



Central Administration Office
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In the News

November-December 2021.....Volume 9, Issue 6

Passionate and purposeful New coordinators determined to help clients succeed

Six different people with one goal.

In an era of heightened uncertainty, NECAC's new county service coordinators are providing a foundation clients can use to achieve a better life.

The steadfast resolve goes beyond stubbornness. It's a commitment to making sure that people in need emerge stronger, safer and more self-reliant.

The experiences they bring to Community Action can only benefit each person with whom they come in contact. Here are their stories:

Carrie Dina

Dina isn't new to NECAC, just the position of St. Charles County Coordinator.

She started March 1 as a housing assistance counselor, but accepted the new role Nov. 3 after Cheryl Clerkley's departure.

Dina has degrees in human services, psychology and counseling, and worked in social services for 20 years. Then, COVID struck and for the first time in her life, the St. Charles County native was laid off. The experience provided a lesson that will help in empathizing with clients.

"I want to make sure I can make a difference in someone's life," she said. "You want to make sure that you're making a difference so that if you find yourself in need that you've paid it forward."

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By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
NECAC St. Charles County Service Coordinator Carrie Dina, left, loads food boxes Nov. 23 as part of No Hunger Holiday. NECAC Ralls County Service Coordinator Stephanie Dunker stocks her food pantry.



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer

Fare thee well

NECAC President and Chief Executive Officer Don Patrick, right, and Chairman of the Board Mike Bridgins, present a plaque and roses to Deputy Director for Community Services Programs Janice Robinson, who retired after 50 years with the agency. The presentation was made at the Nov. 30 Board of Directors meeting. At upper left is Board Vice-Chairman Glenn Eagan and at right in background is Chief Deputy Director Dan Page. The sign reads "May you be proud of the work you have done, the person you are and the difference you have made. Happy retirement, Janice Robinson, Dec. 3, 2021."

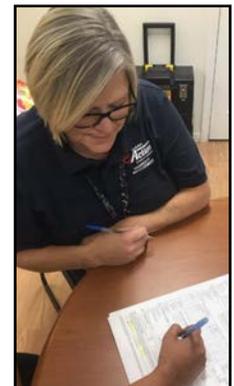
Marion County woman avoids becoming homeless

She has a college degree and served in the military, but a Hannibal woman came close to being homeless until she reached out to NECAC.

The single mother of two, who asked to remain anonymous, now has an apartment and is looking for a job. Just a few months ago, circumstances caused her and her children to move out of the only permanent address she had known for a while.

A community program that assists women in need directed the mother to NECAC's Deanna Nelson, who "helped me get a safe place of my own, a safe place for my kids," the woman said.

In addition to housing assistance, NECAC provides life skills classes
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By Brent Engel
NECAC's Deanna Nelson works with a Hannibal woman who nearly became homeless until the agency stepped in to help.

Coordinators usually are the first faces clients see

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Providing assistance “has been a part of who I’ve always been,” said Dina, who believes her first duty in dealing with clients is to listen.

“People are more than their problems, meaning that they’re more than just the struggles they’re going through,” she said. “Sometimes, all that person might need is just to come in and talk to someone for a moment. That can be helpful, as well. A lot of things are out of their control.”

Anyone call fall upon hard times, but Dina remains upbeat. “Tough times don’t last, but tough people do,” she said. “As long as you have that faith, good things will come. So, you just have to hold on.”



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
Pike County Service Coordinator Penny Dixon, right, and Employment Services Coordinator Crystal Bliss look over gifts donated as part of the Angel Tree Christmas program.

Penny Dixon

Penny Dixon has experienced hardship, personal troubles and unemployment, so she can relate to clients easily.

Life experiences have taught the Pike County Coordinator to run right through roadblocks.

“I had a supervisor once and a co-worker asked him if I was stubborn,” Dixon recalled. “He said, ‘No, that’s just determination.’”

Early on, Dixon’s parents instilled unselfishness and a strong work ethic. She grew up with five sisters. The family always had the necessities, and its treasure was not a matter of money. A combination of faith and family values prompted Dixon’s grace toward those in need.

“The Bible tells you that you’re supposed to help others,” she said. “It just built from there at church.”

Dixon’s community service work and church activities have included all ages, and the outreach has paid off. The COVID pandemic had a direct impact on Dixon. She lost the manufacturing job she’d had for

more than two decades, but found the fortitude to move on.

