financials
- 19 Thank You to Our Donors



# Greetings from Leadership

2022 was a year of both successes and struggles for CAAS and our clients. The pandemic continued to take lives and impact the most vulnerable amongst us, and the ending of the eviction moratorium in June 2022 was followed by the predicted wave of eviction filings. Children in our Head Start classrooms, deprived of normal socialization during the prior two years of isolation, were measurably behind developmentally compared to their peers in earlier years. And the daily news of mass shootings, police executions, and mistreatment of immigrants continued to assault all of us, with seemingly no relief in sight.

But there were noticeable wins as well:

- In response to the increase in eviction filings, our City made rental assistance funds available in amounts never before seen, confirming their commitment to housing justice for all.
- We organized the only showing in Massachusetts of *EVICTED*, based on Mathew Desmond's book of the same name, and thousands came to see it from near and far.
- Our organizing team continued to build power and leadership amongst Somerville's low-income residents, whose Renters Committee has begun to bring concrete proposals for reform of the City's budget based on their daily lived experience of poverty and what it will take to end it.
- And our Head Start program's dedicated and talented staff worked hard to help the "children of the pandemic" become school ready and better able to socialize with their friends and families.

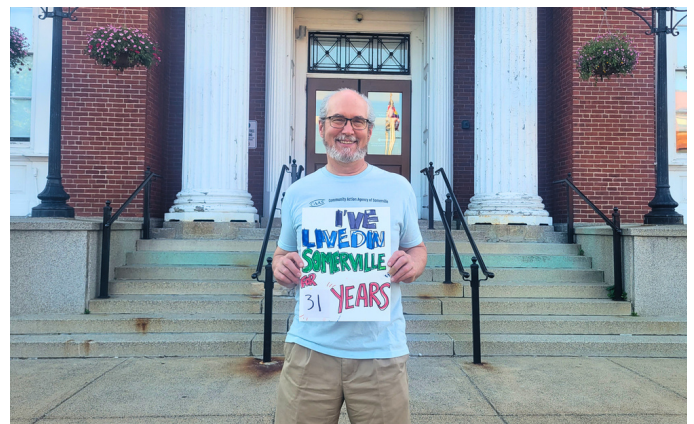
CAAS saw a modest growth in staff during the pandemic, accompanied by a very large increase in revenue intended for cash assistance and rental assistance directly to clients. This responsible growth means that, should these cash resources dry up in the years to come (as is predicted), we will not need to shrink our workforce appreciably.

But we need your continued support to supplement what the City, state and federal government are channeling through us, in order to make our mission real - to **END POVERTY IN SOMERVILLE**, not by gentrifying the poor away from our borders, but by working to assure prosperity and opportunity for all.

I am deeply grateful to everyone who is reading this report. Thank you!

In solidarity,

**David Gibbs,**  
**Executive Director**



# Our Mission & Vision

**CAAS helps local families and individuals achieve financial security while working to eliminate the root causes of economic injustice.**

Our vision for Somerville is for a city where no one lives in poverty, where we support each other through strong community structures, and where the opportunity to thrive is a lived experience for every resident.



