King County | Office of the Executive

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May 28, 2026

The Honorable Sarah Perry
Chair, King County Council
Room 1200
C O U R T H O U S E

Dear Councilmember Perry:

As required by the Crisis Care Centers (CCC) Levy Implementation Plan, this notification letter contains planned refinements to community behavioral health Career Pathways activities funded by the CCC Levy for the 2027-2032 investment period, and describes the community engagement process that informed the proposal.

Introduction and Summary of Planned Improvements

The Crisis Care Centers Levy was authorized by Ordinance 19572 and approved by King County voters in April 2023. The Crisis Care Centers Levy Implementation Plan was later adopted in June 2024 by Ordinance 19783. The initiative then began implementation in the second half of 2024, to create a countywide network of five crisis care centers, restore and expand mental health residential treatment beds, and strengthen the community behavioral health workforce.

The CCC Levy Implementation Plan directs DCHS investment in activities to strengthen the King County community behavioral health workforce. This letter specifically focuses on the impact of behavioral health Career Pathways investments, developed to strengthen, sustain, and increase representativeness of King County's community behavioral health workforce.

DCHS proposes two adjustments for funding years 2027-2032 that reflect lessons learned from 2024-2025:

- Implement at least a two-year contract term to allow agencies additional time to plan and implement their workforce development initiatives.
- Within available CCC Levy resources, sustain current investments in Career Pathways to the degree the long-term sustainability of CCC Levy funds permits.

DCHS intends to continue investments in Career Pathways' four target areas of clinical supervision, practicums and internships, professional development, and workforce wellbeing.

Background

In 2024, DCHS developed its behavioral health Career Pathways workforce investment strategy, and implemented the following four priority focus areas based on needs identified through initial community behavioral health agency engagement, surveys, and the allowable investment areas outlined in the CCC Levy Implementation Plan:

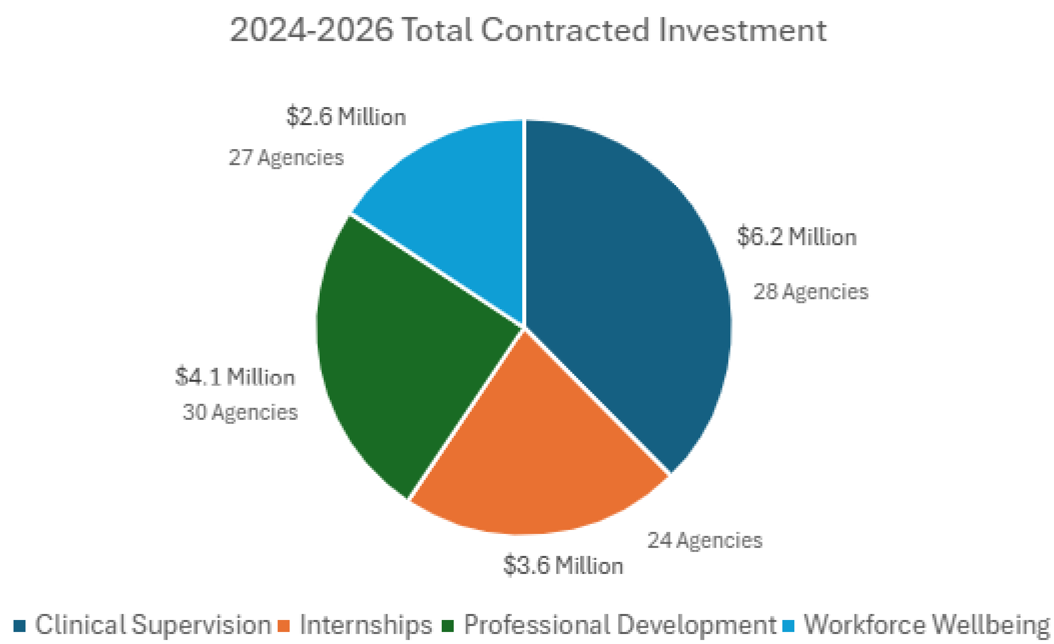
- Clinical supervision;
- Practicums and internships;
- Professional development; and
- Workforce wellbeing.

BHRD released the first Career Pathways Request for Proposals (RFP) in August 2024 and awarded approximately $8.2 million in funds to 35 community behavioral health agencies that are part of the King County Integrated Care Network (KCICN). Awarded funding supported services to be delivered through December 2025. (Awarded agencies and amounts are shown in Appendix A). Requests from the 2024 RFP exceeded $21 million, demonstrating the high demand for these essential workforce recruitment, training, and retention resources.

