

Meet Cover Director Eleanor Brantley Cunningham Talladega, Clay, Randolph, Coosa Child Care/Head Start Talladega, Alabama

“To get what you need for children, you need determination.” And determination is one thing of which Eleanor Brantley Cunningham has plenty. The seven child care programs that make up Talladega, Clay, Randolph, Coosa Child Care/Head Start are a thriving tribute to her efforts to make a difference in the lives of children. “I want all the children to be loved and cared for.”

Since 1971, she has focused her considerable energies on understanding what children need and then rallying support to get it for them. She is adept at perceiving specific needs, rallying community support, working with local governments and agencies, and championing the causes of children on state and national levels — an effective fundraiser on all levels and in all directions.

Eleanor was instrumental in creating TCRC, which has served thousands of children in four counties in eastern Alabama since its incorporation in 1971 as a private, non-profit agency. The concept for the agency originated from efforts of the Appalachian Regional Commission to lend educational support to poor children of families not eligible for normal welfare support. Today 868 children, infants through age 12, are served in subsidized and non-subsidized child care and Head Start programs. The integration of these two child development programs has had an exponential impact on both the quality and quantity of services offered.

Funding is provided by city and county dollars and the State of Alabama Education Trust Fund, as well as through payments made by the Department of Human Resources for eligible children. The Head Start component was granted in 1985, the result of a successful competitive proposal.

A striking feature of the agency is its responsiveness to each community. Using what is available to best advantage is a hallmark of Eleanor’s efforts. “Every program is different; each has its own special personality.”

Drew Court Child Development Center, Sylacauga — The center is housed in buildings provided by the Housing Authority in the Drew Court development. It

has grown from one building in 1971 to a seven building complex which recently underwent an extensive remodeling effort.

Talladega Child Development Center — What was once Talladega High School, a building abandoned during desegregation, now houses a child care program in its large, light spaces.

Roanoke Child Development Center — The program has outgrown the original two story 100 year old yellow house (complete with wraparound screen porch and a swing) to include two mobile Head Start units.

Childersburg Child Development Center — A small World War II hospital was renovated for children in 1972. The old surgery is now the kitchen. It will soon have a new mobile unit that will house 20 children.

Lineville Child Development Center — Two additions have recently been added to a private two story home that was renovated to meet Alabama DHR Licensing Codes.

Goodwater Child Development Center and Cottage Grove Child Development Center are both housed in school buildings with large comfortable rooms and great kitchens.

In the immediate future, a program for 22 Head Start children will be located on the grounds of Talladega County Elementary School. Feeding and play areas will be coordinated with the school system’s kindergarten program.

Each of the seven centers is accredited by The National Academy of Early Childhood Programs. Many have achieved reaccreditation and others are preparing for reaccreditation. As a result of this accomplishment, TCRC was recognized by the Alabama State Legislature.

TCRC, in service to families, offers speech, hearing, and dental screening to its children. Dental care is provided

*Cover
Director*

through the University of Alabama
Dental School.

“I do feel that we have made a difference, especially in the rural counties. A dedicated staff is our secret. Many of our staff have been with us since the beginning of the agency. We want our teachers to take good care of the children so we try to meet their needs. We offer the best wages we can, in addition to hospitalization, retirement, and extensive training. We provide a basic pre-work training program, four full days of training per year when centers close, and two hours of training each month. We also take fun trips together and enjoy a burnout day.

“If you’re going to do something, do it best, be the best. I believe that we are the best!”