## 2022 Leadership Team

**David Gibbs**  
Executive Director

**John Hsieh**  
Deputy Executive Director

**Lisa Lewis**  
Director of Finance

**Jessie Leonard**  
Director of Head Start

**Ashley Tienken**  
Director of Housing Advocacy

**Nicole Eigbrett**  
Director of Community Organizing

**Janet Grogan**  
Human Resources Manager

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Clerk

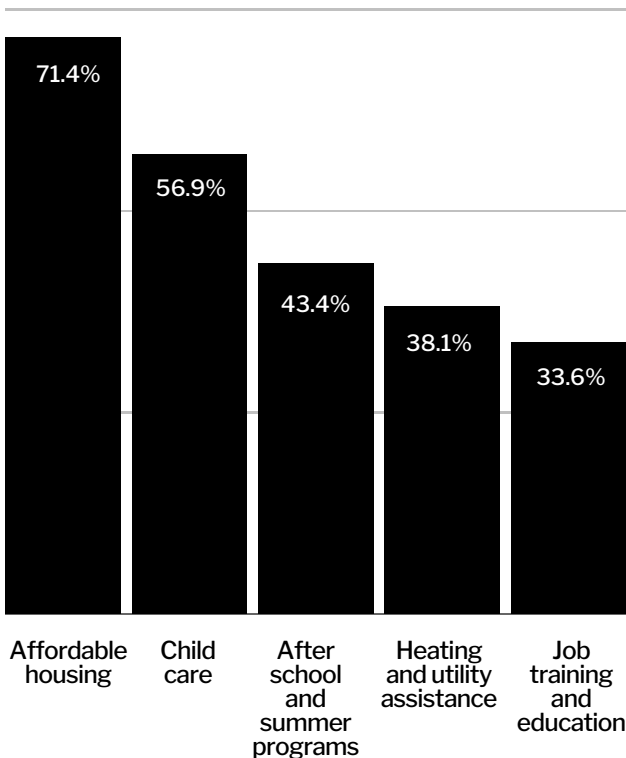
**Sarah Phillips**  
**Andrew Schneider**

# Meeting Our Community's Needs

## Letting our community guide the path forward

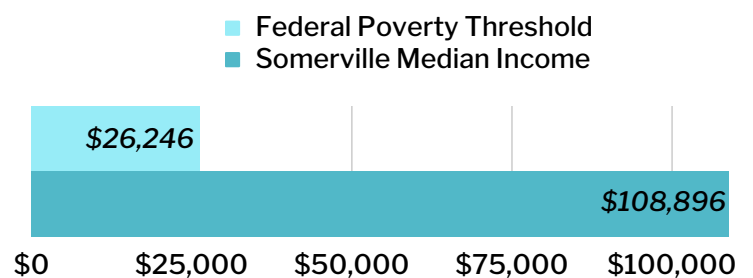
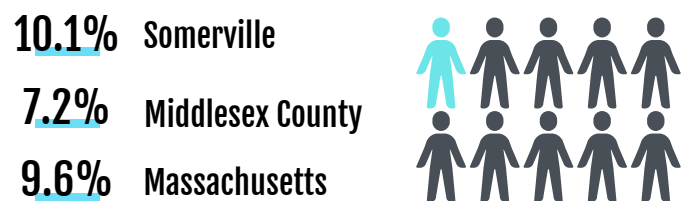
Every three years, CAAS does a Community Assessment Report & Strategic Plan. Through a series of interviews, surveys, and staff and board input, we ensure that we understand the people we serve and the challenges they're facing. We also identify how our current services are working to meet the community's need, and how we can change to meet any new challenges. This process is rooted in the belief that solutions can and will arise from the imagination and capacity of the community itself. In our years of assessment, we've heard the community's clear desire that we emphasize, in all of our work, the need for fundamental change. Part of our charge is to continue to be aware, as we work with individuals and families, of the ways in which their struggles are rooted in societal problems that ultimately must have societal solutions. Another part is to see ourselves, increasingly, as a convener of many voices across many different conversations, out of which we hope to see community-generated solutions arise.

## Somerville's Top Five Community Needs



## Who Do We Serve?

### People Below Poverty Level



One in ten people in Somerville live below the federal poverty line. In 2021, the federal poverty threshold for two adults and two children was \$26,246. The median household income in Somerville in the same year was \$108,896.

# What We Accomplished Together

This year was evidence of the fact that together, we can make more of a difference than we could ever imagine making alone. In total, we served 560 households in Somerville. With the help of our community, we were able to distribute over \$94,000 in flexible financial assistance to Somerville families through our entirely donor-supported fund, the CAAS Emergency Relief Program. And with the help of our community members, Somerville was able to maintain the longest eviction moratorium in the state, protecting over 53,000 Somerville renters from eviction until June 30, 2022.



**560**

Households served by CAAS

**\$94,874**

Dollars distributed to families through the CAAS Emergency Relief Program

**53,460**

Somerville renters protected by CAAS' organizing to win the longest municipal eviction moratorium in the state, until June 30, 2022

## Our Programs

### Head Start

Bringing comprehensive developmental preschool programs that provide wrap-around services to families in Somerville and Cambridge.

### Housing Advocacy

Assisting families & individuals at risk of homelessness through advocacy during eviction processes, and providing rental assistance, access to public benefits, case management, and more.

### Community Organizing & Advocacy

Educating tenants on their legal rights, preventing displacement, advocating for housing as a human right, and building collective leadership and power for tenants most impacted by housing injustice.

