



*L. T. James*

*Panhandle Partnership, Inc.*  
**2020**  
**Annual Report**



**PANHANDLE**  
**PARTNERSHIP**

*Rooted in Frontier Spirit, Committed to the Future*



## PANHANDLE PARTNERSHIP

*Rooted in Frontier Spirit, Committed to the Future*

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*“Find a group of people who challenge and inspire you, spend a lot of time with them, and it will change your life forever.”*

~Amy Poehler

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2020 Panhandle Partnership Annual Report

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## *Who We Are*

We are a non-profit, membership-based organization serving the eleven counties of the Nebraska Panhandle.

## *What We Do*

We build collaboration among agencies, networks and the broader community to find creative solutions to improve quality of life and communities in the Panhandle.

## *Why We Do It*

Rooted in frontier cooperative spirit, we believe in collective impact for thriving and equitable Panhandle communities.

### **Panhandle Partnership, Inc.**

1517 Broadway, Suite 106  
Scottsbluff, NE 69361  
(308) 633-3818

[info@panhandlepartnership.com](mailto:info@panhandlepartnership.com)  
[www.panhandlepartnership.com](http://www.panhandlepartnership.com)



**Betsy Vidlak**  
**2020 Board President**

## *A Letter from the President*

What a year this has been! A year ago, none of us would have imagined where we are today. There has been so much change and many challenges, but as we always do in western Nebraska, we have had the courage and determination to move forward. The Panhandle Partnership continues to imagine a new future. Even though we can not see each other in person today, we are filled with joy that we can celebrate this year and all the hard work we have put toward making the Panhandle a better place.

This year we welcome a new face, Kayla, as our operations coordinator. We are very excited to bring her to our team! And I would be remiss to not mention the great efforts of our Unified Command, including Panhandle Public Health District and Scotts Bluff County Health Department.

They have been absolutely amazing and without them, so many of us would have been completely lost in navigating this new world. Additional thanks to the nonprofits who continue to show up everyday and serve the residents of our communities and businesses who keep us going. I continue to be inspired by the perseverance of our Panhandle.

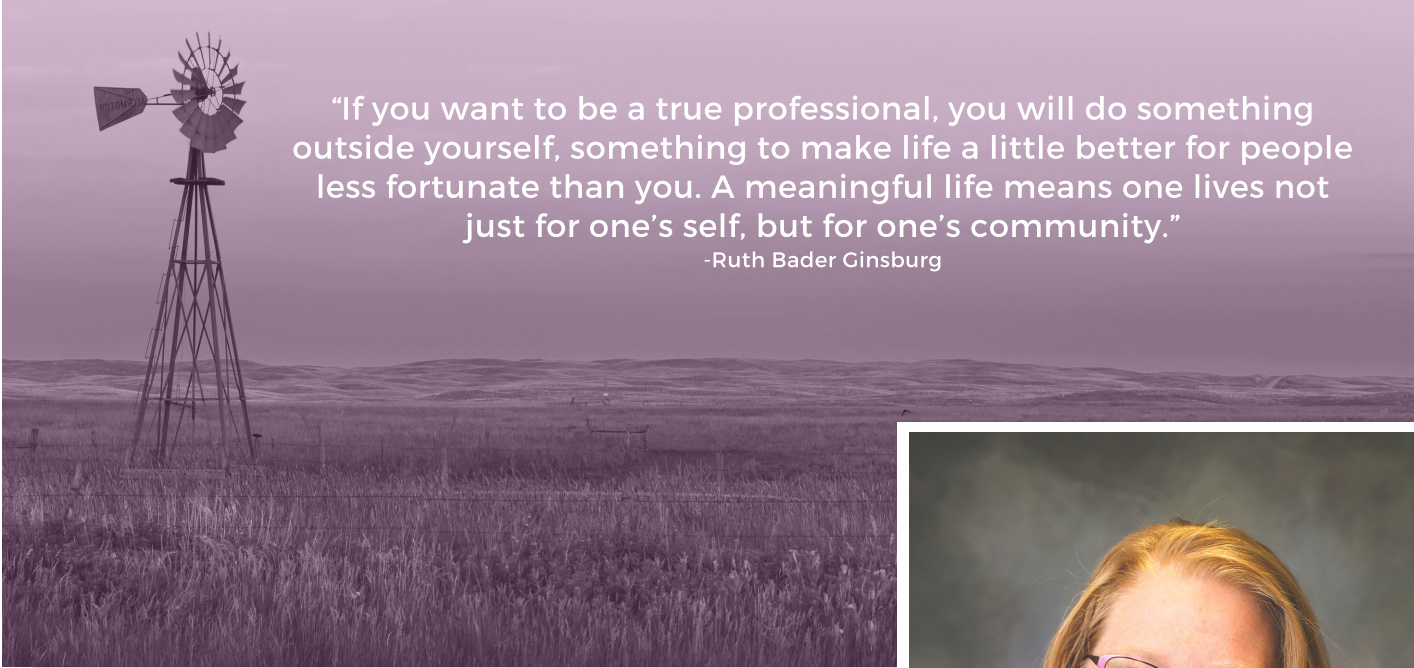
Here's to a new year and the continued wisdom that we all develop through these changing times.

