



## Every inch of progress is helped along by teacher

By CAROLYN PLOTTS

Some teachers measure their students progress in leaps and bounds. Teachers of the mentally handicapped measure their students progress in inches.

Laquita Smith has been a teacher at Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas, an intermediate care facility, for 13 years. She has seen the approach to teaching her special students change. In her early career it was rudimentary skills. Now, students are in life-skill classes. They are encouraged to develop to their fullest potential.

Mrs. Smith said a teacher has to be creative in designing a program adapted to the resident's capabilities. She said they learn how to wash their hands, set a table, brush their teeth, about grooming and personal care.

She is assigned to the men's residential home on Grant Street but will fill-in at the women's house, too. She is the main caregiver for two men and works with them every day.

Mary Ahlemeyer, the Norton facility manager said, "Laquita is one of our best teachers. She can tell the progress of the persons she serves. She has good skills and is determined. She also has patience, because sometimes it takes years to teach one skill."

Mrs. Smith said, "This can be a stressful job. It does take a certain kind of person. They have to be patient, calm and motivated. Motivated

because of the slowness of the progress of the person served. All my co-workers are really great people."

Ms. Ahlemeyer praised Mrs. Smith by saying, "Laquita's main attribute is her compassion for her charges. She will advocate for their needs."

Mrs. Smith said continuity is what the staff at the agency tries to provide the students. Routine is important to their feeling secure. "These residents came from the state hospital. They are getting older and their behaviors have changed. We (the staff) have worked hard for their inclusion into the community."

Ms. Ahlemeyer echoed that sentiment. "We really appreciate the community's acceptance. One of the resident's biggest thrills is the annual Halloween Parade."

Mrs. Smith is a Certified Nurse's Aide, a Certified Medication Aide and a Life Skills Rehabilitation Aide. She is also certified to mentor other staff members. Recently, she received recognition when she was awarded the Teaching Family Association award at a meeting in Cape May, N.J.

Mrs. Smith and her husband Travis, have two daughters; Makayla, 9 and Jaden, 5. She is a member of Norton Christian Church where she teaches an AWANA class. She is also a board member of Sunshine Learning Center.

She loves horses and dogs, shopping and is learning to quilt and how to can.



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### "TAKE A LOOK AT OUR EXTENDED FAMILY"



Pictured right to left, front row: Gail Rhodes, Kathern Applegate, Cynthia Collins, Dolly Tyrrell, Jennifer Glennemeier, back row: Nancy Carlton, Amber Young, Cynthia Kindall, Heather Lawson. Not pictured: Barbara Smith, Carla Collins, Charlene Eastin, Chelsey Eberle, Diana Simmons, Donna Millan, Gwendolyn Largent, Jessica Ebner, Joyce Fischer, Kathleen McConney, Kendra Merchant, Keri Vanover, Keri Donahey, Marjorie Hartzog, Sarah McDiffett, Shantae Ebner.

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