



# Community Action Solutions

July - August 2004

## Community Action Agencies and faith-based group collaborates to repair homes of low-income families

Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency sponsored a Group Workcamp in mid-July where more than 400 teens and adult advisors converged on Jay for a week to repair homes of low-income families and seniors. Dubbed the Dream Catchers Group Workcamp, the teens fanned out over Delaware County to paint, re-roof, replace siding and drywall for 67 houses.

"It's a win-win deal for everyone," declared Jean Cooper, Executive Director. The teens develop new friendships with other team members while helping improve the quality of life for residents. In addition, Cooper estimates the labor provided by the youth will generate about \$200,000 in match that can be used by the agency to qualify for additional funds to bring electrical and plumbing systems in the homes up to current building codes.

Planning for the workcamp began about two years ago. Northeast raised \$25,000 locally to purchase building materials. The youth and their advisors each paid about \$400 to help underwrite the costs.

The mission of the program is to help young people experience Christian service on the front lines of the real world. The Colorado-based Group Camps organizes over 50 workcamps annually. The teens are typically members of church youth groups.

See "Dream Catchers Workcamp" page 5



*Carrie, who is from Illinois, helped paint a house in Jay.*

### Workcamps popular

Community Action Agencies in three communities were involved in Group Workcamps this year. Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency hosted one in Jay. Central Oklahoma Community Action Agency sponsored a camp in Seminole. Big Five Community Services helped with a camp in Coalgate. In 2005, Community Development Support Association is planning a workcamp in Enid and Little Dixie Community Action Agency is planning for one in Hugo.

While the rest of the country was celebrating Independence Day, about 180 teenagers plus their adult supervisors descended on Seminole for the Frontier Group Workcamp sponsored by Central Oklahoma Community Action Agency (COCAA).

According to Executive Director Bill Shields, the teens repaired 29 homes which included replacing five roofs.

This was the second Workcamp held in Seminole.

Working one day in the baking sun and the next in the rain, the teens replaced roofs, painted, rebuilt porches, constructed wheelchair ramps, replaced siding, and made other repairs to the pre-selected homes.

Materials for the Workcamp were purchased locally with \$20,000 raised. Mac Carter, COCAA Outreach Worker, estimated about 800 gallons of paint was purchased.

The City of Seminole, Canadian Valley Electric Co-op Foundation and others provided funds for the program.

The campers came from Missouri, Nebraska, Texas, Illinois, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Louisiana and Oklahoma.

The teens spread out their sleeping bags in the Seminole High School during the week-long Workcamp.

The teens worked 4 1/2 days; they had Wednesday afternoon off to visit area attractions.

See "Seminole Workcamp" page 4

# Housing and Energy Conference Set for Aug. 17-19

*Theme: Building a Foundation for the Future*

The Oklahoma Housing and Energy Conference is scheduled for Aug. 17-19 at the Biltmore Hotel, I-40 & Meridian, in Oklahoma City.

Sponsored by the Oklahoma Weatherization and Housing Advisory Council, the conference will

feature a series of training tracks on:

- Weatherization
  - Housing Resources
  - Financial
  - Homebuyer Funding & Counseling
- In addition, Will Williamson, U.S.

Department of Housing & Urban Development, will present a two-day session entitled “Numbers Don’t Lie But They May Hide.” Attendance at this session is limited to 40.

For registration information, call 405-524-4124.

## 2004 HOUSING AND ENERGY TRAINING SESSIONS

Session dates and times are subject to change

Training Tracks	Numbers Don't Lie, But They Hide	Weatherization	Housing Resources	Financial	Homebuyer Funding and Counseling
<b>Tuesday August 17</b> 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon	Numbers Don't Lie, But They Hide	MHEA Training	Tax Credit 101 (Part 1)	Home Payment Process	American Dream Down Payment Initiative
1:00 - 2:30 p.m.	Numbers Don't Lie, But They Hide	MHEA Training	State Funding: Housing Trust Fund and Rural	Weatherization	HUD-1, RESPA and Closing Fees
3:00 - 4:30 p.m.	Numbers Don't Lie, But They Hide	MHEA Training	HOME-CHDO Certification/Recertification	Self Help	RD: Disabilities, Guaranteed & Direct, Native American
<b>Wednesday August 18</b> 8:30 - 10:00 a.m.	Numbers Don't Lie, But They Hide	MHEA Training	HOME Application Training and Review	HOME Payment Process	OHFA Single Family Revenue Bonds
10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon	Numbers Don't Lie, But They Hide	MHEA Training	HOME-OOR Application Training and Review	HOME-CHDO and Program Income Tracking	Loss Mitigation
1:00 - 2:30 p.m.	Numbers Don't Lie, But They Hide	NEAT Training	Tax Credit 101 (Part 2)	Measuring Program Outcomes	Section 8 Homeownership
3:00 - 4:30 p.m.	Numbers Don't Lie, But They Hide	NEAT Training	HOME Monitoring	HOME Match Tracking and Recordkeeping	Underwriting 101: Who Gets Approved and Why
<b>Thursday August 19</b> 8:30 - 10:00 a.m.	Federal Home Loan Bank Overview	Weatherization Roundtable	Continuum of Care	Community Development Block Grants	Housing Counseling I: Roundtable
10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon	Federal Home Loan Bank Focus on Rehabilitation	Weatherization Roundtable	202 / 811	Community Services Block Grants	Housing Counseling II: Mock Session

