

# CSBG SPOTLIGHT: Building Assets *Statewide in Wisconsin*

*by Jovita Tolbert*

Richard Schlimm, the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP), defines family economic security as “a broad strategy or category of program strategies that provide economic opportunities for families, individuals, and households to acquire the capacity to leave poverty.” Believing that one of these broad strategies is asset building, WISCAP assists its members, composed primarily of Community Action Agencies (CAAs), in administering an Individual Development Account (IDA) Program. Wisconsin CAAs also engage in other asset building activities including homeownership, micro-enterprise development, training, advanced degree and other skill enhancement programs.

Thirteen of Wisconsin’s sixteen CAAs participate in the statewide Wisconsin Community Action Agency IDA Program. Through this program, Wisconsin CAAs have received two Assets for Independence (AFI) grants totaling one million dollars and, through the leveraging of resources, Wisconsin CAAs have matched and exceeded this grant amount. In addition, WISCAP has received funding from the federal DHSS Office of Refugee Resettlement for an IDA Program for refugees in Wisconsin. Notably, since AFI grants provide very limited program operating funds, some agencies utilized Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funds to provide program operating support to recruit participants, provide financial literacy education and “asset-building skills training”, and to fund administrative functions including partnering with financial institutions reporting.

As a result of the Wisconsin Community Action Agency IDA Program, 1,138 low-income participants opened an IDA at more than twenty-five financial institutions. Moreover, 1,108 of these low-income participants graduated from the IDA program and invested in the following:

In answer to the question of whether or not low-income people save, \$1.9 million was saved by low-income participants through the IDA program provided by Wisconsin CAAs. And, many participants had very low-incomes at the time of enrollment yet were able to save. For example, one of the WISCAP project sites at ADVOCAP reports that 73 percent of participants in the OCS grant had an income of less than 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Level at the time of their enrollment while 45 percent had an income level *less* than the Federal Poverty Level at the time of their enrollment.

WISCAP encourages other states to participate in statewide IDA initiatives as the IDA strategy is a good fit with other existing CSBG program efforts, enhances staff ability to provide comprehensive help to program participants, and provides CAAs with an opportunity to expand partnerships between the Community Action Network, financial institutions and TANF agencies.

For more information, please contact Richard Schlimm, WISCAP Executive Director, by phone (608) 244-4422 or by email at [rschlimm@charterinternet.com](mailto:rschlimm@charterinternet.com).