



Community Action Solutions

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COCAA Mobilizes Effort to Make Over Senior's Home

A television reporter's call to Central Oklahoma Community Action Agency



The dilapidated home needed a complete rehabilitation.



Tons of trash were removed before work could even begin on the house.



COCAA staff members and community partners welcome Olive Dill to her newly renovated home.

(COCAA) about an elderly lady with a leaking roof led Ginny Corson to organize an effort to completely rehabilitate the home and clean up the surrounding property.

"She just wanted her roof fixed," Corson, COCAA South District director, recalled.

But when Corson saw the home of 87-year-old Olive Dill for the first time, she was shocked. The house in rural Seminole County was surrounded by years of accumulated garbage and overgrown with brush. In the house itself, the bathroom floor was caving in, the front porch was falling down, there were plumbing problems, and the kitchen was nearly unusable.

"No one should have to live like that," Corson said.

Several people suggested demolishing the house and replacing it with a mobile home. However, Dill had lived in that house for 84 years and it was the only home she had ever known.

"It was the right thing to do to help her remain in her home," Corson said.

COCAA's Interim Executive Director Magi York figured out a way to rehabilitate and reconfigure the house into a safe place for Dill to live.

Before work could even begin on the house, there was a mountain of garbage that needed to be removed.

Corson and Phil Hudson, COCAA's weatherization director, began making calls to local businesses seeking help. Hitachi Computer Products

donated \$1,950 to obtain three 30-yard containers. Circle S Trucking, based in Maud, offered heavy equipment and operators to clean up the trash. Corson estimated there was over 50 tons of garbage on the property.

"It took 10 days to clean up enough garbage before work could begin on the house," Corson said.

When work began on the house itself, Dill temporarily moved to Muskogee to live with her son.

COCAA staff and volunteers virtually gutted the interior of the house. Two rooms that had been added to the original structure 40 years ago were removed. The living room was divided to create a new bedroom.

Two or three people have been on-site virtually every day – sometimes working 10 hour days, according to Corson.

Buford White's Ace Hardware donated thousands of dollars worth of materials to rehabilitate the entire house, Corson said. Westchester Development Company donated additional fixtures. Funding from the Oklahoma Energy Resources Board and the U.S. Department of Energy were used to make the house more energy efficient.

A plumber offered to correct plumbing problems in the house. A company has agreed to create a gravel

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driveway.

Walmart donated paint. The youth group from First Baptist Church painted the house.

"It was amazing what was done,"

Corson said.

The rehabilitated house is handicap accessible with wheel chair ramps to both front and back porches.

Corson said it has been a big undertaking. So many people

collaborated to provide Dill with a clean, safe home.

"This is what Community Action does," Corson said. "Helping people and changing lives. The feeling of satisfaction is wonderful."

Re-Run Junction Thrift Shop Offers Jobs And Bargains

Big Five Community Services opened the Re-Run Junction Thrift Shop in Ardmore a year ago to provide job opportunities for people with developmental disabilities.

The shop is not only providing jobs but great bargains on clothing, appliances, furniture, and other items to Carter County residents struggling to stretch their dollars in a faltering economy.

"The thrift shop serves dual purposes – helping clients and the community," Leila Lenore, vocational site manager, said. There are 13 clients working in the shop and the economy is bringing in buyers.

Job coaches help the clients develop skills necessary to function in a work

station. One Wednesday morning, job coach Dana Salzman worked with Michael Martin sorting toy donations at the rear of the shop. At the front of the shop, Diane Shaver and Amy Arbuckle were hanging up clothes.

Having a developmental disability does not mean having no ability – just the opposite. Big Five staff believe every person has abilities and through this program each individual's personal abilities and talents are blended to form successful results.

"There is a waiting list of people who want to work at the Re-Run Junction," Lenore said.

Clients are paid above minimum wage. They are excited about their jobs not only because they are making their own money, but because with the support provided each person is recognized for his or her own abilities.

The shop offers plenty of bargains for area shoppers. Children's clothes start at 75 cents. Adult shirts sell for \$1.25, pants for \$2.25 and winter coats can be purchased for \$2 to \$4.

On Saturdays, customers who purchase one bag of clothes for \$5 can get two more bags free.

