

ACCESS MUSKOGEE

Fall 2024



In this issue:

- Mobile Nutrition Markets
- The Gift of Literacy
- Farmers Markets

Celebrating the people and places of Muskogee County



Neighbors Building Neighborhoods

Promoting positive change



Students make new "Classroom Friends" in the Dream Team Youth Programs at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center in Muskogee.

Neighbors Building Neighborhoods of Muskogee, Inc. (NBN) improves the quality of life in Eastern Oklahoma through education, organizational support, and coalition building. This broad mission empowers us to provide a wide range of programs. Initiatives include substance abuse prevention, youth programs, and community revitalization. Go to nbn-nrc.org for more information about our programs.



www.healthymuskogee.com

The Healthy Muskogee Project Continues

In the spring of 2023, the pilot issue of Access Muskogee was successfully published, marking the beginning of an ongoing effort to bring to light the many resources available in the Muskogee community. After a robust opening, the team responsible for the publication found themselves at the mercy of time and work, leading to the project being put on the back burner.

Despite the delay, the mission of Access Muskogee remains the same: to highlight the diverse programs, services, and opportunities available to Muskogee County residents, while also working to reshape public perceptions about our community's strengths and resources. Our first issue introduced readers to the collaborative efforts of the Muskogee County Social Determinants of Health Consortium, a collective of local organizations working together under the Healthy Muskogee banner to address challenges in healthcare, education, housing, and other key areas.

Now, with renewed energy and commitment and new leadership, we are excited to continue the journey. This issue of Access Muskogee builds on that foundation, showcasing even more of the inspiring work being done to improve the lives of residents. From mental health initiatives like the Blue Line

Wellness Program to grassroots organizations like Women Who Care, this edition covers a range of efforts designed to meet the real needs of our community.

We understand that while resources exist, they aren't always accessible or well-known. This is where Access Muskogee comes in. By spotlighting the people and programs making a difference, we hope to bridge the gap between available services and the people who need them. Whether it's helping families to access nutritious food through mobile markets or providing low cost transportation to those in need, the stories in this issue are a testament to the resilience and compassion of our community.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to continuing this publication as a resource for the people of Muskogee County. As we grow, we encourage feedback, suggestions, and contributions from our readers. After all, Access Muskogee is not just a magazine – it's a reflection of our community, and we want every resident to feel represented and empowered.

Thank you for joining us on this journey, and we look forward to sharing many more stories of hope, resilience, and community in the issues to come.

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Celebrating the People and Places of Muskogee County

Access Muskogee Partners

- Saint Francis Health System Muskogee
- Neighbors Building Neighborhoods
- Muskogee County Health Department
- Muskogee Transit Authority
- City of Muskogee Foundation
- OSU Extension High Obesity Program
- Eastern Oklahoma Library Systems

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Sharing the Joy of Literacy

Muskogee Public Library's Adult Literacy Program Teaches More Than Reading

Article by Wendy King Burton
Interview by Helene Holland

Literacy is as vital as breathing for Penny Chastain, Muskogee Public Library's Adult Literacy Coordinator. She dedicates her efforts to sharing the joy and empowerment of literacy with the community, striving to improve the lives of those she works with.

Success Stories from the Library's Literacy Programs

The impact of the library's literacy programs is profound. Many students in the Adult Basic Education program have improved their reading skills by more than two grade levels, which boosts their confidence in daily life and even encourages them to engage more in their children's education.

"Our students' successes range from passing GED tests, gaining U.S. citizenship, and receiving scholarships to attend college or technical schools," Chastain shares. One notable example is a student who worked with a tutor to become a hospice chaplain, further enriching his life through art and music lessons. "This achievement, while personal, was essential to his sense of fulfillment," she adds.

Literacy Programs Beyond Reading

Muskogee Public Library's literacy programs extend beyond reading. Students also take courses to brush up on math skills, with one GED student scoring high enough to earn a scholarship to a prestigious university in Arizona. Another key achievement involves helping students prepare for and pass their U.S. citizenship tests. "We have the privilege of attending naturalization ceremonies to celebrate these achievements," Chastain says.

Support from Tutors and the Muskogee Area Literacy Council (MALC)

The success of the library's literacy programs is supported by



Penny Chastain

tutors, volunteers, and the Muskogee Area Literacy Council (MALC). MALC plays a crucial role in promoting the program through events like the summer writing competition, the Poetry Jam, Book Eats, and International Literacy Day. This year, they plan to add a literacy luncheon to the roster of events.

MALC membership is open to the community, and all literacy events are inclusive, welcoming anyone interested. Up-to-date information on these events is available on the library's Facebook page or through the Eastern Oklahoma Library System website.

Thursdays. ESL classes are held on Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. and Thursdays from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Our media literacy class is available on Mondays from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m."

How does the program support adults preparing for the GED test?

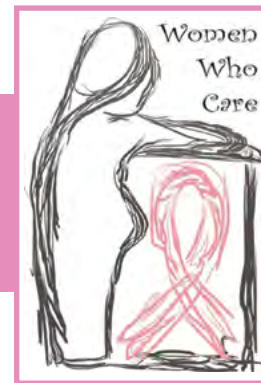
"We offer GED preparation classes both in person and online, along with practice tests to assess knowledge and help students feel confident before taking the exam."

