

Director commemorates 20 years of service for Positive Tomorrows



Nikki Edwards and Julie McDaniel

Twenty years ago, when Phillips Murrah Director [Nikki Jones Edwards](#) first set foot on the [Positive Tomorrows](#) campus, she was hooked. Two decades later, she's still going strong and is now one of the organization's biggest advocates.

"In law school, I thought I would graduate and work for the ACLU, or some other grassroots community organization, using my law degree to help the less fortunate or underserved in some way," said Nikki, Chair of the Firm's [Family Law Practice Group](#). "Although I entered private practice, I still wanted to find ways to serve or advocate for the marginalized people in our community." A friend introduced Nikki to Positive Tomorrows, and she was off and running.

Positive Tomorrows is Oklahoma's only elementary school that serves homeless children. The school provides a unique blend of educational and social services to homeless children and families in hopes of providing quality education despite the unstable circumstances that homelessness can create.

In 1997, Nikki began volunteering at the school. At first, she tried to pace herself, coming into the school every month to read to the kindergarten classes. But it wasn't long before she became a very familiar face around campus, eventually making weekly trips to the school to read. "It was the best part of my week," she said.



Nikki Edwards, Nedra Funk,
and Chris Batson Deason

Her drive and passion for the Positive Tomorrows mission did not go unnoticed. Nikki was invited to sit on the Board of Directors and she jumped at the opportunity. "I served on the Board for several years until my son, Sam, was born. I resigned from the Board to focus on Sam, but continued to support the organization through financial and in-kind donations and attending Positive Tomorrows-sponsored events."

"During the next few years, while she wasn't on the board, she was definitely a friend of Positive Tomorrows," said Susan Agel, Principal and President of the Board. "We heard from her regularly and she was always available to give advice and assist in other areas. I was saddened when she resigned from the board, but I knew she had made the right decision. I resolved to wait until she was ready and invited her back again."

When Nikki rejoined the board two years ago, she also brought the Phillips Murrah family along with her.

“Phillips Murrah not only supports my efforts at Positive Tomorrows, but the Firm and our employees have become partners to the organization as well. Some of our attorneys volunteer at the school, and the Firm contributes to various projects throughout the year,” Nikki said.

Her dedication to this at-risk population is changing lives. “We work with a very difficult population with every strike against them,” said Agel. “Our lasting legacy is to introduce a different life to children who are growing up in very difficult circumstances.”

Nikki attributes her motivation to serve to her upbringing, giving credit to her mother, Rita.

“My mom, who was one of my biggest role models, was a psychotherapist and she dedicated countless hours to volunteering and training volunteers in the area of domestic violence abuse prevention,” she said.

Nikki uses her mother’s example as a template to tackle a different community problem—homelessness. Applying the same tenacity and commitment as her mother, Nikki has been an advocate, supporter and friend to Positive Tomorrows for two decades. “Homelessness can be never-ending. It has the potential to be a vicious cycle, repeated by these kids because they emulate their parents’ actions,” she said, adding that Positive Tomorrows is part of the solution.



Kindergarten students working dress up for Dr. Seuss Day in a classroom at Positive Tomorrows.

"A professor once told me that education is the lone equalizer, and I could not agree more," she said. "These children know that Positive Tomorrows is a safe, nurturing and calming place where they can actually learn. Public schools simply cannot provide the same holistic environment of family services and education. Public schools aren't equipped to handle a child who is falling asleep in class because she was awake all night at the homeless shelter or was displaced in the middle of the night because her family was kicked out of a relative's home."

Research has shown that working with homeless children in this kind of environment can have a long-term impact on the success of a child and his or her family, Agel said. "We want children to feel a sense of control over their destiny and that's one thing that is often lacking for people in poverty," she said.

In addition to assisting homeless families and educating homeless children, Agel said, "Our role is to help teach the general public about poverty, in general, and homelessness in particular."

Recently, Positive Tomorrows launched a fundraising campaign to expand the reach of their message and allow the school to provide services to more children.

"We are in the beginning stages of implementing a capital campaign to raise \$10.2 million, which would allow us to double our capacity from 74 to 140 students," Agel said. "So far this school year, we have turned away 88 students due to a lack of space and resources."

"The new school will have space for a special education

classroom and designated space for music and art, as well as a gym for PE classes. The new building will also include a severe weather safe room, which we currently do not have,” she said.

The organization plans to build the school on the NorthCare campus in Oklahoma City.

“The campus is shaping up to be a center for family and child social-emotional health, and we expect some strong programs to develop out of that partnership,” Agel said. “We’re also hearing that other nonprofits are exploring the location and we’re excited about these possibilities for future partnerships.”

Although Nikki’s commitment to Positive Tomorrows spans two decades, she’s already looking forward to the next twenty years. “I’m excited to see what’s in store for our next phase. Our capital campaign is underway, and I have no doubt that our community will rally to support Positive Tomorrows as it has done for many years.”



To learn ways to get involved with Positive Tomorrows, [please visit their website here.](#)