



Program Notes - Program Notes

Staff Changes

Melissa Hay is starting as a Housing Specialist with EOC's Community Services this fall. Glad to have you join us, Melissa!

Carie Branstrom and **Laurie Sweet** have joined Head Start as Aide/Monitors. Welcome!

Diane Sivak has switched from being a Head Start teacher to a Head Start teacher's aide. **Shelly Teska**, the former Head Start transportation coordinator, has moved back into the classroom as a teacher. **Shelly Ristau**, a former Head Start Family Resource Assistant (FRA), is also changing over to a classroom teaching position.

The following staff have left EOC: **Ellen (Faye) Anderson**, **Patricia Colosimo**, **Deanna Kuzminski**, **Nancy Nansen**, and **Amy Wickert**. Good luck to all in your new endeavors.

H₂O Program Saves Water & \$

The H₂O Program is a Pennsylvania American Water Company program that helps customers save money and conserve water. Income-eligible customers receive a 50% discount on their monthly service charge. When an eligible customer enrolls, they receive a water saving kit that is mailed directly to their home. The kit offers water conserving products for toilets, showers, and sinks. It also offers ways to find hidden and costly toilet leaks. Along with its tips on using water wisely, this program kit can help you save gallons of water every month. In effect, you will have a lower water bill which means you save money.

Contact EOC's Community Services at 726-2400 for eligibility requirements and an appointment to enroll in this program.

Are You Behind on a Mortgage Payment?

Having a home is a dream for many people. But when times are tough and you fall behind on your mortgage payment, your dream can become a nightmare. You are faced with a financial crisis. Which bills do I pay first...mortgage, gas, electric, water, phone? Your decision could put you into foreclosure, causing you to lose your home.

EOC Community Services may be able to help you before you get to foreclosure. We can help you prioritize your finances.

We are here to help support you through this crisis.

If you unfortunately have received you Act 91 foreclosure notice, EOC Community Services can assist you in completing a HEMAP (Homeowner Emergency Mortgage Assistance

Program) application. The program is sponsored by Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency and may provide you with a loan to assist you through your time of crisis. The application temporarily stops the foreclosure process while you file your application with PHFA. Please contact EOC Community Services at 726-2400 for more information and assistance.

Opportunity! Opportunity! Opportunity! Be a Paid Work Experience Site

What is Paid Work Experience?

TANF clients who are receiving cash assistance from the Department of Public Welfare need to meet a 20-30 hour per week work requirement. Paid Work Experience involves a TANF client working for a government agency or non-profit agency to meet this work requirement. Wages are paid by the EOC Employment and Training Program.

What type of job would be good Paid Work Experience?

Janitorial, custodial, clerical, and kitchen work all provide excellent skills needed by clients to secure unsubsidized employment.

How many hours can a Paid Work Experience client work?

Paid Work Experience clients work a minimum of 5 hours a week to a maximum of 20 hours per week.

What is the goal of Paid Work Experience?

The goal of Paid Work is to allow the client to meet their 20-30 hour per week work requirement and gain some experience and possibly a reference. While involved in the Paid Work Experience, clients will also be required to do job searching. With the assistance of their case manager, the client's goal is to secure 20-30 hours per week unsubsidized employment as soon as possible.

Do you think Paid Work Experience could work for your organization? If so, contact:

Employment and Training Program
Warren-Forest Counties EOC
1209 Pennsylvania Avenue West, P.O. Box 547
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(814) 726-2400 Ext. 3031



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In this issue:

Head Start is 40	1
Note From Executive Director	2
CCIS News	3
Self-Sufficiency Winner	3
Program Notes	4

“With a 1% cut in funding, we’re having to do more with less.”

**Roxanne Carifo,
Head Start
Program Director**

Warren - Forest Counties

Economic Opportunity Council

Your Community Action Agency



EOC HEAD START
CELEBRATE

40th Birthday

The EOC Head Start Program is celebrating its 40th birthday this year. From its beginnings as a six-week summer program in 1966, EOC Head Start has grown into an award-winning comprehensive child development program serving income-eligible children ages 3 to 5 and their families. The program promotes social competency and school readiness, including literacy and number recognition, within a classroom center-based learning environment. This year's fall program has 200 preschoolers enrolled.

