



In the News

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Capt. Bennie Church of the Bowling Green Police Department shows students how he places handcuffs on suspects. The demonstration was part of a NECAC Vocational Opportunities Inspiring Children in Education (VOICE) program. It's aimed at helping grade school students get an idea of the types of careers that are available when they grow up. Professionals are brought in to showcase what they do and their educational backgrounds. Church also demonstrated fingerprinting techniques. VOICE is just one of NECAC's outreaches to young people. More on Page 2.



You've got overdue bills, you're out of work and your spouse is in jail. What do you do?

Poverty simulations and reality programs offer a dose of truth



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
Culver-Stockton College education students Sam Wells and Abbey Conner joined others for a poverty simulation.

When the shoe is on the other foot, navigating the roadblocks in life can become more difficult.

NECAC's poverty simulations and Reality Enrichment And Life Lessons (REALL) programs help hammer home important messages for young people. Spring is the time when many of the events are staged by NECAC staff and volunteers.

Poverty simulations offer participants a chance to see how many of their neighbors live. They spend a few hours playing the roles of families or individuals facing economic and medical hardships.

They must go to work or school, arrange transportation or babysitting and meet other daily obligations – all while trying to get by on meager incomes.

Abbey Conner, a student at Culver-Stockton College in Canton, didn't have time to talk much about her experience.

"I've got to go to work," she said.

Isaac Williamson was playing the part of a 39-year-old mother. He said the simulation will be a benefit when he gets a degree in education and embarks on a teaching career.

"This is really going to help me in the classroom being able to understand the situations my students are going through," he said. "This is kind of putting me in their shoes and walking their path."

In similar fashion, REALL offers two scenarios – one negative and one positive – that show kids how to avoid troubles later on.

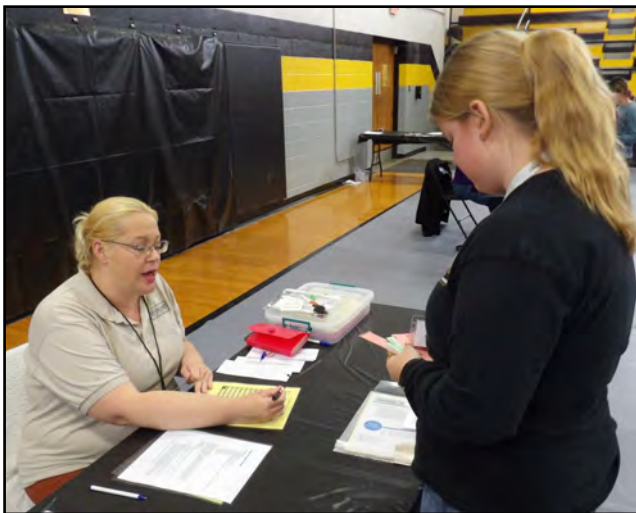
Thanks to the program, Della Gosseen and her classmates at Wellsville High School in Montgomery County have a better idea about how tough life can be if the wrong choices are made.

Consequences follow bad behavior, such as parents leaving their kids at daycare. That can earn participants a trip to jail.

In the first part of the program, Della portrayed an ex-offender who was unemployed with three kids. In the second part, she was an educator with a good salary and a steady life at home.

"It kind of gives us an understanding of what some people have to go through, and maybe it will help some kids realize that this isn't the life they want and help them stay in school and get good grades and work harder to get a better future," Gosseen said.

The programs are "real eye-openers for many" of the students, said NECAC's Kayla Wasson. "They really get a chance to see how tough life can be for a lot of their classmates and friends. It shows them they need to stay in school and work toward a better future."



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
NECAC Warren County Service Coordinator Desiree Antoniou "cashes a check" for Wellsville High School student Della Gosseen during a Reality Enrichment And Life Lessons program.



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
During a Reality Enrichment And Life Lessons program at Westran High School in Huntsville, two students got "thrown in jail" for not supporting their children, represented by dolls at lower right.



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
Former NECAC Lewis County Service Coordinator Judy Eaton, right, returned to help with the poverty simulation at Culver-Stockton College. She's pictured with Shelby County Service Coordinator Lisa Blickhan.

Focus meetings are part of Community Needs Survey

NECAC brought in local stakeholders as part of an effort to upgrade programs and add new services.

Focus meetings were held during April in each of the agency's 12 counties. The meetings were part of NECAC's Community Needs Survey, which is being conducted through June 30.

"We've gotten some really good feedback and we hope to put some of the suggestions toward our goal of greater service to those in need in our communities," said CSBG Director Kayla Wasson. "We appreciate the assistance from so many interested people."

One item mentioned at several meetings was the need for better transportation for disadvantaged people.

