

Riverbend



Friends

GOOD NEWS FOR SUPPORTERS OF RIVERBEND HEAD START & FAMILY SERVICES

Q2 2024 | NEWSLETTER

President's Message



Greetings Friends!

Often when we speak with the community one of the first questions that we are asked is “how many kids do you serve?” While that is a very important question as it gets to the degree to which we are designed to meet the community need, the question we hear less but work tirelessly to answer is “with what level of quality do you serve the children and families in your programs?”

As I reflect on this question anchored in continuous pursuit of improved quality, I look back over the past few months and I am proud to report to you, our community and backbone, that we have endeavored to elevate quality in both physical plants and staff competency.

To address our staff competency, our program leaders have engaged all social service staff in Family Services Credential training. While all of our staff are educated, this training is tailored uniquely to prepare our mission partners to provide services which are well informed with our program foundations and operational philosophies that directly support fidelity implementation of our mission, vision, values and key metrics for success. This fall, our education staff will receive the same training at somewhat less depth but to ensure alignment of understanding across the agency.

In looking around at physical plants, our Facilities Director and team does not strive to benchmark against our peers or other similar programs, but rather to provide the highest possible quality that allows our staff to fully and safely implement our services. To that end, this summer, in partnership with **PNC Bank**, the **Edwardsville Junior Service League** and the **Office of Head Start** we have installed a new playground at our Edwardsville center, we have power washed and provided detail safety inspections and repairs at all playgrounds, replaced failing shade structures with high quality and permanent fixtures, continued our efforts to purchase our Alton Essic Robinson site to ensure that we can continue to provide services to this community for many years to come. All child attendance centers received a deep cleaning with repairs to paint, flooring and fixtures as needed such that we would all be proud to have our own children or grandchildren attend any of our facilities.

So, the next time you speak to one of our employees, feel free to ask about our services and then dig a little deeper and ask how we provide the highest quality child and family support services in Madison County. Needless to say, I’m sure you will be impressed!

Gene Howell

New Pavilions Installed at Three Head Start Locations

As we are all aware, summers in the Midwest can be brutally hot. That's why this summer, we installed new pavilions at three of our Head Start locations. The work began in May and was completed in June. The locations include: Collinsville, Granite City South, and Granite City North. We were able to purchase them at the end of the previous fiscal year with remaining funds from our annual budget.

The three locations were selected to receive a new pavilion because they had storm damage to their current pavilion, or in the case of Granite City North, they didn't have one at all.

Once the new school year begins, the new pavilions will offer much-needed shade to our staff and students. They can also be utilized as an outdoor classroom. While the agency purchased two of the pavilions, we're happy to report that **Tindall Construction Inc.** donated the pavilion to Granite City North. **Scot Garman** of Tindall Construction also constructed them for us at all three locations.

We're thankful for those who worked hard to make this happen and we look forward to our teachers and students being able to use the pavilions for many years to come!



Granite City North



Granite City South

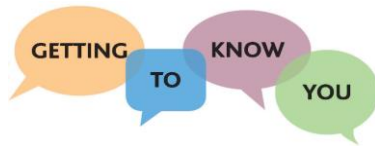


Collinsville

Meet Your Policy Council: Jessica Lewey



Head Start / Early Head Start parent Jessica Lewey has been involved with the program for 16+ years



Jessica Lewey and children: Ariyah, Braden, Aubree, Amira, and Areil

Head Start parent **Jessica Lewey** knows a lot about the program, and is a great resource for other parents who might have questions or concerns. Lewey is involved with our Board of Directors. She is also actively involved in our Policy Council.

“I like being on both because I learn information about what’s going on before a lot of others know about it.”

Lewey has been a Head Start parent for the past 16 years. She has five children, all of them have been involved in the program. Currently, she has a child in the Early Head Start home-based program, and another child who’s attending Head Start at Bethalto. That’s the location closest to her home in Cottage Hills. Even though it’s in the area, she still relies on the transportation provided through the program.

