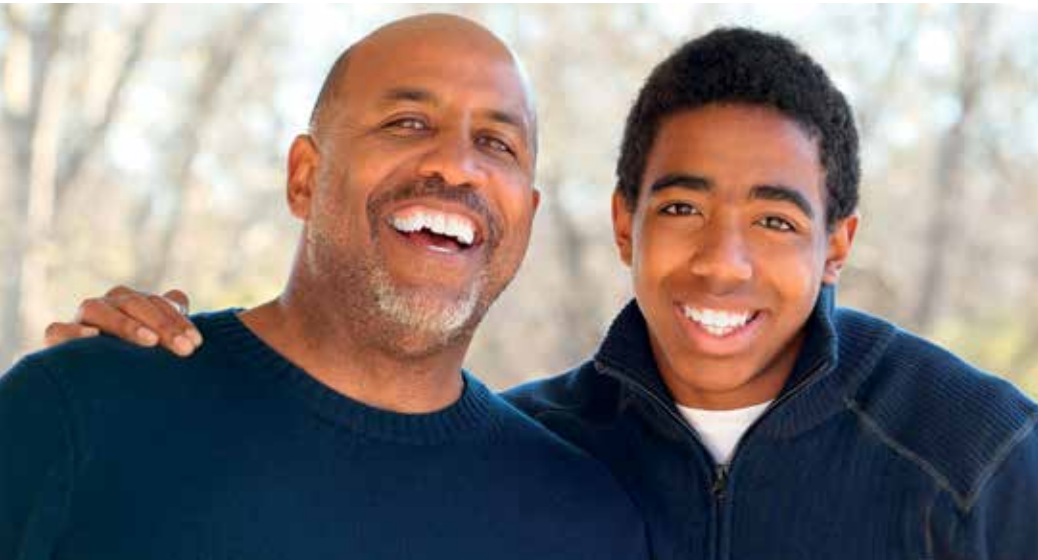


# ANNUAL REPORT 2018

Helping People. Changing Lives.  
[cacsb.org](http://cacsb.org)



**MESSAGE FROM THE CEO**

Believing that real change comes from within, Community Action Commission (CAC) embarked on a journey of self-evaluation and capacity-building in 2018. After all, if we are going to get even better at what we do, we can't be afraid to look at ourselves! Our journey has included implementing new tools, including a new performance-based management system and a new agency-wide data base for tracking outcomes of those we serve. We are also providing staff with new opportunities for training and professional growth. Most importantly, we have been reaching out to the low-income community through surveys and a series of focus groups to help us better understand and prioritize their needs as we move into the future.

At the same time, we've already begun implementing new programs to help individuals and families on their journey to self-sufficiency. The Financial Literacy Program, for instance, empowers parents to make sound spending decisions, manage a budget and meet their financial goals. Our new Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSSP) is designed to remove barriers that often keep motivated individuals from successfully completing a job training program, GED or Associate's degree needed to pursue higher-wage career paths. Children's Services has also expanded to include a new Infants and Toddler's Classroom, designed to provide education and social/emotional enrichment to infants and children between 0-3 years of age. Together, these programs more clearly define and support a path to economic security.

Of course, we could not have achieved any of these accomplishments without the support and advocacy of our donors, community partners, volunteers, and Board of Directors. Looking forward to 2019, we are excited to begin work on CAC's new 5-year strategic plan which promises to take us in new, innovative directions grounded in best practice. We hope that you will continue to support us with your generous contributions of time and donations, or simply by following us on Facebook to stay informed about upcoming events and activities. Together, with your support, we will continue to do what we do best: helping people and changing lives.

Patricia Keelean

**MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR**

As we enter another year in the history of CAC - the 52nd year - there remains a certain constant. This being that people, programs, processes, events, etc., may change, but the mission and commitment of the organization to the community remains the same.