"Sack sales really help us rotate our inventory," Lenore said.

As visibility increases, the shop is becoming a popular place to find bargains.

Helen O'Dell was stocking up on children's clothes. She said her home had been destroyed by fire. She left the shop with four bags of clothing that



Dana Salzman and Michael Martin sort toys donated to the Re-Run Junction Thrift Shop in Ardmore



Leila Lenore sacks up clothes purchased at the Re-Run Junction Thrift Shop.

cost her only \$8.18.

Donna Payne and her granddaughter, Destiny, were buying sweaters to give to family members and people at her church.

The shop relies on donations from the community. It accepts a variety of items including clothes, toys, books, furniture, artwork, jewelry, working appliances, and miscellaneous household knickknacks, said Lenore. The thrift shop is a non-profit organization and donations are tax deductible.

Other Re-Run Junction Thrift Shops are located in McAlester, Ada, Pauls Valley, Duncan, Antlers and Moore.

The Web site is www.rerunjunctionthriftshop.org.

CDSA Helps Find Child Care That Meets A Family's Needs

With child care costs climbing, Dianne Juhnke and Paula Waters are working to help parents find child care that meets their needs, supply training and resources to providers, and raise public awareness about the importance of early childhood development and school readiness.

Juhnke is the Community Development Support Association early childhood director and Waters is the Smart Start Northwest Oklahoma program coordinator. Child Care Resource and Referral and Smart Start are programs of CDSA which is based in Enid.

A recent report released by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies pegged the average price in Oklahoma for full-time care of an infant in a center at \$6,029 a year. Single earning households paying for infant care in a center can expect to spend almost 37 percent of their salary and two income households would pay 11 percent.

"Child care issues are huge," said Juhnke.

Kate Jordan is a child care resource



Paula Waters and Dianne Juhnke promote quality child care in northwestern Oklahoma.

and referral specialist who fields phone calls from parents seeking child care. Using a computer database, she collects basic information on the child's age, times and days of the week care is needed, any transportation requirements, and the parent's preference of a child care center or family home care.

"We can then identify providers that match up with their needs," Jordan said.

There are currently about 400 child care providers in the database. Services are provided to parents in a 15-county area in northwestern Oklahoma.

Jordan said she tries to help parents be better consumers. She can provide advice on what to look for to find quality child care. She has information on programs to help pay child care costs and other community resources.

The average cost of child care in Garfield County in a home is \$83 per week for an infant and \$75 for a child over the age of five. In a child care center, the average cost is \$118 for an infant and \$80 for an older child.

There is a shortage of child care particularly for infants and toddlers, according to Juhnke.

"Almost 50 percent of the callers contacting Child Care Resource and Referral last year were looking for care for infants and toddlers," Juhnke noted in a recent issue of Child Care News.

Many of those parents were calling again looking for additional referrals. Reasons cited for not finding care included no openings for infants and the quality of care did not match the parent's expectations.

"Parents are becoming much more aware of the importance of quality care and the impact that high quality care has on their children's lives.

To help address the problem, Juhnke and her staff provide information on starting a child care center or family



Kate Jordan fields phone calls from families seeking child care.

care home. There is training available on topics including health, safety, successful business practices, reading, games, and craft ideas.

Child Care Resource and Referral is partnering with Redland Community College in El Reno to provide a resource room where child care providers can check out books, toys, and games.

Waters is focusing on raising public awareness about the critical importance of early childhood development.

She promotes family friendly business practices. She wants business owners to rethink how policies and practices affect families.

"What happens at work affects the family," she said.

There's no magic solution. She wants to bring diverse groups to the table to come up with solutions.



Counselors Help Addicts Make Positive Changes

Certified counselors at the Opportunities, Inc. Behavioral Care Services center in Watonga are working to help drug and alcoholic addicts make positive changes in their lives that will help them repair family relationships, hold a job, and become self sufficient.

“We offer 24 hours a day, seven days a week residential treatment,” said Deborah Anderson, clinical director at the center. “This becomes their home. They actually live here.”

The residential center can house 18 men and 8 women. Those in the program are called consumers.

There is no typical consumer, Anderson said. Doctors, lawyers, professional football and basketball players have all come to the center for treatment. Currently, a majority of the consumers are under the age of 25.

