



# Community Action Solutions

September-October 2008

## RSVP: Putting Life Experiences to Work in Communities

Joanne Roberts is a professional clown and one of Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group's most active RSVP volunteers. Roberts, whose clown name is Lil Red, volunteers everywhere, said Virginia Goskey, program director for the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program.

"RSVP is a volunteer network for people age 55 and over," explained Goskey. Last year, 301 volunteers worked 51,485 hours helping at 32 workstations in Harmon, Greer and Jackson counties.

The workstations include schools, senior nutrition meal sites, hospitals, a museum, the senior literacy program, a housing authority, Court Appointed Special Advocates program and other non-profit organizations.

Volunteers can be reimbursed for their travel. They are also recognized at an annual banquet. But the personal satisfaction in helping people is their real reward for volunteering.

"They are an amazing group who have time and want to give back to their communities," Goskey said.

Roberts taught her craft at five "clown schools" for young children in Altus during the summer. They learned how to put on makeup, create their own costumes, make animals out of balloons and perform skits. She also volunteers at nursing homes and assisted living centers, teaches line dancing to a group of seniors called the Oklahoma Silver Belles, helps at the Clinton Veterans

Administration hospital and completes intake forms at a volunteer tax return preparation site.

Roberts estimated she volunteers about 60 hours monthly. Goskey said it is closer to 40 hours weekly.

"I just feel like people need a lot of help and I like to help people," Roberts said.

The RSVP program is popular because of its flexibility, according to Goskey. Volunteers choose how and where they want to serve.



*Virginia Goskey, RSVP director at Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group, visits with volunteer Frank Bailey at the Jackson County Memorial Hospital.*

*Continued on next page*



*Professional clown and RSVP volunteer Joanne Roberts (c) and Harmon County Hospital volunteer Teddie Brookman (l) meet with Tracie Mayabb, Greer County coordinator for Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group.*

# RSVP Volunteers Serve Their Communities

*Continued from previous page*

They choose the amount of time they want to give.

Frank Bailey is a retired banker. For the past year and a half, he's volunteered four hours weekly at the Jackson County Memorial Hospital in Altus. He staffs the same day surgery waiting room where he provides updates on the status of patients in surgery to their families.

Mary Miligan and Bonita Ray also volunteer at the hospital. Miligan, who has volunteered for the past six years, drives 22 miles from Tipton weekly to work in the snack bar and at the information desk.

"This is a real break to get out of the house," she said.

Ray, who worked in the medical field until she retired, now volunteers four hours weekly at the information desk located just inside the entrance to the hospital.

"We just answer all the questions, and deliver mail and flowers to the rooms," she said.

The hospital is the largest workstation for the program. Betty Onan, director of volunteers, said she supervises about 50 volunteers. Most are RSVP volunteers.

"They do everything," Onan said. "They run the snack bar, gift shop, information desk and waiting room. What they give is immeasurable. I'm real proud of them."

Onan noted that proceeds from the snack bar and gift shop helped provide a \$500,000 donation for the newly constructed cancer treatment center at the hospital.

Beverly Fuller volunteers in the snack bar. On her smock is a small pin indicated she has volunteered 600 hours at the hospital. She also volunteers as a bookkeeper for the American Red Cross.

Her reasons for volunteering: "I love people. It's something I can give back. It adds to my life."

Some volunteers go the extra mile to help. Goskey told of a couple that worked at the tax preparation site. Concerned that many seniors not required to file a tax return because of low income had not applied for the stimulus payment, Johnny Wilson and Marie Arredondo went to their homes to help these elderly residents complete the necessary form.

Joni Hollingsworth said she grew up in a gift shop run by her parents. Now she volunteers in the hospital gift shop.

"I enjoy selling. I enjoy every minute of it," Hollingsworth said. "It keeps me in the flow. I can't stand to stay home and watch TV."

Teddie Brookman is a ten-year veteran of the RSVP program. She answers the phone at the Harmon County Memorial Hospital, delivers meals to residences from the Hollis senior nutrition site, listens to children read at the elementary school and reads to residents at a nursing home.

"If you have time to spare, that's a good place to put it. I feel it's a valuable thing to do," she said.

Tracie Mayabb is the Greer county coordinator and monitors the activities of about 150 volunteers at a diverse group of workstations. She has volunteers at the Old Greer County Museum, Christian Thrift Store and Greer County Food Bank, senior nutrition sites in Granite and Mangum, Granite library and free tax return preparation sites.

As program director, Goskey recruits volunteers and identifies workstations. She promotes RSVP through presentations before community groups and through newspaper articles.

"We try to make RSVP more visible," she said.

She also compiles the statistics that must be submitted to funders. The program receives funding from the National Corporation for Community Service, Oklahoma Department of Human Services and Oklahoma Department of Commerce. There are also donations from residents.

Goskey provides training for the volunteers. There are job descriptions for each workstation. She can also arrange for transportation on Southwest Transit for volunteers.