*Betsy Vidlak*

We last longer if we compete against ourselves for the good of others instead of competing against others for the good of ourselves.

-Simon Sinek





“If you want to be a true professional, you will do something outside yourself, something to make life a little better for people less fortunate than you. A meaningful life means one lives not just for one’s self, but for one’s community.”

-Ruth Bader Ginsburg

## *A Letter from the Executive Director*

2020. What a year! Global Pandemic. The fight for racial justice. The deaths of civil rights leader and U.S. Representative John Lewis and Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. 2020 is also the year we celebrated the centennial of the passage of the 19th Amendment affording women the right to vote. It’s the year we spent more time with our kids and included our pets in our Zoom meetings.

Despite the challenges and upheaval, good is coming from it. Awareness. Self-reflection. Neighbors helping neighbors. Ruth Bader Ginsburg said, “If you want to be a true professional, you will do something outside yourself, something to make life a little better for people less fortunate than you. A meaningful life means one lives not just for one’s self, but for one’s community.”

In the Panhandle, one only needs look over their shoulder to see this. After the pandemic hit, the Partnership’s workgroups, members and partners didn’t skip a beat. They kept meeting virtually and, in some cases, doubled their work loads. There were drive-thru food pantries serving people with dignity and compassion. There was respite for a mom who was nearly in tears describing the last four months of her life. There was housing for people experiencing homelessness *and* testing positive for COVID-19. There was support and resources for early childcare providers.

These are transformative times and we are profoundly changed. We are also, in the midst of it, rebuilding our world. Thank you all for the work you do to make the Panhandle a better place to live, work and grow.



**Faith Mills**  
**Executive Director**

*Faith Mills*

# 2020 Board of Directors

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## Providers

**Betsy Vidlak**, President, Community Action Health Center

**Nici Johnson**, Educational Service Unit 13

**Karen Eisenbarth**, Northwest Community Action Partnership

**Mandy Fertig**, Secretary, Aging Office of Western Nebraska

**Jonnie Kusek**, Panhandle Trails Intercity Public Transit

**Sandy Montague-Roes**, Western Community Health Resources

## At Large

**Katie Samples Dean**, Vice President, Samples Dean Law

**Doug Mader**, Treasurer, Western Nebraska Community College

**Kortni Zeiler**, Department of Health & Human Services

**Rachel Sissel**, Individual Member

**Karen Benzel**, United Way of Western NE-Box Butte & Dawes County

**Leodegario Sierra**, UNL Panhandle Research & Extension District

## By Status of Position

**Kim Engel**, Panhandle Public Health District

**Brenda Brooks**, Department of Health & Human Services

**Paulette Schnell**, Scotts Bluff County Health Department

# Panhandle Partnership Staff



**Kayla Gasker**  
Operations Coordinator



**Faith Mills**  
Executive Director

## Panhandle Partnership Board of Directors



*"Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you."*

~Ruth Bader Ginsburg

## A THRIVING PLACE OF BELONGING

Panhandle Partnership strives to fulfill the pillars of **Collective Impact**: a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a backbone organization.

