



Community Action Solutions

May - June 2004

Community Action Agencies help low-income tax filers

Eleven Community Action Agencies helped low-income persons in their service areas electronically file over 2,800 federal tax returns and claim more than \$3.6 million in refunds, according to Internal Revenue Service (IRS) data.

Big Five Community Services, based in Durant, completed 842 returns at three Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites with total refunds reaching \$1,025,739.

Big Five was one of several agencies participating in a pilot program to help low-income families take advantage of the Earned Income Credit and the Child Tax Credit when filing their returns.

The agencies in the pilot program received funds to purchase laptop computers and printers. The IRS provided software to complete and electronically file the returns.



Diana Behm, Special Projects Manager, Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency, (left) and Karen O'Neill, SPEC Territory Manager, Internal Revenue Service, review a report on tax returns prepared by Community Action Agencies.

Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency administered the program. Funding for the effort was provided through grants from the Administration for Children and Families, the Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies Head Start Collaboration Office and the Oklahoma Department of Commerce.

Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties assisted 712 client at three sites. Federal refunds totaled \$965,410.

Oklahoma Department of Commerce staffers volunteered to assist with the effort. Lending a hand were Kathy McLaughlin, Janet Griffin, Floyd BringingGood, Martin Roberts, Tracey Tyrone, Garcia Tarver and Tina Lindsey.

Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency, based in Jay, completed 335 returns with refunds totaling \$576,580.

There were 248 former and present Head Start parents that utilized the free tax service, according to Diana Behm, Special Projects Manager. Forty-four families used an agency account for direct deposit of their refunds which reduced their wait.

Altus-based Southwest Oklahoma Community Action's Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) staff completed 202 returns. Total refunds were \$249,370.

Central Oklahoma Community Action Agency helped 216 clients complete returns in its Norman and Stillwater offices. Total refunds were \$211,226.

According to John Sartori, RSVP Director, Norman, a University of Oklahoma accounting professor brought students to prepare the returns.

Deep Fork Community Action Foundation in Okmulgee prepared 132 federal returns in its four-county service area. Refunds totaled \$165,044.

Opportunities, Inc. electronically filed 197 returns that generated \$169,855 in refunds for families in Watonga, Clinton and Woodward.

KI BOIS Community Action Foundation, headquartered in Stigler, prepared 103 returns in four counties with refunds totaling \$83,937.

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Durant Mayor Jerry Tomlinson congratulated Big Five Community Services for assisting over 840 families complete tax returns. The families received more than \$1 million in refunds. Pictured are, from left, Donna Pound, volunteer; Bill Haddock, Executive Director; Mayor Tomlinson; Beth Parker, site coordinator; and Kerry Manning, volunteer.

Renovated depot to house Community Action offices

Cookson Hills Community Action Foundation's Adair County office and KI BOIS Community Action Foundation's transit (KATS) office will be housed in a newly renovated Kansas City Southern railroad depot in Stilwell.

The depot will also house a visitor's center, the Adair County

Historical and Genealogical Association offices, a museum and a coffee shop.

Funding for the project came from the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, Eastern Oklahoma Development District, KI BOIS and Cookson Hills, Adair County Commissioners, the City of Stilwell

and local donors.

Roger Bartlett, KI BOIS Grant Writer, and Helen James, Executive Director of Cookson Hills, are members of the Kansas City Southern Depot Restoration Committee. Bartlett wrote the grant proposal for the restoration project.

The Depot Restoration Project was a joint effort of the Adair County Historical and Genealogical Association, City of Stilwell, Adair County Commissioners, Cookson Hills and KI BOIS Community Action, E.H. and Sarah McGee, Stilwell Middle School Builder's Club, Oklahoma Development District, and the Stilwell Utility Department.



Attending the dedication of the Stilwell Depot were, from left, Gene Bass, KI BOIS Community Action Foundation Board President; Roger Bartlett, KI BOIS Grant Writer; Helen James, Executive Director, Cookson Hills Community Action Foundation; Charla Sloan, Transit Director, and R. Carroll Huggins, Executive Director, KI BOIS.

