



OCATO Spotlight

Are You Ready for the Busy HEAP Season?

OCATO Offers Free Customer Service Training

It's almost time for the Winter Crisis Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) to begin, and with it, increased numbers of inpatient clients desperate to keep their heat on through the cold winter. Is your staff prepared for the influx of customers? The Ohio Community Action Training Organization (OCATO) can provide free on-site customer service training to members of OACAA.

Anita Maldonado, chief operating officer for IMPACT Community Action and an OCATO Internal Consultant (IC) who provides customer service training explains, "The OCATO Customer Service training provides standardized, state-sanctioned information to ensure the entire Community Action Agency (CAA) network operates and administers programs and services consistently and within regulations and guidelines. With the high turnover or seasonal changes of frontline staff, especially in the HEAP season, customer service training is vital because it is the first customer contact and it sets the tone of the customer experience. In this competitive environment, customer service needs to be a priority. It may be the deciding factor if a customer returns for services or turns to our competitors for the same service. Additionally, it allows for the open exchange of information and practical, real-life applications to ensure best practices are established from the bottom up, as well as from the top down."

Customer service is very important for CAAs. "The number one reason for our existence should be to provide the best service possible to our customers," said Jeffrey Diver, executive director for Supports to Encourage Low-Income Families (SELF), the CAA in Butler County, and OCATO IC. "Sometimes we can become jaded in serving our customers due to those few challenging clients. OCATO's training helps staff members re-focus on how to best serve our clients."

The course provides:

- Basic building blocks for customer service
- Tools and strategies to strengthen the relationship with the customer
- Engaging, hands-on activities

"The participants will be enlightened and equipped, allowing a clearer understanding of the needs of the customer; therefore, empowering the participant to better serve the customer," Maldonado said of the course. "I think one of the most important aspects of the training is how nonverbal gestures sometimes speak more than verbal communication," Diver explained. "Remembering how our verbal and nonverbal communications work together to send a message is critical to successful customer service. Our customers may come to our agencies with the weight of the world on their shoulders; they all should be treated with dignity and respect. This training gives participants techniques for doing just that. With client need and tensions ever-rising, this training helps participants focus on how to provide the best customer service."

If you are interested in receiving customer service training for your agency, contact Josh Summer at (614) 224-8500 or josh@oacaa.org