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WVCAN RECOGNIZED FIVE RECIPIENTS FOR DEDICATION TO HELPING CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN ABUSED

Charleston, WV – The West Virginia Child Advocacy Network (WVCAN) honored five recipients with **One With Courage Awards** for their commitment to preventing child abuse and helping child survivors of abuse heal in the Mountain State. The awards were presented at the One With Courage Awards Reception on October 8th at Embassy Suites in Charleston.

Susan Scharf – One With Courage

Susan Scharf has been leading and growing The Lighthouse Child Advocacy Center for over a decade, providing exemplary services to kids in Wetzel and Tyler Counties. During that time, she has been an unwavering force for positive change in her community and a visionary for what the center could be. Most recently, Susan appealed to her County Commission about the need for expanded trauma-focused therapy services for the kids seen at her center. Thanks to her genuine commitment to the work and the folks around her, she was able to secure ongoing funding for on-site therapy at The Lighthouse.

Joseph Thornton – Partner With Courage

Joe recently retired from his position of Director of Administrative Services (DAS) in the WV Department of Homeland Security. DAS oversees the management of state and federal grants for WV Child Advocacy Centers. During his tenure, Joe showed a genuine heart for WV's most vulnerable citizens and played a key role in ensuring that CACs (and many other victim-serving organizations) have been sustained through federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding shortfalls. Joe was appointed by Governor Manchin as cabinet secretary of the WV Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety (DMAPS) in 2010 and has worked for the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources and at the Division of Rural Health at the Bureau for Public Health.

Highmark West Virginia Charitable Fund for Health – Funder With Courage

The Highmark West Virginia Charitable Fund for Health has been dedicated to improving health outcomes for West Virginia's kids since 2021. Thanks to them, over half of WVCAN's Child Advocacy Centers recently received funding to enhance their mental health services for kids and families seen at

our centers. Countless more children affected by abuse will now receive trauma-informed care, helping to disrupt the risks of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and live happier, healthier lives.

Lt. Steven Sommers – Professional With Courage

Lieutenant Steven Sommers has been working alongside the Mercer County Multidisciplinary Investigative Team (MDIT) for over a decade. While his roles within the Department have changed and shifted over time, his dedication has not; he currently serves as part of the Crimes Against Children Unit, WV Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, and the FBI Criminal Investigation Division Task Force. Lt. Sommers humbly lends his expertise to new investigators and approaches each case with critical thinking and passion for the child victims he serves. He cares as much about the children's wellbeing as the case outcomes, always making time to meet and talk with child victims and connect them to healing services.

Donna McKenna Blood – The Trudy Laurenson Advocate With Courage

Coming to the Marion County Child Advocacy Center from a long career with CASA, Donna has dedicated years to professionally and mindfully standing up for children and their families in a manner that has been well respected and valued by the Marion County community and beyond. During her time with the Marion County CAC, Donna has advocated for over 1,300 child survivors of abuse, insuring they received the services they needed to help them heal.

“These incredible individuals 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. “In their own unique ways, each honoree has advanced the mission so that more child survivors of abuse can heal, find hope, and experience justice.”

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

Photo from left to right: Susan Scharf, Donna McKenna-Blood, Bethany Ross and Cathy McAlister representing Highmark West Virginia Charitable Fund for Health, and Lt. Steven Sommers. Not pictured is Joseph Thornton.