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**Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation presents Grant Awards to Improve the Health and Wellbeing of Highlands, Cashiers, and Surrounding Communities.**

The Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation (The Foundation) hosted its inaugural grant awards ceremony October 9, presenting awards to 25 organizations totaling \$1,287,260 to area organizations.

Grant awards spanned the Foundation's focus areas using the basis of social determinants of health and information obtained through research and community listening sessions. The grants were announced by focus areas as follows: \$488,220 for health and access to health care; \$433,000 for education; \$366,040 for community vitality and economic stability.

Foundation Chairman, Dr. Walter Clark welcomed grant recipients, donors, board and community advisory members in attendance. "This evening marks a strong beginning for advancing our Foundation purpose to improve the health and wellbeing of our surrounding communities. Over the past eight months the Foundation board and community advisory members have worked extensively, and our donor community has contributed generously toward uplifting the important work of these organizations."

Programs and Grants Committee Chair, Stephanie Edwards, emceed the event by announcing each organization's funded project and congratulating the recipients for their fine work. "We are honored to support the dedicated leaders and volunteers of our caring and compassionate grant recipient organizations. You are moving the needle toward improving lives in meaningful and lasting ways. We are proud to partner with you. Together we look forward to increasing awareness of the many ways you positively impact our communities."

One grant recipient, Teri Walawender, Principal of Blue Ridge School explained in detail how their Foundation grant is at work helping students succeed. "The grant funding allowed us to secure a school nurse and a school social worker. We have seen that when a student becomes ill or suffers from mental health disruptions two scenarios play out – the student cannot attend school leading to absenteeism, which is directly linked to poorer academic performance; and the student's parent must leave work causing missed wages leading to more strain on family resources. Also, good mental health, and access to mental health resources, are critical to a student's academic success. Left unmet, mental health issues are linked to negative academic outcomes, behavior problems and delinquency. The Foundation's grant is a pivotal move forward to ensuring our student's health, wellbeing and increased academic success."

In addition to the Blue Ridge School Foundation, grant recipients for the first 2019 grant cycle include the following organizations listed by focus area category: **Health and Access to Healthcare:** Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic; Cashiers Glenville Fire Department; Clay County Public Health Department; Community Care Clinic of Franklin; Community Care Clinic of Highlands-Cashiers; Counseling and Psychotherapy Center of Highlands; Macon County EMS; REACH of Macon County, Vecino's Farmworker Health Program; **Education:** AHEC (Advance Highlands Education Committee,) Cashiers Valley Preschool, Hampton Preschool and Early Learning Center, Highlands Community Child Development Center, Southwestern Community College, Summit Charter School; **Community Vitality and Economic Stability:** AWAKE, Inc., Boys and Girls Club of the Plateau, Cashiers Big Brothers Big Sisters, Fishes and Loves

Food Pantry, HIGHTS, Hospice House Foundation of WNC, International Friendship Center/Highlands Food Pantry, The Literacy Council, Peggy Crosby Center.

Robin Tindall, Foundation CEO, concluded the event with closing words. “This has been an eye-opening transitional year, marking the beginning of what will become transformational change over time as ongoing grants are made. We are deeply grateful for your dedicated work toward innovative solutions to improve the health and wellbeing of our surrounding communities. You can expect that our Foundation will continue to invest in helping people and strengthening our communities for many decades to come.” She also expressed gratitude to those who made these grants possible.

The Foundation’s second grant cycle is now open until 5:00 pm, October 18. The grant application and further information is available on the website: [www.hchealthfnd.org](http://www.hchealthfnd.org)

About the Foundation:

The Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation was established on February 1, 2019 as a 501 (c) 3 public charity with a purpose to improve the health and wellbeing of Highlands, Cashiers, and surrounding communities. As the Highlands-Cashiers Hospital conversion foundation we are committed to continuing a several-decade legacy of generosity and vision to ensure vibrant and healthy living for our year-round, seasonal and visiting families and individuals. Through partnerships with organizations, key stakeholders and caring donors, The Foundation aims to make positive and lasting change through investing in projects and programs that advance innovative solutions and improvements in peoples’ health and wellbeing. The Foundation follows best practices in administering and evaluating grants and projects as well as measuring and reporting outcomes. The Foundation also includes collaborative partnerships that serve the health and wellbeing of all people in western North Carolina, with particular emphasis on Macon, Jackson, Swain, Graham, Clay and Cherokee Counties and the Qualla Boundary. For more information please visit the website: [www.hchealthfnd.org](http://www.hchealthfnd.org) or call 828-482-6510.