

# 2025 Annual Report

Celebrating  
60 Years of  
Community Action





# Mission, Vision and Values

## Mission

- West Central helps people and communities reach their fullest potential by cultivating and coordinating resources, building partnerships, and advocating for change.

## Vision

- West Central envisions a region where people and communities are thriving.

## Values

- Equity, Education, Encouragement, Empowerment, and Excellence

*As I complete my first year as CEO, I am so proud of how West Central has navigated the challenges of this past year. Despite government shutdowns and funding cuts, we haven't just survived—we've thrived. Our mission to help neighbors reach their fullest potential is more alive than ever, fueled by great partnerships and a shared passion for change. None of this would be possible without the heart and soul of this agency: our incredibly hard-working and talented staff, our committed and supportive Board of Directors, and our selfless volunteers. Thank you for standing with me and for working tirelessly to coordinate the resources and advocacy our community deserves. I am honored to be on this journey with you.*

- Mary Lou Schussler, CEO

# Board of Directors

## West Central Missouri Community Action Agency Board of Directors FY 2025



**Bates County**  
Brenda Darr



**Bates County**  
Alvin Griffin



**Bates County**  
Trent Nelson



**Benton County**  
Thomas Gage



**Benton County**  
Larry Berry



**Cass County**  
Louise Hall



**Cass County**  
Dennis Daughtery



**Cedar County**  
Dan Yoder



**Cedar County**  
Ron Alumbaugh



**Henry County**  
Fred Bunch



**Henry County**  
Mark Larson



**Hickory County**  
Shirley Parker  
Morse



**Morgan County**  
Sunday Unger



**St. Clair County**  
Gene Hartley



**St. Clair County**  
Laura Smith



**St. Clair County**  
Matthew Noakes



**Vernon County**  
Martha Sander



**Vernon County**  
Joe Wilson



### Board Term 2023-2025

#### Officers

Fred Bunch, Board Chair  
Martha Sander, Board Vice-Chair  
Dan Yoder, Board Treasurer  
Laura Smith, Board Secretary

#### Executive Committee

Fred Bunch  
Martha Sander  
Dan Yoder  
Laura Smith  
Larry Berry  
Alvin Griffin  
Shirley Morse

The Board of Directors is an 18 member tripartite board representing Low Income Representatives, Local Elected Officials and Private Industry Representatives within our core nine county service area of Bates, Benton, Cass, Cedar, Henry, Hickory, Morgan, St. Clair, and Vernon counties.

# Meet Our Team

## LEADERSHIP TEAM



Left to Right:

**Amy Anderson**, Chief Housing Assistance Officer

**Jana Witt**, Chief Development and Brand Officer

**Chris Richardson-McQueen**, Chief Housing Enrichment Officer

**Kelly Ast**, Chief Regional Mobility Officer

**Jamie Oberly**, Chief Community Services Officer

**Sheridan Garman-Neeman**, New Growth Chief Operations Officer

**Julie Engeman**, Chief Administrative Officer

**Aaron Franklin**, President and Chief Financial Officer

**Dray Schenker**, Chief Technology Officer

**Mary Lou Schussler**, Chief Executive Officer

## PATHWAYS TO EXCELLENCE

West Central Missouri Community Action Agency is honored to be among only **seven** community action agencies nationwide to achieve the Gold Tier status through the Pathways to Excellence Program.

This recognition reflects the dedication, collaboration, and accountability that defines West Central's work.



