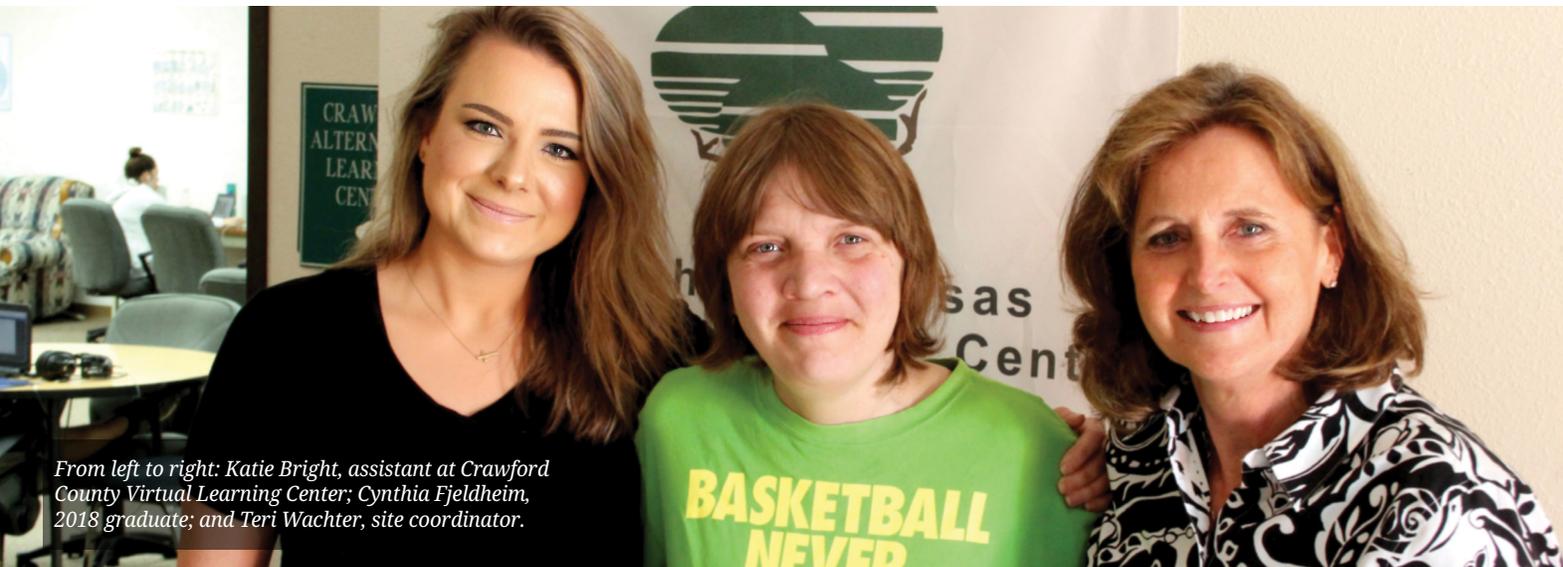


The Greenbush Gazette

THE OFFICIAL COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER OF GREENBUSH -
THE SOUTHEAST KANSAS EDUCATION SERVICE CENTER



From left to right: Katie Bright, assistant at Crawford County Virtual Learning Center; Cynthia Fjeldheim, 2018 graduate; and Teri Wachter, site coordinator.

What's next?

Greenbush University
Professional Development
for Educators
8 a.m. to 3 p.m. June 4-8
FREE

Summer Camps
Held throughout June and July
Ages 4-18
Pricing varies by camp type
greenbush.org/summercamps

**Greenbush Getaway:
STEM Expo**
Saturday, July 28
All Ages
FREE

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Homeless to hopeful

Crawford County Virtual Learning Center graduate defies the odds and receives high school diploma

Cynthia Fjeldheim should not be a high school graduate. Born in Chicago, Fjeldheim grew up in an abusive environment and dropped out of school after sixth grade. As with many victims of abuse, she cultivated destructive habits and abusive relationships as an adult.

Fjeldheim spent time on the streets and in jail. She developed an addiction to crack-cocaine that could easily have taken her life.

