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May 18th, 2023

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“Health Hero” Regional Award Winners

SOUTH CENTRAL IDAHO –This week, South Central Public Health District (SCPHD) recognized local organizations and residents for making an outstanding difference in the health of their communities.

“These are residents who are working quietly every day to make a big impact in their neighborhoods,” said Pam Jones, South Central Public Health Board member and Chair of the Health Heroes Committee. “Recognizing their hard work and giving their efforts a public platform is a highlight of our work as a board each year.”

This year’s Health Hero award winners include:

Youth Volunteer winner: Allison Newton

Allison was first introduced to the Ronald McDonald House when her younger siblings had to stay in the hospital for special vision surgeries. Seeing the mental and emotional strain children in the hospital face, Allison said she decided to assemble care kits to remind kids someone was “in their corner and rooting for them.”

Allison solicited donations and sold homemade slippers to purchase supplies, then created 75 pediatric kits for three different facilities supporting youth. These kits included toothbrushes, toothpaste, and a comfort toy.

“The children she has served will know that someone is caring and thinking about them as they face hard things,” said her nominator. “Community members in Camas County have enjoyed being part of a caring project that helps children facing difficult situations.”

Thank you, Allison, for taking the initiative to support and help our youngest residents while they take on serious health battles.

Adult Volunteer winner: Mackenzie Riley

After fighting her own mental health crisis, Mackenzie realized there were not enough resources for vulnerable youth in her Lincoln County community. Mackenzie created a support group for teens and young adults, identified supportive and empathetic adults in the community who work as allies, and continues to spotlight the need for quality mental health and support. Mackenzie is now also working on a list of local organizations that are accepting and supporting vulnerable youth. Because of her work, the group is growing and has provided much needed resources and support in the area.

Thank Mackenzie for the work you are doing to help people find a safe place and the support they need.

Adult Professionals winner: Randy Wastradowski and John Spiers

Seeing a critical need in the community, Randy and John took on leadership roles this winter to provide residents with shelter during blisteringly cold nights.

In its pilot year, a warming center was started in Twin Falls to provide a warm and safe place for unsheltered people in our community. Ten different people were served by this shelter across 17 freezing days and nights. Many volunteers and professionals made this effort a success, but Randy and John went above and beyond in their efforts. They performed behind the scenes work to establish the center, became the main volunteers to support the facility, and even took turns staying up all night so they could keep the center open despite their full-time day jobs.

We thank Randy and John for the enormous difference they made in starting and continuing a service that likely prevented many health issues for unsheltered residents.

Organization winner: Magic Valley Suicide Awareness and Prevention (MVSAP), 5B Suicide Awareness Alliance, and Mini-Cassia Pause: Suicide Awareness Prevention and Support.

In the last few years, the United States has seen an increase in suicides and mental distress. Our region of Idaho has shared in that increase, with many local families devastated by untimely deaths.

Volunteers and professionals across the region are dedicating time, energy, and resources to reverse this trend. Members of the three coalitions listed above are regularly seen in the community sharing resources and education with schools, emergency responders, and at local events. They also support loss survivors, hire motivational speakers, host events to help break the stigma around suicide and educate the community about mental health.

The nominator wrote, “Everyone in the coalition donates their own time to help educate the community and bring hope to people’s lives.”

We are grateful for the incredible work of these organizations in breaking down barriers and empowering residents to take actions against suicide.

See previous winners on SCPHD’s website at <http://phd5.idaho.gov/health-heroes>. Find forms to nominate residents for the 2024 Health Hero award on the website, at one of SCPHD’s five offices, or by calling 208-737-5900.