How can members of the community get involved in supporting adult literacy?

"Community members can spread the word, become learners themselves, join the literacy council, or volunteer as tutors. Tutor volunteers serve as invaluable mentors to our adult learners, and we are always in need of more tutors. No prior teaching experience is necessary, as we offer training and resources to guide new volunteers."

How can I learn more about classes or volunteering?

"Contact me at 918-682-6657 or pchastain@eols.org."



Offering Much-Needed Support for Those Battling Breast Cancer

By Jesse Thomas

In 2000, when Aanje Wilkerson's mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, the family was faced with a life-changing battle. During this time, Aanje and her mother spoke with Wren Stratton, a family friend and breast cancer survivor, and together they saw a critical need in their community: access to mammograms for women who couldn't afford them. From this realization, Women Who Care (WWC) was born.

WWC, founded by Aanje, her mother, and Wren, is dedicated to helping women in Muskogee and the surrounding areas get the early detection they need to fight breast cancer. Their mission is simple—no woman should go without access to a mammogram because of financial constraints.

The Importance of Early Detection

Early detection saves lives. Unfortunately, many women delay getting mammograms due to financial difficulties or fear of the stigma surrounding breast cancer. By offering free mammograms through a partnership with St. Francis Health System, WWC helps eliminate these barriers. Aanje says, "If you can detect breast cancer early enough, the survival rate is much higher," emphasizing the critical role of early screenings.

WWC also recognizes that many women are simply unsure of where to turn or how to ask for help. This is where the organization truly shines—they don't ask questions about financial situations; they just provide support. Women can contact WWC through their Facebook page or by reaching out to Aanje directly to receive a mammogram voucher. WWC also sets up booths at various community events and hands out vouchers and educational materials to ensure that women know how to perform self-exams and seek help if needed.

Coming Together: The Annual Luncheon and Support Group

After a hiatus due to COVID-19, WWC is reintroducing its annual luncheon, a key fundraising and awareness event. This year's luncheon will take place on October 16th, from 11:30 AM to 1 PM at the Martin Luther King Community Center (MLKCC). The luncheon will feature speakers who emphasize the importance of early detection and will honor local women who have survived breast cancer. A silent auction will be held to raise funds for the organization's efforts. Tickets are available for \$10, with all proceeds going toward funding mammograms for women in need.

In addition to the luncheon, WWC has recently started a monthly support group for breast cancer survivors and those currently battling the disease. The group meets on the second Tuesday of each month at the MLKCC, offering women a safe space to share their experiences



Women Who Care board of directors.



Aanje Wilkerson

and connect with others who understand their journey. These meetings also serve as an opportunity for WWC to distribute their comfort packages, which include handmade pillows and drainage pouches for post-surgery care. The pillows, sewn by the Grace Episcopal Church sewing club, and the pouches are provided to local doctors' offices as well as to attendees of the support meetings.

Community Impact

Beyond providing mammograms, Women Who Care is working to change how the community views breast cancer. By addressing the stigma and providing a support network, WWC makes it easier for women to

seek help. The organization ensures that no woman faces breast cancer alone, offering practical resources, emotional support, and community-driven encouragement.

Women Who Care's commitment to helping the community is evident not only in their mammogram services but also in the way they make themselves accessible. Whether it's through direct outreach on social media, setting up booths at events, or collaborating with local health systems, WWC makes sure that women know help is available.

Why It Matters

For Aanje Wilkerson, early detection is deeply personal. Her mother's breast cancer diagnosis and subsequent recovery highlighted just how crucial it is to catch the disease early. Through WWC, Aanje wants to ensure that other women—and even men—get the support they need without fear or hesitation. "Cancer does not discriminate," she says. WWC has even helped men who have come forward seeking support, further demonstrating that the organization's mission extends to anyone in need.

The work of Women Who Care has touched countless lives in Muskogee, from the women who receive free mammograms to those who find emotional support and understanding through the group's outreach and support meetings.

Get Involved

WWC invites the Muskogee community to join their efforts in spreading awareness and providing lifesaving services. If you or someone you know is in need of a mammogram, don't hesitate to reach out to Women Who Care through their Facebook page or by contacting Aanje Wilkerson directly via Facebook. And for those who want to support this vital work, consider attending the upcoming Annual Luncheon or making a donation.

Through their tireless efforts, Women Who Care ensures that every woman has access to the healthcare she deserves, helping to create a future where no one has to face breast cancer alone. After all, cancer doesn't discriminate—so why should we?

Q&A with Penny Chastain

What programs are currently offered in the Adult Literacy department?

"We offer GED test preparation, English as a Second Language, adult basic education, and citizenship test preparation for adults aged 18 and up. Additionally, we offer media literacy classes on Mondays from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., along with financial literacy and workplace literacy programs."

How do you inspire adult learners to set individual goals for themselves?

"Our program is student-led, meaning we work with each individual to help them meet their goals at their own pace. There is no set timeline; the learner sets their own path."