NECAC conducts the Community Needs Survey every three years as part of its requirements to receive federal and state funding for social service, community health and public housing programs. Past questionnaires led to the creation of food pantries at NECAC service centers, a diaper distribution program and an employment readiness service.

The survey features 36 questions covering income, employment, education, housing and other needs. It can be filled out electronically at NECAC Service Centers, on the NECAC Facebook site or the SurveyMonkey link.



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
NECAC CSBG Director Kayla Wasson leads a focus meeting in Marion County. Similar events were held in the agency's other 12 counties as part of Community Needs Survey effort, which continues through June 30.



Employee Spotlight:

Mabry is no stranger to helping those in need



Laura Mabry

In the last edition of NECAC In the News, the spotlight shone upon one of the agency's longest-serving employees, Lisa Blickhan.

This time, the focus is on a newer staff member. Laura Mabry has spent much of her life serving others, so it's no surprise that she's excited about her job as NECAC Montgomery County Coordinator.

"I'm looking forward to meeting people and teaming up with others to go out there and help those who are struggling," Mabry said. "I know how hard it is to get by and I want people to know there is hope."

Mabry graduated from St. Charles West High School in 2007 and Lindenwood University in 2012 with a bachelor's degree in

Christian ministry. Throughout much of her high school and college days, she was a volunteer to those in need, including a stint as a hospice worker.

"It was a big learning thing," Mabry remembers. "It made me realize that every person has the desire to be loved at the core. I've always had a love for others. I've had generosity shown to me, so I want to pass that on."

Mabry has lived in Montgomery County for less than a year, but enjoys showing people that help is available.

"I want to work alongside them and help them figure out where we can go from there," she said.

WIC drive-up clinic proves a big success

Robert and Lauren Chesnet were among many who appreciated the NECAC Women, Infants and Children program drive-up clinic held recently.

The couple just moved to St. Charles County from Virginia, and is glad WIC is available.

"It means a lot to us," Lauren Chesnet said. "This is our first child and we're kind of like 'We're very unsure of what's going on or what to do, so stuff like this is just extremely helpful.'"

Thirty pre-natal and 30 post-partum bags of items such as diapers, soap, vitamins and laundry detergent were handed out.

"We had a great turnout and it was nice to work with other community organizations to get together and offer a variety of services for St. Charles County families in need," said WIC Nutritionist Jackie Brown. "If we get more donations, we would like to do this again next year and make it even bigger."



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
Robert and Lauren Chesnet were among those who participated in a recent WIC drive-up clinic at the NECAC St. Charles County Service Center in O'Fallon.



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Observances planned for Community Action Month



NECAC will observe National Community Action Month with open houses at its service centers in May.

Board members, staff and the public are invited to the following receptions:

Wednesday, May 3

Lincoln County: 9 a.m., 11 Woodcrest Drive in Troy.
Montgomery County: 10:30 a.m., 137 Farnen in Montgomery City.
Warren County: 11:30 a.m., 120 E. Main in Warrenton.
St. Charles County: 12:30 p.m., 3400 Meadow Pointe Drive in O'Fallon.

Thursday, May 4

Ralls County: 9 a.m., 411 Main in New London.
Monroe County: 10:30 a.m., 314 N. Washington in Paris.
Randolph County: 11:30 a.m., 1903 N. Morley in Moberly.
Macon County: 12:30 p.m., 907 Highway PP in Macon.

Thursday, May 11:

Shelby County: 9:30 a.m., 204 E. Third in Shelbyville.
Lewis County: 11:30 a.m., 408 S. Fourth in Canton.
Marion County: 1 p.m., 3518 Palmyra Road in Hannibal.
Pike County: 2 p.m., 805 Business Highway 61 in Bowling Green.



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
NECAC Ralls County Service Coordinator Stephanie Dunker, left foreground, and CSBG Director Kayla Wasson met March 22 at the capitol in Jefferson City with State Rep. Chad Perkins, R-40, of Bowling Green. The visit was part of Community Action Legislative Day. NECAC joined representatives from agencies around the state in discussing issues with lawmakers. NECAC highlighted its student educational, job training and housing development efforts. Other agency representatives who attended were Lincoln County Coordinator Janice Allan, Monroe County Coordinator Shelby DeOrnellis, Randolph County Coordinator Patsy Redding, St. Charles County Coordinator Carrie Dina and Shelby County Coordinator Lisa Blickhan.



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer

Weatherization team gets safety update

By necessity, the NECAC Weatherization Department must know safety protocols.

The team recently got an update on cardiopulmonary resuscitation techniques. The training was held at the Pike County Health Department in Bowling Green. Pictured at left is Weatherization Lead Auditor Kyle Walker practicing CPR on a mannequin. Awareness provided by the training can help prevent injury or death in an emergency.