Goskey has worked in the RSVP program for three years, but has worked at Southwest for 29 years. She began as an outreach worker and then spent the bulk of her career in the senior nutrition program. Southwest has had the RSVP program for 26 years.



*RSVP volunteer Joni Hollingsworth arranges a display in the hospital gift shop in Altus.*

# Delta Nutrition Dishes Up Food and Fellowship for Seniors

Only a month into his new job as project director for the Delta Community Action Foundation Nutrition Program, Dan Lowrance is sure he made the right decision to change jobs.

“It was exactly what I was looking for,” said Lowrance. “It helps when you can get a job where you can make a difference in people’s lives.”

From his office in the Douglas Community Center in Duncan, Lowrance oversees nine congregate meal sites in Stephens and McClain counties plus the delivery of meals to the homes of senior citizens.

During August, the program served 7,644 meals to 532 persons at the congregate sites and delivered another 2,691 meals to 159 homebound seniors.

The center also serves as the Duncan South nutrition site where nearly 40 people come each weekday for a meal plus a chance to visit, work on puzzles, play games and exercise.

“I think this is one of the best programs,” declared Anna Kirk, site manager. “It helps get them out of the house.”

Duncan South is a satellite nutrition center. The meals are prepared in a kitchen across town and trucked over to the center by 11:30 Monday through Friday. This Monday the menu called for chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, black eye peas, applesauce, a roll and milk. A dietitian prepares the menus.



*Neva Davis (l) collects money and Hester Blair logs in the seniors coming to the nutrition site as Dan Lowrance, project director, looks on.*



*Zella Jackson regularly works on picture puzzles during her weekday visits to the senior nutrition site in Duncan.*

Those over 60 years-of-age and their spouse, even if under age 60, pay \$1.50 for lunch; other guests pay \$3.50. “No senior is turned away if they can’t pay,” said Lowrance.

In one corner, 87-year-old Zella Jackson works on a jigsaw puzzle. The center is lined with completed puzzles that have been framed and hung on the walls.

“I’ve worked a lot of puzzles,” Jackson said. “It keeps my mind and hands busy.”

Jackson has been coming to the center for about 19 years. “I don’t know what I’d do without it,” she said.

Across town at the Duncan North center Janis Pollock, site manager, prepares for the lunch crowd that will begin streaming in shortly after 11 o’clock. Chief cook Shelly Wren is assisted by Lisa Escandon, Landra Colbert and Melissa Ramsey with the meal preparation while site aide Evelyn Chasteen is responsible for cleanup.

Food is stored in a large freezer and a pantry. Pollock purchases food products from a variety of sources including large wholesalers and local grocers.

*Continued on next page*

# Seniors Get Food and Fellowship at Delta Nutrition Sites

*Continued from previous page*

“We do cost comparisons,” explained Pollock. She looks at price and quality.

There are plenty of activities planned at the center. A nurse comes in monthly to check blood pressure and blood sugar levels. A local home health care agency conducts a foot clinic.

“It’s a big need. Lots have diabetes,” Pollock said.

Neva Davis has been volunteering at the center for the past year and a half. She helps count the money paid for the meals and sometimes leads the seniors in a sing along. Hester Blair keeps track of people eating. She’s been coming for about 20 years and knows just about everybody.

“It’s become a part of my daily activities,” she said. “If I stayed at home, I’d just sit by myself.”

Lowrance said he “hopes to grow the program.” He wants to take the story about the senior nutrition program to the community. He admits that he had

lived in Duncan most of his life and didn’t know about the program.

“I’m looking for new ideas on how to promote the program,” he said.



*Fresh baked rolls are on the menu thanks to Melissa Ramsey, Landra Colbert and Lisa Escandon.*



*Brenda Needham, interim executive director, is ready to endorse the \$3.9 million check awarded to Little Dixie Community Action Agency for its literacy program.*

## Little Dixie Awarded Literacy Grant

One of the largest grants in the history of Little Dixie Community Action Agency will turn 18 southeast Oklahoma preschools into model literacy centers.

Project HOPE, or Helping Oklahoma Preschoolers Excel, is the name of Little Dixie’s Early Reading First initiative. A U.S. Department of Education grant in the amount of \$3,930,569 will be used to serve 310 students per year for the next three years.

The Little Dixie Early Reading First grant is the only one awarded this year in Oklahoma or any of its neighboring states, and was one of only 31 awarded in 2008 by the U.S. Department of Education out of approximately 400 applications.

“We do a lot of work at Little Dixie to help people and change lives, but this grant is an exceptionally exciting opportunity,” said Brenda Needham, Little Dixie interim executive director. “Through our Early Reading First program, we have the chance to drastically reduce illiteracy and in fact, we could be turning southeast Oklahoma into a hopeful example of the potential of early childhood education.”