### VITA Tax Assistance

Providing low- and moderate-income families with free tax preparation assistance to reduce their tax burden and get back money that can be used to build savings or pay off debts.



## Providing care for the whole family

Head Start is a comprehensive developmental preschool program that provides a variety of wraparound services to low-income children and their families each year. CAAS Head Start:

- Supports the learning and development of children ages three to five in classrooms throughout Somerville and Cambridge.
- Engages families, supporting them to set and meet financial, professional, housing, and other family goals, and involving them in their child’s education every step of the way.

Our classrooms, like other classrooms across the country, are continuing to feel the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this unprecedented challenge, we've continued to provide high-quality education to our students and a wide range of wraparound services to our parents.

## 2022 by the numbers

We continued to serve families across Somerville and Cambridge to provide early education and supportive services. In 2022, this has looked like:

- 223** Total children served
- 182** Average monthly enrollment
- 72%** Eligible children served
- 182** Children received dental exams
- 154** Children received medical exams



# Serving Our Children

It's no secret that the pandemic impacted education, but early education programs were especially disrupted. There were a number of teachers who left the field entirely. Those who stayed were forced to teach toddlers remotely, which is no small feat. Many of CAAS' Head Start teachers are parents themselves, who were now having to balance working from home while also helping their own children adjust to remote schooling.

Despite the challenges, our teachers continued providing high-quality child care to their students. And when classrooms reopened and they were faced with new challenges, like helping children adjust to new routines and social settings, our teachers met those challenges with creativity and energy that can only come with a true passion for this work.

Because of our teachers, students were able to enter the next stage of their education prepared with the tools that will not only help them in kindergarten, but with the education that research shows will help them for years in their careers.

"I fall in love every year with the kids. They're like my other family. I fall in love with each one as if they were my own children. I thought it would get better over time, more blasé. But I'm even more attached to them."

— Maggie Ashton  
Head Start Lead Teacher



## School Readiness Goals

By the Spring of 2023, our students were either meeting or exceeding the following benchmarks:

**83%** Physical health & development goals

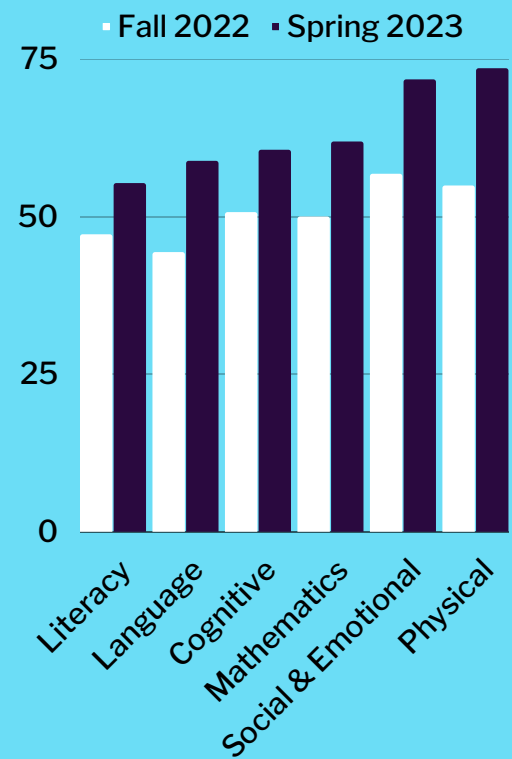
**83%** Social & emotional development goals

**67%** Language goals

**64%** Literacy goals

**71%** Cognition & general knowledge

**69%** Mathematics goals





## Parent Involvement Activities

*We offered a number of supportive programs to our Head Start families this year, and we saw an enthusiastic response in return.*

*In 2022, our parent involvement activities included:*

**100** Parents received emergency and crisis intervention services to meet immediate needs for food, clothing, or shelter

**10** Parents received mental health services and/or counseling

**17** Parents participated in adult education and/or job training programs

**72** Parents received education on nutrition and healthy meal preparation

**72** Parents received education on healthy relationships and marriages

**10** Parents participated in English as a Second Language (ESOL) courses

**37** Parents received parenting education and counseling

# Serving Our Families

One of the most important aspects of the Head Start program involves our work with families outside of the classroom. In order for children to thrive, their families also need to be given all the tools they need to succeed.