Deep Fork plans murder mystery dinner theatre to raise funds for emergency services program

Deep Fork Community Action Foundation is raising funds to help provide emergency services to low-income residents by sponsoring a murder mystery theatre and silent auction, according to Sherry West, Social Services Director.

Scheduled for June 12 at the Natura Vineyard & Winery near Beggs, the play will feature Deep Fork staff and local community members in the cast.

This is the second year that Deep

Fork has been involved in the event, but the first that the agency has had total responsibility for it.

"We think it's going to be pretty good," West said.

Deep Fork raised about \$2,200 in sponsorship money to businesses to help pay the expenses for the event. Tickets are being sold for \$25 per person or \$40 per couple.

The agency has also put together items for a silent auction. A wine tasting is planned before the dinner.

Tax Returns

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Community Action Resource and Development, based in Claremore, completed 35 returns during its first year. Federal refunds were \$58,672.

The 34 clients of Little Dixie Community Action Agency, Hugo, received a total of \$65,161 in refunds.

Cookson Hills Community Action Foundation's effort went well with 23 returns prepared and total refunds of \$36,099.

Vaughn Clark Honored



Vaughn Clark, Director of the Community Development Division, Oklahoma Department of Commerce, was presented a Friend of Community Action Award during the Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies' Summer Conference.

United uses modular houses in rehab program



United Community Action Program (UCAP) joined community partners in Pawnee, Pawhuska and Wynona to make a difference in the lives of some local families.

United is using modular housing in its rehabilitation program. These families got to watch their modular homes being lowered to final resting spots by crane.

“The concept allows us to get the families into their new homes faster,” said George Johnson, Housing Specialist for UCAP.

Modular houses are built by the same specifications and materials. Homes meet all codes and are installed on footings and solid stem walls, says Johnson.

Under the program, families agree to a five-year, forgivable mortgage at zero interest. The occupants can't sell the home, must maintain them and permit annual inspections.

The homeowners had to meet income requirements, and are served on a first-come, first-served basis, with priority given to elderly and residents with disabilities.

Excerpted from April 15, 2004 UCAP News

Southwest Community Action – RSVP’s Community of Promise hosts Earth Day Groceries Project

Greer County’s Promise hosted the Earth Day Groceries Project.

Southwest Oklahoma Community Action’s Head Start, Edison Elementary Pre-K and Kindergarten, Granite Elementary Pre-K and Kindergarten, and Tiger Cub Daycare participated by painting and coloring brown paper sacks with earth friendly messages.

The sacks were donated by Domino Fuel Stop, Puckett’s Food Store and United Supermarket.

The sacks were picked up by Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) volunteers and returned to the stores to be distributed on Apr. 22 -- Earth Day. The stores sacked groceries in the colorful sacks for the patrons to enjoy while observing Earth Day.



Samuel Nona and Whitney Walker attending Head Start in Granite are among the many children in Greer County that participated in the Earth Day Groceries Project.

Southwest Oklahoma Community Action - RSVP's Community of Promise Program hosts National Youth Service Day April 17 in Altus

Jackson County's Promise hosted National Youth Service Day on April 17 at the Altus City Gymnasium.

The event kicked off with a Meth Prevention presentation viewed by youth that was produced by the Oklahoma Highway Patrol. The youth volunteers critiqued the presentation and its effectiveness as serving as a deterrent in using methamphetamines. Upon completion this program will be introduced to the eleven county area surrounding Jackson County.

Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) volunteers and the Dr. Seuss characters of Cat In The Hat and Sam I Am presented the story of Green Eggs and Ham along with magic tricks.

The American Red Cross' Scrubby Bear was on hand to stress the importance of being germ aware.

Altus Police fingerprinted children and taught them the essentials of "911" and the Altus Fire Department assisted children through the Oklahoma Farm Bureau's Fire House.

Also during the afternoon, an Oklahoma Game Ranger taught the basics of gun safety.

The Jackson County Emergency Medical Service personnel showed children emergency medical equipment. Many information booths were set-up including Communities of Promise, Head Start, Altus Public Library, Altus Animal Aide, and Altus Air Force Base Nutrition.

