



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 30, 2014

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Hundreds of Community Members Learn to Help Struggling Families at Communities United Event in Idabel

Idabel, OK (June 30, 2014) – In just two hours, nearly 300 individuals learned about how it takes an entire community to support struggling families and 100 people committed to providing support to local children and families during the “Communities United – We Are One” event in Idabel last week. Garnering the community support was the goal of the more than 40 local service agencies, organizations and businesses that hosted the event for Choctaw, McCurtain and Pushmataha counties. Their efforts will result in stronger families and stronger communities.

The forum, hosted by the Communities of Care initiative, was the last 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 some guest speakers, the event included food from Tyson Foods, children’s activities and prizes for the whole family. The 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, Curtis and Debbie McDaniel, and Lynn McCarn Choctaw County Child Welfare Supervisor.

Communities of Care representative Cherie McGahee, MSW, LCSW, Clinical Director, SequelCare of Oklahoma, 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,” McGahee commented.

Some of the comments on the commitment forms included, "I want to get more involved with my community and I will start here." A local teen stated, "I want to talk to other teens about the effects of drugs."

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) 286-5045.

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Local Hosts of Communities United – We Are One

Boys & Girls Club
Choctaw Electric

Choctaw Nation Youth and Family Services
Cornerstone
Emergency Medical Services – Idabel
Gracefully Yours
Idabel Police Department
Idabel Public Schools
Kiamichi Council of Alcoholism & Drug Abuse
Kidz Kottage
Little Dixie/CASA
McCurtain County Health Dept.
New Directions
Oklahoma Family Network
Oklahoma Workforce – Veterans
PSO
Region 6 Prevention Coordinators
SOS for Families
Systems of Care
TFI Family Connections
WeeCare

Broken Bow Ministers Fellowship
Choctaw Nation Family Violence
Prevention Program
Choctaw Nation Youth Empowerment
DHS
Farm Bureau
Idabel Chamber of Commerce
Idabel Public Library
KI BOIS
Kiamichi Council Treatment Center
Little Dixie Tri-County Smart Start
McCurtain County Coalition for Change
McCurtain Memorial Home Health
ODMHSAS
Oklahoma Systems of Care
Providence
Quest MHSA
SequelCare of Oklahoma
Southeastern Oklahoma Inter-local Cooperative
Tallgrass
Tyson Foods
Zen Gee