Lifeline leads the community in the fight against poverty by offering programs and opportunities to empower our residents to achieve self-sufficiency.

Lifeline, Inc.’s Annual Dinner & Awards Ceremony

Celebrating 49 years of serving our community!

Thursday, May 12, 2022
6:30 p.m.

Pine Ridge Country Club
Agenda

Thank you for joining us as we celebrate National Community Action Month and recognize local businesses and community members who have made an impact on poverty in our community.

6:30 p.m. Cocktail reception
7:00 p.m. Dinner is served
7:30 p.m. Welcome
  ~ Paula Gordos, Lifeline Board President
  ~ Carrie Dotson, Lifeline Executive Director
7:45 p.m. Keynote Remarks
  ~ Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor, Chief Justice of the Ohio Supreme Court
8:00 p.m. Awards Presentation
  ~ Lifeline Board Officers Paula Gordos, Sean Kramer, Christine Shoop & Jennilynn Banks
Lifeline’s History

June 19, 1973: Lakeland Economic Development Corporation (LEDC, later known as Lifeline) is founded as a subsidiary of the NAACP and is incorporated as a tax exempt non-profit organization.

1980: LEDC becomes a participating agency of the United Way of Lake County.

1981: LEDC becomes an independent agency & is no longer a subsidiary of the NAACP.

1987: LEDC is designated as Lake County’s Community Action Agency by the Ohio Department of Development, making the agency eligible to receive the Community Service Block Grant and HEAP programs.

1996: LEDC changes their name to Lifeline for the Empowerment & Development of Consumers, Inc.

1997: Lifeline launches the Security Deposit Assistance Program, using federal Home Investment Partnership Funds granted by the Lake County Commissioners Office.

2006: Lifeline is instrumental in helping victims of the Lake County floods of July 2006 to relocate and start over.

2008: Lifeline is certified by the Ohio Department of Mental Health.

2009: In partnership with the Family Planning Association of Northeast Ohio, the first Dancing Under the Stars fundraiser is held— to date it has generated over $415,000 in unrestricted revenue to be shared by Lifeline and the Family Planning Association.

2009: Lifeline is awarded nearly half a million dollars in federal American Recovery & Reinvestment Act funding and launches the VITA tax clinics, the Employment/Training program and the Eye Care Assistance Program.

2011: Lifeline becomes administrator of the 2-1-1 Lake County program.

2014: Lifeline Board, recognizing the need for long-term sustainable funding, launches the Lifeline Endowment Against Poverty in partnership with the Cleveland Foundation.

2015: Lifeline Board adopts new mission statement “Lifeline leads the community in the fight against poverty by offering programs and opportunities to empower our residents to achieve self-sufficiency.”

2017: Lifeline forms a partnership with the Ohio Community Development Corporation and launches a new asset building education program, Individual Development Accounts, or IDAs, to help low-income residents learn to save towards the purchase of an asset like a home, an education or a new business.

2018: Lifeline launches new Volunteer Guardian Program in partnership with the Lake County Probate Court.

2020: Lifeline is designated by ODOD as the interim Community Action Agency to serve Geauga County and opens a satellite office in Newbury to begin providing services to Geauga residents.

2021: Lifeline joins the Ohio Governor’s Imagination Library Project as Lake County’s affiliate, helping to provide books to Lake County’s children, 5 and under, each month in an effort to increase kindergarten readiness. Over 4,000 children are enrolled to date.

2020-2022: Lifeline is awarded upwards of $30 million through the Ohio Department of Development, the Lake County Board of Commissioners, the Lake County ADAMHS Board and others to assist in COVID-19 relief efforts throughout Lake and Geauga Counties for 2020 and beyond.

Today: Lifeline has an annual budget of approximately $2.5 million in expenditures, not including COVID-19 relief funds, as well as 30+ employees and over 25 programs.

Keynote Speaker

Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor, the first woman to lead the Ohio judicial branch, has made justice system reform the centerpiece of her nine-year tenure.