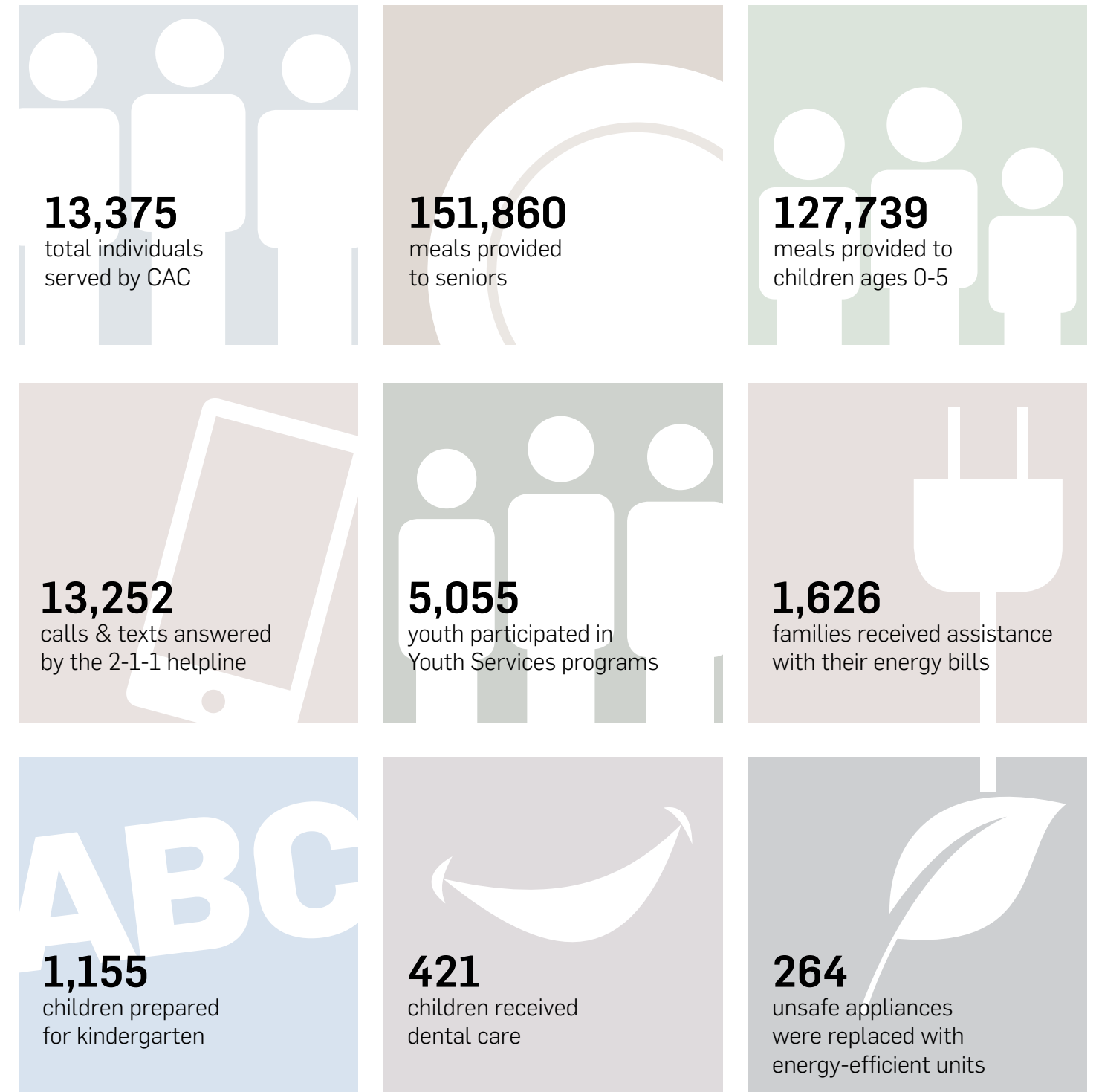
Not that there hasn't been significant progress along the way, there obviously has - since 1967, there better have been! This past year, however, I see as one of exceptional progress. We have a new leader in Pat Keelean, who is bringing her own style and drive to the organization. We also have some fresh energy and perspectives from the Board of Directors that serves to refill the enthusiasm tank. There's much to be enthused about. Pat has undertaken several organizational changes, and adding more structure and ways and means of better measuring success that will surely pay off down the line.

However, throughout these pages, you'll read and see examples of what really matters - successfully serving Santa Barbara County by giving young children an "early head start," to ensuring seniors receive nutritional meals at least once a day, and everything CAC does in between.

I never cease to be amazed by the sheer number of programs CAC offers to our community, and therefore the good it accomplishes. By browsing through this report, I hope you'll be amazed as well.

Robert S. Freeman

Community Action Commission of Santa Barbara County (CAC) creates opportunities for families and individuals to achieve stability through its 22 health and human service programs, including **Head Start, Healthy Senior Lunch, Weatherization and Energy Assistance, Family & Youth Services, and 2-1-1 Santa Barbara.**



**HEAD START**

works in partnership with families and the community to provide education and services that support healthy development, self-sufficiency and enhance the quality of life for children and families.



**GABRIELA GONZALEZ DELACRUZ HEAD START PARENT AND VOLUNTEER**

As a young girl, Gabby's childhood friend had a baby at twelve years old. Consequently, Gabby first became acquainted with the Head Start early care and education program as a high school student when she accompanied her best friend to the local Center to pick up her young son who was enrolled there.

Now 31, Gabriela Gonzalez DeLaCruz, also called Gabby, spoke to us in the Head Start classroom at the CAC Sierra Madre Center in Santa Maria while the young students including her daughter played outside in the sunshine. The Center has become a focal point for her family, but especially for Gabriela. It's here that not only has she watched her own children learn and thrive but she has seen a change in herself as well, a self-described "shy" person.

Growing up in Lompoc, Gabriela's own hardworking mom didn't have the time or awareness to nurture each of her seven children. "Through Head Start I've learned to be more involved with each of my kids, to check in with them and ask open-ended questions like 'tell me about your day', and 'what do you need help with' instead of just telling them 'do your homework', like my mom did," said Gabriela. "I get to know my children's teachers and learn what my daughters are doing, and how they are doing in school."

