



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

## 2015-2016 ANNUAL REPORT



## FIGHTING SCHOOL DROPOUT

I am so thankful for another year at Student Advocacy Center and the lives that were changed, with your help. What better investment is there than an education? It's the gift that keeps giving.

We saw our first 1<sup>st</sup> grader facing expulsion this year and were enormously grateful when common sense prevailed and the expulsion was averted. We helped a preschooler stay in school and watched several long-time clients beat the odds and graduate high school.

We celebrated when a package of bills we like to call the Rethink Discipline bills were introduced in the House and voted out unanimously.

The bills, if passed, will give school districts more discretion by eliminating mandatory expulsions (except for guns) and protect students by requiring that interventions such as restorative practices be considered before removing a student.

We had another successful "Telling Tales Out of School" storytelling fundraiser, raising more than \$28,000 (a 62% increase from last year). Author Shaka Senghor inspired us with his story of redemption, but we were especially proud of the three students who took the stage. The funds are absolutely critical for

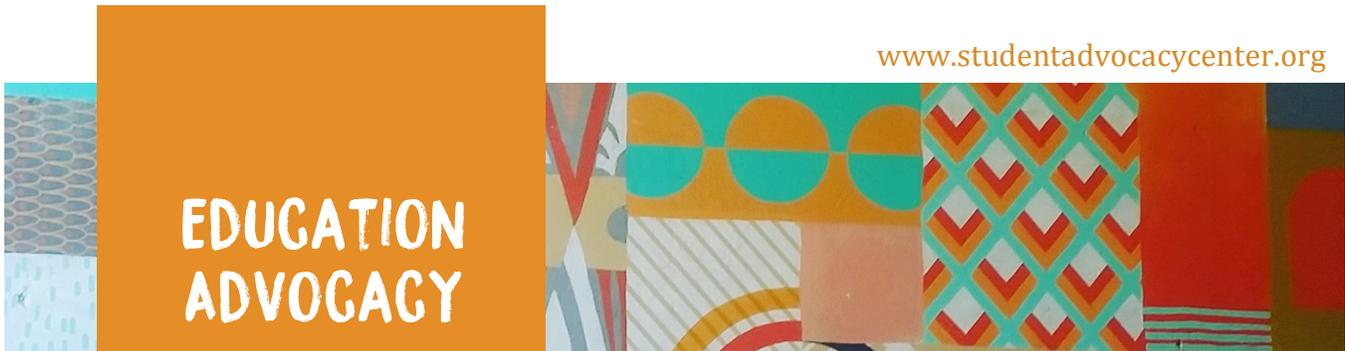


program support and helping ensure more students receive the education they need. Check out our Web site to watch some of the stories.

Please read on to learn about our important work. We are a unique organization laser focused on securing an education for the students who need it most. The work is not easy, but the payoff is huge.

*Peri Stone-Palmquist*

Executive Director



SAC is the only organization in the state providing education advocacy to both general and special education students. Our research-based model is youth-driven, collaborative and focused on the most vulnerable students who are out of school or missing a lot of school and facing barriers to getting the help they need.

Our inter-disciplinary team of professional advocates are housed in Ypsilanti, Detroit and Jackson, bringing backgrounds in education, social work and law together to help students. We help families understand their rights and options, prep for school meetings, secure needed services, problem-solve, connect with community resources and provide intensive academic monitoring.

Referrals come from families, schools, community mental health, probation officers, foster care workers and other community partners.

|  | Staffing             | 2015-2016 Students Served |
|--|----------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Washtenaw</b>                                   | 2.3 FTE              | 108                       |
| <b>Jackson</b>                                     | .4 FTE               | 15                        |
| <b>Wayne County</b>                                | 1 FTE                | 30                        |
| <b>Student Rights Project (southeast Michigan)</b> | 65 Volunteers        | 21                        |
| <b>Volunteer Advocates of Mid-Michigan</b>         | 9 volunteers         | 8                         |
| <b>Fee-Based (Southeast Michigan)</b>              | Part-Time Contractor | 10                        |
|  |                      | <b>192</b>                |

## SUCCESS STORIES

SAC successfully advocated for a student in foster care to continue enrollment at his charter preschool. At the time of referral, the preschool notified the foster parents that their son would not be allowed to complete the school year due to behavior issues (related to fetal alcohol syndrome). The student was also denied a special education certification. The advocate assisted the preschool in creating a behavior plan and obtained a court order requiring DHHS to pay for a paraprofessional to help the preschool. The advocate also successfully obtained special education services and accommodations from the district. The student was able to remain in school.