We bring the Collective Impact approach to the Nebraska Panhandle to integrate services across the region, maximize financial resources, and align efforts towards **common goals**. As the backbone agency, Panhandle Partnership coordinates the interactions between collaborative partners.

As a member of Panhandle Partnership, you are supporting collaboration and cooperation in the Panhandle so that our communities can continue to be thriving places of **belonging, growth and prosperity**.

## FINDING CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TOGETHER

### Benefits of Membership

- ✦ Active voice for annual voting on bylaws and board of directors
- ✦ Continuous communication with membership and the broader community
- ✦ Complimentary meeting space provided by WNCC
- ✦ Training Academy services including full event planning logistics
- ✦ Networking, leadership development and committee involvement opportunities





# PANHANDLE PARTNERSHIP MEMBERSHIP

**Do you know** an organization or individual who could benefit from being a member of Panhandle Partnership?

Email us:  
[info@panhandlepartnership.com](mailto:info@panhandlepartnership.com)

Aging Office of Western Nebraska

Bayard Public Schools

CAPstone

Community Action Health Center

Central Plains Center for Services

Chadron Community Hospital

Chadron Public Schools

Cirrus House

City of Scottsbluff

Conservation Nebraska

Cooperative Ministries Council

Department of Health & Human Services

The DOVES Program

Educational Service Unit 13

Gering Public Schools

Guardian Light Family Services

Housing Partners of Western Nebraska

Immigrant Legal Center

Independence Rising

Legal Aid of Nebraska

Lutheran Family Services

Mediation West

Minatare Public Schools

Monument Prevention Coalition

Nebraska Children's Home Society

Nebraska Civic Engagement Table

Nebraska Commission for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing

Nebraska Department of Labor

Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association

Nebraska Panhandle Area Health Education Center

Nebraska Safety Council

Nebraska Senior Health Insurance Information

Northwest Community Action Partnership

Panhandle Area Development District

Panhandle Equality

Panhandle Public Health District

Panhandle Trails Intercity Public Transit

Region 1 Behavioral Health Authority

Region 1 Office of Human Development

Regional West Medical Center

Snow Redfern Foundation

United Way of Western Nebraska

Panhandle Research & Extension Center

Volunteers of America

Well Care

Western Community Health Resources

Western Nebraska Community College

Katie Samples Dean

Shawna Ricshling

Sonjia Serda

Joan Cromer

Roger Wess

Daniel Bennett

Rachel Sissel

*Thank You for Your Support!*



# TRAINING ACADEMY

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## *Mission*

To build an upwardly mobile workforce with **local** talent by providing credible, meaningful, consistent and **affordable** professional development opportunities that results in an **extraordinary** service system.

## *Specialized Training*

- Trauma Informed Care
- Domestic Violence Training
- Opioid Crisis Summit
- Motivational Interviewing
- Family Development Specialist Training
- Early Childhood Education

*and more!*

## BY THE NUMBERS

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**1,400** training attendees

**460** agencies represented

**47** trainings

*The Panhandle Partnership's Training Academy is a way for us to invest in individuals and agencies/organizations as we strive to make the Panhandle a great place to live and work.*

## UPWARDLY MOBILE WORKFORCE

### TRAINING ACADEMY

Panhandle Partnership's Training Academy provides members with a variety of benefits, whether attending a training or with assistance in planning a training.

The **Training Academy** employs regional training plans, coordinated curriculum development and assists agencies in grant compliance for trainings.

Panhandle Partnership can provide financial, administrative and event management support for a member's training or conference. Contact us to get started!

Even if a training is "in-house" and requires no additional supports or resources from the Partnership, it can still be valuable to the Training Academy. There is no cost to your agency, but it is a benefit to Panhandle Partnership.

**CREDIBLE &  
AFFORDABLE TRAINING**

### WHAT WE CAN DO FOR YOU

- ✦ Contract with speakers and plan travel logistics
- ✦ Coordinate meeting space and catering
- ✦ Provide online registration platform and on-site sign-in assistance
- ✦ Manage marketing and promotion
- ✦ Materials, handouts, certificates and name badges

*Contact:* Kayla Gasker | [kayla.gasker@panhandlepartnership.com](mailto:kayla.gasker@panhandlepartnership.com)

# Connected Youth Initiative

## COMMON AGENDA

The Connected Youth Initiative (CYI) aims to coordinate and align services and resources of agencies serving unconnected youth ages 14-25 to provide opportunities for leadership development, financial responsibility and transitional services.

