



For Immediate Release: June 29, 2018

Contact:

Katie Parker

Community Relations Specialist

(580) 618-1551

katherine.parker@smartstartok.org

OPSR Community Café Puts Serious Conversation on the Table

OKLAHOMA CITY — Simply put, it’s not easy to talk about a complex subject like child abuse. No one wants a child to experience a stomach growling from hunger, a lack of other basic needs or a physical violation of any kind. That’s why the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR) recently hosted the Elk City Community Café, creating a comfortable, open forum to address an uncomfortable issue.

OPSR partnered with the Oklahoma State Department of Health on this event in order to inform a child abuse prevention plan for the state. These forums gathered feedback specifically from parents as well as community partners who work with children and families.

“It was enlightening to see how the church can be involved in this collaborative process and come up with solutions to help the community with respect to strong and healthy children and families,” said Jeff Smith, Elk City United Methodist Church mission coordinator.

Elk City was selected as one of seven communities for this special opportunity to have their voice heard. Other communities chosen for this event include Ada, Altus, Bartlesville, Oklahoma City, Tulsa and Woodward.

During the “community café” participants split into small groups and delved into several hard-to-answer questions to identify priorities and a vision for the future. All the information was transcribed by Oklahoma State Department of Health officials who will analyze it and develop the child abuse prevention plan. In addition to the cafes, the state department will use surveys collected from professionals and families to assist the plan, which is expected to be complete by October.

While participants ranged from church members to child care workers to even Rep. Todd Russ (R – Cordell), the thread that tied everyone together was a concern and love for Oklahoma children.

“The future of our children is the most important thing we can focus on in our state,” Russ said.

During discussions several themes emerged including how public, private and faith-based organizations could partner to tackle issues as well as how to best find and communicate with families that need support. Other areas of concern included ways in which Elk City and the state could be more proactive instead of focusing on reactive services. Despite these existing barriers, participants didn’t seem discouraged by their conversations and instead expressed their hope for future collaborations and efforts to prevent neglect and child abuse.

“Thank you for being here and not shying away from speaking about your struggles. The conversations we’re having are important and will make an impact across the state for children and families,” said Debra Andersen, OPSR executive director.

###