SAC helped a 9th grader who missed his entire first semester of high school due to an enrollment denial get back into school, where he is thriving. The student, who receives special education services,

had been held back twice in elementary school, and was an older 9th grader. He had self-selected to spend part of 7th grade and 8th grade in an online program, but was eager to go back to a traditional setting. He had no previous school discipline incidents but had a probation officer due to a status offense. We believe the student was denied enrollment due to his age and juvenile justice involvement. Through an informal complaint process, SAC secured compensatory education and got the district to train enrollment staff. The student ended up earning 5 credits in one semester (3 is typical), thanks to intensive monitoring, tutoring and transportation assistance from SAC, and a particularly caring school staff person.

## STUDENT BEATS THE ODDS AND GRADUATES

A diploma seemed unreachable when we first started working with “Kevin.” He had been out of school for two years. He was 19 with significant depression. The school was unresponsive. The family was losing hope.

But the Student Advocacy Center could see the possibilities — and thanks to the support of donors like you, we had the resources and expertise to change his course.

Kevin had been removed from his traditional public school for behavioral challenges related to his disability and was then expelled from his day treatment program. That was two years ago and the district was providing only a few hours of home-based tutoring a week. Kevin was earning very few credits. “At the pace he was going, it would have taken him another two years to graduate, if he lasted that long,” his father said.

The district refused to reinstate him. In Michigan, there is no mandate that districts reinstate an expelled student. Removals can be indefinite. Even after the expulsion has been served.

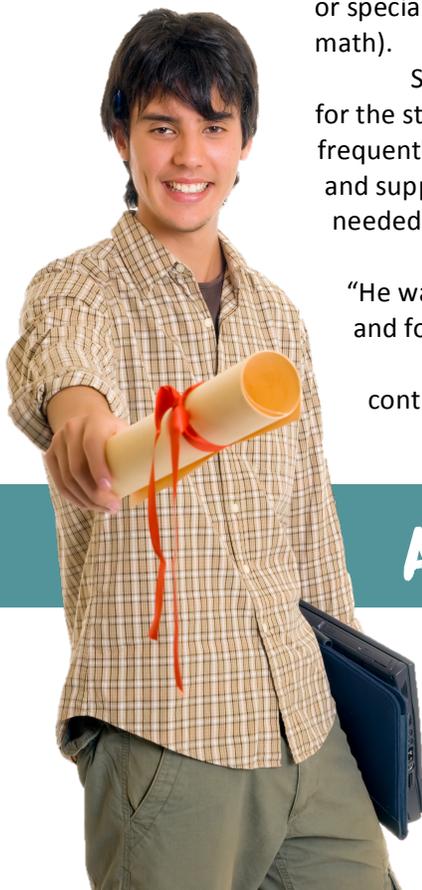
The thing is, a lot changed in two years. Kevin matured. His therapist through Community Mental Health saw great strides in Kevin’s behavioral and emotional health. His parents also noticed changes and described how he thrived in the community at different volunteer sites.

When Kevin’s parents called us, the school was past due for Kevin’s required annual meeting to review his special education plan and not responding to requests for a credit audit or specialized support for math (his home-based teacher did not have expertise in math).

SAC advocated for the district to provide a math teacher and award credit for the student’s extensive volunteer hours. We developed a plan to meet frequently with the school to closely monitor how he was doing. And SAC recruited and supported a team of four volunteer tutors to give Kevin the support he really needed.

“To be honest, it was a struggle many days,” said Brialle, one of his tutors. “He was discouraged and his mental health made it difficult to stay motivated and focus. But we all persevered. It was great to see those breakthroughs.”

In the end, Kevin earned the 5 credits he needed to graduate. He continues to do his volunteer work and plans to attend community college.



## ADVOCACY OUTCOMES

Depending on the county ...

- 81-90% improved attendance or maintained attendance over 90%.
- 89-100% of expulsions were averted
- 83-89% decreased disciplinary incidents or maintained a positive discipline record.



