



Community Action Solutions

July - August 2005

Agency partners with businesses to help clients beat the heat

As temperatures edged into the upper 90s one August morning, the Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties prepared to distribute air conditioners and bottled water to area residents.

James E. Sconzo, executive director, helped direct a truck packed with 37,000 bottles of water to a loading dock where Lowe's and Community Action employees began unloading the pallets.

The day before 74 window air conditioners donated by Whirlpool Corporation had been delivered and were ready for distribution to senior citizens and low-income families with small children.

Sconzo had learned about the air conditioners and bottled water on a Friday from the American Red Cross. By the following Tuesday, they had been delivered and were ready for distribution.

"Community Action can react quickly," declared Sconzo.

The agency already had nearly 250 names on a waiting list



James E. Sconzo, executive director, Community Action Agency of Oklahoma City and Oklahoma/Canadian Counties, (left) is joined by Terry Burlison, district manager, Lowe's; Paula Porter, director of chapter development, American Red Cross; and Steve Witherspoon, Whirlpool representative, with air conditioners that are being distributed to senior citizens and families with small children living in homes without air conditioning.



Pallets stacked with 37,000 bottles of water are unloaded at the Jim Sconzo Community Action Center in Oklahoma City. The water is being distributed through area homeless shelters.

for fans, according to Ann Ricketts, community services director.

"We want to get them out fast. They're not doing any good in the warehouse," Sconzo added.

Sconzo said the air conditioners do not require any special wiring. The units can cool a 350-400 square foot area.

The bottled water was being given to area homeless shelters to distribute. Sconzo also offered part of the bottled water to other Community Action agencies.

Paula Porter, director of chapter development, American Red Cross, said when Lowe's contacted her about facilitating distribution of the air conditioners and water, she did extensive research of local agencies before identifying Community Action as a partner.

"This is a great fit," she said.

Sconzo also praised Lowe's, Whirlpool and the Red Cross as good partners.

Strategies discussed to expand tax credits outreach

Community Action, Oklahoma Department of Human Services staffers and others worked to develop a statewide strategy for expanding the earned income tax and child tax credit programs in 2006 during a workshop in Oklahoma City.

The Building Assets for Oklahoma: Using Tax Credits to Support Families

workshop featured sessions on innovative tax credit and asset building initiatives.

Sponsors of the workshop included the Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Oklahoma Department of Commerce and Oklahoma Department of Human Services.



Diana Behm, Bank of Oklahoma and formerly with Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency, discusses strategies for developing and managing a Mobile Multi-Community Tax Filing Assistance Program to provide services in rural communities.



David Cunningham, consultant, Self Sufficiency Initiative, Administration for Children and Families, checks on the progress of Helen James, Cookson Hills Community Action Foundation, and Pam Baker, Cherokee Nation, who are working on an action plan for developing a local initiative.



Mary Ann Overall, Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency, asks a question during the workshop.



Community Action, Department of Human Services, federal officials, educators and bankers participated in the workshop held July 25-26 in Oklahoma City.



Darlene and Connie Fox practice putting on their face paint during the Clown School.



Joanne Roberts, also known as "Little Red," conducted a Clown School for a dozen children in Altus as part of the Community of Promise program provided by Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group.

Southwest's Community of Promise program sponsors 'Clown School' for Altus youngsters

Ten Altus youth squeezed around a table applying brightly colored face paint under the watchful eye of Joanne Roberts, a professional clown also known as "Little Red."

"All clowns have red noses," she said as she passes out the special face paint and brushes.

Roberts, who was trained in the Ringling Brothers clown college, is teaching the techniques used by professional clowns to the children participating in the Community of Promise activity sponsored by Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group's Retired and Senior Volunteer (RSVP) program.

Roberts does volunteer work in the Head Start program, at local nursing homes and on the air force base.

"She loves clowning," explained Teresa Williams, RSVP director. "She hopes some of these kids will volunteer to clown in the nursing homes."

Meanwhile the youngsters that range in age from 6-13 carefully painted their nose, cheeks and eyebrows during the second day of the three-day school.

During the first day of the clown school, the youngsters began designing their costumes and selecting their clown names.

The second day featured work on skits along with face painting.

"I want you to think up something you can do as a clown," Roberts said as the youngsters formed a large circle earlier in the afternoon.

She gave each child a card with a

statement on it to trigger their imagination.

"Come out and read the phrase. Then do a skit. Dance around. Do something silly," Roberts said.

"I saw a horsefly," was written on one card

"Has anyone seen a flying horse?"

One at a time the youngsters came to the center of the circle, read their phrase and did something clownish.

Next, the clown-in-training worked with a hula hoop -- first spinning it around their arm, then their waist and finally spinning it backwards across the floor.

On the final day, the youngsters were to perform the skits for a group of senior citizens.

The Clown School addresses three of the five promises, Williams explained. It provides an ongoing relationship with a caring adult. It is a structured activity in a safe place. The children who continue clowning will have chances to give back through community service.

The Five Promises

- Ongoing relationships with caring adults
- Safe places with structured activities during nonschool hours
- Healthy starts and future
- Marketable skills through effective education
- Opportunities to give back through community service.

OKACAA to recognize over 200 for service at conference

The Oklahoma Association of Community Action Agencies (OKACAA) will recognize 208 persons for their service in the battle on poverty at the association's annual conference Sept. 21-22 in Oklahoma City.

Community action staffers will be cited for 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 and 35 years of service during the awards banquet at the Biltmore Hotel, I-40 & Meridian.

Other awards to be presented include:

- Guy Davis Leadership Award that recognizes a community action employee or board member for recent, innovative achievement.
- Fred Tucker Service Award that recognizes an outstanding community action employee or board member for a career dedicated to community action.