## Grant to aid first-time homebuyers in Grady County

Washita Valley Community Action Council has been awarded a \$348,300 grant to help provide eligible first-time homebuyers in Grady County with downpayment and closing costs assistance.

Sharlotte Key, Executive Director, expects to provide assistance to at least 36 buyers. She believes many of the applicants will be renters who can make monthly payments but are having trouble putting together enough money for the downpayment and closing costs.

The grant was provided by the Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency. The Grady County Home Finance Authority provided the required match.

The agency will provide up to \$7,500 to buyers in the form of a five-year forgivable second mortgage. If the buyer occupies the purchased property as their principle residence for five years, then the loan is forgiven, explained Key.

Homebuyers must meet federal income guidelines and qualify for a first mortgage from a lender. Buyers must also complete a homebuyer education course.

"We're very excited about this new program," said Stacey Smith, Washita Valley Board Chairman.

Once in their new homes, Key said staff will familiarize the new homebuyers with other programs offered by the agency including Head Start, Senior Nutrition and Weatherization.



*Sharlotte Key, Executive Director, Washita Valley Community Action Council, (standing) briefs board members (from left) Clara McCoy, Sharon Shoemake and Jack Porter on a \$348,300 Homebuyer Grant for Grady County. Shoemake is Grady County Clerk and Porter is a Grady County Commissioner.*

## Workforce program growing

### CDSA opens new offices

One year after taking over the Workforce Investment Act program for adult and dislocated workers, Community Development Support Association (CDSA) Executive

Director Cheri Ezzell is amazed by the growth in the program.

"It's growing fast," she said.

CDSA has opened offices in Kingfisher, Ponca City, Stillwater and Enid to serve the nine county area. Caseworkers have already assisted over 500 clients and Ezzell expects the program to continue growing.

"It's a great program for Community Action Agencies," she said. "It ties in with our other programs."

The approximately \$600,000 grant helps provide training, tuition and supportive services. CDSA was awarded the grant through a competitive bid process.

"It's very flexible," Ezzell said. Funds can be used to pay tuition for training programs in fields such as nursing, aviation mechanics or truck driving. They can also be used to purchase tools or even steel-toed boots that are required for the job.

## COCAA pilots prescription program

Central Oklahoma Community Action Agency's Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) has been chosen by the Oklahoma Pharmacy Connection Council to pilot a new in-house assistance program.

The Prescription Assistance Program will offer help in obtaining free or discounted prescription medication directly from the manufacturer to eligible individuals through product specific applications.

Trained volunteers will link the client's medications to the corresponding pharmaceutical company, download the appropriate application, and assist the individual in completing the forms.

"We handle the red tape and paperwork to help folks get to the source of prescription assistance and the results have been staggering," said John Sartori, RSVP Director.

The service targets low-income individuals, however, financial qualifications can vary from drug to drug. Many people may qualify despite financial status.

"The program has already had an enormous impact on as many as 224 families in our first three months of operation," Sartori added.

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Excerpted from Central Oklahoma Community Action's newsletter.

# Seminole Workcamp

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*Continued from page 1*

That Wednesday afternoon COCAA and the City of Seminole sponsored a cookout for the teens. Local National Guard and advisory committee members served as cooks.

Residents get more than repairs to their homes.

“They get such a blessing from the kids,” Carter said. “The campers lift the spirits of the residents,” he added.

On Friday evening, the residents are invited to join the campers at the school for a program.

Carter said COCAA began taking applications back in February from homeowners. After screening the applications, site visits were made to determine exactly what needed to be done at each site so that materials could be ordered and a work crew assigned.



*Campers replaced roofs on five houses during the week-long WorkCamp.*

Carter praised the school district, city, local businesses and the entire community for their support of the Group Workcamp.



