Former YouthBuild Student Helps with Facility Renovations for Choctaw County YouthBuild Program

March 15, 2019 - It was more than a decade ago when Matt Johnson first learned of the YouthBuild Program. He was still a teenager—a high school dropout who, by his own accord, was headed down the wrong path. Living off and on with an older cousin at the time, Matt stated: “I would be on the couch and watching my cousin interact with his family, his wife and kid, and I would start thinking yeah… that’s what I want in my life. I was headed nowhere, I was trying to be a gangster, wearing baggy clothes, talking like I was tough, partying, drinking, and just no purpose really but I knew I wanted more out of life, I just didn’t have that foundation, you know (pause)………, to know what to do.”

Matt’s cousin told him about a program called YouthBuild and he drove Matt to Little Dixie Community Action Agency’s office where he first met Mrs. Katherine Covington, the GED teacher at the time. Matt attributes much of his success to the late Ms. Covington stating “She had a heart of gold…she listened to my backstory and she was willing to give me a chance to see if I was for real or not.” Matt enrolled in the program and began setting goals; small ones at first and each time he achieved one, he would immediately set another.

The YouthBuild program provided Matt with the foundation, a starting place and resources where he could gain basic skills. And the dedicated and caring staff gave him encouragement and support along his journey. “I gained valuable life skills going through the YouthBuild program. It was much more than just the classroom and learning about construction; that was a big part of it, but more than that, I learned about life”. While in the program, Matt had opportunities to job-shadow and do some work in weatherization where he was able to put his training to the test and continue to increase his skillset. He was making contacts and quite an impression in the construction industry and landed a job in Durant, Oklahoma where he spent several years building custom cabinetry. He continued to set goals, long-term goals which included getting married and becoming a homeowner, both of which he has achieved.

Accepting Applications May 1st
The LDCAA Employee of the Month for January 2019 was Hope Scott (center). Hope is a Teacher in the Head Start Program and has been with the agency since 2013. Also pictured: Board Chairman Brent Franks (left) and Executive Director Rebecca Reynolds.

The LDCAA Employee of the Month for February 2019 was Jason Stillwell. Jason is a Self-Help Specialist with the Technical & Management Assistance Program.

The LDCAA Employee of the Month for March 2019 was Brandy Stachowski. Brandy is the Program Secretary for the Self-Help Housing Program. Brandy has been with the agency since February 2017.

Congratulations to our monthly winners, who are chosen by their peers!

Welcome to Little Dixie's Board of Directors

LDCAA recently welcomed two new board members. Marcia Wright (pictured above) is representing the Nashoba Community Center, a Low-Income Entity on Little Dixie’s Board of Directors. Ashley Whisenhunt (pictured left) is representing Head Start/Early Head Start/Early Head Start-Child Care Policy Council, a Low-Income Entity on Little Dixie’s Board of Directors. These ladies will diligently serve Little Dixie striving to act as a representative of the agency at meetings, conferences and with the general public. As a board member, their duties require them to educate the community about Little Dixie’s programs and services, and actively participate in the Community Needs Assessment, Self-Assessment, strategic planning and evaluation of our Executive Director.
Service Awards

Pictured at right are the Service Award recipients for this quarter.

Darla Galyon - 5 Years
Ashley Gaddy - 5 Years
Jordan Mack - 10 Years
Marsha Zulkey - 20 Years
Karen Burton - 20 Years
Rebecca Reynolds - 25 Years
Herman Adams - 25 Years

Safety Campaign

April 2019 begins the kickoff for Little Dixie Community Action Agency, Inc.'s Safety Campaign. Our slogan, "Safety starts with ME!" will be featured on upcoming marketing material to serve as a helpful reminder for staff. The sole premise is to increase workplace safety and promote behaviors to identify potential hazards under the direction of Risk Management and Safety Consultant, W.F. Grammar. Mr. Grammar has been working diligently to provide our staff with the resources to ensure our workplaces are the safest they can be for our clients and staff.