But the program is not resting on its laurels. “Oh no, we have lots of exciting changes for this year,” Head Start Director **Roxanne Carifo** says.

One big change is Head Start's new center at Youngsville Area High School.

“We are really thrilled to be moving our Youngsville center to the Youngsville Area High School,” Carifo states. Space opened up when YAHS relocated its eighth grade students to Youngsville Elementary School/Middle School, so Head Start was eager to take advantage of the opportunity to move in. “Being in a school environment is really ideal,” Carifo adds. “It lets us partner with the school district, and promote volunteer and internship possibilities with the high school students. The children really benefit from the role models, and being in a school environment helps promote school readiness, which is what Head Start is really all about.”

Other changes include two new Head Start teachers. **Shelly Teska** has been with the Head Start program since 1995, most recently as transportation coordinator. But she “missed the kids,” she says, so she moved back into teaching this fall. **Shelly Ristau** has worked as a Head Start Resource Assistant (FRA) for the past five years. In a “dream come true,” Shelly has her teaching degree and is now starting a career in the Head Start classroom.

Unfortunately, their former positions will not be replaced. “With a one percent cut in funding, we’re having to do more with less,” Carifo explains. “Fortunately, we have a really dedicated and hard-working staff that’s picking up the slack.”

Carifo notes that the new year has started out really well. “We had good attendance at our Open House on September 15, with wonderful participation from our dads.” Head Start also recently completed their mass screening of 188 children and their families for potential developmental, vision, hearing, and dental problems. “It’s truly a community effort to make sure these kids are ready to learn,” Carifo says. “We’re very grateful to IU#5, Crescent Part Dental Clinic, and Erie’s Vision and Blindness Resources for all their help in making the mass screening a success.” Head Start’s Family Literacy Program, coordinated by **Nancy Birt**, has enrolled 19 families for the fall.

A Note From Our Executive Director

Welcome to the fifth issue of the Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Council Newsletter.

As usual, it seems we have a lot of irons in the fire. Our transitional housing project for survivors of domestic violence should be receiving its final funding soon, just as soon as we cut through some minor red tape. We anticipate hiring a new part-time coordinator/case worker for that project in a few months. Head Start got its new playground equipment and landscaping installed, thanks to some one-time funds. We're also gaining some much needed office space on the state hospital grounds, though we've encountered some strange technical glitches. Who knew that those old thick walls could keep you from getting cell phone service? I'm sure nobody anticipated that problem back when those buildings were constructed. In addition, we're moving forward on the Warren County Regional Main Street Project and anticipate getting a grant application submitted to the Department of Community and Economic Development sometime later in the fall.

But through it all, our focus continues to be helping people, changing lives. And in that spirit, I would like to congratulate Susan Wonderling, our Self-Sufficiency winner for 2006.

Bob Raible

News from Child Care Information Services (CCIS) and the Community Engagement Early Care and Education Coalition

By Tish Montgomery
EOC Child Care Information Services (CCIS) Director

The new fiscal year beginning July 2006 afforded a funding grant increase of \$21,000 from last year's original grant. This will enable more enrollments in subsidized funding from the current waiting list of 23 children. Families are encouraged to turn in applications despite the waiting list since available funding changes almost daily.

The CCIS received a satisfactory to commendable rating in all areas of the Performance Standards Review for the 2005-06 year. The Office of Child Development has devised and distributed new application forms and Parent Handbooks for immediate use. The CCIS staff will also be requesting that parents complete an evaluation survey of the of the services they receive from our office beginning October 1, 2006.

We are happy to announce that a new registered family provider has opened her facility in Warren.

