

2026 PH Achievement Award Recipient Accomplishments

Youth: TriDistrict CAPS Healthcare class

TriDistrict Center for Advanced Professional Studies (TriDistrict CAPS) Healthcare class is a unique program bringing together high school juniors and seniors from South St. Paul, Simley, and Two Rivers High Schools to explore careers in healthcare. The program helps students develop empathy, communication skills, and community awareness. Each year, students participate in a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project. Past topics include investigating chronic absenteeism in high school students and increasing the number of students with lifesaving skills such as CPR.

This past year, through a partnership with Vivie – River Heights nursing home in South St. Paul, these students demonstrated how meaningful relationships across generations can strengthen community wellbeing and create lasting positive impacts.

Every other Wednesday, the class visited the nursing home and spent time meeting with residents who had volunteered to participate. Over the course of the semester, the students interviewed residents and learned about their lives, including their childhood, family, schooling, friendships, careers, and personal lessons they wished to share with younger generations.

Residents expressed how much they valued the visits and looked forward to the students' return. Many spoke about how meaningful it was to share their life stories and to know that younger generations were interested in learning from them.

For the students, the experience helped them understand the human side of healthcare. They learned that health is not only about medical treatment but also about connection, dignity, and community.

Individual: Stacie O'Leary

Stacie O'Leary is the Health Services Coordinator and Lead School Nurse for West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools.

Over the years, Stacie has been instrumental in strengthening districtwide immunization compliance—an essential public health priority that protects not only individual students but the entire community.

Her visionary leadership was spotlighted when she brought the “Warrior Care” school-based health center to Two Rivers High School through a partnership with Riverland Community Health, Dakota County Public Health, and the Minnesota School-Based Health Alliance. This center has significantly expanded access to healthcare, particularly for students who face barriers such as transportation, financial limitations, or a lack of a primary care provider.

She also established and continues to lead the School Health Advisory Committee, bringing together partners, and co-located support services such as: 360 Communities and the Associated Clinic of Psychology, a chemical health counselor, local law enforcement, a pediatrician, a Metropolitan State University nursing professor, school district leadership, and community members.

What distinguishes Stacie most is her ability to translate public health principles into sustainable, system-level change. Her leadership has strengthened policies, built collaborative networks, improved immunization compliance, expanded healthcare access, and enhanced emergency preparedness.

Community Group: Mission Outpost

Nearly one in five adults in Dakota County struggles to afford healthcare, with Hispanic residents, young adults, and those with limited education bearing the heaviest burden.

Mission Outpost at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Burnsville has built a community-driven response to meet this challenge — an integrated hub of healthcare, food assistance, and social supports that brings people together to create a healthier future for all Dakota County residents.

Mission Outpost was founded as a food pantry in 2002, and has grown through intentional, community-identified expansion into a comprehensive public health resource. The Mission Outpost Dental Clinic (2014), Community Resource Center (2015), and Mission Outpost Eye Clinic (2025) each emerged from structured community engagement.

The dental and eye clinics are the only safety net clinics of their kind in the south metro, serving uninsured, underinsured, and financially challenged individuals of all ages.

In 2025, 49 local dental professionals donated their services to the dental clinic; the eye clinic also recruited 3 optometrists and 12 opticians who give their time and expertise.

Since 2014, the dental clinic has served more than 6,000 patients; the eye clinic served 54 patients in its first six months. Patient demographics reflect the communities most impacted by healthcare disparities: approximately 70% of dental patients and 74% of eye clinic patients identify as Hispanic or Latino — mirroring Dakota County's own data showing Hispanic residents face uninsured rates nearly triple the state average.

In 2025, 9,000 volunteers also distributed nearly 611,500 pounds of food — fresh produce, meats, dairy, bread, and shelf-staples — to more than 7,000 individuals. Across all programs, Mission Outpost touches thousands of Dakota County lives each year — many of whom would otherwise fall through the gaps of the traditional healthcare and social services systems.