

MOUNTAIN PROJECTS

Affordable Housing & Childcare Among Top Issues

Dear Friends of Mountain Projects,



Davis

First, **thank you** for supporting the work of our agency. I can't say it enough for all the blessings you make possible.

Second, it's important to us that we keep our supporters informed about the latest developments in our programs and the issues impacting the community we serve.

We know you care about what's coming, what we've accomplished and how you can help. Catch up on our news inside.

Every three years, Mountain Projects conducts a **Community Needs Assessment** that helps refine our program strategy and fine-tunes our efforts **to meet the most pressing needs** of our community.

As you know, our programs provide a coordinated effort to **address the root effects of poverty** and, ultimately, move families and individuals to **self-sufficiency.** Poverty is a systemic problem and our agency uses a systems approach to resolving these issues.

Currently, two pressing issues stand out in our results: affordable housing for low-income workers and affordable childcare for both single and double parent households.

Wages aren't keeping up and many aren't making enough at work to make ends meet. Mountain Projects is working to overcome these challenges by **making Head Start accessible** to more families and we are in the ongoing process of **building affordable housing** with increased staffing, new land and pre-qualified homeowners.

As always, handouts aren't the focus of what we do, instead **we empower individuals** to stabilize and improve their lives. Your support helps us do this **and strengthens the social and economic fabric** of western North Carolina.

Thanks again for all of your investments.

Warm regards,

Patsy A. Davis

Executive Director
pdavis@mountainprojects.org

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Simmons

Contact Si at ssimmons@mountainprojects.org

Meet Si Simmons, Deputy Director

Si Simmons, an 5-year employee of Mountain Projects, assumed the role of **Deputy Director** on April 29. Simmons served as Manager of Haywood Transit for the past five years and was a WIOA Youth Case Manager before then. **He is well-known in the community for his experience and enthusiasm for the Mountain Projects mission.**

"Si's compassion combined with years of experience makes a great fit for the position," said Patsy Davis, Executive Director. "He is well respected among our staff and will **help lead Mountain Projects into its next sixty years**."

Says Simmons: "My time with Mountain Projects has made such an impact on me. **I'm in a great place in my life;** I feel like what I do is valued and what I do is worthwhile and helps others."

Welcomes & Congratulations!

Spring has been a season of growth and change at Mountain Projects! We've had departures, retirements and new arrivals.



Melanie Lamb, Human Resources Coordinator



Maggie Leftwich, Affordable Housing Manager



Christy Morrow, Haywood Transit Interim Manager,



Christy Mosteller, HOP Program Manager

60 Years of Community Action

Mountain Projects is part of the Community Action Movement, which began in 1964. That year President Lyndon B. Johnson signed legislation to launch the "War on Poverty", and Community Action Agencies were created across the country to guide programs intended to empower the poor and promote self-sufficiency through an array of programs.

We're celebrating the 60th Anniversary of Community Action this year, and will celebrate another 60th Anniversary next year, when Mountain Projects, founded in 1965, reaches that milestone!

Achievement of a Lifetime For Head Start Teacher



Keffer with grandsons Hunner (left) and Abram



Keffer with Myra Humphrey, former Head Start student, now a teacher

When longtime Head Start teacher Julie Keffer accepted a diploma from **Western Carolina University** in May, she stood out from most of her fellow graduates. For one **she had five children and 14 grandkids in the audience**, cheering her on. For another, she was at the end of a **27-year journey.**

Keffer, 55, has taught for two decades at the **Kneedler Head Start Child Development** Outreach Center on the WCU campus in Cullowhee, but her path to a **Bachelor of Science in Birth-Kindergarten Education** began in Haywood County in 1997, and has taken her through twists, turns and painful places before leading her to the Ramsey Center stage.

Her graduation is the culmination of a dream.

"No matter your age, as long as you have breath in your lungs and a heartbeat, you're not done," Keffer said. **"What I hope to show people is that you can finish your degree at any age. I encourage single moms to push for it – I was once there."**

Keffer started as a volunteer in her own kids' Head Start classes in the nineties. She began Early Childhood Education classes at HCC, and eventually earned the degree at WCU, despite many delays caused by family illnesses, personal illness and an array of other challenges. She worked full time for Mountain Projects Head Start all the way through, and finished as a Dean's List student.

She credits Mountain Projects, "her second family," for making it possible. **We are so proud of Julie,** and appreciative of all she has given to Mountain Projects through the years!

READ MORE FROM THE SYLVA HERALD: TINYURL.COM/YJTAYC9U

Head Start Flashback: Catching Up with Cayson Tiedge



Tiedge and Roberson



Tiedge and his mom, Darlene

In 2020 we shared the story of Cayson Tiedge, a Fairview Head Start graduate who finished at the top of his class at Smoky Mountain High School. Cayson had maintained a relationship with his Head Start teacher from years before, Angie Goss Roberson.

We're proud to announce that Cayson recently graduated from the University of North Carolina with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, as well as a degree from the school's Shuford Program in Entrepreneurship. He'll begin work on his Master's degree in the fall!

First Citizens Bank and Presbytery of WNC Grants Support Smoky Mountain Housing Partnership





SMOKY MOUNTAIN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

To support our affordable housing efforts contact Maggie Leftwich: mleftwich@mountainprojects.org

Smoky Mountain Housing Partnership (SMHP) is pleased to announce two recent grants that will help continue to build the organization's momentum; a $25,000 grant from **First Citizens Bank** and a $20,000 grant from the Mission Team of the **Presbytery of Western North Carolina** will help us continue to make possible the American dream of home ownership. First Citizens' gift is earmarked for SMHP's Housing **Counseling Center,** where staff provide expert advice on buying a home, renting a home, solving problems around default and credit repair issues. The grant awarded by the Presbytery's Mission Team is **intended for the development of buildings, living spaces or properties.**

GetCoveredWNC Helps Neighbors Attain Healthcare



The Mountain Projects GetCoveredWNC team of Health Care Navigators, on the stairs of the Governor's Mansion in Raleigh, clockwise from top right: Program Manager Jan Plummer, Caitlin Quinnett, Jane Harrison, Susan Rose & Savanna Rickman.

