



Agency Happenings

WSOS Community Action Receives National Recognition

Recently WSOS Community Action received national recognition in two different areas of their agency, housing and Head Start. WSOS's affordable housing project, Port Clinton Pointe, was highlighted in a national report produced by the firm Rapoza and Associates to demonstrate the success of Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, while four of their Head Start centers received accreditation from the National Association of the Education of Young Children.

Housing Recognition

The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), established in 1986, has been used to develop and preserve more than 7,600 rental projects in rural America. While the LIHTC is widely recognized as one of the nation's most successful housing programs, recent discussions on tax reforms could eliminate the LIHTC if enacted. To help combat this issue, the national firm of Rapoza and Associates produced a report entitled, "The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit: Overcoming Barriers to Affordable Housing in Rural America." The report includes information on the rental housing needs in rural America, the LIHTC program, federal challenges, and 37 case studies from LIHTC rental housing projects in 19 states throughout the country, including WSOS here in Ohio.

WSOS Community Action's Port Clinton Pointe LIHTC project was a partnership between WSOS and Millennia Housing Management, a for-profit housing developer and management company. The project began when WSOS was awarded the tax credits in 2006 and was completed in 2008. The townhouse-style complex has 46 family units with a mix of two and three bedrooms that are targeted

to families that earn below 60 percent of the area median income.

In 2009, the project received the Project of the Year award from the Ohio CDC Association and was also nominated for a beautification

award from the Port Clinton Area Chamber of Commerce. "I was happy to see affordable housing nominated for beautification," said Don Corley, housing development coordinator for WSOS. "It's a nice design. We're very pleased."



Affordable rental housing is a particular problem in Ottawa County and Port Clinton. "Because of our location on the lake (Lake Erie), there is a lot of tourism, but it pushes up real estate," explained Corley. "There are a lot of seasonal rental properties that are only available monthly or weekly during the tourist season and at three-times the rental rate. This is difficult for low-income people, in particular those working in tourism." Port Clinton Pointe helps address this issue. "The tax credits mean we're able to create market quality housing at below market rates," Corley said.

The report discusses how rural communities face significant barriers to clean, decent and affordable rental housing due to lower incomes and higher poverty rates. The LIHTC is the largest source of federal housing funding and is the principal tool used by rural communities to overcome these barriers to affordable rental housing. "We have received a lot of great feedback about our recent report on how the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit has been used in rural communities. A number of news publications have picked up on it, and a tax law journal is interested in re-printing the article in an



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upcoming issue. Primarily, we've been using the report on Capitol Hill to raise awareness of this critical tax credit," said Sarah Mickelson, policy associate with Rapoza and Associates. "We believe our report has helped educate members of Congress and the public about how critical the program is to rural communities. Since LIHTC is the principal financing tool used to provide affordable housing in rural America, the tax credit is critically important to ensuring that rural Americans have the same access to affordable rental housing—and the same economic benefits—as people living in big cities."

Head Start Accreditation

All nine of WSOS Community Action's Head Start centers have received three-star designations from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services' Step Up to Quality program – the highest ranking in this voluntary quality rating system that recognizes and promotes early care and education programs that meet quality benchmarks over and above minimum health and safety licensing standards. But WSOS decided to take it to the next level by becoming nationally accredited.



WSOS selected four of their Head Start centers to apply for accreditation from the National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) – an accreditation system created to set professional standards for early childhood education and to help families identify high-quality pre-schools, child care centers and other early education programs. With those four centers recently receiving accreditations, WSOS is now working towards accreditation for the remaining centers, which they hope to receive by next summer explained Jacquie Wells, family development director at WSOS.

The accreditation process took about a year to complete. "We went through a study group, then we created a program portfolio electronically and each site did a classroom portfolio, uploading pictures and documents to show that they met a series of different standards," Wells said. The centers' programs and services were measured against the 10 NAEYC early childhood program standards and more than 400 related criteria. After creating the online portfolios, NAEYC conducted site visits at each center.

"We are so proud to be accredited," Wells stated. "This is a national sign of quality. We already had a three-star ranking at the state level, now we are nationally recognized as top centers. Parents pay attention to these types of things when looking for a pre-school and we hope that it will give us an advantage when looking for additional funding. This accreditation affirms the good work we do and helps guide us as we strive to provide the best services to our communities."



Congratulations to WSOS Community Action for these national recognitions!