How can adult learners enroll in different programs, and what are the next steps?

"All classes are free and open to adults in the community aged 18 and over. Materials are provided, and students can enroll in person or online. We hold GED classes on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and

Explore Fresh, Local Food at

Muskogee Farmers Market

Open Rain or Shine!

By Rachel Atherton

Since 2009, the Muskogee Farmers Market has proudly accepted **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** benefits, becoming one of the first markets in Oklahoma to do so. This means you can use your **SNAP** benefits to purchase a wide range of fresh, local produce, eggs, meat, baked goods, and honey. Simply exchange \$1 for one token, and get as many tokens as you need to enjoy what the market has to offer.

The **SNAP** enables low-income families in Oklahoma to buy nutritious food with **Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT)** cards. **SNAP** recipients spend their benefits to buy eligible food in authorized retail food stores/ Farmers' Markets. Learn more at www.oklahoma.gov/okdhs/services/snap.html.

But that's just the start of the benefits available at the market! One of the standout programs here is Double-Up Oklahoma, which matches your **SNAP** dollars. For example, if you spend \$20 in **SNAP**, you'll get an additional \$20 match for free in tokens for fresh produce. It's a great way to make your budget stretch further while eating healthy! Visit www.doubleupoklahoma.org/ for more information.

The market also participates in the **Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)**, providing seniors with \$50 per season for fresh produce, herbs, and honey. This USDA-funded program helps low-income seniors access nutritious, locally grown food. More details are available at www.fns.usda.gov/sfmnp/senior-farmers-market-nutrition-program.

The **Cherokee Nation WIC Program** is also an option to be used at the Muskogee market, providing WIC participants with vouchers for fresh produce. Registered tribal members receive a card, making it easy to purchase nutritious food. You can read more about the program and find out about eligibility requirements here: www.cherokeepublichealth.org/tiles/index/display?alias=WIC.

The Muskogee Farmers Market runs seasonally in an outdoor venue, located at the Muskogee Civic Center – Covered Parking Area on 5th & Okmulgee Street, is open “rain or shine” each Saturday from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m., April through October, and on Wednesday from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., April through August. Vendors accept cash, but you can also buy \$5 tokens onsite with a credit card to use like cash.

“Visit and be surprised and impressed with the variety and quality,” says Doug Walton, a regular market-goer and local advocate. Whether you're a SNAP recipient, senior, tribal member, or simply a local food lover, the market offers something for everyone!

Find new ways to make your family meals delicious and healthy at www.choosehomemade.org.



Muskogee Farmers Market, above.

Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, left.

Muskogee County Transit

By Haley Frix

Muskogee County Transit (MCT) is a vital resource for the citizens of Muskogee County. It facilitates transportation for essential needs, such as doctor appointments, grocery shopping, and more. MCT is committed to serving the community, ensuring accessibility for wheelchair users and providing crucial support for our most vulnerable populations.

“There was an older lady from Fort Gibson who didn't have a ride to the hair salon,” shares Haley Frix, MCT Director of Marketing. “She posted on Facebook about needing a ride, and we were able to help her.” MCT also provides a potential lifeline for job seekers. “We've also been able to put people back to work because they now have access to reliable transportation,” Frix adds. As an employer, MCT has 20 staff members and is always accepting applications for drivers. If you or someone you know is interested in joining the MCT team, please come by to apply.

CITY FIXED ROUTE—WEEKDAYS 9 AM—5 PM
All routes start on the hour. Each boarding fee is \$2. See image for routes.

COUNTY FIXED ROUTE - WEEKDAYS AT DIFFERENT LOCATIONS
County route fare is \$2 for a round trip and includes three stops in Muskogee. Extra stops can be added for \$4 per stop. Driver makes one trip into the scheduled part of the county around 8 am to pick up riders before returning to Muskogee. Riders are picked back up at 2 pm to be taken home.

COUNTY FIXED PICKUPS
Monday—Fort Gibson and Braggs
Tuesday & Thursday—Warner, Porum, Webbers Falls
Wednesday & Friday—Taft, Haskell, Council Hill

CURB TO CURB AND SOONERRIDE
MCT also provides Curb to Curb services, which pick you up from your location and take you wherever you need to go. To reserve a curb-to-curb ride, you must call the office 24 hours in advance at 918-682-1721.

SoonerRide arranges transportation to medically necessary services covered by SoonerCare, but it is not intended for emergency transport. To schedule this service, you need to call at least three (3) days before your appointment. The SoonerRide reservation line is available at 877-404-4500 (TDD 800-722-0353), and a trip authorization number must be obtained in advance for gas or mileage reimbursement.

CONTACT INFO:
Facebook: www.facebook.com/muskogeecountytransit
Phone Number: 918-682-1721
Website: www.muskogeecountytransit.org
Email: muskogeecountytransitsocial@gmail.com



MCT's all-electric passenger van.

