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OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES RECOGNIZES OUTSTANDING EMPLOYEES

Several employees of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services were recognized recently for outstanding contributions to the agency and its clients.

Top awards were given in seven categories from among nominations sent in from ODMHSAS facilities across the state.

ODMHSAS Commissioner Terri White said the dedication and commitment exhibited by the agency's employees are exemplary and much appreciated.

"The work our employees do on a daily basis affects the lives of thousands of Oklahomans," White said. "Directly or indirectly, what they do allows Oklahomans of all ages to find hope after their lives have been disrupted because of a mental or addictive disorder. As employees of this agency, they are keenly aware of the devastating effects of these illnesses when not given the attention they deserve. Some people have dedicated 45 years of their lives to working for this department. Without their dedication and selfless service, providing quality care to Oklahomans would not be possible. Every day, our employees are changing lives and helping to make recovery a reality for countless Oklahomans."

The top award, the Commissioner's Award for Excellence, was given to an employee for exceptional performance or action that enhances the mission and values of

ODMHSAS. This award was presented to Teresa Capps, director of mental health services for youth at Central Oklahoma Community Mental Health Center in **Norman**.

Capps has been involved in community mental health for nearly three decades. Over the course of her tenure, she has spearheaded numerous initiatives designed to improve access and services on behalf of the children and families served at COCMHC.

The Facility Employee of the Year award, given to an employee for outstanding merit and performance or an action that enhances the mission and values of ODMHSAS, was presented to Ricki Rickard, social services specialist at Northwest Center for Behavioral Health in **Woodward**. Twelve facilities across the state chose an employee of the year, and Rickard was selected from this list.

Rickard was recognized for her outpatient counseling skills in helping consumers learn to lead productive and independent lives, a vital part of effective treatment and recovery from mental and addictive disorders. She also has taken on the role of learning and training more than 100 staff in a new, complex computer records system, in addition to numerous other responsibilities.

The Central Office Employee of the Year Award went to Tracy Leeper, information policy analyst at the central office in **Oklahoma City**. In her position, Leeper helps facilities across the state understand the importance of data reporting, and how important accurate data can be in providing better service to the agency's consumers. In addition to maintaining the stringent, professional requirements of her position, she is active in extra-curricular activities that support the department's mission, such as the Recovery Walk and NAMI Walk.

Leeper also represents ODMHSAS on a number of interagency projects, including the Health Information Exchange (HIE) and Health Information Security and Privacy (HISPIC) Consortium projects.

Elizabeth Parker, administrative assistant at the agency's Central Office in **Oklahoma City**, won the Customer Service Award for providing exceptional customer service to internal and external customers. Parker was recognized for her upbeat attitude, courtesy and customer service skills, and the cheerful way she welcomes each and every person who visits the Central Office.

Steve Graham, data processing office systems and network specialist at Jim Taliaferro Community Mental Health Center in **Lawton**, received the Award for Innovation, Quality Improvement, and Productivity Enhancement. This award was given to an employee or group of employees whose suggestions/recommendations led to improved employee productivity, increased safety, reduction in expenses or improved processes.

Graham has worked for Jim Taliaferro CMHC for over 13 years. His creation of the local JTCMHC web-site early in 2008 was initially intended to increase communication between various programs and keep everyone informed of policy changes, employee news, etc. However, after nearly a year of evolution, the web-site revolutionized the way things are done in nearly every area of the facility, resulting in cost savings to the agency and streamlining staff training efforts. The web-site now includes a "help desk," survey and evaluation results, training schedules, upcoming events, policy and procedure manuals, and other items.

Chaplain Charles Darland, affiliated with the Oklahoma Forensic Center in **Vinita**, received the Good Samaritan Award, given to an individual who has provided significant volunteer work for the agency in a spirit of service and selflessness.

Darland began working with OFC in January of 1992 as a member of the rehabilitative services department, serving on a team of chaplains who provided church services and spiritual guidance to OFC clients. After a reduction-in-force in 2000, he became an unpaid volunteer for the facility, continuing to provide church services to OFC clients each week, providing spiritual counseling, and visiting those who cannot attend regular church services. The “Reverend,” as he is known, is noted for his giving spirit and his kindness. Every year, he contributes to the “Project Santa” program that helps provide Christmas gifts for clients, and also personally brings holiday cards to OFC clients.

The Excellence in Changing Attitudes Award was given to an employee who has taken significant and visible steps to eliminate stigma and provide access to services. James Stone, a chemical dependency counselor trainee at the **Tulsa** Center for Behavioral Health, received this honor.

Stone has helped teach workshops that include a major component about reducing stigma toward consumers with co-occurring disorders. He serves as an intake coordinator and personally welcomes each and every consumer at the front door. He has a comprehensive knowledge of resources in Oklahoma and surrounding states that he shares with all consumers, professionals and family members.

Stone also volunteers at fund-raising events, playing guitar and singing. He is a full-time student, having just finished his bachelor’s degree, and has recently begun work on a master’s degree in substance abuse counseling.

ODMHSAS provides a vast range of prevention and treatment services to Oklahomans who are affected by mental or addictive disorders, in both inpatient and outpatient settings. In FY 08, the agency provided services to nearly 65,000 Oklahomans.

The mission of the department is to promote healthy communities and provide the highest quality care to enhance the well-being of all Oklahomans.

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