## VOLUNTEERS MAKE ENORMOUS DIFFERENCE AT SAC

The Student Advocacy Center would not be able to impact as many families through the year without the amazing support of our many volunteers. We are so thankful for our interns, volunteer advocates (see below), board of directors, Youth Action Michigan allies and volunteer tutors.

Thank you to the following board members for their service in 2015-2016: Faye Askew-King (vice-chair), Claudette Braxton (secretary), Nakisha Chaney (new member), Leslie Desmond (service completed), Joel Gechter (treasurer), James

|                  |          |
|------------------|----------|
| Total Volunteers | 25       |
| Volunteer Hours  | 142      |
| \$ Value         | \$2,080  |
| Total interns    | 14       |
| Intern hours     | 5,430    |
| \$ Value         | \$81,447 |

Hawkins (service completed-continuing as Member Emeritus), Craig Hernandez (new member), Katie Hoener, Jimmie Jones, Cynthia Maritato (chair), Twila McKinney (service completed), Rossi Ray-Taylor (new member), Francisco Sanchez (new member), DiAnna Solomon, Peri Stone-Palmquist, Ruth Zweifler.

Treasured board member Joan Chesler died in March. She provided tremendous



wisdom and encouragement. We continue to feel her loss deeply.

We are proud that our board can boast 100% giving. The board meets six times a year and committees meet monthly.

If you are interested in volunteering as a tutor with SAC, please email [contact@studentadvocacycenter.org](mailto:contact@studentadvocacycenter.org).

## VOLUNTEER ADVOCATES

SAC is thrilled to support two volunteer advocacy projects, one based at University of Michigan and one based in Ingham County. SAC provides oversight, supervision, training, intakes and support to both projects, so they can provide school discipline advocacy. This allows us to serve a larger geographical area. Both groups also do "Know Your Rights" trainings and conduct community outreach.

The Student Rights Project is a collaborative project with SAC that brings together an interdisciplinary team of law, social work and education students from University of Michigan to advocate for K-12 students in Southeast Michigan in school disciplinary hearings. In 2015-2016, 64 advocates were trained and 40 advocates took on 23 cases, including 9 from Wayne County, 5 from Oakland County, 3 from Macomb County, 2 from Washtenaw and 1 from Livingston. SRP put in 400 hours of volunteer time. One success includes an 11th grader in Oakland County who faced expulsion after

bringing a knife to school. With SRP's advocacy, the student was able to avoid expulsion and transfer to a new school where they could receive the services they needed.

The Volunteer Advocates of Mid-Michigan are a group of lawyers, community members and Michigan State University students providing school discipline advocacy in Ingham, Jackson, Clinton and Eaton counties. During the 2015-2016 school year, VAMM provided advocacy for 7 cases using 9 volunteer advocates. VAMM helped an 11th grade student who was expelled for allegedly selling drugs and was in danger of not graduating on time. At the appeal hearing, the advocates successfully argued that the student should not be expelled as long as he completed certain conditions. VAMM advocates also successfully averted an expulsion for a 6th grade student, who brought his recently deceased, great-grandfather's knife to school.

# YOUTH ACTION MICHIGAN

Our Youth Action Michigan program is an opportunity for youth impacted by school pushout to build leadership skills and plan actions to impact local and state policy and practice. More than 20 students in Ypsilanti, Jackson and Detroit met weekly. Highlights from this year include:

- ❖ A youth leadership training in August 2015 facilitated by Neutral Zone.
- ❖ Zero Tolerance Game of Life demonstrations in October in Jackson and Ypsilanti as part of the national Dignity In Schools Campaign Week of Action. The events allowed participants (including school administrators) to experience the life of an expelled students, including being locked up in a mock jail.
- ❖ In the fall, Jackson youth hosted a weekly online radio show.
- ❖ A media training in May for all three chapters from the national Dignity In Schools Campaign.
- ❖ On April 13, Detroit youth testified in Lansing about new legislation encouraging alternatives to school removal.
- ❖ On May 12, an Ypsilanti student and SAC Executive Director Peri Stone-Palmquist testified on 3 House bills before the Education Committee that would encourage restorative practices and require districts consider lesser interventions. On May 19, a Jackson youth testified on the House bills as well. The bills were approved unanimously.
- ❖ Ypsilanti youth had a community party in April.
- ❖ In Jackson, students worked on public service announcement campaign called SCHOOL MATTERS. They had an end-of -year feature presentation at McCulloch Academy in June.





