



2025 NUHSA Human Services Awards

Press Release

The North Urban Human Services Alliance (NUHSA) is proud to announce its 2025 Human Services Award recipients and nominees! All have made a significant contribution to the health and welfare of our North King County community and have supported or advocated for a strong and accessible health and human services system, strengthening our community through their initiative and leadership.

Recipients and nominees will be honored at NUHSA's 2025 Human Services Awards celebration on Wednesday, January 28th from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. at Bothell City Hall.

To join this community celebration, please RSVP by emailing staff@nuhsa.org.

Acknowledgement of the Life and Work of Sandy Labyris

NUHSA would like to acknowledge the life and work of Sandy Labyris, founder of Everyday Activist in Shoreline, who died unexpectedly in November of 2025. Sandy was a fierce advocate for social justice, a powerful organizer for community action and a generous spirit who gave freely of her time, resources, and passion. She believed that all people regardless of their station in life deserved dignity, safety and equality and that individually and collectively we have the power to move this work forward. We are grateful for Sandy and her work and honor her life and spirit in this space.

Human Services Champion

Jill Bieler

Jill Bieler is a dedicated social worker at the Shoreline-Lake Forest Park Senior Activity Center, known for her compassionate support and practical assistance to seniors. She helps connect seniors to vital resources such as housing, food, transportation, financial aid, legal services, and mental health support, and provides short-term counseling for aging-related challenges. Jill has assisted over 100 Shoreline residents this year. Despite working only 20 hours a week, Jill's energy and commitment are remarkable. She also advocated for a mental health

counselor for low-income seniors, leading to a pioneering pilot project at the Shoreline/Lake Forest Park Senior Activity Center. Jill is recognized as a positive force for seniors in her community

Nominees:

Matt Keenan

Matt Keenan, case manager at the Lake City Partner's GLA Day Center, is being honored for his exceptional commitment to serving individuals experiencing displacement across Kenmore, Shoreline, and Lake City. Matt consistently demonstrates compassion and dedication, always showing up for his clients and advocating tirelessly on their behalf. His impressive track record of helping people secure stable housing speaks to his effectiveness and unwavering support. Beyond direct service, Matt actively engages and educates community members about the challenges faced by those experiencing homelessness. He is known for his honesty, transparency, and genuine care for every client he meets, making a lasting impact on both individuals and the broader community. Matt's work exemplifies the values of empathy, advocacy, and community engagement, and his contributions continue to inspire those around him.

Kerry O'Meara

Kerry has served as the Community Connector at North Helpline for over 18 months, transforming how the organization interacts with its clients. She excels at helping people navigate resources, especially housing paperwork, earning recognition from local organizations. Kerry builds strong relationships within the community, advocates for affordable housing, and supports people experiencing homelessness through her board work and outreach. She is known for her patience and ability to calm and assist individuals who are scared or frustrated, ensuring they feel heard and connected to vital services. Kerry's efforts have significantly improved the lives of residents and strengthened the community.

Stephanie Poole Reichert

Stephanie founded Shared Journeys Supported Living Services to address the growing need for support among adults with developmental disabilities in the community. Despite facing significant challenges such as budget cuts, staff shortages, and the pandemic, she has persevered and sustained this non-profit agency. Shared Journeys provides in-home staffing, enabling individuals with disabilities to live independently within the community. Her program allows aging parents to enjoy their retirement years as parents, rather than continuing in the demanding role of parent-caregiver. Establishing and maintaining a nonprofit human services agency single-handedly is a formidable task, and Stephanie's ongoing commitment to her clients and community is truly commendable.

Gaynor Beckstead

Gaynor Beckstead, Resident Services Coordinator at King County Housing Authority, is recognized for her extraordinary commitment to improving the lives of local residents. Through innovative programs and tireless advocacy, Gaynor has connected families to essential resources—including housing, healthcare, and education—creating pathways to long-term stability and success. Her leadership has led to measurable improvements in housing stability and mental health support, while her collaborative approach has strengthened partnerships among local agencies. Gaynor's dedication to equity and empowerment is evident in her ability to build trust, foster community connections, and organize impactful, resident-focused events. Her work not only delivers vital services but also inspires hope and sets a new standard for excellence in

service. Gaynor Beckstead's vision and compassion continue to drive positive change, making her a cornerstone of progress in North King County.

Outstanding Human Services Program

Manos Unidas

Manos Unidas is a home-based program in Kenmore, serving North King County and expanding in the Puget Sound area. Its goal is to improve access to evidence-based information, training, and advocacy tools for Latinx families and educators, strengthening connections between home, school, and community. The program focuses on families with children ages 0-5 who have disabilities or suspected developmental delays, especially if at least one family member speaks Spanish. Manos Unidas recognizes families as key educators and works to increase children's learning outcomes by leveraging technology and virtual networks. The program offers weekly home visits with video resources, mentoring families, helping them access early intervention services, receive diagnoses, and navigate school transitions.

Nominees:

KCSARC Prevention Team -Chris Johnson, Hannah Pepin, and Jessica Cowles

The King County Sexual Assault Resource Center Prevention Team is recognized for creating lasting community change by educating, partnering, and empowering others to prevent sexual violence. Their work goes beyond raising awareness—they equip thousands of students, parents, and educators each year with practical skills and foster a sense of collective responsibility. Their approach is grounded in equity, inclusion, and respect for youth experiences, and they facilitate open conversations about consent, boundaries, and healthy relationships. In 2024, they launched a Youth Advisory Council to elevate youth voices in prevention efforts. Despite challenges, the team's innovative and compassionate work has transformed how schools and communities address sexual violence, building trust and making prevention a central part of community life. Their courage and commitment have normalized important conversations that were once difficult to have.