## KEY PROGRAMS

- Youth Leadership & Service Learning
- Opportunity Passport
- Transitional Services
- Youth Thrive
- Connected Youth Host Home Program

## 2020 NOTES

- 153 new referrals were made for transitional services through the Navigation System
- 435 nights of emergency shelter were provided to young adults and their children
- 70 youth were assisted with rent and/or utilities
- 48 youth were assisted with various needs such as work clothes, mental health evaluations and medication
- 52 individuals are active in the Opportunity Passport program, out of a total of 69 enrolled.
- Panhandle Older Youth Systems meetings are ongoing and throughout 2020, CYI meetings were held virtually



Funds from the William & Ruth Scott Foundation provided stipends to youth for participating in community engagement and leadership development programs.

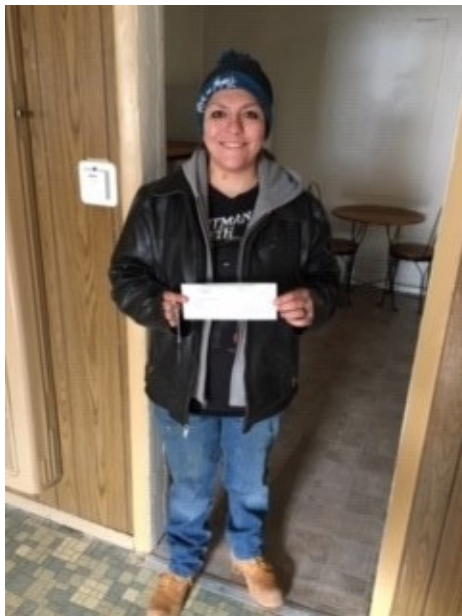
## LOOKING AHEAD

***"Many of these participants aged out of foster care or do not have strong, parental role models and can use the additional supports as they learn to live independently."***

~Liz MacDonald, CYI Coordinator

# CONNECTED YOUTH INITIATIVE OPPORTUNITY PASSPORT

*Celebrate the  
Good!*



Justice is a great example of the success of the **Opportunity Passport** program, a program of the Connected Youth Initiative. She works at Western Sugar and had been doubled up in a small house with relatives. With a housing match, she was able to pay the deposit and Opportunity Passport paid the first month's rent and then part of her utility deposit. Justice was very appreciative of Opportunity Passport and the assistance to accomplish her goal of having her own place to live.

Blade completed the **Opportunity Passport** training several years ago and has been working at Safeway for the past six years. Blade completed a vehicle match at the end of March. This vehicle will allow Blade to forgo the one mile walk to and from work every day, something he had been doing for six months. He saved his money and worked really hard toward this goal for a long time. This is definitely going to be a bright spot in Blade's life. He is so appreciative of the Opportunity Passport program.



# Continuum of Care

## FOR HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

### COMMON AGENDA

The Panhandle Continuum of Care for Housing & Homelessness is a collaboration of agencies that are committed to serving the homeless or near homeless population in the Panhandle. Striving to eliminate and prevent homelessness is at the forefront of this initiative.

### 2020 NOTES

In January, a national **Point In Time (PIT) survey** was conducted to count sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night. Finding individuals and families sleeping in cars, parks and abandoned buildings proved difficult and only 5 people for the entire Panhandle were accounted for. The PIT survey does not take into account people who are couch-surfing, living in substandard housing or overcrowded situations. Planning for a 2021 PIT survey is underway.

Members of the CoC **served meals** at the Lakota Lutheran Center in Scottsbluff and the Community Table in Alliance. Participating in this outreach solidified the need for meal programs and a small committee was formed to explore offering a daily lunch in Scottsbluff/Gering. However, due to COVID, this endeavor was put on hold.



Volunteers at the Community Table in Alliance

Originally planned for September, the **2nd Annual Panhandle Project Connect** event was canceled due to COVID concerns.