Among initiatives she has championed in Ohio and nationally are racial justice; challenges to “debtor’s prisons;” attorney representation for the poor; reform of bail, fines and fees; sentencing fairness; cameras in courtrooms; and grand jury reform.

Chief Justice O’Connor led the creation in 2016 of the nation’s first multistate body designed to fight the opioid epidemic by creating an across-borders team of judicial, legislative and law enforcement sectors with medical, scientific, research and philanthropic groups. The work of nine states acting as a unit continues today and has spawned a national body and regional efforts.

She has served as co-chair of the National Task Force on Fines, Fees, and Bail Practices and is past president of the national Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and past chair of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) Board of Directors. Maureen O’Connor was Ohio’s lieutenant governor when she was elected to the Supreme Court of Ohio as a justice in November 2002. She was re-elected in 2008. Voters chose her as Ohio’s 10th chief justice in 2010 and she was unopposed for a second six-year term in 2016.

In her first statewide judicial election in 2002, she took more than 57 percent of the vote to become the 148th justice of the court and the sixth woman to join the court. Her election gave the court its first female majority.

Born in the nation’s capital and raised in Strongsville and Parma in Ohio, Chief Justice O’Connor’s career in public service and the law spans three decades and includes service as a private lawyer, magistrate, common pleas court judge, and prosecutor.

She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree at Seton Hill College in 1973 and her law degree from Cleveland-Marshall College of Law in 1980.

While gaining experience in practice as an attorney during the early 1980s, Chief Justice O’Connor created a home for her family and her legal career in Northeast Ohio. Appointed a magistrate in Summit County in 1985, she served until becoming a common pleas court judge in 1993. As a busy trial judge, she was selected by her peers to serve as the administrative judge — a testament to her ability to build coalitions and maintain collegiality while administering to the business of the courts.

She resigned from the bench to become the Summit County prosecuting attorney in 1995. There, she aggressively prosecuted repeat offenders, violent criminals, and public officials who committed ethical violations or improprieties, and lobbied the General Assembly for tougher laws on rape and gang-related offenses. Her untiring work received accolades from victims’ rights groups and educational institutions, and earned awards from Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Cleveland State University.

In 1998, she was elected lieutenant governor – the second-highest executive office in the state. She became Governor Bob Taft’s chief adviser on criminal justice issues, served as director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety and as chair of Ohio’s Security Task Force and the State Building Security Review Committee.
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About Lifeline, Inc.

Can you imagine our community if poverty didn’t exist? If everyone had access to healthcare and had a warm, safe place to call home? What if jobs were plentiful and no one went hungry? This is what Lifeline, Inc. is working towards—fighting poverty and improving the quality of life for all members of our community. We work every day to help those living in poverty to move towards self-sufficiency. Our success stories have been many—people who have received prescriptions and other medical care who otherwise would’ve gone without because they’ve lost their insurance; people who were able to participate in job training programs and explore new career opportunities when they otherwise would’ve remained unemployed; and those who were provided emergency utility assistance so that they could maintain safe and affordable housing during the cold winter months.

As a Community Action Agency, Lifeline is uniquely poised to rapidly respond to the critical needs of our local community. Lifeline’s Board and staff believe firmly that self-sufficiency means something different to every consumer that we meet. To some it may mean securing affordable housing and keeping their utilities connected so that they have a warm, safe home. To others it may mean having access to medical services so that they can properly maintain their health. And to others it might mean enrolling in school or job training programs so that they can pursue different career opportunities. Because we believe that poverty affects every household differently, we offer a wide variety of programs designed to combat the many effects of poverty. Currently our programming is divided into four main areas: Energy Assistance, Community Services, Guardianship, and Information & Referral Services.

Over the years, Lifeline has helped thousands of local residents who were struggling with basic needs and trying to become more self-sufficient. Poverty affects everyone in some way, particularly throughout the last two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lake & Geauga County residents have faced challenges like job losses, loss of health insurance and home foreclosures and evictions and Lifeline, Inc. is proud to provide a safety net for our neighbors in need.

