

FROM ADVERSITY TO DELIVERANCE, A STORY FOR OUR TIME



The 38th annual banquet of the Boys, Girls Adults Community Development Center this year is dedicated to Anna Huff Davis. This is the remarkable story of how a child with many disadvantages in life changed the dreams and lives of generations of children in the community.

Anna Huff was born a few miles south of Marvell in the Turner community and went to school there in the first grade. She was bused to Marvell in the second grade and went to an integrated school starting in the fifth grade, which brought both challenges and new experiences for a child. She finished high school and enrolled at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. Despite the struggles of single parenting, she received a bachelor's degree in business administration in 1981. Job prospects in Marvell were scant and she had to venture elsewhere, but she wanted to return to the community she knew and loved. She tried substitute teaching, a particularly challenging task.

A childhood friend approached her in the local grocery store on multiple occasions and mentioned an organization that she was working for that needed to hire someone. The catch was that you would have to wait a while to get paid because the organization had no funds. This, of course, was not what anyone seeking employment wanted to hear and the immediate response was "No, thank you." Several subsequent attempts were made to convince an unbeliever to believe—and eventually she did. In November 1983, she applied, and the journey began. Starting out as a Job Training Partnership Act receptionist at Boys, Girls, Adults Community Development Center (BGACDC), Anna worked alongside the director—the person who had recruited her and later a fellow church member—in enrolling children in the Save the Children program.

From there she went on to work in the Home-Start program, providing tools for parents to work with their children at home. The program was enhanced by adopting the Home Instruction Program for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPPY), an early-childhood experiment begun in Arkansas by future First Lady Hillary Clinton.

To further enhance preschool education, a licensed daycare center was opened and operated under Anna's leadership. Numerous other education programs followed. In addition, she was elected to the Marvell School Board, which provided new opportunities to enhance the educational opportunities for children. Through her role as planner and developer, numerous grants were written that funded programs for the entire family—from the womb to the tomb, as it was called.

As a member of a core management team, she helped BGACDC experience tremendous growth not only in programs and activities but in human capital. Investments in community capacity that formed outside but also within the community yielded a lifelong return on investments.

From these humble beginnings, Anna Huff traveled across the United States and abroad to collaborate with and run out-of-state and local programs that have channeled resources back into BGACDC. Her role as a community researcher at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences continues to facilitate links to resources that help eliminate health disparities in the community that she still calls home.

