

Strategic Merger Helps Indiana Advance the War on Poverty

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Founded in 2004, the Indiana Institute for Working Families (Institute) is a program of the Indiana Community Action Association (IN-CAA). The Institute conducts research and promotes public policies to help Hoosier families achieve and maintain economic self-sufficiency and is the only statewide program in Indiana that combines research and policy analysis on federal and state legislation, public policies, and programs impacting low-income working families with education and outreach. The Institute focuses on the following areas: public policy research and analysis; advocacy, education, and information; and national, statewide, and community partnerships.

However, the Institute has not always been a program of IN-CAA. The Institute was originally a program of the Indiana Coalition on Housing and Homeless Issues (ICHHI). In 2009, ICHHI closed its doors after 23 years due to a decline in funding. Dedicated staff tried to place ICHHI's programs strategically in new organizations. Most programs were placed with the state housing authority or the state association for community economic development. ICHHI and the audience and clients it served were quite different from whom the Institute was trying to serve and therefore it was not the best fit. So when the Institute was looking for a new home it wanted to be housed within an organization that was a better fit.

IN-CAA was approached about the Institute becoming a program of the association.

The staff felt it would be a good fit as IN-CAA's vision is to have a state with limited or no poverty, where its residents have decent, safe, and sanitary living conditions, and where resources are available to help low income individuals attain self-sufficiency.

Additionally IN-CAA's members (local Community Action Agencies) serve the same population that the Institute tries to serve, including workers and families of various ages and races with incomes generally below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines and individuals who have barriers to work such as low literacy levels, domestic violence, addiction, health care problems, and mental illnesses.

At the same time this would allow the association to be able to have an in-house "think tank" to do research and advocacy on behalf of the state's low-income individuals and families, therefore helping IN-CAA to advance the War on Poverty in Indiana.

The Institute came to IN-CAA with no funding, two staff members, and limited office supplies. IN-CAA's board considered the pros and cons of having

such a program and voted to have the Institute become a program of IN-CAA in February 2009. The board also approved \$33,500 in seed money to help the Institute complete several research projects they were finishing for funders at the time and until more funds

could be raised.

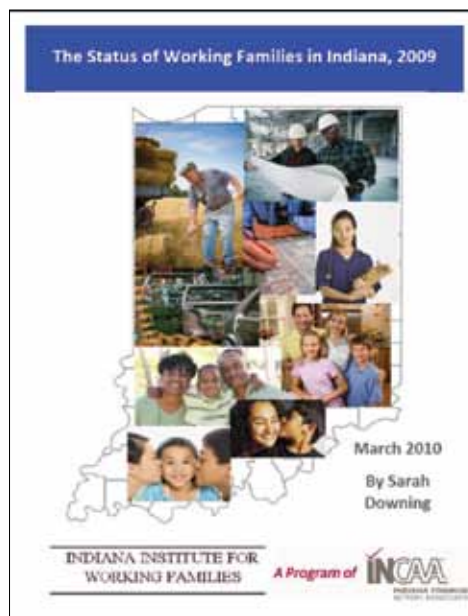
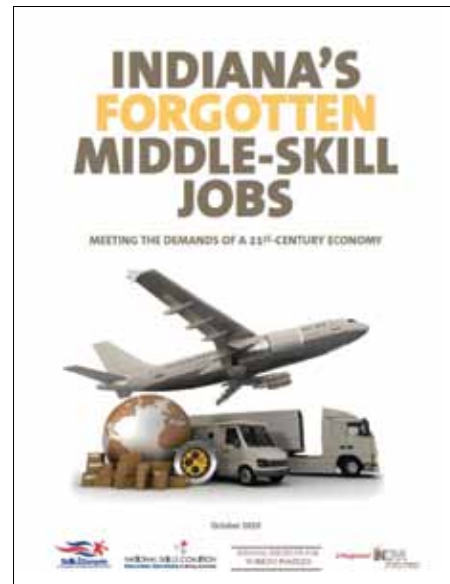
The Institute also worked on projects and programs of IN-CAA until they were fully funded where their research skills could benefit the association including the Community Needs Assessment and policy and data analysis of state American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) data.

