

Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency



2013 ANNUAL REPORT

Executive Director's Report — Poverty Drives Us to Do More With Less

The incidence of poverty in the agency's five counties – Adair, Cherokee, Craig, Delaware, and Ottawa – continues to grow. There were 2,030 more individuals in poverty in this year than in the previous year. There are a total of 33,456 individuals in poverty in the five counties. This represents 22% of the population. This compares to 15.9% of the population in the United States and 17.2% of the population in Oklahoma. This translates to having more than 9000 more people in poverty because we exceed the state and national averages. (The income of an individual in poverty cannot exceed \$10,890 and a family of three can make no more than \$18,350.)

Not only are these poverty levels of income perilously low to sustain a family, the median income in the five counties is more

than \$20,000 less per year for each family in the area. These very low incomes affect not only the well-being of these families in a powerful way but also represent a significant challenge for the communities. In many of the school districts as many as 80% of the children qualify for free and reduced lunches. Rental rates and the price of homes make it almost impossible for many individuals and families to find affordable, decent housing. Many work in seasonal or service occupations without insurance and benefits, driving them to hospital emergency rooms for health care, raising the rate of hospital care for the entire community.

Continued inside...

2013 Board of Directors

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- ◆ Rebecca Jim, Vice Chairperson
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NORTHEAST OKLAHOMA COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCY 2013 ANNUAL REPORT

Poverty Drives Us to Do More With Less

The agency's community assessment this year has basic life support issues as the highest rated issues (food, homes to rent, prescriptions, rent and utility assistance) as the most important needs for low-income families. This trend is compounded by shrinking dollars for these types of services, making it harder and harder to serve families with severe survival needs. Creating additional jobs in the five counties continues to be an exceptionally high priority based on the identified needs expressed in the assessment as well as the demand for service. The agency will continue to offer the wide range of social and support services (rent and utility assistance, housing rehabilitation, weatherization, prescription assistance, homelessness prevention and intervention, tax preparation services, financial and homeowner assistance, and job assistance). The agency will, however, continue to work directly to create additional jobs in the five-county areas. This initiative stresses the development of businesses that provide a needed service that will directly benefit low-income families as well as the larger communities. Health and nutrition initiatives are one central focus with efforts to grow and distribute healthy foods to the entire community with discounts provided to low-income families. Providing training programs for individuals interested in a food service career is a high priority for the agency. Training individuals to cook healthy meals and grow vegetables are also central. Other initiatives include weatherization and construction activities that emphasize energy efficiency for families, businesses, and governmental entities

such as schools. These activities are in their infancy but will be more and more central to the agency's activities. This emphasis on economic and community development activities is focused on the staggering poverty rates that face our communities. Because our families have incomes so far below the living wage, the financial burden to pay the rent, buy groceries, pay utilities, purchase medicine and clothing taxes these families' ability to live in safe and affordable housing and care for their families adequately. The agency hopes to assist many of these families directly and to assist many families to achieve the tools that they need to succeed. These include financial literacy training, job placement, financial planning, educational achievement, and establishing plans for personal attainment. This presents a much larger challenge now than in previous years because the needs continue to expand while funding for core programs continues to decline. The agency continues to expand its housing program to assist more families to achieve affordable housing. It has also initiated child care services which should allow more mothers the opportunity to pursue employment opportunities without being overwhelmed by the cost of child care. The agency will continue to try to find additional avenues to provide families in the area with greater sustainability for themselves and their families.

— Jean A. Cooper, Ed.D.
Executive Director

On the cover, New Day Care, New Board Members, and RX Assistance

SERVICES	FAMILIES SERVED
Emergency Services for Families at risk of homelessness	191
TANF Literacy	16
Free Tax Preparation	982
Rehabilitation	17
Weatherization	73
Jobs/Financial Literacy Assistance	284
Jobs/Financial Literacy Training	40
RX for Oklahoma	229
Rentals	14
New Construction	3
Continuum of Care	34
Total	1883

HOUSING and RENTAL SERVICES CENTER

HOME REHABILITATION

Our Housing Rehabilitation Program is a program designed to provide low-income individuals and families with a safe, sanitary and comfortable home environment. Low income individuals typically are able to pay their bills and mortgage obligations, but may not have the skills or disposable income to keep their homes in good repair. Various sources of funds are available to bring their homes up to an acceptable standard. Each rehab program has income requirements. An application, proof of income, ownership and a copy of their deed are needed. In the past year, the Housing program has been working on 5 grants awarded thru the USDA rural partial rehab program. We have grants for the towns of Jay, Kansas, Stilwell, Commerce & Tahlequah to do 6 homes in each town, The HPG grants will fund partial rehab on 30 homes for very low income applicants. We have completed the Commerce, Jay, and Kansas projects, and are working to get more applicants to fill our remaining slots for Stilwell and Tahlequah.

