



## 2022 Minnesota Head Start Heroes

Head Start Heroes is an annual event that honors members of the Minnesota Head Start community who overcame tremendous challenges and achieved personal and family success. These children, families, alumni and staff members have been selected by the Minnesota Head Start Association Scholarships and Awards Committee based on compelling, personal testimonies about their Head Start experience and how they were able to transform their lives. The Head Start Heroes epitomize how determination, fortitude and access to early learning and whole-family approaches can pave the way to lifelong success.

### ***Minnesota Head Start Heroes Reception and Award Ceremony***

*Zoom Presentation: 11:00 a.m., Tuesday, March 8, 2022*



## CATEGORY 1: STAFF MEMBER

Head Start alumni who has become involved in their local program as a staff member and demonstrates a passion for serving through advocacy, career growth, or being involved in Head Start, the community, or the state/national level that benefits Head Start families.

### **Chau Nguyen**

**Parents In Community Action, Inc.**



As a preschooler, Chau Nguyen attended and graduated from the Head Start program at Parents In Community Action, Inc. (PICA) in Minneapolis, which set her on a path to success and inspired her to pursue a career in early childhood education.

Throughout her years in education, Chau demonstrated a strong passion for learning and professional development. Chau received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Child Psychology and Sociology from the University of Minnesota and obtained her Master of Arts degree in Educational Leadership and Educational Administration—as well as her K-12 principal certificate—from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. She began her career at PICA in 2006 as an Assistant Teacher and, given her commitment

to teaching and mentoring others, eventually left the classroom to become PICA's Early Learning and Mentor Coach. Chau also served as PICA's Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) expert—a role she still holds today—she also trained several other PICA staff members as CLASS reliable observers and assisted the staff in understanding the CLASS domains and improving adult-child interactions. Chau left PICA briefly to complete her M.A. degree and worked in a local school district before returning to PICA in 2019 as our Director of Education, in which capacity she directs the agency's early childhood education program, including overseeing curriculum, assessment, and school readiness initiatives for over 2,600 young children at PICA's 13 early childhood centers located throughout Hennepin County. Throughout her career, Chau has exhibited continual professional growth and has developed into a top-notch administrator and an outstanding mentor and role model for other PICA employees.

As evidenced above, Chau's passion for coaching and training has enabled her to help our teachers at PICA grow and develop professionally to benefit our children and families. She created the very successful SAIL project, collaborating with local schools

to conduct kindergarten transition activities to prepare Head Start graduates for a successful kindergarten experience. When our facilities were closed due to COVID-19, she secured thousands of dollars' worth of donated materials for families to assist them in continuing their children's education at home. She is also actively involved in the local community, having served on the Board of Directors for Cornerstone, which serves adults and children impacted by domestic violence, sexual violence, human trafficking, and crime; and currently serving on the Minnesota Department of Education's World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Early Years State Leadership Collaboration Team, where she contributes to equitable educational opportunities for English Language Learners. Chau is always willing to share her knowledge and expertise with the greater Head Start community and has presented at conferences and other events at the state and national levels. Chau Nguyen is an inspiration to everyone she meets. Her passion, dedication, and outstanding leadership continue to motivate and empower others. Chau deserves this award for what she has done for Head Start teachers, children and families.





## CATEGORY 2: FAMILY SUCCESS

*Head Start family who has made significant life changes within the past 12 months and is currently enrolled in a Head Start or Early Head Start program or is serving on a Policy Council.*

### **Brittney Mae Yeazle** Bi-County Community Action Partnership



My journey with Head Start began 7 years ago when I found myself pregnant at 19 with no partner and little optimism for the future. I didn't have a clear idea of what I wanted for my child and myself, only sure that I wanted better than the way I grew up. I was scared, defiant, and determined that I would make my own way. With my home visitors and family advocates over the years, listening, encouraging even when I doubted my own strength. We have many challenges ahead with our youngest, but I know how to advocate for our baby because of Head Starts continued support.

**2015** Homeless & pregnant my EHS Home visitor gave resources, followed up, set up and attended Hospital tour prior to birth while sharing an apartment with friends who were also young mothers. A re-kindled relationship blossomed into for me and my child. He became her father, not by blood by heart and mind.

**2016** EHS allowed my Partner and I to work, and save enough to buy a trailer house we remodeled ourselves. HV encouraged us on goals and offered resources. HS Family Advocate and teachers were a constant support. I realized a life-long dream and entered Cosmetology School as our child developed.