“I have no transportation, so if my kids have to go to the eye doctor or dentist, Head Start will provide transportation,” says Lewey. “As a single mom of five, that really helps me out.”

She admits that when she first became involved in Policy Council, she was shy about speaking up. But as the years have gone by, she’s more comfortable and confident and has really come into her own.

“And now, I’m my kid’s voice, I answer questions, I give my opinion when needed,” she says. “I also want to be helpful to other parents. If someone won’t speak up, I don’t mind speaking up.”

Lewey has benefitted from donated items in the program. She sees firsthand how the program is helping out in the community.

“I also like how Riverbend Head Start will help moms out if their kids need clothes, diapers, wipes, and things like that.”

It’s because of the help that she’s received that she likes to pay it forward, and regularly donates to help other Head Start families in need.

Lewey first learned about the Head Start program 16+ years ago while applying for the WIC (Women, Infants & Children) program. And now, she regularly encourages other families to consider Head Start. It’s another full circle moment for her and she loves spreading the word about her time here.

“You guys, I would say are like my second family,” she says.

For now, she’s busy getting ready for a new school year. It will be quite the contrast from the start of the 2023-24 school year. A year ago, she says her daughter Ariyah would cry and become upset during those first days at Bethalto. But that quickly changed.

“I would say the first week of her going to school her behavior changed,” says Lewey. “She was coming home talking about what she did at school. They were doing butterflies in the classroom and they let them go. And to this day, she still talks about that.”



Jessica Lewey and her daughter Ariyah.

The 2nd Annual Back-to-School & Donor Appreciation Event Scheduled for Tuesday, August 27th

In 2023, the agency resumed its annual in-person donor event. It was the first such event since the pandemic ended, replacing the very successful Circle of Care fundraiser.

“We listened to you, and made adjustments on how we approached fundraising,” says President/CEO **Gene Howell**. “The overwhelming majority of our supporters wanted a more casual event, and so we came up with the Back-to-School & Donor Appreciation fundraiser.”

In August 2023, we held the newly revamped event with its casual attire and atmosphere, and it was a success! The Fairview Heights based food truck, **Takozz**, will once again provide tasty Mexican food this year including street tacos and quesadillas. **Vera Lee Meeting & Event Venue** will host the event, and will provide margaritas.

We want to invite our donors and supporters to attend. The event will be held on Tuesday, August 27th from 4:00 to 6:00 pm. Details are on the invitation below. If interested in attending, please be sure to RSVP by August 23rd. Remarks will be given by President/CEO **Gene Howell** and our newly-elected Board President **Monica Bristow**, among others.



The invitation card is framed by a decorative border of colorful icons including scissors, paper, and a pencil. The text is centered and includes details about the event. A small taco illustration is placed to the left of the 'When' and 'What time' lines. Two chili peppers are to the right of the 'When' line. A small box at the bottom right contains the RSVP information.

Who: You're Invited to Taco Tuesday!
What: 2nd Annual Donor Appreciation
& Back-to-School Fundraiser
When: Tuesday, August 27, 2024
What time: 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm
Where: Vera Lee Meeting & Event Venue
1854B E. Broadway, Alton, IL
Why: Because we appreciate you and your support!

Food provided by Takozz Food Truck. Margaritas served by Vera Lee.

Please come as you are! Attire is classroom casual.

Please RSVP by
Friday, Aug 23rd to:
Judy Gann, Executive Secretary
JudyG@riverbendfamilies.org
(618) 463-5946

School Bus Donation

A decision by a neighboring program in Ohio to cease providing transportation services prompted them to donate a pair of school buses to the agency.

Both buses are 20-passenger vehicles equipped with seat belts. They are a 2020 and a 2019 model, respectively.

Head Start's Regional Office was aware of our recent efforts to start up transportation, made the connection and paved the way for us to add these two buses to our fleet.

Both buses are in excellent shape and have less than 10,000 miles. They are a very welcome addition to our fleet, as we have two aging diesel engine buses that we are looking at retiring as costs to maintain and repair them exceed their value.