The Housing Preservation Grants (HPG) is a grant that allows us to do partial rehab on the homes. The agency has grants for the cities of Jay, Kansas, Stilwell, Commerce & Tahlequah to do 6 homes per city. Projects may be for health and safety related issues. The HPG grants are for partial rehab on 30 homes. The agency has completed 10 homes on these grants. NEOCAA is working to find applicants for the remaining slots.

Housing New Construction (Rentals)

The Agency is in the process of building 1 duplex in Jay, 1 three bedroom single family house in Jay and 2 duplexes in Colcord, 1 three bedroom and 1 two bedroom. The purpose of the rental program is to have housing in our communities to support our low income clients to have a healthy, safe and affordable place to call home. These projects will be built using all energy efficient appliances and Cool roof technologies, making the homes more energy efficient for our clients, and help save them money. The duplex and single family home in Jay are under construction now and should be finished by the end of October or first of November. We expect to break ground in Colcord on the next two duplexes around mid to end of October.

The Agency now has 11 rental units and 6 Continuum of Care Houses in service in the 5 county area and 8 more in various stages of environmental review and construction.



Housing Program

In 2012 the Agency worked on a project in Miami which was funded by Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency and HUD, the Agency partnered with FFATC to build 3 supportive Mini-housing units. Each unit has two 300 sq. ft. with a living room, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom. The units were completed in April of 2013. The Agency and FFATC had an open house on May 9th 2013 to officially open the doors to new clients to move in, Donna Wickes and Jackie McBride from HUD were in attendance as well as Mr. Richard Lillard Chairman of the Board of Trustees of OHFA, who spoke during the open house dedication, along with Dr. Jean Cooper Executive Director of Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Agency.



Jackie McBride, HUD Field Representative, Donna Wickes, Hud Director of Community Development, Dick Lillard, Chairman of OHFA Board of Trustees, and Jean Cooper, Executive Director, NEOCAA

WEATHERIZATION AND HOUSING SERVICES CENTER

WEATHERIZATION PROGRAM

Fiscal year 2013 ended with a total of 51 homes that were weatherized, 17 with DHS funds, 16 with Department of Energy funds, 8 from additional stimulus funds and 10 from Oklahoma Natural Gas

Even though the stimulus grant was over, Northeast was asked to spend additional funds other agencies could not spend. We were eager to accept, and did a total of 23 additional homes with stimulus money.

We are down to one crew and they are still doing an excellent job with their quality of work. Our clients are always complimenting on their professional conduct and we receive thank you letters on a regular basis.

All of our monitoring from Oklahoma Department of Commerce from all the grants was without any findings or concerns. When the current weatherization grants are completed, the crew will move to the housing department to do rehab work.



10 year smoke alarm



Tyvek suits are worn during safe work practices for windows with lead base paint



Doors and Windows are repaired or replaced

Weatherization Works!!



Two Satisfied Customers

Rx FOR OKLAHOMA

S.H., a middle aged female, who has been a client of the Rx or Oklahoma program for many years and has many of her medications supplied to her through various Patient Assistance Programs (PAP) . Recently she started receiving her disability checks and has Medicaid but takes more medications than allowed. She is also nearly deaf. She relies heavily on Rx staff to explain the options she has. In her last phone call, she said without the help of the Rx for Oklahoma staff she would not be able to get her medications. She is very appreciative of all the assistance she has received.

Rx for Oklahoma has helped so many people just like S.H. Rx for Oklahoma Program assists individuals with chronic conditions and ongoing prescription needs to access prescription assistance programs. NEOCAA is the lead agency over 17 counties.



This year the agency assisted 229 clients and had 1740 new claims with a total savings of \$516,200.00. While Region 3 including NEOCAA assisted 662 clients and had 7010 new claims with a total savings of \$2,279,379.00.



VITA (VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE PROGRAM)

The 2013 tax season was the last year for NEOCAA's three-year grant. Tax preparers completed over 1000 tax returns during the season with federal refunds and state refunds over \$1.3 million returned to the taxpayers. The VITA Final Report Questionnaire was completed and submitted. An application for a grant for the 2014 tax season has been prepared and submitted.

In November and December, staff visited Jay Head Start and Jay Early Head Start to discuss the VITA program and how it can help them. Many of the Head Start parents came to VITA sites for help with their taxes. This tax season the agency opened 7 sites in our five-county service area. The Grove Public Library requested that we come back to their building. It had been several years since we had a presence there. We also had a kiosk available at the Jay site that taxpayers could use to prepare their own taxes.

New this year was "My Free Taxes" on NEOCAA's website. Taxpayers who made less than \$57,000 could log on to our website and prepare their own taxes and e-file them when completed. Twenty-six clients filed their taxes using this free service on our website. "My Free Taxes" will be offered again for tax season 2014.



FREE
VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE.

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Welcome to the Education Station

The agency recognized a significant need for day care in the Jay area because very few of the day care providers would accept DHS

and tribal subsidies.

Therefore, many parents are forced to travel to Grove for services and return to Jay to work.

This places a serious burden on these parents.

There was also a shortage of day care placements to meet the need in the area.

The staff have been working for the past year to prepare the old conference room in the main office's adjacent building to house a day care operation for two- and three-year-old children.