**2018** Now Expecting our 2nd working as a Licensed Cosmetologist. HS was a solid family and started rebuilding extended family ties.

**2019** Home Based visits for our little boy and our little girl in HS we are both employed steadily and able to save money toward buying our dream home. With losses along the way. HS staff were always there to listen and support.

**2020** We purchased a house for our growing family with land where we will build our dreams. Our oldest last year in HS programming and youngest in the Toddler Classroom. With support of HS, we have learned to advocate for our kids with their doctors through helmet and Occupational Therapy for our son.

**2021** Expecting our 3rd child which carries the genes for Down's Syndrome. A national pandemic diminished my cliental at the salon, along with many medical appointments, has me working at a restaurant. My Family Coach is supportive and helpful. Our HS family grows and changes, but with no judgments they already love and accept our unborn child, perfect as she is meant to be.

**1/5/22** Our baby girl has arrived! She decided on an early entrance that had us sprinting to Duluth and making her debut after just 17 minutes! She is tiny and beautiful and perfect! We absolutely adore her. She will be in the hospital a little while to put on some weight, but we are excited to bring her home and begin our life together with our HS family who are all anxiously waiting to meet her!



### CATEGORY 3: CHILD SUCCESS

*A currently enrolled child who has made tremendous developmental progress while enrolled in a Head Start / Early Head Start program.*

## Tobias Johansen

Lakes & Prairies Community Action (CAPLP)



Tobias started with the CAPLP EHS program in fall of 2018 with a home visitor, completing 2 years in the program. The family was dedicated to Tobias' development and learning by attending CAPLP events and group socializations. August 2020, Tobias enrolled into a virtual classroom due to location and complex medical conditions. During this time, both mom (Allyson) and Teacher Jenna saw certain things would be a challenge when he entered a classroom setting, which mom knew was needed to help prepare Tobias for Kindergarten. Together they worked to get supports ready for in-person services in the fall of 2021. Tobias was placed on an Individual Education Plan, getting CTSS (Children's Therapeutic Services and Supports) and making accommodations to safely be in the classroom with multiple food allergies.

Mom, Teacher and Tobias started 2021–2022 year knowing there would be challenges. The first few weeks were hard, but connections made the previous year helped keep things calm but exhausting for Tobias. Learning how to be in a classroom setting, and teachers telling him what to do was hard. Tobias asked, “why do you guys have so many rules?” Jenna responded, “you are here to learn and get ready for Kindergarten! We have rules at school so you can learn, and everyone is safe.” Barriers to learning included sitting at the carpet for activities. Structure and routines in the classroom and follow through from Teachers, EIS staff, and his Solutions worker, have Tobias now willing to join the rest of the class for circle time. He is interested in the book that is being read and wants to know what is going to happen next in the story. After needing to do a virtual classroom due to weather, Allyson messaged Jenna and said, “boy oh boy was that a different experience than last year, he sat through the whole book and was able to answer questions!” Mom is impressed that he is now able to focus on things even if it is not his preferred activity. “He will even engage in activities with others, and that is huge because that did not happen before.” Work time and being in an environment with 16 other kids, some of them wanting to play with the same toys as him or getting in his way was also difficult for Tobias.

Immediate responses of conflict with Tobias and other children looked like pushing, hitting, taking toys away from others and yelling. Tobias had to learn how to interact with other children by using his words. Through support from Teachers, follow through during conflict, emotional support when upset and mom's support, she has noticed these changes: “Tobias is now learning how to play with others instead of isolating himself. He is learning how to use his words instead of hitting and destroying the activity and melting down. He is learning how to regulate his emotions better. I have seen him grow leaps and bounds in his ability to adapt to changes and being flexible when given commands.”

Mom's dedication to Tobias' education was evident through her actions and communication with school every day. Without this consistency from mom, we wouldn't be seeing these great changes happening from Tobias.



#### CATEGORY 4: LOCAL ADVOCATE

*A Head Start alumni who has demonstrated advocacy by becoming involved in their local program or community, such as Policy Council, their agency's Board of Directors, a parent committee / board at their public / private school, leadership in a local organization, etc.*

### Eric Totten

Parents In Community Action, Inc



Eric Totten became involved in Head Start in 2017 when his infant son enrolled in PICA's EHS program. Eric became actively involved in the program, participating in Center Committee meetings and parent and family events at PICA. Eric knows the importance of being involved in his child's education and definitely "walks the talk," proving to be a strong advocate for his child and playing an active role in his child's education. Eric's involvement goes far beyond the center level. His commitment to his child's education, to HS, PICA, and community is admirable. He is a strong leader and a positive role model for other HS parents.

