

Resilience Embodied

Despite a decade of challenges, Mississippi HIPPY site always bounces back

When asked what makes their HIPPY site resilient by design, Gail M. Brown, Project Director at the Community Students Learning Center (CSLC), explains it this way: “I think that’s our middle name—resilient—simply because there have been many challenges over the years, but we’ve always been blessed and we’ve come up with ways to not let the program fall,” she said. “When you say resilient, we have been one resilient program and I think it’s due to the leadership that we’ve had.”

And that leadership has proven its resilience through a number of challenges over the last decade—from funding shortfalls to the passing of the HIPPY coordinator, and now the COVID-19 pandemic’s effect on the program—but has always kept what’s most important top of mind: helping the community it serves to thrive.

This is nothing new to CSLC. Serving the Lexington, Mississippi area, the Center offers housing in addition to programs designed to provide children in underserved, rural areas with the tools they need to create a better future for generations to come. As a result of this dedication to the community, it only made sense for the Center to become a HIPPY site.

“We looked at the research and we see how well these children do compared to kids who have not participated in HIPPY,” said Beulah Greer, CSLC’s Executive Director. “We expect our children to do well, we expect our parents to work with them, but if they don’t have the right tools, then it’s going to be almost impossible. With HIPPY, all the tools are there.”

In providing those tools, the Center has faced numerous challenges—not the least of which is being able to keep the HIPPY program funded. In order to make up for shortfalls in funding, the site has relied on creative ideas—from organizing motorcycle shows to holding garage sales—to ensure that the program can continue. And after going through lean times, CSLC has recently gotten the money it needs to run the program the way they want to—including installing a replacement for the coordinator who passed away earlier this year.

But of course, the new coordinator, Lubertha Banks, is stepping into her role as the whole world faces a challenge that no one could have predicted or planned for. Despite having to work with families remotely, she is hopeful that with the funding and the ability to hire new home visitors, they will be able to reach their recruitment goals despite the pandemic. And when the country bounces back from COVID-19, CSLC plans to resiliently move forward with keeping HIPPY families engaged by showing them how much they mean to the community. For Lubertha, she looks forward to being able to continue building her relationships with the families through face-to-face activities, like movie nights.

“I try to build a relationship with the parents; to get to know the parents and I want them to get to know me. I want to let them know they are special,” she said. “If that happens, they will do better in the program.”