KCICN agencies provide behavioral health care to over 70,000 families, single adults, chronically homeless adults, veterans, youth and young adults. The agencies deliver culturally relevant, trauma-informed services that address the mental and behavioral health needs of King County residents, including but not limited to care for substance use disorders. Through existing contractual relationships and payment mechanisms with KCICN agencies, DCHS rapidly implemented the Career Pathways program to address workforce stabilization in the community behavioral health care system. The program achieved strong initial results as described below. Figure 1 details the amount contracted across the four priority funding areas.

Through the 2026-2027 Biennial Budget Ordinance 2023, King County adopted a decision package to add $6.1 million to Strategy 3 for 2026-2027 to increase the budget for Career Pathways activities from $2.1 million in 2026 and 2027 to $5 million in 2026 and $5.2 million in 2027. With this additional appropriation, plus carry-forward of unspent Career Pathways funds from the levy's initial ramp-up period, DCHS maintained 2025 funding levels and extended the contracts for the 35 agencies, contracting $8.2 million through 2026 to allow them to continue implementing workforce investments in the four priority areas. (Awarded agencies and amounts for 2024-2025 and 2026 are shown in Appendix A.)

Figure 11: 2024-2026 Career Pathways Contracted Investments



Complementing Other Workforce Investments
The behavioral health workforce strategy represented in part by the CCC Levy's Career Pathways investments is part of DCHS' overall effort to strengthen the human services workforce through complementary investments with distinct focuses. For example, agencies that are eligible for the CCC's targeted behavioral health workforce investments may also apply for VSHSL's FS 6 Human Services Workforce Stabilization funds, though the types of activities each levy supports have key differences. For example, VSHSL's funding provides agencies the opportunity to apply for wage boosts, while the CCC's Career Pathways funding targets the behavioral health-specific workforce needs shown in Figure 1.

Description of Community Engagement Activities that Informed the Proposal
From July 2024 through December 2025, DCHS conducted a comprehensive community engagement process and collected data through existing convenings and data reporting to assess the impact of 2024-2025 Career Pathways investments and inform the recommendations in this letter. These engagement efforts are summarized below and in Appendix B. As required by the Implementation Plan, a wide variety of stakeholders participated in the community engagement process. These included community behavioral health providers and frontline workers, including those delivering substance use disorder services; labor-management workforce development partners; government; higher education, including community and technical colleges; and community-based organizations. Workers who identify as members of populations experiencing behavioral health inequities provided additional input through key informant interviews.

The community engagement efforts included 19 multi-sector stakeholder convenings, five MIDD behavioral health sales tax renewal subject matter expert workgroups, a KCICN behavioral health workforce survey, contractor meetings and reports, and six targeted key informant interviews. Further detail is available in Appendix B.

Summary of Findings from Community Engagement

DCHS released a KCICN behavioral health workforce survey in October 2025. All 35 agencies funded through Career Pathways responded, sharing data on the state of their behavioral health workforce. According to the survey, there are 3,549 behavioral health professionals who work directly with clients employed across the 35 agencies receiving Career Pathways funding. The vacancy rate is over 10 percent, with 362 open positions. Recruitment and burnout are still the top workforce barriers for agencies, with 77 percent of agencies citing a lack of qualified candidates.

To attract new workforce, clinical interns continue to be the primary pipeline for developing community behavioral health workers, including diverse workers. Via quarterly reports and meetings, agency leaders emphasized that clinical supervision is essential to addressing workforce shortages and is a valued recruitment incentive. Free clinical supervision allows current staff and interns to advance their credentials and move into hard-to-fill roles, supporting a “grow-your-own” talent strategy.

Additional findings from the 2025 KCICN behavioral health workforce survey and other community engagement and data collection efforts included:

- 66 percent of agencies reported that staff retention was improving.
- 49 percent indicated that hiring was improving.
- Agencies are using a diverse range of strategies to retain staff. 75 percent of agencies are offering advancement opportunities – funding for licensure and certifications, professional development, and clinical supervision.
- At Career Pathways quarterly meetings and provider convenings, agency leaders shared that sustaining investment in internship and practicum programs was a high priority. Internship stipends enable agencies to recruit and place graduate students to work in community behavioral health, including diverse and bilingual students who reflect the communities that they serve.
- Quarterly and end of year report data show that professional development and workforce wellbeing resources are encouraging staff retention.

