

## **COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING ESSAY #1**

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My CEL assignment involves working in a Head Start classroom organized by Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties.

*Why, when, and by whom was your organization founded or opened?*

Head Start is a national program sponsored by the federal government (Community Action Partnership 2016). In the program, the federal government provides funding to local and state agencies that then offer services to poor families that have young children in them. Head Start money mostly goes for preschool education programs, but it also goes for health and nutrition services, parenting education, and other family support services.

The program was founded as part of President Lyndon Johnson's 1964 "War on Poverty" and "Great Society" campaigns (Head Start 2016a).

In 1965, President Johnson said: "I believe that this is one of the most constructive, and one of the most sensible, and also one of the most exciting programs that this nation has ever undertaken" (Head Start 2016a). Fifty years later, on the fiftieth anniversary of the program, President Obama said: "For millions of families, Head Start has been a lifeline. And for millions of kids, it's been the start of a better life" (Head Start 2016a).

Community Action—then called something different—was launched immediately upon the formation of the Head Start program in 1965 by St Paul mayor George Vavoulis and United Way planner William Hoffman (Community Action Partnership 2016). It is the main local agency in St Paul that provides Head Start services for low income children.

*What problems does the organization seek to solve, or what issues does it address?*

Head Start—as well as Community Action Partnership—has always been designed to help disadvantaged pre-school children (and their families) so that those children are ready for school. Over time, it has evolved from a summer program for pre-school children to a more comprehensive program designed to help with a variety of influences on children's early development (Head Start 2016a)

*How does your organization try to solve those problems or address those issues?*

As noted above, Head start offers early education services, nutrition and health services, and family support services.

In addition to traditional Head Start services, Community Action Partnership provides programs on energy assistance, energy conservation, and self-sufficiency.

*Who are the people that your organization serves or helps?*

Children (0 to 5) who are classified as impoverished according to federal guidelines are eligible for the Head Start program. More than 11,200 children in Minnesota were eligible for Head Start in 2015 (Head Start 2016b). Because of racial/ethnic inequalities in poverty rates in

America, Head Start participants in the U.S. are disproportionately racial/ethnic minorities. In 2015, about half were white and half were other races/ethnicities (Head Start 2016b).

Community Action Partnership serves more than 25,000 children each year.

*How does your organization identify its clientele, or how does its clientele come to be served by your organization?*

To participate in Head Start, families must reach out to a local organization that provides Head Start services. They apply, which involves documenting their eligibility (which is based on income). Many Head Start programs advertise in poorer neighborhoods, encouraging poor families to enroll their children.

*Where does the money come from to support your organization?*

The federal government. In 2015, the federal government provided more than \$8.2 billion for Head Start programs (Head Start 2016b).

## References

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