



# **Shenango Valley Urban League, Inc.**

## **2015-2016 Annual Report**

**“Providing Equal Service & Support to Diverse  
Communities Throughout Mercer County”**



## **OUR MISSION**

This mission of the Shenango Valley Urban League, Inc. is to ensure equal access and opportunity for African-Americans and others in need to empower individuals to cultivate and exercise their full human potential. The Shenango Valley Urban League, Inc. implements its mission through advocacy, bridge building and program services.

## **OUR VISION**

Our vision is a community where all citizens have equal opportunity to achieve their fullest potential, where everyone contributes to improving the quality of life and shares in prosperity.

## **MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO AND BOARD CHAIR**

The Shenango Valley Urban League, Inc. prides itself on being an outlet for individuals in need through our health & welfare, housing, and education services. As it is our mission to encourage and empower individuals in Mercer County to reach their full potential, we will continue to advocate for social justice and equality for all individuals. Through our programming, we will continue to make great impacts on youth and adults and provide them with the education and resources that are necessary during their time of need. With many obstacles such as unemployment, and lack of food, the Shenango Valley Urban League, Inc. strives to provide supportive outreach initiatives and programs in the areas most needed by the community. Furthermore, the partnership with the United Way of Mercer County is invaluable and through co-branding efforts we will collectively work toward lifting families out of poverty. Through these efforts, the Shenango Valley Urban League, Inc. Board of Directors and staff will continue to focus on serving diverse populations throughout Mercer County.

**SHENANGO VALLEY URBAN LEAGUE, INC. BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**Executive Committee**

Joseph Walsh-Board Chair

Rocco Russo

Mark Malcolmson

Ronald Heiman

**Members**

Diane Gardner

Autumn Johnson

Kavon Wright

Michael Muha

Christine Burger

Deborah Stiger

**Administrative Staff**

Dr. Erin R. Houston-President/CEO

Virginia Gibson-Thurman-Fiscal Director

Elizabeth Lampkins-WIC Director

Cornelius Holmes-WIC Fiscal Administrator

Lori Graham-Administrative Assistant

## EDUCATION

Through community outreach and academic focused programming, the Shenango Valley Urban League, Inc. Education Department strives to promote education and excellence in its works. Our focus and work in education during the 2015-2016 fiscal year are highlighted below:

### **MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY OF REMEMBRANCE**

Held at the City of Farrell Municipal building, the Shenango Valley Urban League, Inc. observed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Viewing this day as a “day on” and not a day off, we invited the community to honor the work, memory, and legacy of Dr. King while youth, Christian Walker and Malachi Newell, members our the Urban League’s Nulites program reflected on how the leadership of Dr. Kings has impacted their lives today. The keynote address focused on racism and social injustices of today was given by Rev. Dr. Angel De La Cruz, Senior Pastor of Word Centered Presbyterian Church, Sharon, PA.

### **AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH**

#### **URBAN LEAGUE SUNDAY**

Urban League Sunday was held Sunday, February 14, 2016 at Cedar Ave. Church of God, Sharon, PA. Reverend Charles Johnson Jr. was host pastor. The Shenango Valley Urban League Choir debuted under the direction of Robyn Dobie-Allen and Vernon Scott, Jr. Youth from the local area were encouraged to participate. Urban League Sunday is celebrated throughout the Urban League Movement each year during the month of February.

#### **BLACK HISTORY ESSAY CONTEST LUNCHEON**

The 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Black History & Heroes Essay Contest was held throughout several local school districts in Mercer County. Fifth and Sixth grade students submitted essays on their favorite African American heroes and detailed how they have impacted the culture and society overall. First place and honorable mention winners are honored at an annual luncheon that rotates each year to a different school district. This contest provides students, parents, and the community an opportunity to learn about many civil rights leaders and African American inventors. This year the luncheon was held at West Middlesex Area School District.

### **SHENANGO VALLEY URBAN LEAGUE FRANK J. NAGY SCHOLARSHIP FUND**

#### **SCHOLARSHIP FUND ESSAY CONTEST**

The Education Department conducted its fifth essay contest for a \$1,500 scholarship award. High School Seniors from throughout Mercer could submit an essay responding in 500 words to the question, “how you have demonstrated leadership ability both academically and socially and what role you have played in making a positive impact in the urban community. “Essay submissions were submitted from the following high schools in Mercer County: Sharon, Hickory, Farrell, Greenville, Sharpsville, Jamestown, Kennedy Catholic, and Reynolds. After a committee of community judges read and scored the essays a first place winner was selected. Cassandra Thomas, a senior at Farrell High School was the 2016 recipient and winner of the

Frank J. Nagy Scholarship and was recognized and awarded at Farrell High School's senior recognition day. The scholarship fund provides financial support to a deserving Mercer County student and highlights our commitment to education.

