



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Heywood Healthcare

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Heywood Healthcare School-Based Services Named 2026 Outstanding Community Health Worker Program of the Year

Gardner, MA - June 26th, 2026 - Heywood Healthcare's School-Based Services (SBS) program has been recognized as the 2026 Outstanding Community Health Worker Program of the Year by the Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers (MACHW), honoring over two decades of innovation and impact in delivering care to students and families.

The award was presented at a special recognition event attended by healthcare leaders, school partners, community organizations, and program staff. The honor highlights Heywood Healthcare's integrated model of care, which places Community Health Workers (CHWs) at the center of school-based services.

Over the past 25 years, SBS has grown from a single School-Based Health Center at Murdock Middle/High School into a comprehensive, multi-district program that includes School-Based Health Centers, Telebehavioral Health, mentoring, substance use services, and community resource navigation. Today, the program serves students across five school districts, with CHWs embedded directly in schools to coordinate care, remove barriers, and connect families to critical resources.

The program's impact is significant. In the past year alone, SBS supported more than 6,000 mental health sessions, nearly 1,900 medical visits, and over 1,200 referrals. Nationally, school-based health programs reach more than 1 million students across 1,800 schools, yet only approximately 2% of students have access, underscoring the importance of expanding models like Heywood Healthcare's.

"Today, we are honored to receive the 2026 Outstanding Community Health Worker Program of the Year Award," said Christie Cutting, Director of School-Based Services at Heywood Healthcare. "While this award has our program's name on it, it truly belongs to our entire team. Every day, our Community Health Workers meet students and families where they are, in schools, in the community, or on the other end of the phone. They build trust, navigate complex systems, and ensure no student falls through the cracks. I couldn't be more proud of the compassion and dedication they bring to this work."



Community Health Workers serve as the foundation of the SBS model, acting as the bridge between schools, healthcare providers, families, and community agencies. They coordinate services across programs, support access to care, and help improve outcomes for students, including increased access to services, reduced emergency department utilization, and decreased school absences.

“This recognition reflects the power of a model that brings care directly into our communities,” said Rozanna Penney, President and CEO of Heywood Healthcare. “Our Community Health Workers are at the heart of this work, building trusted relationships and making a meaningful difference in the lives of students and families every day.”

The success of the program is driven by strong partnerships with local school districts (Athol-Royalston Regional School District, Gardner Public Schools, Narragansett, Regional School District, Ralph C. Mahar Regional School District, Winchendon Public Schools), community organizations, healthcare providers, and grant funders. Together, these collaborations ensure that students receive comprehensive, coordinated care in the environments where they learn and grow.

As Heywood Healthcare looks to the future, the organization remains committed to expanding access to school-based services, strengthening partnerships, and continuing to innovate in support of youth and families across the region.



Left to right:Christine McMahon, NP; Devon Murphy, CHW; Kirsten Bright, Clinician; Jennifer Trites, Clinician; Sheila Graham, CHW; Joslyn Houle, CHW; Adreanne Boggs, Mentor; Rozanna Penney, Heywood President; Lissette Blondet, MACHW Exec. Director; Christie Cutting, Director Heywood SBS; Taylor Rich, MACHW; Jennifer Bruinsma, Clinician; Shanina Rodado, MACHW; Joey Rivers, Mentor; Brionna Beaudry, CHW; Josie Jenks, CHW



Left to right: Sheila Graham, CHW, Brionna Beaudry, CHW, Josie Jenks, CHW; Lissette Blodent, Exec. Director MACHW; Christie Cutting, Director Heywood SBS; Joslyn Houle, CHW; Devon Murphy, CHW (*missing CHWs: Alli Davis, Kaylee Vitols, Omayra Diaz, Linda LeBlanc & Tracy Coller*)

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About Heywood Healthcare:

Heywood Healthcare is a non-profit, community-owned health system serving north central Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. The system includes Heywood Hospital, a 134-bed acute care hospital in Gardner, MA; Athol Hospital, a 25-bed Critical Access hospital in Athol, MA; Heywood Medical Group; and multiple regional satellite facilities.

Heywood Hospital and Athol Hospital provide a full range of inpatient and outpatient services, including emergency care, surgery, imaging, rehabilitation, and specialty services. Heywood



Medical Group, a non-profit physician organization with more than 75 providers, delivers primary and specialty care across a broad range of disciplines.

Together, the system provides coordinated, patient-centered care focused on expanding access and improving health outcomes across the region. Our mission is To be our region's first choice for quality, compassionate, patient-centered care.