The findings from this survey suggest workforce stabilization strategies may be beginning to improve retention. DCHS will administer the KCICN behavioral health workforce survey annually to monitor changes to workforce recruitment, retention, and representativeness and identify successful strategies to strengthen the workforce.

Input from the extensive community engagement combined with the following analysis of investment impacts informed the approach for 2027-32 Career Pathways investments.

2024-2025 Investment Impact

Feedback on DCHS’s funding approach and focus areas among agency leadership and frontline workers benefiting from Career Pathways funding was overwhelmingly positive. Agencies appreciated the flexibility to request funding from the four target areas of clinical supervision, practicums and internships, professional development, and workforce wellbeing based on their needs. A summary of end of year report data based on 12 months of Career Pathways activities demonstrates the positive impact of DCHS’s initial investments. Thirty-two agencies completed the end of year report, a 91 percent response rate:

- 100 percent of agencies agreed or strongly agreed that their retention efforts were enhanced by Career Pathways funding.
- 88 percent of agencies agreed or strongly agreed that their efforts to increase workforce representation were enhanced by Career Pathways funding.

- 88 percent of agencies agreed or strongly agreed that their <u>workforce wellbeing</u> efforts were enhanced by Career Pathways funding.
- 75 percent of agencies agreed or strongly agreed that their <u>recruitment</u> efforts were enhanced by Career Pathways funding.

<u>Professional Development 2024-2025 Investment Impact</u>
In 2024-2025, DCHS invested over $1.9 million in professional development activities at 23 agencies to grow the community behavioral health workforce's skills to address the disparate behavioral health needs in the community. Among agencies participating in Career Pathways, 83 percent received resources for licensure and certification, and 80 percent received resources for professional development.

The primary categories of professional development offered by agencies using Career Pathways funds were:

- clinical skills in evidence-based practices such as Motivational Interviewing and Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy;
- equity, race, and social justice; and
- management and leadership development including mentoring and growing skills of non-supervisory staff to create future behavioral health leaders.

DCHS funded behavioral health agencies' initiatives designed to increase the representativeness of the behavioral health workforce, to meet the CCC Levy Implementation requirement that at least 25 percent of funding be used to increase the representativeness of community behavioral health workers. Initiatives included diversity, equity, and inclusion related training, mentorship programs, and providing internship stipends and clinical supervision that enhance new and existing behavioral health staff's ability to offer culturally and linguistically relevant care.

The largest part of the CCC Levy's Career Pathways professional development investment was funding for the Y+Heritage program, a free Master's in Mental Health Counseling program the YMCA delivers in partnership with Heritage University. Participants in the two-year program are KCICN providers who identify themselves as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and/or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual/Ally/Agender (LGBTQIA+), and/or live with a disability. Program participants agree to continue working at their agency for four years after graduation, incentivizing retention and advancing the skills of diverse behavioral health workers.

Professional Development Outcomes:

- 18 clinicians from underrepresented groups graduated with their master's degree from the Y+Heritage Master's in Mental Health Counseling program, and 44 additional students are participating in subsequent cohorts.
- 230 staff obtained a license through Career Pathways funding.
- 603 staff renewed a license through Career Pathways funding.
- Agencies were able to offer clinical training and release time for staff members to address the barriers of financial strain and burnout that typically prevent staff from attaining or even attempting higher education.

In the KCICN Behavioral Health Workforce Survey, a minority of agencies noted that insufficient professional development resources were a barrier to retention, suggesting that investments in professional development may be helping address this challenge.

<u>Clinical Supervision 2024-2025 Investment Impact</u>
The largest area of investment in 2024-2025, at over $3.1 million, was clinical supervision. Thirty agencies received funding for internal staff and external contractors to provide clinical supervision at no cost to clinical staff and interns across a variety of licensure areas. Between 1,000 and 3,000 hours of postgraduate experience, overseen by a clinical supervisor, are required to become a fully licensed behavioral health worker, depending on the license type. Supplemental clinical supervision funding enabled agencies to protect clinical supervisors' time for dedicated clinical oversight, an essential component of delivering high-quality clinical training.

Clinical Supervision Outcomes:
- 1,377 clinical staff received clinical supervision with Career Pathways funding.
- Agencies reported enhanced retention of clinical supervisors, improved clinical supervisor job satisfaction, increased capacity of agencies to deliver clinical supervision for specialty areas and specific license types, and improved ability to deliver culturally and linguistically relevant care.
- Participating agencies also reported that guaranteeing consistent clinical supervision hours at no cost enabled them to recruit and retain new substance use disorder and mental health staff and interns.

