

The strength of HCC comes from the work and dedication of our partners. Through collaboration and shared goals we work together to improve the health and quality of life for those in our community. This is why it is important for HCC as a coalition to bring recognition to all of the amazing things that our partners accomplish every day!

We begin our first partner recognition with Connecting Communities in Action (CCA) (*a.k.a. Cattaraugus Community Action*)! Two HCC members had the honor to have a brief virtual interview with Tina Zerbian, CEO and discuss some of the big news of the agency as well as the services, goals, and our long-standing partnership.

First, it is important to recognize that CCA has partnered with Healthy Cattaraugus County; drug-free coalition since the inception. In fact, at any given time since HCC formed in 2009, there have been one or more CCA employees who have remained active in the coalition over the years.

During our conversation we had the opportunity to learn about some big news and changes that CCA has recently experienced. CCA just recently celebrated their 55th birthday and they have come a long way! The organization had its beginnings with minimal funding trying to address poverty in the area. Over the years the organization has expanded the services they provide as well as their reach to include Cattaraugus, Allegany, Chautauqua, Wyoming, and Livingston counties. Based on these expanded regional services, the name Cattaraugus Community Action was no longer an adequate representation of the organization. After, a revisit of the organizational vision and mission they decided that Connecting Communities in Action with a new tagline “building resilient communities” was a better fit as it is an expression of what the organization is trying to do. Now when you go to their website <https://www.ccaction.org/> you will experience a refreshed, more inclusive feel and see the new name and logo.

We also spoke about how the services that CCA provides help to contribute to the mission of HCC in preventing youth substance use and providing education to change community social norms surrounding use. As Tina discussed, every service that CCA provides directly impacts the social determinants of health for the community members they serve whether it be helping people with home repairs or offering therapy or advocacy services for victims of domestic violence or sexual assault. Everything that Connecting Communities in Action does is “in support of family stability and personal growth” stated Tina.

CCA has also taken the lead in the Trauma-Informed Coalition in which Tina discusses that “if we address trauma and its impact on a child’s developing brain then we can better address substance abuse and other social and health related outcomes,” and that “we should be working to build resilient children and families in our communities”. We also spoke about some of the successes and challenges that the Trauma Informed Coalition has faced. One of the biggest successes has been the community education aspect as there have been a number of trained facilitators among the coalition who have provided showings of the trauma-informed

resiliency film titled “The Biology of Stress and the Science of Hope.” The film has been viewed by over 700 people in the community including schools, healthcare providers, other agencies and community members. The coalition also has trained members to facilitate another education called NEAR which stands for Neuroscience, Epigenetics, Adverse Childhood Experiences, and Resilience. Anyone interested in this training which can be tailored to your specific group should contact CCA for more information. The biggest challenge that the Trauma Informed Coalition continues to face is the lack of funding to provide a paid staff position in order to fully launch some of the initiatives that the group has been working to take action on. While they have received some small grants and investments from partners, funding for the coalition would help to provide many more resources to the community.

Our interview also led to a discussion on how HCC can help CCA reach their goals, and as Tina remarked, collaboration is key and that “it’s only when we come together as a community with other community organizations, with other providers and neighbors, that we can truly create self-healing communities”. She also discussed that it’s the work of the coalitions and other agencies that will help our communities to break down the barriers that we encounter in helping others and become more inclusive.

Finally we talked about the one thing that everyone should know about Connecting Communities in Action which is that those who have sought their services have stated that they “finally felt seen or heard”. This is a true testament to the amazing work that CCA does in the community every day! Thank you for being an HCC partner!

Vision Statement: “CCA envisions a nation that creates opportunities for all people to thrive; builds strong, resilient communities; and ensures a more equitable society.”