

Good kids in bad situations: Our community responds

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Good kids in bad situations: Our community responds

In November 2013, an ad hoc citizens group examined growing concerns over local youth who are homeless, “couch-hoppers” or living in dysfunctional situations.

In many instances, parents are no longer willing or able to care for their children. These youth fall through a tear in the social safety net.

Many youth are challenged to simply make it through another day – without stable living conditions and adequate nutrition, without a plan, without expectations, without employable skills, without finances, without moral support.

These are good kids in bad situations.

How much of a problem in Owensboro-Daviess County?

Daviess County has two public school districts: the Owensboro Public Schools (OPS) with approximately 5,000 students; the Daviess County Public Schools (DCPS) with more than 11,600 students; and private schools in the city and county that serve about 2,500 students.

More than 270 youth are officially classified as homeless in the DCPS. Approximately 60 more are classified as homeless in the OPS.

School counselors and other student services personnel say “couch-hoppers” and teens living in dysfunctional situations are more plentiful than those officially classified as homeless. Moreover, these problems are complicated by transient lifestyles, precarious housing and peer pressure.

Project proponents interviewed school counselors, family resource center personnel, juvenile judges and attorneys, court designated workers, law enforcement personnel and others.

A “couch-hopper” is someone who bounces from couch to couch of friends and relatives with no stable place to call home. Teen-age couch-hoppers typically sever ties with custodial parents and there is little or no effort to bring the child home.

Do we not already have agencies that fill this need?

Organizations such as the Mary Kendall Home, Birthright, St. Joseph's Peace Mission and Yewell Home for Boys provide emergency housing, assistance for pregnant teens, chemical dependency and special needs. The gap that exists: youth between the ages of 13 to 18 who are homeless or on the verge of being so, those living in dysfunctional situations, and those that do not fit the criteria of other agencies.

These youth need a home-like living space, good food, personal space, shelter, clean clothing and other personal items, internet access, part-time jobs, help with homework, education in life skills and transportation.

According to the National Center on Family Homelessness, nearly 67,000 Kentucky children were homeless in 2012-2013, which ranks Kentucky worst among all states (on a per capita basis).

Responding to the need

Upon verifying the need, project proponents concluded that a long-term facility is needed to provide safe housing, counseling and other services for these youth. The preliminary goal is to provide a clean, safe and supportive environment for up to 27 youth. (An additional room will be added for those who need handicapped accessibility.)

Vicki Quisenberry (Foundation for Daviess County Public Schools) has been the group's key organizer. The advisory committee is forming a nonprofit corporation, expanding the committee to a board of directors, developing a business plan and preparing a lease on a building that will be compatible for this use.

The Empowerment Academy

Through a partnership with the Ursuline Sisters, the selected site is a former dormitory, Saint Angela Hall, on the campus of Mount St. Joseph in southwest Daviess County. A local architect estimates the need for \$1.1 million in renovation costs. Project leaders also plan to secure operating/endowment funds for long-term sustainability. The program/project will be named the Empowerment Academy.

Since the mission of local school systems is not to provide housing, the Empowerment Academy is envisioned as a spin-off of the Foundation for Daviess County Schools and a collaborative initiative that will include representatives from the Owensboro Public Schools, court system, government, social services, retired educators, law enforcement, the faith community and more.

This community initiative is an impressive grass roots demonstration of how citizens identified a need, did their homework, convened stakeholders and the community at-large. They learned from other organizations and advisors, invited public input and developed an action plan.

Although there are still obstacles to overcome, project advocates are to be commended for advancing this project responsibly. We look forward to the opening and success of the Empowerment Academy.

“When teens live in dysfunctional situations, education is typically not a top priority. The Empowerment Academy will give teens a safe, stable place to live with emphasis on education and life skills training.”

Vicki Quisenberry

Youth advocates pushing 2015 policy priorities

Although the 2015 Kentucky General Assembly is not a budget session, a coalition of youth and education advocates are focused on various policy priorities that could be addressed through legislation.

The Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA) is focused on four priorities:

1. Require training on the prevention and recognition of child abuse for public school personnel and information for students and parents.
2. Enact a statewide, comprehensive smoke-free law to protect children, pregnant women, and women of childbearing age from secondhand smoke.
3. Protect youth from experiencing or witnessing violence by extending protective orders.
4. Establish a child care advisory council to promote quality, accessibility and affordability of early childhood education and care.