Gabriela has five children with the sixth one due in the Fall. Her three oldest - daughters Anelsie, Fernanda and Alexis - are all graduates of the Head Start program at Sierra Madre Center. Four-year-old Liberty Bella - born on the 4th of July - is currently enrolled there. And 16-month-old Luciana

already can't wait to "go to school" just like her four older sisters. There isn't much doubt that in a few years, the new baby will also attend Sierra Madre Head Start. After all, it's a family affair. Especially with the involvement of the Gonzalez parents, Gabriela and Alfredo.

For the past three years, with the support of her husband, Gabriela has become vitally involved in the Head Start program, volunteering time and effort as a member of the Sierra Madre Center Parent Group, eventually conducting the meetings as President. She also serves on the regional Head Start Policy Council, which helps govern the Children's Services Program, and is on the Board of Directors at CAC. Here she works alongside of company CEOs, county supervisors and city council members, as well as other community advocates.

According to Gabriela, this organizational and management experience at Head Start, including public speaking, opened up a whole new world of possibilities to her. She had always loved the idea of becoming a teacher but now she also sees a career opportunity in working with families like her own. Realizing she needed a college degree to achieve those goals, she set her sights on higher education with the encouragement of her "mentor" Ramona Guzman, a Family Service Advocate with CAC "who has been such an inspiration to me."

Currently enrolled at Alan Hancock College, Gabriela is on track to earn a AA degree in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Her immediate plans are to start out as Assistant Teacher for Head Start. Once she has her

college degree, Gabriela would like be a Head Start teacher and also explore a career in social work "like Ramona."

Of course, this all needs to be accomplished while continuing her busy life as a wife and mother of six. But the formerly shy Gabby is now the articulate, self-confidant Gabriela who has the drive and energy to make it all happen - thanks in part to the education and inspiration she has received at Head Start. "Head Start has encouraged me to make and reach my goals of being a better mom, getting an education, and contributing to the community."

**777** parents were formally engaged in the Head Start program in 2018

*"Through Head Start I've learned to be more involved with each of my kids, to check in with them and ask open-ended questions like "tell me about your day", and "what do you need help with."*

**Gabriela Gonzalez DeLaCruz**



**HEALTHY SENIOR LUNCH**

Every weekday hundreds of seniors gather at 14 community meal centers from Guadalupe to Carpinteria, where they are welcomed by CAC Site Hosts to enjoy a **Healthy Senior Lunch**. In addition to the nutritious meals, seniors also benefit from socializing and sharing activities with their companions - an important part of their quality of life.



**KEN JONES HEALTHY SENIOR LUNCH PARTICIPANT**

Ken Jones, 72 years young, happened upon the Senior Lunch program over three months ago, and has since become "a daily diner." His previous routine was to sit down at a local Carpinteria coffee shop to plug in and recharge his laptop computer and mobile phone. But one day there wasn't a place to sit and all the electrical outlets were in use. Ken, who is experiencing homelessness, must keep his digital devices charged as they are his primary method of sending and receiving communication.

Feeling frustrated, he thought he would check out the local Veteran's Hall. "I am a veteran, so why not?" Ken thought. As fate would have it, he met Geraldine Ortega, the Site Host for this Senior Lunch venue, as he was coming through the double doors of the stately Carpinteria Veteran's Memorial Building. Geraldine - or Geri as she is best known - is a kind and dedicated program volunteer who told Ken about the Healthy Senior Lunch program and welcomed him to come back around Noon.

When we met Ken a few months later, he was, of course, setting up his laptop and phone on a Senior Lunch table near an electrical outlet. His communication devices would re-charge while he enjoyed a hot lunch, a cup of coffee and a good conversation. Ken is a charming conversationalist. Smart, educated and well-traveled he can talk about books, biology and beaches, among many other subjects.

When asked about himself - "where did you grow up?," Ken told us with a laugh that he's "never grown up" but his boyhood

was spent on Rincon Beach. "We were poor but we had beach-front property," he said. "And we were surfing before surf boards were readily available here in California. We made our own boards." The Carpinteria native went on to college, "I have a degree in Biology but I really wanted to be a travel writer," and took any and all opportunities to travel to Europe and Africa. In the 1960s he was drafted and served in the military.

Eventually Ken Jones returned home, where he built a 3,000 square-foot house on property he owned in the area. He also tried to start a winery "but the timing was bad." It was at this point that things "started to go south" and the lender foreclosed on his property.

In spite of this big financial set-back, Ken Jones is upbeat and laughs a lot. He has a canine companion named Dorothy, "after Dorothy Parker," he tells us, launching a delightful conversation about famous writers and the Algonquin Round Table in New York.

"I appreciate Geri and the Senior Lunch - of which I am a paying customer" Ken proudly tells us. (The Senior Lunch program is free to any Senior but suggests a contribution of \$3 per lunch for those Seniors who can afford it.) "This daily lunch really helps me stretch my social security budget."

