

5th Annual Kansas Equity and Access Leadership Awards

(Hays, April 3, 2016) Kansans for Equal Access to Transition Services (keatsks.org) announced its fifth annual Equity and Access Leadership Awards, for the school year 2016-2017. "We are overjoyed to be able to draw attention to the vital work being done by this year's six honorees," said KEATS founding director Robert Bruce Scott. "I brought a list of nominees to our advisory panel, and based my final selections on their passionate support for their choices as well as the compatibility between our mission and the values demonstrated by these organizations."

- Project SEARCH - a Sedgwick County Developmental Disability Organization - is a high school transition program for youth with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, focused on the goal of achieving competitive employment. Project SEARCH provides real world work experience combined with classroom instruction for students in their last year of high school.
- The Centro Hispano Resource Center of Lawrence was started in the fall of 2006 to address the needs of Lawrence's growing Hispanic population. Centro Hispano helps to bridge the gap between people's needs and the available community resources by providing translation and interpreting services, and empowering people by making them aware of how they can best utilize their resources.
- Camp Wood YMCA, in Elmdale, was established 100 years ago by a small visionary group of Kansas farmers, civil servants, business owners, and teachers who believed in the power of summer camp and its value to the young people of Kansas. Their summer residence camp, year-round outdoor education, and event hosting programs are guided by a commitment to youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility.
- The Disability Rights Center of Kansas (DRC) is a public interest legal advocacy agency empowered by federal law to advocate for the civil and legal rights of Kansans with disabilities. The DRC assists Kansas youth in securing their rights to transition and vocational rehabilitation services, and can be contacted at 877-776-1541 or info@drckansas.org.
- The Summer Food Service Program, paid for by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and administered by the Office of Child Nutrition and Wellness,

in the Kansas State Department of Education, aims to ensure that children continue to receive nutritious meals when school is not in session. The program reimburses schools, public agencies, and private nonprofit groups for food services. Free meals often are paired with summer education or recreation programs. The program is open to all children 18 or younger, and no proof of residency or income is required. Organizations interested in serving meals to children through a summer program should contact Kelly Chanay at KSDE, 785-296-2276 or visit www.kn-eat.org and select "Summer Food Service Program."

- The Office of Undergraduate Admissions at Kansas State University is being recognized as a special "Director's Choice" for this year's Equity and Access Leadership Awards on account of K-State's active recruitment of high-school graduates who are undocumented immigrants. Although Kansas law protects in-state tuition for qualifying immigrant high school graduates who are applying for residency or citizenship, undocumented youth from Kansas City, Missouri, high schools are generally not accepted at Missouri colleges and universities, but they are welcomed at K-State and many qualify for special scholarships to enable them to afford to earn a college degree and progress towards their dreams and goals. K-State administrators believe that many of these students will eventually become contributors and donors supporting scholarships for new generations of Hispanic students at K-State, because K-State provided them with an opportunity.

"We have a long list of winners this year," explained KEATS director Robert Bruce Scott, "but this is only the tip of the iceberg, and we hope to continue finding greater numbers of individuals and groups whose efforts are making a positive difference in the post-secondary school outcomes for Kansas youth from diverse cultural and linguistic heritages." Anyone wishing to bring forward a nominee may call 785-236-8158 or e-mail awards@keatsks.org.

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