

## Helping Our People Excel (HOPE) Celebrates 10<sup>th</sup> Year

### An Innovative GED Program

Sherman, March 21, 2014 - Dr. Susan Thomas, Executive Director of Texoma Council of Governments (TCOG) recognized today the 10<sup>th</sup> year of the Helping Our People Excel (HOPE) GED Program. The program is a collaborative effort made possible through the partnership of agencies serving on the Fannin Literacy Council. Texoma Housing Partners, a public housing consortium operated by TCOG, has been a partner agency since the inception of the Literacy Council in 2004.

“The HOPE GED Program is one of a kind,” Thomas stated. “It is the only open entry; open exit program available in Fannin County which provides students the opportunity to work at their own pace.” Thomas added, “This unique approach to attaining a GED has been the solution for many students struggling to attend other conventional programs and with over 120 graduates to date, the success speaks for itself.”

The Literacy Council is a 501(c) 3 non-profit supported by grants and donations. Lou Ann Taylor, TCOG Social Services Coordinator and Literacy board member said “we survive on a shoe-string budget, but the program is so important to our community and has such impact on the lives of the students we find a way to make it happen year after year.”

The program utilizes the AZTEC learning software which allows students to work on an individual time-frame. Use of this specialized software, along with one-on-one assistance from the GED teachers, results in a much higher rate of success for the students. To celebrate their success, each year a ceremony is held to recognize the students who have achieved their GED certification. Complete with cap and gown, students proudly walk across the stage to receive their certification as family and friends applaud their accomplishment.

The Texoma Council of Governments is a voluntary association of the local governments in Cooke, Fannin, and Grayson Counties. Established in 1968, the Texoma Council of Governments promotes economy and efficiency in the coordinated planning and development of the tri-county region through its community and economic development activities. Either directly, or through contractors, the Council provides housing, utility assistance, and weatherization services for low-income citizens in the region and assists the elderly through a variety of Area Agency on Aging programs. The Council also facilitates the delivery of grant funding for homeland security and criminal justice.

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