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 Center for Wholeness
 Central Ohio Green Ed Fund
 City Year Columbus
 Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio
 Columbus Historical Society
 Columbus Landmarks Foundation
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 NARAL/Pro Choice Ohio Education Foundation
 Neighborhood Services, Inc.
 Ohio Alliance for Arts Education
 Ohio Citizen Action
 Ohio Domestic Violence Network
 Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association
 Ohio League for the Mentally Retarded
 Ohio Literacy Network
 Ohio NOW Education and Legal Fund
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 Stop the Suffering
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Four Community Shares Members are Finalists for Ohio Nonprofit Excellence Award

Columbus, OH – Four members of Community Shares of Mid Ohio (CoSMO) have been named finalists for the 4th Annual Ohio Nonprofit Excellence Award sponsored by the Ohio Association of Nonprofit Organizations (OANO). The award ceremony will be held May 12 at 11:30 a.m. at the Ohio Statehouse Atrium.

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Franklin County, Camp Fire USA Central Ohio Council and Ohio Literacy Network are the three finalists for the Central Region Small to Mid-size Budget award. The Coalition of Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO) is one of three finalists for the Central Region Large Budget award.

CASA was nominated for their Volunteer Recruitment Campaign program. It recruits, screens, trains and supports community volunteers to become Guardians *ad litem* (GAL) who advocate for the best interest of abused and neglected children in court. After receiving an increase of funds from Franklin County, CASA was told to serve 17% more children by the end of the year. With a new strategic plan, board member involvement and increased staff dedication to volunteer recruitment, CASA was able to add 79 new GALs who helped to serve 736 children in 2008, a 20% increase for the organization.

“All of us at CASA consider this nomination as an opportunity to expose the plight of too many of our most vulnerable population—our children. We are also always eager to bring to light the amazing, selfless service of our community volunteer Guardians *ad litem* (GALs) on behalf of those children. By selecting CASA’s significant volunteer recruitment project as a finalist, OANO is helping to further awareness about volunteer GALs,” said Marilyn Berlekamp, Executive Director of CASA.

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Camp Fire USA Central Ohio Council was nominated for their Camp Ataghi, a resident camp for children ages 7-18 who have experienced the death of a caregiver or immediate family member. The camp is a combination of traditional camping activities and activities to assist children through the natural grieving process. Camp Fire served 48 campers in 2008, almost doubling the number served in the previous year. The organization was able to provide 42 full scholarships for children to attend who otherwise would not have been able to afford the camp thanks in a large part to effective volunteer and staff fundraising.

“Camp Fire USA Central Ohio Council is thrilled to be nominated as a finalist for this year’s Ohio Nonprofit Excellence Award from the Ohio Association of Nonprofit Organizations,” said Amy Boyd, Campfire CEO. “Our strategic vision of ‘Reuniting Children and Nature’ is realized in all our programs, but none more so than Camp Ataghi at Wyandot, our special summer camp program for children who have lost a loved one. Combining the healing power of nature and specialized grief counseling allows us to assist children in their unique journey from pain to healing.”

Ohio Literacy Network (OLN) was nominated for The Gateway Project, a program to connect adult learners across Ohio to OLN’s online learning website where they can advance their educational goals on their own schedule and find literacy resources within their own community. The project included a complete re-design of their website which delivers free educational content for every learning level from basic skills and GED preparation to computer and workplace training. The project also lets OLN connect their statewide network of literacy providers and social service collaborators. In 2008, the Ohio Literacy Network received 6,000 calls to their READ hotline and also reported 300-400 viewers per month who watched the organization’s GED preparation video series online.

“Our Board and staff recognize the wonderful opportunity this honor provides to us as we share our mission to serve Ohio's citizens with the opportunity to improve the lives of their family and their community,” said Alan Toops, Executive Director of the Ohio Literacy Network. “The Ohio Literacy Network's E-learning portal has enabled nearly 180,000 individuals, families, and organizations to connect with free on-line learning opportunities from Basic Skills to Health Literacy since its August 2008 launch.”

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Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO) was nominated for their battle to reform payday lending in Ohio. As the state's lead advocacy group for low-income and homeless Ohioans, COHHIO was the lead consumer organization behind HB 545 as well as the Yes on Issue 5 campaign. Through grassroots efforts, COHHIO collaborated with statewide advocacy groups, legislators and religious leaders to educate voters about the dangers of payday lending. HB 545 reduced payday lending interest rates from 391% to 28%. In November 2008, with COHHIO's effort, voters by a margin of nearly two to one, said Yes to Issue 5, the referendum for HB 545.

"It's a great honor to be acknowledged as an OANO award finalist from among a field of such worthy participants," said Bill Faith, COHHIO executive director. "Any success COHHIO enjoys is the result of collaboration. Payday lending reform is a great example of what can be achieved when we work together - - against enormous financial odds -- to overcome an industry bent on trapping cash-strapped borrowers in deepening debt. We're grateful for our partnerships and look forward to more joint achievements on behalf of Ohio's vulnerable consumers."

The Ohio Nonprofit Excellence Award recognizes the creativity, execution, achievement and overall excellence of a specific project or program completed by an Ohio nonprofit in 2008. Eighteen organizations throughout Ohio are being recognized.

With 15 years of success in workplace fundraising and distributions of \$2.5 million to its members, Community Shares of Mid Ohio assists local area nonprofits in new options to receive donations. Through workplace fundraising drives done in public and private sector workplaces, employees are given the opportunity to donate directly to the non-profit agencies they care about most through payroll contributions.