“The longer I worked there, the more I thought about how it would be nice to do something to make a difference in someone’s life,” Dixon said. “Had (the job loss) not happened, I would not have this opportunity to help people.”

Stephanie Dunker

Stephanie Dunker has brought the patience, resilience and skills she used in helping to educate children with developmental disabilities and in working as a retail store manager to the Ralls County Coordinator position.

“I need that feeling of helping someone,” Dunker said. “It’s just what we do in our family. That’s where I thrive.”

Service is nothing new to Dunker’s family. Growing up, her grandparents served as foster parents. The experience taught her to look outside of herself.

“There are a lot of different needs that are out there and you don’t realize it unless you grow up around it,” she said. “I was really lucky to be exposed to that.”

In college, Dunker studied deaf education and sign language interpreting. Her first job came as a deaf education interpreter at a school district in Southwestern Missouri. It was a role she’ll remember, thanks to one very determined third-grade girl who was deaf and blind.

“I’ll never forget the first time she read (in Braille) and (signed) the word ‘see,’” Dunker said. “She never had somebody that was able to give her access to the world around her. She was able to discover everyday life for the first time and I was able to experience that wonder and growth with her.”

Dunker has been involved in stewardship activities at her church, and led various drives for local organizations that provide food for the needy, assistance for foster families, and women’s programs. She believes it’s important to treat NECAC clients individually, listen to their needs and do everything possible to put them on the path to self-sufficiency.

“My job is to offer help when I can and get them what they need,” she said. “It’s not easy to ask for help. It is my privilege to offer a hand up during the hardest of times.”

Shelby DeOrnellis

For Shelby DeOrnellis, Monroe County will always be home.

That’s one reason she enjoys helping her disadvantaged neighbors as NECAC’s coordinator there.

“I’m excited,” she said. “I’ve worked locally, but haven’t been as involved in the community as I’d like. I’m ready to jump in feet first.”

DeOrnellis grew up on a farm west of Paris and was in 4-H livestock and shooting sports programs as well as being a youth assistant. She still volunteers with the organization. Her empathy for the disadvantaged was solidified while working at a nursing home and in a doctor’s office, and her positive attitude can be catching.

“If we can’t help, let’s find someone who can,” DeOrnellis said. “We’re not going to leave you to your own devices. If you don’t ask for help, your situation is not going to get better.”

DeOrnellis understands that it’s easy to get into a rut and give up hope. “You get in that mindset of ‘Well, this is how it’s going to be,’” she said. “You have to remember that there’s usually something or someone to help.”

Juggling work, home and volunteer efforts are second nature for DeOrnellis. She owns a vinyl crafts and decorative shirt business called Country Chic Design. “I stay busy,” she said.

DeOrnellis loves the rural setting. “The city is too busy for me,” she said. “I like to know who my neighbors are.”

One thing DeOrnellis can promise NECAC clients is a friendly ear. “If you’re not listening, change can’t happen,” she said.



Shelby DeOrnellis

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Coordinators usually are the first faces clients see

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Gena Scott learned a lesson from her late mother that will serve her well as Lewis County Coordinator.

“She didn’t know what a stranger was,” Scott recalled of her mother, Sandy. “That’s the way I grew up.”

Scott wasn’t sure what to do when the company where she had worked in shipping, sales and marketing closed in 2020. Scott had commuted 500 miles a week for more than 30 years, and had to reevaluate what she wanted out of the next phase in her life.

“I decided I really wanted to do something that made a difference – something that would really help people,” she said.

Scott is passionate about providing people with a better social, educational and career foundation. Despite a wealth of experiences, she still considers herself a student.

“I still have so much to learn,” she said. “Times are changing, and we’ve got to have open minds.”

Scott looks forward to collaborations with other Lewis County agencies and organizations.

“It’s important that the community work together,” she said. “You can get a lot more done if you have help. If you have a support system, everything goes better.”

Being a Lewis County native will provide Scott with an advantage as she assists clients on the road to self-sufficiency.

“Some of them come in and I say ‘I know you,’” she said. “It’s good to reconnect with your roots.”



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer
Lewis County Service Coordinator Gena Scott assembles Christmas packages for the Adopt-A-Child program.

Robin Zumwalt

Robin Zumwalt has no problem understanding people who seek help from NECAC.

The Montgomery County Service Coordinator was once a client herself. “I know it’s hard,” Zumwalt said. “I know it’s heartbreaking when you can’t supply the food your family needs. I understand how important it is to provide that.”