The Institute and its work is 100 percent funded by private foundations

and individual, group, or corporate contributions. Some of the Institute's funders include: The Joyce Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education, Duke Energy Foundation, and Central Indiana Community Foundation.

After two years, the Institute is fully funded, has three staff members, and is earning some administration funds for the agency to support key administrative staff. Funders have also been interested in this partnership as we are the first state "think tank" to be housed in a Community Action Agency. The partnership works well because when the Institute needs to put a face on public policy programs or issues that the Institute is advocating for, or needs feedback on how certain programs are really working in the field, it can solicit information and feedback from the Network.

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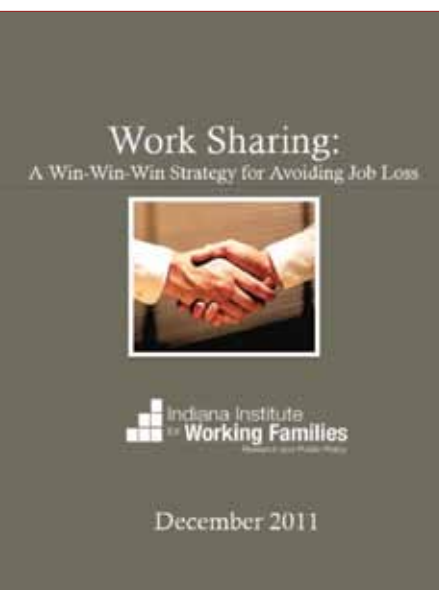
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The press releases published by the Institute on its research and related topics such as the 2010 Census data on poverty, Status of Working Families in Indiana report, Indiana's Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs report to name a few have made the Institute and association a reliable source of information on low-income workers in Indiana. As a result, the media and policymakers contact the Institute and IN-CAA for feedback on issues related to low-income families in Indiana. The Institute has received local and national media coverage—including USA Today, The New York Times, Businessweek, 60 Minutes, and the Chicago Tribune.

The Institute has also had several legislative and policy victories during the 2010 and 2011 sessions of the Indiana General Assembly including:

- Being the only advocates in the room, bringing other partners around the table, and working on legislation to make the state Family and Social Services Administration apply for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) ARRA funds which then could be reinvested into direct cash assistance and child care vouchers for low-income families. As a result Indiana received \$26,762,466 in TANF emergency funds.
- Passing Senate Resolution 85, a Senate Resolution urging assessment of industry recognized standards for middle-skills industry clusters that are essential to the state's economy to ensure that the education and training programs in Indiana meet these standards. In addition, the resolution urged the governing bodies of the Workforce Investment State Plan, the adult basic education State Plan, and the career and technical education State Plan to amend their plans to create such an assessment and to identify and close gaps in the education and training programs to assure that workers

can earn these industry recognized credentials.



resolution addresses urging state agencies to use the Self-Sufficiency Standard when counseling individuals who seek assistance, education, training, or employment, including: during financial planning, in order to help clients evaluate strategies to reach self-sufficient wages; during career counseling, to help participants make choices among various occupations and jobs; and when helping clients set a budget, to demonstrate the real costs of becoming economically independent. This resolution is significant because during this session a law was passed preventing localities from passing ordinances that set any sort of living wage standard, or minimum wage, above that of the State Minimum Wage. The Institute is hoping to leverage

this resolution and get the issue of true wage adequacy made a part of a summer study committee, and hopefully role this into more binding legislation.

The Institute is now pursuing four pieces of state legislation during the current 2012 legislative session including: work sharing as an alternative to layoffs and unemployment; expanding Individual Development Accounts and allowing them to be used to purchase a car; expanding financial aid for adult students; and moving Indiana's state financial aid deadline to a later date for adult and first generation college students.

The Institute furthers the debate that sometimes work alone is not enough to support a family and that the educational and training needs of Indiana's workforce must be addressed in order for Indiana to compete in a global economy. Thanks to IN-CAA, the Institute plans to build upon our success to impact public policy issues through continued outreach, education, and research and at the same time hopes to help IN-CAA advance the War on Poverty in Indiana.

To learn more about the Institute, please visit us:

Web: www.incap.org/iwff.html

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