Because our community is still feeling the effects of the pandemic, CAAS' ability to offer these services is more important than ever. Rising costs of basic necessities like food, clothing, and shelter have put a strain on our families' budgets. That is why CAAS Case Managers work closely with families, and why we offer a number of supportive programs and services. This year, we were able to offer parents mental health and counseling services, healthy relationship education, job training, education around nutrition and healthy meal preparation, and English as a Second Language courses. And despite the busy schedules of many families, parents were incredibly receptive and made time to participate in these programs. What's more, Head Start parents often become volunteers, lending a hand in the classroom, joining the Head Start Policy Council, or by getting involved with other CAAS programs.

Part of what makes the programs so impactful for the community is the Head Start Policy Council. Head Start parents volunteer their time to help guide the program and make sure that we are truly meeting the needs of our families. When parents make these decisions, we create stronger communities, and brighter futures for our children.



# Housing Advocacy Program



## Intervening during crisis to create long-term stability

CAAS' Housing Advocacy Program (HAP) provides a wide range of services to low-income individuals at risk of homelessness. HAP targets the root causes of housing affordability and helps prevent future crises by advocating on the behalf of tenants during the eviction process and by providing support applying for rental assistance, public benefits, and affordable housing. HAP also partners with other organizations to assist with additional services, making it part of the important network of Human Service providers in Somerville that help families and individuals succeed.

Like families across the country, our clients are continuing to feel the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. After the end of the Somerville Eviction Moratorium, we saw a wave of eviction notices surge through our community. In addition to that challenge, we see the rising costs of living forcing many families to stretch their dollars even further than before. While our clients work hard to provide for their families, they don't have to do it alone. Our Housing Advocacy team has worked incredibly hard this year to keep families in their homes, and worked with them to ensure their needs continue to be met.

## 2022 by the numbers

There was an overwhelming need from our community this year, and CAAS' Housing Advocacy Program rose to meet that challenge. Serving over 200 households, we're proud to share our impact:

- 42** Households assisted with utility payments
- 74** Evictions prevented
- 152** Households received rental assistance
- 24** Families received food assistance



# Addressing Emergency Needs: CAAS Emergency Relief Program

In their work with families to find safe, affordable housing, our advocates often see clients struggle to cover costs related to moving, but for which no designated funding sources are available. In response to this community need, we created the CAAS Emergency Relief Program (CERP), a flexible source of emergency assistance designed to meet a variety of basic needs, funded entirely by donations from our community. This allows us to provide families assistance with:

- Utility/telephone/internet service payments
- Moving expenses
- Brokers' fees
- New appliances
- Transportation needs/car repairs
- Legal expenses (such as filing fees)
- Purchase of identification documents

Since its inception, CERP has played a critical role in our ability to help our clients overcome financial barriers to housing. We're lucky to have programs that fund a variety of needs for our clients. However, these systems are imperfect, and a number of financial needs continue to fall through the cracks. CERP plays an essential role in allowing us to fill in those gaps in financial assistance, which makes all the difference to the lives of our community members.

Your support is what makes this program possible. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to help make a difference in the lives of our Somerville neighbors.

## Solving Complex Challenges Takes a Community

Families know their needs best, and being able to provide financial assistance where it is most needed plays a critical role in allowing them to stay in our community. Not having the funding to cover these needs can sometimes make the difference between a family using a Section 8 voucher to secure a home and losing the ability to receive subsidized housing for life.

**\$1,157**

Average award size

**82**

Total CERP funding awards granted

**32**

Moving trucks rented

**15**

Moving startup grants

**29**

Utility assistance awards



# Their Stories

## Theresa and Manuel, our clients profiled in the Boston Globe

Theresa and Manuel, along with their four children, were in crisis. Unable to afford the rising costs of an apartment, the family of six was forced to live in one room of a three-bedroom apartment. After an inspector cited the landlord for overcrowding, Theresa and Manuel returned home to find all of their belongings scattered on the ground. Facing their fifth move in just under one year in Boston, the family was struggling to find a home that was both safe and affordable.

On news of an available apartment around the corner from their previous home, the Housing Advocacy Program at CAAS was able to use federal funds to cover six months of the family's rent in a three-bedroom apartment.

