



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hundreds of Community Members Learn to Help Struggling Families at Communities of Care Event in Ada

Ada, OK (June 30, 2014) – In just two hours, nearly 200 individuals learned about how it takes an entire community to support struggling families during the “It Takes a Whole Village to ‘Foster’ a Change” event in Ada in June. Garnering the community support was the goal of the more than 20 local service agencies, organizations and businesses that hosted the event for Pontotoc, Seminole, Hughes, Bryan and Coal counties. Their efforts will result in stronger families and stronger communities.

The forum, hosted by the Communities of Care initiative was the fifth of six to be offered in southeastern Oklahoma as part of the initiative’s 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 entertainment by Injunuity and food and prizes for the whole family, the event included guest speakers who 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, and Dr. Deb Shropshire, a pediatrician for children in the foster care system. Shropshire also is involved in a variety of community projects to engage communities around struggling children and families. She works with the 111 project that seeks to inform and equip churches to recruit and support foster families. She believes that if we can give hope to one generation of kids, there will be an end to child abuse in future generations.

Communities of Care representative Bonnie Keeley, MS, LPC, Project Director of Pontotoc and Seminole Systems of Care, Multi-County Counseling, Inc., 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,” Keeley commented.

Some of the comments on the commitment forms included, "I want to speak to youth and share my story and let young children know that they can break the cycle," "As a special education teacher, I will reach out to my students and their families to help them the best I can by putting them in contact with all the resources I can," and "I will communicate this message to my peers at work, church and home."

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 (580) 235-0210.

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**Local Hosts of
It Takes a Whole Village to “Foster” a Change**

Multi- County Counseling
Ada City Schools
Oklahoma Parents as Teachers
Seminole Nation
Oklahoma Family Network
Smart Start South Central
Mental Health Services of Southern
 Oklahoma Systems of Care
1-1-1 Project
Trinity Baptist Church
Pontotoc County Drug Court

Pontotoc and Seminole County Systems of Care
Chickasaw Nation
Ada Regional United Way
DHS
Oklahoma Federation of Families
Choctaw Nation
Office of Juvenile Affairs

Life Launch
Byng Public Schools