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Three Catawba County employees win statewide award

Catawba County Department of Social Services employees Sarah Shumate, Heather Ball and Adrienne Overby have been recognized with a 2009-10 Local Government Federal Credit Union Employee Productivity Award from the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners for an innovative program designed to help children transition into foster care.

“For 19 years, the Association has been rewarding county employees who develop ideas that make county government better and more efficient,” said NCACC President Elect Brian McMahan of Jackson County, who presented the awards during the NCACC Annual Conference in Pitt County. “Our Productivity Awards Program recognizes innovation in business practices at the county level.”

Transitioning into foster care is not easy for a child. To try to make this transition as easy as possible and to minimize the number of school moves, Catawba County started an Educational Advocate Initiative with a goal of improving educational continuity and stability for children in foster care. A county educational advocate works with each of the 44 schools in the county for all children in foster care. Each school assigns a staff person to work as the point of contact with the educational advocate.

The educational advocate focuses on establishing communication channels and standardizing communication protocols between social services and the school systems; minimizing school moves for children in foster care; developing timely enrollment procedures; and tracking school placements and educational progress of children in foster care.

One of the primary goals for the educational advocate is to assure coordination of transportation in order to minimize school moves or to facilitate school record transfers for children entering foster care. The advocate also spearheaded a “Back to School Backpack” drive to ensure that each child in foster care had a backpack and the necessary school supplies to start the school year and foster care.

The Educational Advocate Initiative also won a NCACC Outstanding County Program Award and a National Association of Counties Achievement Award earlier in 2010.

Local Government Federal Credit Union generously donates \$10,000 annually to recognize and reward innovative county employees for their successful productivity improvements. Shumate, Ball and Overby split one of 10 \$1,000 awards. Now celebrating its 19th year, the awards program has attracted 1,440 project applications representing more than \$113 million in savings to North Carolina counties.

Two review committees made up of county commissioners, county managers and staff, and School of Government representatives met Aug. 6 in Raleigh to consider entries and select the best productivity enhancements. A listing of all winning programs is available online at www.ncacc.org/awards/productivity/2010winners.html.

For more information on the awards program, now in its second year of LGFCU sponsorship, visit www.ncacc.org/awards/productivity/about.html.

The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) is the official voice of all 100 counties on issues being considered by the General Assembly, Congress and federal and state agencies. The Association provides expertise to counties in the areas of lobbying, fiscal and legal research, communications, intergovernmental relations, information technology, field visits and risk management services.