



Casey Dobbins

**Wiley RA Of
The Year**

2005

Introduction

My alarm went off at 8:00 AM on a Saturday morning. “Arggg,” I thought. “No college student should have to get up this early on a Saturday.” I dragged myself through the shower, barely brushed my teeth, and pulled on the same clothes I had worn the night before. I grabbed my wallet and my keys and yanked open the door. To my surprise there was a layer of ice covering everything in sight. “Great,” I mumbled to myself. I went back and grabbed my heavy coat, hat, and gloves before ice-skating my way over to the Frith Community Center.

Upon my arrival to the community center I found six people standing outside, waiting in the cold. “Come in where it is warm,” I called to them as I unlocked the community center. We all moved inside to wait.

A few minutes later a Kansas State University van pulled up outside the community center. “Casey is here,” I told everybody. We all headed outside to get into the van. As I opened the van door and crawled inside Casey said, “Sorry I am late.” “The ice scrapper that was provided with the van broke when I started to scrape the windows, so I had to sit and wait for the heater to clear the windows.” “No problem,” I replied. “We were able to wait inside where it was warm.”

Casey then started her Saturday morning routine of checking the student ID’s of the residents who had joined us in the van and having each one of them sign a waiver. We waited for a few moments and a couple more residents joined us in the van. Once Casey thought we had everybody we headed over to the K-State Union to pick up more students. Once everybody was settled into the van we headed to Wal-Mart, Dillon’s, Aldi’s, and the International Food Store. This Saturday, just like every other Saturday throughout the academic year, Casey was taking the students of Kansas State University who did not have any transportation of their own to do their weekly shopping.

Shopping Shuttle is just one of the many programs that Casey Dobbins has overseen during the 2004-2005 school year. While many of the Resident Assistants (RA’s) at Kansas State University donate their time and talents to helping the students we serve, I have never seen a RA as committed and as dedicated as Casey Dobbins. Casey loves people and her love is evident in her daily interactions with residents, her passion for her job, and her appreciation of the community in which she lives. Casey has been a phenomenal addition to the Jardine community over the last year and it is with great honor that that residents and staff of the Jardine Apartments Complex nominate Casey Dobbins for Resident Assistant of the Year.

Wiley Involvement

Casey has had the unique opportunity of working with the residents of “W” building as well as all the other residents of Wiley and of Jardine for the last year. After we hired Casey in the spring of 2004 we discovered that some of our returning staff members were planning to be gone for most or part of the summer. Since our apartments are open all year long, it is necessary for us to maintain adequate staff at all times. In order to keep Jardine running smoothly over the summer months we decided to ask our newly hired staff members if they would like to start work

a bit early. When we offered Casey the opportunity to start working at Jardine in May and she jumped at the chance to begin serving her new community before the traditional “first day” for new hires in July.

When Casey started her new job in May she dove in head-first and has hardly come up for air since then. She began by getting to know the residents around her. She went door-to-door to introduce herself and find out about her new neighbors. Since there was not a RA living in the building next to her, she also started to get to know those residents too. By the time school started in August she knew most of the Wiley residents, regardless of whether they were technically “her” residents.

Every August the Wiley staff sponsors a “Welcome Back” event to encourage residents to get to know their neighbors and to give residents an opportunity to voice their concerns about living in the Wiley Apartments. Once it was established that this year’s opening event would be a Bar-B-Q, Casey went to work. She made fliers for the event and helped to deliver them door-to-door. She also left a voice-mail message for every Wiley resident to remind them of the Bar-B-Q the day before the event took place. She also helped to plan the games that were going to be provided for the residents, and helped create the menu for this event. The day of the event Casey helped to prepare dinner and set-up everything that would be needed throughout the evening. As residents arrived she greeted each of them and engaged many of them in conversation. She also helped with the cleanup, which the coordinator of the event was very thankful for.