*Building porches and wheel chair ramps were among the projects.*



*Lunch break on the work site included a devotional led by one of the teens.*



*There was lots of old peeling paint to scrape off the houses.*



*Campers spread an estimated 800 gallons of paint on the houses (and some on themselves) during the Frontier Group Workcamp.*



*Campers replaced siding at several of the houses during the Workcamp.*



# Dream Catchers Workcamp

*Continued from page 1*

“Kids love hands-on service opportunities,” explained Bill Ziech, youth minister, Yorkville, Illinois. “It’s all about being a servant,” he added. He brought 39 teens and advisors with him.

As part of the registration process for the workcamp, the teens rate their skills in carpentry, roofing and painting. A computer program is used to match the teens with the different homes to be repaired.

The campers sleep on the floor of classrooms in a public school. Hot morning and evening meals are provided and picnic type lunches are taken to the worksites.

After a day of working, they attend evening devotionals in the school gym and other special programs. The Cherokee Nation provided a cultural program one evening and the campers had a chance to ride the Cherokee Queen paddleboat on their one afternoon off during the week.

Each crewmember has specific

duties, Ziech explained. The Work Director oversees the project and orders any needed materials. The Progress Reporter reports on the progress being made daily and lets Workcamp staffers know if additional help will be needed to complete the work. The Quartermaster is in charge of tools. The Break Maker is responsible for lunch. The Organizer makes sure the crew departs on time. A Devotional Leader leads an on-site devotional each day during the lunch break.

“It’s nice to get out and help

people,” said Chris Wood who came from Colorado. He is attending his second workcamp.

Jill, an adult advisor from Omaha, said, “We’re having a ball. There’s nothing like a Workcamp.” Jay was her 10<sup>th</sup> Workcamp – her second as an adult advisor. “I love it,” she added.

“This community has gotten behind this 200 percent,” said Cooper. A trolley took Northeast board members and financial supporters on a tour of several sites.



*Local financial supporters of the Dream Catchers Group Workcamp visited with teen workers during a tour of the sites.*



*It was wall-to-wall sleeping bags when campers took over a public school classroom in Jay.*



*Workcamp staffers served as troubleshooters. They would lend a hand to the campers, if needed.*



*This camper lugs shingles up a ladder in Jay.*

# Government web site offers access to benefit programs

The U.S. Department of Labor is managing a free web site that helps citizens determine their potential eligibility for hundreds of government-funded benefit and assistance programs.

The innovative web site -- [www.GovBenefits.gov](http://www.GovBenefits.gov) -- offers diverse and extensive benefit program information for veterans, seniors, students, teachers, children, people with disabilities, dependents, disaster victims, farmers, caregivers, job seekers, prospective homeowners

and more.

The web site features more than 400 federally administered benefit programs, as well as more than 100 state administered benefit programs.

According to the Department of Labor, the web site has attracted more

than 11 million visitors in its first two years.

This past April marked the second anniversary of the site, which was commemorated with the launching of a Spanish version as well as a new loan-oriented section of the site.

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## OKACAA Annual Conference set for Sept. 22-23

More than 220 Community Action staff members will be recognized for their years of service during the Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies (OKACAA) Annual Conference.

Community Action is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year.

The conference is scheduled for Sept. 22-23 at the Biltmore Hotel, I-40 & Meridian, in Oklahoma City.

The Awards Banquet is scheduled for 6 p.m. on Sept. 22. Fifteen Community Action employees will be honored for 35 years of service. Another 10 will be recognized for 30 years of service.

The conference will feature management training on "Managing Diversity." Pre-enrollment is required for this session.

The conference will also feature a training track for board members. Sessions are planned on understanding financial reports and managing conflicts of interest.

A training session on Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act Security Compliance is planned. A Results Oriented Management & Accountability roundtable is also scheduled.

Other training tracks planned are financial, housing, Head Start, and Child and Adult Care Food Program staff members.

The OKACAA Board of Directors, Oklahoma Weatherization and Housing Advisory Council and Oklahoma Head Start Association are all scheduled to meet during the conference.

### How to Reach OKACAA Staff

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## Community Action Agencies to aid in predatory loans refinance effort

Fannie Mae has pledged \$2 million to refinance people out of predatory loans.

Rex Smitherman, Director of Fannie Mae's Oklahoma Partnership Office, made the announcement during a press conference in Tulsa.

Victims of predatory lending can apply to non-profit partners in the initiative. The partners include Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties, Community Action Development Corporation, Community Development Support Association, Great Plains Improve-

ment Foundation, KI BOIS Community Action Foundation and Little Dixie Community Action Agency.

First Mortgage LLC will serve as the lender that refinances the loans.

Fannie Mae gave a \$10,000 grant to Legal Aid of Oklahoma to assist people who may make more money than the usual income limitations set by Legal Aid.

Refinancing will depend upon the determination that the existing loan is predatory, there is available equity in the property to support the new loan, and the ability of the victim to repay the new loan.

