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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Anoka County Wins Two Association of Minnesota Counties Awards

During its annual conference, held this year Dec. 2-4 in Bloomington, the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) recognized Anoka County for its outstanding work on a pair of initiatives. Awards were given to counties that displayed valuable innovations and improvements in county government.

One AMC County Achievement Award was presented to Anoka County for its Chemical Health and Heroin Initiative. In 2016, six separate heroin overdoses occurred in Anoka County within a 12-hour period. Two of the six ended in death. Following these tragedies, Anoka County took action in an effort to mitigate future overdoses and deaths. Three forums were organized to educate on the dangers of heroin, other opiates and prescription painkillers. Feedback collected at these forums led to the creation of the Chemical Health and Heroin Initiative. Three workgroups were established. These workgroups engaged with community partners to provide education, support and prevention around the current drug crisis.

“We are honored to be recognized with an AMC award for our Chemical Health and Heroin Initiative,” said Rhonda Sivarajah, chair, Anoka County Board. “This initiative focuses on saving lives. If we have an engaged community that’s informed about the dangers of opiates, we can hopefully prevent drug abuse and drug-related fatalities.”

The county secured a second AMC County Achievement Award for the Anoka County Library VolunTeen Program. Beginning in 2016, Anoka County Library staff reimagined the library’s longstanding teen volunteer program from the ground up, using best practices from the youth development and afterschool fields to infuse quality into its program. This revamp resulted in a youth-focused volunteer program. In 2015, prior to the program redesign, just 4 of 16 teens

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worked consistent hours in all three summer months at the pilot library. After changes were implemented, 19 of 21 teens logged consistent hours all summer long, only one of whom had volunteered previously, showing that the VolunTeen program changes both attracted and better retained teen volunteers.

“Our library staff worked hard to improve the VolunTeen program, because they saw the value in having engaged teen volunteers,” Anoka County Commissioner Mike Gamache said. “The teens certainly aid our staff during the busy summer months, and now they get more out of the experience through social and emotional learning activities, and a personal project component that was just introduced this year. We’re excited to receive this award.”

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Anoka County officials accept an AMC Achievement Award for Anoka County’s Chemical Health and Heroin Initiative. From left: Jerry Pederson, Anoka County Community Social Services and Behavioral Health director; Anoka County Commissioner Scott Schulte; Jonelle Hubbard, Anoka County Community Health and Environmental Services director; Rhonda Sivarajah, chair, Anoka County Board; Cindy Cesare, Anoka County Human Services division manager; Anoka County Commissioners Jim Kordiak, Julie Braastad, Mike Gamache, Robyn West and Matt Look; Anoka County Administrator Jerry Soma; Susan Morris, 2018 AMC president.



CUTLINE

Anoka County officials accept an AMC Achievement Award for the Anoka County Library’s VolunTeen Program. From left: Anoka County Commissioner Mike Gamache; Jennifer M. Gerbig and Katlin J. Heidgerken-Greene, Anoka County librarians; Anoka County Commissioner Scott Schulte; Maggie Snow, Anoka County Library director; Anoka County Commissioners Jim Kordiak and Julie Braastad; Rhonda Sivarajah, chair, Anoka County Board; Anoka County Commissioners Robyn West and Matt Look; Anoka County Administrator Jerry Soma; Susan Morris, 2018 AMC president.

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