



Many LWS members continue to support kids enrolled in Family Services' Child Development program.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FAMILY SERVICES INC.

# LEADERSHIP CONNECTS TO EDUCATION

A teddy bear parade showed Annette Ellis a nuance of need in Forsyth County.

Ellis was a member of Leadership Winston-Salem's 2009 Action Learning Team that partnered with Head Start, which is now Family Services Inc., Child Development. The nonprofit provides a comprehensive program of educational, social services, and parent involvement opportunities to low-income children and their families in the community.

During their partnership, the Head Start staff coordinated a teddy bear collection and parade for area children, and the LWS team learned that there were some children in Winston-Salem who had never had a teddy bear.

"The teddy bear is not about the toy because toys are not necessities like food and water," Ellis says. "The teddy bear represented something more ... it was the comfort, the security, the love that it represents."

With the teddy bears serving as inspiration, the group from LWS looked to increase its involvement. The Head Start management team wanted to bring global exposure to their children through activities such as music, art, and literature, and they had hoped the LWS team could help, explains Marcy Sheets, who was then the Community Engagement Manager for Head Start.

"The professionals [from LWS] with varied experience and background were amazing," Sheets says. "They asked numerous

questions about the program and began what was one of the most exciting exchanges among themselves with ideas, suggestions, and enthusiasm flowing back and forth. ... At the end of the meeting, they decided to expand the project to the parents and bring new community partners to our program, as well as strengthen those few we had at that time. The team spread out across the community and talked with numerous corporations and nonprofits. After many months, the LWS team presented us with a binder listing all new potential community partners, what they could contribute, and their contact information."

Several LWS team members continue to support the program today with food drives, toy drives, and helping feed families most in need. One team member still sends a check right before Christmas break that has come at exactly the right time to help a family in crisis, Sheets says.

When Ellis received a Volunteer Leadership award a few years ago, she designated Head Start as the recipient of the \$1,000 award, which was used for a college scholarship for a sibling of a Head Start student. To this day, Ellis and her husband, Mike, continue to support the cause.

"We can read about situations and challenges that people face, but LWS gave me a chance to meet those people, actually face to face, hear their stories, and feel their real life experiences," Ellis says. "I always knew I was a part of a community, but now I know the community is also a part of me."

—KATHY NORCROSS WATTS

*This article is the third in a yearlong series on Leadership Winston-Salem as the program celebrates its 30th anniversary. For more information on the program, go to [leadershipws.org](http://leadershipws.org).*