

Member Agency Spotlight

Mid Central Community Action



Program History

Mid Central Community Action, Inc. (MCCA), the domestic violence program in Bloomington, Illinois, has a rich history of women taking action against the violence in their community. Carol Reitan, Normal's first female mayor, was a spearhead for developing the domestic violence program in Bloomington. Reitan became the Executive Director/CEO of MCCA, serving from 1981-1985. During this time, the agency took over the local Countering Domestic

Violence Program, which was a massive steppingstone in addressing domestic violence in Central Illinois. In 1987, the program was able to establish shelter services and expand on the assistance they could offer survivors. Their shelter is known as Neville House. In 1993, they began a collaboration with the State's Attorney's office and the agency's court advocates.

MCCA and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 Pandemic has deeply affected domestic violence programs throughout Illinois, and we have all been required to adjust our services to keep survivors and staff safe. MCCA is a great example of a program that has continuously moved forward and provided effective services to survivors despite the challenges and complications they have experienced. We spoke with Michell Cervantes, the Countering Domestic Violence Program Director at MCCA, about the challenges and successes they have experienced throughout the last two years.

According to Cervantes, MCCA has always held staff and survivor safety as a top priority, even prior to the pandemic. However, recent events have brought everyone's safety needs to another level. Cervantes believes the most challenging part about the pandemic is navigating through changing guidelines and deciding what is required to provide safety in shelter. Another challenge that MCCA has experienced, much like many other domestic violence programs in the state, is the inability to fill all necessary positions and receive qualified applicants when positions are open. Cervantes noted that every time they think they are close to being fully staffed, something prevents that from happening.

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Even though MCCA has experienced challenges throughout the pandemic, they have experienced the strength and motivation that comes with having a dedicated team of staff members who keep the safety of survivors and other staff at the forefront. MCCA has not experienced an outbreak of COVID-19 at their shelter, and they believe that is due to the effective guidelines and practices they have continued to follow. They have limited their shelter space to one family per bedroom, and only one family is able to use the kitchen and shared computer at one time. They are willing to book hotel rooms for survivors if the shelter fills up, but they have only had to do so once. Staff complete temperature checks on everyone staying and working in the shelter every day, and everyone is required to wear a mask while in the shelter. They have been able to utilize Cares Act funding to hire a cleaning service that comes once a week to clean and sanitize the entire shelter.

Cervantes emphasized how wonderful the CDV staff has been throughout this pandemic. Even with staffing shortages, mandatory quarantines, and constantly experiencing the unexpected, staff has remained supportive of each other. When asked to give a piece of advice, Cervantes said, "Remember that we are all very capable of getting through this pandemic, but we need each other to get through it." We are all experiencing a whole new level of compassion fatigue and physical fatigue. We need to show kindness and support to each other. To everyone reading, Cervantes says, "Just hang in there... and sanitize."



Interviewed:
Michell Cervantes,
Program Director

MCCA Countering Domestic Violence Program Staff
at an agency fundraising event
Pictured: Rachel Sizemore (Outreach Coordinator),
Jessica Martin (Residential Services Coordinator),
and Michell Cervantes (Program Director)



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