Unable to make the trip were Marilyn Tollie and Linda Curtis.

GETCOVEREDWNC

Members of the Mountain Projects GetCoveredWNC team traveled to Raleigh for **Governor Roy Cooper's proclamation of North Carolina Enrollment Assister Appreciation Week.**

North Carolina Assisters enabled over **1 million enrollments** through Affordable Care Act Open Enrollment 11, and 424,000 enrollments through recently enacted Medicaid expansion.

Western North Carolina Assisters, including our own, helped the region to a 17% increase in enrollments during the same time period!

Call 828.452.1447 and ask to speak to a Healthcare Navigator-Assister for more information.



Workforce Education & Training Partnership

Mountain Projects and the **Construction Skills and Technology program at Haywood Community College**, with funding from the Dogwood Health Trust, have joined forces to create the **Construction Workforce Pipeline.**

Students will **receive education, training and hands-on, paid experience** in the construction profession, along with job placement assistance upon completion of the program. The hands-on experience will take place on our affordable housing construction sites. The goal is to meet construction workforce needs in Haywood and Jackson Counties.

Want to refer a student you know? Contact Si Simmons at 828-452-1447.

Program News in Brief



Mountain Projects has played a growing role in the affordable housing space since the late 1990's. In 2018 we formed the Smoky Mountain Housing Partnership to accelerate our efforts. Among our initiatives are Self Help housing developments in which first-time home buyers provide "sweat equity" to help keep the price affordable.

Our newest project, Harris Estates, in Sylva, is nearing completion.



Mountain Strong is a Mountain Projects program that provides substance misuse prevention services in the western counties. These services are designed to help reduce impacts associated with alcohol, tobacco, and other drug misuse and promote safer, low risk choices for a healthier community.

One of our initiatives, designed to discourage underage drinking, is supported by "Catch it Early" messaging you might've seen, intended to encourage adults to stay engaged in activities with teens in their lives. We recently re-booted our most popular ad ever. Known in our offices as "turkey boy", this ad reached many thousands of WNC residents.

News in Brief



Patsy Davis, District Court Judge Donna Forga and NCCAA President Sharon Goodson

Patsy Davis isn't just Executive Director of Mountain Projects, she is also president of the North Carolina Community Action Association Board of Directors. Mountain Projects is one of 34 NCCAA member agencies.

What was her motivation? "I recognized that our state's community action organizations were not being heard in Raleigh, and I felt this was a way I could help," Davis said.

The organization's conference was held in Cherokee this year. Hundreds of employees of member agencies gathered for training and networking and swapped success stories.

One such story was shared in a keynote speech by District Court Judge Donna Forga, a Mountain Projects client in the early 1980s. With Mountain Projects help she overcame difficult circumstances, stabilized her family and moved forward with her education as a single mother.

READ MORE FROM THE SMOKY MOUNTAIN NEWS: TINYURL.COM/3ETR4A6J

Emergency Funds Help Us Help Others When it's Cold

There are common themes between the stories of Kim Hammon, Maria Wengyn and Amy Roberts. They are Haywood County residents on **fixed incomes,** and they **struggled mightily** last winter with a **spike in heating bills**.

Another common theme? *"I wouldn't be in this house right now if it wasn't for Mountain Projects,"* Hammon says.

Mountain Projects isn't the only non-profit organization in Haywood County to help in these types of scenarios, but **we receive hundreds of calls for emergency assistance each winter.** And the trick is, most of Mountain Projects programs are grant-driven, meaning the funds are already earmarked for specific work.

"We can't access restricted funds to support utility assistance or emergency funds requests," Davis says. **"That's why we reach out to the community."**

Fortunately, our community steps up to support those in need. We raise money year around



Kim Hammon

for our Emergency and Winter Warmth Funds, and these discretionary funds allow us to respond quickly and efficiently when members of our community need a leg up.

Thank you for your contributions!

READ MORE FROM THE MOUNTAINEER: TINYURL.COM/DEN6ZWXU

Please consider a contribution. Your support strengthens our community!

TO DONATE ELECTRONICALLY:

- Visit our website, MountainProjects.org/donate & fill out the online contribution form

TO DONATE BY MAIL:

- Fill out the enclosed contribution coupon
- Place coupon with credit card info OR check in return envelope
- Add a first class stamp (thank you!) and drop in mail

WANT TO VOLUNTEER?

- Call John Chicoine, Volunteer Coordinator: 828-356-2833

DONATE "ALMOST NEW" HOUSEHOLD ITEMS:

- Mountain Projects Resale Store, 2143 Asheville Rd in Waynesville
- Sylva Linings Resale Store, 1264 W Main St in Sylva

Mountain Projects is a 501(c)3 nonprofit charitable organization.
Donations to Mountain Projects are tax deductible. Our EIN number is 56-0849092.

Contact Us

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Wish to inquire about our services for you or someone you know? Schedule a meeting with one of our intake counselors, at either our Haywood County or Jackson County offices.

Call for an appointment:

Haywood County	**828-492-4103 or 828-492-4114**
Jackson County	**828-586-2345 or 828-550-5315**