



# Community Action Solutions

November-December 2007



*Children joined community leaders to break ground for the Educare Center to be constructed in Oklahoma City. The early childhood learning facility is a collaboration of Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties, Sunbeam Family Services and the Oklahoma City Public Schools.*



*Community Action Executive Director James E. Sconzo participated in the groundbreaking ceremony.*

## Educare Center To Provide Quality Education For Kids

### **Community Action Is Part Of Collaboration**

As Governor Brad Henry and a host of dignitaries looked on, a group of youngsters broke ground for the Oklahoma City Educare Center on November 5.

The early childhood learning center is a collaboration of Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties, the Oklahoma City Public Schools and Sunbeam Family Services.

The center is expected to open in January 2009 and will serve 200 children. About one-third of the youngsters will be from birth to age 3 with the remainder age 3 to 5.

Community Action will fund 140 children from its Head Start program. Sunbeam will provide children

from its Early Head Start program.

Gov. Henry, who described himself and wife Kim as passionate about early childhood education, praised the program as one that will benefit those children most likely to fall through the cracks when they enter public schools. It will really make a difference and is exciting, he said.

George Kaiser, a major contributor to the project, said children are not responsible for the situation of their birth. He called the project a moral obligation and sound investment.

Dan Pedersen, President of the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, said the center will help level the playing field so that children from poor families can compete in kindergarten. He added the challenge was to create an early education center that would reach the children who needed it most.

An elementary school will be built adjacent to the Educare Center, creating a comprehensive campus for children from birth through the sixth grade.

Over \$6.7 million of the \$10.5 million capital budget has been raised. Several foundations donated funds to the project. Land for the center was also donated. The center is expected to have a \$3.1 million annual operating budget.

The Oklahoma City Educare center will be the second in the state. The first is in Tulsa.

## Training Program Leads To Dream Job At Washita Valley Community Action

What began as an Experience Works job training position at Washita Valley Community Action Council has become a dream job for 60-year-old Ginger Miller.

Miller came to Washita Valley in April 2006 to upgrade her job skills through the Senior Community Service Employment Program.

The program provides training, counseling and work assignments to unemployed, income eligible persons, 55 years of age and older. They gain work experience at community and faith-based organizations prior to transitioning into the workforce.

Miller, who had previously worked as a cashier at pharmacies, found she was unable to land a new job after taking time off to care for an ill family member.

“I didn’t know how to use a copier,” she said.

She now juggles a multi-line telephone system, inputs data into a computer and uses the fax, copier and postage meter.

Normally, when seniors complete their training, they look for jobs elsewhere. But, when Washita Valley’s receptionist retired earlier this year, Miller applied and was hired.

“She’s been wonderful,” said Executive Director Charlotte Key. “She’s genuinely concerned about our clients because she was one of our clients.”

Miller said when she began training at Washita Valley, she rode the transit van to work because she couldn’t afford gas and insurance for her car. She has also obtained prescriptions through the Rx for Oklahoma program. That program helps eligible residents obtain free or low-costs prescriptions through pharmaceutical manufacturers’ assistance programs.

Miller said before her job training assignment, she had never heard of Community Action.

“I didn’t know what they did. Now I see it everywhere,” she said.

Her empathy for struggling families was evident as she fielded a phone call from a person seeking help paying a high utility bill. After patiently listening to the caller, she explained the agency had no funds to pay utility bills. She suggested the caller talk to the weatherization director about how the agency could lower the family’s utility costs by improving the energy efficiency of the house.

Miller said she is so thankful for the opportunity to contribute to her community. “It’s been the best experience of my life,” she said.

Experience Works is a national, nonprofit organization that offers programs designed to help mature individuals enter the workforce, move into new career areas or supplement their income.



*Ginger Miller (seated) got a receptionist job at Washita Valley Community Action Council after participating in the Experience Works job training program. Executive Director Charlotte Key said Miller is a wonderful employee and is genuinely concerned about agency clients.*

# A Home To Call Their Own

*By Heather Sleightholm  
Sapulpa Daily Herald Assistant Editor*

Owning her own home has always been something that Kiefer resident Mary Henning wanted for her family.

And as her family started to grow, she knew that they would need more room than the apartment they were living in, so Henning looked into the Deep Fork Community Action Foundation's Self-Help Housing Program.

The program aids people with little or no down payment build a new home for their family.

According to the program, all it takes is the desire to own a home, a good credit history, ability to make payments and a willingness to take part in the construction to acquire a home.

"This is a neat program for people who need housing," Henning said. "It's

also neat to be involved."

Henning first heard about the self-help housing program, which is currently building ranch-style houses in Kiefer, through her oldest daughter's involvement with the program.

Previously Henning was living in an apartment with her daughter Erin and young grandson Bradyn who, because of health needs, uses special equipment that soon crowded their living space.

"We wanted somewhere to live that would be a good environment for Bradyn," Henning said. "He has asthma and needs to live somewhere wheelchair accessible."

She added, "We were able to customize the house to his needs, and since we've moved he's been doing wonderfully. We found out later that the apartment we'd been in had a mold problem, so now that we're in our

house his asthma has really improved."

Henning and her family were involved with the building process from the beginning, from choosing fixtures to doing heavy-duty clean-up as well as painting.

"There were days when we'd be working all day until 11 p.m. at night," Henning said. "But it was a great experience to be involved, you got to really see what was going into your home."

Henning now lives across the street from her oldest daughter and is loving being a part of her new community.