SAC operates a statewide Student Rights Helpline staffed by a part-time social worker (with extensive experience in the schools and working with youth in foster care), with the help of social work interns. This Helpline is currently the only place in the state for general education students facing expulsion or long-term suspension to receive no-cost support and education advice. Each year, we are seeing dramatic increases in call volume; we served 192 clients during the 2014-2015 school year, and **322 during the 2015-2016 school year.**

Families have learned about us online, from the Michigan Department of Education, intermediate school districts, foster care workers, probation officers and others. Families call for a variety of reasons, including denial of enrollment, repeated suspensions, facing expulsion or long-term suspension, help with reinstatement or other post-expulsion services, disability-related bullying, and much more.

Intake specialists assess client need with empathy and determine needed supports. This can include assigning the client to a staff advocate, SAC volunteer advocate, or providing information and resources. Our intake specialists have reviewed records, assisted in writing letters to schools, filing complaints, contacted school officials on family's behalf, developed plans of action, researched resources and more. Our goal is to help the student get back in school, avoid a long-term removal, find a better learning path, and ultimately experience more school success.

Successes are many, such as the case with the foster parent of a 17-year-old student in Washtenaw County with refugee status. She called because her foster child had been denied enrollment at the local high school and referred instead to a GED program. SAC explained to the foster parent that the student was eligible for immediate enrollment in school under federal law. When she went back to the school with

| County     |     |
|------------|-----|
| Washtenaw  | 121 |
| Wayne      | 75  |
| Jackson    | 16  |
| Oakland    | 15  |
| Macomb     | 12  |
| Ingham     | 6   |
| Kent       | 6   |
| Livingston | 6   |
| Lenawee    | 5   |
| Genesee    | 4   |
| Calhoun    | 2   |
| Muskegon   | 2   |

**OTHER COUNTIES SERVED INCLUDE:**

Arenac, Bay, Berrien, Clinton, Gladwin, Hillsdale, Kalamazoo, Ionia, Lake, Lapeer, Menominee, Monroe, Newaygo, Ottawa, Roscommon, Saginaw, St. Clair, Tuscola, Van Buren, Wexford

information on the law, the student was immediately enrolled. When staff followed up with the foster mom, she reported that the student was adjusting well and happy with her school placement.

We received a call from the parent of a 9th grade student in Macomb County who had been expelled. He applied for reinstatement but was denied. Helpline staff contacted the school to get records and more information. After this contact, the student was offered an alternative on-line program through the school. Mom felt that it was our contact that prompted the alternative plan. The school had never offered services before.

A 4th grade student in Berrien County faced expulsion for threatening another student. The student had been out of school 14 days when the dad called SAC. Helpline staff advised Dad of the student's rights, allowing him to advocate for his son at a meeting the next day. At the meeting, it was decided that the student would be allowed to return to an alternate program next day.

## CHECK AND CONNECT

SAC's Check and Connect program in Ypsilanti provided evidence-based education mentoring program served 47 students, who were referred by their schools or probation officers due to significant disengagement in school. Our mentors meet weekly with the students, check data weekly (attendance, grades, discipline) and use that data to design personalized interventions that focus on building the students' problem-solving skills.

## OUTCOMES

- ❖ 82% improved attendance or maintained at least 90% attendance.
- ❖ 79% improved grades or maintained passing grades.
- ❖ 74% decreased disciplinary referrals or maintained a good discipline record.

## SUCCESS STORIES

A 22-year-old student with disabilities completed his last half credit to complete high school. When SAC's Check and Connect mentor first met this young man two years ago, he was depressed and stayed home most of the time. He had the desire to finish school but had a lot of anxiety from bad experiences when he last attended school. SAC helped him enroll in a GED program and provided one-on-one tutoring, as well as transportation to class. This student pushed himself to try to pass the GED, but math was too difficult. Last year, Ann Arbor offered a high school completion program. SAC helped the student enroll and complete his last half credit.