Lifeline was founded on June 19, 1973 with the mission of helping Lake County’s low-income residents by providing assistance and life skills programming that was designed to increase self-sufficiency. Lifeline assisted nearly 3,100 households, in 2021 with our energy & community services programs. This included over 550 households served by the 2021-2022 HEAP Winter Crisis Program and over 360 households served by the 2021 HEAP Summer Crisis Program. Additionally, the 2-1-1 Lake County staff answered over 35,000 incoming inquiries requesting information and referral services in 2021.
Louise Yager
Mildred P. Wilson Award

The Mildred P. Wilson Award is named for the late Mildred Wilson, who was a dedicated Lifeline employee for many years. Mildred’s commitment and service to both Lifeline and Lake County’s low-income community were remarkable. This award was established in 2004 to honor an individual who goes above and beyond the call of duty in working to benefit Lifeline and the individuals that we serve.

Louise Yager was a long-time employee of Lifeline and worked for 2-1-1 for years before the program moved under Lifeline’s umbrella. She provided stability and oversight for 2-1-1 at Lifeline for over 10 years, but had served 2-1-1 at United Way of Lake County since 2001 before retiring in 2020. That’s nearly 20 years serving Lake County residents through 2-1-1. As a national AIRS certified data curator Louise spent many hours updating the 2-1-1 data base by contacting organizations to ensure the referral information given out by 2-1-1 Navigators was accurate and up to date. For so many years, Louise truly was the face of 2-1-1 in Lake County.

During a recent transition in 2-1-1 staff, Louise came out of retirement to provide valuable database insight and operational knowledge to keep the department moving along efficiently. She is always willing to provide information when asked and assistance with phones on a PRN basis. In 2016, Louise was recognized by Ohio AIRS, Ohio’s state association for information & referral providers, and was awarded a full scholarship to the national AIRS Conference in St. Louis, Missouri. Louise has been a valuable 2-1-1 resource for years and continues to be today!
2022 Award Recipients

Erika Taylor
Staff of the Year Award

Erika Taylor has been with Lifeline since 2009 and was one of the first staff we hired for our new HEAP Program. First hired as a HEAP Intake Specialist, Erika is now our Assistant Program Manager for the Energy Services department. Erika is incredibly dedicated to serving our customers and always gives 100% to her job. She’s also widely known around the office for checking in on each of her co-workers every day. She keeps everyone smiling with her singing!

"Erika is one of the hardest working people I have ever met. She goes above and beyond what is expected of her," said one co-worker. "She knows her job inside and out and is willing to teach and help others with all of the work. She is not afraid of the hard or dirty work either! I am glad that I met her."

"The first reason why Erika deserves the award is because of her desire to help the community. The second reason is her willingness to help her coworkers," said another co-worker. "Lifeline’s mission is to lead the community in the fight against poverty by offering programs and opportunities to empower our residents to achieve self-sufficiency. Erika follows the mission statement by continuously helping clients with their HEAP needs by phone or in person. Throughout the years, I’ve asked Erika questions and her willingness to explain procedures has helped out tremendously. Erika is service-oriented and a generous individual. She is an asset to Lifeline. I admire her passion and commitment to her coworkers and Lifeline. Erika has a positive attitude and can-do spirit. I am proud to say Erika is a fellow coworker."

Kathy Stuper
Mildred P. Wilson Award

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Kathy Stuper was a long-time Community Action staff, starting with Ashtabula Community Action Agency’s HEAP program in 1994 and coming to work at Lifeline’s HEAP program in 2009, until she retired in 2020.

"I started at Lifeline in 2009 and Kathy taught me what was needed to perform and understand the HEAP program," said HEAP Program Manager Marina Rivera. "Kathy was always at work early, barely ever missed work and she loved working with the public, especially the elderly. There were times that Kathy provided fuel oil to our clients when she herself was without fuel oil at home. Kathy was a dedicated employee to the Community Action network, working for Ashtabula CAA’s HEAP program before coming to work at Lifeline in 2009. I believe she gave everything she could to both agencies she worked for. It was a pleasure to work with Kathy."