### LOOKING AHEAD

***"We have all seen an increase in demand over the last few months and anticipate it will likely get worse. The work we do matters, especially now."***

~Hilary Wasserburger, CoC Coordinator

# Lifespan Respite

## NEBRASKA RESPITE NETWORK

### COMMON AGENDA

The Lifespan Respite initiative is one of six in the Nebraska Respite Network. The program provides respite services for family caregivers for relief from the demands of ongoing care of an individual with long-term or lifelong disabilities. The Respite Network offers information and referral services for families and respite providers.

### 2020 NOTES

- From July 2019 through August 2020, there were a total of 80 respite subsidy applications completed including annual renewals.
- There were 57 individuals on the Lifespan Respite Subsidy Program, which used \$66,511.85 in funding to respite providers.
- 21 individuals (16 children, 3 elderly, 2 adults) utilized the Respite Days Program, which receives funding from the Snow Redfern Foundation and Friends of Alzheimer's & Dementia. Funds used totaled \$6,239.50.
- At the start of the COVID pandemic, demand for monthly respite decreased slightly, however, it is now increasing as families feel the strain of being home.
- One **new Community Organization Provider**, Aerial Gymnastics, and three new individual providers have been added.



Respite FUN Day was revised in the midst of COVID with families given extra money to plan a fun outing for their kids.

- **New Virtual Support Group/Trainings** for youth siblings of individuals with autism is upcoming.

### LOOKING AHEAD

*"We are excited to see the continued growth and increased referrals. The biggest need is finding more individuals willing to become respite providers."*

~Sherri Blome, Respite Coordinator

# Panhandle Prevention Coalition

## COMMON AGENDA

United together by passion and dedication to make residents of western Nebraska healthy and safe across the lifespan, the purpose of the Panhandle Prevention Coalition (PPC) is to reduce the impact of substance use and abuse while promoting and supporting mental and emotional health for all.

## 2020 NOTES

Although COVID slowed prevention work throughout the Panhandle, positive strides still took place. The PPC committee met in person in January but not again until July albeit virtually.

Some accomplishments include:

- Sent letters to the Nebraska Liquor Commission regarding an establishment of concern resulting in a denied special event application at the city level
- Contracted with Dr. David Schramm of Utah State University Extension to create **positive prevention videos** to share throughout the Panhandle
- Collected local data from a law enforcement panel, hosted by PPC, regarding current trends around marijuana and opioid use, alcohol consumption and mental health concerns
- **QPR Suicide Prevention** training is now offered virtually



- Gering, Bayard, Hemingford, Alliance, Creek Valley, and Chadron schools **implemented Hope Squads**
- In collaboration with the Hazeldon Betty Ford Foundation, numerous opioid trainings have been held

## LOOKING AHEAD

*"I am amazed at the commitment our community partners have in the field of prevention. We, as a prevention system, have had the opportunity to rest and regenerate our enthusiasm for prevention work. Here's to another great year!"*

~Chelsy Schneringer, PPC Coordinator



# System of Care Birth to Eight

## COMMON AGENDA

The System of Care (SOC): Birth to Eight's mission is to build collaboration among agencies, networks and the community to find innovative solutions to improve the quality of life for families and children in the Panhandle.

## KEY PROGRAMS

- Circle of Security Parenting Class
- FAST (Families And Schools Together)
- Rooted in Relationships

## 2020 NOTES

2020 has been a year of flexibility. SOC committee members strived to be an outlet for families and providers to get the services and support they needed.

**Partners worked together** sharing ideas and supports that they had for children and families, successes and celebrations, as well as things to learn. The pandemic strengthened the notion that all of work groups are connected when a crisis arises. The SOC group appreciates all of the partners that have supported the families of the Panhandle.



**Rooted in Relationships** is an initiative that partners with communities to implement evidence based practices that enhance the social-emotional development of children, birth through age 8.

## LOOKING AHEAD

***"We have some new things on the horizon! Garden County, the City of Gering and Sidney are newly involved with Communities for Kids. Watch for opportunities in these communities to participate. These teams need members who care about the community and have experience in collective impact."***

~Nici Johnson, SOC Coordinator

*Special Thanks to our*  
**FUNDING PARTNERS**



*Thank you for your support throughout the year!*