EOC's Community Engagement Early Care and Education Coalition received a grant for 2006-07. Many of the same activities will continue as in the past.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION COALITION GOALS FOR 2006-2007

- **Educate parents, the community, businesses, and legislators** about the importance of quality care and education in the years prior to kindergarten through media, public events, and distribution of literature.
- **Expand the Pre-K scholarship program** by promoting the Educational Tax Credit Program to local businesses, which will allow more children to participate in quality Pre-K programs.
- **Promote Keystone STARS** to help families understand the importance of quality care for their children and the impact it has on their future. Keystone STARS is a quality rating system for child care providers based on staffing qualifications, environment, and how a facility runs their business.
- **Continue partnering** with Warren County School District and Forest Area School District to create a seamless transition from Pre-K to kindergarten.

Meet Susan Wonderling: EOC Self-Sufficiency Award Winner for 2006

Like many women at the end of a marriage, Susan Wonderling wasn't sure what was coming next. So she and her 1 ½-year-old daughter Katie moved back to Warren, Pennsylvania so they'd be closer to family support.

Even so, they literally had nothing when they got back to town. "No food, no shelter, not even diapers," Susan recalls. Susan's mother provided them with a mobile home to live in, which helped a lot, but even the mobile home was in need of maintenance and repairs.

It was in applying for a part-time bookkeeping job two years ago that Susan found out about Warren-Forest EOC. Susan got the job at EOC, and it was then that she discovered all the services that EOC provides.

From the start, the regular paycheck helped her catch up on the bills. But EOC provided far more than that. "I then found out how EOC offered child care assistance if I was able to secure enough working hours during the week, which I managed to do," Susan says. "They have saved me a lot of money each week, enough to buy groceries and gasoline." Those services were through EOC's Child Care Information Services (CCIS).

Then Susan was able to obtain winter coats two years in a row for her daughter through EOC's "Coats for Kids" program, which is administered by Community Services.

EOC's Head Start program has also been a life-saver. "Katie began Head Start last year – it offers so much I can't even begin to tell you," Susan says. "Head Start has been absolutely wonderful in our lives. I've just signed Katie for a second year because it's so much better than leaving her in day care all day. They gave us food for the holidays, special programs to attend, and a lot of guidance. [Head Start teacher] **Kerwin Smith** has been the best influence in Katie's life. She still tells me how much she misses him all the time."

Susan was also able to take advantage of EOC's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Weatherization programs. "The Weatherization program gave us some weather stripping for my doors. **Jerome Stiner**, on his own time, looked at my furnace to see if it was safe and showed me how to light it. It works fine now." But Susan also showed a lot of personal initiative. "Weatherization loaned me a how-to book, and by myself I was able to put in all new insulation under my Mom's trailer. With help, I installed a new door, put on a new roof coating, and replaced the bathroom floor and toilet—all because of that book!"

Susan eventually left her job at EOC behind when she was offered a higher paying full-time position. "It made me cry when I left their employ," Susan admits. "I just can't begin to tell you the friendships I've cultivated there. They



are genuine and caring and truly do their jobs from their hearts."

But Susan has continued her involvement in EOC programs, especially with child care and Head Start. Looking to the future, Susan is also involved in the Family Savings Program (FSA), which is administered through EOC's Community Services. "I'm considering using the money toward obtaining my Commercial Pilot License. I obtained my 2nd Class Medical this year, but I have been unable to afford to start my commercial rating. I think the \$4,000 I am saving will probably cover the entire amount. It feels a lot better to be saving money than owing."

What does self sufficiency mean to Susan? "It means I can support my daughter, paying my own way without assistance. Being self sufficient means feeling good about myself, that I can support my daughter and not go into debt. I have also learned that it's okay to ask for help when times are tough—and it feels good to say 'no, thank you' when I don't need it anymore, even if I still qualify."

Susan isn't entirely self sufficient yet, but she is realistic and patient. And she knows she will get there eventually. "I'm working toward self sufficiency all the time, but I still need help for a little longer, since Katie is only four and I'm a single mom. My goal is to be completely self sufficient by the time she starts kindergarten. " Susan also believes that it is important to "give back," so she has volunteered time, equipment, and ideas to the Head Start program and referred people in need to EOC.

The EOC staff have no doubt that Susan will meet her goal of self sufficiency. As one staff member comments, "We feel that Susan is very deserving of the Self-Sufficiency Award. She is making every effort to provide the best life for herself and her daughter."