MUSKOGEE COUNTY TRANSIT ROUTES START EVERY HOUR FROM 9 AM - 3PM, MONDAY - FRIDAY		
WEST SHUTTLE ROUTE	MID-TOWN SHUTTLE ROUTE	WEST SHUTTLE ROUTE
LEAVING:	LEAVING:	LEAVING:
Arrowhead Mall - :00	Arrowhead Mall - :00	Arrowhead Mall - :00
CashSaver - :05	Surgery/Manhattan Apts. - :03	Lakeland - :03
Meadowbrook Apts. - :09	Gaddy Drug - :06	King Park - :07
Casey's, 32nd & Arline - :15	Library - :10	ACME - :12
Health Dept. - :20	Civic Center - :12	Connors St. College - :19
Saint Francis - :24	Green Country Apts. - :18	Country Club Apts. - :24
CCOM - :27	Greenleaf Apts. - :26	Mini-Max - :28
Honor Heights Towers - :32	Homeland, N. York St. - :30	Curts Mall/Shawnee Crossing - :30
VAMC - :37	Toby's Pit Stop - :33	Austin Heights Apts. - :33
Port City - :40	Lakeland Shop. Center - :38	Aldi - :36
Social Security - :43	Fairhaven - :41	Summer Ridge - :42
Wal-Mart - :46		Green Country - :48
RETURN:	RETURN:	RETURN:
Arrowhead Mall - :50 (Ten minute stop)	Arrowhead Mall - :50 (Ten minute stop)	Arrowhead Mall - :50 (Ten minute stop)



MCT vans are wheelchair accessible.

Photo by Angel Ford



GETTING A HEAD START ON NUTRITION



MOBILE MARKETS BRING FOOD TO FAMILIES' TABLES

By Leo Perez

Since 2021, the Head Start on Nutrition Mobile Markets in Muskogee have been making a real difference in the lives of local families. Thanks to funding from the Muskogee Medical Foundation and a partnership with the Oklahoma State University High Obesity Program (OSU HOP), these mobile markets have become a crucial resource for families with young children in the Early Head Start and Head Start programs at three sites in Muskogee. The goal is to provide fresh, locally-sourced produce and teach families how to make healthier food choices, all while supporting local farmers.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Each month, families receive \$15 in “veggie bucks” to spend at the markets during the growing season, which typically runs from June to September. These veggie bucks allow families to pick out their own fresh fruits and vegetables, helping them choose foods that fit their preferences and cultural traditions. By giving families the power to make their own choices, the program promotes healthier eating habits that are more likely to stick.

Through these markets, families can access high-quality produce while learning about the importance of healthy eating. The connection between local farmers and families is an essential part of the program, known as Farm to Early Childhood Education (Farm to ECE), which aims to bring fresh, local foods into young children’s lives.

TEAMWORK AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The success of the mobile markets wouldn’t be possible without the combined efforts of many organizations. OSU HOP works alongside the Healthy Oklahomans Nutrition Alliance (HONA) and other community groups like EnRoute, Muskogee County Health Department, and the Cherokee Nation Public Health, just to name a few. These partners all play key roles in running the markets, ensuring that families get the help they need.

HONA plays a big part by sourcing fresh fruits and vegetables from local farmers in northeastern Oklahoma. This helps ensure that families in Muskogee are getting fresh, nutritious food while also supporting local agriculture. Plus, the markets accept multiple payment options like SNAP, SFMNP, OKFresh, and cash, making them accessible to a wide range of families.



Photos by Dave Crenshaw



AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE FOR CHILDREN

For the kids, visiting the mobile markets is more than just a grocery trip—it’s a fun learning experience. Each child receives a tote bag to carry their produce, giving them an exciting chance to participate in shopping for healthy foods. It’s a simple but effective way to get children interested in fruits and vegetables and to help them develop healthy eating habits at a young age.

At many markets, there are also cooking demonstrations where families can learn how to prepare the produce they take home. When enough volunteers are available, families even get to taste-test new fruits and vegetables, encouraging both kids and adults to try foods they may not have eaten before. These taste tests are especially popular with children, helping them see that healthy foods can be tasty, too.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The Head Start on Nutrition Mobile Markets have had a noticeable impact on families in Muskogee. Since the program started, families have reported eating more fruits and vegetables—a key measure of the program’s success.

In 2023 alone, over 1,560 pounds of produce were distributed across the three Head Start sites. Altogether, the program has shared nearly 3 tons of fresh food with local families since it began! This level of distribution shows just how important the markets are in providing families with access to nutritious food they might not otherwise have.

Evaluations of the program continue to show positive results, with many families saying they’ve increased their fruit and vegetable intake since participating. This is especially important in a community where fresh produce hasn’t always been easy to find.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As the program has grown, it has become a model for other communities interested in improving access to healthy food. The Head Start on Nutrition Mobile Markets show what’s possible when local organizations work together with the shared goal of improving health and nutrition for families. By making fresh, local produce available to everyone, the program is helping to ensure that Muskogee families are healthy, nourished, and supported for years to come.

Learn more by visiting the OSU High Obesity Program’s Facebook page at www.facebook.com/OSUHOP

GROWING TOGETHER

Muskogee's Community Gardens

By Rebecca Walkup

Muskogee's community gardens are more than places to grow vegetables; they play a key role in promoting wellness, nutrition, and community engagement. By providing access to fresh produce, encouraging physical activity, and fostering social connections, these gardens have become an important part of the city's landscape.