# Fiscal Year 2025 Grant Revenue

<b>Department of Health &amp; Human Services</b>	<b>2,988,066</b>
<b>Department of Housing &amp; Urban Development</b>	<b>10,830,002</b>
<b>Department of Energy</b>	<b>739,136</b>
<b>Department of Agriculture</b>	<b>876,990</b>
<b>Department of Labor</b>	<b>89,127</b>
<b>Department of Treasury</b>	<b>166,607</b>
<b>Small Business Administration</b>	<b>173,083</b>
<b>Regional Mobility</b>	<b>2,309,969</b>
<b>United Way</b>	<b>24,900</b>
<b>Other Grant Revenue</b>	<b>353,374</b>
<b>TOTAL GRANT REVENUE</b>	<b>\$18,551,254</b>



# Community Services

West Central's Family and Community Engagement Strategies (FACES) program empowers individuals, families, and communities across our region by connecting them with vital services and resources. Last year, our Family Engagement team supported 997 unique individuals in 482 households, providing comprehensive assistance tailored to local needs. Through **FACES**, we deliver a broad spectrum of support—from career coaching and tuition assistance to food distribution and utility relief—so every household can access what they need to thrive.

## Examples of the services provided include:

- SkillUP/Workforce Enrollments - 22
- Career Coaching - 55
- Tuition Support - 10
- Financial Coaching - 57
- Case Management - 207
- Food Pantry Distribution - 789



When families struggle with utility shut-offs or heating costs, **LIHEAP** provides critical relief. But beyond the numbers, the real impact is seen in the faces of those helped.

- Applications processed: 6,031
- Individuals avoiding utility shut-off: 1,317
- Individuals whose Energy Service was restored after disconnection: 141
- ECIP Utility Payments: 5,577
- Total Energy Assistance Benefits Paid: \$1,612,577.80
- Total Winter ECIP Benefits Paid: \$1,027,576.25
- Total Summer ECIP Benefits Paid: \$459,476.16

**Workforce YOU** brings together businesses, nonprofits, public agencies, and community leaders to address barriers that limit workforce participation and economic growth. Challenges such as childcare, transportation, housing, and education affect both workers and employers, impacting families, businesses, and the prosperity of our region. Through strategic partnerships and innovative approaches, Workforce YOU develops practical solutions that expand opportunities, strengthen Missouri's workforce, and build pathways to employment, stability, and economic vitality.

## 2025 Highlights

- **Child Care:** Advanced Tri-Share pilot models and hosted regional asset mapping to improve access and affordability
- **Transportation:** Convened partners and transit providers through summits to connect workers with jobs
- **Housing:** Collaborated with developers, landlords, and funders to expand attainable housing options
- **Education & Training:** Supported expos and programs aligned with employer needs, leading to living-wage careers



# Housing Assistance

West Central Housing Assistance programs provide essential services to help families secure and maintain safe, affordable housing.

**Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program** – Offers rental assistance to help low-income families, seniors, and individuals with disabilities afford decent and sanitary housing in the private market.

**Home Ownership Voucher (HOV) Program** – Allows eligible families receiving HCV assistance to apply their voucher toward purchasing a home with ongoing support for homeownership expenses.

**Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program** – Aims to assist HCV program participants in becoming economically self-sufficient. The program encourages participants to increase their earned income, build financial stability, and reduce their dependency on rental assistance.

**Transition Services** – Rapidly connects individuals and families experiencing homelessness to temporary housing solutions through time-limited financial assistance and targeted support services.



FSS Participant receiving her escrow check and becoming a Homeowner!

## HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

HOUSING ASSISTANCE PAYMENTS - \$7,514,784

HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PARTICIPANTS - 991

HOME OWNERSHIP ASSISTANCE - \$32,208

FSS PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS- 80

FSS GRADUATES - 13

FSS ESCROW ACCOUNT FUNDS DISBURSED TO GRADUATES- \$177,586

HOME OWNERSHIP PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS - 8

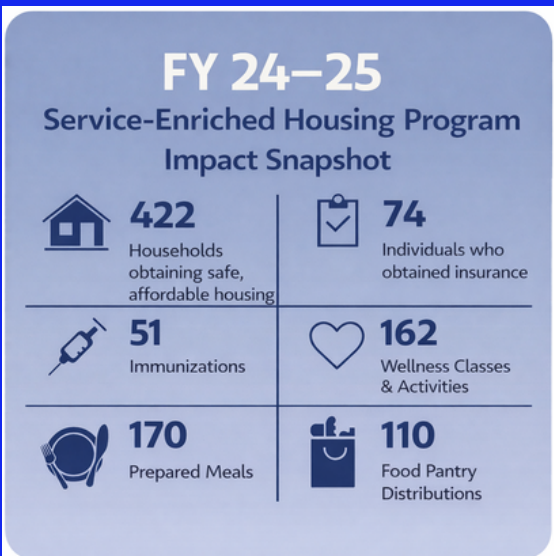
## TRANSITION SERVICES

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION ASSISTANCE PROVIDED: \$10,905