- Volunteer of the Year Award that recognizes long-term service of an individual.
- Head Start awards

The conference will feature training tracks for board members, Head Start staff and disability coordinators, Child & Adult Care Food Program staff and others.

KI BOIS, Deep Fork receive housing awards

The Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency (OHFA) recognized KI BOIS Community Action Foundation and Deep Fork Community Action Foundation for their efforts in affordable housing.

KI BOIS received an Apex Award for Elderly Housing and John Jones, housing director, received an award under the Friend of Affordable Housing category.

Deep Fork received an Apex Award for an Innovative Affordable Housing Initiative.

KI BOIS opened new developments in Stigler and Heavener to provide housing for senior citizens.

Jones used money from the OHFA Housing Trust Fund to construct a special needs group home in Stigler, and worked with a private developer to construct a 60-unit tax credit project in McAlester.

Deep Fork was recognized for a self-produced homebuyer education video. Available in both Spanish and English, the video discusses how to inspect a house prior to purchase.

Community Land Security grant awarded to Little Dixie

Little Dixie Community Action Agency recently received notification that it has been chosen to participate in two projects that deal with homeland security – a topic that has become important to all Americans since 9/11.

Little Dixie was one of seven organizations in the nation selected to receive Community Land Security funding from the national Community Action Partnership, and one of four collaborations in the nation chosen to participate in the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Redefining Readiness demonstration program.

Through a \$10,000 Community Land Security grant from the national Community Action Partnership, Little Dixie will establish and equip a community resource center where citizens can get information about local terrorism response plans as well as local emergency plans for storms or other natural disasters.

Little Dixie will work with local emergency management officials to ensure that emergency response procedures are provided in a format that can be distributed to the public through the community resource center. The program provides funds to help staff the resource center. In addition, anti-terrorism training will be provided by the Community Action Partnership.

This Community Land Security program will work hand-in-hand with another homeland security program in which Little Dixie is a participant. Little Dixie is the lead entity and the fiscal agent for the Southeast Oklahoma Enterprise Community, which has been selected by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to carry out one of four "Redefining Readiness" homeland security demonstration projects in the nation.

This \$150,000 grant will allow the Southeast Oklahoma Enterprise

Community to develop model homeland security plans that can be adapted and customized easily by communities around the country.

The Redefining Readiness project will focus on two different scenarios: The first model plan will show communities around the country how to control a smallpox outbreak while protecting the large number of people who are at risk of developing life-threatening complications from the smallpox vaccine.

Current plans are seriously flawed because they do not protect the people who could get sick or die from the smallpox vaccine. The other model plan will show communities around the country how to work with community residents and organizations to develop safe haven plans in work sites, schools, and shops that can protect the public in the event of a dirty bomb or other toxic exposure.



Affordable housing complex opening

A 60-unit apartment complex for low-income families in Okmulgee is set for a grand opening in September.

“There is a shortage of safe, high quality, affordable housing in Okmulgee,” said Jeff Schuman, executive director, Deep Fork Community Action Foundation.

The complex features a mixture of one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments with a community building. It is located on five acres purchased from the city.

Deep Fork partnered with Zimmerman Properties to build the \$4.5 million tax credit project.

Schuman said Oxford Place is the first big multi-family project undertaken by Deep Fork. The agency has been working on the project for about 18 months.

“Rent will be income-based,” Schuman said.

Jeff Schuman, executive director, Deep Fork Community Action Foundation, is pictured at the leasing office for Oxford Place, a 60-unit apartment complex in Okmulgee for low-income families.



June Billington, nutrition project director, Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group (standing), chats with volunteers Clayton Nall and Maggie Ellis who collect donations at the senior nutrition site in Altus.



About 300 meals are provided at congregate sites or are delivered to homebound seniors by Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group on weekdays.

Southwest’s senior centers provide variety of services

Senior citizens in Jackson, Harmon and Greer counties are getting a hot, nutritious lunch weekdays thanks to Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group.

June Billington, nutrition project director, said that about 300 meals are prepared in three kitchens each weekday. The meals are served at

seven sites throughout the three counties and are delivered to the homes of seniors unable to come to a site.

Another 94 meals are delivered seven days per week to seniors on the Advantage Medicaid program.

The Altus Senior Citizen Center provides more than a hot meal.

There are domino tables, exercise

equipment and a variety of programs for the seniors.

A nurse comes every two months to check blood pressure and blood sugar levels.

Outreach specialists based in the center work with other social service agencies to link people needing help with the appropriate group.



Becky Hayes prepares some hot ham and cheese sandwiches for children enrolled in the Lincoln Head Start Center program operated by Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group in Altus.

Cook keeps busy during summer Head Start program

It's mid-morning and Becky Hayes has already cooked breakfast and is starting lunch for a group of four-year-old children enrolled in Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group's Lincoln Head Start Center.

Outside the youngsters are enjoying some play time under the careful supervision of their teachers and assistants.

Hot ham and cheese sandwiches, potatoes and a salad are on the menu today. She'll prepare a snack for a mid-afternoon break.

She's put her cooking skills to work at Head Start for about ten years. Hayes said she began cooking for Head Start as a trainee through the work experience program.

During the winter months, she cooks for nearly 60 children in three classrooms at the Lincoln Center.

Her speciality: "They all say my pizza is good," she responded. "They're good eaters," she said.

With breakfast scheduled for 8:45 and lunch just three hours later, she keeps very busy -- even with the help of an aide.

The children really appreciate her efforts.

"They come running and give me hugs when I take out the cart of food," she said.

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Volunteer Judy Millers and Derricka Williams work up appetites playing catch at Southwest Oklahoma Community Action Group's Lincoln Head Start Center.



Shylynd Zuercher loads up his "water laser" during playtime on a hot July morning at the Head Start center.