

Oregon State University Extension Service

METRO CONNECTION

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Introducing our RECAN member LaRue Williams

by Stephanie Haugen



LaRue Williams grew up with no worries, running through fields and gardens in the fresh air outside Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. She remembers being outside and feeling “like the whole world was wide open,” Williams said. “I had a wonderful childhood.”

Williams has since dedicated her career to bringing that delight to the childhoods of thousands across the country, and most recently in Washington County. Working with children since she was a teenager, Williams has had a clear grasp of her calling from early on. “It’s all I’ve ever done,” she said.

As the director of the county’s Oregon Child Development Coalition (OCDC), Williams is responsible for budgeting, staffing and program planning for the state and federally funded organization that provides early childhood education to Oregon’s low-income children.

Williams first partnered with OSU Extension Family and Community Health (FCH) faculty, Maureen Quinn several years ago to teach hands-on nutrition and cooking classes for parents. The classes cover selecting and preparing healthy food along with budgeting tips for families with limited income. Many of the class participants, for example, don’t know they can use SNAP benefits to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at local farmers markets.

“OSU’s programs are so well received,” Williams said. “Parents often ask if they can come back.”

The classes are part of OCDC’s mission to provide families and children with “holistic wellness,” Williams said, because a healthy family unit is integral in helping create healthy children. Williams is lucky. “I get to see children and families grow everyday socially, emotionally and academically.”

Williams enjoys visiting the Oregon Coast, going for walks, reading murder mysteries and spending time with her husband, daughter and grandson. After moving to Oregon from Arizona, where she worked in early childhood education programs, Williams discovered the natural beauty of the state she now calls home.

Being on RECAN gives Williams the opportunity to learn about OSU Extension’s multitude of programs and bring that information back to the families she serves. RECAN members “want to share because everybody wants to see Washington County thrive and excel,” Williams said. “And OSU has a lot of doors open for people to walk through in this community.”

Williams is thankful for RECAN because it allows her to interact with so many people from different areas of the county she wouldn’t have otherwise ever met.

“It’s always worth it when someone asks you to volunteer,” Williams said. “We get so much more out of it than we’re giving.”