Clayton, Haworth and Swink public schools will serve as leading partners for Project HOPE.

The ultimate goal of Little Dixie Project HOPE will be to improve the school readiness of our young children, especially those from low-income families.

## C. Carter Crane Shelter Offers Temporary Housing in Lawton

A two-story wooden barracks that once served as home for soldiers training at Fort Sill now provides a safe and clean temporary residence for homeless people in Lawton.

Great Plains Improvement Foundation operates the C. Carter Crane Shelter for the Homeless. The 4,000 square foot structure has been configured to house nine men in a single dorm room and up to five families in a series of bedrooms. The shelter features a large kitchen and dining area plus a family room filled with comfortable chairs and couches where clients can watch television in the evening.

“We are the only homeless shelter in Lawton that serves families and single men,” said Virginia Spencer, executive director. Clients can stay in the shelter for up to six weeks.

A community assessment conducted by the city of Lawton and Cameron University four years ago identified homelessness as one of the top concerns in the city.

Betty Caldwell, project director, has worked with the homeless since Great Plains acquired the barracks from the Army in 1989.

“If I can help one person a day, it’s worth it,” Caldwell said. “It’s a very, very valuable program in our community.”

She proudly tells success stories. There was one young man who lived for a short time in the shelter. While there he was able to obtain a maintenance job at an area career

technology center and continues working. Caldwell said he’s done great.

“We consider this a working program. They must search for a job. They can’t just sit here and eat three meals,” she said.

*Continued on next page*



*The C. Carter Crane Shelter for the Homeless was formerly an army barracks at Fort Sill.*



*Betty Caldwell is the project director at Great Plains Improvement Foundation for the C. Carter Crane Shelter for the Homeless.*



*Brenda Fay who is the house case manager makes a pot of coffee in the newly renovated kitchen at the shelter.*

# Temporary Housing Provided at C. Carter Crane Shelter

*Continued from previous page*

Clients must make five job search contacts each day.

The shelter is gradually being renovated. New cabinets line the kitchen and part of the old carpet has been stripped from the dining area and replaced with tile. The next project is to re-roof the building.

The \$136,000 annual operating budget comes from several sources. United Way provides much of the funding. Additional funding

comes from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Emergency Shelter Grants program administered by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce and donations from community residents. Community partners supporting the shelter include Goodwill Industries and the Salvation Army along with retailers Wal-Mart, Kmart and Cato.

People learn about the shelter from a variety of sources. There is information at the 2-1-1 call center, churches, library, police department, public schools and on the Great Plains Web site.

"They all know we are here," Caldwell said.

Brenda Fay, house case manager, typically handles intake.

Great Plains is careful to make sure the shelter is a safe place for families to stay. Fay conducts a criminal background check during the intake process. Sex offenders, domestic and child abusers are not welcome. She

carefully reviews the 25 house rules with those who clear the background check. House rules provide a zero tolerance policy on firearms, pocket knives, pornography, drugs and alcohol, smoking in the facility, use of profanity, fighting or gambling.

Shelter staff and community partners work with the clients on preparing for job interviews and other life skills.

"We try to bring them up to self-sufficiency," Spencer said.

Once clients begin working, they can move into one of 15 transitional houses. Great Plains purchased the houses through the city of Lawton and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The agency is in the process of building two more on donated lots with funding provided by the city.

"We charge a minimal amount of rent based on their income," Spencer explained. "They can stay in transitional houses for up to 24 months."

## Contact Us

Oklahoma Association of  
Community Action Agencies  
2800 N.W. 36th St., Suite 221  
Oklahoma City, OK 73112  
(405) 949-1495

Fax: (405) 949-0955  
Email: okacaa@yahoo.com  
Web: www.okacaa.org

Michael E. Jones  
Executive Director

Patty Laub  
Director of Operations

Kay C. Floyd  
State Director of Head Start  
Collaboration

Tricia Auberle  
Director of Financial  
Education Programs

Bob Brandenburg  
Communication Director

Wanda Welters  
Executive Assistant

This newsletter was produced with funds from the  
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.



*After leaving the Crane Shelter clients can live in transitional housing units for up to 24 months. They pay a minimal amount of rent based on their income.*

# OKACAA 2008 Annual Conference



*Third grade teacher Valorie Lewis shared her story of living in poverty as a child and how a pair of teachers changed her life during her awards luncheon speech as OKACAA Executive Director Michael Jones looked on.*



*Psychologist Walt Davis discussed foundations for effective socialization of challenging children.*



*OKACAA President Karen Nichols presented the Guy Davis Leadership Award to Tom Marlatt (l) and the Fred Tucker Service Award to Larry Hall.*



*Sheryl Smith, Debbie Stinnett and Randy Heisel were among the 175 people that registered for the annual conference held September 17-19 in Oklahoma City.*



*Justice Whitehorn provided lessons in dealing with individuals from poverty during his Bridges Out of Poverty presentation.*