



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Alaska and Madi Performance Helped Promote Systems of Care for Local Families at Party of a Cause

McAlester, OK (June 12, 2014) – The performing duo of Alaska and Madi from the popular TV show *The Voice* took center stage last week at the Communities of Care Party for a Cause event in McAlester and brought awareness to nearly 160 individuals about how it takes an entire community to support struggling families. In just four hours about 160 people made commitments to volunteer time and resources to support local children and families in Atoka, Coal, Haskell, McIntosh, Pittsburg and Latimer counties that may be struggling through personal issues. More than 30 community agencies helped spread the word.

The forum was the second of six to be offered in southeastern Oklahoma as part of the Communities of Care initiative kick-off events. The goal of the initiative is to raise awareness about the number of families struggling through traumatic events in local communities. Initiative members also are emphasizing the importance of helping fragile families on the front end before the family structure weakens to the point of children being taken into foster care.

In addition to the live performance by Alaska and Madi, McAlester Radio was on hand broadcasting live from the event that included food, prizes and activities for the whole family. Speakers told their stories of what it meant to be part of a struggling family and how community support helps families rise above difficult times. Speakers included Pam Toohey, nationally renowned speaker and child advocate; Terrance Roby and Brondalyn Coleman, young adult experts on foster care.

Communities of Care representative Stacy Williams, MA, Assistant Director of Children's Services at CROKS Behavioral Health Services for Pittsburg, Latimer and Haskell counties, said those in attendance became aware of how working together to help struggling families is beneficial to the whole community. "All of the agencies involved feel those who attended the event left with a better understanding of what community services are available locally and how even the smallest commitment of their own time and resources can help strengthen our community," Williams commented.

Some of the comments on the commitment forms included, “strengthen the community that I work in,” “mentor a foster child,” “stay involved with Local Service Coalition and be a support person for opportunities involving foster families” and “coordinate a fundraiser for remodeling the youth shelter.” According to Casey White, Communications Manager for the Department of Human Services, “These are great commitments and they show that a day, a week or a year of someone’s time can make a difference. The event may be over but Communities of Care will continue to work to help everyone understand that the entire community must work together to create strong families and keep our children out of the foster care system, or safe while they are in the system. Communities of Care will continue to engage in a variety of efforts that promote healthy families and healthy communities across the state for a long time to come.”

Families are the most basic building block of any community and the statistics in eastern Oklahoma indicate there are high numbers of children and families at risk for experiencing some type of stress that can lead to children entering the foster care system.

In eastern Oklahoma alone, in 2013, there were 1,498 confirmed reports of child abuse and neglect representing 2,781 children. An overwhelming 60 percent of those children were age 0 to 6. This is an increase of nearly 20 percent over 2012. Approximately 70 percent of adults and 40 percent of youth are not being treated for mental health issues and 77 percent of adults and 80 percent of youth need help for substance abuse problems.

Further statistics show that for eastern Oklahoma, in 2013, more children entered foster care than there were approved beds. With only 1,761 approved beds, 2,217 children were removed from their homes and placed into the system. This startling statistic represents 21 percent of the total number of children in Oklahoma removed from their family and is a 23 percent increase over 2012.

To make a commitment of time or resources and join with others in strengthening the community, information about the Communities of Care initiative and its goals can be found on Facebook at www.facebook.com/OKCommunitiesofcare or by calling (918) 497-8424.

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Local Agency Hosts of Communities of Care Spring Fling

CREOKS Behavioral Health Services

Life Church

KiBois Community Action

McAlester Regional Hospital

Carl Albert Mental Health

Pittsburg County Youth Emergency Shelter

Oklahoma Family Network

Oklahoma Systems of Care

Pittsburg County Local Service Coalition

Pittsburg County Health Department

DHS

Caring Hands FQHC

Oklahoma Kids

Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services