As we wrapped up the conversation we mentioned to Ken that tomorrow's lunch would be pot roast, a personal favorite. "Oh, I know," said Ken with a big smile.



**1,453** meals were served daily to Seniors in 2018; 497 were home-delivered

*"This daily lunch really helps me stretch my social security budget."*  
**Ken Jones**

**TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND PARENTING (TAPP)**

provides case management to expectant and parenting teens in the areas of healthy pregnancy, parenting skills, completion of high school education, goal setting, and access to community resources. This is the only program for teen moms in the Tri-County area of Ventura, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo.



**MONICA GONZALEZ** CASE MANAGER **RUBY SIERRA** CLIENT

Ruby Sierra, 19, was born and raised in Santa Maria. A straight-A student in school, Ruby was also involved with the Future Farmers of America where she raised a prize-winning goat. "I was interested in doing this because my parents grew up on a working farm, and I wanted to have some of that experience," Ruby said thoughtfully. She also worked 30 hours a week as a cashier at a local grocery store. Stylish, engaged and smart, Ruby had a full teen life those first few years of high school.

Soon after her 16th birthday, Ruby became pregnant. Another teen mom suggested that Ruby get involved in TAPP. This is where Ruby met her mentor and case worker Monica Gonzalez. Meeting twice a month in Ruby's home, together they developed an action plan to support Ruby through her pregnancy and early motherhood. Ruby's plans included keeping herself healthy, both physically and emotionally; finishing high school and planning for college; developing parenting skills for successfully raising her 2 ½-year-old son Noel; and addressing family planning.

On top of all that, Ruby chose to join the Navy Reserves after high school. "Ruby is a star client," said Monica. "She has great energy and always follows-through with her goals. I often have Ruby speak on panels and at meetings of county and community social service associates. She is such a positive example of Youth Development."

We met Ruby and Monica at the CAC offices in Santa Maria. Ruby had just returned from nine weeks of basic training where she serves in the SeaBee construction and

engineering unit of the Navy Reserve – a smart move considering Ruby's interest in a career in Architecture, and the tuition assistance that the Navy provides. This April, Ruby starts at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. The straight A student and teen mom applied to a half-dozen colleges and was accepted by all of them including University of California, Berkeley. She chose Cal Poly because of the reputation of its Architecture program, as well as the top-quality child care center. And, of course, it's close to home where she and Noel currently live with her mom and sister.

Though Ruby has graduated from the TAPP program, she and Monica stay in touch. And probably always will. Monica continues to encourage Ruby to "take that driver's test" so she can get her California driver's license. As a parting gift that day, Monica gave Ruby a little t-shirt for her son Noel. Printed on the shirt was the phrase "Raised by Strong Women."

**3,683**  
students received assistance in preparing for college in 2018

**615**  
youth participated in reproductive health and skills training



**LOS COMPADRES**

helps youth focus on their strengths, understand the consequences of their choices, prevent teen pregnancy, and avoid substance abuse and violence.



**JEREMY TERRONES** PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

At 16 years old, he stands 6'5" tall and has a full beard. But that's not the most impressive thing about Jeremy Terrones. The direct and articulate way that he speaks to people, including complete strangers, is Jeremy's most striking feature. He appears to have a self-confidence and wisdom beyond his sixteen years.

The afternoon we met Jeremy he openly shared his story of growing up having many good and some not so great experiences. Referring to himself as a humble person, Jeremy felt he could see through all the phoniness and drama of life. He wondered "what is our purpose?", "what is the point of all this?" and assumed that he must "be crazy" to have such philosophical questions and ideas. As many know, the road to discovering personal identity can be filled with ups and downs. It was during one of those "not so great experiences" that Jeremy was introduced to the Los Compadres program and met Joshua Hurst.

Joshua is an Educator and Mentor with Los Compadres, a program that assists high-risk youth. At their first meeting, the two "locals" bonded right away though they are seemingly quite different. Joshua is a quiet, slight man in sharp contrast to Jeremy's more gregarious bearlike appearance. But they share an interest in knowledge – Jeremy is seeking answers to life's big questions, and Joshua has both a bachelors and a master's degree, and is currently working on his PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision.

Ultimately Jeremy presents ideas to Joshua who first listens, before exchanging ideas. "He's cool, he helps me and he's not boring,"

says Jeremy who calls his Los Compadres mentor "Dude". Their weekly meetings are often "philosophy classes" with deep discussions about current social ills, or the meaning of life and what really matters.

"From the beginning with my guys, I emphasize being truthful to me and to yourself as the best way to learn and understand one's self and the world," said Joshua Hurst. "Jeremy is good about that. We tell our truth to each other." Jeremy is in complete agreement "I'm not into superficial relationships."