This pattern of behavior was repeated many times throughout the year. The Wiley staff as a whole is required to do one program a month and Casey took it upon herself to coordinate the Wiley programs for the months of September, October, November, and March. In September she planned an ice cream social and was able to purchase 6 different varieties of Call Hall ice cream, none of which went wasted. She also had a variety of topping available and found appropriate music for everybody to enjoy while they socialized and ate their ice cream. In October Casey put together a spaghetti dinner that was open to all Wiley Residents. Spaghetti, garlic bread, salad, and dessert were provided and many residents came to eat dinner together and enjoy each other’s company. For the month of November Casey created a Salsa Night. For this program she recruited residents to make their favorite salsa recipe and provided tortilla chips for the tasting and the judging. She also secured a couple of Salsa dancers to come in and teach the residents how Salsa Dance. When March rolled around Casey was ready to celebrate St. Patrick’s Day. So she planned a green dinner (complete with green beverages and a green dessert) and hosted a green costume contest. Through all of these programs Casey took care of publicity, making sure food and supplies were picked up, securing reservations for the place where each event was held, making sure there was enough staff to run the event, welcoming each resident to the event, conversing with residents during the event, and making sure that everything was cleaned up and returned to its proper location after the event.

Beyond connecting with residents on a personal level (which is not an easy task in an apartment setting) and promoting and executing successful programs for the Wiley residents, Casey has also role modeled an outstanding attitude toward the many changes that are happening at the Jardine Apartments Complex. As Jardine has started the redevelopment process, Casey has demonstrated her flexibility and her willingness to help many times. When Casey first found out

that Guest Housing was going to be dissolved and students from the residence halls were going to be moving into P-building she knew that the dynamics of the complex were changing. One of the first changes noticed by the residents of Wiley when the residence hall students returned from winter break was the sudden lack of parking available in front of their buildings. While it would have been easy to whine and complain about this change, Casey handled this situation with poise and grace. She encouraged people to be patient with each other and reminded residents that it was important to welcome our new neighbors to our community.

Jardine Involvement

Even though Casey has been assigned to serve the Wiley community, her involvement has spanned the gamut of the entire Jardine community. Casey dedicated a multitude of time to programming for all the residents of Jardine throughout this academic year. She started last August by helping plan and coordinate Opening Olympics, a major program that involves going door-to-door to invite each Jardine resident, planning games for children and adults between the ages of 2 and 70, securing enough food to serve approximately 200 people, facilitating the entire Jardine staff throughout the program, and cleaning up after this event that spans 2 city blocks. Casey also coordinated the Month of Love program that took place throughout the month of February. To celebrate the month of love Casey planned a couple's bowling trip, successfully recruited pictures of love (which were wedding/engagement pictures with stories about the traditions surrounding each couple's engagement/wedding) to display in the Frith Community Center, and the delivery of candygrams. Beyond coordinating these big programs, Casey has continually made herself available to help with all the programs in Jardine, and when Casey comes to help she shows up early to help set up, she does whatever needs to be done during the program, and she stays and to help clean up after the program.

The biggest responsibility that Casey has accounted herself to this year is one of the most needed programs throughout Jardine and the international community at K-State. That program is Shopping Shuttle. Shopping Shuttle is a service that is offered to all K-State students, though it is primarily geared toward international students. A van is reserved for this service every week through the K-State motorpool. The van has been driven by Casey every other Saturday for the entire academic year and picks up students at the Frith Community Center in Jardine and at the K-State Student Union every Saturday. Once everybody has been picked up the Shopping Shuttle makes stops at Wal-Mart, Dillon's, Aldi's, and the International Food store. After everybody has had the chance to pick up the items they need for the next week, Casey personally takes every person on the Shopping Shuttle to their place of residence to drop them off so that they do not have to carry their groceries and other necessities for a long distance. This program allows K-State students without transportation the opportunity to get the things they need to live from week to week. The Office of International Programs is responsible for driving the van on the weekends between Casey's excursions, but it is Casey that truly puts her heart and soul into this program. When you ask Casey what her favorite experience has been since working in Jardine, she replies, "Shopping Shuttle." When you ask her why this is her favorite program she will tell you it is because of the people who use this service. She loves meeting the people and learning about their cultures. She feels that the people she meets during Shopping Shuttle create a bond with her that cannot be reproduced in other programs. The people who need this service are the people who utilize it, and they are all so grateful for the time and dedication that Casey

