

■ MARSHALL COUNTY

Head Start Adjusts To Budget Cuts

By SARAH HARMON
Staff Writer

After Northern Panhandle Head Start in Moundsville experienced a 5.27 percent funding cut at the beginning of July, the program and its families have made necessary changes and are looking toward the future of the program.

The center has eliminated 37 preschool slots at the program's Fourth Street facility and has relocated the early head start classroom from the Marshall County Day Care facility to the center to reduce money spent on rented facilities.

"A lot of our families in our program suffered," Jackie Bell, Head Start coordinator, said. "It's a been a transition for us. Our hope is the sequester will end and our budget will get back to it was, so we can pick up more families. The Northern Panhandle relies on agencies like ours to service and help the families of the area."

According to Bell, reducing rented facilities

has allowed Head Start to keep some of the programs previously funded with federal money. However, in order to keep all the program's services, two of the three Head Start programs for children ages 3-5 and eight staff positions were eliminated. Early Head Start for children ages 1-3 now occupies the former preschool classrooms.

"We were forced to make this change in Marshall County based on budget reductions, and with the reduction of 37 preschooler slots at the Fourth Street facility, it was obvious we had to combine these operations into one facility," Marlene Midget, Head Start executive director said.

"The sequester has forced many federally funded agencies to make operational changes, and within our early childhood program, the effect is that less families with young children will have access to our ... program."

Head Start serves prenatal women and children from birth to age 5, while



Photo by Sarah Harmon
Todd Ross plays with his son, Tristan Ross, at the Marshall County Early Head Start toddler classroom in Moundsville.

providing comprehensive early childhood development services, including education, transportation, medical referrals and social services to low-income families free of charge.

Bell said she sees a great need for these support services for families in Marshall County.

"Some families have no support system at all," Bell

said. "We have families that are working families that just may not make enough to make ends meet. There are so many families that couldn't afford quality day care and services. A lot of them would fall through the cracks because they wouldn't know where to turn. We are one of the only agencies to provide these kind of comprehensive services," she added.