Jeremy also works on "his plan" with Joshua - a plan that includes getting a paid part-time job and taking courses at Alan Hancock College while finishing high school. "College Now was all Jeremy's idea," says Joshua about Jeremy having started college classes – Business Law and General Psychology – this past January. Jeremy has quite a full plate these days which includes a diet and exercise program of his own design. But he appears to enjoy his busy schedule, understanding now that there needs to be a balance of responsible actions with the desired freedom to get where he wants to go. "To learn and to teach and to help" is his self-stated mission. Jeremy's initial goals are to finish high school, earn a bachelor's degree, and start a business that becomes a big financial success.

Recalling that famous phrase *I think, therefore I am*, the ever-philosophical Jeremy Terrones says he would eventually like to live "a quiet life of meditation and contemplation."



*"To learn and to teach and to help" is my mission in life.*

**Jeremy Terrones**

**HOME ENERGY**

Rising utility expenses can burden a family so heavily that often the only option available is to do without. The Home Energy program at CAC is dedicated to energy efficiency and conservation through education, home weatherization, gas appliance safety testing, and helping low-income families pay their utility bills.



**LESLIE HALE HOME ENERGY CLIENT**

In 2001, while dropping her kids off at school, Leslie Hale noticed a For Sale sign going up in a nice family neighborhood near the elementary school. It was a foreclosure that the lender was selling under market price "as-is", making it just financially possible for the single working mom to afford her own home. Leslie and her four kids happily moved in, though the house needed a tremendous amount of work; it appeared that the previous owners repaired motorcycles in the living room!

For the next six years, Leslie and her four children poured their hearts into home improvement projects, building significant "sweat equity" in what became an attractive, tidy house. This work occurred while Leslie also held down a good job in Human Resources at the Vandenberg military base, and the kids went to school.

Then the unexpected happened. In 2007, after getting a routine flu shot, Leslie became seriously ill, and partially paralyzed. She was diagnosed with Guillain-Barré syndrome, a rare disorder in which a person's own immune system damages their nerve cells, causing muscle weakness and paralysis. In Leslie's case, the Guillain-Barré was brought on by the flu shot, as verified by the Center for Disease Control.

Unable to work, Leslie was placed on disability in 2008, and saw her income drop dramatically. "I had this great job with benefits, and never imagined I would need outside support," said the Lompoc native. One day she saw a public service announcement on television for CAC's Home Energy program, and gave them a call. After Leslie's initial appointment to present

her qualifications, a Home Energy team came out to inspect her home, as they have every year now for the past 10 years. During these inspections, the knowledgeable home energy technicians look for ways to improve energy efficiency in order to help the customer save money on utilities, and improve their comfort and safety.

On the day we interviewed Leslie, who uses a cane to get around and looks much younger than her 60 years, she thoughtfully provided a handwritten list of all the ways the local Home Energy team had improved her energy usage and made her home safer and more comfortable over the last decade. This list included installing new shower heads, light bulbs, and smoke and carbon monoxide detectors; servicing the furnace and thermostat, replacing a drafty window and an old stove with a new one.

"My favorite home improvement is the new window with safety glass," said Leslie. "Because not only does it insulate my living room from loss of heat, but it also has greatly reduced the noise from the street outside."

Leslie's four children are grown now and living on their own. She has 10 grandchildren, three whom she sees daily, caring for them part-time while their parents are working. At "Grandma's house", the youngsters have their own room for napping, and a large well-kept backyard for playing. One can easily see that it's a joy for Leslie to share her time and her home with her family. On our visit, Leslie was also temporarily serving as a "foster mom" to a cute little rescue dog named Armani.

Leslie was enthusiastic about sharing her Home Energy story. "Everyone at Home Energy is so nice and the work they do is professional," she says. "I have recommended it to friends and acquaintances because it really has made a difference in my life. This program and its people have truly helped me."

**209**  
homes were weatherized in 2018

*"I had this great job with benefits, and never imagined I would need outside support."*  
**Leslie Hale**



**2-1-1 SANTA BARBARA COUNTY**

is a helpline, connecting people to health and human services, disaster relief and public information.



**LYNDA MILLNER AND DON SETH 2-1-1 CALLERS**

For the older married couple, the morning of January 9, 2018 started out as usual - waking up in their beautiful Montecito home set among tall trees and next to a picturesque creek bed. "We didn't know anything had happened," said Lynda Millner, the attractive and gracious society columnist for a local newspaper. But "the realization started to set in when we found we didn't have electricity." As Lynda and her husband Don Seth gathered up candles and flashlights, they saw that a huge tree had fallen across their driveway gate, narrowly missing the house, and making it impossible for them to leave the property.

The cell phone that they rarely used wasn't completely charged but there was just enough "juice" that they were able to contact their tree trimmer. Amazingly "at 7:30am the tree guy answered his phone and his team came right out to remove the fallen tree." It was around that time that they began to understand the full extent of the damage and devastation in Montecito, caused by the recent fires, heavy overnight rains and an unprecedented mud and debris flow.

