



MAINE WELFARE DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER ■ ■ MARCH 2021

Mission Statement

Establish and promote equitable, efficient and standardized administration of General Assistance.

Encourage the professional development, growth, and knowledge base of those who administer General Assistance.

Advocate for the municipalities and citizens that we serve.

Actively promote and present our program needs to the Legislature and citizens by creating a greater public awareness of the importance and the benefits of equitable, efficient and standardized General Assistance administration.

mainewelfaredirectors.org

MWDA Board – Here to Serve You!

Thanks for taking the time to read through this issue of the Maine Welfare Directors' Association newsletter. We hope you find the information helpful. I wanted to take a moment to share with you the ways in which the MWDA Board is working to serve all GA administrators across the state. First and foremost, we provide training to all those overseeing GA programs. Some are full-time directors, others are staff members who wear multiple hats, and still others are members of their town's select board. Because of the broad range of experience among GA administrators, we provide training tailored to those with very little knowledge of GA to those who have many years under their belt. In the past, we have offered two GA Basics sessions, two GA Advanced sessions, a Winter Issues session, and a Spring Seminar yearly.

In the beginning of 2020, our intent was to provide the same offerings, but COVID gave us both a challenge and opportunity to do things differently. COVID sidelined all of us for most of 2020 as we scrambled to keep our own programs running smoothly under the "new normal." As 2020 drew to a close, we began to plan for our first virtual GA Basics training. As one who's not particularly tech-savvy, it was a bit nerve wracking, but it was more than worth it. We had over 120 participants from all corners of Maine. It was so nice to see participation from municipalities that had never before sent staff to these trainings – primarily due to travel costs. Despite some technical glitches along the way, a very understanding audience gave the training very positive reviews. Next up is the Virtual Spring Seminar on April 27th. We're hoping for an equally impressive turnout and believe we have a great program lined up for you. Looking ahead, we'll return to in-person training, but it will be mixed with more virtual trainings that allow for greater participation. Ultimately, we hope to record trainings so they'll be available on-demand on the MWDA website.

Speaking of the MWDA website, it's another way in which the Board works for you. With much help from the Maine Municipal Association, we've created a website mainewelfaredirectors.org that has all the information you'll need to run your programs. The GA statutes and ordinances are available along with a wealth of forms you can adapt for your program. The website is showing its age, and we've allocated money in this year's budget to make some much needed improvements. We want the website

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CAP Information

Denise Murray ■ Health/Welfare Director

Hello to all General Assistance Welfare Directors, Administrators, and Caseworkers,

Some of you may be very new at processing General Assistance applications, and you may not be aware of local resources in your area. Local CAP Agencies have a variety of services they provide to residents in a specific county. Their services range from Energy/Housing Services that include the following: weatherization for homes, assistance with electric bills, fuel assistance for heat. Classes/Coaching: that can help with foreclosure prevention and provide education to new home buyers. There are also transportation services, and childcare services, and many other programs. Currently, the Covid 19 Rent Relief Assistance is handled by the CAP agency.

If you do not know about the CAP Agency in your area, now is a good time to go to their website or give them a call to find out what kind of assistance they provide in your area. Once you get the information, you will be able to pass it on to your clients.

For your convenience, the following link will give you the location and contact information for the CAP agency in your area:

<https://www.mainehousing.org/programs-services/energy/liheap-agency-contacts>



**Maine Welfare
Directors Association**
2021 Spring
Training Seminar

April 27, 2021

Remote Access – Zoom

EDUCATION • NETWORKING

Check the MWDA website: www.maine-welfare-directors.org
for registration coming soon!

MWDA Board - Here to Serve You! - - continued

to be a user-friendly resource for anyone working in a GA program.

The MWDA Board members are also active legislatively. When bills are presented that pertain to GA, Board members offer testimony both in writing and in person. We're seen as a resource by the legislature and are often called upon to provide our expertise during work sessions tied to GA or other social service-related bills. We're also contacted by individual legislators with questions pertaining to GA or the ways in which our programs are impacted by bills relating to such things as TANF, MaineCare, and SNAP.