Eric has served PICA and HS at the local, state, and regional levels and several community efforts to improve life and support other fathers in strengthening their relationships with their children. Eric served on the Center Committee at PICA's Aubrey Della Center since becoming involved in HS, and on PICA's parent Policy Council. He was elected by Policy Council peers to serve as PICA's State Parent Affiliate (SPA) representative to the Minnesota Head Start Association (MHSA) and participated in MHSA quarterly meetings. He participates in the Office of Head Start (OHS) Regional Training and Technical Assistance Network, supporting school readiness and success for young African American boys. Eric is active in PICA's Men Are Important male involvement program as a role model for other fathers through interactions and demonstrates commitment to becoming involved in his child's education and opportunities PICA provides for parents. Eric is a board member of Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties Energy Assistance Program, participated in the Goodwill-Easter Seals FATHER Project, and volunteered with the Festival of Fathers and the Minneapolis chapter of MAD

DADS (Men Against Destruction – Defending Against Drugs and Social Disorder). Eric has been recognized for his dedication to HS and community. In 2018 he was the recipient of Father of the Year award presented by the Goodwill-Easter Seals FATHER Project and by PICA as the father having the most volunteer hours during a program year.

Eric has shown great interest in his child's education, played an active role in that process, and taken advantage of all PICA has to offer parents. What sets Eric apart is his willingness to always step up, get involved, learn, and apply those skills to his own life, by helping others—especially fathers. His experiences on Center Committee, and Policy Council, allowed him to develop his leadership and advocacy skills by gaining confidence to represent PICA and HS at state and regional levels by utilizing his passion for serving to get others involved. Eric is a true champion of HS and its power to make a difference in the lives of young children and their parents. He is an outstanding role model for HS parents, especially other fathers; his enthusiasm, dedication, and passion make him a great local Advocate.





## CATEGORY 5: PARENT SCHOLARSHIP

*Head Start child alumni or current/past parent that is going on to achieve their education goals by attending an institution of higher education.*

### Eligio Ramirez Sandoval

Southwestern Minnesota Opportunity Council



Eligio first became involved with Head Start when his oldest son attended Southwestern Minnesota Opportunity Council, Inc.'s Head Start home-based option five years ago. His two youngest children attended Head Start. Once he learned about Policy Council, he volunteered to join.

At our first Policy Council meeting, he ran for Vice President and was elected by the other parents (Policy Council Representatives). He remembers that there were not enough classrooms then, so the Policy Council started presenting the idea of a new building. He also realized that the program not only

worked with children but involved the whole family, which caught his attention because the program encouraged him to set and achieve goals. The program also provides many opportunities for academic growth and provides information and resources to families who have the greatest need. Through our interactions during Policy Council, we learned Eligio has a degree in primary education from Guatemala. About two years ago, he applied for an Assistant Teacher position we had available, and he was hired. A few months after he was hired, he was promoted to Teacher. Eligio is currently the Teacher of Center 2 and is a Substitute Bus Driver. He mentioned he thinks he was offered this job because many families are from Central America and many of them do not speak Spanish and speak their native language, which is Mam, which he also speaks. He has been a great help to be the middle man and help communicate between the families and program. It's incredible to see him balance the commitments he has in the community, the Head Start program, and personal life. He is always willing to advocate and help the families in the program and community.

He is currently attending Minnesota West Community & Technical College in Worthington, Minnesota. He recently finished the fall term and is registered for the spring term

He will be pursuing an Early Childhood degree.

Eligio was born and raised in Guatemala in a very poor community. His father spends a lot of time volunteering in the community to get clean water, help schools, make better roads, etc. His father taught him to advocate for those most in need and to work for the well-being of the community. He has been involved and leads many non-profit organizations that meet the needs of the community, such as Love, INC. (in the Name of Christ), which is an organization made up of churches that work together to help people in need with resources, with the Knights of Columbus, Our Lady of Guadalupe Free Clinic through St. Mary's Catholic Church, Small Community, the Faces of Worthington, Abana Foundation, Sharing Seeds, etc. Through his connections, we have been able to help families in our program.

