

Texas Woman's University Boosts Support for Parenting Students with the Family Friendly Campus Toolkit

Texas Woman's University (TWU) is a Hispanic-Serving Institution with over 15,000 students on three campuses and is the largest public university in the nation primarily for women. While TWU has provided family housing options for many years and provides other supports for student parents through its CARE office, it has found it difficult to meet the child care needs of its students. Five years ago, with support from the chancellor, a new strategic plan made providing child care for students an institutional priority. To support this priority, TWU began to implement the *Family Friendly Campus Toolkit: Using Data to Improve Outcomes*. After 10 years of failed attempts, the new data and collaborations resulting from the work with the Toolkit finally helped TWU win a CCAMPIS grant to fund on-campus child care.

MEET JESSICA ARMSTRONG, STUDENT PARENT

Jessica Armstrong is a married 35-year-old mother of four children ranging in age from 1 to 7 years old. She grew up in Germany, the daughter of an Army service member, and served in the U.S. Air Force from 2004–2012. She began pursuing her B.A. in Human Resource Management in 2014 as a mother of two while her husband worked as an over the road (long distance) trucker. While at TWU, she had two more children and worked as a bookkeeper and editor to add to the family's income. The support she has found with the CARE office at TWU has helped her maintain an average GPA of 3.9. She will be the first in her family to graduate from a university when she receives her diploma in May 2020.

“Child care is always a challenge for me as a student, as well as the stress. I appreciate the recognition TWU gives to students who have children, because it is difficult but important to me to be both a mother and receive my education.”

—Jessica Armstrong
Human Resources Major
Class of 2020



Jessica Armstrong with her children Safiya, Yusuf, and Layla.

The Family Friendly Campus Toolkit: Using Data to Improve Outcomes

The Family Friendly Campus Toolkit is a no-cost, award-winning self-assessment system and guide for improving supports and outcomes for students who are raising children. Two- and four-year colleges and universities have used the Toolkit's resources to:

- **raise awareness about the strengths, needs, and challenges of student parents;**
- **increase visibility of existing supports and improve services;**
- **learn about recommended practices;**
- **develop new resources devoted to student parent success.**

The Toolkit includes:

- a student parent survey;
- a list of recommended practices;
- a profile of existing services;
- guidance for setting up a Task Force, collecting institutional data, and conducting focus groups;
- action and dissemination plan templates and other resources.

To download the Toolkit, please visit:
familyfriendlycampustoolkit.endicott.edu

PROCESS AND PLAN

Prior to leading the *Family Friendly Campus Toolkit* effort, the CARE office at Texas Woman's University was already focused on the needs of student parents at TWU. It offers emotional and more tangible help to student parents in crisis, supports SPARK—Student Pioneers Also Raising Kids, provides a special logo to indicate family friendly programming throughout the institution, and engages in other activities in support of student parents. However, **the CARE staff knew that this population faces multiple barriers to academic success unique to their status as parents.** For many of these students, the most critical need is for more child care support, especially for younger children. TWU and the CARE office decided that implementing the

Toolkit could help them with this and other issues faced by student parents.

TWU began implementing the Toolkit by creating an institution-wide Task Force of faculty and staff. **The group was able to determine the number and needs of parenting students** on the three campuses based on data collected utilizing Toolkit resources and guidance. In addition to providing critical data for their successful CCAMPIS application, this information has also led to other new initiatives.

There are now three new groups that meet at TWU to focus on different aspects of improving conditions and outcomes for parenting students. One, related to their new strategic plan, is conducting focus groups based on

Toolkit-collected data to gain additional insights about student parent needs. Graduate students will be in charge of these, using the data as part of their own research. The CCAMPIS grant is funding another group whose initial goal is to address the primary issues identified in the Toolkit survey—work/life balance and finances. Finally, the Toolkit Task Force continues to meet to finalize an action and dissemination plan based on all of the data they have collected using the multiple Toolkit instruments. As a result of all of these initiatives, **TWU now has a new optimism about their efforts to better meet the needs of student parents.**

“At Texas Woman’s, we believe that equipping a woman with a college education has a positive effect not only for her, but also her offspring. Such an education should not be limited to only those without children—we seek to provide opportunity and excellence to all of our students, particularly those academically talented students in the margins.”

—Carine Feyten, PhD
President and Chancellor
Texas Woman's University

Amy O’Keefe, Campus Advocate

Amy O’Keefe has been the executive director of Campus Alliance for Resource Education (CARE) for 16 years. CARE provides targeted programming for student parents, as well as wrap-around services for veterans, former foster care students, and students in crisis from evictions, food insecurity, and financial need. It also provides services for other commuter and non-traditional students, including access to a social worker and counselor on staff. CARE’s biggest challenges are having enough resources and identifying the students who need assistance. One of the reasons Amy is pleased to lead the Toolkit process is that it has enabled her office to meet long-standing goals. For Amy, this is her dream job, working at the macro and micro level to empower women through education. “I know that when a mother graduates, her life and the lives of her children are forever changed for the better.”

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The *Family Friendly Campus Toolkit: Using Data to Improve Outcomes* was developed by the Program Evaluation and Research Group (PERG) at Endicott College, with support from the U.S. Department of Education and Lumina Foundation. For more information, contact Joan Karp at jkarp@endicott.edu or Elizabeth Osche at eosche@endicott.edu.

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