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NEWS

For immediate release

Ouachita's Elrod Center receives Celebrate Literacy Award by Arkansas Literacy Association



By Mandy Halbert

September 4, 2020

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5206

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.— Ouachita Baptist University’s Elrod Center for Family and Community received the Arkansas Literacy Association’s (ALA) Celebrate Literacy Award this summer for its America Reads/America Counts, Peake Partnership and Homeschool/After-School tutoring programs in Arkadelphia. Leigh Anne McKinney, assistant director of the Elrod Center, attended a virtual ceremony in July hosted by the ALA Council Leadership Institute to accept the award.

“The Elrod Center’s partnership with Arkadelphia Public Schools has been in place for over 23 years now,” McKinney said. “We are so thankful for the opportunity to work with administrators and teachers in order to identify children who qualify for our programs, to schedule tutoring sessions and to provide proper tutor training. The Elrod Center could not do the work it does through tutoring without the wonderful cooperation of our school district.”

“When we started the America Reads/America Counts Program 23 years ago, we were uncertain as to its long-term sustainability,” said Ian Cosh, vice president for community and international relations. “Thanks to Jan Bass, who was involved in the early years, and to Leigh Anne McKinney’s strong leadership, it has grown into a valuable and enriching relationship with the Arkadelphia Public Schools.”

While the ALA Celebrate Literacy Award usually is given to only one agency in the state of Arkansas, the Elrod Center and Goff Public Library in Searcy, Ark., both were chosen this year for championing literacy in their respective communities. The ALA is an affiliate of the International Literacy Association and, according to its website, is “a professional organization of individuals, institutions and councils dedicated to promoting reading and developing literacy.”

Each year, about 100 Arkadelphia Public School children meet weekly with Ouachita students through the Elrod Center’s America Reads/America Counts, Peake Partnership and Homeschool/After-School programs. Ouachita student tutors meet with elementary-age children on their public school campuses to offer convenience and consistency, and they meet with middle school, high school and homeschool youth at the Elrod Center in order to offer older students the opportunity to experience a college campus.

“We are aware that any strong partnership must be mutually beneficial, and this program realizes that goal through its positive impact on both tutors and students,” Cosh said. “The give-and-take of the teaching experience is fulfilling for the college student and enriching for the student being taught.”

McKinney noted that the stigma many children associate with tutoring is alleviated when they begin to meet regularly with and form a relationship with college students.



Picture 1 Darby Byrd, a junior Christian studies/Christian ministries major from McKinney, Texas, works with a local student in 2019 as part of the Elrod Center’s After-School tutoring program.



Picture 2 Lauren (Archer) Woo, a 2020 communication sciences & disorders major from Fordyce, Ark., tutors a student through the America Reads program.

“Although standardized test scores and a marked change in classroom performance indicate that our programs are very beneficial to the children we tutor, we believe that our greatest impact goes far beyond test scores alone,” she said. “What was once a negative now becomes a positive. We often have the joy of witnessing an increase in confidence, improvement in behavior and overall outlook toward school, as well as a new excitement about learning, in many of the children we tutor. Students who are excited about coming to school are more likely to stick with it.”

“The Arkadelphia Area Reading Council felt the Elrod Center was more than deserving to nominate for the Celebrate Literacy Award because the center works so hard to help our community and support our schools with the many programs that are offered,” said Jodie Daniell, instructional facilitator at Peake Elementary.

“Although we won't be able to have student tutors in the building at this time due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Elrod Center is still supporting our students and staff with encouraging notes, treats and helping staff complete projects,” Daniell continued. “We are so grateful for this support and partnership in our district!”

For more information about the Elrod Center or its tutoring programs, visit www.obu.edu/elrod/ or contact Leigh Anne McKinney at mckinneyl@obu.edu. To learn more about the Arkansas Literacy Association, visit www.arareading.org.