With mileage under 10,000 miles, these donated buses are nearly new! This is a huge cost savings for the agency, as a new bus today will cost around \$110K.

We are grateful for the care that the **Hancock Hardin Wyandot Putnam Community Action Commission** took with these buses. We also appreciate the support from the office staff with the **Office of Head Start Region V** for quickly making the connection and enabling us to acquire these buses.



*RHSFS employees including **Chuck Hancock**, **Beverly Bock** and **Victoria Bock** drove to Findley, Ohio on Thursday, May 30th to retrieve the bus donation. The drive averaged about 9 hours each way!*



Theresa Mull
Bus Monitor

Theresa Mull joined the agency in January 2024 as a Bus Monitor. Her route is #15, proudly serving our students at Granite City South (GCS).

“I have been a Bus Monitor for awhile now and I love it,” says Mull. “I make sure my kids are safe and always make sure they have seatbelts on the right way.”

In addition to helping to oversee the ride to GCS and the return trip home, Mull also helps to make sure the bus is clean and looking its very best.

“Theresa is very knowledgeable of her job as a monitor,” says Bus Driver **Tracy Whitten**. “Her work ethic is fantastic, and she goes above and beyond her job to help the children.”

“I enjoy talking to them,” says Mull. “I have learned about the challenges that some of these kids face and how to be a listener and someone they can see every day and trust.”

“Theresa is always on time for work, which is very important,” says Transportation Coordinator Chuck Hancock. “Beyond that, she loves to joke and laugh. She’s a pleasure to talk with.”

When she’s not working, Mull enjoys crafting, especially diamond and gem art.



“Theresa has such patience with the children on the bus and with her colleagues. She should be commended.”

Tracy Whitten, Bus Driver



Riverbend Head Start & Family Services Show Case Week 2024

This October will mark our inaugural Head Start Show Case Week. Each site will showcase something special about their program on a different day throughout the week. In an effort to spotlight quality programming and the importance of Head Start at the new state Early Childhood Agency, all political stakeholders will be invited to attend the event including **Ann Whalen** the new Director of the new state ECE agency. Multiple days of celebration offers more options for visit dates.

Recently, policy council members including **Samantha Jolliff** and **Leiasia Spink**, along with Center Operations Coordinator **Veneta Wadlow** traveled to Springfield, IL to deliver personal invitations to **Governor J.B. Pritzker**, **Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton**, **Representative Amy Elik** and **Senator Erica Harriss**. In addition, the invitations to their offices were presented with folders containing important data regarding the quality work that Head Start provides within the state. The highlight of the information provided was a book spotlighting our Head Start students. The book was produced by **Hannah Asbeck** (Center Supervisor, Granite City South) with help from Lead Family Advocate **Paige Simmons**.

In September, **Samantha Jolliff** and **Veneta Wadlow** will hand deliver the books and invitation to **Senators Dick Durbin** and **Tammy Duckworth** and to **Representative Nikki Budzinski** in Washington D.C. We look forward to sharing details of the mission and “showcasing” our Head Start sites in October.



Policy Council members **Leiasia Spink** and **Samantha Jolliff** in Springfield, IL

Showcase Dates:

Monday, Oct 21st - Essic Robinson

Tuesday, Oct 22nd - Bethalto

Wednesday, Oct 23rd - Collinsville and Edwardsville

Thursday, Oct 24th - Granite City North

Friday, Oct 25th - Granite City South



Pictured from left to right:

Lora Vitek, Executive Director, Delta Dental Foundation, **Michelle Baalman**, RHSFS Health Advocate, **Casey Cope**, RHSFS Health Specialist, **Joe Leo**, Delta Dental of Illinois Board of Directors, **Dr. Nancy Cozzi**, Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation Grants Committee.



Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation

Delta Dental Community Grants Reception

In November 2023, the agency was awarded a grant in the amount of \$20,000 to assist with our efforts to provide dental screenings and treatment for our Head Start students.

