



For Immediate Release

Contact: Heather Bouffard

(207) 808-9373 | hbouffard@healthoptions.com

Three Maine Youth Organizations Receive Community Health Options Grants

Lewiston, Maine, July 14, 2020 – In a second round of COVID-19-related grant allocations, Lewiston-based Community Health Options (Health Options), the state’s only nonprofit, Member-led health insurance plan, has awarded grants to three Maine nonprofit agencies dedicated to Maine’s youth.

The recipients are: Tree Street Youth, a youth support and enrichment organization in Lewiston; My Place Teen Center, an after-school resource for kids, ages 10 to 18, in Westbrook; and the Center for Grieving Children, a nonprofit that provides support to grieving children, teens, and families in Portland and Sanford. Each organization will receive \$10,000.

“These groups remind us that addressing the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 does not entail a ‘one size fits all’ approach,” said Kevin Lewis, president and CEO of Health Options. “Young people need particular attention as they struggle through the pandemic with less socializing, family stress, disrupted schedules and school plans, food insecurity, grief, and other concerns. These three organizations have been helping Maine kids for years, and their work is more important than ever.”

At My Place Teen Center (MPTC), the team’s work of enriching and feeding children in an after-school resource center has shifted outward. The small staff is making and delivering free meals for the broader community in need throughout Westbrook.

Donna Dwyer, the center’s director said, “A local family wrote to thank us and noted that many in our community have no idea what truly happens behind our big red doors. Because of the pandemic, they learned that our work is ‘so much more than a physical space,’” Dwyer continued, “With our daily, mobile food pantry providing 1,250 free meals per week to kids, people who are elderly, without transportation, disabled or immuno-compromised, we are affirming that we are all in this together.”

Teaching resilience to Lewiston’s youth has always been part of the mission at Tree Street Youth, where elementary, middle, and high school students get learning enrichment, academic tutoring, college preparation, and internships or mentoring opportunities for 18-to-24-year-olds.

“Tree Street, like so many other organizations, has been working hard to navigate the many unknowns related to COVID-19,” said Julia Sleeper, co-founder and executive director. “Everyone here is working hard to navigate the new normal. We are grateful for the creativity of our team, our extremely hardworking and adaptive parents, and the tremendous community support which has made it possible to continue to serve students safely in new ways.”

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“At the Center, holding hands and hugs are so different now,” said Anne Heros, the center’s executive director. “We are forever grateful for the trust of our families, who we are supporting by phone and email. We have created a special technology team to implement the safest platform for our Peer Support groups to resume. We host a series of ‘Center Chats’ to share real-time updates and hear from families, and we are always looking at ways to stay connected. It’s also important for us to stay focused on things that were happening in our community before COVID-19. There are still suicides; there is still a high incidence of overdose loss. For those who are struggling with losses like these, this pandemic is yet another layer and extra struggle. The center is here to continue to support our community,” said Heros.

Health Options made an initial round of statewide COVID-19 response grants in May to address immediate food and shelter needs.

About Community Health Options – Community Health Options is the only Maine-based, nonprofit, Member-led health plan providing comprehensive, Member-focused health insurance benefits for individuals, families, and businesses. Health Options awards grants and makes donations as part of our Community Benefit Expenditure Fund, administered by the Maine Community Foundation. For more information about Health Options, visit the website: HealthOptions.org.