



Afterschool Ambassador Program: Legacy of Leadership

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Contact: [Magen Eissenstat](#)
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Lovington's Melinda Franco Chosen to Be One of Just 15 'Afterschool Ambassadors' in the Country This Year

Franco Will Work in New Mexico and Nationally to Increase Access to Afterschool Programs

Washington, DC – The Afterschool Alliance today announced that Melinda, Director at the Lovington Youth Center has been selected to serve as an Afterschool Ambassador for the Afterschool Alliance in 2019-2020. She is one of just 15 leaders in the United States chosen for the honor this year. Ambassadors will continue their work supporting local afterschool programs while serving the one-year Afterschool Ambassador term, organizing public events, communicating with policy makers and community leaders, and in other ways increasing awareness and support for afterschool and summer learning programs.

“We are delighted that Melinda Franco will serve as an Afterschool Ambassador this year,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “With federal funding for quality afterschool and summer learning programs at risk, we need strong advocates like Melinda. Her work will mobilize parents, educators and business, community and faith leaders, among others, to send the message that afterschool programs are vital to the future of our children, families, and communities. Afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn and help give working families peace of mind. They offer hands-on learning opportunities, opportunities to think critically and collaborate, homework help, mentors, science and technology, healthy snacks and meals, sports and fitness, arts programming, college and job prep, and much more.”

“I am eager to join the Afterschool Alliance in building support for afterschool programs,” said Franco. “In my four years working in the field, I’ve seen time and again the extraordinary difference that afterschool makes in the lives of young people in New Mexico. These programs help students explore their interests, discover their passions, and learn to communicate with peers and adults while giving parents the security that comes from knowing their children are safe and supervised, with opportunities to learn and grow after the school day ends. I look forward to building support for the out-of-school-time opportunities all students need.”

Lovington Youth Center strives to provide a safe haven for kids pre-k through 12th grade. Using science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM) to engage and motivate students to enhance their school learning. The youth center provides coding, circuits, 3D printing and media classes along with culinary arts, gym activities and hands-on “wacky science” after school and during the summer.

- The youth center serves 50 kids daily. It is based in Lovington, NM, and is city-funded.

- Kids can expect to receive a healthy homemade snack while receiving homework help with qualified staff. Kids then participate in the science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) lab where they can create programs with coding or learn circuitry using little bits or Makey Makey. Media classes include 3D printing, photography using drones, cameras, GoPros and iPads. Gym activities are a favorite and include dodgeball, basketball, and programs using Go Noodle. Kids can also choose to participate in Jr. Iron Chef where they will learn basic culinary skills and participate in a cook-off at the end of the six-month course taught by the Lea County Extension office.
- Lovington Youth Center is proud to partner with local and county agencies to bring quality programs to Lovington's Youth. Lovington Chamber of Commerce, Lovington Mainstreet and Lovington Economic Development Corporation provide career and technical education for teens. Option, Inc., a non-profit organization for prevention of domestic violence, provides timely discussions of issues our teens face, including sexting, relationships, and self-esteem. Lea County Extension office and Nor Lea Hospital team up with the Lovington youth Center to provide programs on healthy eating and active lifestyles.

Each Ambassador will organize a major event for *Lights On Afterschool*, the Afterschool Alliance's annual rally for afterschool, which will celebrate its 20th anniversary this year. Most *Lights On Afterschool* events will be on or around Thursday, October 24. Last year, 1 million people participated in some 8,000 events across the United States and at U.S. military bases worldwide.

The 2019-2020 Afterschool Ambassadors are:

- **Alaska:** Courtney Havrilek, Lead Coordinator, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Fairbanks NSB School District, **Fairbanks;**
- **California:** Leslie Einhorn, Founder & Executive Director, CASA (Children's After School Arts), **San Francisco;**
- **Colorado:** Sarah Johnson, Senior Vice President of Education & Arts YouthPower365, **Avon;**
- **Florida:** Suzette L. Harvey, President/CEO, Prime Time Palm Beach County, **Boynton Beach;**
- **Iowa:** Robert C. Reid, Executive Director, Camp Fire Heart of Iowa, **Des Moines;**
- **Michigan:** Willie Buford, Site Manager, Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce – YouthQuest, **Flint;**
- **Michigan:** Trevor Davies, Sr. Manager, Forum for Youth Investment, David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, **Wyoming;**
- **Minnesota:** Nicole Hernandez, Youth Development Director, Children's Defense Fund Minnesota, **St. Paul;**

- **New Mexico:** Melinda Franco, Director, Lovington Youth Center, **Lovington;**
- **North Carolina,** Abigail Swanger, Family and Community Coordinator, Community Kids Afterschool Program, **Boone;**
- **Ohio:** Lori Garrison, Program Manager, 21st CCLC, Graham Local Schools, **St. Paris;**
- **Tennessee:** Rico X, Vice President of School Age Services, YMCA of Middle Tennessee, **Nashville;**
- **Utah:** Kaylee Milliner, Center Coordinator, Promise South Salt Lake, **Salt Lake City;**
- **Virginia:** Daryle Rodgers, Out-of-School Time Coordinator, Hampton City Schools, **Hampton;** and
- **Wisconsin:** Jennifer Smith, Afterschool Program Manager, Marshfield Clinic Health System, **Marshfield.**

The [America After 3PM](#) household survey of more than 30,000 families, commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance, found that participation in afterschool programs has increased to 10.2 million students nationwide, up from 6.5 million in 2004. But the unmet demand for afterschool programs has increased as well. Today, for every child in an afterschool program, there are two more whose parents say they would participate, if a program were available. Unmet demand is especially high in rural communities and communities of concentrated poverty. One in five students in the United States today is unsupervised after the school day ends.

A large and growing body of evidence demonstrates improvements in attendance, behavior, academic achievement and more among children in afterschool programs. Researchers have also found that afterschool programs encourage increased parental involvement – an important building block for student success.

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The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.

Lovington Youth Center, where kids can be kids.