"The high level of success that Lifeline has experienced with the HEAP program throughout the years is due to Kathy’s 20+ years of service and dedication working as a Community Action Agency employee," said HEAP Assistant Program Manager Erika Taylor. "I have known Kathy since 2009, as she was the very first person who provided me with all of my training, understanding and knowledge of HEAP. Kathy was a supportive team-player from day one, and she set the foundation and provided us- the new staff, Erika and Marina, with guidance and direction. Kathy’s colorful nature and fun-loving spirit always kept the team upbeat and going. Although Kathy was highly skilled at doing her job, she has especially been appreciated for the ways in which she engaged with the clients and families. Many individuals to this day often ask about her, remembering how kind and friendly she was to them, which speaks volumes about her character. It can be stated with certainty that the success of Lifeline with its many years of providing HEAP assistance can be attributed to having Kathy as a co-worker and team player and we are very much thankful for the wonderful contribution that she had made to Lifeline."
Lifeline quickly formed a partnership with Fair Housing Resource Center in order to ensure the application process went as smoothly as possible. The staff at Fair Housing helped us create a step-by-step process that utilized the strengths of both agencies. Clients would begin their application at the Fair Housing Resource Center, where Fair Housing would screen them for eligibility as well as collect required documents from the tenants and their landlords or mortgage lenders. When Fair Housing received all of the documentation they needed, they would send the partially completed application to Lifeline, where we would collect the remaining necessary documentation, approve the application and issue payments. Fair Housing assists with the legal aspect of the applications—agreement from vendors to participate in the program, lease and W9 issues, and conflicts between tenants and landlords. Lifeline takes care of the income, approvals/denials, grant budget, and data entry of clients receiving assistance. If Lifeline had to do this entire application process on its own, we would have many more obstacles and would not be able to assist nearly as many clients.

The Fair Housing Resource Center staff is passionate and dedicated to what they do. Throughout the two years of the pandemic, Fair Housing has been an incredible partner in administering all of our COVID grants. It has been far from easy, but with Fair Housing’s help we have been able to prevent evictions, foreclosures, and homelessness. Not only have we assisted tenants, but we have helped landlords stay financially afloat as well. We have caught fraud and helped resolve legal conflicts. We have been able to navigate through all of the different COVID grants while adapting to any changes and resolving any issues that came our way. Our COVID grants are not ending soon, but we know that with Fair Housing’s help we’ll be able to push through.

The Outstanding Community Partnership Award recognizes a program or collaboration that shows both innovation and results in helping low-income families achieve self-sufficiency.

After the pandemic hit and Lifeline began receiving grants to assist renters and homeowners who were financially impacted by COVID, it was extremely overwhelming. The grants were for very large sums of money and had many rules to follow. Each grant was unique. We knew that the number of individuals who would need assistance through these COVID grants would be unmanageable on our own.

"I believe Dane has gone above and beyond what has been asked of him to help out and contribute his knowledge and skills to help Lifeline grow," said one of Dane’s co-workers. "Dane has done a great job training the staff in housing intake for COVID Relief and has also been instrumental in handling supervisor situations with staff when Andria has not been available. He has been a tremendous asset to Lifeline and has helped the COVID Relief program blossom, while getting his own Rep Payee program going."
2022 Award Recipients

Kate Feighan-Becka
Volunteer of the Year Award

The City of Painesville is fortunate to have Kate Feighan-Becka as a resident. Kate is a wife, mother, and grandmother. She spends one full day a week with her grandchildren. Over the years, she has volunteered at many places, aiding in the lives of many.

While working at Tri-Point Medical Center, she was a social worker on the floor and a psychiatric nurse in the Emergency Room and in the psychiatric unit spreading her special kind of healing to all. Kate came to Lifeline as a volunteer to assist in taking calls for 2-1-1. She was there to help individuals for over seven years, giving as many hours as she possibly could. Many people’s lives were impacted because she was there to help them. She cared deeply about making things better for callers. Even when she was unable to go into the office due to COVID, she spent every Monday calling to remind people of their appointments.