# Housing Enrichment HeRO & Weatherization

The Home Enrichment section of Housing Enrichment manages the Weatherization and Home Energy Repair Opportunity (HeRO) programs. The HeRO program provides essential home repairs and accessibility modifications for income-qualified homeowners, ensuring homes are safe, healthy, and secure. With up to \$22,500 available per home, HeRO addresses critical health and safety needs helping families remain in their homes with dignity and peace of mind. Weatherization Assistance Program helps families create safe, efficient, and affordable homes through two key programs. Our team provides free home energy audits and critical repairs to prevent hazards, improve comfort, and protect long-term housing stability. Through Weatherization Assistance, we offer insulation, air sealing, and energy-saving upgrades at no cost to eligible households. These improvements make homes healthier and more sustainable, saving families an average of \$283 or more annually on utility bills. Together, we make homes safer and more affordable.

## Housing Enrichment Multi Family Housing



West Central owns and manages 12 affordable, service-enriched communities across seven counties, providing safe, welcoming spaces that foster stability, connection, and opportunity for residents of all ages.

Eligible applicants pay income-based rent, typically 30% of household income, with deductions for medical, senior, child, and utility expenses. Demand is high—waiting lists range from one month to two years—highlighting the urgent need for affordable housing.

Through our Service-Enriched Housing Program, we deliver tailored on-site services that strengthen communities and improve quality of life. From health and wellness to education and social support, we help residents thrive.

### Contact us

about finding your new home!

Email: [forrent@wcmcaa.org](mailto:forrent@wcmcaa.org)

Call 660-476-2185, ext. 1504

Text: 660-466-2134

[www.wcmcaa.org](http://www.wcmcaa.org)



# ■ Food Systems

The New Growth Food Systems program champions local and regional initiatives that support farm-to-fork practices.

## **Farm to Fork Food Summit and Expo**

The Farm to Fork Summit and Expo is an annual event for food and farm businesses in west central Missouri and eastern Kansas. It helps participants gain insights and forge connections, sparking collaborative ventures and fresh business prospects. This contributes to a thriving community with access to quality food for a healthy lifestyle. Participation in 2025 included 161 attendees, 29 exhibitors, a luncheon with locally sourced foods, one keynote speaker plus a working demonstration, and eight breakout sessions. This united effort strengthens the workforce, supports employers, and creates lasting positive

## **Beginning Farmers and Ranchers**

The 2025 Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program connected 15 farmer mentors with 11 beginning farmers and administered \$2,320 in training scholarships. This program helps farm entrepreneurs with less than 10 years of experience succeed quickly. Participants gain access to mentorships, business guidance, and vital resources, benefiting both individual farmers and rural economies.

## **Heartland Regional Food Business Center**

The Heartland Regional Food Business Center aims to build a more resilient, responsive, and competitive food system by providing localized and proactive assistance to small, mid-sized, and diverse food and farm businesses, as well as local and regional food sector initiatives. Initially funded by the USDA in 2023, it was one of 12 Regional Food Business Centers nationwide. New Growth was co-lead alongside University of Nebraska-Lincoln and partnered with 32 organizations. As one of the assistance providers through HRFBC, New Growth assisted 19 new farm clients, held 56 technical assistance meetings, and facilitated 57 farm-to-market resource connections in 2025. Across the HRFBC region, \$3.7M in Business Builder grants was awarded to 89 businesses. In late 2025, HRFBC transitioned to foundation funded Heartland Food Business Coalition.