By improving safety conditions in the workplace we will greatly improve productivity, staff morale and reduce costly mistakes. Mr. Grammar has spent his time visiting various sites in the agency to assess the potential risks and provide input to alleviate the issues. He has also implemented helpful handouts regarding tips and tricks to reduce risk in the workplace.

Below are some helpful tips to remember in your day-to-day adventures at work!

Never carry a tool by the cord or hose.
Wear proper apparel for the task.
Avoid accidental starting.
Disconnect tools when not using them.
AmeriCorps

2019 - 2020 AmeriCorps Recruitment

Little Dixie School Readiness AmeriCorps Program is pleased to welcome the newly appointed specialist, Catherine Oliva. Catherine comes to the program as a current Head Start parent and previous Policy Council Chairperson. The program is excited to see all that Catherine will bring to the table and watch her lead the program for years to come!

The AmeriCorps program is a school readiness grant that Head Start/Early Head Start was awarded in 2007. Since then hundreds of children have received one-on-one tutoring to help prepare them for Kindergarten. The children are having greater success rates when it comes to entering Kindergarten prepared. This, in turn, gives the children a much better chance at being successful throughout their public school years. The members serve a total of 900 hours throughout the school year and earn a living allowance. Upon completion they receive an educational voucher valued at $2,822.00 to use for higher education purposes. The education award can be used at any Title IV college or Vo-Tech or it can be used to pay qualified student loans. Members who are 55 and older can transfer their education award to a child or grandchild if they do not plan to use it for themselves. The Members receive trainings that enhance their skills in the classroom and they are receiving experience that sometimes helps determine the career path they choose for themselves.

Applications are being accepted for the 2019 – 2020 school year. Interested parties should contact Mrs. Oliva at 580-326-7581.

Welcome Mrs. Oliva!
2019 Volunteer Appreciation Event

On March 16th Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Program held their Annual Volunteer Appreciation Event featuring a St. Patrick’s Day Theme. Volunteers from the tri-county area were invited to the Hugo HomeOwnership Center to celebrate another year of fabulous dedication to the CASA Program. CASA Volunteers serve as a “voice” for children in the child welfare system. A CASA volunteer advocates for children who have been declared by the courts as “deprived”, meaning abused, neglected, or abandoned. During this event, volunteers enjoyed an Irish themed lunch, photo-booth and lots of fellowship.

Pictured throughout are CASA Volunteers, staff members and Associate Director, Johnny Moffitt, enjoying the Irish themed photo-booth.

35 Total Volunteers
1,962 Volunteer Hours
71 Children’s Cases Closed
Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Impact Program

Early Literacy Corners
ECCS Impact continues to spread our early literacy corners throughout Choctaw, McCurtain and Pushmataha Counties. Since January, we have incorporated five more early literacy corners. They are located at the Kiamichi Family Medical Center in Idabel and Hugo, Pushmataha County Health Department, Choctaw County Health Department, and My Brothers Place, a local homeless shelter, located in Hugo.

Partnerships with Local Child Care Centers
Since the beginning of the year, ECCS Impact has added one more child care center in Pushmataha County to implement the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) in their facility. This makes a total of ten child care centers in our tri-county area who are now screening their children for developmental delays. ASQ’s are are the most reliable way to screen young children for developmental delays in the first five years of life. Since August 2018, over 250 children have been developmentally screened to ensure they are meeting their developmental milestones.

State & Community Team Meetings
On March 29th, ECCS Impact and Rural Impact held their quarterly Community Team Meeting. During the meeting we had the opportunity to discuss Collaborative Improvement & Innovation Networks (CoIIN) Identified Strategies, along with updates and information provided by our community partners.

On April 2nd, ECCS Impact held their virtual State Advisory Team Meeting and discussed the early childhood systems within our state and the progress we are making through ECCS Impact.