Kate also volunteers with the Lake County Volunteer Network, operated by Cristen Kane through Lake County’s Senior Services department. There she does anything and everything they ask of her. Additionally, she has been a member in good standing on the Advisory Board for Broadmoor Schools for several years. There she assists in supervising the care of the students and the efficient maintenance of the school itself. As you might guess, she is also a volunteer to aid the students in their daily lives at the school, giving her kindness and care to all in need.

Kate is always kind, giving, and caring to those around her. Without Kate, many residents of our area would not have been able to make the changes needed to improve their lives. Kate has never done any of these things to gain recognition, but she is more than deserving of the accolades. As you can see, Kate is more than well-deserving of receiving the volunteer of the year award.

Marcy Clark
Volunteer of the Year Award

Marcy has been a volunteer with the Volunteer Guardian Program since 2019, and she is the guardian of three wards. She continues to dedicate herself by going above and beyond in her role as a volunteer. Marcy has built an amazing bond with all of “her boys” (Marcy’s term of endearment for her wards). Two of her individuals have a diagnosis of DD, and the third has a significant mental health diagnosis. This year, Marcy attended the Special Olympics in support of one of her “boys.” During the event, Marcy’s dedication and advocacy were so apparent that her ward told her, “I love you.” Both of Marcy’s young men have grown, matured, and progressed as a result of her support, advocacy, and love.

We are so grateful for Marcy. Her dedication to her wards humbles us, inspires us, and is the reason why our program is so successful.

Lake County Volunteer Guardian Program: Lake County Probate Court, Lake County Senior Services, Lake County ADAMHS Board, Lake County Board of DD

Outstanding Community Partnership Award

The Outstanding Community Partnership Award recognizes a program or collaboration that shows both innovation and results in helping low-income families achieve self-sufficiency.

For several consecutive years, a guardianship program had been suggested as a need in our Community Needs Assessment, but it seemed like such a daunting task to develop one. However, that changed in 2018 when the Lake County Senior Services Office approached Lifeline about collaborating on a Volunteer Guardian Program with the Lake County Probate Court. We readily agreed and a partnership was born.

With funding contributed by the Lake County Senior Services Office, the Lake County ADAMHS Board and the Lake County Board of Developmental Disabilities, and close collaboration with the Lake County Probate Court under Judge Bartolotta, the VGP has really taken off. Today, we have 17 volunteer guardians and three full time staff members providing care and ensuring the health and safety of 73 wards. This program truly is providing the advocacy our wards need, and likely saving many lives as a result.

“Lake County has a high number of individuals diagnosed with a serious mental illness. As the elderly population in Lake County grows, those with serious mental illness lose family and responsible persons to assist with decision making. This leaves this population without a responsible advocate and decision maker,” said Antoinette Foster, Program Manager for Lifeline’s Volunteer Guardian Program. “In three years, the Volunteer Guardian Program has helped so many individuals find appropriate placement, gain access to necessary services and remain stable in the community.”
**2022 Award Recipients**

**Lake County Home Delivered Groceries/ Drive Through/Mobile Food Pantry Collaboration: Laketrans, the Cleveland Foodbank, RSVP, Lake County Council on Aging, Lake County Senior Services**

**Outstanding Community Partnership Award**

The Outstanding Community Partnership Award recognizes a program or collaboration that shows both innovation and results in helping low-income families achieve self-sufficiency.

When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit and folks were being encouraged to stay home, seniors in particular, we knew right away that there would be a need to get food to them. What quickly formed was an amazing partnership between Lifeline, LakeTran, RSVP, Lake County Senior Services, the Cleveland FoodBank, and the Lake County Council on Aging to get groceries home delivered to Lake County’s seniors.

As the pandemic drew on, the program evolved into a drive-through produce pick up in the LakeTran park and ride lot and later into Lake County’s Mobile Food Pantry, which continues to run today, providing Lake County’s seniors with fresh produce and other grocery items. Each organization plays a very specific role in the project—Lifeline’s 2-1-1 and the Council on Aging manage the screening and reservations for the program, the Cleveland Foodbank provides the food and produce boxes, Laketrans provides the actual mobile food pantry bus, and the Lake County Senior Services and Volunteer Network provide volunteers and oversight to make the project work. This is one of the most successful partnerships Lifeline has ever been a part of that impacts the fastest growing population in Lake County—our seniors.