"It's a great little neighborhood out here, with all the houses built through this program," Henning said. "I'm just so glad that we have a cozy little house."

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## Community Action Agency And Boys And Girls Club Help Trio Focus On Their Education

The Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties joined forces with the Boys and Girls Club to help three young adults turn their lives around and begin focusing on their education.

The trio, two boys we'll call Chuck and Mike and a girl we'll call Jane, had bad attitudes, feelings of hopelessness and lots of problems.

All three had made an attempt at Job Corps.

Jane was enrolled for a period of time, but was terminated because of too many absences.

When she came back to Oklahoma City, she went to the Boys and Girls Club seeking help with finding a school in which she could enroll. Mary, a Club staff member, urged her to enroll in the Community Action Agency sponsored General Equivalency Diploma (GED)

class. She's now attending class and has a job.

Mary took the boys to Job Corps in Guthrie, but neither could enroll. Chuck was rejected because he didn't have a birth certificate and state identification card. Mike was rejected because he had some pending juvenile charges that made him ineligible to enroll.

The Community Action Agency helped Chuck with a referral to pay for an out-of-state birth certificate which was needed to get a state ID. The charges against Mike were dismissed. Chuck and Mike joined Jane in the GED class.

When Mike completes his GED class, he plans to give Job Corps another try. Chuck is now working two jobs and attending class. Both boys are attending church on a regular basis.

The Boys and Girls Club staff and the

GED teacher have been very impressed with the remarkable progress these young people have made.

In the 3-4 months since they enrolled, the three are attending regularly and staying for the entire three hours of class time. This is a major improvement in itself.

They've changed their attitude toward education and have improved their life skills. They have learned to focus and are beginning to believe they can learn.

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*This article is based on information supplied by Connie Crew who is the Area Director for the Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties. The names of the three young adults and the Boys and Girls Club staff member have been changed.*



# OKACAA Holds Winter Conference Despite Icy Blast



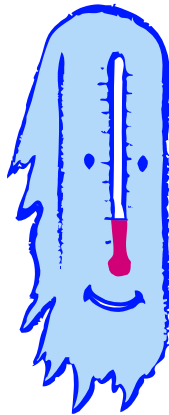
State Senator James Williamson described provisions of Oklahoma's new immigration law and answered questions about its potential impact on Community Action Agencies. OKACAA President Karen Nichols introduced Williamson.



Conference attendees had to brave slick roads and dodge falling tree limbs to attend the Winter Conference held December 12-13 in Tulsa.



Attorneys Eleanor Evans (standing) from CAPLAW and Cheryl Vaught from Vaught & Conner discussed issues agencies should consider when updating their bylaws.



Judie Hanes from Southwestern Youth Services explored cultural awareness sensitivity and how to develop an action plan to work with respect and appreciate parents from different cultures with Head Start Partnership Coordinators.

# Scholarship Application Deadline Is January 11

The deadline for submitting an application to the Oklahoma Weatherization & Housing Advisory Council for the \$1,000 Ted Allen/David Walker Scholarship is January 11, 2008.

For an application, contact: Ted

Allen/David Walker Scholarship, Attn: John Jones, KI BOIS Community Action Foundation, P.O. Box 727, Stigler, OK 74462. Phone: 918-967-3325.

Applicants must be high school

seniors with a minimum 3.0 grade point average planning to attend an accredited four year college or university, or an accredited junior college with plans to complete a degree.

Applicants must also be a direct relative (2nd degree) of an employee of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency or a Community Action Agency.

Applicants must submit a 500 word essay entitled: "The Importance of Affordable Housing for the Low Income."

## Weatherization To The Rescue

Helen is a woman with a disability living in Tulsa with her daughter and grandson. Her daughter is a full-time student so Helen's meager monthly disability check must stretch as far as possible to support the three of them. This means scrimping and doing with out many of life's day-to-day needs.

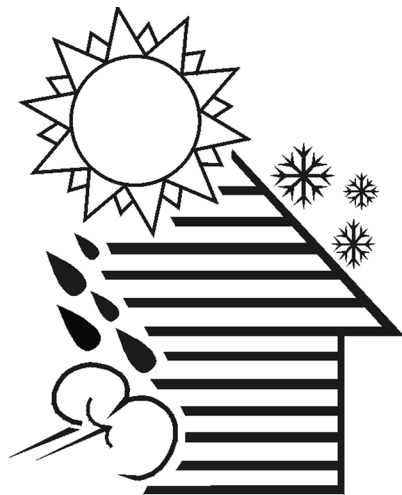
Using all the energy savings tricks she knew, Helen was still averaging a monthly gas bill of at least \$250. Helen knew she could not afford the high gas costs nor afford home weatherization.

Desperate for help, she contacted Community Action Resource and Development ( C.A.R.D.) The weatherization crew replaced 14 old wooden windows, replaced the front and back door, insulated walls and attic spaces, installed carbon dioxide and smoke detectors, installed combustion air pipes in her hot water heater closet, caulked and painted all the exterior trim, wrapped her water heater tank with an insulation blanket and provided sealing/patching throughout her home.

C.A.R.D. also replaced her old inefficient heating system with a new energy efficient unit. The improvements provided and coordinated by the C.A.R.D. weatherization team made her home more comfortable and substantially reduced her gas and electric bills an average of \$90 a month. Now, Helen and her family have the financial ability to meet those day-to-day needs.

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*This article originally appeared on the Community Action Resource & Development web site at [www.cardcaa.org](http://www.cardcaa.org).*



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