

Helping the Youth of Rowan County

Watkins Wins “Excellence in Civic Engagement Award”

Helping troubled teenagers better themselves is Denise Watkins’ goal. Watkins, an associate professor of theatre at MSU, assists ten teenagers who are in the court system. Every spring semester teenagers are chosen by Marilyn Slone, court designated worker, to participate in a nationwide program called “Theatre in Diversion.”

Watkins struggled as teen, but managed to stay out of the court system by making the right decisions. She says, “I sympathize with them because I was one decision away from being where they are.”

Watkins generosity was recently acknowledged. She received an “Excellence in Civic Engagement Award” at Morehead State University’s Constitution Days. This award was sponsored by the Morehead-Rowan County Chamber of Commerce and MSU’s Center for Regional Engagement.

Watkins decided to participate in Theatre in Diversion to be a positive influence on teens. She has succeeded.

Slone says, “Denise does an outstanding job working with the youth.”

“I felt that something was missing in my life. I would come home and complain about my bad day and then I realized there are kids out there with bigger problems,” Watkins says.

Theatre of Diversion was developed to teach teenagers in the court system to replace their anger with more positive responses. Watkins and Slone help the teens implement their artistic talents. Shanae Allen, a MSU student, also assists with the program. The teens express themselves through performance poetry, dancing, creative writing and skits.

Watkins truly has helped these teens better their lives and head in the right direction. Approximately ninety-percent of teenagers successfully complete the program. Watkins says that many program graduates come up to her with updates about their lives. Most say their lives are better now.

Slone says, “Denise is a very genuine, caring person who unselfishly gives her time to help the youth of this community. It gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to work with her.”