Community Outreach
In February, ECCS Impact had the opportunity to be part of the Choctaw County Coalition 2nd Annual Father-Daughter Dance. The event had tremendous success last year and we decided to continue those efforts into 2019. This year, over 450 father figures and daughters attended the dance. This allows father’s to strengthen their bond with their daughters and promote social-emotional health starting in the early childhood years. The goal is to continue this effort for years to come.

In March, ECCS Impact had the opportunity to participate in the Clayton Health Fair, located in Pushmataha County. We handed out Early Childhood and Family Resource Bundles, set up a developmental screening booth and provided early childhood books and activities for children.
Recruitment Has Begun

Little Dixie Head Start, Early Head Start and Early Head Start Child-Care Programs are currently recruiting for the 2019-2020 school year. All of the Head Start, Early Head Start and Early Head Start Child-Care staff have been diligently posting signs and flyers over the tri-county area. The family advocates have also been hanging up flyers and passing out applications and information on what Little Dixie Head Start and Early Head Start Programs have to offer families. Throughout the spring many of the Head Start, Early Head Start and Early Head Start Child-Care staff will be attending festivals and parades in the various area communities to recruit as many children as possible for all the Little Dixie Programs.

For more information, please call Sara Moore, Enrollment Specialist, at (580) 326-7581. To complete an application, please go to https://littledixie.org/head-start-application

Infants and toddlers are provided high quality care in a center based setting. Both programs are family oriented and designed to enhance children’s approaches to learning, social and emotional development, language and literacy development, cognitive development, perceptual, motor and physical development.

Center Highlights

Pictured above, Antlers Early Head Start Classroom 2 children enjoying investigating and taking turns during a Sink and Float activity with Gabby Brown, classroom teacher.

Pictured at right, Kewona Richards, with her high school diploma. Kewona is an Early Head Start Child-Care parent who worked very diligently to receive her High School diploma.

After a three week study of music, Mathew Hamilton showed the Battiest Head Start children how to play the guitar and sing. The children enjoyed singing along to the alphabet song as he played his guitar.

The projects described were supported by Grant Numbers 06CH7099, 06CH010743, and 06HP0017 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Administration for Children and Families or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
Head Start, Early Head Start, EHS-Child Care & Early Learning Centers

HS/EHS/EHS-CC In-Service

In the month of February Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start- Child Care employees attended their quarterly in-service training at Kiamichi Vo-Tech in Hugo. Sara Moore, ERSEA Specialist, trained on the importance of recruitment and attendance. We are excited to see our new apple shaped signs going up around our three counties. Lakeshore Learning trainers were also in attendance and provided developmentally specific Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) training to our employees. CLASS is a flexible tool that focuses on the heart of great teaching: the teacher-student interactions proven to drive learning and development. CLASS uses research-driven insight to improve how teachers interact each and every day to cultivate supportive, structured and engaging classroom experiences. CLASS helps child-care providers nurture children’s early learning while responding to their needs. As children enter preschool, their sense of themselves is grounded in and dependent on relationships. CLASS helps teachers and caregivers to foster a secure, supportive base for learning and exploration. The response and participation from our employees was awesome to see.

Analyzing Outcomes

Data from Teaching Strategies GOLD is collected to show the growth of children from October to February. A final comparison will be reported after the end of the school year. Progress is indicated in all areas for the 4 year-olds in Little Dixie Head Start. Information from this data is used to help teachers and administrative staff target areas of growth and concerns. It is also used in planning for teacher training during the year. This is a sample of the outcomes information that is presented to the Little Dixie Community Action Agency Governing Board and Policy Council.

Charts detailing these outcomes are provided at right.

"Head Start is the national commitment to give every child, regardless of circumstances at birth, an opportunity to succeed in school and in life. In the 50 years since its inception, Head Start has improved the lives of more than 32 million children and their families. Head Start alumni - or "Head Start babies," as they often call themselves - are in all walks of the nation’s life."

