

Information provided by Dr. Ahmed Agyeman, Director, and Lauren Low, Public Relation Specialist.

## Evelyn K. Davis Center for Working Families

*At the Evelyn K. Davis Center for Working Families, we're helping families and individuals improve their financial position and connecting them with their work and career goals.*

From its location in the heart of Des Moines, Iowa, the state's capital city, the Evelyn K. Davis Center is helping many Central Iowans build their educational and job dreams. This first-of-its-kind center is a beacon for those looking for educational, job training and career opportunities by delivering these workforce services. The Center is preparing many Central Iowans to find their life's calling as successful, working Iowans.

The Center is a partnership between the [Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines](#), [The Directors Council](#), [United Way](#), and [Des Moines Area Community College \(DMACC\)](#). Several other organizations in the community help to fund the center. The partnership is providing solutions to three crucial needs identified by local residents: workforce training, employment opportunities, and grocery and retail services.

### **The Beginning Story**

The center was started in October 2013. “It started with this idea. Berry Griswell, who was then the CEO of the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines, and DMACC President Denson, and at that time the director of United Way, came together and basically agreed to this concept to create a center that will support our community [and] provide social services for our community but at the same time [would be] connected to the community college,” Dr. Agyeman, EKD Center, Director.

Dr. Mary Chapman was the original director. She was followed by Dr. Marvin Dejean. Dr. Ahmed Agyeman is the current director, and Joy Esposito is the current Assistant Director.

The Center began across the street from where it is now, in what is now the C Fresh Market. It relocated to its current building in the Fall of 2019. In March 2020, the building was shut down for COVID, and then reopened in June 2021. This building




served to expand space and allowed the services to be closer to DMACC's campus. Due to the closer proximity, more students come for job placement services and other assistance.

## **Current Assistance Programs**

Dr. Agyeman: "Coming back from the pandemic, we weren't really sure how the needs and numbers [would be]. Moving here, shutting the building down, not really getting enough time to let the community know that we're here and that we shut the building down, initially, we were not sure how those factors might impact the services and clients coming in. The most recent report for the Center showed that yes, the number of clients has stayed very consistent to pre-covid."

Dr Agyeman continued, "We have added more services. For example, the summer youth program is now a year-round service. The center has been able to shift offerings based on the needs of our community. We've definitely added other programs, especially since we moved to the current location."

On average, there is a headcount of about 7500 a year. These clients receive multiple services, however, so last year we had 7478 clients. A total of 9870 services were received last year.

 <p><b>Polk County Financial Empowerment Center</b> <small>Evelyn K. Davis Center</small></p> <p><b>Polk County Financial Empowerment Center</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Whether it's personal finance, business growth, or nonprofit development needs, FEC has got you covered. <a href="#">[Learn More]</a></li></ul>	 <p><b>Small Business Solutions Center</b> <small>A trusted resource for your profit &amp; nonprofit business Evelyn K. Davis Center</small></p> <p><b>Small Business Solutions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help your business with management and operations, marketing plans, products and service, Social Media, registering your business with the state and federally, business identity and more. <a href="#">[Learn More]</a></li></ul>	 <p><b>Y-EXCL</b> <small>YOUTH EXCEL INTO CAREERS &amp; LEADERSHIP Evelyn K. Davis Center FOR WORKING FAMILIES</small></p> <p><b>Y-ExCL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help your business with management and operations, marketing plans, products and service, Social Media, registering your business with the state and federally, business identity and more. <a href="#">[Learn More]</a></li></ul>
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### Men on the Move

- A career closet where men who have been selected for a job interview and have clothing needs will have a personal shopping experience.  
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### Job Development

- Our career coaches are ready to provide one-on-one job search and resume assistance to job seekers. We continue to hear from employers who are hiring - let our coaches provide guidance during this process.  
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### Opportunity Passport

- A financial education and matched savings program that helps youth make a successful transition to adulthood.  
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### Digital Skills

- ELL, Digital Literacy, Marketing and Branding, Business Application, and more.  
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### Parenting

- Whether your child is a baby, toddler, middle-schooler, or teenager, take a class with a parenting expert that helps you improve your family's overall happiness.  
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## DMACC's Role to the Center

The Center reports to DMACC, and the director reports to the Urban provost, etc. The DMACC board oversees all operations. In addition, the center has an advisory committee made up of partners and community members.

