

UB REPORTER

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NEWS

Partnering in community wellness, neighborhood development



Friendly faces at the CAO-UB Center: UB undergraduate intern Adam Noga, CAO-UB center director Jacqueline Hall, case manager Winde! Nnochirionye, intake clerk Edith Parker and UB graduate intern David Trent. Photo: NANCY J. PARISI

By **LAUREN NEWKIRK MAYNARD**

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A steady stream of Fruit Belt residents bring questions, concerns and tax forms to the CAO-UB

Community Wellness and Neighborhood Development Center on High Street, a partnership of the Community Action Organization of Erie County (CAO) and UB's Center

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Partnering in community wellness, neighborhood development

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for Urban Studies.

The center's four case managers provide information about jobs, health, education and training, community organizing, home improvement and more. Families come for free food and clothing, income tax preparation and help finding emergency shelter or a doctor. Block club leaders meet with members, while individuals use the center's computer lab and attend job-readiness courses in the center's first-floor classroom.

The collaboration between UB and the CAO began in 2005 when they received a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to develop neighborhood revitalization in the Masten and Ellicott districts. After the HUD grant ended in 2008, the CAO officially began sharing its building and staff with the Center for Urban Studies, directed by Henry Taylor, a UB professor of urban planning.

Taylor and the center's director, UB alumna Jacqueline Hall, now develop CAO programs based on Taylor's 10 years of neighborhood development research in the Fruit Belt. Their local partners include the City of Buffalo, Buffalo Federation of Neighborhood Centers, the Futures Academy, Kaleida Health, Roswell Park Cancer Institute, St. John Baptist Church and UB.

Student interns from UB, the Futures Academy and Buffalo State College help case managers run the center's programs.

Intern David Trent, a UB graduate student in urban planning who also is a real estate developer and affordable-housing advocate, sees the neighborhood as "surprisingly cohesive," but with a lot of work still to be done.

"To start, we need more local employers to hire people living around them," Trent says. Since 2008, the CAO-UB center has helped place 30 local residents in entry-level health sciences jobs at the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus.

CAO-UB center's core programs are:

- Emergency services. Disaster-preparedness

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information, financial and legal aid, short-term housing, and food and clothing giveaways.

- Case management, information and referrals. Certified social workers assist with quality-of-life issues, weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Block club development. Meeting space and office services for block clubs, homeowners and tenants. Nine block clubs have been created in the Fruit Belt in the past two years.
- VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance). Free tax preparation, electronic tax filing, refund transfers and bank account set-up.
- Health care employment and training. Kaleida Prep and Roswell Works job placement programs include free work-readiness courses about the health sciences industry.
- Save Ourselves (S.O.S.). A public safety program for teenagers that provides a welcoming environment and information about personal responsibility, health and safety.
- Keep Buffalo Neat. Affordable, fee-for-service landscaping and outdoor clean-up for Buffalo properties. The program hires local employees and 26 Fruit Belt households currently are participating.