“The mobile food pantry is a wonderful community partnership!” said Director of Community Services Jennie Best. “The staff and volunteers are friendly, organized, and dependable! Each food pantry recipient is so appreciative of the box of fresh produce and the convenient distribution process. The mobile food pantry is an amazing example of Lake County’s ability to work together to quickly implement a program, with sustainability, to meet the needs of its residents!”

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**Sherry Smith**

**Outstanding Achievement Award**

The Outstanding Achievement Award recognizes a program participant of Lifeline who has made significant progress in achieving self-sufficiency.

Sherry Smith has been with our Volunteer Guardian Program since 2019. Clients in our VGP program are not voluntarily asked to be a participant nor are they given the option to decline. Therefore, it is easy to imagine the dissatisfaction felt after learning you’re being involuntarily put into a program, especially for someone with Sherry’s history.

In 2019, Sherry struggled with both chronic mental and physical health symptoms that affected her housing, services in the community, and relationships with others. In addition, life had not been kind to Sherry; she struggled for years with homelessness, acceptance of her mental health condition, unanswered questions, and proper mental and physical health treatment. These struggles caused feelings of distrust towards providers in the community and during inpatient hospitalizations. Sherry often felt ignored and dismissed by those she thought cared about her. Even through all of her struggles, Sherry maintained her good heart, helping others when she could by giving her last dollar to someone in need or opening her door to someone without a warm place to sleep.

Over the past three years, Sherry became open and trusting of the Volunteer Guardian Program. She allowed the Volunteer Guardian Program to switch all of her mental health services to one agency and has successfully gained insight into her mental and physical health. Sherry maintains an open and trusting relationship with her medication provider, she feels listened to and empowered to advocate for herself. She is now on appropriate medication for her illness and often takes the initiative to contact her doctor when she is feeling symptoms outside of her normal range.

Sherry meets regularly with her case manager and she has gone from a passive participant in her care to the director and overseer of her needs. She lives independently in the community taking care of all of her basic necessities and often contacts her providers with plans for her future. Sherry remains humble and honest about her struggles, her mental health, and her truth. The Volunteer Guardian Program has had the pleasure of working with Sherry and looks forward to her continued success and growth.
2022 Award Recipients

Annette Bundy
Outstanding Achievement Award

The Outstanding Achievement Award recognizes a program participant of Lifeline who has made significant progress in achieving self-sufficiency.

In October 2021, Annette enrolled in the HCRP Program at Lifeline. The HCRP, or Homeless Crisis Response Program, provides emergency rental assistance to the homeless population in Lake County to help them exit shelter or street environments and stabilize in private rental housing. In addition to rental assistance, this program also provides assistance with security deposit, utility payments, and utility deposits/arrears.

Annette had been staying at the local homeless shelter, Project Hope, when she was referred to Lifeline for housing assistance. Upon receiving her referral, Annette quickly completed her intake appointment with HCRP Program Coordinator, Angela Wrana, and began her housing search.

“I first heard about the HCRP program when I was staying at Project Hope,” explains Annette. “I had lost my housing due to an illness which kept me from being able to work. I had been living out of my car or couch surfing for nearly 2 months.”

Shortly after completing her intake, Annette was able to secure safe and affordable housing. For the first time in months, she was finally able to have her own space again. However, she did encounter a few more challenges once she had moved in.

“Shortly after moving in, my car was stolen. I couldn’t continue with the job I had found because it required having your own transportation. I thank God that the HCRP program was there to continue with my rent and utility payments so I could keep my housing until I found a new job. I now have a steady income, have been able to pay off a significant portion of my debts, and my depression and self-esteem have greatly improved!”

“Annette has continued to make tremendous progress in setting and achieving her goals,” said Angela Wrana. “She remains motivated and determined no matter what challenges that she encounters. This program has provided her with the support that she needs to achieve self-sufficiency.”

