

Senior Center Celebrates Meal Program Funding; Community Support Praised

Staff Report
ENTERPRISE NEWS

The Clay County Senior Citizens Center was filled with smiles, hugs, and a deep sense of relief on Wednesday as staff, volunteers, and seniors gathered to celebrate the restoration of funding for the center's meal program—a lifeline many residents depend on daily.

For weeks, the program had been on the brink of running out of money, leaving seniors anxious about where their next meal might come from. Thanks to emergency action at the state level, funding has now been secured through the end of the year.

Director Carmen Webb Roberts said the celebration was as much about gratitude as it was about renewed hope.

"This community came together in a way that still brings me to tears," Roberts said. "Our seniors deserve dignity, stability, and a warm meal every day—and Clay County stepped up when they needed it most."

The center's dining room echoed with laughter during Wednesday's gathering. For many, the moment symbolized more than just food—it was reassurance that they are not forgotten.

"Who says you're too old to do things? We don't!" joked Clay County senior Robert Green, drawing applause from his friends.

When the funding crisis first emerged, churches, local volunteers, and area nonprofits immediately rallied to fill the gap.

"It's like hands holding hands to help each other," said Shirley Hurley, director of the Seventh-Day Adventist Food Pantry. "That's what we need to do for the seniors."

Local high school students Emma Frazier and Madison Rawlings agreed, saying helping seniors should always remain a priority.

"It's important to show up for the ones who built the foundation of Clay County," they said. "We want them to know we're here for them."

Governor Andy Beshear's administration reallocated \$9.1 million from an unused Medicaid study to cover the statewide shortfall—a temporary fix that ensures meal coverage through December. The governor has also asked the Finance Cabinet to review long-term funding needs, while lawmakers face addressing a \$305 million deficit next fiscal year.

Even so, seniors remain hopeful.

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From A1

kids are proving they can compete with anyone in the state."

The strongest performance came from Oneida Elementary, which ranked #1 out of 717 Kentucky elementary schools, taking the top spot statewide. Close behind was Burning Springs Elementary, which earned an impressive #2 statewide ranking.

Oneida Principal Thomas Hyden credited teamwork and consistency for the school's number-one ranking.

"We focus on building strong foundations—academically, emotionally, and socially," Hyden said. "Our students rise to the expectations we set for them. Being named number one in Kentucky is an honor for our whole community."

Burning Springs Principal Kendra Hooker said the recognition validates the effort her staff puts in every day. "Our teachers pour their heart into these kids," Hooker said. "Finishing number two in the entire state shows what can happen when a school community truly believes in its students."

Other Clay County elementary schools also performed strongly within the 717-school statewide system:

- Manchester Elementary — #25
- Goose Rock Elementary — #75

- Paces Creek Elementary — #125
 - Hacker Elementary — #170
 - Big Creek Elementary — #219
- Paces Creek, Hacker, and Big Creek were all rated green.

"These numbers tell a powerful story," Sexton added. "Credit is to God for his blessing and his hand on our district. The dedication of our board members and our staff is working together to improve student achievement."

Middle and High School Rankings

Clay County Middle School ranked 112 out of 318 statewide, earning a Green rating—solidly above the state average.

Clay County High School was ranked 147 out of 228, falling into the Yellow category, but Sexton emphasized the score will improve soon.

"The high school's rating was affected by missing data that was not submitted on time," he explained. "That information has since been corrected and should be reflected before January. We expect the score to rise."

Hyden, still celebrating Oneida's number-one finish, said it best: "Our kids can accomplish anything. Clay County proved that this week."

Clay County Family Recovery Court Saves Over Half a Million Dollars, Study Finds

Manchester, KY — A recent study shows that Clay County's Family Recovery Court (FRC) has generated significant financial savings—totaling more than \$519,000—while helping families overcome substance use disorder and reunite with their children.

The FRC program, a voluntary initiative led by Volunteers of America and Judge Clint Harris in partnership with the Department of Community Based Services, focuses on safety, sobriety, and long-term family stability. By coordinating community services, FRC helps parents become responsible caregivers and provides access to treatment, job opportunities, and educational resources.

Key Benefits

- Faster family reunification
- Improved parenting skills
- Better access to treatment
- Opportunities for employment and education

Study Highlights

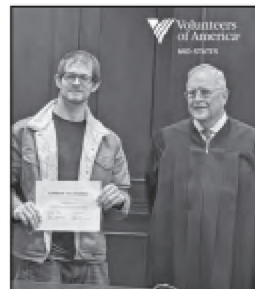
The University of Louisville Center for Family and Community Well-Being analyzed the program's cost-effectiveness, factoring in operational expenses and savings from improved outcomes. Here's how the numbers break down:

- Prenatal Care Savings: Between \$16,652 and \$84,138 per child, depending on medical needs. One infant was born healthy during the program.
- Medicaid Savings: \$14,124, thanks to reduced costs for children in out-of-home care.
- Out-of-Home Care Savings: \$404,625, as children spent far fewer days in foster care—an average of 79 days compared to the usual 690.
- Emergency Room Savings: \$38,010, with only 11.5% of participants visiting the ER versus the national average of 42.7%.
- Jail and Probation Savings: \$271,260, as no graduates were incarcerated or on probation.

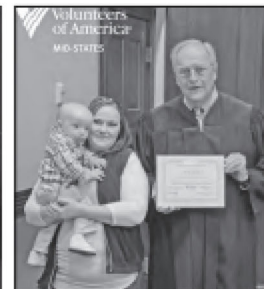
In total, the program saved \$812,148, with a net cost-benefit of \$519,925 after factoring the expense of the program, or about \$58,000 per family.

Judge Harris praised the results, noting that "Family Recovery Court is not just changing lives—it's saving taxpayer dollars while strengthening families."

"This study spans almost five years and confirms what we have long believed: when we invest in families' recovery, the return is both immediate and enduring," said Jennifer Hancock, President and CEO of VOA Mid-States. "These early savings are just the start. We anticipate ongoing financial impact as well as a growing social return on investment as more families find stability, recovery, and reunification in the years ahead."



Dewayne Day, pictured with Judge Clint Harris, is the first father to graduate from Clay County Family Recovery Court. He has custody of both of his children and works as a manager at Burger King in Manchester.



April Biggs and her son, Kyson, with Judge Clint Harris. April graduated from FRC in March 2024 and has stable housing, transportation, and custody of her son. She is also a graduate of VOA's Freedom House.

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