Thus was born the Education Station. Many individuals volunteered to help the agency prepare for the Education Station. Christy Youngblood assisted with the design of the program and then did an awesome job of decorating the walls.

The Education Station is staffed with three qualified and educated women: Becki Caudill (Center Director/Teacher), Staci Summerfield (Teacher Assistant), and Penny Clark (Cook). These staff are providing a fun, quality and educational experience and look forward to serving many young children in the community for many years to come.

Now 2 Star Rated Through OKDHS.



Service Awards

Congratulations on your years of service!

We wish to applaud Jean Cooper, Natasha Tanner, Debby Foreman and Terry Schroeder for their years of dedicated service.

Fifteen Years
Jean Cooper, Ed.D
Executive Director

Ten Years
Natasha Tanner
Business Manager

Ten Years
Terry Schroeder
Planner

Ten Years
Debby Foreman
Weatherization
Director

Natasha, Debby, Jean and Terry



All deserve special awards for their devotion to the agency and Terry Schroeder has just set a new record by exceeding \$15 million in grants written and approved in his short 10 years.



America's Poverty Fighting Network

ENTERPRISING DEVELOPMENTS

The Special Projects Team seeks to increase families' resources through several strategies: free tax preparation, employment, financial education, additional income, micro-finance, and economic development.

Job Development/Client Training Services

The clients have a variety of needs which interfere with attaining self-sufficiency. Whether individuals need to attain a GED, improve literacy, learn methods of dealing with stress, money, anger management, develop parenting skills, budget finances or deal with issues of drug or alcohol misuse, mentoring and classes are offered to help meet the client's needs.

Our experienced staff research training needs and either utilize available training, refer to other agencies such as Bridges out of Poverty, Drug and Alcohol agencies, and Mental Health counseling, or develop individual or group training to meet training needs. The Job Trainer helps with individuals who need to learn to apply for a job, write a resume, find a training program to develop essential job skills and apply for schooling to achieve certifications which enable them to get better jobs.

The Job Trainer completed SOAR training in order to assist clients in applying for disability payments.



Julia Teska Teaching a Class at the ARK

CLASSES PROVIDED
Ark – 48 classes
Harbor – 28
Safe Passages – 23
Hope House – 31
Neosho Ridge – 5

Agency Wide Initiatives

COFFEE SHOP PROJECT

NEOCAA purchased a building in downtown Jay for the agency's new coffee shop. Equipment and supplies were researched and priced. Two staff members traveled to Springfield, Missouri, to tour two Starbuck operations on the campus of Missouri State University. The project is being developed with support from the Oklahoma Department of Commerce in order to provide job training for homeless, developmentally disabled, and low income individuals seeking to work in food service.

INDIANPRENEURSHIP CLASSES

Two staff members were certified to teach the Indianpreneurship class. The first NEOCAA Indianpreneurship class graduated with eight students. A group was also trained in in Quapaw. More classes are scheduled. This program assists students to develop a business plan and implement new businesses in the area.

BRIDGES OF HOPE

Three staff members volunteered for the Bridges of Hope poverty simulation in Grove. The simulation was attended by local community leaders and members who experienced how difficult and frustrating living in poverty is.

GREENHOUSE PROJECT

Research continued for the agency's greenhouse project. Staff toured a local Aquaponics farm for information on starting an aquaponics greenhouse. Land in Colcord was donated to the agency for building greenhouses.

Research and plans continue. A grant application has been made at the federal level to build and operate a solar greenhouse year round,



Volunteers Karen & Thurman Thomas producing

food for local consumers at a discount for low-income families. The project will also create additional jobs in the area. Several tribes have also expressed an interest in partnering on this

Welcome Donations

GENEROUS PLEDGE... Property

NEOCOA received two donations of land which provided the agency with sufficient match to apply for construction grants in Jay and Colcord.

In Colcord, the proposed project is two duplexes near the schools, one a two bedroom and one a three bedroom. The donor for this project is Carl Denny a long- term Colcord resident. His motivation for this valued donation is a desire to help his community grow and improve the housing stock. Mr. Denny has also donated land as a site for the commercial greenhouse project.

Chad and Candace Garrison donated two parcels of land on Monroe in Jay after seeing our completed duplex project from last year. With this land match the agency has submitted a grant to build a two bedroom duplex and a single occupancy house in Jay.

Both of these construction projects are now granted and environmental review. Projects will be available as rentals.

The agency is forever grateful to these individuals for their help in making housing a priority in these towns.

The Promise of Community Action

Community Action changes people's lives,

Embodies the spirit of hope,

Improves communities,

And makes America a better place to live.

We care about the entire community,

And we are dedicated to

Helping people help themselves

And each other.



AMERICA'S POVERTY FIGHTING NETWORK

Northeast Oklahoma Community Action Services

Affordable Housing

Housing Rehabilitation Assistance

Weatherization Assistance

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance

Financial Empowerment

Emergency Assistance

RX for Oklahoma

Jobs Skills Development

Economic Development

Housing Development/Rentals



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