

## **Three Winners of Kansas Equity and Access Leadership Awards**

(Manhattan, April 8, 2014) The third annual Kansas Equity and Access Leadership Awards were announced today by Dr. Robert Bruce Scott, director of Kansans for Equal Access to Transition Services (keatsks.org). “There were literally dozens of nominees this year,” said Scott, “and I am thankful to the KEATS advisory panel for guiding me to three who really stood out as making the most positive difference for young Kansans from diverse heritages.”

This year’s honorees are: Teens Reaching Adult Independent Living (TRAIL), the TRAIL programs of Kansas City, Topeka, and Wichita; the El Centro “Mary Lou Jaramillo Scholarship Fund” for students attending the Academy for Children (AFC) in Kansas City; and Maria Boyd, organizer of this week’s Indigenous Empowerment Summit at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence.

The TRAIL program assists young people ages 17 to 22 navigate what would otherwise be a very complicated path from adolescence to adulthood for children preparing to age out of the foster care system, explained Scott. The scholarship fund at El Centro, named for Mary Lou Jaramillo, past president of El Centro, supports enrollment at the Academy for Children, a fully accredited dual language preschool in Kansas City. The Indigenous Empowerment Summit at Haskell runs all day Friday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, and includes presentations by Native American Indian leaders, a “Buffalo Feast,” and a “Heels for a Cause” fashion show to collect donations of canned goods and clothing for victims of domestic violence.

“The personal story of the Haskell summit organizer, Maria Boyd, is a very compelling tribute to the importance of self-determination and breaking the cycle of situations and conditions that might otherwise limit a young person’s resilience and creativity,” said Scott. “The seven members of our KEATS advisory panel were adamant about naming Boyd one of our 2014-2015 Kansas Equity and Access Leaders for her dedication to making a positive difference for Haskell students and other members of the Lawrence community.”

According to Scott, “the value of El Centro’s scholarship for bilingual preschoolers to attend the Academy for Children is inestimable and infinite.” Decades of research have shown a positive correlation between bilingual instruction in the early years of schooling and high levels of achievement in English classrooms in high school and post-secondary education, he explained. “By reinforcing a child’s heritage language,” Scott said, “schools like El Centro’s academy are strengthening the foundation upon which that child will build his or her English language skills as well.”

The TRAIL program was created in 2010 by Pathway Family Services, Inc., of Topeka, to provide youth from the foster care system with an opportunity to make the transition to adulthood while learning skills for independent living within a community. Pathway provides

fully furnished and equipped TRAIL apartments, with on-site case management and supervision. Before exiting the TRAIL program, youth are required to identify an adult mentor in the community who they can rely on for further guidance.

“This year’s three Kansas Equity and Access Leadership awardees are wonderful examples that all of us can learn from,” said Robert B. Scott, KEATS director. “Successful transition outcomes truly begin in the earliest years of a child’s life, as El Centro’s ‘Mary Lou Jaramillo Scholarship Fund’ reminds us”—“Pathway’s TRAIL program strategically fills a potential gap between high school IEPs and local social services for young people transitioning from adolescence in a foster family to independent adulthood”—“And Maria Boyd’s determination to graduate from college herself and make a positive difference for Native American youth by organizing events like Haskell’s Indigenous Empowerment Summit stands as a beacon of hope.”

The Kansas Equity and Access Leadership Awards are presented yearly to deserving individuals, schools, districts, agencies, and organizations that have distinguished themselves by their innovative work on behalf of youth and families from diverse heritages to improve transition outcomes.

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*For more information:*

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