



*Pictured above, Joyce Allen CAPCO Adult Education Coordinator, Dr. Donna Beegle, Lindy Glennon, CAPCO Executive Director*

### **Cortland, New York -- The Newest Opportunity Community**

Cortland, New York – It took several years to get funding, but Lindy Glennon, Executive Director of Cortland County Community Action Program, Inc. (CAPCO), finally secured a grant through the Alliance for Economic Inclusion to begin the process last March for Cortland County to become an "Opportunity Community," a Beegle program designed to eliminate poverty through leveraging resources.

“There are many strengths in the Cortland County community,” says Glennon. “I truly believed that the Opportunity Community process would give us the framework, support and guidance to bring those strengths together in a new way to address the issues facing low income people in our community. It is doing that, and exceeding even my high hopes of what it could mean.”

The program kicked off last March with a Leadership For Change Summit--a meeting where Dr. Beegle spoke to leaders to create a shared understanding of the many different types of poverty, how they impact our neighbors, and strategies to break barriers. During the Summit, leaders gained tools for channeling their existing resources and human capital in ways they have never done before. More than 40 Cortland Leaders participated in the summit. “After starting the process, it took on its own natural flow,” says Joyce Allen, Adult Education Coordinator with CAPCO. “We had a lot of amazing feedback. People kept asking, when is she (Dr. Beegle) coming back?”

Community interest grew. "We are seeing people from every area of the community – elected officials, human services, medical, law enforcement, education, faith based and so many others – coming together to be a part of this process," says Glennon. In May, over 200 attendees heard Dr. Beegle speak at the Prosperity Summit. The Prosperity Summit brings the community together to begin to take action, discuss next steps for becoming an Opportunity Community, and ask community members to become a Navigator for one year for neighbors who are struggling. Allen says they had about 25% of attendees sign up to be a Navigator.

In September, Navigators will attend a one-day training where they learn a deeper level of understanding poverty and different communication styles, as well as strategies for connecting, relating, and supporting individuals and families living in poverty. Navigators are also connected to a wide-range of resources that will help them to quickly remove barriers for the neighbors they work with.

After Navigator training, the community will be ready to host the Opportunity Conference for neighbors living in the crisis of poverty. This six-hour training scheduled for October 26, 2019, highlights the strengths of neighbors and helps them gain a deeper understanding of their skills, knowledge, and experiences that can be turned into ways to earn a living. The goals of the conference are to 1) remove the shame of living in poverty, 2) rebuild hope, and 3) remove isolation by building networks of support.

Cortland is a community where nearly half of the families with school-age children qualify for free and reduced lunch. According to Glennon and Allen, there is no stopping now. Community support is strong and Cortland is seeing action everyday. In May, County Legislators passed a Proclamation to make Cortland County an Opportunity Community. This community is going forward with eliminating poverty and creating the kind of communities we all want to live in.