



Community Action Solutions

May - June 2006

INCA + OG&E + Band of Brothers = Lower Utility Bills

INCA Community Services partnered with a state utility and a local faith-based group to weatherize the homes of three senior citizens in Sulphur.

INCA did the initial assessment to identify what steps could be taken to improve the energy efficiency of the houses. The faith-based group known as the Band of Brothers did the work using materials purchased with funds provided by the OG&E Hand-N-Hand program.

The Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies administers the program to weatherize the homes of eligible senior citizens who are OG&E customers.

"I think it's wonderful," declared Eddie Jarman whose home of 32 years was weatherized. He said his electric bill was cut by \$58 after doors were replaced and windows were caulked.

"I would recommend this program and INCA to anybody," Jarman said.

Nadine Tinker, INCA's Murray County coordinator, said about \$1,200 was spent to weatherize the three-bedroom house and make some other repairs. It was the first house weatherized with funds provided to INCA through the Hand-N-Hand program.

Maxine Barnett, a 20-year RSVP volunteer for INCA, echoed the praise for the program. Her 100-year-old home had windows replaced, window air conditioners boxed in, caulking and other repairs.

Bonnie Owens had been living in her neat little house for 29 years when she heard about the program. "Somebody told me INCA was doing it so I signed up," she said.

Two new doors were added along with foam insulation and lots of caulking. All three praised the Band of Brothers.



Eddie Jarman shows Nadine Tinker, INCA's Murray County coordinator, a new door installed as part of the weatherization project.



Maxine Barnett shows INCA board member Emagene Gibbs where the Band of Brothers boxed in her window air conditioner.

"I think it's wonderful. Those men were so nice," Owens said.

When the men were working on her house, they discovered a step to the back door was missing. They chipped in their own money to buy materials to create a step.

The Band of Brothers is a group of men who hold down full-time jobs, but do volunteer work in the community, Tinker said. They work in near anonymity. Even the homeowners did not know the names of the men that worked on their homes.



Although not a part of the weatherization work, the Band of Brothers chipped in extra money to build a step for Bonnie Owens.

OKACAA Summer Conference features training, political candidates & fun



Karen O'Neill from the Internal Revenue Service discusses how clients can receive a portion of their Earned Income Tax Credit monthly.



Pete Regan, candidate for Lt. Governor, visits with Carroll Huggins, executive director, and Gene Bass, board member, KI BOIS Community Action Foundation, following a breakfast speech during the conference.



Brent Morey, executive director, Community Action Development Corporation, describes how his agency developed procedures for responding to a crisis.



Community Action executive directors serenade retiring Big Five Community Services Executive Director Bill Haddock during the Pre-July 4th picnic.



Greg Smith, housing director, Community Development Support Association, facilitates a housing roundtable.



Susan Stewart, director of outreach services, YWCA Oklahoma, discusses ways to recruit, training and keep volunteers.

Police developing positive relationships with children

When Chickasha Police Lt. Elip Moore first stepped into the Head Start classroom, the children looked up from their work and cautiously gazed at the uniformed visitor.

Then the 4-year-olds in Tina Dolch's class converged on Lt. Moore and began peppering him with questions about the equipment he carried on his belt. They were fascinated -- touching his handcuffs, radio, baton, flashlight and even a metal plate from his protective vest.

The visit to the Washita Valley Community Action Council Head Start classroom was part of a daily walk-through Chickasha police officers make through school buildings.

Sometimes officers will share a safety tip with the youngsters and sometimes they'll answer a seemingly endless stream of questions.

It's all part of a community outreach

effort to begin building long-term, trusting relationships between officers and the children.

