

Every April CAPCC honors individuals and/or organizations that are doing exceptional work in the field of child abuse prevention and intervention. The following are our 2026 Children First recipients.

April 2026 Children First Award Recipients

Early Head Start & Head Start Home Visitors of Northcoast Children's Services: Ana Perez, Wendy Hunt, Raylene Rhodes, Amy Fuller, Lindy Sproat, Shireen Boling, Gabriela LaBonte, and Carla Diaz



"I feel that this group of people are very deserving of this award due to their years of dedication and commitment to families and children in the community. Each of them brings so many unique and valuable strengths to their work. They build strong relationships, they meet families where they are at, celebrating each family's growth and successes alongside them. They are amazing "cheerleaders", helping parents and families to build their skills and their confidence in knowing that they are the expert on their child, and their best first teacher."



**Northcoast
Children's
Services**

<https://ncsheadstart.org/>

<https://www.instagram.com/ncsheadstart/>

<https://www.facebook.com/ncsheadstart/>

Maria "Ross" Beltran Espitia



For me, the inclusion of our Hispanic community is not just important — it is deeply personal. I know what it feels like. Integrating is not always easy, and many times it requires more courage than people recognize. That is why, in every space I create, my intention is clear: to open a place where everyone — families, children, and adults — feels seen, heard, and truly welcomed. A safe space filled with respect, warmth, and connection, where no one has to change who they are to belong. I believe in the importance of building community, supporting one another, and honoring our roots. Because when we feel safe and supported, we flourish... and when we flourish together, we create something much greater.

"Ross has worked as a playgroup leader at Jefferson for a couple years and now is also a playgroup leader at the Loleta playgroup. She is instrumental in ensuring Spanish speaking families are included in these groups. As a

playgroup leader she is so welcoming to all families and especially Spanish speaking families and caregivers making it to playgroup for the first time. She holds space for listening fully and empathically and is also a wealth of wellness knowledge and resources. Aside from being a playgroup leader and supporting families in that realm, Ross wears many other hats in the community to encourage language access, healing, mindfulness, and food access.

I am so thankful that we have Ross in our community as a colleague and as a person who supports parents and families."

Humboldt County Teen Court



Humboldt County Teen Court, a program of the Boys & Girls Club of the Redwoods, provides a restorative justice diversion program for youth ages 11 to 18 across Humboldt County. For many of the youth we serve, involvement in Teen Court comes at a critical moment: when a single mistake could otherwise lead to suspension, court involvement, or deeper system contact.

For the last 25 years, Teen Court has offered a different path.



Through a structured, peer-led model, youth who have caused harm take accountability in a meaningful and supportive way. Instead of being punished and removed from their community, they participate in a Teen Court hearing where trained youth volunteers, supported by adult mentors, serve as advocates, jurors, and facilitators. Together, they determine individualized, restorative outcomes focused on accountability, skill-building, and repairing harm.

Teen Court is built on a simple but powerful belief: young people learn best from each other. When given the opportunity, youth consistently rise to the occasion, holding one another accountable while also offering empathy, understanding, and support.

Traditional responses to youth behavior often rely on punishment, removal, or system involvement without addressing the underlying causes. Teen Court creates a space for reflection, responsibility, and growth, helping redirect youth before behaviors become more serious patterns.

We serve youth in partnership with schools, law enforcement, probation, and community organizations. Our is not only about responding to harm. It is about building a stronger, healthier community by investing in young people at the moment they need it most.

We are honored to receive the Children's First Award from the Child Abuse Prevention Coordinating Council. This recognition reflects not only the work of our staff, but the dedication of the youth volunteers who make this program possible. Every Teen Court hearing is led by young people who choose to show up and support their peers. They are the heart of this program. This recognition is as much theirs as it is Teen Court's.

We are deeply grateful to our community partners, schools, families, and referring agencies who trust us with this work and continue to support restorative, youth-centered approaches in Humboldt County.

"I have never regretted my decision to become involved with Teen Court as a volunteer Mentor and perhaps, in at least some small way, to help impact the lives of youth who have made a mistake that has brought them to the juvenile justice system. Mentoring cultivates positive youth development by connecting youth with committed adults who work one-on-one to provide support and guidance to

young people. Adult mentors help youth to identify and use their strengths, as well as encouraging the development of positive behaviors, attitudes and goals, in order to decrease the risk of further entanglement with the justice system." - Richard Hendry

"The support they give my son has been a key component to his success in this program as well as his desires to look into law on some level as a possible future career. So for that I say thank you!" -John T.

"Teen court has been a tremendous stepping stone for Jayden and I'm excited to see where it takes him next!" - Tina T.

<https://bgcredwoods.org/teen-court/>

<https://www.instagram.com/hcteencourt/>

<https://www.facebook.com/hcteencourt/>

Southern Humboldt Family Resource Center



"The Southern Humboldt Family Resource Center is the epicenter of information and support. The FRC is a joint program of co-located services and is supported by grant funding from extremely diverse sources. Our programs are open to change, and we are responsive to the needs of our participants and the community. Parents, sponsoring agencies, staff members, and the community, are welcome and

encouraged to be involved in program design, delivery, and evaluation. The Southern Humboldt Family Resource Center has a strong reputation as a place where all Southern Humboldt children, and their families, can get support and services. We understand that all children and parents need help at some time but not everyone needs the same type of support, we offer a wide range of programs to serve the needs of our community. Our goal is for strong, healthy children and teens to live in strong, healthy families. To do that, we work with many funding sources to bring multiple strategies to support Southern Humboldt youth and families. Early Prevention funded by FIRST 5 Humboldt, Substance Use Diversion Program funded by Prop 64 Cannabis taxes, Parent Education and Support Program funded by Mental Health Services Act, food security funded by CalFresh, and other services to our center.

As the Coordinator, I supervise the team of four. These four women facilitate life changing services everyday. They do it as smooth as inhalation. Often under the radar of the community at large. Never asking for recognition or the spotlight. Through their work, the SHFRC has created a safer community for our youth, a stronger sense of camaraderie amongst parents, and reduced stigma around participating in our programs overall. I am ever so impressed with their commitment and dedication to the work. I feel blessed to witness it."



**Southern Humboldt
Family Resource Center**

<https://www.hnfrc.org>

<https://sohumhealth.org/services/family-resource-center/>

<https://www.facebook.com/p/Family-Resource-Center-Southern-Humboldt-100067838165216/>