

10 to Watch

PROVIDENCE MONTHLY

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Melissa Husband

Executive Director of Community Action Partnership of Providence

Photo courtesy of JAMES JONES

Article By John Taraborelli Posted December 12, 2014

Bio

- 37 years old
- Bachelors in Political Science from Roger Williams University and Masters in Public Administration from URI
- Previously worked in [Rhode Island Housing's Supportive Housing Program](#)
- Has been a mentor for young people from [Year Up](#) and [Youth Build](#), and an advisor to the [NAACP Youth Council](#)
- Named to Mayor-elect Eloriza's **One Providence Steering committee**

Why Her Job is So Tough

As Executive Director of [Community Action Partnership of Providence \(CAPP\)](#), Melissa Husband is tasked with building an effective social services agency from the ashes of **ProCAP (Providence Community Action Partnership)**. ProCAP was the city's largest anti-poverty organization until it collapsed into scandal and receivership in 2012. CAPP is an entirely new 501(c)3 intended to replace the troubled organization. In addition to stabilizing the structure and funding of an entirely new agency, Husband had to clean up the mess left behind by CAPP's predecessor. It hasn't been an easy task. CAPP is still housed in ProCAP's old headquarters, and on Husband's first day on the job, the internet was turned off due to nonpayment. On her second day, the phones were cut too.

The Progress She's Made

CAPP has more than doubled its budget, is debt free and has added new programs and departments, growing from about 30 employees to 50. Even better, all but one of ProCAP's funders came back on board with the new organization, and most have contributed more than before. "The money that has increased, we're able to put back into the community," she says. This means new programs, like a first-in-the-state pilot [Individual Development Account](#), a savings account that helps low-income residents buy a home, go back to school or start a business by matching every dollar they contribute. They've also launched a [Parent Leadership Training Initiative](#), for which CAPP had to be selected as part of a national program, to help parents advocate for their children and families by teaching them to navigate processes like medical bills, school boards and city council meetings. It's only the second of its kind in the state (Woonsocket has the other) and Husband hopes to work with the Woonsocket organization to take it statewide.

What's Next for CAPP

The organization will continue to grow, adding staff, programs and funding. In fact, Husband has three staff members starting this month for a new childhood lead program, and no space left in her building to put them. Given the struggles she faced at the beginning, that's a good problem to have. She has also asked all of her managers to pitch their ideas this month for creating a for-profit arm of the organization, similar to what agencies like [Amos House](#) and [AS220](#) do with some of their programs. The biggest item on Husband's agenda for 2015, however, is to re-open the **Elmwood Community Center**. The first obstacle is about \$1.5 million in renovations; unfortunately, CAPP can't raise those funds because it doesn't own the property, the city does. "I hope the city sees the value in it," she says of her vision for "a full service community center to bring back the much needed resident programs and services."

After a tough first couple of years on the job, Husband is ready for CAPP to take off. "It was very challenging, but I knew it could be done. We are completely on the opposite side now."