ORIGINS AND GROWTH

Established in 2007 through the Muskogee Wellness Initiative Road, and Grace Episcopal Church. These were funded by the City of Muskogee Foundation and supported by the Muskogee County Health Department's TSET Healthy Living Program.

While gardeners keep most of their harvest, many share excess produce with local food pantries like Muskogee Cooperative Ministries and Catholic Charities, or with neighbors. Grace Episcopal Church's garden focuses on donations, while Spaulding and Civitan Parks have public fruit trees and Spaulding Park has community beds available for anyone to harvest. These gardens not only provide fresh, healthy food but also foster a sense of community and well-being for residents of all backgrounds.

Muskogee's community gardens are accessible year-round, providing a reliable source of fresh produce in every season. Cool-weather crops such as carrots, beets, cabbage, turnips, spinach, broccoli, onions, garlic, lettuce, mustard greens, leeks, and radishes thrive in early spring and late fall, allowing for extended growing periods even during cooler months. This continuous availability ensures that residents can consistently access fresh, healthy food, reinforcing the gardens' importance as a valuable resource for the community.

STARTING YOUR OWN GARDEN

For those interested in joining Muskogee's community gardens, the process is straightforward: find a garden near you, sign up for a plot, and start planting. Muskogee is home to several community gardens, including those at Spaulding Park, Civitan Park, the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center, Chandler Road, the former Teen Center, and Grace Episcopal Church. You can find a complete list of garden locations and contact information at the end of this article.

Once you're assigned a garden plot, you'll need to sign an agreement outlining the garden's rules. These rules ensure the

gardens remain a valuable resource for everyone. Gardeners are responsible for maintaining their plots—keeping them weeded, harvested, free of trash, and preventing plants from encroaching on paths or neighboring plots. To maintain a safe and organic environment, the use of power tools, pesticides, herbicides, and illegal plants is prohibited. Gardeners must also sign a liability waiver acknowledging the responsibilities and risks involved.

After securing a plot, the next step is deciding what to plant. This will depend on the season, and seeds or plants can be found at local garden centers, home and garden stores, greenhouses, or the farmers market during spring, summer, and early fall. Gardening tools are typically minimal due to the small size of the plots and the prohibition on power tools. Most tasks, like weeding, can be done by hand, and larger tools can be borrowed from fellow gardeners or community members.

Plot availability varies by location, but most of the six community gardens usually have spaces open. Spaulding and Civitan Park gardens each have 20-30 plots, typically measuring about 10-12 feet by 4-5 feet. To request a plot, contact the garden's coordinator listed at the end of this article.

LOCAL PROGRAMS

Starting a garden may seem overwhelming, but with the right support, it can be a highly rewarding experience. The key to success is persistence and learning through experience. Each season brings new challenges, such as changing weather and varying insect activity, but community gardens provide a supportive environment where experienced gardeners are often happy to share their knowledge. With help from resources like the OSU Extension Service, Master Gardeners, and fellow gardeners, even beginners can thrive.

The OSU Extension Service provides detailed fact sheets on topics ranging from soil preparation to pest control, offering guidance for gardeners of all levels. The Oklahoma Garden Planning Guide, for example, outlines the best times of year to plant various vegetables and includes tips on garden preparation. These resources are available online at www.extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets. The Muskogee County Master Gardeners Program is another valuable resource. Dedicated to community service, the Master Gardeners continuously educate themselves on a wide range of gardening topics and share that knowledge through hands-on guidance. They simplify technical information for beginners and host free public forums on the fourth Thursday of each month, January through October. They also offer Best Practices for Gardening workshops and promote the

Muskogee Community Gardens

Would you like to grow your own food?

- o Free locations to plant and grow your own vegetables!
- o Free water for irrigation
- o Great chance to learn about gardening from others
- o Social interaction with fellow gardeners
- o Good exercise and stress relief

Chandler Road

Approximately 1900 Chandler Road
On south side of Chandler (at T Street)
Muskogee Parks & Recreation
918-684-6302 ext.1470

Civitan Park

3301 Gibson Street
Along east end of parking lot
Fruit trees are growing for public harvest
Civitan Club
918-682-4957

Grace Episcopal Church

Corner of North 7th and Court Streets
918-687-5416

MLK Community Center

300 W. Martin Luther King Street
At northwest corner of property
918-684-6314

Muskogee Teen Center

322 Callahan Street
On Dayton Street behind Teen Center
918-684-6345

Spaulding Park

East Okmulgee and Eastside Blvd.
At corner of Spaulding Blvd. and
East Cincinnati Ave.
Fruit trees are growing for public harvest
918-684-6302 ext.1470



Visit www.muskogee parks.com/communitygardens
for an electronic version of this flyer,
or call one of the gardens listed for
more information.

4/18/2019



community gardens at the Muskogee Farmers Market from April to October. For personalized assistance, Master Gardeners are available at the Farmers Market or through the contact details on their website at www.muskogee-county-master-gardeners.org.

