



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA COUNTIES ANNOUNCES 2015 COUNTY ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS**

***Winners include programs in Anoka, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching,  
Lake, Nicollet, St. Louis and Wright Counties***

(St. Paul, MN)—Four outstanding programs from counties across Minnesota were recognized with Association of Minnesota Counties' (AMC) 2015 'County Achievement Awards' for exhibiting excellence and innovation in their counties. 2015 AMC President Christopher Shoff, a Ramsey County commissioner, presented the awards at the association's annual conference December 7 in St. Cloud. The recipients were nominated by their counties and selected by a committee of county officials, chaired by 2015 AMC First Vice President Jack Swanson, a Roseau County Commissioner.

### ***About the Award Winners:***

#### **Mental Health Intake Redesign – Anoka County**

Since March 31, 2014, Adult Mental Health Intake Services has been Anoka County's centralized access point for county adult mental health services. Recognizing a service gap for short-term support services and an increasing reliance on civil commitment as a default treatment option this redesign provides increased voluntary preventative services to adults with mental illness, regardless of income or insurance reimbursement. Since the redesign of the intake unit Anoka County has seen a dramatic decrease in the number of individuals entering the civil commitment process. Between 2012 and 2013, Anoka County averaged 479 referrals for civil commitment. In 2014 we received 400 requests for commitment (decrease of 19.75%). As of 10/21/15 we have received 285 referrals for civil commitment and are on pace to complete the year with 353 referrals. This represents a decrease of 13.3% from 2014 and a decrease of 35.6 percent from the two year average noted above. At the same time, Anoka County increased the number of individuals served. In 2013 we received an average of 110.3 phone calls per month requesting mental health services and an average of 17.4 individuals were assigned case management services. Since April of 2014 we averaged at least 578 phone calls requesting services per month and an average of 36 people per month were assigned case managers.

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## **Birch Tree Center Crisis Stabilization - Collaborative with Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, and St. Louis Counties; Bois Forte, Fond du Lac and Grand Portage Bands of the Lake Superior Chippewa**

The crisis stabilization program in Northeastern Minnesota was closed by the State of Minnesota in 2012. Regional partners came together to develop a state-of-the-art, culturally welcoming facility to serve the growing mental health needs in the region. This public, private, and tribal partnership went through two years of planning and a year of construction before opening in January of 2015. The counties of Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake and St. Louis, along with Bois Forte, Fond du Lac & Grand Portage Bands of the Lake Superior Chippewa partnered with the private agencies Rule 36 of Duluth, Center City Housing and the Minnesota Department of Human Services to make this a reality. The physical design of the space and program philosophy has created a healing environment for all people to feel welcome in a time of crisis. The facility has 12 single rooms that all have access to views of the natural environment, and also houses the regional mobile crisis team. The program has served more people in crisis than had been initially anticipated with very positive comments from the regional hospital, law enforcement and mental health provider community.

## **Connecting Nicollet County – Nicollet County**

Rapid and widespread change in the world around us is affecting our communities in dramatic and often unpredictable ways. Communities struggle with a variety of economic and social changes, issues that are too big for just local government to solve or for just one organization. Complex issues need leaders from both public and private entities to come together and lead efforts to address change... but in smaller communities, finding people to take on leadership roles can be tough. A group of citizen leaders have come together in partnership with Nicollet County to develop a program called Connecting Nicollet County. The program's purpose is to develop a greater awareness of community, collaboration and shared vision for the county. The program engages both emerging and existing leaders for a multi-session leadership development program. Beginning its sixth year, CNC has successfully increased local leadership capacity by training over 150 citizens and has significantly improved working relationships throughout the county by bringing together public and private sectors to improve public participation to address local issues.

## **wRight Choice Program – Wright County**

Collaboration is a strong tool. By sharing resources and solving problems between county partners and school partners, Wright County has created a great example of what can happen cooperatively: an out-of-school suspension program titled wRight Choice. wRight Choice continues to be a strong advocate program that supports youth and families. Last year, over 252 students from eight school districts participated in the program and 98% of the youth completed their out-of-school suspension at wRight Choice. Youth were referred to the program for: 31% alcohol/drug use/possession, 19% insubordination, 18% disorderly behavior, 15% fighting, and the balance for other infractions. Most of the students referred were in 9th and 10th grades. 74% were male and 26% were female. Average length of the suspension was 3 days. Students returned to their schools caught up academically and with a plan to repair the harm caused by their behavior. wRight Choice is one of the best examples of what happens when professionals working with youth share their passion and ideas on how best to support teens.

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**Editors: Photos attached for each group.**

***Photo Caption: 2015 County Achievement Awards were presented at the AMC Annual Conference December 7 in St. Cloud by 2015 AMC President Commissioner Christopher Shoff (Freeborn County) and 2015 AMC First Vice President Commissioner Jack Swanson (Roseau County).***