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WVCAN RECOGNIZES FIVE INDIVIDUALS & ORGANIZATIONS FOR DEDICATION TO HELPING CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN ABUSED

Charleston, WV – The West Virginia Child Advocacy Network has recognized five individuals and organizations with **One With Courage Awards** for their commitment to preventing child abuse and helping child survivors of abuse heal in the Mountain State. Due to COVID-19, the ceremony was transformed into a digital experience on social media. Their videos can be found on WVCAN's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/wvcan>.

West Virginia Department of Education – Partner With Courage

Through their efforts with the implementation of Erin Merryn's Law this past year, the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) is improving the statewide response to child abuse and helping to prevent it in the first place. As a leader on The WV State Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Children, the WVDE worked to ensure students are receiving abuse prevention education in K-12 schools, as well as preparing educators and administrators for mandatory reporting and to deliver age-appropriate, evidence-informed lessons.

The Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation – Funder With Courage

Through their investment in the implementation of Erin Merryn's Law this past year, The Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation has provided financial assistance to ensure that West Virginia students would receive body safety education in K-12 schools, as well as preparing educators and administrators for mandatory reporting and providing age-appropriate, evidence-informed lesson plans improving the statewide response to child abuse.

Crystal Good – Advocate With Courage

Over the past year, Crystal Good of Charleston has supported the implementation of Erin Merryn's Law in a number of ways. She was part of the training videos to educate school service personnel across the state on child abuse prevention and education – improving the statewide response and helping to prevent it in the first place. Prior to her support of the law's implementation, Good helped advocate for its passage – sharing her story of abuse and the role schools could have provided in keeping her safe.

WV House Judiciary Chairman John Shott – Legislator With Courage

From keeping children safe, supporting the CAC model and the multidisciplinary investigative teams, holding offenders accountable, and supporting child abuse prevention initiatives, House Judiciary Chairman John Shott of Mercer County has continuously kept children as a core focus of his legislative priorities. His efforts over the past several years have made a marked difference for child abuse survivors in the Mountain State.

Patty Saunders – One With Courage

Patty Saunders of Clarksburg is the program coordinator and lead forensic interviewer at the Harrison County Child Advocacy Center – a CAC serving children in Harrison, Doddridge, Taylor, and Barbour Counties. In recent years, Patty has not only listened to thousands of stories from child survivors of abuse but has also provided child abuse prevention education in schools throughout the counties the CAC serves. She was also instrumental in providing content for the West Virginia Department of Education Body Safety Toolkit creation in response to Erin Merry's Law.

The One With Courage videos celebrate each recipient and their personal stories with a special focus on their position and role in child advocacy in West Virginia. "These incredible individuals and organizations have made a tremendous impact on the lives of West Virginia's children," said Kate Flack, Chief Executive Officer of the West Virginia Child Advocacy Network. "Each in their own way have helped to bring awareness to child abuse in our state and provide prevention education so that all children can be safer."

For more information about the West Virginia Child Advocacy Network, please visit www.wvcan.org.

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West Virginia Child Advocacy Network (WVCAN) provides statewide leadership in the fight against child abuse while working side-by-side with the 21 Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) and their multidisciplinary investigative teams (MDITs) throughout the state. WVCAN provides training, technical assistance, leadership, legislative and policy advocacy, and overall coordination for CACs around the state. A CAC is a child-friendly facility in which child protection, criminal justice, and child treatment professionals work together to investigate abuse, hold offenders accountable, and help children heal. Rather than having a child taken from agency to agency to endure multiple interviews, the CAC model brings the system to the child for an effective, child-centered, healing process. As the statewide authority on multidisciplinary approaches to supporting child victims of abuse, WVCAN's purpose is to empower local communities to provide comprehensive, coordinated and compassionate services to victims of child abuse.