

Introduction
UCHRA
Van Buren County Head Start

The Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency's Head Start Program is located in the rural, mountainous area of Van Buren County. Spencer is the only existing town in this small, isolated county but we have a unique program with dedicated staff and community supporters. Our Head Start center is NAEYC accredited and maintains the highest rating of three stars allocated by the State of Tennessee. Therefore, we feel that the Head Start Program in Van Buren County can be a model for the rest of the nation.

Head Start has a staff that is committed to educating the children in order that they can adapt more easily to the future demands of the public school environment and everyday life. This is achieved through enormous community support and contributions. The Van Buren Public School System, which is our biggest contributor of in-kind and maintains a productive pre-school program, provides the building where our center is located as well as light maintenance, pays utilities, maintains grounds, provides a special education supervisor and speech pathologists, nutritionists, kitchen staff with meals being provided and prepared on site, maintaining production records, contracting and ordering from vendors, and approving menus. The Public School system also provides a gated storage space for Head Start buses, periodically checks buses to ensure operation and partners with us for the drivers to attend required yearly bus training.

Some of our contributors and supporters are but not limited to:

- Southeastern Regional Correctional Facility which provides large maintenance projects and Christmas donations for every child.
- Local County Government serves as a liaison between Policy Council and governing body and has yet to tell us no on any reasonable requests.
- Local newspaper provides free advertisements and assists us in all public relations related needs as in-kind.
- Fall Creek Falls State Park has partnered with Head Start for employment opportunities and has a life long agreement for a safe haven in the case of an emergency evacuation.
- Caney Fork Regional Library delivers thematic focus packs and books for the classrooms upon request.
- City, County and State Police provide trainings, donates items for children and families, maintenance, participates in health fair and heads up Male Involvement programs.
- Walmart, which is located outside the county, hasn't ever said no to any reasonable request.
- Local family/community education clubs provides refreshments for the children during periodic seasonal parties.
- UT Ag Extension does onsite nutrition and health activities.
- District Attorney provides trainings and collaboration for families in need of child support.
- Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency partners with us for Male Involvement.

- DHS, the local Health Dept., Regional Health Dept., and local businesses are additional partners.

Education is a vital part in the success of young children. Our education program consists of three yearly home visits, web based tracking system for assessments, palm pilots for faster data entry, book swap (each child receives a book to keep at school which can be taken home at the end of the school year), agency supported BSK Program (Be Smart Kids academic computer program), monthly community story time, Power Packs (education activities and materials extended into the home), Second Step program, Circle Step program, local library cards (every child receives a library card to the local library), Dolly Parton Imagination Station (each child receives a free book each month), weekly home activities, periodic book fair, Scholastic Books orders, Lending Library (families can check out books and videos for children and family members) and our transition program which includes partnering with the local public school systems by spending a day in a Kindergarten class and eating lunch. We also do a transition lunch program at Head Start to acclimate the children to lunch at the public school, to go from family style food service to a cafeteria type. We offer assistance to parents/guardians with enrolling their child in the public school system. These programs ensure the success of former Head Start children in kindergarten readiness.

Under the umbrella of the grantee, UCHRA, we have access to over sixty programs, most of them which are relevant to the families we serve. Our nine thousand square foot spacious center, located on six scenic acres on the Cumberland Plateau, includes a Lending House (a community operated program with free access to anyone in need of clothing or household items), indoor gross motor area, parent/staff lounge and training facility which includes computers with internet access for parents to use, a continually updated playground, and an accessible food bin for families when needed. Security is achieved by utilizing video surveillance outside the building and in the classrooms and communication is conveyed by staff using handheld radios.

Our Health program includes vision screenings provided by the Lions Club at no charge, hearing screenings provided by the school system at no charge, tooth brushing in the classroom twice daily and partnering with Remote Area Medical to provide free dental and visions services for the community, children and families.

Our Parent Involvement is unique as it includes our Male Involvement program. Two major activities for this program are MVP Day (a weekend day for fathers and male community volunteers to participate in athletic activities while creating bonds and providing positive role models for children) and Birdhouse activity (a day for fathers and male community volunteers to aid children in making their own birdhouses). Our Parent Involvement also supports the Alumni Association and Scholarship program (the association is made up of prior graduating Head Start students with a banquet every year and is supported by our Parent Committee through donations, allowing a prior Head Start student graduating senior to receive a scholarship for the use of higher education), and the newly formed Mother's Day Out (this activity gives mothers the opportunity to spend quality time outside the home environment).

Van Buren County Head Start community involvement also includes service within disability and other advocacy groups. We participate in the Community Advisory Board (CAB), Tennessee Early Intervention Advisory, Regional Health Council, Pandemic Flu Advisory, Tennessee Head Start Health Advisory, representation on the Pre-School Advisory Board, yearly Open House, participation in the Christmas Parade, participation in the county fair, organize, coordinate and conduct yearly health/education awareness fair and a job/education fair.

Communication is the key to the success of any organization and the UCHRA Board of Directors use newsletters, informed daily conversations and formal board meetings. The information obtained from these actions aid the staff in assessing how to better serve the children and families which will ultimately lead to a more positive image within the community and better relationships with the legislative branch of that region.

Please visit the Head Start office in Van Buren County whenever you are in the area and see the wonderful progress being made with the children that will be the leaders of tomorrow. Visit us online at www.vanburenheadstart.com and add us on your “Favorites” at Facebook!