

Circles of Hope Offers Support for Job Seekers

Curiosity led Crystal McLendon to Circles of Hope, never dreaming it would become her lifeline. Circles USA is a national campaign to end generational poverty that started a pilot program in 2009 in Anson County. When McLendon first heard about Circles of Hope she wanted to share the information with friends but realized she didn't know that much about it. She decided to find out more by contacting the program's coordinator, then missionary Wilma Dunbar. To her surprise, although she had a degree from Wingate University in business administration and was employed fulltime, her income was considered under the poverty level, making her eligible to enroll in the program.



Circle Leaders Crystal McLendon and John Polk volunteer at a spaghetti dinner fundraiser for Anson Circles of Hope.

"I didn't enroll in the program," she said. But with one son in college and another son and daughter finishing high school, she knew something had to change.

McLendon became a member of the first "Getting Ahead in a Just Getting by World" class at First United Methodist Church in Wadesboro. The class teaches strategies for making sound decisions and changing defeatist attitudes that can lead to a successful transition from poverty to middle class. McLendon learned that poverty comes in many forms. Generational poverty is when a pattern is continued from parent to child, locking the family in a hopeless cycle of welfare. Situational poverty became more prevalent during the recession when middle-class families found themselves without jobs and eventually, homes. And some, like McLendon, are

on the fringe, working from paycheck to paycheck and unable to plan for the future. Then, the worst happened. McLendon's job was eliminated and she was suddenly unemployed. But, because of Circles of Hope, she was prepared. "When I lost my job I had the resources and support, so I was able to cope," she said. "Circles allows you to network. You meet people with connections who become stepping stones to that job. You find ways to get where you need to be. Because of the class I was equipped to take advantage of available resources."

Through these connections, McLendon learned she could use her degree to find work as a substitute teacher. After a year subbing at Wadesboro Elementary School she is now preparing to take the Praxis exam to get her teaching license. At the same time, she is pursuing leads for a job in administration.

More than that, McLendon is using her experience to help others. She has remained a Circle Leader, as graduates of the Getting Ahead class are called, and is co-facilitating the classes, sharing her insight with others. She also is a source of quiet support for others in the program who are struggling. "Circles of Hope is an awesome program. If you are in a position where you need encouragement and support, this is the place to be," she said.

At this writing, there are nine Circles programs in North Carolina, and growing. Although Anson Circles of Hope's administrative office is at First United Methodist Church and the majority of meetings are held there, it is not church-affiliated. Circles is a community-sponsored effort, and has also met at First Presbyterian Church, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Calvary Episcopal Church and Harvest Ministries.

The program has been funded by grants, but those sources are drying up. The Circle Leaders themselves have raised money for administrative costs through putting on hot lunches and spaghetti suppers. Meals are donated by area churches, civic clubs and individuals. However, increased community support is necessary to allow the program to help more families reach a sustainable living.

While Circles of Hope strengthens families, it also strengthens Anson County's economic picture. Since its inception, the TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) for Circles participants dropped from an average of \$3,000 per family to \$799.

In addition, 21 Circle Leaders are no longer on public assistance, 24 haven't gotten jobs, and 20 have upgraded their job skills. Three families have purchased homes.

And, like McLendon, Circle Leaders value education. Of the 24 children in the program, 18 were on the A-B honor roll last year.

McLendon is not a typical example of "a person in poverty." In fact, there is no "typical" person, but individuals, all with a story to tell, and all wanting a better life for themselves and their children. Attendees at Circles of Hope Anson range from young adult singles to middle aged couples with children or single parents to displaced workers in their 50s and 60s. They meet every Thursday at 5:30 p.m. for a free meal and then break up to attend the Getting Ahead class, or to meet as Circle Leaders and continue planning strategies to get out of poverty.

Once a month Circle Leaders meet with their Allies, knowledgeable community members who are paired with a Circle Leader to share their experience and expertise. Other meetings can be arranged as often as the Circle Leader and Ally want, and contact is kept up via telephone or email. Some Circle Leaders and Allies become lifelong friends, each with something to give and each with something to learn.

Infants and younger children go to supervised child care and older youths are helped with programs such as tutoring, a computer lab, or a monthly 4-H meeting.

You can be involved. Volunteer your church or social organization to provide a meal, volunteer to serve on the Guiding Coalition or as an Ally, or support Circles financially. To volunteer call Yulonda Lindsey at 704-994-2333 or Stephen Shytle at 704-694-3654. Donations may be made out to Hands for Hope and mailed to 118 East Morgan Street, Wadesboro, NC 28170; or online at www.circlesofhopeanson.org.

Wildlife Commission Seeks Public Input for Game Land Planning

The NC Wildlife Resources Commission is holding seven public meetings in July and August to seek input in developing management plans for Commission-managed game lands across the state. Wildlife Commission staff will use public input from the meetings to help guide management and user activities on game lands for the next 10 years. Through its NC Game Lands Program, the Commission manages more than 2 million acres of public and private lands for hunters, anglers, trappers and other outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy.

"We are seeking input from all users of our game lands and others who are interested in how the properties are managed," said Lands Program Manager Isaac Harrold. "These meetings are not just for hunters and anglers. They are for wildlife watchers and photographers, birding groups, hikers, kayakers and others who have interest in our game lands. Everyone is encouraged to provide input."