Zumwalt has extensive training in computer programming and in working with juveniles. “I’m looking forward to helping again,” she said. “I want to help more people be more self-sufficient.”

Zumwalt has always had a drive to assist others and enjoys seeing others succeed.

“I live to take care of people,” she said. “It’s fulfilling to see when you help and then see that light come on when they’re able to get a job, manage their money better or better their lives. It’s a good feeling when you’re able to help somebody.”

Though she remains modest, Zumwalt is an example of how lives can be changed. Once on rental assistance, she now owns her home. She promises to always listen to those in need.

“I’m going to talk to them about what they need and be compassionate, be sympathetic and talk about the programs NECAC has,” she said.

One of Zumwalt’s passions is financial education. She likes teaching clients about money management. “In the long run, it helps them become more self-sufficient,” she said.



Robin Zumwalt

Hannibal woman appreciates help from NECAC

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and offers other programs that can help struggling people get back on their feet.

The Hannibal woman says her stress level and her children’s anxiety over finding proper housing have been lifted.

“Now, they have their own space,” she said. “It’s nice.”

The woman urges others in similar situations to contact NECAC. The agencies service centers in all 12 counties offer assistance that can get those in need back on track.

“Always ask for help,” the woman urges. “Look into every possible program there is. You never know where you’re going to get help. It never hurts to apply.”



By Brent Engel, Public Relations Officer

Board installation

The annual installation of NECAC Officers and Directors was conducted at the Nov. 30 Board Meeting. Pictured in the front row, from left are President and Chief Executive Officer Don Patrick, Trustees Lowell Jackson and Jane Dorlac and Chairman of the Board Mike Bridgins. Vice-Chairman Glenn Eagan is not pictured. Secretary D. Randall Cone attended via the conferencing platform Zoom. Trustee Troy Dawkins was unable to attend. The ceremony was conducted via Zoom by Charles McCann, former director of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) with the Missouri Department of Social Services and a Certified Community Action Professional (CCAP).



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Mike Bridgins,
Chairman of
the Board



Don Patrick,
President &
CEO



Return Service Requested

Holiday happenings



Marion County Service Coordinator Gwen Koch offered children's socks to clients.



MIS Administrator Kathy Block and Grayson Gerding of the Montgomery Progressors 4-H Club filled "Blessing Bags" of products for disadvantaged people. Block also participated in the Montgomery County Christmas Club gift program.



CSBG Assistant Kayla Wasson places tags with the names of disadvantaged children's gift request on the Pike County Angel Tree. The Brotherhood of Bikers and Poage Ford were among donors to the campaign.



Macon County Service Coordinator Terri Laughlin provided Thanksgiving meals to 10 families. Meals also were distributed in Marion, Pike, St. Charles and Warren counties.



The Salvation Army kettle campaign proved successful again. Pike County Service Coordinator Penny Dixon rings Dec. 24 with her dog, Cuda. Local groups, families and State Rep. Chad Perkins also helped. Other NECAC personnel who rang were Anita Lemke and Brent Engel.



Anchor House, which provides affordable housing in Warren County, donated 250 pair of jeans to NECAC. "We're just so thankful to have them," said NECAC Warren County Service Coordinator Desiree Antoniou. "A lot of families are benefitting." The agency had five coats, but distributed them the day the garments arrived. Other items donated for distribution to needy people included fleece blankets and food.

WIC contract awarded

NECAC has been awarded a \$272,623 Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services fiscal 2022 contract to provide Women, Infants and Children program services in Warren and St. Charles counties.

The agency expects to serve 15,334 clients during the year, which runs through Sept. 30, 2022.

WIC is a supplemental USDA food program that provides free foods and nutrition education to expectant, breastfeeding and postpartum mothers and children up to age five. Participants must meet WIC income guidelines and be determined by a health professional to be at nutritional risk.

NECAC also was approved for the eighth straight year as a Breastfeeding Friendly WIC Clinic. NECAC is an Equal Opportunity Provider.

Utility help doubles

Funding for utility assistance has double in Missouri.

The change affects maximum benefits for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and Energy Crisis Intervention Program (ECIP).

"This is great news for our clients," said NECAC's Angela Kattenbraker. "This will make a big difference for families and individuals who are struggling with rising utility costs."

NECAC is contractually required to publish the following: "This program is funded 100% at \$100 with federal funds received from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as provided by the Missouri Department of Social Services, Family Support Division."