



*Community Focused
Relationship Driven*

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A nonprofit organization

Office Hours

Monday—Friday
10 a.m.—4 p.m.
Closed Saturday & Sunday

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Peace Connections Newsletter



Gina Skinner and daughters Charlie (left) and Jaye are big fans of SEAK.

Blessing families for 10 years

For the past 10 years this June, the Summer Enrichment Activities for Kids (SEAK) has blessed countless parents as well as children.

For seven weeks each summer, SEAK provides 40 kids, ages six through 10, with social time, and parents with down time. It's a perfect combination for families when school lets out and boredom sets in.

"The program helps my girls to keep learning and practicing their social skills during summer vacation," said Gina Skinner, mother to Jaye and Charlie, and secretary at North Ridge Elementary School in Newton. "They love being around their friends, and at the same time, I love a little break, when I can catch my breath, and run to the bank or Dillons."

The way that SEAK blesses entire families is one of the beauties of the program, funded by Peace Connections through your financial gifts. Your generosity helps families of varied backgrounds to benefit from SEAK, which helps parents and kids to transition into vacation time.

"The program keeps kids from sitting around watching television all morning and gives them safe place to have fun and make new friends," said Sue Elder, longtime SEAK coordinator and special education paraprofessional for USD 373.

"And for parents who work outside the home, their kids won't be out roaming the streets and getting into trouble. This keeps their children occupied in healthy ways, and it helps the parents to be healthier, too."

Kids keep busy and happy with a wide range of activities: physical



SEAK participants enjoy a variety of activities, including learning about dairy cows, studying nutrition and creating art.

games, educational programs such as learning about dairy cows, snakes and owls, creating art, studying good nutrition and reading. "We try to bring in experts from the community, including police officers who do a safety unit with their police dogs, and Newton pool staff who do a water safety course."

Before SEAK begins each morning, USD 373 -- through a federally-funded program -- serves breakfast for free to the children, and for a small fee, to adults. Directly after the program, lunch is served, followed by supper later in the day. In 2015, the food program served 8,800 meals in the Sunset school cafeteria. Cathy Willis coordinates the 20 volunteers needed to serve meals, and Elder has several other assistants.

The food option allowed Gina to have lunch with her girls a couple of days each week, and to socialize with other adults, too.

"People were so nice and welcoming and warm, and never once did I feel we didn't belong there," Gina said. "The program is open to every family, no matter how much money you make, or don't make."



Sue Elder, SEAK coordinator

TEN for 10: Together, let's raise \$10,000!!!!

Thanks to your contributions, the Summer Enrichment Activities for Kids (SEAK) celebrates its 10th year this June. To help SEAK remain a strong program in Harvey County, we seek to raise \$10,000 dollars to mark this milestone. For more information on how to add your dollars to the celebration -- or to check out volunteer opportunities -- please visit www.peaceconnections.org. We are halfway to our goal, with \$4,500 donated so far! Help us to meet the \$10,000 goal with your financial gift today



Your donations to Peace Connections have empowered Mackala Blair, AmeriCorps VISTA, (pictured above right) to coordinate four Poetry Slam events at Norm's Coffee Bar in downtown Newton since fall of last year. Blair said that when she first envisioned the idea, she hoped it would help under-represented youth to become involved. "Growing up in poverty here in Newton, there weren't a lot of activities I could engage with because I couldn't afford them," she said. "That led to loneliness and depression. I hoped that someone would start something affordable and accessible. That was our guiding goal as we organized the poetry events. We set the poets' entry fee low and made admission free so that it could be affordable to everyone interested. We also made a great connection with Poetry for Personal Power, another non-profit organization, that has helped to develop this event into a popular community gathering that promises to grow."

Board/Volunteer Spotlight: Retirement is for reaching out

A month ago, Gary Rediger retired after 25 and a half years as a financial advisor with Everence. A couple of years prior, Gloria Rediger retired from a long career in social work.

For this couple -- who has been involved with Peace Connections and Circles for the past several years -- retirement doesn't mean putting their feet up and hiding their heads in the sand.

Instead, they are reaching out to others in Harvey County. In 2010, Gloria became an Ally in Circles of Hope to be a support person to a Circle Leader who was working toward a brighter future. Gloria shared her enthusiasm with Gary, which inspired him in 2011 to become a member and treasurer of the Peace Connections board. He also serves on the organization's Fund Development committee.

Though they have plans to travel and to enjoy their garden in rural Newton, they are also using some of their "free" time to enrich others.

"I had always thought that when I retired I wanted to be involved in the community somehow," she said. "And then I heard about Circles, and it felt like a good fit. I think that many people in poverty are misunderstood. There are a lot of reasons why they are in poverty, and I was interested in exploring that."

Gary said, "My challenges are helping to keep this whole thing funded. It involves both fund-raising efforts as well as being careful with our expenses -- something that our director, Jennifer, has done a good job with on both counts. I believe we have a solid base of donor generosity in this community that will help us tackle our challenges."

Beyond donor dollars, the courage of Circle Leaders in the face of great odds, coupled with the flexibility of the staff during a season of transition, has empowered the organization and the people it serves to move forward.

"The individual stories and experiences that Circle Leaders go through show how incredibly strong and hopeful they are in spite of all their struggles," Gloria said. One of her Circle Leader matches was Dennis and Patti. Patti is now a staff member for Circles. "She met her goals of paying off her credit cards and getting a better job and not having to commute to work in Wichita. Because of her persistence, she met all those goals."



Gary and Gloria Rediger are using retirement to keep active with Peace Connections, Circles and the Summer Food Program.



Your financial gifts are helping Peace Connections to move into a fresh future, with its new office location in The Hub, located above Prairie Harvest in downtown Newton. To celebrate its progress, Peace Connections sponsored an open house and a street fair March 29. About 100 people enjoyed the food and fun on Sixth Street outside the office. Jennifer Rose, director of Peace Connections and coordinator of Circles of Hope, said she deeply appreciates all the financial gifts and talents that made the event possible and successful. "Harvey County is an awesome community -- it is filled with strong and resilient people," she said. "Peace Connections is proud to be a part of this community, where together we live, laugh and help. It is because of your support that we can offer programs like Circles of Hope and the Summer Enrichment Activities for Kids (SEAK). We could not do it without you." She extends special thanks to The Hub and Outside the Walls, a music group, for sharing their talent. She also thanks event sponsors: Sonic, CARQUEST, Burger King, Sherwin Williams, Wal-Mart, Graber's Ace Hardware, First Baptist Church and the Farm Bureau Association. Photos above, from left: Bobby Rose (right), applies tattoos to the arm of Harley Carter; mother Deanna Jackson and daughter Megan; and children enjoy face-painting.



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Vision: Thriving communities sustained by peace and social justice.

Save the

Date!

**Community
Prom
Fundraiser,
Saturday,
May 7,
6 to 9 p.m.,
Newton
Rec Center**

*YOU HAVE MADE
A DIFFERENCE*

Ways To Give

Monthly Giving is our sustaining grace. Call or come by for details on how to set up a convenient monthly automatic gift.

Secure Online Donation through PayPal is available anytime through our website:
www.peaceconnections.org/Donate_redirect.html

Volunteering is a wonderful way to give. Our volunteers provide nearly twice the value of all other donations combined.

Thoughts and prayers are always welcome!

We apologize for the unintentional omission of Bill and Ruth Mason in our 2015 list of donors.

Peace Connections seeks to inspire transformation in people and systems by building relationships, resourcefulness and resilience.

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The Board of Directors meets monthly at 601 N. Main, Suite 303, Newton, KS. Meetings are open to the public.

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