"We couldn't actually tell if we were in the evacuation area or not," said Lynda. "It turns out the evacuation border went right down the middle of our street, so the people across the street had to evacuate, and we didn't," added Don, the personable 91-year-old who purchased the house in 1980. "We didn't know whether we should stay or leave," continued Lynda. "And because we didn't have access to TV or radio or any information really, that is when I first called 2-1-1 Santa Barbara County." It was the first of sever-

al calls to the helpline as Lynda and Don toughed it out in their power-less home for four long days.

"When I called 2-1-1 they always knew what was going on," said Lynda. "I was so happy to talk to a real person. I felt like I had somebody on our side. It really was a traumatic experience, even though nothing bad happened to us. The 'not knowing' is hard."

On January 13, their house lost the natural gas in addition to the electricity, making it too difficult to stay there any longer. Lynda and Don left, concerned that it would be a long while before they could get back into the neighborhood, past all the emergency workers and law enforcement. After spending five days with family outside the disaster zone, they were finally able to return home.

A few months later, the following was published in Lynda Millner's weekly column *Seen Around Town* in the **Montecito Journal**:

*Until recently I wasn't aware of this non-profit (CAC). But during the mudslide, they were my lifeline when I called 2-1-1. I always got a real person on the line and could ask if we were supposed to evacuate. Since we were right on the border, I never knew. They could zero-in on their computer maps to our house and tell exactly. Little did I know that was part of CAC. You can dial 2-1-1 to find health and human services for postpartum depression, healthcare, counseling, food assistance, housing and much more. For more information, check out [www.cacsb.com](http://www.cacsb.com)*

**7,025**  
calls & texts responded to by  
2-1-1 during January disaster



SAVE THE DATE

*The Art of Giving Back*

CHAMPIONS DINNER

**05.17.19**

FRIDAY, MAY SEVENTEEN  
TWO THOUSAND AND NINETEEN

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Community Action Commission OF SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

Complimentary transportation to and from Santa Barbara to Solvang will be provided again this year; first come first serve!

[www.cacsb.org](http://www.cacsb.org)



**2018 CHAMPIONS DINNER**

Community Action Commission honored those who have helped improve the lives of children, youth, families, and seniors in Santa Barbara County. The 13th annual Champions event was held on May 17, 2018 at Hotel Corque in Solvang.

**L to R:** CAC Board Member Guy Walker, 2018 CAC Champion Dr. Kevin Walthers, Superintendent/President of Allan Hancock College, CAC CEO Pat Keelean, 2018 CAC Champion Fran Forman, and Bob Freeman, CEO of CenCal Health, who accepted the 2018 CAC Champion honor for CenCal Health.



**2018 DONOR RECEPTION**

Partnering with The Towbes Group, CAC held a reception for donors and friends at the Villa del Sol, a new residential property in Santa Maria from The Towbes Group.

**L to R:** CAC CEO Pat Keelean, Mayor of Santa Maria Alice Patino and Towbes Group Manager Marlana Murdock at a CAC Donor Appreciation reception at Villa del Sol.



**2018 SANTA MARIA PARADE OF LIGHTS**

CAC was honored to be included in the Villa del Sol parade float at the annual Santa Maria Parade of Lights. Held on December 1, 2018, and sponsored by The Towbes Group, the float was a recreation of the façade of its newest residential property, Villa del Sol.

# CONTRIBUTORS

Community Action Commission (CAC) is a private non-profit agency that leverages support for Santa Barbara County residents through private funding as well as government contracts and grants.

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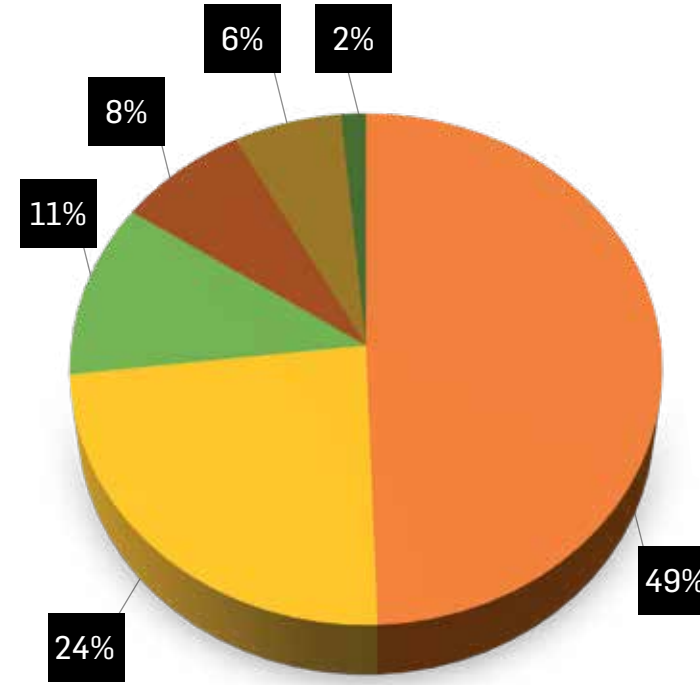
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 Ms. Daisy Linares  
 Ms. Dovie Louise Lindberg  
 ms. joyce ellen lippman  
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# FINANCIALS