These and other positions affecting youth in Kentucky are endorsed by more than 100 coalition members, including:

- Medical doctors, firms and associations
- Hospitals and clinics
- Health departments
- Head Start agencies
- Foundations
- Advocacy groups
- Children's homes
- Dentists, firms and associations
- Health insurance companies
- Educators, associations



Share your positions on these issues affecting our youth:



Senator Joe Bowen
joe.bowen@lrc.ky.gov
502-564-8100 Ext. 662



Representative Tommy Thompson
tommy.thompson@lrc.ky.gov
502-564-8100 Ext. 688



Representative Jim Glenn
jim.glenn@lrc.ky.gov
502-564-8100 Ext. 705



Representative Suzanne Miles
502-564-8100 Ext. 709

Goodfellows Club surpasses annual campaign goal

The 2014 Goodfellows Club "Roll Call" campaign raised \$156,658, surpassing its goal of \$155,000. The Christmas Party, held on December 20, 2014 at the Owensboro Sportscenter, attracted more than 1,000 children and hundreds of parents and guardians.

The Christmas Party featured music, inflatable slides, gifts of fruit, books, toys and a visit from Santa Claus. The Owensboro High School Rose Curtain Players performed a Christmas skit and led the crowd in carols. More than 100 volunteers assisted with the party, including officers from the Owensboro police and fire departments.



2014-2015 Board of Directors

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Tracy McQueen, President-Elect
Gordon Wilkerson, Past President
Tom Greer, Past President
Bob Clark, Treasurer
Stan Syra, Assistant Treasurer
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Beth Noffsinger
Gavin Noffsinger
David Powell
Susan Wallace
Sally Wood
Larry Hager, Director Emeritus



Mary Beth Hurley, a long-time volunteer and Goodfellows school coordinator, received the Ann Sabetta Memorial Award for her many years of service.

Throughout 2014, more than 1,200 youth were served through a partnership between the Goodfellows Club and local schools. Needy children received clothing, shoes and emergency dental care.

In 2016, the Goodfellows Club will hold its 100th Christmas Party.

Co-founder awards grants



Public Life Foundation co-founder Marjorie M. Hager recently awarded seven substantial grants to the following organizations and institutions:

- Owensboro Community and Technical College
- Theatre Workshop of Owensboro
- Owensboro Symphony Orchestra
- Back Alley Musicals
- RiverPark Center
- Western Kentucky Botanical Gardens
- Owensboro Museum of Fine Art

The grants will be awarded over a two year period.

Mrs. Hager has a keen interest in the arts and education. For many years, she was active in Theatre Workshop of Owensboro – acting in productions and serving in various administrative capacities.

Lawrence and Augusta Hager Educational Foundation continues to expand free tax service program

In 10 years, the Green River Asset Building Coalition (established by the Lawrence and Augusta Hager Educational Foundation) has organized and promoted the program, trained volunteers and filed 24,882 free tax returns, from 305 in 2005 to 4,533 in 2014. The service has brought forth \$2,177,417 in Earned Income Tax Credits in 2014, up from \$200,000 in 2005. This reflects a total of \$5,821,741 in total returns, up from \$306,000 in 2005.

In 2015, the program benefits from the service of 125 volunteers at 15 sites in seven counties.

Hat's off to the Lawrence and Augusta Hager Educational Foundation for the program's remarkable growth and value to our community!

Impact of youth savings accounts

What if every child born in Owensboro-Daviess County each year received a \$500 jump-start on a 529 college savings plan? That would mean nearly 2,000 children saving for college, nearly 2,000 children with higher expectations. It could be as easy as adding a box to check on a birth certificate.

If \$50 per month were contributed by the parents of the child, matched by a “community sponsor,” the student would have a substantial source of funds for tuition, books, lab fees and more 13 to 16 years later. Even with current low interest rates, over time, such a fund would benefit from compounding interest, reduce the excessive amount of student debt, and enable many students to enroll in college or vocational training.

Even though such a plan may not cover all the cost, it sets in place an expectation that a college degree is in a student’s future. Their confidence and leadership skills improve when they realize that higher education is accessible and flexible to meet their needs.

Moreover, technology and on-line education are expanding lower cost opportunities. Institutions such as Southern New Hampshire College offer a full bachelor’s degree as low as \$10,000. Georgia Tech offers a complete master’s degree for \$7,000. We will likely see customized plans that combine online courses, courses from several institutions, semesters abroad, corporate internships and more.

Brescia University is expanding its online offerings: Last



academic year, 369 online and distance learning courses (in addition to 476 courses offered through traditional face-to-face instruction).

Kentucky Wesleyan College, a more traditional residential experience, now offers 59 online and distance learning courses (in addition to 501 courses offered through traditional face-to-face instruction).

Western Kentucky University-Owensboro (a branch of Western Kentucky University) offers nearly 1,000 online and distance learning courses (in addition to 80-100 courses offered through traditional face-to-face instruction on the Owensboro campus).

Public institutions, private nonprofit institutions, and for-profit enterprises are sure to innovate and collaborate to better meet the needs and expand opportunities for higher education in our community and region.

Our favorite beekeeper



Carol Mark, a great friend to Owensboro–Davies County and regular participant in Public Life Foundation programs, passed away in October 2014 at her home after a battle with cancer.