DCHS plans to continue funding clinical supervision to mitigate loss of trained clinical supervisors and ensure that supervision is available for new workers.

<u>Internship and Practicum 2024-2025 Investment Impact</u>
DCHS provided $1.9 million to 24 agencies for their internship and practicum programs in 2024-2025, including for stipends, internship coordination, and intern professional development. Clinical internships and practicums are a required component of graduate degree programs. Eighty percent of agencies receiving Career Pathways funding hosted practicum students and other trainees within the past year; over half were master's-level clinical interns. Among agencies with vacancies, the majority reported that at least a quarter of interns accepted a permanent position at their agency at the conclusion of their practicum, demonstrating that internship programs are a strong pipeline for recruitment.

Internship and Practicum Outcomes:
- 436 interns benefited from Career Pathways funding.
- Intern stipends reduced the financial burden for a position that is historically unpaid, allowed trainees to focus on coursework, and complete the initial training required for licensure and career advancement.
- Agencies were able to dedicate more staff time for intern recruitment, training, program management, and coordination with higher education programs.

DCHS investments in this area strengthened agency internship and practicum programs, which are preparing future mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, social workers, substance use disorder professionals, and psychologists to work in community behavioral health.

<u>Wellbeing Investment Results</u>
In 2024-2025, DCHS provided $1.2 million to 27 agencies to improve their behavioral health workforce's wellbeing. Twelve agencies established structured employee choice reimbursement programs to increase

the physical, mental, and emotional health of employees. Selected benefits paid for via these funds included medical co-insurance and deductibles, wellness resources such as meditation subscriptions, gym memberships, and massage reimbursement. Data from end of year reports validated the importance of this investment area:

- 4,799 staff participated in wellbeing activities funded by Career Pathways.
- 1,831 staff participated in staff retreats and team building activities.
- 1,569 staff participated in a wellness program or received wellness reimbursements.
- 664 staff received reimbursements or funds for health insurance-related costs.
- Agencies reported that providers felt valued and appreciated. Funding addressed financial needs, decreased stress, and improved their ability to focus on client services.

DCHS plans to continue funding workforce wellbeing initiatives to enable agencies to support health benefits and resources that reduce provider burnout and make it more possible for agencies to retain experienced workers.

Planned Refinements to Career Pathway Activities
As a result of this extensive community engagement process and analysis of data from the first year of Career Pathways investments, DCHS intends to continue the four targeted investment areas of clinical supervision, internships and practicums, professional development, and workforce wellbeing to strengthen community behavioral health workforce recruitment, retention, advancement, and diversification.

DCHS intends to implement two refinements to the Career Pathways funding strategy for 2027-2032:
1. Implement longer contract periods of at least two years.
Agencies requested a longer-term contract commitment from DCHS to continue advancing workforce development goals. With multi-year funding, agencies will be able to plan and implement initiatives that require longer timelines, including initiatives requiring hiring and onboarding of workers, providing longer-term training and clinical supervision, and improving retention.

2. Within available CCC Levy resources, sustain current investments in Career Pathways, to the degree the long-term sustainability of CCC Levy funds permits.
Consistent with the goals of Supporting Purpose 2 of the CCC Levy, DCHS intends to continue to respond to agencies' behavioral health workforce stabilization needs via Career Pathways funding in levy years 2027-2032, maximizing investments to the degree CCC Levy funding allows.

Due to significant demand for these resources, DCHS plans to maintain a similar investment level to sustain this behavioral health workforce development initiative. Among these, the department intends to prioritize continuation of the Y+ Heritage tuition-free Master's in Mental Health Counseling program. The Y+ Heritage program is open to staff working at all KCICN agencies and increases the representativeness of the community behavioral health workforce pipeline, thereby benefitting the region's community behavioral health network as a whole.

Plan for Annual Reporting of ZIP Code Data about Workforce Development Programs
The CCC Levy Implementation Plan requires this letter to include a plan for annual reporting of ZIP code data regarding CCC Levy workforce investments, to be developed in consultation with cities. In April 2026, DCHS consulted with the Sound Cities Association and human services staff from cities throughout King County about the plan described in this section.