- National Head Start Association

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Healthy Start

Agency Receives Continued Funding to Improve Pregnancy Outcomes and Reduce Infant Mortality

In March 2019, Little Dixie Community Action Agency was awarded a Healthy Start Initiative: Eliminating Disparities in Perinatal Health Grant (also known as Healthy Start) from the Health Resources and Services Administration. LDCAA Healthy Start joins 99 other programs across the United States funded in 2019 under this initiative, including three in Oklahoma. In this new five-year grant cycle, the purpose of LDCAA’s Healthy Start Program will be to reduce the rate of infant mortality, improve perinatal outcomes, and improve the health of women and their families within the service area of Atoka, Choctaw, McCurtain, and Pushmataha Counties in southeast Oklahoma.

The target population for the LDCAA Healthy Start Program will be pregnant women, women recently delivered, women of reproductive age, children up to 18 months of age, and the fathers/male partners of program participants residing in the service area. The program will address the needs of high-risk women and their families before, during and after pregnancy.

A staff of 15—including the Healthy Start Director, Care Coordinator Manager, twelve Care Coordinators and a Fatherhood Coordinator—will deliver services and supports intended to improve maternal and child health outcomes.

Grant funding will support a wide range of services for women, children, and families, including: healthcare coordination; case management; linkage to social services; screening and counseling for alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use; breastfeeding support; interconception education; child development education; and parenting support. In addition, funding will strengthen the health workforce to provide such services, build a more effective and efficient service-delivery system, and promote and improve health equity across participating organizations.

Since 2014, LDCAA’s Healthy Start Program has worked to effectively respond to the medical, social, cultural, and social service needs of women and their infants. For more information on the Little Dixie Healthy Start Program, call (580) 326-6441, visit https://littledixie.org/healthy-start/, or like the program on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/littledixiehealthystart.

Certified Lactation Counselor

Healthy Start is excited to announce we have added another Certified Lactation Counselor to our staff. Kelsey Nichole Barrick recently traveled to Temple, Texas for a week of training and received notice she has passed her exams. Healthy Start now has certified lactation counselors in Choctaw, Pushmataha, and McCurtain counties. Our Certified Lactation Counselor’s offer their services not only to our clients, but to any community member that might need assistance or help with breastfeeding.

Congratulations, Kelsey!
Little Dixie Utilizes Internal Referrals to Promote Self-Sufficiency

Cindy Cockerham (Pictured Far Left), Outreach Coordinator in McCurtain County assisting Darnisha Fields in completing a tax return. Ms. Fields is also enrolled in our Self-Help Housing Program. In order to promote self-sufficiency and alleviate poverty, Little Dixie strives to inform clients of all programs offered. Ms. Fields is an excellent example of this initiative.

Weatherization

Little Dixie’s Weatherization Team recently attended a Retrofit Installer Training led by the Victoria Stewart in Edmond, Oklahoma. Topics included Safe Work Practices, Identifying and Sealing the Building Envelope, DOE Job Task Analysis, BPI 1200 compliance, and more.

Small Business Lending

Little Dixie Community Action Agency, Inc. would like to congratulate Meagan Penson on the opening of her new salon, The Hair Room, located at 501 E Duke in Hugo, OK. Meagan utilized Little Dixie’s small business services for assistance with starting her business.

Little Dixie offers small business lending, as well as pre- and post-loan technical assistance to residents in Choctaw, McCurtain and Pushmataha counties. Loan amounts range from five hundred to several thousand dollars depending on type of loan, credit scores, collateral and other factors. For more information contact Stacy Teague at 580-326-5165.

Homebuyer Education

Little Dixie provided education to 20 potential home buyers this quarter. Out of those, 5 reached their goal of homeownership. By utilizing our housing counseling services and lending programs they were able to improve their credit and obtain loans through USDA’s 502 Direct and Guaranteed loan products.
Experts tell Congress Federal Support for Rural Housing is Essential

On April 2, HAC CEO David Lipsetz was one of five panelists at “The Affordable Housing Crisis in Rural America: Assessing the Federal Response,” a hearing convened by the House Financial Services Committee’s Subcommittee on Housing, Community Development and Insurance. Covered topics included the need to address rental properties’ maturing mortgages, the need for local capacity building and the need for new construction of rental housing in rural areas, as well as the possibility of moving the USDA rural housing programs to HUD – an idea not supported by any of the panelists.