“My goal is to continue to pay off my debts, start savings accounts for emergency use only, and save money for a down payment on a vehicle,” said Annette when asked about her future goals. “I thank God every day for this apartment and the beautiful view of Lake Erie! I am so grateful for Angela and her support! I don’t think any of this would be possible without the rental assistance provided by the HCRP program. I am forever grateful!”

Leadership Lake County
Community Spirit Award

The Community Spirit Award is bestowed upon a local business or organization who displays exceptional dedication and service to improving the quality of life for Lake and Geauga Counties’ low-income families.

Leadership Lake County provides so many valuable programs and opportunities for our local non-profits to grow and thrive and over the years Lifeline has benefited from so many of them. Both Lifeline’s Executive Director and Director of Community Services, as well as several of our Board members, are graduates of Leadership Lake County’s Signature Class, which prepared us all for the many facets and challenges that leadership positions bring. Several years ago, an additional program was launched by LLC, Community Builders, to help position middle-management for growth. We have committed to sending each of our program managers through Community Builders—one is enrolled this year, with the others to follow in the coming years—this will only make our agency stronger. Throughout both of these programs, opportunities continually arise to allow agencies to outreach, including the annual speed networking with the Signature Class. LLC has become a very valuable partner in terms of volunteer and Board recruitment and training.

Each year the Signature Class chooses several community projects at local non-profits, and Lifeline has also benefited several times as project partners—going back 10 years ago to when a Signature Class team developed a marketing plan for 2-1-1, to the team in 2020-2021 who was going to design a kids area in our new lobby, to our current team who is helping us to fine-tune our reentry simulation so it is ready to launch this summer. Each of these projects have impacted our agency in a positive way.

The LLC Deep Dive group was launched four years ago to allow Lake & Geauga’s female CEOs to network and focus on projects that often end up on the back burner, but that would significantly impact the organization that they lead. Lifeline’s Executive Director was a charter member of the group and has found the experience one of the most impactful of her career. Projects have included standards review preparation and planning and development of HR materials. But far greater than the projects are the supportive relationships built with the other CEOs and the opportunity to work strategically with others.

Finally, beyond a commitment to impacting the work of the non-profit community, LLC annually also works to promote the issue of poverty in our community by presenting the Community Action Poverty Simulation to the Signature and Junior Classes as the annual mid-year retreat. The poverty simulation is such a strong tool for promoting the root causes and challenges of living in poverty and we appreciate LLC using it as a teaching tool every January.

Any one of these reasons would make LLC a good candidate for the Community Spirit Award. All of them combined make them an obvious choice and an invaluable partner in our community!
The COVID-19 pandemic was a challenging time for every non-profit agency, particularly those already helping at risk populations like we do at Lifeline. Our agency is incredibly proud that we never closed our doors and continued to do whatever we could to assist our community and our clients in getting through the pandemic safely. We could not have done that without the support of some of our funders, the Lake County ADAMHS Board and the United Way of Lake County, and our state association, the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies.

The Lake County ADAMHS Board supported Lifeline in several ways, including two pandemic grants—one for overtime costs for 2-1-1 which saw a dramatic increase in call volume and another for homelessness assistance, which Lifeline was able to sub-grant to Project Hope to increase their hours during the stay-at-home orders. Both grants were critical in helping to meet early needs of the pandemic. The Lake County ADAMHS Board has also been providing free PPE to Lifeline since the early days of the pandemic to keep our staff safe and they continue to do so to this day.

The United Way of Lake County also stepped up with funding. As the pandemic raged and senior centers remained largely closed or limited, AARP tax clinics were forced to close or offer very limited services, as well. We knew that our VITA Program would need to step up, expand and meet the increased demand for services. And we were able to do that because in 2021 and 2022 UWLC provided additional funding for us to expand our VITA program.