#### **URBAN SCHOLARS & EDUCATORS AWARDS**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Urban Scholars & Educator Awards Scholarship Fundraiser was held to recognize five excellent students (grades 9-12) and five educators (K-12) in Mercer County. Also, funds raised benefitted the Shenango Valley Urban League, Inc. Frank J. Nagy Scholarship Fund. Nominations of faculty (K-12) were made by School Board members, Superintendents, Principals, or any school administrator/official. Nominations of students (9-12) can be made by Faculty, School Board members, Superintendents, Principals, or any school administrator/official.

For the Distinguished Urban Educator of the Year and Distinguished Urban Student of the Year Awards only Superintendents could make nominations.

#### **EDUCATOR CATEGORIES**

##### ***Above and Beyond Award (2015-2016) (2 winners)***

This educator goes above and beyond and does more than is asked of them. They are a positive example to other faculty and also volunteers in the community. Any educator is eligible for this award regardless of years served.

##### ***Rising Star Award (2015-2016) (2 winners)***

This educator shows promise as an up and coming educator in the district and have employed creative teaching strategies early in their career. The individual has served 10 years or less as an educator.

##### ***Distinguished Urban Educator of the Year (2015-2016) (1 winner)***

This seasoned educator has demonstrated their passion for students and has served 11 or more years as an educator. Over the years they have employed exceptional teaching strategies, increased student achievement, demonstrated concern for students, faculty/staff, and is committed to high standards of professionalism. The recipient of this award can only be nominated by the Superintendent.

#### **STUDENT CATEGORIES**

##### ***Brains & Brawn Award (2015-2016) (2 winners)***

This individual is a student-athlete who has demonstrated leadership abilities on and off the court/field. This individual maintains high grades and also excels in extra-curricular activities. To be eligible for this award, the student-athlete must have a minimum GPA of 3.0 and be in grades 9-12.

##### ***Future Innovator Award (2015-2016) (2 winners)***

This is a student who excels in STEM related courses demonstrating high academic achievement in the areas of science, technology, engineering, or mathematics. This student must have a minimum GPA of 3.0 and be in grades 9-12 to be eligible for this award.

***Distinguished Urban Student of the Year (2015-2016) (1 winner)***

This student is a graduating senior who demonstrates leadership ability, respect, and is actively involved in the community. This student is also active within the school district and participates in school sponsored activities such as sports, student council, drama, or other clubs and organizations while maintaining high grades. This student must have a minimum GPA of 3.0 and be a senior (grade 12) to be eligible for this award. The recipient of this award can only be nominated by the Superintendent.

**SUMMER YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM**

The Summer Youth Apprenticeship Program provides Mercer County students (age 12-15) an opportunity to job shadow different career fields and earn a stipend. First beginning in the mid 1990's, this program has impacted many students, the majority of whom have graduated high school and have gone to college or military. This program operates from the end of June-mid August each summer and works with students on developing leadership skills, social skills, and life skills. Components of the program include, one-on-one interviewing, weekly enrichment group sessions, lunch with leaders series, career camp, and job shadowing. Students who successfully complete the program receive a stipend, achievement awards, commemorative t-shirt, and certificate of completion at the conclusion of the program.

**FALL GIVE BACK**

Student participants in the Nulites and Summer Youth Apprenticeship programs participated in a community service project to understand the importance of service learning. Youth and staff collected specific items for Joshua's Haven City Mission, a homeless men's shelter during our Annual Secret Santa Christmas Gift Collection. The items were a part of the shelter's "wish list" and helped defray costs of having to purchase the items themselves.



### **HOMELESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

The Shenango Valley Urban League, Inc. has been designated by the Mercer County Commissioners to administer the HAP Program. The purpose of the HAP program is two-fold. First, the program assists Mercer County residents in need of acquiring or maintaining rental housing and second, the program provides funding to the Emergency Shelter Program administered by the Salvation Army.

The rent assistance component assists homeless persons with verifiable income to be placed into more permanent rental housing or. For renters facing eviction and near homelessness the program assists the renter in resolving the necessary issues to maintain their current rental housing. The types of assistance consist of rental counseling, unit search, budget counseling, and a financial grant of \$350.00 toward the first month's rent or the delinquent rent.

