



Florida Behavioral Health Association

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The Florida Behavioral Health Association

Celebrated its Heroic Awards of Excellence Winners

Tallahassee, Fla.—The Florida Behavioral Health Association (FBHA) honored six heroes with a series of prestigious achievement awards on August 18.

After such a difficult year and a half, the FBHA President and CEO Melanie Brown-Woofter said these behavioral health professionals deserved to be celebrated.

“Our Awards of Excellence recipients have been at the forefront of this pandemic,” said Brown-Woofter. “Each and every day these heroes have set their own personal lives aside to assist those who were and continue to struggle with mental health and substance use disorders during the pandemic.”

The Awards of Excellence annually honors Florida’s best behavioral health professionals. This year, FBHA awarded the following:

- **Supervisor/Administrator of the Year Award:** Larry McFarland, LMHC, Clinical Officer, Bridgeway Center, Inc.
- **Peer/Recovery Support Specialist of the Year Award:** Joseph “Joe” Wiesen, Senior Recovery Support-Specialist, DACCO-Behavioral Health
- **Clinician of the Year Award (Youth):** Wanda Stuart, Prevention Specialist, Operation PAR
- **Clinician of the Year Award (Adults):** Cinthia Creteur, Care Coordinator, Peace River Center
- **Medical Professional of the Year Award:** Kelly Jenkins-Gregory, RN, BSN, Director of Nursing, SMA Healthcare
- **Distinguished Service Award:** Dr. Evalina Bestman

Read more about our award winners below.

Larry McFarland of Bridgeway Center, Inc., located in the Fort Walton Beach area, received the Supervisor/Administrator of the Year Award. McFarland went above and beyond during the past 15 months. He ensured the safety and security of both staff and clients of the Forensic Pre-Trial Program. Thanks to his work, the program was able to continue to accept referrals throughout the pandemic. As a member of Bridgeway Center's Executive Leadership Team, Larry quickly discerns individual needs and moves efficiently to provide key information, recommendations, or direction to his managers and staff. Larry is a servant leader and has made many sacrifices to ensure his clients received care and assistance.

Bonnie Barlow, CEO of Bridgeway Center, Inc., said Larry McFarland has dedicated his entire professional life to helping others.

"For over 35 years, he has been a staunch advocate for the mentally ill and those suffering with substance use disorders," said Barlow. "Bridgeway Center, Inc. could not be more proud that he has been recognized for this prestigious award that is so very much deserved."

McFarland said, "For many years I have attended the annual FBHA conference and witnessed the awards given to so many of my peers. I never thought that one day I, too, would receive an award recognizing my service. I am extremely humbled and appreciative of this recognition and thank all of those that have supported my receipt of this award."

Joseph Wiesen of DACCO Behavioral Health, located in the Tampa area, contributed to human health and wellbeing by using his hardships and subsequent long-term recovery to assist others in a way that only someone with lived experience can, said DACCO Behavioral Health.

DACCO Behavioral Health CEO Deanna Obregon said, "Joe Wiesen is an integral part of our team, and has made a tremendous impact on DACCO and the community. Joe continues to provide a unique perspective to the delivery of services to our patients. We are incredibly proud that he has been recognized for such an esteemed award from FBHA."

Wiesen said he is so honored to have been recognized for such a prestigious award from the Florida Behavioral Health Association.

"I take great pride in my work, making an impact in the community's overall wellness," said Wiesen.

Wanda Stuart of Operation PAR, located in Pinellas County, has spent over 25 years teaching, educating and engaging youth about making positive choices.

"Operation PAR is proud and grateful that Wanda Stuart is recognized by the Florida Behavioral Health Association as the Clinician of the Year (Youth)," said Dianne Clarke, CEO of Operation PAR. "We are proud because we are able to share the amazing work Wanda has done with the youth in our community and we are grateful to Wanda for choosing Operation PAR to share her talents with those youth."

Cynthia Creuter of Peace River Center, located in the Lakeland area, stepped up and navigated her patients through the trials and tribulations they were facing during the pandemic, Peace River Center said.

“Peace River Center is fortunate to have staff who are passionate and committed to our mission” said Bill Gardom, President and CEO of Peace River Center. “Cynthia exemplifies this commitment and passion for her work, and we are so proud of the way she walks alongside clients daily. Her nomination for the FBHA’s Excellence Award was an excellent avenue for her to be recognized within our organization and among her peers.”

Kelly Jenkins-Gregory of SMA Healthcare, located in the Daytona area, has served her community in a number of roles, but now leads her organization’s Nursing Team as the Director of Nursing. Whether she is working directly with patients on the floor, or functioning in an administrative role, every decision she makes puts the health and safety of clients first. Her kindness and compassion are second to none, said SMA Healthcare.

“Kelly is deeply dedicated to the health and wellbeing of our clients, and she ensures our provision of exceptional healthcare services,” said SMA Healthcare CEO Ivan Cosimi. “She is a selfless leader who always puts her clients and her team before herself. She is a true asset to our community and role model for our entire SMA Healthcare team.”

A special recognition was presented to **Dr. Evalina Bestman** who received the Distinguished Service Award.

“Dr. Bestman is someone who has truly embodied what it means to be a servant leader throughout her entire career,” said Brown-Woofter. “Not only was she the CEO of New Horizons Community Mental Health Center in Miami for 45 years, but she was the first Black mental health professional to be appointed as the Executive Director of a Community Mental Health Center in the state of Florida.”

Dr. Bestman said she is incredibly honored to receive this recognition from the organization that helped support her community mental health center for years.

“I am humbled and shall be grateful to receive this outstanding award,” said Bestman. “To have earned respect and recognition from professional colleagues is awesome.”

To learn more about FBHA’s 2021 Awards of Excellence visit www.floridabha.org or click [here](#).

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The Florida Behavioral Health Association is a non-profit organization that provides statewide leadership on behavioral health policy and practice. FBHA supports member agencies offering services to those in need of mental health and substance use disorder assistance and support. Its members include a broad range of provider types, ranging from small specialty organizations to

comprehensive treatment organizations with multiple locations within a geographic region. For more information, please visit www.floridabha.org.