Need Capital for your Affordable Housing Project?

HAC’s loan funds provide low interest rate loans to support single- and multifamily affordable housing projects for low-income rural residents throughout the U.S. and territories. Capital is available for all types of affordable and mixed-income housing projects, including preservation, farmworker, senior and veteran housing. HAC loan funds can be used for pre-development, site acquisition, site development and construction/rehabilitation. Contact HAC’s loan fund staff at hacloanfund@ruralhome.org, 202-842-8600.

Start Planning Now for National Homeownership Month

June marks National Homeownership Month – only two months away! This is a great opportunity to show off your SelfHelp Housing program and gain publicity for the good work of your organization. Now is the time to start planning your event so it does not catch you by surprise. Contact your RD office and see how they want to be involved and who might attend from the state or even national offices. This represents a great opportunity to involve your Congressional Representative and Senators, and local politicians as well. Invite your Mayor and Town or County Council members, other stakeholders, your HFA, and funders.

Hold a groundbreaking, frame a house, have a Build Day, dedicate homes that are ready for move-in, or host an Open House. Along with oratory from supporters, make sure to include testimony from self-help participants – have them share their “housing story” including what the Self-Help program and your organization means to their family.

Homeownership is so important to the economy, the local tax base, and the families that are able to move from rental housing and pursue the American Dream. Self-Help Housing is such a unique way to achieve homeownership – use its appeal to market and advance your organization. Fully engage social media, have a photographer, do media advisories and invite the press, and have data on your accomplishments ready to share. Make your June event work for your organization.
New Faces

LDCAA’s T&MA Contractor department welcomes Paul Bartlett as its newest Self-Help Specialist. Paul is an experienced economic development professional with a 34-year history of working for Rural Development in the affordable housing area. He started his career serving as a County Supervisor/Assistant County Supervisor then moved on to the position of Single Family Housing Specialist, Area Director and finally, Multi-Family Housing Program Director. Paul is a graduate of the University of Minnesota and has served on the Board of the Kearney Area Habitat for Humanity for 10 years. He is currently Vice-President of that organization.

We appreciate Paul’s extensive knowledge in the many areas of Self-Help Housing and welcome him aboard!

The Role of Self-Help Grantee Board of Directors

Boards of Directors are responsible for the success of their organizations. They act as the owner of the organization. Just as quality governance is a key element in the success of organizations, poor governance can be a contributor to the failure of organizations.

Boards of Directors and their members have a variety of roles that they work together to embody. Boards are called to be Visionary by being aware of community needs and developing the organization and its programs to address those needs. This includes developing a mission and assuring positive community Impact.

Refunded Grantees

T&MA Contractor Congratulates USDA Rural Development Re-Funded Housing Programs:

Deep Fork Community Action Agency
of Okmulgee, Oklahoma was funded to complete 38 homes.

Universal Housing Development Corporation
of Russellville, Arkansas was funded to complete 32 equivalent units of rehab.

Congratulations!
RSVP Secures Funding from The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)

Little Dixie’s Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) recently secured funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) along with 150 additional RSVP programs throughout the nation. CNCS awarded more than $13.6 Million in funding to strengthen existing programs and establish new areas of service for the Senior Corps RSVP program.

269 VOLUNTEERS
58 VOLUNTEER STATIONS
62,090 VOLUNTEER HOURS

Local RSVP Volunteer Recognized on MLK JR Day

Little Dixie RSVP Volunteer, Mr. Marcelus Channing, was recently recognized for his dedication to the youth in McCurtain county on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Mr. Channing enjoys watching his group of students singing and dancing (Pictured Below). Mr. Channing also teaches the children values and respect as well as dance. He has taught step dance all over the country.