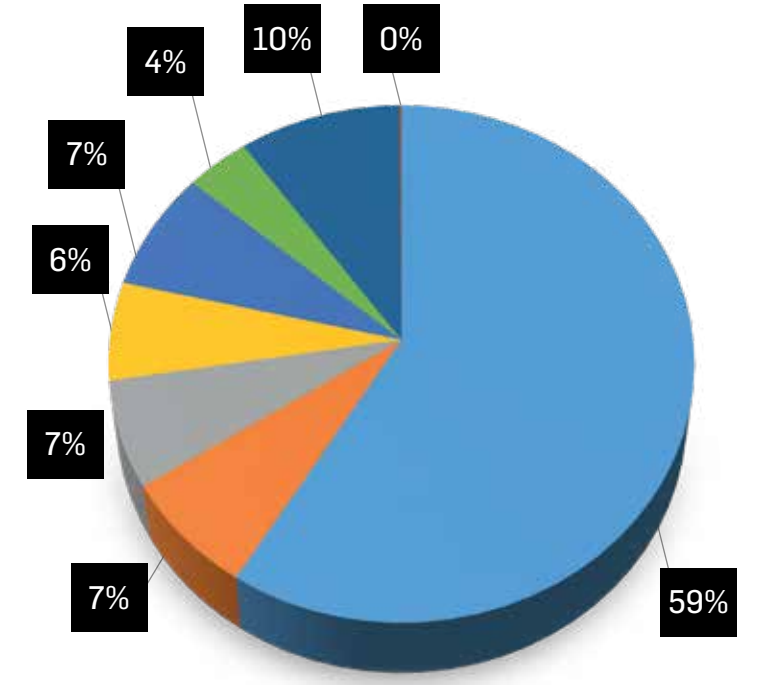


## SOURCES OF FUNDS

- Federal Grants
- State Grants
- Local Grants
- Program Income
- Donations (incl. In-Kind)
- Other

## REVENUE

Federal Grants	\$ 12,119,861
State Grants	\$ 5,825,282
Local Grants	\$ 2,729,739
Program Income	\$ 1,896,585
Donations (including In-Kind)	\$ 1,580,577
Other	\$ 364,746
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 24,516,790</b>



## USES OF FUNDS

- Children's Services
- Nutrition Services
- Energy Services
- Senior Program
- Family Resources
- Other Projects
- Management and General
- Fundraising

## EXPENSES:

### Program Services:

Children's Services	\$ 14,233,166
Nutrition Services	\$ 1,731,733
Energy Services	\$ 1,601,833
Senior Program	\$ 1,493,692
Family Resource	\$ 1,843,777
Other Projects	\$ 931,683

### Total Program

**Services Expenses** \$ 21,835,884

### Administration Services:

Management and General	\$ 2,376,159
Fundraising	\$ 21,579

**Total Expenses** \$ 24,233,622



**Bold names indicate donors who gave \$20,000 to \$200,000.**



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Secretary/Treasurer



Mike Cordero



Karin Dominguez



Robert Freeman  
Chair



Gabriela Gonzalez  
Head Start Representative



Oscar Gutierrez



Shanice Jackson  
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Steve Lavagnino



Sara Limas  
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Sharon Lutz



Elizabeth Snyder



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2018 SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

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CEO

Gary Lynd  
Director of Nutrition Services

Lorraine R. Neenan  
Director of Children's Services

Anthony Mitchell  
COO

Kemba Lawrence  
Director of Energy Services

Tracy Lang Wood  
Director of Family & Youth Services

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Director of Finance

COMMUNITY ACTION COMMISSION OF SANTA BARBARA COUNTY (CAC)

employs over 400 health, education and social service workers and is one of Santa Barbara County's largest employers.

ELISA PARDO  
CAC EMPLOYEE AND PROGRAM MANAGER FOR 2-1-1 SANTA BARBARA COUNTY



Elisa Pardo has grown up at Community Action Commission, beginning her journey with the agency as a teen parent in a youth mentoring group, then as a young employee with her first paying job to eventually become a highly-regarded CAC program manager. "It feels like home to me," says Elisa looking back on two decades with the non-profit organization.

Elisa first became aware of CAC when she participated as a high school student in Las Comadres, a program that provides support and mentoring to low income teens. It was there she first "fell in love with the mission of CAC," attracted to the idea of helping people through mentorship and community involvement.

"Because I was an immigrant, raised by a single mother – a very proud woman, I wasn't too aware of life beyond my neighborhood," said Elisa. That was the case until her Las Comadres mentor Maria Gutierrez shared "a much bigger world" with her. "Maria showed me the value of accessing local resources, which I acted on," said Elisa, who pursued higher education while her daughter was well cared for at the local Head Start. Elisa also learned about peer-to-peer support and how to contribute to the community by being accountable and self-sufficient. "In our Las Comadres meetings, we found that in talking, we could find ways to help one another, rather than just taking what was given to us," said Elisa.