## Multi-sensory techniques used in summer reading program

A youth lies on the floor with his ear pressed against one of a dozen scattered cards. He is participating in a unique summer reading program conducted by Community Development Support Association in Enid for elementary school age

youngsters who need help with their reading skills.

“The program uses multi-sensory teaching techniques to create an enjoyment of reading,” explained Vickey Gailey, tutoring coordinator. The youngster on the floor is one of a

dozen students playing a variation of the game “Twister.”

Earlier that afternoon, the student had been studying words with the “ough” sound. There are six different ways to pronounce “ough” in English, Gailey explained. She leads the students through a list of different words that contain “ough” but sound differently. Drought, enough, through, tough and thought are examples.

After hearing the words and definitions, the students write the words on small cards. The cards are used in the game.

Put your ear on a street that goes through town, Gailey calls out. The kids search the cards until they find the one with “thoroughfare” written on it. The kids say the word aloud.

Put your left foot on “doughnut.” Now your right hand should go on “enough.” The exercise continues — supporting the earlier instruction.

Gailey has also created a “noodle hockey” game. The team that can answer questions about the topic studied that day gets to hit the puck first.

Students meet twice weekly in a Northwestern Oklahoma State University classroom in Enid. In addition to Gailey, there are volunteers to help. The six-week program is funded by a grant from the Office of Juvenile Affairs



*“Noodle Hockey” is a tool used to help improve reading skills.*



*The Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies (OKACAA) presented the Congressional Leader Award to U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas in recognition of his support of Oklahoma’s Community Action Agencies. Participating in the presentation were, from left, Michael E. Jones, Executive Director, OKACAA; Rep. Lucas, Georgia Forthum, Executive Director, Opportunities, Inc.; and Jim Sconzo, Executive Director, Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties.*



*Vickey Gailey uses a variation of the game Twister to help students improve reading skills.*

## Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies

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## Member Agencies of the Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies

**Big Five Community Services**  
Durant (580) 924-5331  
Serving: Bryan, Carter, Coal, Love and Pontotoc Counties

**Central Oklahoma  
Community Action Agency**  
Shawnee (405) 275-6060  
Serving: Cleveland, Lincoln, Logan, Payne, Pottawatomie and Seminole Counties

**Community Action Agency of  
Oklahoma City and  
Oklahoma/Canadian Counties**  
Oklahoma City (405) 232-0199  
Serving: Oklahoma and Canadian Counties

**Community Action Development  
Corporation**  
Frederick (580) 335-5588  
Serving: Beckham, Cotton, Jefferson, Kiowa, Roger Mills, Tillman and Washita Counties

**Community Action Resource  
& Development, Inc.**  
Claremore (918) 341-5000  
Serving: Mayes, Rogers, Nowata, Wagoner and Washington Counties

**Community Development  
Support Association**  
Enid (580) 242-6131  
Serving: Garfield and Grant Counties

**Cookson Hills Community  
Action Foundation**  
Tahlequah (918) 456-0571  
Serving: Adair, Cherokee and Sequoyah Counties

**Deep Fork Community Action  
Foundation**  
Okmulgee (918) 756-2826  
Serving: McIntosh, Hughes, Okfuskee and Okmulgee Counties

**Delta Community Action  
Foundation**  
Purcell (405) 527-6537  
Serving: Garvin, McClain and Stephens Counties

**Great Plains Improvement  
Foundation**  
Lawton (580) 353-2364  
Serving: Comanche County

**INCA Community Services**  
Tishomingo (580) 371-2352  
Serving: Atoka, Johnston, Marshall and Murray Counties

**KI BOIS Community Action  
Foundation**  
Stigler (918) 967-3325  
Serving: Haskell, Latimer, Leflore and Pittsburg Counties

**Little Dixie Community Action  
Agency**  
Hugo (580) 326-3351  
Serving: Choctaw, McCurtain and Pushmataha Counties

**Muskogee County Community  
Action Foundation**  
Muskogee (918) 683-7637  
Serving: Muskogee County

**Northeast Oklahoma  
Community Action Agency**  
Jay (918) 253-4683  
Serving: Craig, Delaware and Ottawa Counties

**Opportunities, Inc.**  
Watonga (580) 623-7283  
Serving: Alfalfa, Beaver, Blaine, Cimarron, Custer, Dewey, Ellis, Harper, Kingfisher, Major, Texas, Woods and Woodward Counties

**Southwest Oklahoma  
Community Action Group**  
Altus (580) 482-5040  
Serving: Greer, Harmon and Jackson Counties

**United Community Action  
Program**  
Pawnee (918) 762-3041  
Serving: Creek, Kay, Noble, Osage and Pawnee Counties

**Washita Valley  
Community Action Council**  
Chickasha (405) 224-5831  
Serving: Grady and Caddo Counties