One spectacular presentation was the break dancing crew from the Altus City Gym. They were invited to do a demonstration that was appreciated by over 30 spectators.

Thirty youth volunteers and eight RSVP volunteers assisted with the service day.

Area business made over \$630 worth of in-kind donations to provide free breakfast, lunch, drinks, and needed supplies.



Sack races were one of several activities at National Youth Service Day that stressed fitness that can be fun.



Community garden feeds families in McIntosh County

Hundreds of low-income families in McIntosh County will again this year be getting fresh vegetables from a community garden in Eufaula.

Deep Fork Community Action Foundation coordinates the program. The garden is located on three acres of Corps of Engineer land.

According to Deep Fork County Coordinator Debbie Wright, the garden has more than a dozen different vegetables that were planted and are being cultivated and harvested by community groups.

Now in its third year, the garden provided fresh vegetables to more than 400 families last year.

The harvested vegetables are taken to Deep Fork's office to be distributed. In addition, some of the vegetables are taken to Deep Fork nutrition sites and senior citizen centers.

Wright expects more than 250 individuals will work in the garden during the year.

Grant to fund educational programs

The Eufaula Inspiration Garden will feature an educational pavilion on the site thanks to a \$30,000 community grant from the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth.

Part of the grant will be used to help construct an educational pavilion where children can learn

more about gardening. The Corps of Engineers and Oklahoma State University Extension Service are expected to provide instructors for the classes.

A 24-member youth advisory committee is being appointed to provide input features they would like to see at the garden.



Potatoes, peas, tomatoes, onions, beets, radishes, lettuce, green beans and peppers are among the vegetables being grown in the Eufaula Inspiration Garden to help feed low-income families in McIntosh County.

OKACAA web site provides link to child care information

OKACAA's web site now provides a link to a new National Child Care Information Center web site.

Go on-line to OKACAA's web site home page (www.okacaa.org), click on Head Start links and then scroll down and click on National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC).

The site contains information resources on early care and education. Menu links include:

- Popular Topics: Browse through a variety of the most commonly requested information. The topical information products contains lists of publications, links to organizations, and other resources associated with each topic.

- On-line Library: Search and view summaries of publications of interest to the child care community.

- State Data and Contacts: State-specific information is available in four sections -- state profiles, child care database, contact directories and requests for proposals.

- Child Care Database: Search Child Care and Development Fund and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families statistics, state demographics, child care licensing, program enrollment and participation, and professional development data by state and region.

- Contact Directories: Find contact

information for state agencies and organizations.

The NCCIC is a project of the Child Care Bureau at the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

Oklahoma Housing & Energy Conference

August 17-19, 2004

Biltmore Hotel
I-40 & Meridian
Oklahoma City

CARD sponsors innovative program to teach students about grant making process

Community Action Resource & Development (CARD) sponsored a school/community partnership project to teach high school students about the grant making process and the role of community-based nonprofit organizations.

“The vision behind the project was to help youth become knowledgeable about the nonprofit sector and to understand the importance of contributing to their communities,”

said Georgene Zachary, Executive Director, CARD.

Students attending South Coffeyville and Coweta High Schools each awarded \$2,500 to a local organization. Students established the grant purpose, selection criteria, advertised for proposals, reviewed proposals, selected recipients and evaluated the funded projects.

In South Coffeyville, students in Sherry Price’s Leadership Class selected the local police and fire departments to receive the awards.

Police Chief Wade Lamb said they would use funds to outfit vehicles and canines for a narcotics detection team.

Fire Chief Jim Wilson said the funds would help purchase specialized equipment needed by a Rapid Intervention Team to rescue fellow firefighters trapped while battling blazes.

“This has got us off to a great

start,” Chief Wilson said.

The Leadership Class is in its inaugural year.

“I hope my students will gain an awareness of what will help and how they can help serve their community that they live in,” Price said.

The pilot program is also drawing praise from the Oklahoma Department of Commerce (ODOC).