Perhaps most importantly, we're here for you whenever you have questions or need help with your program. Contact information for each Board member is posted on our website, and you're always welcome to reach out to us. I receive calls or emails quite frequently and thoroughly enjoy the interaction with my counterparts across the state. If there's one thing I've learned in my 12+ years of GA administration, it's that it's a tough job. I'm constantly reaching out to other Board members and administrators seeking advice or guidance. Sometimes there are no easy answers in a given situation, and it's nice to have other opinions!

Thanks again for taking the time to read through our newsletter. We welcome suggestions and articles for inclusion in the next issue. Have a wonderful spring, and I hope to "see" you at our Spring Seminar!

Rindy Fogler, President
MWDA

Portland General Assistance/Challenges/Successes

By Ryan Gomeau ▪ Portland GA Manager/MWDA Board Member

The landscape of General Assistance looks different depending where one is located, how the program is operating, and where one is applying. The past year has brought with it a heightened awareness of the General Assistance program throughout the state of Maine for many, as more people than ever are seeking assistance with their basic needs and asking how to apply. I would like to give a little insight into what it looks like supporting the staff and applicants I manage in Portland, and to discuss the challenges many have faced throughout the past year. Changes come about by outside forces, whether that is a policy change, or operational change within the department. This past year has challenged anyone who may be change adverse, to adopt a different attitude in order to be successful in the implementation of the General Assistance program in their municipality, while also being a good steward of the municipality's monies and resources.

Portland has been working nonstop (seven days a week for most weeks), and also with help of some community partners, in meeting the challenge to permanently house and temporarily provide (emergency shelter) to unhoused individuals and residents, in order to meet their basic needs. While Portland has a municipal run shelter called the Oxford Street Shelter, for many, primarily due to COVID19, this was not an option for emergency shelter for a period of time given capacity restrictions. As a result, we/Portland GA have had to take more applications for emergency shelter and other basic needs, than ever. When I look back at some of the data, I can still feel the pressure of last June, when we saw and processed a total of 1,613 applications. The months following were not far off from that number, with an overall average of 1,229

applications monthly. In 2020, Portland General Assistance processed a total of 14,748 applications. I share this data in hopes of highlighting the imaginable challenges with processing that number of applications at this office, while supporting all involved, staff and applicants.

As outbreaks, mandates/operational guidance, and Executive Orders change, so does Portland General Assistance (and elsewhere) in order to meet the needs. Lately, all applications are done either via phone, or via a small access window opening to a parking lot where documents are submitted, or vouchers given directly to the applicants. Many people took advantage of technology such as email, to submit documents/receipts/paperwork, and then were uploaded to the client's cases.

I can say that this past year has left me questioning if what "we" are doing is working, and I would like to believe that it is to some degree. I know that at Portland GA have provided assistance to a very large group of people that were not able to meet their basic needs, for one reason or another. I'm thankful that we have a new year to gain more understanding and experiences that will shape how we will effectively support the community, and continue to be responsible stewards of Portland municipality's monies and resources. I am lucky to have a great team of colleagues to lean on, and look forward to working with you/other municipalities, with a shared goal of implementing the GA program in accordance with the statute. The challenge is great, but we will persevere, and continue to achieve many accomplishments.

mainewelfaredirectors.org

MWDA

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Date	Day/Time	Event	Location
January 15 th	Friday 9:30 am	Executive Board Meeting	Zoom
January 21 st	Thursday 9:00 am - Noon	Introduction to GA webinar	Zoom
March 5 th	Thursday TBD	Professional Development committee mtg	Zoom
April 27th	Tuesday, varies	Spring Training Seminar & Advanced GA training	Zoom
July		Executive Board Organizational Meeting	TBD
September		GA Basics	TBD
September		Advanced GA	TBD
October		Executive Board Meeting	TBD
December 3 rd		Winter Issues	Pending MMA