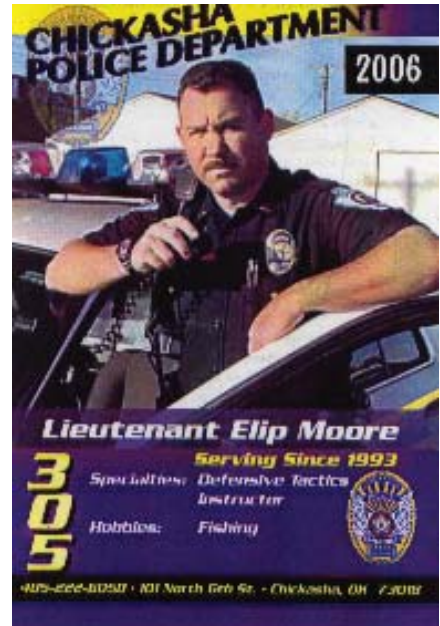
Officers are often seen only in an enforcement role, Lt. Moore explained. The youngsters are scared of police.

Lt. Moore and his fellow officers are determined to change that image. Moore wants to build long-term, positive, pleasant relationships with children.

Looking for different ways to interact with children, the department created trading cards that are similar to sports figure cards.

Lt. Moore checked with the teacher to see which child had been behaving in class. Brandon Thornburg was rewarded with one of Moore's cards.

The program was launched about 18 months ago. Officers have already distributed about 6,600 cards, according to Lt. Moore.



As part of its community outreach effort, Chickasha police officers now carry cards to give to children. Any youngster who collects 20 different cards gets lunch with the police chief.



Children enrolled in the Head Start program in Chickasha crowd around Lt. Elip Moore to ask questions about his equipment. Children are, from left, Brandon Thornburg, Taylor Herrera, Kyle Davis and Cortez Woods.

Local community organizations underwrite the cost of printing the cards.

Head Start center director Rebecca Donovan says it's great to watch the officers interact with the children. Officers have also volunteered to read to the children enrolled in the Head Start program.

An added benefit to Donovan is the security that the presence of the officers brings to the center. Officers visit the schools at random times.

The center is housed in a school building constructed in 1930. There's no intercom and solid doors prevent her from easily monitoring classroom activities.

Safety of these children is a number one priority, according to Donovan. The officers walking through the building makes her feel a lot safer.

Little Dixie launches Early Reading First Program

Teachers and parents in southeastern Oklahoma are getting new tools to help prepare pre-kindergarten children to read through an intensive literacy program provided by Little Dixie Community Action Agency.

“We are trying to prepare children for kindergarten with all pre-reading skills accomplished,” said Ruthie Tate, program director for the Early Reading First - Project ROAR (Rural Oklahoma Advocates Reading).

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the program is creating “centers of excellence” in 14 Head Start classrooms located in Antlers, Boswell, Hugo, Glover and Idabel. The three-year grant totals nearly \$4 million.

“The program is creating a literacy environment and improving literacy instruction,” Tate said.

Five reading specialists are coaching classroom teachers on reading instruction techniques.

Family literacy advocates plan monthly meetings for parents in each community. Each parent attending a meeting receives a hardback book for their child.

“We’re trying to create a family library at home,” Tate explained.

In addition, each week children take home a bag containing four books for their parents to read to them. When they return the first four books, another bag of books goes home with the children.

Little Dixie’s Early Reading First Program grant is one of only two grants awarded in Oklahoma. The other grant went to the Center for Early Childhood Professional Development in the College of Continuing Education at the University of Oklahoma.

The grant application process is very rigorous. Only very good programs are considered for a grant.

“We had to prove in the grant application that we already had a good program,” Tate said.

The curriculum is research based. Pre-assessments were conducted and Little Dixie has contracted with the University of Memphis to track evaluations.

The grant has allowed Little Dixie to provide an abundance of resource materials. Over \$150,000 was spent on computers and over \$225,000 on curriculum materials and supplies. Each teacher could spend \$2,000 on materials.

Although introduced only in January, Tate is already getting positive feedback from parents.

“Parents tell me their children now talk to them about books,” Tate said. “Classrooms are getting needed resources. I know it’s going to be a great program.”



Ruthie Tate, program director for Early Reading First - Project ROAR, (left) meets with Pam Covington, planning director at Little Dixie Community Action Agency. Covington wrote the grant application.

