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**OKLAHOMA TO OBSERVE CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS
DAY MAY 6**

Children's mental health will be at the forefront May 6 as the nation, and Oklahoma, observes National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day.

In Oklahoma, "Systems of Care" (SOC) sites in several counties will host events during May to draw attention to the need for continued emphasis on children's mental health issues.

An estimated 10 percent of state youth have a mental health disorder and an additional 10 percent have a substance abuse issue, said Jackie Shipp, director of community based services at the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. "Mental illnesses tend to strike early in life and delays in treatment leave affected individuals vulnerable to debilitating symptoms during their most productive years."

Systems of Care represents a variety of mental health and support services that are coordinated to meet the individual needs of children and youth who are struggling in school, in the community, or at home due to serious mental health issues, Shipp said. With input from the family, partners plan and put into place individualized services to meet the child's physical, emotional, social, educational, and family needs. The goal of the SOC team is to help children get all the services they need in or near their own home.

The program, started in 2000, has grown to more than 40 counties, and has already served more than 2,000 children. A recent federal grant will help the program

expand statewide, with a goal of serving 2,000 children annually by the end of the six-year grant period.

Counties planning awareness activities, which are open to the public, include:

Beckham and Roger Mills counties: “Mental Health Day Celebration” – Ice cream social and balloon release, **Elk City**, May 6 from 4-5 p.m. For more information, contact Amy Estes (580-799-0995).

Blaine County: “Myth Busters” – Ice cream social, scavenger hunt, activities and games, **Watonga**, May 6 from 3:30-4:30 p.m. For more information, contact Docia Swearingim (580-614-1215).

Canadian County: “Balloon Release” – Family cook-out and balloon release, **El Reno**. For more information, contact Rebecca Linam-Baker (405-388-2089)

Carter County: “Public Information Display” at **Ardmore** Public Library, through May 7. For more information, contact Pam Kerkstra (580-223-2537).

Cleveland County: Artwork on display at **Norman** Public Library through May 14, and “Chalking of Children’s Mental Health Stats,” OU Campus, Undergraduate Social Work Association & Psychology Club. For more information, contact Audra Hunt (405-761-3571).

Custer and Washita counties: “Ice Out” – Ice cream social and balloon release, **Clinton**, May 6 from 4-5 p.m. For more information, contact Stephanie Warner (580-214-0339).

Grady County: “Balloon Release,” **Chickasha**. For more information, contact Rebecca Linam-Baker (405-388-2089).

Kay County: “Mayfest” – free event including informational booths, cake walk, drawings for prizes, inflatable games and more, lawn of Edwin Fair CMHC, 1500 N. 6th, **Ponca City**, May 13 from 3:30-5:30 p.m. For more information, contact Gary Wilburn (580-762-7561).

Oklahoma County: “Mental Health Provider Resources Fair,” NorthCare, 4436 NW 50th St., **Oklahoma City**, May 14, 9-11 a.m. For more information, contact LaCinda Daugherty (405-858-2882).

Payne County: “Kids Fishing Tournament” – prizes for everyone, awards for fish caught, west side of Boomer Lake (**Stillwater**) and Lake Marianna (**Ponca City**), May 15 from 10 a.m. to noon. For more information, contact Adam Carroll (405-372-1250).

Tulsa County: Indian Health Care Resource Center of Tulsa “Restoring Harmony Pow-Wow,” May 8. For more information, contact Tamara Newcomb (918-382-2205).

Washington County: “Children’s Mental Health Matters,” public marketing campaign including local businesses. For more information, contact Sarada McGaha (918-335-1111 ext. 225).

The purpose of National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day is to promote positive youth development, resilience, recovery, and the transformation of mental health services delivery for children and youth with serious mental health needs and their families.

For more information about these events or issues related to children’s mental health in Oklahoma, contact Traci Castles, ODMHSAS Systems of Care, at (405) 522-8019 or (405) 365-7391.

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