Presently the financial assistance is capped at \$350.00 and is only available to clients in compliance with the guidelines of the program. All applicants must have a face-to-face interview with the Housing Counselor. Applicants must verify documentation attesting to the validity of their situation and income. The Housing Counselor contacts the landlords to validate the information and to seek the landlord's approval of the proposed housing remedy. Once a client has been assisted, the client is not eligible for financial assistance for a period of two years. During the 2015-2016 fiscal year (July-June), the Shenango Valley Urban League, Inc. assisted 123 individual rent cases which supported a total of 209 Mercer County resident adults and children.

In the Emergency Shelter Program administered by the Salvation Army, emergency shelter is defined as housing individuals facing imminent crisis with temporary overnight housing up to a period of one week. For the 2015-2016 fiscal year, the Salvation Army provided housing for 358 Mercer County adults and children. The amount of money sub-granted from the Shenango Valley Urban League, Inc. to the Salvation Army was \$7,741.00

### **HEMAP PROGRAM**

The Shenango Valley Urban League, Inc. is certified by HUD (Housing and Urban Development) to provide mortgage default counseling to homeowners facing foreclosure. During the 2015-2016 fiscal year, the Shenango Valley Urban League, Inc. processed 27 applications to the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) for emergency mortgage loan assistance through the states Homeowners Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program. In October 2010, the Shenango Valley Urban League, Inc. received a congratulatory Commendation Plaque from the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency for providing 27 years of mortgage counseling service to the state's HEMAP Program.

## HOUSING

Provided rental assistance to 123 individual households. Cumulative total of 209 adults and children.

Provided mortgage foreclosure assistance to 27 households facing delinquency.

Emergency shelter assistance provided by the Salvation Army, sub recipient of the Urban League, to 154 individual households that supported a cumulative total of 228 adults and children.

Provided financial support of \$42,080.00 in rental assistance and \$7,741.00 for emergency shelter.

## WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN



**Choose Healthy.  
Choose WIC!**

### **Pennsylvania Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is the sole funding source for the WIC Program, and it provides a grant used to prevent and improve nutrition-related health problems for women, infants, and children with healthy supplemental foods and nutrition services.

- WIC was authorized by Congress in 1972 and was implemented in Pennsylvania in May 1974.
- The program is administered through contracts with county and private non-profit agencies that deliver WIC services locally in all 67 counties at about 278 sites.

SVUL Inc. has been providing WIC services since April 1, 1978.

### **How WIC Help Families:**

- Offers screenings and referrals to health care and other services
- Gives advice for healthy eating
- Supports breastfeeding
- Provides healthy food

### **Program highlights:**

- Received continued funding from Pennsylvania Department of Health in the amount of \$911,551.00 for the WIC and Peer Counselor Project for FFY October 1, 2015 through September 30, 2016.
- Provided service in Mercer, Venango & Forest counties, with an average participation of 3,883 clients per month.
- Distributed 9,044 Farmers' Market coupons for produce and fruit to 1,537 children and



estimated 724 women for the past fiscal year.

**Nutrition Education and Breastfeeding Goals - October 1, 2015- September 30, 2016:**

- Improve the quality of nutrition education through formal observation and appropriate staff training.
- Increase breastfeeding awareness in the community

**Outreach Goals - October 1, 2016 - September 30, 2017:**

- Increase Local Agency Participation by 2%

**WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Program**

**“A Breastfeeding Support Program for Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women”**

The WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counseling Program is a support program for pregnant and breastfeeding women to help women initiate and continue breastfeeding with the help of Peer Counselors who are trained to assist by offering breastfeeding education, support and role modeling.

The breastfeeding peer counselor are mothers who have breastfed and have personal experience with breastfeeding and are trained to provides valuable support to increase breastfeeding initiation and duration rates.

The program is funded by USDA using the “Loving Support Model” to for a successful Peer Counseling Program for WIC.

The SVUL, Inc. recently implemented a “**Breastfeeding Café**” where mothers can meet in a pleasant setting to share stories of their breastfeeding experience and fellowship over a cup of tea and light refreshments.

To learn more about the WIC and Peer Counseling Program, check online at [www.health.pa.gov](http://www.health.pa.gov) or [www.pawic.com](http://www.pawic.com), or call 1-800-WIC-WINS (1-800-942-9467).