Dads involved in Head Start program

Mike Turner is on a mission: To get dads involved with their kids.

As the Fatherhood Initiative coordinator for Little Dixie Community Action Agency’s Early Head Start/Head Start programs, he oversees a broad range of activities including the Raising a Reader program that is part of the Early Reading First program.

The Raising a Reader component involves sending books home with children for their parents to read to them.

He also encourages fathers to read to the children in the Head Start classrooms.

There is a Dad’s Day activity at each of the Head Start centers monthly, Turner explained. It may involve the dad and child building a birdhouse or some other joint activity.

According to Turner, agency wide an average of over 100 men per month participate in Dad’s Day activities.

Little Dixie has about 500 children enrolled in its Head Start and Early Head Start programs.



Mike Turner



Little Dixie Community Action Agency has purchased the Federal Building in Hugo to house its administrative offices.



Executive Director Randall Erwin and about 20 staff members are housed in the new building.



Grilling hotdogs at the open house were Tommy Butler, Frank Hinton and Butch Needham.

Little Dixie hosts open house and cookout at new office

Little Dixie Community Action Agency celebrated Community Action Month on May 31 with a community cookout and open house at its new administrative offices.

Little Dixie bought the massive two-story Federal Building from the U.S. General Services Administration last summer with a loan provided by Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation.

Much of the interior was gutted and new walls were erected to accommodate the staff. Little Dixie occupies about half of the building with the Post Office remaining in the building as a tenant.

“It gives us a presence in downtown and more space,” explained Randall Erwin, executive director.

The executive director, associate directors, planners, accounting staff, human resources department and business information center are housed in the building located at 209 N. 4th St. in Hugo.

The open house featured a cookout with Tommy Butler, financial services director; Frank Hinton, human resources director; and Butch Needham, Youth Restitution Program director, grilling hotdogs. Entertainment was provided by Stacie Pace, Small Business Services director, and Carolyn Whitley from the Head Start program.

Little Dixie’s Head Start office moved into the old administrative building at 502 W. Duke.



Brent Franks, mayor of Antlers, (left) congratulates Charles Uhles, Little Dixie Community Action Agency board chairman, following the signing of a proclamation declaring May as Community Action Month. Little Dixie serves three counties: Pushmataha, Choctaw, and McCurtain. (Photo provided by Little Dixie Community Action Agency)



Odell Gunter, executive director, Great Plains Improvement Foundation, (left) accepts a proclamation from Gail Turner, county commissioner, proclaiming May as Community Action Month. (Photo provided by Great Plains Improvement Foundation)

Children shadow parents at Great Plains Community Action Month event

Children of Great Plains Improvement Foundation employees helped celebrate Community Action Month by shadowing their parents on May 26.

About 25 children ranging in age from 5 to 15 participated. The youngsters got the chance to help out during a visit to the C. Carter Crane homeless shelter operated by Great Plains. The children helped stock the food pantry in the center.

The full day of activities included a pizza lunch with several speakers including Odell Gunter, executive director, and Patricia Peters, a 30-year employee of Great Plains.

The Community Action Month observance began with presentation of a proclamation from the

Comanche County Board of County Commissioners.

The agency also set up exhibit booths in the Central Mall in Lawton on May 20 to distribute brochures about the various programs operated by Great Plains.



Shawna Silva, receptionist at Great Plains Improvement Foundation, gets some help from children of agency employees who participated in a Shadow Day as part of Community Action Month. (Photo provided by Great Plains Improvement Foundation)

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Executive Directors meet with U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas



Michael E. Jones, executive director, Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies (right), briefs Congressman Frank Lucas (R-3rd) on programs offered by Community Action Agencies. Johnny Bryant from United Community Action Program, Charlotte Key from Washita Valley Community Action Council and Georgia Forthum from Opportunities, Inc. participated in the meeting. All three agencies provide services in the congressman's district. The executive directors met with Rep. Lucas in Yukon during the congressional district work break in June.