He reminisced about his days in Los Angeles in the late 1960’s with losing ML King Jr. and Robert Kennedy. But, he said he likes to think of all of the good things that have happened since Martin Luther King’s days and that is what he teaches his students!

Mr. Marcelus Channing, RSVP Volunteer.

Congratulations Mr. Channing!
Stalking Awareness Proclamation

The overall aim of the Safe Place Healing Hearts (SPHH) Program is to enhance the safety of rural victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. In January, the SPHH Program kicked off a community-wide campaign in conjunction with the Stalking Awareness and Resource Prevention Center (SPARC) to promote Stalking Awareness. Little Dixie shared inspiring infographics daily in an effort to promote awareness and provide helpful resources.

What is Stalking?

While legal definitions of stalking vary from one jurisdiction to another, a good working definition of stalking is: a course of conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear.

Dating Violence Awareness

In an effort to educate youth on the dangers of Dating Violence, Safe Place Healing Hearts implemented a resource corner in Hugo Middle School (HMS). This resource was provided by Safe Place Healing Hearts Technical Assistance and discusses information regarding positive relationships.

Jodie Allen, SPHH Coordinator, DeeDee Atwood, Victim Services Coordinator, and Marissa Jordan, CASA Advocate Coordinator, completed 40 hours of training in the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) Victim Assistance Academy to become Victim Advocates.

Christina Smith (Pictured Left) HMS Guidance Counselor and Tonya Finley (Pictured Right) SPHH Coordinator posing for a photo next to the resource center.

1 in 3 teens experience some kind of abuse in their romantic relationships.

- The U.S. Department of Justice
Self-Help Housing Program

One Step Closer to Becoming a Homeowner...

Pictured (left to right) are Construction Supervisor, Grady Ford, Rural Development Specialist, Shaunda Webb, Sommer McMurtry, Group Worker, Tabatha Eads, Homeowner, and Self-Help Housing Director Terri Harless, during the final inspection on February 5, 2019.

Pictured above (left to right) are Self-Help Housing Group Worker, Beverly Coleman, Amelia Laster, McCurtain County Homeowner, Shaunda Webb, USDA Rural Development Specialist and Jerry Burton, Self-Help Housing Construction Supervisor.

Pictured above (left to right) is Cindy Muse, Arbuckle Closing Agent and Colton Romero, Carter County Homeowner.

Pictured (left to right) Terri Harless, Self-Help Housing Director, Renee Thompson, USDA Rural Development Specialist, Juanita Martinez, Marshall County Homeowner, Linda Martin, Self-Help Housing Group Worker and Dusty Watkins, Self-Help Housing Construction Supervisor.
Self-Help Housing Program

One Step Closer to Becoming a Homeowner...

Pictured (top left) is Norma Sosa, Homeowner, and Cindy Muse, Arbuckle Closing Agent. Norma built LDH1 Home in Marshall County.

Pictured above (left to right) are Terri Harless, Self-Help Housing Director, Shaunda Webb, USDA Rural Development Loan Assistant, Linda Martin, Self-Help Housing Group Worker, Donna Jones, Carter County Homeowner, and Dusty Watkins Self-Help Housing Construction Supervisor.

Pictured (left to right) are Renee Thompson, USDA Rural Development Specialist, Linda Martin, Self-Help Housing Group Worker, Dylan, Hailey and Grayson Pletcher, Carter County Homeowner, Terri Harless, Self-Help Housing Director and Dusty Watkins, Self-Help Housing Construction Supervisor.
Youth First

Youth First participants and their families enjoy a fun group trip to the local movie theater.

Youth First Coordinator AJ Henslee with workshop participants. During the activity, participants enjoyed pizza and arts and crafts.

Youth First participants in a Strengthening Families Training and singing karaoke, crafting hearts for Valentines and building birdhouses.

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209 N. 4th St.
Hugo, OK 74743
(580) 326-3351
https://littledixie.org/

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This project is financed in whole or in part by funds from the U.S. Department of Justice as administered by the Oklahoma Office of Juvenile Affairs.