A native of Niagara Falls, New York, Carol earned degrees from the University of Evansville (Chemistry), American University (Human Resources) and Erie County Technical Institute. She retired as a metallurgical engineer. She had many interests and lived life with gusto. She will be remembered for many attributes, particularly her broad smile and friendly nature.

Carol and her husband, David Lashbrook, raised produce on two farms. She was a Master Beekeeper and Master

Gardener. She and David were regular vendors at the Owensboro Regional Farmer’s Market. She loved nature and was a member of the Sierra Club. She was also a member of the Owensboro Area World Affairs Council and First Christian Church. Her work with the Burmese immigrants included the design, construction and management of a community garden and food pantry at the church.

The Owensboro Human Relations Commission recognized her important role and generous assistance by honoring her with its prestigious Humanitarian Award.

“Carol seldom missed an opportunity to participate in civic dialogue. She loved our forums and town meetings. She was particularly excited when a new downtown farmer’s market was a top recommendation that came out of the voting at one of our workshops. But later, she was aggravated and disappointed when the project was not implemented. It will happen someday and she’ll be smiling down on us.”

Rodney Berry

Public Life Foundation

The Public Life Foundation celebrates Carol’s wonderful life and extends its sincere sympathy to Carol’s family and friends.

Activity Report

Public Life Foundation of Owensboro

2014

Focus for 2014: **Youth and Education**

Early Childhood Education
Children Living in Poverty
Reading Proficiency
Quality Teaching
Postsecondary Educational Attainment



...fostering broad and meaningful
citizen participation in community
decisions and public policy

Information > Deliberation > Action



Information

The foundation produced and disseminated information on important community challenges and opportunities:

Four editions of the Public Life Advocate

Articles/Issue Briefs/Reports

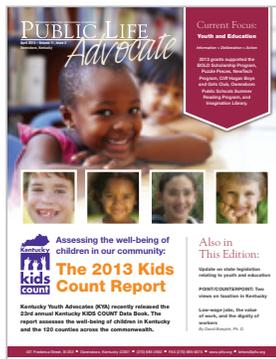
Volume 11 Issue 1

- Foundation awards \$433,500 in grants, \$1.3 million planned over three years
- The Reading Priority: Forum participants share ways in which our community can advance and improve reading
- Dialogue on race, justice and child welfare
- How to help the poor – 10 ways, right now
- PLFO 2013 Key Activities



Volume 11 Issue 2

- Assessing the well-being of children in our community: The 2013 Kids Count Report
- Update on state legislation relating to youth and education
- POINT/COUNTERPOINT: Two views on taxation in Kentucky
- Low-wage jobs, the value of work, and the dignity of workers, by David Boeyink, Ph. D.



Volume 11 Issue 3

- New Tech: Challenges on the forefront of educational innovation
- ATC Phase II: Skilled Trades Center – Building a case for the future, by James S. Klauber, Ph.D.
- What's next for downtown? Citizens invited to share their vision
- People's Square now available for public discourse
- Coalition continues to break records
- Economic development is your job: how we all can play our part, by Madison Silvert



Volume 11 Issue 4

- Report on the Community Forum: The War on Poverty
- 2014 Kids Count County Data Book: How does Daviess County compare?
- Owensboro Public Schools Summer Literacy Camp yields impressive results
- Special initiatives give distinction to local school districts
- Owensboro Community and Technical College launches Hager Civic Engagement Scholars Program
- Wendell H. Ford Education Center cultivating leaders
- Owensboro Area World Affairs Council connects citizens, students with the world
- Junior Achievement of West Kentucky and Regional Alliance for Education earn Soft Skills designation



Dialogue and Deliberation

Difference in a Day, Ford Center
January 2014

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
January 2014

Inequality for All film screening
March 2014

Asset Building Coalition forum
June 2014

War on Poverty forum
September 2014

Women's Network Dialogue
October 2014
Amy Glennon Publisher, Atlanta Journal Constitution

Strive Together
Cradle to Career Network

- Preliminary research
- Affiliation
- 23 interviews conducted

Action

Grants awarded in 2014

BOLD Scholarship
\$50,000 (matching grant)

Cliff Hagan Boys and Girls Club
\$40,000 (programs)

Imagination Library
\$50,000 (books, supplies, endowment)

New Tech Network
\$110,500 (affiliation and training)

OPS Reading Camp
\$80,000 (staff, material, field trips, etc.)

Puzzle Pieces
\$35,000 (staff, program support)

Literacy Task force

People's Square unveiled July 2014

2065 in Owensboro Planning Summit
(Chamber and EDC)

PLFO received the Flag of Learning and Liberty Award Nov. 2014

Administration

Public Life Foundation of Owensboro
John and Marjorie Hager, Founders

Board of Directors
Sally Hager Wood, Chair
Bruce Hager, Vice-Chair
Rodney Berry, President
Susie Hager Alford, Treasurer
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Yolla Hager, ex-officio

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