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APHSA Recognizes Member Agencies and Partners at the 2022 EMWB Conference

Recipients Include Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services and Loaves and Fishes/Friendship Trays; Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Quality Control Team; and Vermont Department for Children and Families Economic Services Division

ARLINGTON, VA – At this year’s Economic Mobility and Well-Being (EMWB) Conference, bringing together three American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) affinity groups, including the American Association of SNAP Directors (AASD), the National Association for Program Information and Performance Measurement (NAPIPM), and the National Association of State TANF Administrators (NASTA), APHSA was honored to recognize recipients of the AASD Collaborating Star Award, the NAPIPM Rising Star Award, and the NASTA North Star Award.

AASD Collaborating Star

The AASD Collaborating Star Award honors a human services agency and their partner(s) who have demonstrated an exemplary partnership that helps reduce hunger and increase access to nutrition support services in their community. This year’s recipients are the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services (DSS) and Loaves and Fishes/Friendship Trays (L&F) who have been collaborating since 2011 to address childhood food insecurity. L&F is the largest feeding organization serving the residents of Mecklenburg County, and together with Mecklenburg County DSS, they recently created the “Food Navigator Model.” Through this model, they employ a team of staff with lived experiences navigating food assistance programs, who work together to best serve county residents and provide support to community members navigating the many nutrition assistance programs offered in the county including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

Zach Lewis, a Management Analyst at Mecklenburg County DSS shared, “We have had an outstanding partnership for years now. In the last year though, that partnership has only grown stronger with the hiring of the Food Navigator team and everyone’s mutual dedication to combatting hunger in our communities.” For numerous reasons, the partnership between Mecklenburg County DSS and L&F has been successful since inception. Just a few of the many highlights include Mecklenburg County seeing an overall 12 percent increase in SNAP enrollment and a 13 percent increase among children. The Food Navigator team has also attended over 250 community events with more than 20,000 attendees and
gathered direct feedback on community barriers and program experiences from over 3,000 residents to make improvements for the future. Due to their connection with L&F, the Food Navigators are also able to provide emergency food assistance and feeding boxes for those in immediate need.

**NAPIPM Rising Star**

The NAPIPM Rising Star Award recognizes a state Quality Control (QC) or Quality Assurance team that has created a promising practice in their state. Over the past two years, state agencies faced some of their biggest challenges including Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) modified state and territory QC expectations and practices. However, the recipients of this award, the **Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Quality Control Team**, recognized this was a rare opportunity for making systemic changes to their QC system. The team worked with partners, internal teammates, and leadership to emerge from the FNS modifications, which suspended traditional activities, with more effective and efficient processes. The initiatives were focused on increasing payment accuracy, improving QC case completion rates, and fostering subject matter expertise in every QC team member. Deborah Doyle, Director of the Division of Program Integrity in Washington shared, “Improving program performance during COVID-19 is both a substantial accomplishment and inspiring. This team assessed the entire QC system and implemented innovative approaches based on successful collaboration with partners. They executed systemic changes to enhance root cause error analysis, focused on feedback to improve communications, and designed training programs around staff needs.”

**NASTA North Star**

The **NASTA North Star Award** honors a state or local human services program administering Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in accordance with APHSA’s [TANF Modernization Principles](#), as evidenced by exemplary service to the community that maintains the value of equity, inclusion, and the limitless possibilities of human potential as a clear North Star. This year’s recipient is the **Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) Economic Services Division (ESD)** led by Director Erin Oalican.

ESD has been on a mission to move its TANF program in an antiracist direction for almost a decade. The agency started their transformation by defining a mission statement which they have used to guide their work: *we join families on their journey to overcome obstacles, explore opportunities, improve their finances, and reach their goals.* This year, their efforts culminated through a major legislative proposal to align their state policies with the practices they have been implementing over the last several years. Separate from this legislative effort, building on their commitment to help families create a stable foundation that makes work possible, the agency also created a special pathway for TANF recipients to receive housing assistance during the pandemic.

Congratulations to all this year’s recipients. APHSA is eternally grateful for those helping to build thriving communities across the country while leaving a lasting impact on both the human services field and those it serves.

The **2022 Economic Mobility and Well-Being Conference** took place August 14-17 at the Marriott Savannah Riverfront in Savannah, GA.

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The American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) is a bipartisan national membership association representing state and local health and human services agencies and the subject matter experts that help execute their mission to improve outcomes for people nationwide. Building on their long-standing relationships with health and human services leaders, APHSA focuses on generating pragmatic solutions that advance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities.

APHSA connects its members to national policymakers and human-serving organizations across a wide circle of stakeholders in the health and human services sector, as well as key partners in education, housing, employment, and others. They also help members build more capacity for their teams through access to professional education and development conferences, technical expertise, publications, and their Organizational Effectiveness practice. To learn more about APHSA, please visit www.aphsa.org.