Now, Theresa and Manuel are continuing to raise their family in their new home. Their children can remain in their school, they can stay close to their family members in Boston, and they can continue being a part of the community in Somerville.



# Their Voices

## Vanessa continues the fight to stay in her home

Vanessa Vela connected with CAAS after her family was threatened with displacement, and has continued to be one of our community's strongest advocates for housing justice.

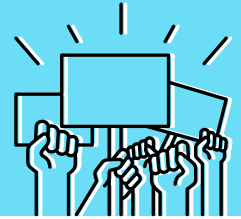
In September of 2022, the apartment she, her mother, and her son lived in was sold and they and the other tenants faced a no-fault eviction. Even with the new landlord's offer to pay for moving costs, finding a new apartment at the same price was unlikely - she was paying below market level rent, and housing prices in the city have significantly increased following the opening of the MBTA Green Line extension.

In a *Boston Globe* front-page story, Vanessa said, "I am just tired of working for others to get rich. I'm not going to be stressed out working two and three jobs and leave my son alone, just because [the owner's] pockets are never filled."

After nearly 2 years of campaigning with the help of CAAS Organizers and the community, Vanessa and her family won a rent freeze and more time to stay in their home. What's more, Vanessa has become a leader on the Renters Committee to fight against the displacement of others.



# Community Organizing & Advocacy



## Helping transform crisis into **COURAGE**

The CAAS Community Organizing program was revitalized at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in summer 2020 – a time of loss, isolation, and fear for so many of us. We looked around and asked ourselves, **what does our community need right now?** How can we break down these barriers of isolation, create connections between our neighbors who might be struggling, and build spaces of care, belonging, education, and even healing? How do we do that while responding to the very real affordable housing and displacement crisis, which somehow became even worse?

**We are amazed and humbled by how far our organizing in Somerville has come.** Together, we are building a multiclass, multiracial, multicultural and multilingual movement of tenants, who sometimes arrive at CAAS *because of* a crisis – but who are now using their stories as a source of **courage and leadership** for the rest of our community. We are grateful to every single resident who trusted our team with your circumstances and stories. What makes CAAS unique is that we have the resources to remove material barriers – like the inability to pay rent and utilities, language accessibility, and more – and personal fears, so that **tenants feel supported, empowered, and capable of reaching their fullest potential as leaders.**

2022 was the year CAAS Organizing went further and deeper with our leadership development, became frontline responders to the city's gentrification and displacement crisis, and launched new tenant-led organizing teams that address multiple goals of housing justice in creative, grassroots ways.

## 2022 by the numbers

- 399** Overall Renters Meeting attendance
- 34** Average monthly attendance
- 57%** Average % of attendees who are from a non-English speaking background
- 16** Leadership Development Institute (LDI) graduates
- 7** Buildings where we helped tenants organize
- 33** Anti-Displacement Research Team members



# Building Grassroots Leaders

Organizing is fundamentally about building your community's collective power for social change, and that begins with relationships. In CAAS Organizing, our tenant leaders are low-income residents, immigrants, parents, and people of color who are the most impacted by housing injustice. We call our volunteers "members" and "leaders", because their commitment to build a Somerville that's better for all people is at the heart of our organizing. We're all united under the value that housing is a human right.

In 2022, we hosted our first **Leadership Development Institute (LDI)**, a comprehensive, multilingual training for working class and low-income residents to build their skills as housing justice organizers. Upon graduating from the LDI, tenants were invited to join the **Somerville Renters Committee (SRC)**, our leadership body that is responsible for leading citywide campaigns and carrying out tenant outreach and education programs.

That summer, we launched three tenant-led organizing teams where SRC leaders further specialized their skills and strategies: the **Renters Meeting Team**, the **Know Your Rights Team**, and the **Anti-Displacement Team**. This model ensures that CAAS Organizing initiatives are developed by and for renters who are most impacted by the housing crisis.

Members of our solidarity volunteer base, the **Eviction Response Network (ERN)**, have spent hundreds of hours canvassing to distribute multilingual know your rights flyers to our neighbors. The **Anti-Displacement Research Team** was launched in September 2022 to track buildings for sale, contact tenants who might be at risk of eviction, and learn more about the City's planning and development processes.

