

The 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. The winning children, families, alumni, and staff members were selected by the Minnesota Head Start Association Scholarships and Awards Committee based on 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 for lifelong success.

Former TCC Head Start child, Hailee was the winner of the High School Senior category. Hailee began her journey in our Early Head Start home-based program and continued into center-based. Through her experience with the Head Start program, she developed a commitment to caring for people. Hailee actively gives back to her community and has earned her Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) certification and works with the elderly in a care center which she has developed a passion for. In the fall, Hailee plans to attend Central Lakes College for two years before transferring to St. Cloud State University to pursue a Bachelor of Science Degree and become a Registered Nurse.

This year, the award ceremony was held at PICA Head Start in Minneapolis during the week of the NHSA conference. All attendees of the NHSA conference had the honor of attending the MNHSA Head Start Heroes Awards.

Hailee was nominated by Erin Karnowski.





CATEGORY: HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR SCHOLARSHIP

Head Start child alumni who are high school seniors and are going on to achieve their educational goals by attending an institution of higher education. This award has a \$750 monetary scholarship to be paid to the recipient's educational institution.

Hailee ★

Tri-County Community Action Program

MY JOURNEY began in Early Head Start through the home-based program and continued into center-based preschool. Those early experiences created a strong foundation that shaped the person I am today. In Head Start, I learned the importance of routine, responsibility, and forming positive relationships with caring adults. More importantly, I felt supported, encouraged, and believed in. That sense of belonging built my confidence and sparked a love for learning that continues to guide me.

Being part of Head Start showed me how compassionate and dedicated professionals can truly impact children and families. The kindness and encouragement I received inspired my desire to help others in meaningful ways. Because of those early experiences, I have developed a deep commitment to caring for people who may feel vulnerable, overlooked, or alone.

Today, I actively give back to my community. I have participated in the Day of Caring, helping with tasks such as picking up trash, raking leaves, and washing windows to support local families. I also work at St. Otto's Care Center, where I began as an Activities Assistant helping residents stay engaged and connected. I have since earned my Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) certification and now provide hands-on care to residents. Through this work, I discovered a passion for geriatric care, especially supporting individuals who do not often receive visitors. Some of my most meaningful moments have come from simply sitting with residents, offering comfort, and reminding them they are not alone. One resident once told me that if I turned around, I would see angels behind me. Another shared that my hugs made her feel like she was being embraced by her daughter. These experiences confirmed my calling to serve others through compassionate healthcare.

In the fall, I plan to attend Central Lakes College to complete my first two years of study before transferring to St. Cloud State University to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. My long-term educational goal is to become a Registered Nurse. I hope to begin my career in the Emergency Room and later advance into Intensive Care, where I can support patients facing critical and life-threatening situations. I am especially drawn to caring for those experiencing their most vulnerable moments, providing both skilled medical care and emotional comfort.

Head Start planted the seed of confidence, compassion, and purpose within me. Just as the program supported me during a crucial stage of my life, I am committed to supporting others through healthcare and community service. My goal is to carry forward the kindness, encouragement, and belief that Head Start gave me, using it to make a lasting difference in the lives of individuals and families. ★