has given to make this program and service such a success. Every Jardine staff member takes a turn helping Casey during the course of each semester, but Casey is the only staff member willing to get up at 7:30 every other Saturday morning to serve the students of the K-State campus.

Beyond programming Casey has made other extraordinary contributions to the Jardine Community. One of the requirements of the Wiley RA's is to complete 6 office hours each week in the Jardine Apartments Office. During this time they are asked to help answer the phone, serve the people who walk into the office, file the necessary apartment information, and to complete other administrative tasks that need to be done. Casey has consistently gone above and beyond what is required of her in the office. One of the first challenges that Casey took on when she started her office work was Guest Housing. When our Guest Housing Coordinator had to be out of town for a few weeks last summer Casey was ready and willing to learn how to do this tedious job. She was trained in under one week and successfully carried out these extra duties.

Almost any job description that you look at has a clause in it that states that you will need to compete "other duties as assigned." The Wiley RA position is no different. Even though most job descriptions have this clause, few have as many interesting "other duties" as the Wiley RA position, and nobody has ever been as willing to take on these "other duties" as Casey Dobbins. Beyond Guest Housing, another "other duty" that Casey took on was an extra building. The Jardine complex lost a staff member in late September. When this staff member left, five buildings were left unattended. When the Jardine staff met to discuss how to maintain coverage in these buildings until somebody new could be hired, Casey took on the responsibility of maintaining a second building. While other staff member also took on extra buildings, Casey was extremely thorough about her new responsibilities. She went door-to-door and met all of her new, through temporary, residents and told them where she could be found and how to best contact her with questions and concerns. This was particularly important since Casey lives four blocks away from the residents she was serving in her second building. Even though she was not geographically close enough to see and hear what their questions and concerns might be, Casey made it a point to go door-to-door a couple of times a month so that residents would have an opportunity to see her and talk to her. Casey also immediately started to include their needs in her programming efforts. She invited all of the adults to the Salsa Night that was being planned for the Wiley residents. Not wanting to leave children out of programming opportunities, she helped develop the Kid's Cooking Corner, which was a program that taught children how to make healthy, inexpensive snacks for themselves that did not involve cooking or sharp knives.

The Jardine staff has also benefited greatly from Casey's leadership over the last year. Casey volunteered to be the person responsible for staff development and staff retreat. To help the staff bond, Casey started this academic year by organizing a progressive dinner for all the staff members. She also established a staff tradition of going to the Union on Friday nights to see the movie that was playing. Casey has also planned staff dinners at various Manhattan eating establishments and she synchronized our staff holiday celebration in December. If that were not enough to keep a staff united, Casey also played a key role in managing the annual Jardine staff retreat. Planning the retreat required her to work more hours than she is required to, but Casey did not even seem to notice as she booked a place for everybody to sleep and planned the training schedule for the weekend.

Casey's leadership for Jardine extends past her dedication to the staff. While her accomplishments of developing staff camaraderie and unity have already been discussed, it is also necessary to point out that she has also taken on a lot of responsibilities that have eased the schedules of other staff members. When we lost a staff member in September, we also lost our Homecoming Chair. When everybody else was committed elsewhere for Homecoming, Casey took on the awesome responsibility of coordinating all of the Homecoming events for Jardine. She attended the all-university meetings and facilitated all of the discussions about Homecoming. She also created the publicity needed to get the word out about Homecoming to Jardine residents and she actively recruited Jardine residents to compete in Homecoming events.

