



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Tri-County Head Start Recognition

After a year that brought new challenges and disruptions to what is considered 'normal', the Tri-County Head Start team pulled together to continue to serve the children and families of Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties. The staff at Tri-County developed innovative ways to connect with families and continued to prepare children for Kindergarten success. Chanda Hillman, CEO/Executive Director, stated, "I have proudly watched our Tri-County Head Start team pull together in ways I never knew were possible. I am inspired and proud to see how far we have come from being a high-quality, in-person program to being able to instantly transition to remote learning when a classroom had to close, staff were prepared. I hope you are all as proud of yourselves as I am of you."

Tri-County Head Start closed out this year with a recognition program dedicated to covering the successes of this past year with both In-Person and Virtual Learning. The Distinguished Employee Award is determined by the Directors team, honoring those staff from each category who for the entire year have gone above and beyond, have had outstanding performance, have had exceptionally consistent and diligent long-term job performance, and provide outstanding service to the profession. Tri-County Head Start recognized the following outstanding staff members for their hard work and dedication to the children and families:



Education

Mandy Orlando, Education Director is quoted as saying, "Ms. Patty Humphreys, Center Program Director in Dowagiac, was named the Distinguished Employee in Education. I am so pleased to recognize a teacher who has influenced so many of us during her 28 years of service. Patty's classroom is a model for high quality preschool excellence. She is a master teacher but is also always willing to learn and grow. Patty is an excellent leader whose team feels supported, motivated, and cared for. If you are lucky enough to know her personally you know she has a heart of gold, she gives great advice and she loves her iced coffee! Ms. Patty Humphreys, thank you for the impact you have made on students, families, and staff over the years. We appreciate you and your

dedication to TCHS."



Transportation

Allison Lowry, Operations Director presented Ms. Kalley Zabonick, Bus Driver in Marcellus, the Distinguished Employee in Transportation. "Kalley has worked for TCHS for 6 years and has used each year as an opportunity to grow within the agency. Kalley is always willing to go above and beyond to help wherever needed, including mentoring new staff, helping in the kitchen, delivering meals, and helping at other center locations. Thank you, Kalley, for your hard work and dedication to the agency and your coworkers. We appreciate everything you do."



Support

Ms. Elizabeth Rodriguez, Dual Language Coordinator, was given the Distinguished Employee in Support by Gloria Walter, Director of Family Services. Gloria said, “Elizabeth is the true definition of an advocate for her families. She does everything that she can to encourage, motivate, and support her families and always advocates for our departments and our agency to move forward with equity and inclusion. Elizabeth challenges herself to never stop improving and has enveloped herself in professional trainings and continues to hone her skills. Elizabeth has also been recognized by community partners for her collaboration and knowledge. It is her multifaceted understanding of our program, coupled with her inventive vision for the future, that makes her so worthy of this award.”



Tri-County Head Start Directors also awarded the team at the Bangor Center the Team Innovation Award for being the center/location/or team who went above and beyond for their families. The Bangor Center thought outside of the box to come up with solutions and developed new processes that resulted in positive changes during this past year.



The Peer Choice Award is one of the highest recognitions that anyone in the organization can receive. Staff are nominated, then voted on by the entire TCHS team. Nancy Bolhuis received this honor after going above and beyond for each staff member who asks for help. Nancy greets every guest with a smile, and warm welcome. She helped staff navigate a difficult year and staff showed their appreciation with this nomination.

About Tri-County Head Start

Tri-County Head Start has served more than 40,000 children and families in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties since 1972. They serve both the children and their families by providing a preschool program for children to be able to begin Kindergarten school ready but also connect families with needed resources, educational, and leadership opportunities. Services are free for eligible families. Head Start provides hope and helps dreams come true. For more information, please visit www.tricountyhs.org.

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