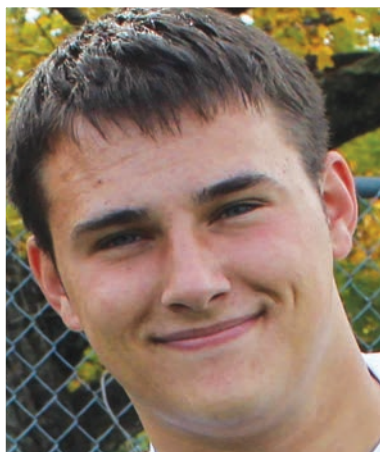


## **CATEGORY 6: HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR SCHOLARSHIP**

*Head Start child alumni that is a high school senior and is going on to achieve their educational goals by attending an institution of higher education.*

### **Dylan Paulick**

**Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency**



Dylan Paulick is a senior at Proctor High School in Proctor, Minnesota and will graduate in June 2022.

In December of 2015, Dylan's dad, Brett, suffered a major medical event that left him blind in both eyes. The family had to make many adjustments, and Dylan helped in any way he could. During the summer of 2021, it was discovered that his mom, Krista, needed surgery to remove a brain tumor. Dylan drove his mom to doctor appointments, took care of her during her recovery, and helped take care of the house. Dylan also drove her once she was allowed to return to work but was not able to drive.

School was a challenge for Dylan. He has several diagnoses that have made learning more difficult. When needed, Dylan would seek extra help, even though asking for help is hard for him.

Dylan played soccer during his high school years. The highlight of his career was when his team made it to the state play offs during the 2021 season.

Dylan has worked at Kids Zone as a childcare aide for 2 years and will continue to work there during the summer of 2022. He is a favorite of the children who attend there.

Future plans for Dylan include attending Lake Superior College in Duluth, Minnesota for auto mechanics. After graduating, Dylan plans to work in an established car shop for a few years before opening his own business.

I was Dylan's Head Start teacher in 2007–2008 and 2008–2009. Luckily, we live in a small community, and I have been able to follow Dylan's life since he was in my class. He has worked hard to get where he is now, and I know he will excel in his career as a mechanic.



## SPECIAL RECOGNITION FOR HEAD START ALUMNI AND PARTNERS

**The Minnesota Head Start Association, Inc. also honors Head Start alumni and partners who provide exceptional leadership in education and early childhood in Minnesota.**

**2015:** *Michelle Soldo, Labor and Employment Lawyer, Soldo Consulting*  
AND *Aubrey Puckett, PICA, Inc. Head Start staff, in memorial (1952–2014)*

**2016:** *Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton*

**2017:** *Leah Pigatti, Executive Director, Mahube-Otwa Community Action Partnership*  
AND *Kay Willmoth, Regional Program Manager, Region V Office of Head Start*

**2019:** *Gayle Kelly, Executive Director Minnesota Head Start Association*

**2020:** *Alyce Dillon, Executive Director, Parents in Community Action, Inc.*

**2021:** *Mark Carlson, Head Start Director, Northwest Community Action Agency*

**2022:** *Cherry Brouwer, Head Start Director, Northwest Community Action Agency*

## Cherry Brouwer 2022 Honorary Head Start Hero

What an honor it is to have had a chance to work with Cherry.

Cherry has been a friend of the Northern Cluster in 1991 and BICAP thereafter. There are many stories that epitomize the wonderful nature and contribution that Cherry has made to the Head Start program. BICAP, Northern Cluster and MHSA are indeed fortunate to have had the privilege of Cherry's expertise, passion and commitment to the Head Start program.

Cherry has left a remarkable legacy behind and one which will remain with us for years to come. She is leaving Head Start in a better place than when she began volunteering over 30 years ago, and that in itself, will remain a lasting tribute to your dedication to Head Start.

We will miss our colleague, friend, wise counselor, visionary, and a strong leader in our community.

May the years that lie ahead be filled with laughter and happiness.

Michele Andringa, *Head Start Director*  
BI-CAP

Cherry has been part of the fabric of Early Childhood in Minnesota for many years. As a teacher at Bemidji State University, she helped shape generations of early education professionals and state systems around what early educators need to be trained on. I can remember working with Cherry and new EHS/HS staff to get Child Development Associates that were college credit based close to 20 years ago and how cutting edge that was at that time. It was important to those students to be able to use those credits later on to get Degrees and to the programs to have staff that had solid training and education in the field. In 2001 Cherry joined the Board as a Friend and in 2004 took on the duties of Treasurer for the Minnesota Head Start Association. Cherry's leadership has been invaluable to MHSA and the programs it supports.

Kraig Gratke