In Anderson’s office is a sign that says: “Easy does it.”

“We try to teach them to keep things simple,” she said. “We want them to be a part of the treatment. We want to keep it simple so they can understand the treatment plan.”

Anderson and her staff work with consumers to help them change the way they think about themselves and understand why they got into trouble. The key is for the consumers to start accepting responsibility for their actions.

“We start changing the way they think about life and their families,” Anderson explained.

Consumers in the residential program follow a fairly strict schedule. The day begins at 6 a.m. with breakfast and chores. They receive education on substance abuse and on relapse prevention techniques throughout the day. Some attend the self-help



Key staff at the Opportunities, Inc. Behavioral Care Services center in Watonga are, from left, Jon Foster, Fred Mosqueda, Staci Black, Sherry Forgit, Richard Christian and Deborah Anderson.

programs Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Cocaine Anonymous. After 9 p.m. is free time to watch television or enjoy snacks.

The program works closely with community partners. The public school system provides classes two nights weekly where consumers can prepare for the general equivalency diploma test. There are field trips to the Oklahoma City Zoo.

“We teach them to socialize,” Anderson explained. “They see things they can do as families that are fun.”

A nearby private prison provides a reality check. Consumers speak with the addiction unit staff. Anderson recalled how during one visit to the prison a 17-year-old inmate sentenced to life talked about his experiences. It had a profound impact on the group.

“Their interaction with us is wonderful,” Anderson said.

Food, clothing, furniture, and other items are donated to the program. Anderson wants to expand the outreach to the community to increase support for the program. She would also like to recruit more staff, but finding people with the proper certifications is difficult in rural Oklahoma.

Anderson is assisted by two

counselors – Fred Mosqueda and Richard Christian who said he is in his 21st year of recovery from alcohol addiction. Other key staff members include Substance Abuse Technician Jon Foster, Intake Specialist Sherry Forgit and Case Manager Staci Black. Anderson began working with the program over nine years ago.

“We never close,” Anderson said. “Christmas morning, we’re here.”

Consumers are often angry when they arrive at the center. They’re mad at the police who arrested them. They’re mad at the Department of Human Services who took custody of their children. They’re mad at the drug court that ordered them to the center. Anderson said her staff is trained to handle crisis situations.

In addition to the residential program, outpatient and family counseling services are available.

Georgia Forthum, Opportunities, Inc. executive director, said the agency has had the program about 30 years. The facility was originally located in Clinton but later moved to Watonga.

Primary funding for the program comes from the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

INCA Loans Medical Equipment To Those With A Need

When Sue Staats' parents died after she had been their primary care giver for years, they left a house filled with an assortment of medical equipment including a wheel chair, hospital bed, shower chair, lift, and other items.

"It was like a small nursing home," Staats said. She didn't know what to do with all of the equipment.

Shortly after coming to work for INCA Community Services as an outreach worker eight years ago, Staats donated the items to the agency to start a medical equipment lending closet. Since that humble beginning, the assortment of equipment has grown into a large collection that is housed in INCA's Atoka office.

"We work closely with home health and hospice agencies," Staats said. "They know where equipment is needed."

The only criterion is need. There are no income requirements or referrals required. However, each person that borrows equipment must sign a disclaimer to not hold INCA liable if they are injured using the equipment.

"You don't understand the need until you live it," Staats said. "It's okay. Where there is a need, it will be met."

Equipment is loaned to people throughout INCA's four county service area. Staats estimated there were 25-30 pieces of equipment out on loan.

Staats recalled two Head Start parents who were seriously injured in an automobile accident. During their recovery, the pair used hospital beds, a shower chair, bedside toilet, walkers, and crutches. As they finished using one item during the recovery process, they returned it to INCA and took another. Both are now fully recovered and working, Staats said.

A man in his 30s fell off the roof. He had no insurance. INCA loaned him a wheel chair, stationary walker, cane, and bedside toilet. As he improved, the man brought back the equipment.

Staats estimated the agency loans 25 pieces of equipment each year. The agency has an active inventory of about 75 pieces of equipment.

The equipment is loaned on the honor system. Over 90 percent is brought back. Even when a piece of equipment is not returned, Staats has learned that someone will show up at the door to donate items.