The Master Gardeners are deeply committed to serving Muskogee's veterans and youth through two key programs. In partnership with the Veterans Administration Whole Health program, they offer the Veterans Whole Health Garden Program at the MLK Community Center gardens. This initiative helps veterans improve their physical and mental health through gardening. Veterans choose what to grow, and Master Gardener volunteers assist with garden planning, planting, and harvesting. They also offer educational programs, like the fall 2023 class on raised beds. Recently, a veteran who became a Master Gardener taught a class on microgreens, while another shared expertise on compost tea fertilizer. The group meets every Friday morning from 8:30 to 10:30 AM, weather permitting. For more information, contact the OSU Extension office at 918-686-7200.

Additionally, the Master Gardeners run an after-school Junior

Master Gardeners program at the MLK Community Center for fifth and sixth graders in the Dream Team After School Program, as well as a gardening program at Cherokee Elementary for fourth and fifth graders. These programs, based on the Texas A&M Extension's Junior Master Gardener Teacher & Leader Guide, help children gain access to gardening and healthy food. The programs teach practical skills and promote physical and mental well-being through outdoor activities.

GET INVOLVED

Muskogee's community gardens offer a unique opportunity for residents to engage in gardening while fostering community connections and promoting health and wellness. Whether you are a seasoned gardener or just starting, there are ample resources and support available to help you succeed. By participating in these gardens, you can enjoy fresh produce, learn valuable gardening skills, and become part of a vibrant community. If you're ready to cultivate your own plot, please see the contact information above to request a garden space and begin your gardening journey!



Photos by Angel Ford



Blue Line Wellness Initiative

Providing Mental Health Support for Law Enforcement and First Responders

By Jesse Thomas

Policing can be one of the most challenging and stressful professions, and that stress can take a serious toll on the mental health of those who serve. In response to this, the Muskogee Police Department launched the Blue Line Wellness Initiative, a peer support program designed to provide mental health assistance and peer counseling to officers and first responders. Now in its fifth year, this program continues to grow, offering essential services to officers, their families, and other first responders across northeastern Oklahoma.

Lynn Hamlin, Public Information Officer for the Muskogee Police Department and Peer Team Commander, explains that the program began in 2019, thanks to funding from the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act (LEMHWA) Program, a U.S. Department of Justice initiative. The goal was clear: improve access to mental health and wellness services for law enforcement officers through peer support, family resources, and other wellness programs.

How the Initiative Works

The Blue Line Wellness Initiative is composed of 18 members, along with two clinicians who offer professional mental health services. One of the unique aspects of the program is that rank does not play a role when it comes to peer support—officers of all ranks, from captains to patrol officers, participate. This ensures that those in supervisory positions, who may need to discipline others, are not the ones providing peer support.

The initiative operates across the northeastern Oklahoma area, and in some cases, they extend their services to other regions. When a critical incident occurs, such as an officer-involved shooting, a peer support person is assigned to the officer to provide one-on-one check-ins and follow-ups. If the situation requires more than peer support, the team refers the officer to a clinician for further assistance. In addition to helping their own officers, the team assists other agencies that may not have peer support systems in place. Recently, they provided support to a nearby county after a critical incident, offering much-needed guidance and counseling.

Breaking the Stigma

One of the most significant challenges faced by law enforcement officers is the stigma surrounding mental health. Many officers feel that asking for help is a sign of weakness, but the Blue Line Wellness Initiative is working to change that narrative. As Hamlin explains, “This peer support program has helped break down the walls officers have regarding asking for help. They learn that needing help is not a weakness.”

As part of the initiative, all officers are required to attend a wellness check-in with a therapist once a year. These sessions assess potential



Lynn Hamlin and the Muskogee Police Department Peer Team attended National Police Week in Washington, D.C.

issues such as burnout, sleep disorders, or substance abuse, and provide officers with a safe space to discuss their mental health. The team also offers educational resources throughout the year, aimed at reducing the stigma and encouraging officers to take care of their mental health proactively.

Supporting Officers' Families

The Blue Line Wellness Initiative doesn't just stop with officers. Recognizing that families play a crucial role in an officer's life, the team has created a spouse support group. One spouse has even gone through peer support training, allowing them to offer guidance to other family members. Hamlin emphasizes the importance of preparing families for what to expect when their loved ones return home after experiencing a critical incident. This holistic approach ensures that officers are supported both on and off the job.

Challenges and Growth

Like any new program, the Blue Line Wellness Initiative faced some initial resistance. The stigma surrounding mental health in law enforcement created pushback from some officers. However, as the initiative has grown and officers have seen the benefits firsthand, the mindset has shifted. “The program has helped change the culture of the department in a good way,” says Hamlin. Officers are now more willing to seek help, and the department has become more open to conversations about mental health.

The initiative is also expanding its reach by helping other agencies develop their own peer support teams. They've worked with first responders from various agencies, including EMS and fire departments, to ensure that everyone involved in critical incidents has access to the support they need.

Looking Ahead

The Blue Line Wellness Initiative shows no signs of slowing down. In addition to continuing their peer support work and educational outreach, the team plans to attend National Police Week in Washington, D.C. every year, offering their support to grieving families and departments. Last year, they held their first-ever awards banquet at the Muskogee Civic Center, recognizing officers with honors like Lieutenant of the Year, Officer of the Year, and Rookie of the Year—all voted on by their peers. The event, catered by local businesses, was a celebration of the department's commitment to mental health and well-being.