Following the grant award, members of our health team were invited to attend Delta Dental's annual community grants reception.

It was held on April 25, 2024 in Naperville, IL. Health Specialist **Casey Cope** and Health Advocate **Michelle Baalman** attended this year's reception.

"Each organization got to speak for a couple of minutes about what we do and how we're planning on using the funds," said Cope. "The Delta Dental grant is crucial to our program to help pay for the extensive cost of dental work on the kids and dental education for our families."

Cope has attended the reception for the past couple of years, but it was Baalman's first time attending.

"It was a great opportunity to learn from other recipients of resources that we can possibly utilize in the future," said Baalman. "I look forward to attending the Delta Dental reception again next year."

In her role, Baalman organizes the dental clinics for the centers twice a year with **Miles of Smiles**.

"This past year, Granite City South (GCS) started placing Miles of Smiles consent forms inside all of our enrollment packets – so that we were able to pull all children needing dental exams from class," says Baalman. "This worked out great and GCS had a total of 92% of center-based children with dental exams by the end of April."

PEOPLE WHO MAKE A
DIFFERENCE



Accounting Specialist **Tobbi Tyson** celebrated her one-year anniversary with the agency on April 3rd, and she's already making a lasting impact with her colleagues.

"Having just celebrated her first year with the Agency, Tobbi has been a very valuable addition to our finance team," says President/CEO **Gene Howell**. "Tobbi has been very dependable, accurate in her work, and demonstrates a quiet and steady confidence."

According to Tyson, her duties include: recording financial transactions, preparing financial reports, maintaining the general ledger, and allocating grant monies appropriately. All of this financial data is used to make informed decisions to fulfill the organization's mission.

"Tobbi is a valued asset in the accounting department," says Finance Director **Tim Warren**. "Her role requires a great deal of technical understanding of accounting as well as functional knowledge of our accounting codes and how they interact with each other."

So, what's the toughest part about her role? "Deadlines and working with information that can change quickly," according to Tyson.

"Tobbi is my sounding board when I need someone else with an understanding of the accounting principles and regulations that impact the work of our department," says Finance Director **Tim Warren**. "She is a great fit at the agency and a delight to work with."

Tyson's colleagues at central office, especially on the third floor can't help but take notice of Tyson's enthusiasm for celebrating all of the holidays and helping to dress up her work space, and beyond. Her love for the job and the agency really shines through!

"I love working in the non-profit sector where everyone is truly passionate about their role and the service that it provides to the community," says Tyson. "Riverbend Head Start, in particular, really seems to have an employee forward approach and is always looking for ways to support our staff better."

No matter how long they've been here, the four members of the finance team seem to have created a professional, yet cohesive working relationship, and don't mind rolling up their sleeves to meet their deadlines – while still having fun, of course.

"I always enjoy working with Tobbi because I know we can rely on each other to get the job done," says A/P Accountant **Shelly Reed**. "I believe Tobbi is a true asset to our Finance Team as well as the agency itself."



Tobbi Tyson
Accounting Specialist, Central Office

A Letter from the Editor



Dear Riverbend Friends and Supporters,

Summer is here! It's a time to catch up with friends and family, and to relax and have some fun. We thank you for your ongoing support of our e-newsletter and to the agency and our mission.

As you make your summer plans, we hope you'll keep Head Start in mind. We're in the final planning stages of our Back-to-School and Donor Appreciation event, now in its second year.

This year, it will be held on **Tuesday, August 27th**. The theme is Taco Tuesday! An invitation is enclosed with this newsletter.

Because of your ongoing generosity, we're able to continue helping Head Start and Early Head Start children and their families in Madison County, IL. We hope you'll mark your calendar, and join us for food and fellowship as we show our appreciation to you, our amazing donors!

Once again, thank you for caring about Head Start, and showing your ongoing support for the families we proudly serve!

Melanie Steen
Public Relations & Development Director

Riverbend Head Start & Family Services

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