"I stayed close to my Las Comadres mentor, and as CAC job openings came up, Maria would let me know about them." Elisa began working in various positions in CAC programs throughout the county, "growing up in the hallways of CAC."

She appreciated the idea of being "paid to help people", especially because she had benefitted from CAC youth programs herself. Moving up in the agency, she was a Case Manager, Health & Reproductive Educator, and at one point filled-in for various positions at different CAC programs. "I enjoyed getting to know the agency through my involvement in so many aspects of the organization

including Visitation Aide, the Front Porch program, and TAPP."

It was during this time that Elisa began to hear about the 2-1-1, the county helpline that was moving to CAC from another local non-profit. "This would be total involvement," she says, "coordinating with hundreds of government agency contacts and local groups to create an accessible resource database that would support the community."

Prior to the move to CAC, 2-1-1 was dark for two years. Elisa took on the responsibility of re-building the database, engaging with emergency departments, and health and human service resources, retaining an accredited call center, and developing the 2-1-1 branding including a website, among other start-up tasks.

The experience of giving new life to the 2-1-1 program in Santa Barbara County would prove to be invaluable to Elisa and to the community considering what happened next. In December 2017, a blaze that broke out in Ventura County quickly moved to Santa Barbara County, and became one of California's largest recorded fires, forcing more than 100,000 people to evacuate, destroying at least 1,000 structures, and taking the life of a firefighter. A few weeks later, a torrential overnight rain caused mud and boulders from the mountains to flow down creeks and valleys into Montecito, killing 23 people and destroying more than 100 homes.

"I never thought I would have a role in something like this," said Elisa, still emotional at the thought of the twin disasters. "The calls from frantic people started coming in, at one point there were hundreds of calls in the phone center queue," she said. The 9-1-1 line and the county emergency line were impacted and, because many of those calls were not life-threatening, they were referred to 2-1-1. Most people needed reassurance that they were okay in their home, or that they did need to evacuate. "Our call center helped clarify," said Elisa. Where to evacuate pets,

find shelters, determine road closures, or locate drinking water were also concerns that the call center could adeptly handle via collaboration with the local office of emergency, and the up-to-date database.

But others who called 2-1-1 had unique worries – doctors and nurses who needed to get to work in local hospitals (the 101 freeway was closed), and a cancer patient who was trapped at home and needed to get to a chemotherapy appointment. "I was trying to fill in the gaps of what our call center could handle; it was several nights without sleep, making sure people got the help they needed." Elisa particularly remembers being worried about "an elderly woman who had evacuated to a hotel with her husband who had Alzheimer's. He was becoming agitated, and his wife felt alone and helpless, and needed someone to talk to. So, of course, we accommodated her."

Successfully surviving last year's disasters, Elisa and the 2-1-1 helpline are stronger than ever. Elisa Pardo was nominated to participate in Emerging Leaders, a professional development program with the goal to empower, elevate, and connect the next generation of nonprofit leaders in Santa Barbara County. She is now a 2018 alumna of this prestigious group. "One of the insights from that 10-month experience was the idea of self-care," said Elisa. "I'm not very good at that. Since I was a teenager, I've been running - to beat the odds of being an immigrant and a teen mom, always striving to prove that I can make it." But now she's also working on "being present, and in the moment." Though she says with a laugh, "I have no time to explore what people call hobbies."

At 33 years old, a mother of two daughters, Elisa shares her full life with her husband, and their large extended family in Santa Maria. Asked about a favorite motto, she doesn't hesitate. "This is something from Martin Luther King Jr that has always inspired me." ***If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.***



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Since 1967.

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**North County Office**

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805 922-2243  
FAX 805 349-8165

**Mid-County Office**

120 West Chestnut Avenue  
Lompoc, CA 93436  
805 740-4555  
FAX 805 740-4558

[cacsb.org](http://cacsb.org)

**Family & Youth Services**

CalSOAP (Student Opportunity  
& Access Program)  
Economic Empowerment Program  
Teenage Pregnancy & Parenting  
Program (TAPP)  
CalPrep (Personal Responsibility  
Education Program)  
Information & Education (I&E) Program  
Los Compadres/YOBG Program  
Front Porch Program  
Enhanced Family Reunification Program  
Behavioral Wellness Programs  
CalGrip (Gang Reduction, Intervention &  
Prevention) Project  
South Coast Task Force on Youth Safety  
2-1-1 Santa Barbara

**Nutrition Services**

Senior Healthy Lunch Program  
After-School Snack Program  
Summer Food Services Program  
Children's Waiting Room (Courthouse)  
Home Connection Finders

**Children's Services**

Head Start Program  
Early Head Start: Infants &  
Toddlers Program  
California State Preschool Program

**Community Services**

Energy/Weatherization Services  
Utility Assistance Program  
Family Self-Sufficiency Program  
Senior Home Repair Program