The Blue Line Wellness Initiative is not just changing the culture of the Muskogee Police Department—it's setting a new standard for how we support the mental health of law enforcement officers across Muskogee County and beyond. Lynn Hamlin says it best: “Healthy and well officers are better able to serve their community. It makes them better officers, better spouses, better sons and daughters, and better parts of their own lives and the lives of others.”

Muskogee County Resources

Recursos del Condado de Muskogee

FOOD & NUTRITION

(Alimentación y Nutrición)

FOOD PANTRIES

(DESPENSAS DE ALIMENTOS)

Little Free Pantry on Peak.
112 E Peak Blvd. (under awning), Open 24/7.

First Assembly of God.
3100 Gulick St.,
Mon-Fri 9am-12pm, Tues, Wed, Fri 1-4pm.

Faith Love Baptist Church.
1208 Tamaroa St.,
Wed 4-5:30pm by request. Sun 12:30-1pm.

Community Food Pantry.
601 E Broadway St.,
Mon-Wed 1-2pm. Thurs 3-4pm, 4-6pm.

Community First Center.
8th & Boston, Tues 10am-12pm.

Joseph's Storehouse.
615 S Main, Mon 10am-1pm.

Muskogee Catholic Charities.
1220 W Broadway, Mon-Fri 9am-12pm.

The Salvation Army.
700 Independence Ave., Mon-Thurs 9am-4pm.

Eastern Heights Baptist Church.
2401 Haskell Blvd, Sat 11am-2pm.

MEALS

(COMIDAS)

Gospel Rescue Mission.
326 S Second St., Sack lunches available
Mon-Fri from 12-12:30pm.

Muskogee Creek Nation.
111 S Virginia St., 55+ Tribal residents.

Honor Heights Towers.
300 N 40th St.,
918-910-5570, Mon-Fri 11:30am-12:30pm.

Meals on Wheels.
918-687-5416, 1st Sat/mo 8-10am. 918-682-7891, ask for outreach.

EODD (Senior) Nutrition Sites in Muskogee County:
Fort Gibson Site, 790 S Lee, Fort Gibson, 918-230-6683.

Muskogee Site, 501 N Main St., 918-231-5297.
Honor Heights Site, 300 N 40th St., 918-687-5232.

OTHER FOOD RESOURCES

(OTROS RECURSOS ALIMENTARIOS)

Community Gardens. To request a plot:
Chandler Road, 1900 Chandler Rd. (at T Street)
Parks & Recreation 918-684-6302 ext.1470.

Civitan Park 3301 Gibson St., Civitan Club, 918-682-4957.

Grace Episcopal Church,
Corner of North 7th and Court Streets, 918-687-5416.

MLK Community Center
300 W Martin Luther King St., 918-684-6314.

Muskogee Teen Center, 322 Callahan St., 918-684-6345.

Spaulding Park, corner of Spaulding & Cincinnati,
Parks & Recreation, 918-684-6302 ext.1470.

OKFresh!

Go to okfresh.org to see if your healthcare provider is participating in this program.

Double Up OK. EBT @ Farmers' Market.
Tues 4-7pm (May-Sept), Sat 8am-12pm (Apr-Oct).

TRANSPORTATION

(Transporte)

Muskogee County Transit.
918-682-1721, muskogeecountytransit.org.

Sooner Ride. Scheduling
877-404-4500, TDD 800-722-0353.

Angel Flight. 12345 E. Skelly Dr., Tulsa, OK 74128
Phone: 918-749-8992.

SHELTER & HOUSING

(Refugio y Vivienda)

SHELTERS

(REFUGIOS)

Gospel Rescue Mission. 323 Callahan St.,
Mon-Fri. Up to 2 weeks unless arrangement.

Women in Safe Homes (WISH).
Domestic violence emergencies, 918-682-7879.

HOUSING ASSISTANCE

(ASISTENCIA DE VIVIENDA)

Muskogee Housing Authority.
918-910-5489, www.muskogeehousing.org.

Habitat for Humanity.
918-478-0074, <https://www.muskogeehabitat.org>.

KIBOIS Community Action.
315 N 5th St, 918-967-3325., Once/year rent/utilities help.

KIBOIS Community Action Emergency Housing Vouchers.
918-684-7258, 315 N 5th St.

KIBOIS Support Services for Veteran Families.
<https://www.kibois.org/ssvf>, 918-681-7525.

Red Cross Disaster housing assistance.
566 N 6th St, 918-682-1366.

Eldercare Locator.
1-800-677-1116, www.eldercare.acl.gov.

Muskogee County Resources

Recursos del Condado de Muskogee

HEALTHCARE & MEDICAL *(Asistencia Sanitaria y Médica)*

GENERAL (GENERAL)

Arkansas Verdigris Valley Health Center.
East: 918-682-0222. West: 918-912-2333.

Baptist Free Health Clinic.
205 Houston St., 918-869-0516.