A 12th grade student, who started with Check and Connect just after his 9th grade year, graduated on time with his 2016 class, defying the expectations of many (school staff shared with us that they didn't believe he had the skills to graduate). SAC help facilitate a personal curriculum to increase his chances of graduating on time. SAC helped to empower the student to be able to complete all missing credits by transporting him to SAC office to work with him one-on-one to provide support.

A 12th grade student graduated after being reinstated from an expulsion for fighting in the spring of 2014. She worked with SAC to get reinstated and was then able to complete all the remaining requirements to graduate on time. SAC assisted her with applying to college.

After failing every class as an 8th grader, a 15-year-old freshman at Ypsilanti Community High School was able to



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PERI STONE-PALMQUIST, MENTOR GORDIE WYKES WITH MENTEE BRANDEN MAGEE AT A RADIO INTERVIEW

gain 4.5 credits this school year working with SAC. In 8th grade, he was suspended 6 times, ranging from 3 to 7 days, and became court involved. This year, he was only suspended once. He also passed all of his classes his 4th marking period, only failing 1 class for the 2nd semester. He also completed probation with our help.

An 8-year-old student received the most improved award for her school this year. Her attendance rate improved from 68 at the time of referral to 86 by the end of the year.

## BRIDGES TO SCHOOL

SAC's Bridges to School (formerly the Early Truancy Intervention or ETI program) provides home-based support services to Jackson County families with elementary school-aged children, grades K-4, who have been referred by their elementary school for absenteeism. To assist, staff provide families with support services that include a comprehensive assessment, intervention plan, in-home parent education using evidence-based curriculum, case management, advocacy, resource connections, and weekly attendance monitoring. Our goal is to identify and overcome barriers to regular school attendance.

The 2015-2016 academic year marked the 10th consecutive year of the Early Truancy Intervention program in Jackson County. Student Advocacy Center, which took the program over in 2015, served a total of 21 students and 71 family members this past year with a part-time director.

### OUTCOMES

- ❖ 80% of students improved attendance.
- ❖ Overall student attendance rate increased from 72% at time of opening to 78% at time of closure.

## SUCCESS STORY

Bridges to School received referrals for two siblings living in separate homes. The first grade brother lived with his father and the fourth grade sister lived with her mother. The parents were still married but had recently separated. The program director met with both families jointly to discuss the attendance issues of the children.

Additionally, a Family Needs Assessment was completed which revealed the need for parenting

education, as well as counseling. Within a week, the parents had enrolled in an 8-week group Nurturing Parenting class with a local community provider. The following week, the parents also started couple counseling and eventually started family counseling. Over the course of 12 weeks, the attendance of both children significantly improved. Both cases were successfully closed due to achieving an attendance rate over 80%.

## SAC TEAM

Peri Stone-Palmquist, MSW, MPP, Executive Director  
Elizabeth Bowker, JD, LLM, Advocate  
Hakim Crampton, YAM Adult Ally - Jackson  
Anell Eccleston, BSW, Mentor  
Danielle Flint, MSW, Advocate  
Cathy Heins, Advocate (\*Retired, 2016)  
Lance Hicks, YAM Adult Ally - Detroit  
Mary Jackson, Family Worker

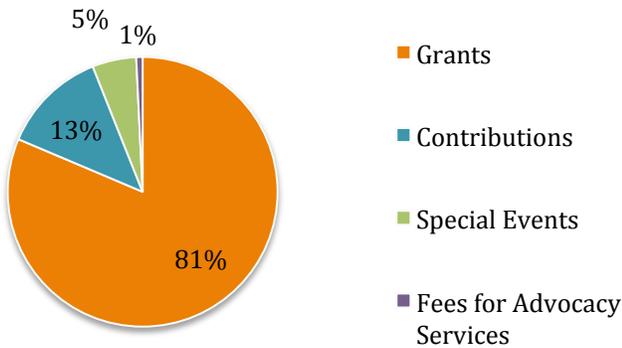
Kathleen Kosobud, MA, NBCT, Advocate  
Annis Lewis, BSW, MA, B2S Program Director  
Amy Wilhelm, BSW, Outreach & Admin Associate  
Gordie Wykes, Mentor

