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COUNTY EMPLOYEES LEARN LEADERSHIP BY HELPING FAMILIES IN NEED

A group of Catawba County employees working to develop their leadership skills gathered on June 13 at the Family Care Center on Highland Avenue in Hickory to celebrate the completion of a project that will benefit families undergoing a transition in their lives at the Center.

Catawba County's Leadership Academy participants created sixteen raised beds for vegetable gardens at the Center. Families living transitionally at the Center are given assignments as they learn life skills so they can succeed and transition into permanent housing.



Leadership Academy members cut the ribbon for their vegetable garden bed project at the Family Care Center on June 12. Front row, left to right: Lori Wray, Dawn Wilson, Regina Arrowood, Family Care Center Director Jane Earnest, County Commissioner Barbara Beatty, Angie Triplett, Paulette Smyre and Stephanie Pannell. Back row: Philip Overholtzer, Cari Burns, Chantae Lail, Julie Byrd and Steve Lackey

“Family Care Center is honored that our community garden is the first project of Catawba County’s Leadership Academy,” said Jane Earnest, Executive Director of the Family Care Center. “The gardens will add significantly to Family Care Center’s program, giving our guests the opportunity to grow and eat fresh vegetables, and take what they learn about raised bed gardens with them when they move on to independent living.”

As the eleven County employees began their studies in the Academy in the fall of 2012, they discussed various ideas for a group project. The participants selected the Family Care Center and then built the raised vegetable gardens, arranged for and will coordinate the installation of a cistern to catch rain water and will complete miscellaneous landscaping on the Center grounds. The new gardens will expand the amount of land the Center is using, allowing it to apply for available tax exemptions on the additional land, which also benefits the Center.

“The Catawba County Leadership Academy is designed to identify employees who have leadership potential and interest and develop their skills by expanding their understanding of leadership and management responsibilities,” said Nancy Rockett, Catawba County’s Assistant Human Resources Director and organizer of the Academy. “This is done through participation in professional development opportunities, book studies, networking and team-building opportunities, a team project and successful completion of County-sponsored academic modules. The program runs for one full year, with this group having started their work in October 2012. Our goal is to develop diverse



leaders and decision makers, while instilling in them a sense of mission, service and professionalism. This program also demonstrates the County's proactive approach to succession planning and provides competencies to address emerging challenges in local government."

Participants in the Leadership Academy this year include Regina Arrowood, Social Work Program Manager at Social Services; Cari Burns, Paralegal II in the County Manger's Office; Julie Byrd, Nutrition Supervisor at Public Health; Steve Lackey, Programmer/Analyst with the County's Technology Department; Chantae Lail, Medical Lab Manager at Public Health; Phillip Overholtzer, Librarian at the Maiden Branch Library, Stephanie Pannell, Senior Network Engineer with the Technology Department; Paulette Smyre, Human Resources Specialist with the County's Human Resources Department; Angie Triplett, Human Resources Analyst with Human Resources; Dawn Wilson, Social Work Program Manager at Social Services; and Lori Wray, Senior Real Estate Appraiser with the County Tax Office.

Academy participants say they saw the project as a way of making a sustainable, positive difference in their community.

"I loved the physical aspect of creating the garden," said Lori Wray. "When you think of a supervisory program, physical activity is not something that comes to mind. I was glad we chose this as our project and that, as a group, we also had the opportunity to participate in a ropes program. As we have participated in both of these activities, I think our preconceived ideas about our fellow team members quickly changed. We are different in different situations and we were able to see a different side of the classroom individual. The Leadership Academy represents a well-rounded program that encompasses all aspects of leadership."

"The first class of the Catawba County Leadership Academy met on October 4, 2012," added Cari Burns. "Within a few short months we began the planning phase of our team project to benefit the Family Care Center. Even though we are all County employees, for the most part we didn't have established relationships with one another. In the past eight months that has changed. One of the things I am most proud of is the way our team has worked together to accomplish our goal."

Leadership Academy participants were assisted in creation of the vegetable gardens by a number of sponsors including Arrowhead Greenhouse; Brian Shook, Catawba County's Horticulturist; Carolina Glove; Catawba County Extension Master Gardener Volunteers; the Catawba County Department of Utilities & Engineering; Friends of the Catawba County Library; Robinson Builders Mart; Sigmon's Bark and Mulch and Veronica Grantham of the North Carolina Department of Commerce.

"The Academy has been a wonderful learning and growing experience for me," said Philip Overholtzer. "Through the course of the Academy, I have learned what it takes to become a successful leader and team member in my department. The project we chose really reflects on the kind of people we have in the Academy. We are all people who want to give back to our community and make it better for others. We are County employees paid by the taxpayers of Catawba County, so we understand that helping our communities is a way to show it is money well spent."

