

# ***News Release***

**Lifeline for the Empowerment and Development of Consumers, Inc.**

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**Lifeline, Inc. Staff Member Completes Community Action Leadership Academy  
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**PAINESVILLE, Ohio**— Lifeline, Inc., Lake County's Community Action Agency, is honored to announce that Michelle Mezaris, Family Development Specialist for Lifeline, Inc., has completed all requirements and graduated from the Community Action Leadership Academy, CALA, as part of its seventh class.

The Community Action Leadership Academy is a hands-on training program which helps prepare employees of community action agencies for leadership positions within their agencies and communities. CALA's curriculum provides leadership and management skill-building opportunities to professionals in the 52 community action agencies throughout Ohio.

CALA is a year-long professional development course with a curriculum that includes concepts such as management, self-knowledge, strategic visioning and communication. The goal of the program is to deepen the knowledge and understanding of the history, opportunities, resources and challenges of the Ohio Community Action Network and to motivate future leaders to think strategically. Each monthly session occurs in a different location in Ohio, which creates a unique opportunity for the participants to learn about the culture of Community Action and to build a network of professional resources that help to strengthen their own agencies and communities.

Mezaris, who joined the Lifeline, Inc. staff in June 2006, felt that CALA was a great experience.

“CALA allowed me to learn new things about myself and connect with other community action staff,” said Mezaris.

Lifeline, Inc. Executive Director, Carrie Dotson said that she is very proud of Mezaris’ accomplishments.

“I’m really excited that Michelle had the opportunity to go through CALA because it is such a valuable experience,” said Dotson. “CALA not only teaches you the underlying principles of the Community Action mission and the skills that go into managing a Community Action Agency, but it also gives you the opportunity to really build relationships with colleagues at other CAAs in Ohio and Michelle did that.”

One valuable component of the CALA curriculum is the completion of a project. Each class member completes a project that will benefit their agency. The project encourages the CALA participants to apply leadership skills directly in their workplace and provides an opportunity for learn self-realization and staff development.

Mezaris’ project was to lead Lifeline, Inc.’s efforts to obtain certification through the Ohio Department of Mental Health. The project involved collecting data and documentation, creating a planning document and advising on revisions to the existing agency policies and by-laws to meet ODMH compliance. Mezaris’ project was highly successful—Lifeline, Inc. was awarded ODMH certification as a mental health agency in January 2009.

“Getting the ODMH certification was a huge accomplishment. I am looking forward to the new opportunities in programming and funding,” said Mezaris about her project results. “I will be able to see the difference I made at Lifeline.”

Dotson agreed that Mezaris’ project success will have far-reaching effects on the agency.

“Michelle’s project was an overwhelming undertaking, but she managed it very well,” Dotson said. “The results of this project, obtaining ODMH certification, will open up a variety of

opportunities for Lifeline to grow and better serve our customers. It also makes us somewhat unique in the Community Action network.”

Dotson said that Mezaris is the third Lifeline, Inc. staff to graduate from the CALA program. Dotson completed the program in 2004 and Cate Hearn, Health Services Coordinator completed it in 2006.

The CALA program began in 2002. It is a program of the Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development and was developed with support from the Ohio Department of Development.

Lifeline for the Empowerment and Development of Consumers was founded in 1973 with the mission of helping Lake County residents by providing them assistance and life skills programming that is designed to increase self-sufficiency. In 1980 Lifeline became a participating agency of the United Way of Lake County, UWLC, and in 1987 was designated a community action agency by the Ohio Department of Development, ODOD.

Today Lifeline continues with the same mission of helping Lake County’s low-income residents break the cycle of poverty and make the transition from agency-dependency to self-sufficiency. Lifeline’s current programming includes services in the health, housing and family development areas. Our motto is ‘first to help, then to teach.’ Lifeline is currently funded by the UWLC and by grants through the ODOD, the City of Mentor, the Lake County Board of Commissioners, the Western Reserve Junior Service League, the CVS Foundation, the Ohio Housing Trust Fund, the Bikers Aiding Local Diabetics and through private donors.