Not only has Casey served the Jardine community as a staff member, she has also served as a volunteer. One of the on-going programs that is offered to the children of Jardine is tutoring. Many of the children who live in Jardine do not speak English as their first language, and even the children who have a good grasp on the language need help with their schoolwork. For the past couple of years Jardine has been able to fund the tutoring program with grant money that enabled us to pay tutors to come in twice a week to work with the children who needed it. Unfortunately this money ran low this year and we could no longer afford to pay tutors, so we started looking for volunteers who would be able to tutor one or two nights a week. When it was announced in staff meeting that we were short tutors, Casey instantly volunteered her time to become a tutor. Casey was paired with a young boy who was learning English and the two of them made great progress.

Since Casey still had some spare time to fill after coordinating Homecoming and Shopping Shuttle and since tutoring the children of Jardine was not enough to fill her time void, Casey also volunteered to be the Jardine RAMA (Residents Assistant and Multicultural Assistant) Council representative. This was the first year for Jardine to join in on RAMA council meetings and Casey was excited to be part of this group. She attended all of the RAMA Council meetings and became the liaison between the Hall staff and the Jardine staff. She has done an outstanding job of keeping everybody informed about what is going on and the Jardine staff feels that this connection has helped bring the Jardine staff and the Hall staff closer together.

Academics

After doing so much for Jardine and the Department of Housing and Dining, it may seem impossible that Casey is also a successful student. Yet, somehow between all of her activities Casey finds a way to keep up with her studies. Casey had an even bigger challenge this year because she graduated in December and had to be accepted to graduate school for the spring semester in order to keep her job as a Wiley RA. She somehow managed to balance all of her fall finals, graduation, and taking the GRE (Graduate Record Examination) with all of the programming that continued through the month of December.

While every RA knows that a large variety of issues can arise when you are working with people, many RA's do not receive the opportunity to personally confront resident issues that extend into the society around us. This year some issues of discrimination arose for one of Casey's residents and she responded beautifully. One of Casey's true passions is the diversity of

mankind. When Casey was informed that one of her residents was dealing with discrimination in the form of racism, she was ready and willing to support and help in any way she could. Even though all of the Housing and Dining staff is trained to deal with serious issues such as these, Casey did a phenomenal job of demonstrating her ability to put her training to use and maintained the utmost professionalism to help her resident resolve the situation. Through her quick response to this situation Casey was able to help a resident in need and she was also able to educate others about acceptance.

Awards

Casey has been recognized for her outstanding work a couple of times over the last year. In September she was awarded a Regional Honorable Mention for her RA of the month nomination. She also received a certificate from Craig Wanklyn for demonstrating a positive attitude and strong staff spirit in the month of February.

Conclusion

There are many people across the K-State campus who should be recognized for the contributions they have made to K-State and the surrounding community. They all should be commended for a job well done. The Jardine staff would like to recognize each of them for their hard work, their dedication, and their passion for making K-State such a great place to live. Yet the Jardine staff would particularly like to recognize Casey Dobbins. Her spirit, determination, and love for people has impacted the residents of Wiley, the residents of Jardine, the staff of Jardine, the staff of the Residence Halls, the community of K-State, and the community of Manhattan. Casey should be an inspiration for all of us. She does not waste time, but finds time to serve those around her. While the rest of us are enjoying a Saturday morning sleep-in Casey is up driving students to the store so that they can purchase life's necessities. When the rest of us are trying to decide whether or not to do a program Casey already has a program planned for that month and has two more ideas for what program she can do next month. Above all, when something needs to be done and nobody volunteers to step up to the plate, Casey rearranges her schedule and finds time to help those in need. Casey Dobbins is a phenomenal woman and an outstanding RA, and that is why the Jardine Apartments Complex would like to nominate her for RA of the year.