“These young adults will soon be leaders in their communities and it is important that they be prepared to understand grant making processes,” said Kathy McLaughlin, Team Leader, ODOC. “They may well be involved in securing funds someday and the more they know about how grants are awarded, the better,” she added.

The funds for the program come from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Community Services Block Grant Act and is administered by ODOC.

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The South Coffeyville Leadership class awarded a \$2,500 grant to the fire and police departments. This pilot program was funded by Community Action Resource & Development (CARD) as a tool to acquaint students with the role of community-based organizations and the grant making process. Participating in the check presentation are, from left, Floyd BringingGood, Liaison, Oklahoma Department of Commerce; Principal Clem Haddox; Wanda DeBruler, CARD Consultant; Police Chief Wade Lamb and Fire Chief Jim Wilson; students Miranda Lamb, Ashley Benfer and Laken Roeder; Georgene Zachary, CARD Executive Director; Superintendent Rich McSpadden and teacher Sherry Price.

Letters praise Community Action programs

Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start are comprehensive child development programs that serve children from birth to age 5, pregnant women, and their families. They are child-focused programs and have the overall goal of increasing the school readiness of young children in low-income families.

Below are excerpts from a cross section of letters sent to Community Action Agencies:

"There are not enough words to describe how terrific this program has been. My daughter...started at Wilson Head Start last year in the three year old program. Since that time she has been diagnosed with a speech delay. Without this program she would have been entering kindergarten behind other children," wrote the parent of a child in the Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group's Head Start program.

Another parent wrote:

"As a former Head Start parent I must express how strongly I support this program. I felt that this program

was an excellent beginning for my child both socially and academically. This program introduced my child to the experience of interacting with other children and adults in a school-like setting but still offered the nurturing I feel a three-year old child needs."

A parent with a child in the Little Dixie Head Start program in south-eastern Oklahoma wrote:

"As a three-year-old in Head Start last year, my son learned all of his colors, ABCs, and numbers up to 20, as well as songs and stories that he would come home and tell me about. I am now a steadfast advocate of Head Start because I know what a

wonderful job they do and what a great education they provide for children."

Another parent noted:

"Head Start has really helped with their food program and encouraging kids to taste something even if they don't like it. It has really helped my youngest...change his eating habits at home."

Still another parent wrote:

"I'd like to say that the Delta Head Start Program school in Marlow, Oklahoma, has been a wonderful part of our life. The teachers are absolutely wonderful. They have taught our boys so very much, both educational, and also good - honest - down home values."

Weatherization

The mission of the Weatherization Assistance Program is to reduce energy costs for low-income families, particularly for the elderly, people with disabilities, by improving energy efficiency of their homes while ensuring their health and safety.

A letter from a family in Anadarko written to Washita Valley Community Action Group:

"I just want to Thank You All so much for the work you did to my home, it is 100% warmer and 110%

safer. Thank you for fixing my broken windows, the holes in the floors, giving us a carbon-monoxide & smoke detectors and all of the other weatherization items. You are lifesavers."

Central Oklahoma Community Action Agency received a letter from a Prague woman:

"I just got my house weatherization completed yesterday. This is going to make my propane bill a little easier to pay this year."

Foster Grandparents

The Foster Grandparents Program offers seniors age 60 and older opportunities to serve as mentors, tutors, and caregivers for children and youth with special needs. They serve in community organizations such as schools, hospitals and youth centers.

Cookson Hills Community Action Foundation received several letters from Foster Grandparents:

"I start the Foster Grandparent Program tomorrow. If I can help some child to learn, to get a grip on wanting to get an education, give them the love & attention they aren't

getting at home I will have met my own personal goal."

A Stilwell woman wrote:

"I have learned a lot working around and being with little ones. I enjoy working with them, I also enjoy working with the teachers."

Another woman who works in the Muldrow kindergarten wrote:

"I remember the years back when I wanted so much to be F.G.P. On October 30, 2000 I came to be one. I like helping the students with their work. I like to see them learn their ABCs and numbers and print their names. I like to know that I was a part of helping them."

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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
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Opportunities, Inc.

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United Community Action Program

Pawnee (918) 762-3041
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Washita Valley Community Action Council

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