

BCBSRI and Rhode Island Foundation honor five nonprofits for award-winning work

By Staff Writer

May 21, 2016

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — The Rhode Island Foundation and Blue Cross Blue Shield of RI (BCBSRI) are honoring five nonprofit organizations with 2016 Best Practice Awards, which recognize work that can become models for nonprofits statewide. The projects range from an initiative that links outdoor play and a summer meal program for low-income Providence children to providing special services for immigrants who are victims of domestic violence.

These recipients emerged from a highly competitive process and an impressive group of nominees. There is something in each of their remarkable achievements that can help any nonprofit become even more effective, said Jill Pfitzenmayer, vice president of the Foundations Initiative for Nonprofit Excellence (INE).

Sponsored by BCBSRI, the Best Practice Awards program recognizes outstanding work by Rhode Island nonprofit organizations in the areas of collaboration, communication, innovation, leadership and volunteer engagement.

As a nonprofit organization ourselves, with deep roots and an exclusive focus on Rhode Island communities, the Best Practice Awards have special meaning for Blue Cross, said Peter Andruszkiewicz, president and CEO of BCBSRI. These awards are a great example of what it means to work as a team. By working together and learning from each other, we can make incredible positive change in the lives of every Rhode Islander.

Sojourner House of Providence received the Innovation Award for integrating services for victims of domestic violence who have the added layer of immigration issues. As the only domestic violence agency in the state doing so, Sojourner House provides culturally sensitive assistance, resources and options to assist clients in making informed decisions about their status and how to live free from abuse.

“Immigrants and refugees who are also victims of domestic violence face unique barriers in navigating the legal system. Language and cultural barriers often make it difficult for some immigrant victims to access services, understand their rights, and contact law enforcement,” said Vanessa Volz, executive director.

“Due to a victims immigration status, an abusive partner may use specific tactics to exert power and control over them. Our immigration program provides these clients with critical, life-saving legal advocacy, and we're honored that the program is being recognized for the service that it provides to the community,” she said.

The Collaboration Award was presented to the Partnership for Providence Parks for its PlayCorps initiative. A partnership with the Providence Childrens Museum and the City of Providences Department of Parks and Recreation and Healthy Communities Office, PlayCorps activates inner-city parks in conjunction with the free federal summer meals program.

The Partnership for Providence Parks is collaborating with the City of Providences Department of Parks + Recreation and Healthy Communities Office and Providence Childrens Museum for a third exciting summer of Providence PlayCorps in neighborhood parks across the city. PlayCorps is seeking energetic summer Play Leaders and Interns to facilitate and support creative and rewarding play experiences for Providence youth in conjunction with the free federal summer meals program.

PlayCorps trained play facilitators provide enrichment materials and active play opportunities daily at seven Providence parks in high-risk neighborhoods, promoting low-income childrens use of the parks and participation in the meals program.

We would like to thank the Rhode Island Foundation and Blue Cross & Blue Shield for this coveted honor, said Helene Miller, executive director. As a group, we believe PlayCorps brings together best practices from each of our organizations to facilitate the highest quality, open-ended and creative educational programing in combination with free summer meals. A community is created around play and sharing healthy meals.

GrowSmart RI of Providence received the Communications Award for #ShareCommunity, a digital storytelling campaign focusing on the strength of urban areas. The strategy leverages the power of social media and video storytelling and represents a partnership between GrowSmart RI and like-minded, local companies.

We're very grateful to the Rhode Island Foundation and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Rhode Island for recognizing our media campaign to highlight Rhode Island's many underappreciated assets and help all of us be more effective ambassadors for our outstanding state, said Scott Wolf, executive director of GrowSmart RI.

The Volunteer Engagement Award was presented to House of Hope Community Development Corporation of Warwick for utilizing a unique and innovative approach to integrating volunteers directly into service provision and decision-making within the agency while ensuring that the needs of the clients served remain the primary focus.

Our peer mentors work selflessly, day and night, with our shelter residents at Harrington Hall and within the community to create a positive change in the lives of the homeless, said Jean Johnson, executive director of House of Hope.

By empowering our peer mentors, many of whom have struggled with homelessness themselves, they gain newfound self-worth and self-respect in knowing that they are making a difference in the lives of others, she said. We will continue our work to provide the services and meet the needs of the homeless with the goal of providing safe and stable housing for all Rhode Islanders. Working together, we can end homelessness.

The Newport County Community Mental Health Center (NCCMHC) of Middletown received the Leadership Award. Through an intensive strategic planning process that involved both its Board of Directors and its executive management team, NCCMHC created a strategic business plan that addresses enhancing and diversifying clinical services; partnerships and collaboration; expanding and sustaining revenue; workforce development; and branding, marketing, outreach and communication.

This is a tremendous honor, said James Lehane, President and CEO. Our board members and leadership staff have worked very hard this year to expand and improve our services in a way that promotes excellence and immediate access to care. We are honored and humbled to receive this award.

Every recipient will receive a \$1,000 grant, a promotional video highlighting their work and tuition waivers to any INE professional development workshop or seminar in the next 12 months.

Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island is the states leading health insurer and covers more than 600,000 members. The company is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. For more information, visit www.bcbsri.com and follow it on Twitter @BCBSRI.

The Rhode Island Foundation is the largest and most comprehensive funder of nonprofit organizations in Rhode Island. In 2015, the Foundation awarded \$41.5 million in grants to organizations addressing the states most pressing issues and needs of diverse communities. Through leadership, fundraising, and grantmaking activities, often in partnership with individuals and organizations, the Foundation is helping Rhode Island reach its true potential.

For more information, visit www.rifoundation.org. A(c) 2009 Providence American Design by
BSL Systems Ltd, Esmond, RI