

# Kiowa Recycling Center

**TEEA 2016 Winner: Youth**



*High school students' vision for recycling center serves the entire community.*

In September 2009, six students in Booker ISD's environmental-science class developed a vision for an opportunity that went beyond their school alone and made a student-led and student-maintained recycling center a reality for the entire community.

For small and rural communities, recycling opportunities have consistently been challenging. In Booker, with a population hovering near just 1,500 residents, providing a recycling opportunity was a massive undertaking. The students conquered this challenge with help from, and coordination through, organizations like Cooperative Teamwork & Recycling Assistance, which offers opportunities for rural recycling through a hub-and-spoke cooperative model. Next, to secure funding, the founding student members drafted the grant request to the Panhandle Regional Planning Commission to seek funding for their project. Total funding from grant and donations came from an eclectic group of nonprofits, residents, and public and private agencies. Final approval allowed them to open their doors to the community in 2010.

Each subsequent class of environmental-science students have expanded and improved upon the work of peers from earlier years. What began as a collection center for paper, cardboard, metal, and some plastics has expanded to accept tires, books, and used electronics. In 2011, the class obtained funding to begin a community garden, which now helps to feed the city's emergency medical technicians and volunteer fire department as well as residents. Most recently, students have been working to add a rain-capture device and drip irrigation system to obtain water for the garden without having to use city water.

The students, including the entire senior class of 2016, continue the operations. They write business plans, seek out and secure funding, make presentations to community and business leaders, and

source and purchase the materials necessary to keep this project growing.

All in all, the vision of that 2009 environmental-science class and the hard work of the students that followed have diverted more than 1 million pounds of material away from the landfill. This project has not only given their community and school the opportunity to divert waste but has also taught the students how to run a business, write grant proposals, and interact with people in the professional world.

Kiowa Recycling Center was born from the hard work and determination of those six young men, but the youth continue to take pride in the ownership of this service opportunity, a mentality that will continue to foster success in Booker for years to come.