[www.wcmcaa.org](http://www.wcmcaa.org)  
[www.newgrowthmo.org](http://www.newgrowthmo.org)



# New Growth Transit

New Growth Transit, an affiliate of West Central Missouri Community Action Agency, supports rides to residents throughout a 14-county service area through a volunteer driver network. Counties served include Bates, Benton, Cass, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Miller, Morgan, Polk, St. Clair, and Vernon. Rides are scheduled at least 48 hours in advance for essential trips within a 200-mile radius, including medical appointments, therapy, pharmacy, work, groceries, and banking.

Volunteer drivers receive the federal mileage reimbursement, which doesn't affect taxable income. They are trained, insured through CIMA Volunteer Insurance once certified, and set their own schedules and destinations. Many say the role offers more than reimbursement—it provides connection and fulfillment. *“The importance of your mission at New Growth Transit could never be overstated. You guys and what you do is quite literally saving lives.”* – NGT Volunteer Driver, 2025

## Fiscal Year 2024-2025

Miles Provided: 571,469

Unique Riders: 1,534

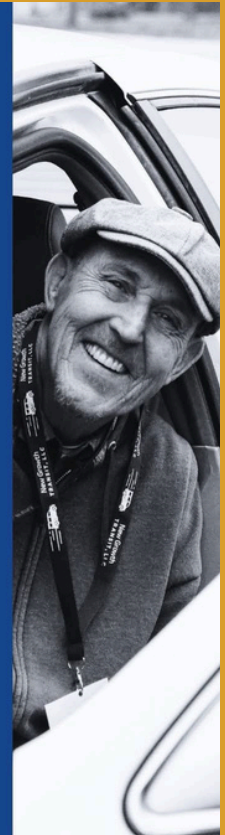
Volunteer Drivers: 53

Volunteer Hours: 12,699



## WHAT'S A VOLUNTEER DRIVER

- They choose their availability & where willing to drive.
- Because driving their own car, no special license needed, & volunteer insurance is provided.
- Reimbursed \$0.70 per mile - it's a reimbursement, NOT an income, but covers more than just gas.
- Many say they started for monetary reasons, but now love “having a reason to get out” and helping people.



For more information call 417-283-7991 or email [transportation@wcmcaa.org](mailto:transportation@wcmcaa.org)

# New Growth

## Women's Business Center

New Growth Women's Business Center advances rural entrepreneurs in all stages of business development and growth. We focus on the power and potential of rural women to employ themselves, provide jobs for others, and build their local economies and communities. We are coaches and connectors. We make sure your business has the right resource at the right time. Services are available to men and women and generally at no cost or low cost.









## New Growth Capital

New Growth Capital is New Growth's financing arm. New Growth Capital provides rural entrepreneurs with microenterprise loans from \$500 - \$50,000. New Growth Capital also helps individuals and entrepreneurs join the financial mainstream with credit building services.

Credit Building is a free, nonprofit service available from New Growth Capital to help individuals and entrepreneurs establish or improve credit scores. A good credit score is necessary to access employment, housing, and bank financing, and for going into business and saves money through lower borrowing costs, insurance rates, and more. Credit building can move more rural people and small businesses into the financial mainstream.

Microlending offers microloans to startup and existing rural businesses that are unable to find financing elsewhere. Our goal is for microloan borrowers to grow and graduate to traditional bank loans.

Contact  
[wbcinfo@newgrowthmo.org](mailto:wbcinfo@newgrowthmo.org)

NEW GROWTH WOMEN'S BUSINESS CENTER FY 2024-25		
	Number of unique clients served	492
	Jobs supported	511
	Capital infusions	\$200,651
	New businesses started	2
	Credit as an Asset Workshops	10
	Webinars	17

# Contact Us



660-476-2185



info@wcmcaa.org



www.wcmcaa.org



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## West Central Missouri Community Action Agency

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New Growth Transit: 417-283-7991 or transportation@wcmcaa.org

Business Hours: Monday-Thursday, 7:30 am to 5:00 pm