Good Shepherd Free Health Clinic of Muskogee.
2130 W Okmulgee, 918-683-8080.

NeoHealth – Muskogee.
922 N York St., 918-683-0470.

Muskogee County Health Department.
530 S 34th St., 918-683-0321.

Three Rivers Health Center (Tribal).
1001 S 41st, 918-781-6500.

Kelly B. Todd Cerebral Palsy and Neuromuscular Center.
1111 N 36th, 918-683-4621.

MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING & CRISIS *(Consejería y Crisis en Salud Mental)*

COUNSELING

(CONSEJERÍA EN SALUD MENTAL)

Creoks Behavioral Health Services.
1139 N Main St., 918-687-7064.

Green Country Behavioral Health Services.
619 N Main St., 918-682-8407.

Integrity Pathways.
814 W Okmulgee Ave., 918-682-9292.

MCCOYS.
4009 Eufaula Ave., 918-682-2841.

Monarch Behavioral Health (Outpatient).
2400 W Broadway, 918-682-7210. monarchok.org/request-services

Oklahoma Families First – Muskogee.
928 N. York, Suite 44, 918-686-5588.

CRISIS (CRISIS EN SALUD MENTAL)

Green Country Crisis Stabilization.
24/hr. 918-682-8407.

Saint Francis Geriatric Acute Crisis Stabilization/Inpatient Care.
918-488-6688. (Seniors)

Willow Crest. 24/hr.
800-950-7577, ages 5-17. (Children)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.
1-800-784-2333.

National Suicide Prevention Hotline.
1-800-273-8255.

Oklahoma Department of Mental Health Hotline.
1-800-522-9054.

National Youth Crisis Hotline.
1-800-448-4663.

National Youth Crisis Text Line.
Text TALK to 741741 24/7.

National Native Youth Crisis Text Line.
Text NATIVE to 741741 24/7. (Tribal)

TXT 4 HELP (Youth).
Text 'safe' w/ location to 4HELP (44357) to connect with a Safe Place.

Student Assistance by Mercy (SAM).
Mental health for college students.
1-855-225-2726.

Reach Out Mental Health Hotline.
1-800-522-9054.

EDUCATION *(Educación)*

Bridges Out of Poverty.
1503 W Broadway, Muskogee. 918-684-6314.

Muskogee Public Library.
891 W Okmulgee, 918-682-6657.
GED, US citizenship, tutoring.

Ark of Faith.
429 E Broadway, Classes: guitar, deaf signing, anger management.

ABUSE & ADDICTION *(Abuso y Adicción)*

24/7 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.
9-8-8.

24/7 Treatment Assistance Hotline
1-866-335-7377.

Green Country Behavioral Health Services.
619 N Main St., 918-682-8407.

Gospel Rescue Mission.
326 S Second St., Tues-Thurs 8am-4 pm.

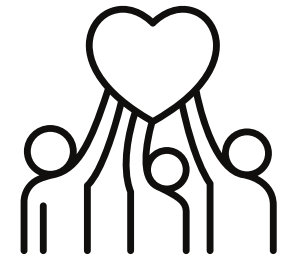
Monarch Substance Abuse (Outpatient).
2400 W Broadway, 918-682-7210.
monarchok.org/request-services

Monarch Substance Abuse (Inpatient).
By referral.
Visit monarchok.org/request-services.

Rays House.
3991 Peak Blvd., 918-706-0883

2025 COMMUNITY HEALTH SURVEY

We would like to hear from you!



Scan the QR code to take the survey!



Saint Francis Health System is conducting a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA).

A CHNA helps us learn about the health needs of the community. By exploring factors affecting housing, income, and access to healthcare, we can create services that improve health for everyone.

This process helps understand the most important health needs and make changes that lead to better health outcomes.

PARTICIPANTS WHO COMPLETE THE SURVEY WILL ALSO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENTER A DRAWING TO WIN A \$100 GIFT CARD.



Neighbors Building Neighborhoods
Nonprofit Resource Center
207 North Second Street
Muskogee, OK 74401

Non-Profit Org
ECRWSS
U.S. Postage
PAID
Tulsa, OK
Permit No. 932

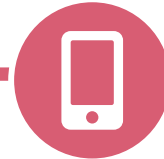
Residential Customer



CONVENIENT
HEALTHCARE



ACCESS CARE
FROM ANYWHERE
IN OKLAHOMA



VIDEO VISITS WITH
SAINT FRANCIS
PROVIDERS

WARREN CLINIC 24/7 VIRTUAL URGENT CARE

With Warren Clinic 24/7 Virtual Urgent Care, adult and pediatric patients with minor illnesses or non-emergency conditions can be evaluated and provided with a treatment plan.

To access Warren Clinic 24/7 Virtual Urgent Care through your smartphone or computer, visit saintfrancis.com/urgentcare or sign in to your Saint Francis MyChart account to start your visit.

**If you are experiencing severe illness, a major injury, symptoms of a heart attack, stroke or shortness of breath, please call 911 or visit your nearest emergency room.*

saintfrancis.com/urgentcare

 **WarrenClinic**
Urgent Care

A part of Saint Francis Health System