Contractors  
Julia Gilbert, Accountant  
Linda Burkett, Fee-Based Advocate

# FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

July 1, 2015-June 30, 2016

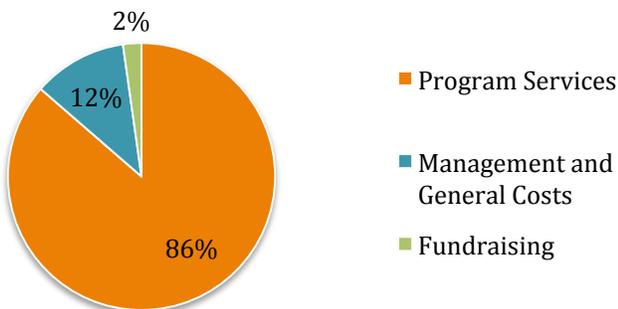
## REVENUE



## REVENUE

|                            |                  |             |
|----------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Grants                     | \$396,766        | 81%         |
| Contributions              | \$61,430         | 13%         |
| Special Events             | \$25,653         | 5%          |
| Fees for Advocacy Services | \$3,716          | 1%          |
| <b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>       | <b>\$487,565</b> | <b>100%</b> |

## EXPENSES



## EXPENSES

|                              |                  |             |
|------------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Program Services             | \$432,360        | 86%         |
| Management and General Costs | \$57,008         | 11%         |
| Fundraising                  | \$11,122         | 2%          |
| <b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>        | <b>\$500,490</b> | <b>100%</b> |

Note: The difference between revenue and expenses is due to the timing of grants.

## A NOTE

SAC is proud that more than 86% of our revenue goes to programs, a percentage that would qualify us for the highest score on financial efficiency by organizations such as Charity Navigator. Their data shows that 70% of charities spend at least 75% of their budgets on programs.

SAC is a small organization, where all staff engage in direct service. But we also value high quality governance, oversight and quality control.

We urge donors to check out sites such as

overheadmyth.com, which asks donors to challenge the false conception that financial ratios are a proxy for overall nonprofit performance. Client outcomes matter, and we are proud that we are changing the lives of so many students, despite working with some of the hardest-to-reach and hardest-to-serve clients. Please know we are committed to being good stewards of the resources given to us. Thank you for your support.

## OUR SUPPORTERS

### THANKS TO OUR FUNDERS

- ❖ **Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation**
- ❖ **The Arc Michigan**
- ❖ **The Carls Foundation**
- ❖ **Children's Trust Fund**
- ❖ **County of Wayne**
- ❖ **Dignity In Schools Campaign**
- ❖ **Gerald Beckwith Constitutional Liberties Fund**
- ❖ **Jackson Community Foundation**
- ❖ **Michigan Department of Health & Human Services**
- ❖ **The Women Lawyers Association of Michigan Foundation**

- ❖ **Washtenaw Coordinated Funders**, a collaboration of the Office of Community & Economic Development (representing the City of Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, and Washtenaw Urban County), the United Way of Washtenaw County, the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation and the RNF Foundation

- ❖ **United Way of Washtenaw County**

- ❖ **Washtenaw County Community Mental Health**

- ❖ **Washtenaw Community Department of Health & Human Services**

### MONTHLY GIVERS

A special thank you to our monthly donors who have committed to regular and ongoing support: Jessica "Decky" Alexander, Carrie & Greg Hammerman, Katie Hoener, Marjorie Kauth-Karjala, Jeralyn Lowe, Cynthia Maritato, Peri & Matt Stone-Palmquist, Ruth & Andy Zweifler

### ANNUAL EVENT SUPPORT

#### **Salutatorian:**

Leslie Desmond & Phil Stroffregen

#### **Honor Roll Sponsors:**

Joan Binkow, Cindy Strang Insurance Agency, Nancy C. Wheeler, Andy and Ruth Zweifler, Zingerman's Community of Businesses.

#### **Rising Scholar:**

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#### **Pep Squad Sponsors:**

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#### **In-Kind Support:**

Beezy's, Better Made Snack Foods, Patty Maher & Rob Hoffman, Washtenaw County Department of Health & Human Services, Steve Pepple, United Sonz, Zingerman's.

# YEAR IN PHOTOS