Our gratitude also goes to the hundreds of Somerville community members who volunteer time when they can, signing onto our petitions and advocacy actions, and taking to the streets and our in-person rallies and protests. Lasting community change comes from the collective efforts of Somerville residents who are willing to organize and advocate for justice. Thank you for building collective power with CAAS!



# Working Together to Change Lives

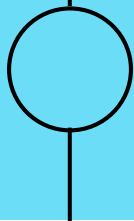
“My name is Fatima Lacerda and I moved to Winter Hill, Somerville from Brazil. I have been involved with CAAS since 2020. During the pandemic, my husband and I have been through difficult times with the loss of our jobs and our income. CAAS helped my family and I with information about renting and other resources. I started as a volunteer and had the opportunity to do a training called LDI (Leadership Development Institute). This training gave me the opportunity to learn the skills I need to create lasting positive change in my community. CAAS Organizing welcomed me regardless of race, color, social class and immigration status.

Knowing such a wonderful and welcoming organization made me want to team up with other organizations to help more people. This was also the reason why I decided to learn to speak English to make my communication stronger and accessible to help my community. Together we are stronger and we can make a difference!

**Fatima Maria Lacerda,**

Somerville Renters Committee member, former Head Start parent, and Somerville Cares Fund recipient





# Volunteer Income Tax Assistance

## Helping families build savings and pay off debts

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) offers free Federal & State tax return preparation for low-income families provided by trained volunteers. The program increases the capacity for low-income families to file returns, and improves the accuracy of the returns. By offering this service, we help clients avoid preparation fees and reduce their tax burden, allowing them to put that money towards everyday needs and financial capacity.

This year, CAAS helped file everything from simple wages; to families with Earned Income Tax Credits, which can put several thousand dollars a year into a family's budget; to students with tuition and loans; to taxpayers deemed self employed. We also served clients who were excitedly building small businesses in the community.

The VITA program is only made possible with the help of a dedicated team of volunteers who donate their time and skills to helping their neighbors. We cannot overstate how grateful we are to the members of our community who made this work possible.

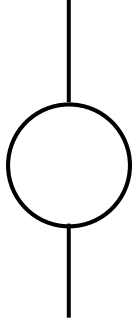
## 2022 tax season by the numbers

The VITA program at CAAS is a small investment with an outsized impact. Spanning from January to April, VITA helped over 200 families and kept thousands of dollars circulating in our community. This is what the 2022 Tax Season looked like:

<b>230</b>	Returns filed
<b>\$257,098</b>	Federal refunds
<b>\$85,507</b>	State refunds
<b>\$342,605</b>	Total refunds
<b>\$51,750</b>	Estimated tax preparation fees saved







# Special Project: EVICTED

In September, 2022, we opened EVICTED at The Armory in Somerville, in collaboration with The Welcome Project, The Somerville Homeless Coalition, Somerville Arts Council, Arts at the Armory, All She Wrote Books, Somerville Office of Housing Stability, Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services, De Novo, YouthBuild Just-A-Start, Somerville Public Schools, and local artists. This immersive exhibition based on Matthew Desmond's Pulitzer prize-winning book used data developed by the Princeton Eviction Lab, as well as local Somerville data, to examine the reasons for, and fallout from, the millions of American evictions each year.

The exhibit brought in over 2000 visitors from Massachusetts and beyond, and hosted a variety of well-attended community events, including policy panels, services fairs, book clubs, organizing workshops, and more. The exhibit was built and staffed by local volunteers, including students of Just A Start's Youth Build program.

A massive undertaking, this exhibit wouldn't have been possible without the support of our fellow community members. CAAS is honored to have played a role in bringing everyone together for this exhibit, and we look forward to more creative collaborations in the future.