DCHS' strategy for ZIP code reporting for the CCC Levy's Supporting Purpose Two, workforce development, is expected to include two key areas of measurement:

- Total workforce development expenditure of CCC Levy proceeds by ZIP code. DCHS intends to calculate expenditures by ZIP code using service provider locations, which is defined as all ZIP codes where providers indicate they will serve clients. This approach is consistent with established ZIP code reporting methodologies used for reporting about other CCC Levy investments and other DCHS levies and sales taxes.
- Total number of provider agency staff participants who engaged in CCC Levy funded workforce activities by ZIP code. Activities included in this calculation may be limited to those designed to support career development, staff training, and licensing. This calculation will be based on where staff participants provide the majority of their services, capturing where the greatest impact to clients is expected to occur. This may not be tied to a provider office building. When staff participants do not have a location where they provide the majority of their services because they provide a mix of virtual, mobile, and in-person service across a widely distributed area, the service provider's location will be used.

DCHS intends to report these ZIP code metrics in the CCC Levy's online annual report beginning in the report covering calendar year 2027, working within the limitations pertaining to ZIP code-level reporting described in the Implementation Plan. CCC Levy annual reporting will also describe overall outcomes of its workforce investments as results data becomes available.

Conclusion and Next Actions
DCHS intends to implement the CCC Levy's Career Pathways investments to support the community behavioral health workforce during 2027 to 2032 reflecting the refinements summarized above, within available CCC Levy resources and subject to appropriation. Consistent with the CCC Levy Implementation Plan, DCHS will proceed with implementation unless the Council has passed a motion rejecting these plans within 30 days of this letter.

I look forward to working with the Council to continue increasing the sustainability and representativeness of the community behavioral health workforce in King County through investments like these. Thank you for your consideration of this letter.

If your staff have any questions, please contact Dr. Susan McLaughlin, Acting Director, Department of Community and Human Services, at 206-477-9309.

Sincerely,

for

Girmay Zahilay
King County Executive

Enclosure

cc: King County Councilmembers
ATTN: Stephanie Cirkovich, Chief of Staff
Melani Hay, Clerk of the Council
Karan Gill, Deputy Executive, Office of the Executive
Jasmin Weaver, Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive
Hyeok Kim, Chief Operating Officer, Office of the Executive
Sierra Howlett Browne, Director of Government Relations, Office of the Executive
Garrett Holbrook, Council Relations Manager, Office of the Executive
Dr. Susan McLaughlin, Acting Director, Department of Community and Human Services

Appendix A

Career Pathways Funding Awards 2024-2026

Agency Name	Mental Health (MH) or Substance Use Disorder (SUD)	District	2024- 2025 Award	2026 Award
Asian Counseling and Referral Service	**MH, SUD**	2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	$234,186	$225,883
Atlantic Street Center	**MH**	2, 5, 7, 8	$195,421	$193,056
Catholic Community Services of King County	**MH, SUD**	1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	$139,274	$193,479
Center For Human Services	**MH, SUD**	1, 3, 6, 9	$498,885	$503,845
Children's Home Society of Washington DBA Akin	**MH, SUD**	2, 5, 8	$301,823	$365,935
ConnectionsWA, LLC	**MH, SUD**	1	$255,650	N/A
Consejo Counseling and Referral Service	**MH, SUD**	1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9	$559,035	$563,767
Crisis Connections	**MH, SUD**	4	$333,260	$329,226
Downtown Emergency Service Center	**MH, SUD**	2, 8	$305,718	$302,017
Evergreen Treatment Services	**SUD**	2, 5, 8	$237,000	$234,131
Friends of Youth	**MH, SUD**	3	$296,748	$300,656
HERO House NW		4, 9	$61,000	$54,440
IKRON Corporation	**MH, SUD**	6	$198,871	$173,779
Integrative Counseling Services	**SUD**	4	$160,200	$162,261
Kent Youth & Family Services	**MH, SUD**	5, 7	$127,868	$209,958
King County Sexual Assault Resource Center	**MH, SUD**	2, 5, 8	$188,722	$221,438
Navos	**MH, SUD**	5, 8	$38,199	$42,737
New Traditions	**SUD**	8	$252,458	$249,402
Pioneer Human Services	**SUD**	7, 8	$140,663	$149,961
Refugee Women's Alliance	**MH**	2, 5, 7, 8	$194,779	$199,921