"Our needs have been met every time we get short," she said

Other items in the lending closet include bedding, equipment to check blood pressure, a treadmill, exercise mats, disposable adult briefs, and several cases of cough drops.

"We don't turn away anything given. If they want to give us something, we'll find a place for it."



Sue Staats, outreach/transit operations manager, INCA Community Services (l), and Erica Pogue, community specialist, inventory the items in the medical equipment lending closet in Atoka.

Patty Laub, director of operations, and Tricia Auberle, director of financial education programs at the Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies, recently donated a motorized scooter, wheel chair, and other items to INCA.

The medical equipment lending closet shares space with the food pantry in what was once the Thunderbird Elementary School. INCA acquired the building in 2000 and it now houses three Head Start classrooms, a career opportunities office, housing and weatherization, human resources and an office for Executive Director LaQuita Thornley.

CARD Offers Training at Staff Retreat

Community Action Resource & Development staff gathered at Dry Gulch USA, an old west theme summer camp and working ranch near Pryor, for its annual fall retreat.

The management staff participated in training on Reflective Supervision conducted by Senta Greene, founder of Full Circle, a professional consulting agency. Other staff received training on emergency medical services, fire safety, agency benefits and effective communications.

Wrapping up the retreat were a pair of motivational speakers. Chuck Jackson gave a lighthearted and inspirational speech on burn out and how to keep mentally and physically healthy. Valerie Lewis spoke about those who made a difference in her life and helped her overcome many hardships to become a teacher. She challenged participants to make a difference in the lives of others.

CDSA PLANS TO REMODEL BUILDING FOR OFFICES

Community Development Support Association is beginning a capital campaign to remodel a 50,000 square foot building in downtown Enid into an early childhood development center and offices for the agency's other programs.

"This is a great building. It's a big, open building," said CDSA Executive Director Cheri Ezzell.

David Isaak has joined the CDSA staff as the development director to spearhead the campaign to raise the several million dollars needed to remodel the building. Ezzell expects it will take a couple of years to raise the needed funds.

The former Newman's Department Store building is located on the square across the street from the post office and court house. There is on-street parking and a bus stop near the building.

"The board is committed to creating a center for early childhood development and consolidating the other human service programs under one roof," Ezzell said. CDSA currently operates out of two offices in Enid.

Ezzell said the building will become a one-stop shop for the many services offered by the agency. In addition to the early childhood program, the building will be home for CDSA's emergency services, housing, prescription assistance, weatherization, tax return preparation, and workforce programs.

She expects other non-profit organizations to also have offices in the building.

The facility will be a highly visible and easily accessed non-profit center where multiple organizations can co-locate and share resources, according to Ezzell. She predicts a synergy will develop in a non-competitive, more collaborative environment.

CDSA is the fourth community action agency in the last



Chuck Crites, housing specialist (l), and David Isaak, development director, check out the floor plan for Community Development Support Association's new headquarters. CDSA purchased the 50,000 square foot former department store building in downtown Enid.

three years to purchase and remodel buildings to house their programs.

Delta Community Action Foundation moved its administrative offices from Purcell to Lindsay in 2005 after remodeling the former city hall. The Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties moved into the former John A. Brown department store after renovating the 53,000 square foot building in the Capitol Hill area of the city. Little Dixie Community Action Agency moved its offices into the remodeled former Federal Building in Hugo in 2006.



OKACAA Winter Conference



Beverly Bortell, Peggy Sayers, and Rebecca Donovan from Washita Valley Community Action Council listen to a presentation on the inter-relationships between the Americans with Disabilities Act, Family Medical Leave Act, and Workers' Compensation laws during a training track for human resources staff members.



Myrna Calvert with Booz Allen Hamilton discusses techniques for supporting children with challenging behavior during a training track session for Head Start program staff members.

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*Community Action Resource &
Development Executive Director
Karol May presents the Volunteer
of the Year Award to Darrell
Owens during OKACAA's Winter
Conference held Dec. 10-12 in
Tulsa.*



George Cochran, weatherization specialist from Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency, and Brent Morey, executive director of Community Action Development Corporation, listen to a presentation by Robert Adams, director of weatherization services at the National Association for State Community Services Programs, on expansion of the Weatherization Assistance Program.