

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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When I became Chief Executive Officer of the Council for Economic Opportunity in Greater Cleveland (CEOGC), I made a commitment to not only restructure and rebuild CEOGC, but also to reboot its relationship with Greater Cleveland. Regular, candid, and transparent communication with the people who rely on CEOGC – Greater Cleveland's civic, community, and business leaders, and our community partners – is a critical component to re-establishing CEOGC's role.

In keeping with this commitment, last November, I wrote to community stakeholders about the progress CEOGC has made to better serve those living in poverty in Greater Cleveland. A good deal has happened in the intervening months and I thought it was time for another update.

Head Start is CEOGC's largest program and stabilizing and improving Head Start is one of our highest priorities. I am happy to report that after only one year of our turn-around effort, *Step Up To Quality* (SUTQ), the State of Ohio's early education quality rating and improvement system, awarded its highest-possible rating – Five Stars – to 12 of our 14 Head Start locations and awarded Four-Star ratings to our two remaining sites.

While improving the quality of our services, we also have found ways to reduce our Head Start costs, including a 93% reduction in the cost of our training supplies, a 91% reduction in the cost of consumable supplies, and a 32% reduction in the cost of both our office supplies and vehicle maintenance.

CEOGC was invited to present these achievements at the annual conference of the National Head Start Association (NHSA) last December in a presentation entitled *The Resurrection of a Community Action Agency and Head Start Program*. Following our presentation, NHSA Executive Director Yasmina Vinci announced her intention to come to Cleveland to study CEOGC's fast turnaround success.

Unfortunately, Ms. Vinci was forced to cancel her February visit to remain in Washington D. C. to monitor Head Start's status in the Federal budget process, but she was quoted in *Crain's Cleveland Business* as saying:

"CEOGC's commitment to continued innovation and excellence is transforming the delivery of quality, comprehensive, early learning services to Cleveland's most vulnerable children and families."

We expect that Ms. Vinci will reschedule her trip to Cleveland in the near future.

We are also privileged to have received an endorsement by Barbara Haxton, the Executive Director of the Ohio Head Start Association, Inc.:

"The work that Dr. Jacklyn Chisholm and her leadership team, including Dr. Thea Wilson who oversees Head Start, has been exactly what the Head Start program needed," said Haxton. "The program has shown remarkable improvement over the short time Dr. Chisholm has been at the helm of the agency."

While we are excited about our progress with Head Start and the recognition it is receiving, we still have more work to do. CEOGC's Head Start services have been chronically under-utilized for years. We have committed ourselves to understanding and solving this problem; if we have Head Start slots available, children should be filling them.

While environmental and policy issues contribute to our under-utilization, we have concluded that the issue primarily stems from inaccurate assumptions and problematic commitments in the five-year Head Start grant that CEOGC entered into in 2012. We are now in our last year of the 2012 grant and we are working with Region V of the Federal Office of Administration for Children and Families to increase our utilization within the constraints this grant imposes. We will submit our proposal for our next five-year grant at the end of this year. Our proposal will eliminate the problems in the 2012 grant that made under-utilization inevitable and enable us to finally move toward full utilization within our Head Start program.

Beyond the success we had improving Head Start services, we also have made strides with our other programs: for example, we have improved access to our Home Energy Assistance Program and we have launched new, innovative initiatives to help people get jobs. But to me, the most important step forward we have taken has been in rebuilding our partnerships throughout Greater Cleveland.

As I'm sure you know, CEOGC is the Community Action Agency (CAA) for Greater Cleveland. CAAs were created more than 50 years ago as part of the President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty as vehicles for funneling federal support into locally led efforts to alleviate poverty and empower low-income families. Community partnership is crucial to a CAA's success.

Over the years, CEOGC's community partnerships often weakened, withered or just went away. We have been working hard to reverse this trend and, thanks to leaders like you, the Greater Cleveland community is embracing us and supporting our work to right the CEOGC ship. If you visit our website, www.ceogc.org, you can see a small expression of this commitment from the community leaders who are volunteering to read to children at our Head Start locations. Even more exciting, though, is that while we continue to reach out, others are inviting us in. Community leaders and funders are once again reaching out to CEOGC to present new opportunities and engage us as partners with shared missions. This is a gratifying and humbling expression of faith in the long-term success of our efforts.

We rely on your continued interest and support to protect the headway CEOGC has made and help us become an engine for economic opportunity in Greater Cleveland. Rest assured, I will keep you apprised of our progress.