Hope Rising Clinic

Hope Rising Clinic, a division of Wonderland Child & Family Services, stands as the only clinic in Washington State offering comprehensive services for children from birth to age 13 affected by prenatal substance exposure (PSE), including Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. The clinic's innovative approach includes launching a speaker bureau featuring board members and parents, amplifying advocacy and education efforts. Serving approximately 100 children annually—many in foster care or adoption programs—Hope Rising Clinic provides vital family and caregiver support. With 70% of foster children impacted by PSE, the clinic's mission is to reach every child and family in need. Despite PSE affecting four times as many children as autism spectrum disorder, it remains under-diagnosed due to stigma and limited resources. Hope Rising Clinic is transforming community response to this silent epidemic by working to remove shame and stigma, advocating for families, and collaborating with local agencies. Family resource coordinators assist with educational plans, addressing gaps in recognition and support for PSE. With long waitlists at other diagnostic centers, Hope Rising Clinic's work is essential in ensuring timely, compassionate care and advocacy for affected children and families.

KidVantage

KidVantage (formerly Eastside Baby Corner) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping children from birth through age 12 thrive by providing essential care, safety, and health items to families facing economic insecurity, systemic inequities, or family disruption. KidVantage has grown from a small operation in someone's home to three hubs serving the Central Puget Sound region, including one in Shoreline. KidVantage helps the helpers in our community and collaborates with nearly 80 school districts, health and human service organizations, early learning centers, and food banks. Through these partnerships, counselors, nurses, case managers, and teachers can order customized weekly supplies—such as clothing, diapers, shoes, school supplies, and more—for children and families in their programs. The organization also supports expectant and postpartum mothers with maternity wear, personal care goods, and mother-infant support items. Most of the goods distributed by KidVantage are donated by community members, collection drives, and events, while crucial supplies like baby food, formula, car seats, and diapers are purchased to ensure availability.

Youth Human Services Leadership

Shrita Palla

Shrita, a 16-year-old student from Bothell, founded Together We Shine to support children with special needs by fostering inclusion and community. Since October 2024, Shrita has dedicated around 300 hours to planning and running 15 events, positively impacting over 100 families. Her programs create a welcoming environment for children with special needs to play, learn, and build friendships, while also supporting their families. Shrita leads a team of youth volunteers, organizes monthly birthday celebrations, social groups, arts and crafts, and special events like Easter egg hunts. She also started a birthday club that sends handmade cards to special needs youth nationwide. Together We Shine has increased autism awareness and built a “special needs village” where families feel connected and supported. Shrita's leadership and dedication make her a strong nominee for a youth award. Website: <https://togetherweshinewa.org/>

Persistence Award

Donna Hawkey

This year, NUHSA is proud to present a special Persistence Award to Donna Hawkey for her relentless volunteer work in Lake Forest Park. Donna's constant curiosity about local issues drives her to find meaningful solutions and make a lasting impact in North King County. After attending NUHSA's Homelessness 101 training, Donna was inspired to research and advocate for Community Land Trusts to preserve affordable housing. She volunteered as a Navigator for the Shoreline Community Court, assisting participants in connecting with vital agencies and services, and guiding them through the court system with compassion and care. Most recently, Donna supported a senior who became unhoused, providing nonjudgmental support and helping secure emergency shelter and, ultimately, after three years of effort she helped them secure permanent housing. Donna's persistence, commitment to learning, and unwavering dedication to helping others are evident in every aspect of her work. She continues to seek out resources and never quits in her efforts to strengthen the community.

Lifetime Achievement Award

Ray Thomas

This year's **NUHSA's Human Services Lifetime Achievement Award** is given to Ray Thomas for his significant commitment to advocating on behalf of the many individuals in our region who are homeless.

For many years, this dedicated advocate has worked with the Poor People's Campaign, lobbying the state legislature to advance social justice. After joining the board of Camp United We Stand, he quickly rose to become board president, where he provides vital resources and networking opportunities for the camp. Known for his joyful attitude and resilience in the face of setbacks, he inspires those around him to work harder and never lose hope.

His leadership spans policy, organizational strategy, and direct support for individual campers. He is deeply engaged in solving personal challenges with campers and elevates these issues to the policy level, ensuring systemic change. Through unwavering commitment and a hands-on approach, he sets a powerful example of service and advocacy, making a lasting impact on both individuals and the broader community.

Congratulations Ray on receiving the **NUHSA's Human Services Lifetime Achievement Award** for 2025! NUHSA staff, Board of Directors, members and partners are deeply grateful to Ray and the tremendous work he has done to benefit residents and communities throughout King County.

NUHSA's Annual Human Services Awards have been celebrating the accomplishments of local individuals and organizations since 2008. NUHSA is an alliance of non-profit agencies, faith communities, city and county leadership, school districts and members of the community who advocate for a strong and accessible health and human services system in North King County, encompassing Shoreline, Lake Forest Park, Kenmore, Bothell and Woodinville. Through partnership and collaboration, NUHSA supports providers, funders and the community to enhance existing resources and build our capacity to effectively respond to community needs.

For more information, email staff@nuhsa.org.