



Afterschool Ambassador Program: Legacy of Leadership

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Sioux Falls' DeWit Selected as One of Just 12 'Afterschool Ambassadors' from Across Nation

Heather DeWit Will Work in South Dakota and Nationally to Expand Afterschool

Washington, DC – The Afterschool Alliance today announced that Heather DeWit, Director of Childcare and Education for Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota, has been selected to serve as a 2012-2013 Afterschool Ambassador. She is one of just 12 local leaders from across the country to be chosen for the honor this year. Each Afterschool Ambassador will continue directing or supporting a local afterschool program while also serving the one-year Afterschool Ambassador term organizing public events, communicating with policy makers, and building support for afterschool programs.

“Quality afterschool programs are essential to students, families and communities,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “These programs keep kids safe during the afternoon hours, help working families and inspire students to learn by offering hands-on science, math and other activities as well as homework help, mentoring opportunities, and much more. But in Washington, D.C. and all across the country, the afterschool programs that families rely on are being threatened by budget cuts and efforts to divert afterschool funds to other programs. As an Afterschool Ambassador, Heather will bring great energy to the work to build even stronger support for afterschool programs among parents, business and community leaders, lawmakers and others. I look forward to working with her this year.”

Afterschool programs are under intense pressure. The Afterschool Alliance's [Uncertain Times](#) survey project, the only research effort to examine how the economy affects afterschool programs, found that nearly two in five afterschool programs (39 percent) report that their budgets are in worse shape today than at the height of the recession in 2008. More than three in five (62 percent) afterschool programs report that their funding is down “a little or a lot” from three years ago. Even in communities where local economies and program funding are faring better, program leaders express significant concern about their financial outlook and their inability to reach all children who need afterschool.

“It is an honor to have this opportunity to share about the importance of afterschool and summer programs. The hours after school offer a unique opportunity for students to learn and explore their interests. I know first-hand how important it is for parents to have the confidence that their child is safe and engaged in hands-on learning after school.” said DeWit. “Afterschool programs are an essential piece of the academic success puzzle. They provide students and families with

support and positively impact America's workforce for the future. It is imperative that we ensure that there is a program for every child who needs one and strengthen those programs that are already serving students."

Heather DeWit has been an employee of Lutheran Social Services (LSS) for nearly 15 years. LSS has emerged as a leader in the field of afterschool and summer programming, currently serving hundreds of students from more than 10 Sioux Falls elementary schools. Last year, more than 56,000 lives were touched through a variety of services offered through Lutheran Social Services statewide. In addition to the childcare and education programs, core services offered by LSS include mentoring, adoption, pregnancy counseling, foster care, disaster response, consumer credit counseling, residential services for youth, refugee and immigration services, rural life ministries, affordable housing and mental health counseling. LSS serves people of all ages, races, faiths and economic levels with professional, confidential and affordable services. LSS is licensed by the State of South Dakota and accredited by the Council on Accreditation.

Each Ambassador will organize a major event for *Lights On Afterschool*, the Afterschool Alliance's 13th annual national rally for afterschool, to be held on October 18 this year. Last year, a million people participated in some 7,500 *Lights On Afterschool* events across the United States and at U.S. military bases worldwide.

The 2012-2013 Afterschool Ambassadors are:

- **California, Oakland:** Kasey Blackburn, After School Program Manager, Oakland Unified School District;
- **Delaware, Newark:** Fontella Taylor, Youth Development Extension Educator, University of Delaware, 4-H Afterschool;
- **Florida, Titusville:** Jacalyn Francisco, Assistant District Coordinator, Brevard Public Schools;
- **Georgia, Riceboro:** Christopher Stacy, CEO, Georgia Coastal Youth, Inc.;
- **Indiana, Indianapolis:** Milele Kennedy, Manager, City of Indianapolis Department of Parks & Recreation;
- **New York, Forest Hills:** Patrick Pinchinat, Beacon Director, Queens Community House;
- **North Dakota, Mandan:** Andrew Jordan, Program Director, Missouri River Educational Cooperative;
- **Rhode Island, Cranston:** Kelly Whaley, Program Manager, Cranston Community Learning Center.
- **South Dakota, Sioux Falls:** Heather DeWit, Director of Childcare and Education Services, Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota;
- **Vermont, North Clarendon:** Carrie Becker, Director, Rutland South Supervisory Union Afterschool;
- **Washington, Lynwood:** Victoria Raya, Diversity Program Manager, National Girls Collaborative Project; and
- **Wyoming, Thermopolis:** Jenny Davis, Program Coordinator, Hot Springs County School District #1.

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The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.