

NEWS RELEASE

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Long Time NADC Head Start Director Retires

After 49 years of dedicated service to NADC's Head Start program, Linda Cooper of Salem retired this month as Head Start Director. Hired in March 1971 as a teacher aide at Salem, she became a teacher aide II in 1973 and full-time teacher in 1974. She remained in that position until 1978 when she became Family Services Handicap Coordinator and shortly after that the Consortium Handicap Coordinator. In March 1988 she was named Program Director and in November 1989 she replaced Deltha Sharp after her passing to become Head Start Director for all programs in Fulton, Independence, Izard, Sharp and Stone counties where she remained until this month. Cooper is the last remaining NADC employee to have worked under every NADC executive director starting with Rayburn Richardson, Larry Goodwin, Brad Cummings and current director, Charlie Morris.

"It is almost unheard today to have an employee who has spent almost her entire working professional career with one organization," said Morris. "During her time here as Director, she has accomplished many great things and oversaw the expansion of the program over the last 31 years. She is definitely been an asset and she should be proud of her career and the many accolades and compliments many around the state have of her."

Asked what was the biggest difference she has seen over the years and she said in 1971 there was no state funded kindergarten and every child that registered was enrolled regardless of income. Today, Head Start is a free educational program geared to low income families and serving birth to five-year old kids instead of kindergarten age children.

"Head Start was one of the building blocks of President Johnson's War on Poverty program in the mid-1960s. Today, it continues to be one of the few programs that continues of having strong bipartisan support in Congress because of its success and foundation it creates in young people," said Cooper.

She said she has been fortunate Head Start and NADC has provided her opportunities she wouldn't have otherwise. When she began at NADC, she only had a tenth-grade education but with NADC and Head Start's help, she was able to further her education and eventually obtaining a Bachelor of Science degree in Education from the University of Arkansas.

"My passion has always been for the kids and their parents. Providing a quality program, great education centers and providing opportunities for parents to become Head Start aides and teachers are things that drove me," she added. "I have had great support from my staff, administration and Head Start funders to make a lot of that passion happen over the years. And because it is such a strong and vital program, it will continue for many more years down the road."

NADC will never forget Linda Cooper as they are planning to name their Head Start and Outreach office building in Salem after her in honor of her legacy to NADC and Head Start.

"I mentioned to the board of directors about a couple of years ago that I knew this day would come eventually and I wanted to do this since we own the building in honor of her since that was her hometown and much of her family remains there. People down the road need to know how much she was appreciated and NADC wants to recognize her value and dedication to our organization and growth," Morris added. A ceremony for the renaming will be held at a later date.

Asked what her plans were for the future and she replied to survive 2020 and start 2021 healthy and optimistic and be involved with groups that support children and young families. She said one of the founding concepts of Head Start is parents are a child's first and most important teacher. She said that is true and all Head Start programs will always assist parents in being the best parent they can be.

Currently, NADC operates 19 centers in 12 locations of combined Head Start programs in the five-county region plus many other low-income assistance programs. Administration offices are located in Batesville. Teresa Goings, current Early Head Start director, has been named interim Head Start director.