**2000+**

Exhibit  
visitors

**50+**

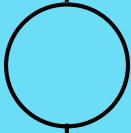
Volunteers

**11**

Collaborating  
organizations

**25**

Community  
events



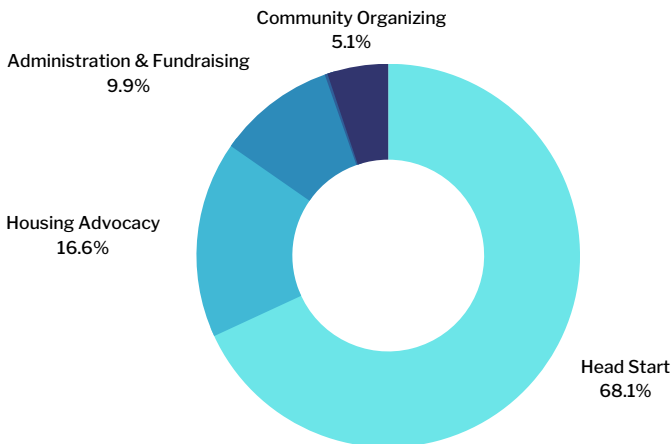
# 2022 Financials

## CAAS Income by Sources

Government	\$ 8,810,084
Cash Donations	\$ 226,100
In-Kind Donations	\$ 490,884
Miscellaneous	\$ 9,638
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 9,538,706</b>

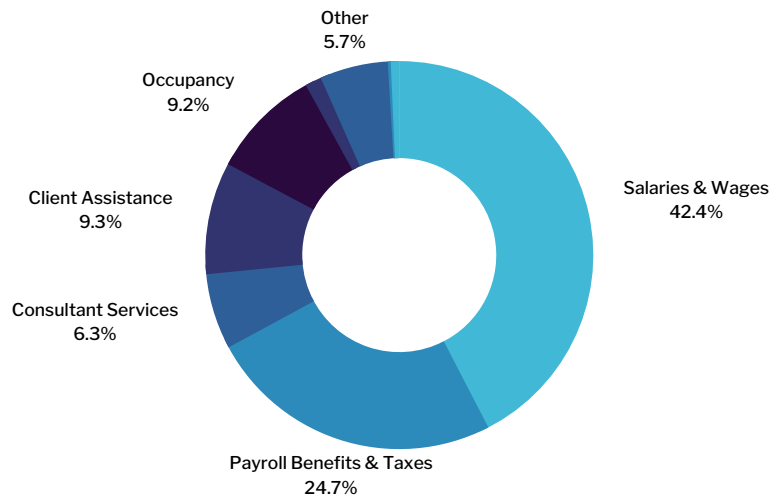
## CAAS Expenses by Program

Head Start	\$ 6,206,852
Housing Advocacy	\$ 1,510,557
Community Organizing	\$ 468,257
VITA	\$ 21,520
Administration & Fundraising	\$ 906,762
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 9,113,948*</b>



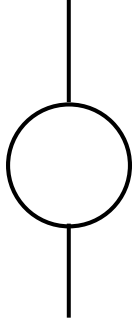
## CAAS Expenses by Category

Salaries & Wages	\$ 3,864,817
Benefits & Payroll Taxes	\$ 2,251,597
Consultant Services	\$ 575,296
Client Assistance	\$ 851,987
Occupancy	\$ 840,601
Supplies	\$ 124,423
Other**	\$ 519,986
Interest	\$ 22,094
Depreciation	\$ 64,237
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 9,113,948*</b>



\*CAAS had a surplus of \$424,758 at the end of 2022. These funds were almost entirely restricted to the Head Start program.

\*\*Includes expenses such as insurance, advertising, postage, printing, and staff training



# Thank You to Our Donors

## Individual Supporters

Alessandra Seiter  
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Housing Trust Fund  
City of Somerville, ARPA  
City of Somerville, Job Creation  
and Retention Trust  
Hamilton Company Charitable  
Foundation  
Iron Workers Union Local  
James B Boskey Memorial  
Foundation  
Madri Family Foundation  
Massachusetts Department of  
Early Education and Care  
Massachusetts Executive Office  
of Housing and Livable  
Communities  
Mutual of America Foundation  
Taggart-Turner Giving Fund  
Somerville Lions Club  
Somerville Municipal Employees  
Association  
Schrupka Fund  
The Bushrod H. Campbell and  
Adah F. Hall Charity Fund  
The Nature Conservancy  
Tufts University Community  
Relations  
Somernova  
US HHS, Administration for  
Children and Families,  
Office of Head Start  
US HHS, Administration for  
Children and Families,  
Office of Community  
Services  
US Dept. of Agriculture,  
Child and Adult Care  
Food Program



# Community Action Agency of Somerville

66-70 Union Square, Somerville, MA 02143



**For the war against poverty will not be won here in Washington. It must be won in the field, in every private home, in every public office, from the courthouse to the White House.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
President Lyndon B. Johnson,  
1964 State of the Union Address

