AEOA strengthens communities by providing opportunities for people experiencing social and economic challenges.

From babies and young children to families and elders, AEOA delivers the assistance that struggling households need to make ends meet.
African-American and American Indian families receiving public assistance in Minnesota have far poorer employment outcomes than white participants. This reality prompted the State to offer competitive grants to counties and tribal nations to design programs to alleviate that disparity. St. Louis County applied for and was awarded funding with its designated partners—AEOA and Community Action Duluth for the Bridge to Employment Program.

Bridge to Employment’s purpose is to improve job outcomes for people of color on public assistance and its design is based on state research and local experience. The current system does not adequately address the many needs faced by people of color, including bias and racism. A strong program component focuses on working with employers to match the skills they need, while advocating for the workers whom we are training to be seen as the able employees they can be. Michael Williams and Deanna Drift were hired to work closely with families of color. Michael is African-American and Deanna is American Indian.

38 families enrolled through AEOA, including 46 children;
18 families headed by women and 10 by men;
18 American Indian families and 10 African-American;
18 or 47% had some college at enrollment;
15 families have either found a job or are in training;
5 families have experienced domestic violence.

Greatest Barriers: Homelessness, transportation, past involvement with the criminal justice system, and finding safe and affordable child care.

“Dealing with the public assistance system is difficult. Clients worry about trusting their counselor with the very personal details of their lives. It is easier when you have a counselor who can relate to your life story. Clients more freely share information when they have a connection to the person helping them.”—Deanna Drift, AEOA Equity Employment Counselor

Jay grew up in Embarrass. He remembers attending pow-wows with his Grandmother during his youth. Kayla moved to this area when she was 12. They were young when their first daughter was born seven years ago. Regardless of the struggle, both earned their GEDs. Jay graduated from community college with a two-year millwright degree. He applied with many employers but didn’t receive any offers. Bridge to Employment is giving Jay and Kayla the opportunity to receive training in welding. Bridge to Employment is noticeably different than their previous experience with public assistance. Their counselor works closely with them and is better able to help them overcome barriers like gas for their vehicle so that they can get to school and drop their three-year old daughter at day care.

“Learning welding is good. Kayla is doing really well—she is passing everything.”—Jay and Kayla have high hopes for their future, given this opportunity. “We might like to have our own business someday.”
Elder Services Network (ESN), a private, non-profit offering services to help seniors age at home, dissolved this year; but their programs continued without missing a beat because AEOA stepped up to assist. AEOA was approached by ESN funders prior to its “going out of business” and asked to consider acquiring the non-profit and folding its services within the Senior Services Department. Given AEOA’s capacity and funding assistance from United Way of Northeastern Minnesota and the Northland Foundation, seniors who were depending on ESN services weren’t disappointed. ESN and its services are now administered by AEOA. One of those services is Groceries to Go—a shopping and grocery delivery service for homebound seniors in northern St. Louis County.

Groceries to Go serves 60 seniors and has a volunteer list of 53.

Rob Tomassoni—Profile of a Volunteer
Rob Tomassoni has been a volunteer for Groceries to Go for close to five years. He shops for people on a weekly basis—at times, shopping for up to four people at once. "When I shop," said Rob, "I make sure that I get the biggest green pepper I can for them or I make sure that the apple is in great shape—without bruises. I shop as if I am shopping for myself.” When asked why he spends his time volunteering, Rob said it is because he wants to remain active in his retirement; but more than that, he considers himself fortunate and wants to give back to the community.

“I enjoy talking to and visiting with the people I shop for. This program touches peoples’ lives and helps them remain independent for as long as possible. I appreciate the opportunity to help and hope that it is available for me if I ever need it.”

Bernice Tate—A Groceries to Go Participant
Bernice will soon be 98 years old. She lives alone in her own home in Hibbing—the town where she was born and raised. Her husband died 40 years ago and her two children live far from here. She was a butcher during World War II at Hill’s Grocery, right across from the Brooklyn Location Fire Department. She had lots of friends over the years but most are gone. Bernice is a participant in the Groceries to Go Program.

“It’s a Godsend! I don’t know what I would do without it. I remember the first time I used Groceries to Go and the volunteer shopped for me and put the food away. I sat down and cried and cried. I don’t know if I was crying because I couldn’t do it anymore or crying because of how thankful I was for the service.”

Community Offender Re-entry Program (CORP)

AEOA’s Community Offender Re-entry Program (CORP) began in April of 2014 as a sub-grantee of SOAR Career Solutions out of Duluth. CORP helps high-risk offenders successfully transition back to Greater St. Louis County from federal, state, and county correctional institutions. CORP offers intensive assistance to identify resources, supportive services, and mentorship to help returning offenders successfully transition back into society. Community mentors partner with ex-offenders to foster positive social relationships which ease the transition back into society. Since implementation, CORP has served 50 clients. Twenty-three (23) have been helped with securing housing, six (6) have gained employment, and two (2) have enrolled into college.

Derrick was referred to Northeast Regional Corrections Center (NERCC) in August of 2014 after spending time in a more restrictive correctional facility. An AEOA CORP Case Manager met with Derrick to discuss his plans after release. Derrick was overwhelmed and nervous but excited to go home and spend time with his three boys. Derrick faced many obstacles upon release, including a divorce and inability to continue his on-line education (due to probation internet restrictions). He was also required to attend weekly treatment. With CORP help, Derrick dealt with these life challenges and found temporary employment through Express Employment at AmeriPride. He worked hard and moved from temporary to permanent full-time employment with AmeriPride. He continues to be active in CORP, working to secure his driver’s license, enrolling in school, and gaining joint custody of his three boys. Without CORP, Derrick wouldn’t have known where to begin to navigate the numerous and difficult barriers in rejoining society.
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ARROWHEAD ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AGENCY
2015 ANNUAL BUDGET
TOTAL ANNUAL BUDGET AS OF 6-30-15 = $34,589,814

Senior Services $4,002,212 12%

Head Start $3,787,236 11%

Central $843,476 2%

Housing $12,735,897 37%

Transit $9,108,292 26%

Employment & Training $4,112,701 12%