OPE is accepting applications for the Education Opportunity Center grant competition through April 4, 2015. Apply now!

With a goal to increase the number of adults who enroll in postsecondary institutions, the Education Opportunity Center (EOC) grant program provides counseling and information on the college application and financial aid process to qualified adults who are interested in entering a postsecondary program or continuing a postsecondary degree. The program also seeks to improve the financial and economic literacy of its participants.

(Left) Former inmate, Ms. Vanessa Butler (married in 2015 --now Mrs Crouch) rediscovered her potential during her visits with EOC’s Education Specialist Klye Davis (right) at a local EOC center in Claremore, OK. When Mr. Davis first tested Vanessa using the TABE she was assessed at the 5th grade level. After being incarcerated three times, just four months later Vanessa earned her GED certificate. In December of 2016, Vanessa will graduate with an AA degree in Sociology with a goal to pursue a bachelor's in Community Counseling. Read her moving story below.

Types of Services may Include:

- Academic advice, personal counseling, career workshops, tutoring and mentoring;
- Information on postsecondary education opportunities and student financial assistance;
- Help in completing applications for college admissions, testing, and financial aid; coordination with nearby postsecondary institutions;

- Media activities designed to involve and acquaint the community with higher education opportunities;

- Programs and activities previously mentioned that are specially designed for students who are limited English proficient, students from groups that are traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education, students with disabilities, students who are homeless children and youths, students who are in foster care or are aging out of foster care system or other disconnected students.

Those eligible to apply include:
Specifically: Institutions of Higher Education, public and private agencies and organizations including community-based organizations with experience in serving disadvantaged youth, combinations of such institutions, agencies, and organizations, and secondary schools.

Participants must reside in the target area served by an EOC. The students must be at least 19 years old and two-thirds of them must be potential first-generation college students and low-income persons. If the services of a Talent Search program are not available in the target area, persons under 19 may be served.

EOC Success Story!
The Rogers State University (RSU) Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) project, based in Claremore, Oklahoma, is truly exemplifying the EOC mission by assisting adults who don’t have easy access to higher education. The RSU EOC project provides services to Oklahoma inmates, in addition to other vulnerable groups, including those in workforce centers and adult foster care. They help inmates take those first critical steps to re-enter the educational pipeline, which Mrs. Crouch attests are often the hardest. Here's Vanessa’s story...

I grew up in a poor home where my dad was an addict and not around much. I first used drugs at age ten and thought it was normal. I loved my dad even though he was an addict. He passed away my junior year of high school, I was broken hearted. After that I followed my dad's footsteps, selling and using drugs. I missed a lot of school and failed my senior year.

By age nineteen I had a felony case, my drug addiction continued for three years and I ended up in prison. In prison I regained focus, determined to be a better person. Wanting to get my education; TRIO helped me enroll in GED classes in the fall of 2010 where I obtained my GED.

Upon release in September 2011, I came to His House Ministry Homes in Claremore, Oklahoma. TRIO again assisted me by completing my FAFSA and the admissions application to Rogers State University. I was not accepted into RSU because of my felony conviction. However, a special person from RSU stepped forward to support my application, within days I was accepted. I was going to RSU, I was thrilled!
Attending RSU, the EOC family has been there offering advice, friendship and a smile of encouragement. This unconditional support has been constant for me as I work toward my degree at the university. While attending RSU I served as house manager at His House Ministry Homes helping women released from prison transition into society. Today as a leader in Celebrate Recovery I visit women in the County Jail, who struggle with addictions. My goal is to earn a degree in Community Counseling, becoming a drug and alcohol counselor helping those recovering from addictions. I've worked hard to get where I am today with a lot of help from TRIO and an education. Six years ago I didn’t see myself as a college student because I had no confidence. Today I know I can do whatever I want and be whoever I want to be with the support I have. There’s no stopping me!

Vanessa Crouch is just one example of such a journey back to education through the information and support provided by EOC.

To learn more about this program and to apply visit the Education Opportunity Centers grant program webpage on OPE’s website.

For additional information on OPE’s 2016 grant competitions please visit OPE’s Funding Opportunity page or look out for grant announcements by following us on Twitter @EDPostsecondary.