After kicking that habit 20 years ago, Fjeldheim skipped around the country seeking a fresh start, eventually landing in Pittsburg around 2008. Pittsburg residents could often see her bicycling across town with two young children, Robert and Grace, towed behind in a covered carrier.

"Our son Robert was born in Eugene, Oregon," Fjeldheim said. "I wouldn't change a moment because I got Robert and Grace. Everything I've been through, it was for a reason."

But without an education, opportunities to get ahead were hard to come by. Fjeldheim knew she wanted to pursue a

high school diploma and enrolled at the Crawford County Virtual Learning Center (VLC) soon after settling in Pittsburg.

Crawford County VLC is one of several Greenbush programs across the state that allow students to work toward high school diplomas at their own pace through online learning.

However, her partner at the time was unsupportive of her educational efforts, and violence and substance use were still very much a part of her life.

Fjeldheim decided it was time to change after Robert and Grace were taken from her home. Fortunately, a teacher who knew the family sought them out and fostered the children in Pittsburg.

With her children's well-being no longer in question, Fjeldheim decided to strike out on her own, going to rehab and staying at Safehouse Crisis Center.

Fjeldheim underwent intense therapy, facing the trauma that had driven her behavior for decades and deciding to move past it.

Story continues on next page

Greenbush Grads

Three Greenbush staff members graduating this May with advanced degrees in education were recognized by their respective programs for outstanding academic achievement.



Monica Ross
Director, Infant Toddler Services of Johnson County



Kathy Clapp
Coordinator, Gifted Education



Michael Koonce
Outgoing Director, Learning Services

May 2018 Degree:

Master of Arts in Educational Leadership

Award:

Excellence in Research Award
in Teaching and Leadership

Institution of Higher Learning:

Pittsburg State University

Previous Education:

Master of Science in Speech-Language
Pathology, University of Nebraska - Lincoln

May 2018 Degree:

Master of Science in Special Education -
Gifted Education Emphasis

Award:

Outstanding Graduate in Special
Education - Gifted, Talented and Creative

Institution of Higher Learning:

Emporia State University

Previous Education:

Bachelor of Science in Elementary
Education, Kansas State University

May 2018 Degree:

Doctor of Education in Educational
Leadership

Award:

Outstanding Student in Educational
Leadership

Institution of Higher Learning:

University of Arkansas

Previous Education:

Master of Science in Education, University
of Kansas; Specialist in Educational
Leadership, Pittsburg State University

“Homeless to hopeful” - Continued from front page

“That was the turning point—now that you lost it all, what are you going to do to make it better? Not only for you, but for your kids,” Fjeldheim said.

Fjeldheim completed rehab and stayed at Safehouse as long as she could. She also started tackling Crawford County VLC courses at a furious pace, sometimes spending 16-hour days at the library.

“Robert and Grace have been my inspiration, my drive,” Fjeldheim said. “They never turned their back on Mom. Through everything we’ve been through, my kids stood by me. They were the loving force that I needed to keep going.”

But Safehouse could only keep her for a time, and soon Fjeldheim was without

a home. Undeterred, she connected her VLC-issued laptop to public wifi networks and continued to work toward her high school diploma.

“I knew the more I focused on my school work, and the more that I did right, that’s a step closer to bringing my babies home,” Fjeldheim said.

Remarkably, Fjeldheim managed to prepare home-cooked meals for her weekly visits with her children using a shopping cart she turned into a grill.

“I’m really adamant about home-cooked meals,” Fjeldheim said. “If you love your kids enough, you’ll find any genius idea you can to provide for them no matter the circumstance you’re in.”

Fjeldheim’s perseverance paid off. Within the last year, she found work, secured housing, and regained custody of her children.

And this May, Cynthia Fjeldheim, sixth-grade dropout from Chicago, received an accredited high school diploma through Crawford County VLC.

Fjeldheim said she’s strongly considering continuing her education so she can help others struggling with domestic violence and substance abuse—to “give back,” as she puts it. But regardless, she feels she has accomplished her major goal.

“I wanted my kids to see Mom graduate from high school,” Fjeldheim said. “It was for them. I’m trying to pave their way.”