Agency Name	Mental Health (MH) or Substance Use Disorder (SUD)	District	2024- 2025 Award	2026 Award
Ryther	**MH, SUD**	1, 2, 4	$304,167	$339,112
Sea Mar Community Health Centers	**MH, SUD**	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	$134,902	$135,269
Seattle Drug & Narcotic Center, Incorporated dba Key Recovery & Life Skills Center	**MH, SUD**	8	$190,704	$204,396
Seattle Indian Health Board	**SUD**	2, 8	$413,000	$426,000
Seneca Family of Agencies	**MH**	2, 5, 8	$62,535	$66,278
Sound	**MH, SUD**	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	$230,809	$241,015
Southwest Youth and Family Services	**MH, SUD**	8	$261,347	$271,498
Telecare Corporation	**SUD**	5, 7	$56,333	N/A
Therapeutic Health Services	**MH, SUD**	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	$66,500	$75,695
Transitional Resources	**MH**	8	$173,389	$114,268
Valley Cities Counseling & Consultation	**MH, SUD**	1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8	$273,202	$292,395
Vashon Youth and Family Services	**MH, SUD**	8	$190,026	$200,226
WAPI Community Services	**SUD**	2, 5, 7, 8	$97,779	$96,596
YMCA of Greater Seattle	**MH, SUD**	5, 7	$981,063	$997,705
Youth Eastside Services	**MH, SUD**	1, 3, 6, 9	$90,441	$91,551
Total			**$8,245,959**	**$8,227,896**

Appendix B

Community Engagement Participants

	Learning Collaboratives	MIDD Renewal Subject Matter Expert Workgroups	Career Pathways Data	KCICN Behavioral Health Workforce Survey	Key Informant Interviews
Description	19 one to two-hour meetings on behavioral health topics	5 workforce-focused multi-sector workgroup meetings to discuss needs and funding priorities for community behavioral health workforce	Quarterly meetings and reports, end of year report	Survey on employment levels, vacancies, recruitment and retention practices, challenges, and priorities to address workforce challenges	Interviews collecting data on successes, impact, gaps, and suggested refinements for Career Pathways
Number of Participants	775	19	35 agencies	35 agencies	6
Representatives of workers including representatives of labor management.	X	X	X	X	
Higher education training programs including community & technical colleges	X	X			
Community behavioral health agencies including MH and SUD	X	X	X	X	
People with expertise in improving representativeness of the behavioral health workforce	X	X			
Workers who identify as members of populations experiencing behavioral health inequities	X	X	X		X

Appendix C

Agency Career Pathways Quotes

- "Offering in-house clinical supervision hours is a major factor for both recruiting and retaining counseling staff. IKRON was able to recruit a new supervisor with a social work license, which has helped IKRON bring on an additional staff member in a social work program. Providing approved supervision hours helps retain staff as they want to stay with IKRON until they get their full licensure, and as a result, IKRON has had minimal turnover in 2025." – *IKRON*

- "Multiple staff members reported that the Wellness Stipend allowed them to use their time off in ways that meaningfully benefitted their wellness, as well as generally supporting their work-life balance and general well-being. This led to staff being better equipped to serve our clients as they had decreased stress levels and increased personal health as an outcome of this support." – *King County Sexual Assault Resource Center*

- "Willingness to allow Opportunity Costs (the cost of lost revenue to the agency when clinicians are not providing services) as part of the grant funds, is a game-changer! For a training that costs $2,000, an agency may lose $10,000 in potential revenue to send one clinician to that $2,000 training. So, grants that only cover the cost of training are not coming close to meeting the agency's actual needs." – *Kent Youth and Family Services*

- "Because of their positive experience as interns, five interns decided to stay on at Ryther as employees--3 full-time and 2 as part-time employees." – *Ryther*

- "The stipend has been incredibly helpful as a MSW student. I work in food service to cover my education and living expenses, because of the stipend I was able to reduce my hours. This has allowed me to dedicate more time and attention to my program and practicum. It has also helped reduce financial stress which was hindering my health and performance in school." – *Crisis Connections*

- "This summer we hired a Clinical Director and promoted one of our dually licensed clinicians to be a dually licensed supervisor. She is now supervising 3 dually licensed clinicians in our Long-Term Recovery Program. With this added capacity, we were able to hire four new clinicians. One started in June, two started in July, and one started in August." – *Key Works*

- "One of the greatest successes we have had is that 4 staff members complete their Master's degree through the Y/Heritage program at the end of 2025. This would not have been possible without Career Pathways funding allowing us to pay their release time. This funding allowed our staff members the ability to further their education without encountering the barriers of financial strain and exhaustion/burnout that typically prevent staff from attaining or even attempting higher education." – *Center for Human Services*