The meeting closest to Anson County concerns Sandhills Game Land. It will be held tomorrow, Thursday, July 18 at 6 p.m. at Hinson Lake Rotary Lodge, located at 152 Hinson Lake Drive in Rockingham.

The Wildlife Commission also is accepting comments and suggestions from people who do not attend the meeting. The public can submit comments regarding game land management plans beginning July 16 at www.ncwildlife.org. Click on "Comment on Game Land Plans" in the scrolling icon links at bottom of the page. Comments also can be emailed to gamelandplan@ncwildlife.org. If emailing comments, note the name of the game land and type "Game Land Management Plan" in the subject line.

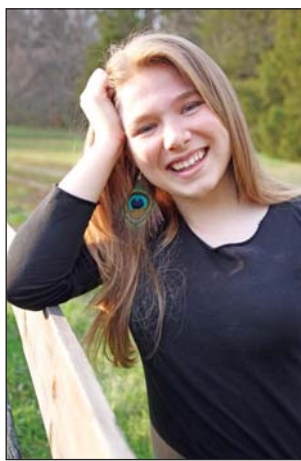
"Agriculture Adventures" Summer Camp Offered by Cooperative Extension

Anson County Cooperative Extension is proud to announce two sessions of summer camp focused on agriculture entitled, "Agriculture Adventures."

The first session, July 30th & July 31st is open to youth ages 5-8, and will take place from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Youth will learn how to make yourself into a cow and all about sheep, goats, and cattle! Youth will visit a farm and learn how to take care of animals.

The second session will take place August 1st & 2nd, and will take place from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. It is for youth ages 9 and up. This 2-day camp is for older participants who want to learn the finer details of animal agriculture. Youth will participate in hands-on demonstrations; learn about the industry and how what cows eat is all down to a science.

Each session is \$10. Registration must be made in person at the Anson County Cooperative Extension, located at 501 McLaurin Street in Wadesboro. A medical release form must be completed and notarized before camp. An adult must register youth. No refunds are allowed. Payment is due at registration. For more information contact Jessica Anderson, Agriculture Agent, at 704-694-2415.



ALISHA KELSEY NEWTON is a National Merit Scholarship winner and will be attending Vanderbilt University, where she will study cognitive science and communications. Alisha has received many awards and accolades from her school and multiple offers from highly desirable universities, amounting to a staggering amount in scholarship dollars.

Alisha resides with her parents, Bryan and Lisa Newton, in Waxhaw and is Valedictorian of the Parkwood High School graduating class of 2013. Two of her most treasured scholarships are the Monroe-Union Rotary Breakfast Club "Service Above Self" Scholarship and the Melton Memorial Scholarship, given to a Union County runner. She is a member of both the Beta Club and National Honor Society, and has received her school's English and Science Department Awards.

Ms. Newton was born in San Antonio, Texas and has since traveled the width and breadth of the United States, and crossed the Atlantic and Pacific oceans several times. She lived a number of her childhood years in the Philippines as an MK (missionary kid) and spent some of her teenaged summers with youth mission groups in France and China.

She is an athlete, a member of her school's cross-country, indoor and outdoor track, and swim teams. She has entered and completed a sprint triathlon, placing second in her age division.

Her hobbies include photography, writing, blogging, and layout design. She has had her photography and poetry published in Teen Ink, a magazine featuring the artistic gifts of teens. She competed annually in her school's Poetry Slam, and has recently competed in an oratory competition at the NC Beta Club state convention. In September 2012 she was privileged to attend the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, NC as a student journalist.

Alisha is a young lady of strong faith, integrity and high moral ethics and lives her life accordingly. She is a servant-leader in her JAARS youth group and participates in World Vision's 30 Hour Famine. This group of teenagers raise between \$7,000-\$7,500 each year to aid in the fight against child hunger around the world.

Having experienced third-world countries, she has seen the effects of poverty and hunger, and against this huge task she renders her personal best. From her own resources she designs and makes friendship bracelets for her self-created non-profit, Bracelets4Education. She sells them locally and online. The proceeds from the sale of bracelets are given to Cuatro Christian School in Manila, Philippines. This school, in partnership with two Manila churches, provides a totally free education, with shelter, food and clothing, to 226 abandoned, orphaned and dependent children from the squatter community of Cuatro.

Alisha was honored on her eighteenth birthday by her grandparents having her named a Paul Harris Fellow through the Wadesboro Rotary Club, in appreciation of the ways in which her life exemplifies the humanitarian and educational objectives of the Rotary Foundation. Paul Harris, the founder of Rotary International, was a man with an idea who changed the world, and Alisha is a young lady with purpose and goals that will change her world. She is the perfect candidate for this award. Alisha believes that every person can make a difference right where they are.

Before beginning classes at Vanderbilt in August, Alisha will be working at a summer camp in China, teaching English as a second language to kids attending the camp.

Alisha is the granddaughter of Calvin Haywood and Sue Newton of Wadesboro and of Sonja Simpson and the late Paul Simpson, Ph.D. of Pensacola, Florida.

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