“DMACC supports us with the physical space, computers, physical plant, facilities, custodial services, and [funding].

We've had classes here in the building that are taught by DMACC faculty members. We work closely with DMACC ELL (English Language Learners). We serve roughly 80 ELL students per semester.

In addition, the fashion program at DMACC sends students to complete internships with our Men's Closet.

DMACC isn't a partner; we're part of DMACC," explained Dr. Agyeman.

### **Future Plans**

Dr Agyeman shared EKD Centers future plans and Vision: "We have a strategic plan that we're working on right now. Based on the outcome of the strategic plan, we hope to continue raising funds and getting volunteers to continue the work that is needed."

Vision:

The next 10-year goal is to create an endowment for the Center because funding right now is based on year to year. Every year we have to go and reapply. With the services we provide, we want more long-term financial support for two main reasons:

- 1) Recruiting the best team possible – to fund workers like a marketing team to get our name out. To get a good person in that position, we need to make sure they have at least some confidence that the job is going to be there.

Also, to have adequate staff to help the clients we serve – so clients can know the programs they need will be here. Consistent staffing helps to sustain relationships built with clients.

- 2) Waiting for the strategic plan that is being co-created with community partners currently and working to implement it. This involves the physical space of our building. We are hoping to renovate and add signs and labels to upgrade our building.

### **Why Evelyn K Davis?**

"Miss Davis was a resident of Des Moines [who] spent over 30 years basically providing childcare and supporting working families."

She opened Tiny Tots Daycare Center in DSM to provide daycare for working parents and set up a clinic at House of Mercy in the 50314 neighborhood.

"So when the idea to design a center came up, looking at the mission and the goals of the center, it just really made sense to name the building after her."

(Evelyn K Davis passed away before the center opened; it was named in her honor)

## Who Was Evelyn K. Davis?

Evelyn Davis was a woman with the common touch. She unmistakably was Des Moines' queen mother devoted to nurturing children and strengthening families in Des Moines and Central Iowa.

The eldest of five children, she was originally born Kay Evelyn Scott and grew up in Hiteman, Iowa, a small, rural southern Iowa town. She was the daughter of a coal miner father Lewis (Bud) Scott and a deeply religious mother Nettie Finks Scott, who always had a meal for those needing assistance.

Evelyn was married at age 16. She divorced five years later. She then moved with her mother and two children, Bobby and Donna, to Des Moines, Iowa, changed her name to Evelyn K. and went to work in several low-paying jobs to try to make ends meet. It was here in Des Moines that she met a man, Lawrence Davis, whom she married and built her life and family. During their 50 years together their family expanded by four more children - Larry, Jimmy, Eddie and Sherrie.

While their family grew, Evelyn, like her mother, also was quite aware of the struggles of her neighbors and families in the community. It was here that she shaped her vision for a better future for others in the area.

In the 1960s when an increasing number of women began working outside their homes, she looked around her neighborhood and saw less-privileged families struggling to work and find suitable day care for their children. She wanted them to have the same work and day care options as middle-class families, and quickly worked to open her day care center - called Tiny Tots - in the heart of the city to meet this demand. It was Iowa's first day care center for at-risk children and set the stage for her work as an early childhood educator and champion leader for the poor. She developed the state's first day care certification program with Iowa State University and opened a free medical clinic located at the House of Mercy.

For more than 30 years she faithfully nurtured the needs of the whole family while caring for children whose parents were working to support their families. From 1966 to 1989, Evelyn directed the child care center that was seen as a lighthouse of hope for many in the community, while setting the standard for day care services in Iowa. She also connected with city and political leaders to make a difference across the city. Through her community leadership and advocacy for families, she worked tirelessly to see that the less-privileged received needed family support services so they could access jobs and education. She planted the seeds of hope.

Now in the Evelyn K. Davis Center for Working Families, Evelyn's inspiration is fostering educational programs, job training and the prospects for a brighter future. The values of hard work and perseverance that Evelyn taught on the streets of Des Moines and in the classrooms of the Tiny Tots center, now are coming alive just blocks away in the Evelyn K. Davis Center for Working Families.

Evelyn K. Davis - Des Moines' woman of action; the city's woman with a dream.



<https://evelynkdaviscenter.org/about.html>

Compiled by Judith Vogel

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