

Local nonprofit celebrates 15 years

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Local nonprofit agency ABLE Families marked 15 years of assisting people living in poverty in Mingo County on Friday.

The agency will celebrated with an anniversary party at its Kermit location and h a special program during which time Sr. Janet Peterworth, former director, was presented with a medal from West Virginia Gov. Joe Manchin. A scholarship program has also been set up in her name.

ABLE Families was founded in 1995 by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wheeling. Its mission from the start has been to confront the systemic causes of poverty by supporting families as they make positive changes in their lives.

Sr. Janet Peterworth was hired as the agency's founding director. She served in that position until her recent retirement. On September 1, 2009, Barry Hudock was hired as the new director.

"Confronting the systemic causes of poverty means we try to change the circumstances and situations that keep people from getting themselves out of poverty. Living in Appalachia, it's obvious that not everyone is poor because of their own fault. There are some things that get in the way of getting out of it," Peterworth explained.

The "systemic cause" of poverty that ABLE Families has most directly addressed is lack of education. Throughout its fifteen years, the agency has provided high quality programs to help local people improve their education.

These programs include an afterschool program for elementary school students, which provides homework help, enrichment activities, exercise, and a nutritious snack every day; an in-home family education program on maternal and infant health; adult education, including individual tutoring to prepare for the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) exam; a series of day camps every summer for local kids; and a nutrition education program that is presented in the agency's on-site kitchen classroom.

"As an outsider coming in, I have been very impressed by the quality of the programs that ABLE Families has provided for fifteen years. We recently learned, for example, that our nutrition education program has been replicated in six community sites in the Nashville area. They intentionally modeled their program on what's been done here," said Hudock.

The new director moved with his family in the fall from Syracuse, New York, in order to take the position. At the same time, Sr. Patricia Ann Murray, a Franciscan sister from Decatur, Illinois, was hired as ABLE Families' program director.

"We're not simply looking back enjoying what's been accomplished. We're building on it and making it stronger. Right now, we're preparing to become a satellite site for Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College, so people in the Kermit area have easy access to college classes. We have a few more exciting new things in the works, too," Murray said.

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