

# C.E.F.S. Economic Opportunity Corporation



## 2016 FAMILY OF DISTINCTION The Tammy Merrell Family

As a part of the 2016 National Community Action Month, C.E.F.S. Economic Opportunity Corporation honored a local family for their personal achievements demonstrating the fact that community action helps people and changes lives. The Tammy Merrell family of Louisville was recognized at the May C.E.F.S. Board of Directors meeting as the 2016 Family of Distinction for exemplifying the spirit of hope and success that C.E.F.S. Economic Opportunity Corporation offers to all individuals and families in its mission to provide opportunities for people through education and support to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency. The Tammy Merrell family was nominated for the award by the C.E.F.S. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Program staff for the significant strides the family made in the pursuit of self-sufficiency since first seeking help from the agency.

The Tammy Merrell family was also recognized and honored along with other families from across the state on May 1, 2016 by the Illinois Association of Community Action Agencies in Springfield as one of the outstanding Illinois families for their personal achievements to improve their lives.

Tammy Merrell is an inspiration to all who know her story. Tammy has faced hardships and difficult situations in her life, but she never let those situations bring her down; instead she used her compassion for others to find creative ways to overcome her own obstacles.



The Tammy Merrell Family is the recipient of the 2016 Family of Distinction Award.

Tammy was a foster child when she was young and knew poverty when she was growing up. As an adult, Tammy became a foster parent because she wanted to help other foster children by taking them into her home, and over the years Tammy has fostered over 25 children. A single mother raising a daughter on her own, Tammy worked hard but the family still had to rely on assistance to make ends meet. Seeking an education that would enable her to earn a self-sufficient wage to support her family, Tammy came to the C.E.F.S. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Program Office to inquire about assistance to go back to college. Tammy was familiar with C.E.F.S. Economic Opportunity Corporation and the services offered as the Clay County Outreach Office had assisted the family for the past few years through agency sponsored programs including the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and the IL Home Weatherization Assistance Program.

Tammy has always had a passion for helping people, especially children and the elderly, and after seeing the positive differences nurses made when they cared for her children, Tammy set her goal to attend nursing school to become a registered nurse with hopes to achieve her dream of helping people and making a difference in the lives of others. Even though it had been several years since she had been in school, Tammy proceeded forward with courage to continue her education because she knew it would help her family. With assistance and support received through the C.E.F.S. WIOA Adult Program, Tammy enrolled in the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges nursing program and began working towards her goal. While in college, even with long hours of classes and studying, Tammy took in five foster children, obtained resources to support the family and was a nurturing mother, reading to the children every night. During this time the young children were participants in the C.E.F.S. Head Start 0-5 Program and Tammy attended the parent meetings. Committed to the foster children in her care, Tammy completed all the requirements to finalize the adoption of the children while she continued to attend college and work toward obtaining her nursing degree.

In May 2015 Tammy Merrell graduated from the nursing program at Frontier Community College and is now employed full time as a registered nurse at St. Mary's Hospital in Centralia and has achieved her goal of self-sufficiency.

Tammy is very grateful for the assistance that she and her family have received from C.E.F.S. and through her career as a nurse, hopes to pay forward the help that was given to her.