Finally, the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies has worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to support CAAs in so many different ways. In the very early days of the pandemic, they worked with the Children’s Hunger Alliance to secure shelf-ready meals to get out into our communities. Lifeline received several hundred of them, which we shared with our partners at Lake Geauga United Head Start. They also arranged for delivery of cases of antibacterial soap at a time when it was hard to find. We distributed these through the Home Delivered Groceries program for seniors. But where OACAA really shined was in its advocacy—they were instrumental in helping to secure millions of dollars for the CAA network through the Ohio Department of Development to assist with housing and utility relief for those financially impacted by COVID-19. They continue to advocate on our behalf and share our success stories on providing COVID-19 relief funding. These entities each made a difference for Lifeline during the pandemic and allowed us to serve our community in the best ways we could.

Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies, Lake County ADAMHS Board, and United Way of Lake County

Community Spirit Award

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The Lake County ADAMHS Board supported Lifeline in several ways, including two pandemic grants—one for overtime costs for 2-1-1 which saw a dramatic increase in call volume and another for homelessness assistance, which Lifeline was able to sub-grant to Project Hope to increase their hours during the stay-at-home orders. Both grants were critical in helping to meet early needs of the pandemic. The Lake County ADAMHS Board has also been providing free PPE to Lifeline since the early days of the pandemic to keep our staff safe and they continue to do so to this day.

The United Way of Lake County also stepped up with funding. As the pandemic raged and senior centers remained largely closed or limited, AARP tax clinics were forced to close or offer very limited services, as well. We knew that our VITA Program would need to step up, expand and meet the increased demand for services. And we were able to do that because in 2021 and 2022 UWLC provided additional funding for us to expand our VITA program.

Finally, the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies has worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to support CAAs in so many different ways. In the very early days of the pandemic, they worked with the Children’s Hunger Alliance to secure shelf-ready meals to get out into our communities. Lifeline received several hundred of them, which we shared with our partners at Lake Geauga United Head Start. They also arranged for delivery of cases of antibacterial soap at a time when it was hard to find. We distributed these through the Home Delivered Groceries program for seniors. But where OACAA really shined was in its advocacy—they were instrumental in helping to secure millions of dollars for the CAA network through the Ohio Department of Development to assist with housing and utility relief for those financially impacted by COVID-19. They continue to advocate on our behalf and share our success stories on providing COVID-19 relief funding. These entities each made a difference for Lifeline during the pandemic and allowed us to serve our community in the best ways we could.

2022 Award Recipients

Krishona Brinson

Outstanding Achievement Award

The Outstanding Achievement Award recognizes a program participant of Lifeline who has made significant progress in achieving self-sufficiency.

In July 2021, Krishona enrolled in the HCRP Program. The HCRP, or Homeless Crisis Response Program, provides emergency rental assistance to the homeless population in Lake County to help them exit shelter or street environments and stabilize in private rental housing. In addition to rental assistance, this program also provides assistance with security deposit, utility payments and utility deposits/arrears.

Krishona was staying at the shelter with her young children after fleeing from a 15-year domestic violence situation. After being referred to Lifeline by the shelter, Krishona met with Lifeline program coordinator Angela Wrana to complete her intake and then began her housing search.

Krishona explains, “Prior to my enrollment in this program I felt hopeless and depressed like there was no way I was going to make it. My only source of income was social security disability and landlords would not consider me for the size apartment that I would need with that income. Upon being approved for HCRP, landlords started considering me and I was able to get into an apartment.”

Once Krishona had found an apartment, Lifeline provided an inspection of the unit to ensure that it was safe for her and her children. As soon as the apartment passed inspection, Krishona signed her lease agreement and moved in.

“Krishona has remained very motivated and determined during her search for housing. I was very happy to see her and her children have their own safe home,” stated Angela Wrana.

Since obtaining her housing, Krishona has remained focused on maintaining her part-time employment and saving her income so that she will be able to be self-sufficient once the program ends. Krishona currently walks forty minutes daily to take her daughters to daycare and then herself to work. She is also learning how to drive and hopes to purchase her own vehicle in the near future. This will help her get back and forth to work, her children’s events and the grocery store.

Krishona states, “My goal after this program is to be able to pay my rent and utilities and still afford all that my kids need. I hope to one day be able to give back because this program has helped me tremendously. I honestly know in my heart that without this program I would not have made it.”