

Positive Change

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Wheeler provides comprehensive solutions that address complex health issues, providing individuals, families and communities with accessible, innovative care that encourages health, recovery, and growth at all stages of life. Our integrated approach to primary and behavioral health, education, and recovery creates measurable results, positive outcomes and hopeful tomorrows for more than 30,000 individuals across Connecticut each year.



Celebrating a Leader, Launching a New Era at Wheeler



Wheeler ushered in a new era with the retirement of Susan Walkama, LCSW, and the appointment of Sabrina Trocchi, PhD, MPA, as president and chief executive officer.

Dr. Trocchi's appointment came after a thorough search process conducted by the Wheeler Board of Trustees and led by outgoing Chair Christine Skelly during the summer.

Walkama transformed Wheeler into a leading statewide provider of integrated health care services, serving as president and CEO for more than a dozen years. She began her career at Wheeler nearly four decades ago as a volunteer in Emergency Services. Under her leadership, Wheeler evolved from a community-based provider of behavioral health services to a statewide, innovative leader in fully integrated health care and a federally qualified community health center, and grew to serve more than 30,000 individuals and families annually. It opened its fourth federally qualified community health center in Waterbury this August, joining other centers in Bristol, Hartford, and New Britain.

"Susan has been an exceptional leader through unprecedented change," said Skelly. "She did not chase trends, but led Wheeler to the cutting edge and lit a path for everyone to follow. Her strategic vision of quality, accessible health care for all shaped every decision, in every area."

Walkama's influence reached every area of the organization, particularly in services for children, which she grew, expanded, and led prior to assuming the president and CEO role, and in integrated whole-person health care. Her tenure as the president and CEO moved the organization forward in a time of dramatic national change, such as the Affordable Care Act.

Shortly after assuming the role of president and CEO, after identifying significant unmet needs for primary care in the patients she served, Walkama led Wheeler to become a federally qualified health center (FQHC), part of a system of care nationally that serves more than 28 million Americans, especially medically underserved individuals and communities. *(Continued on Page 2.)*

Matching Gift Campaign Honors Walkama, Supports Nutrition Programming

A matching gift campaign honors retired Wheeler President and Chief Executive Officer Susan Walkama, LCSW, and raises support for Wheeler's nutrition programming, which she envisioned and implemented. The anonymous gift pledge, from a longtime supporter and dedicated former Wheeler trustee, will match, dollar-for-dollar, gifts made in Walkama's honor for the program, up to \$25,000 in total, through December 31, 2019.



"Susan's legacy is looking at health holistically, and you can see her influence in so many areas, from adding dental care, to expanding community health workers who connect patients to available programs and services," says the donor. "It's difficult to pick just one area to support in her honor, but nutrition is a perfect example of a program she championed that cuts across many elements of health and wellness." *(Continued on Page 2.)*



Wheeler

Innovative Care. Positive Change.

a message of **change** from the president

WheelerClinic.org



As we complete this issue of *Positive Change*, our organization begins many new chapters. From shifts in leadership, to how we serve consumers and the launch of new programs, we are doing all we can—as creatively and efficiently as we can—to meet the dynamic needs of individuals and families across Connecticut.

Our cover story highlights Wheeler’s matching gift campaign to support innovative nutritional programming, in honor of Susan Walkama, who retired as president and CEO. This effort includes an anonymous gift pledge, from a longtime supporter and dedicated former Wheeler trustee, which will match, dollar-for-dollar, gifts made in Susan’s honor for the program, up to \$25,000 in total, through December 31, 2019.

We also highlight a national health care model that embeds behavioral health in primary care and how our teams at

Wheeler’s Family Health & Wellness Centers are working side-by-side to deliver seamless care to patients. A new Wheeler program that helps older teens leaving the foster care system to transition successfully into adulthood also is featured, as well as a story of one woman’s journey to adopting her son.

The future is bright, and we are steadfast in our commitment to encouraging health, recovery, and growth for individuals and families at every stage of life. I look forward to working with you as the months unfold and urge you to consider how you can make a difference this season, from donating to our matching gift campaign, to strengthening Wheeler’s Basic Needs Fund. Thank you for your support. YOU are at the heart of what we do. YOU make positive change possible.

Sabrina Trocchi, PhD, MPA
President and Chief Executive Officer

Celebrating a Leader (cont.)

A New Era

Dr. Trocchi previously served as the organization’s chief operating officer, a role in which she implemented a systemic approach to the development and execution of organizational strategy, along with a wide range of community-based and in-home services in children’s and adult outpatient, community justice, prevention and wellness, family and community services, congregate care, early childhood, and psychiatric medical, as well as grants development and quality operations. She also served as the chief strategy officer, overseeing and implementing strategic partnerships, ventures, and alliances.

“Dr. Trocchi’s deep expertise in health care systems, integrated care, evidence-based practices, addiction treatment, and more, is the perfect fit for a visionary organization like Wheeler that is always looking to community priorities today, and the future of health care tomorrow,” said James Moylan of Bristol, Wheeler’s Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

Prior to joining Wheeler in 2014, she served in leadership positions with the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, including as chief of staff. She was responsible for directing the planning, development, and garnering of over \$170 million in new federal funds for the

expansion and enhancement of clinical substance abuse and/or mental health treatment and prevention services.

Trocchi provided leadership and direct oversight to DMHAS’ six state-operated local mental health authorities, with over 1,600 staff, including planning, developing, and directing clinical and administrative programs and services in accordance with policies established by the commissioner and in response to local needs.

Matching Gift (cont.)

Programs are held at the Corsini Kitchen, on the campus of



the community health center, thanks to the philanthropic support of the Corsini and Brantner families. Raymond Corsini was Wheeler’s longest-serving trustee and was passionate about food, gardening, cooking, and healthy diet.

“Wheeler’s donors have challenged and inspired us throughout our history,” said Walkama. “I’m honored that our dear friend is raising support for something that is so important for our patients to achieve wellness and stay healthy.” To contribute, please visit WheelerClinic.org/give, or fill out the form on Page 7.

Honoring a Legacy

Community Health Center in Hartford Renamed to Honor Susan Walkama



The primary five-story building at Wheeler's flagship community health center will be renamed the *Susan Walkama Family Health & Wellness Center* in the spring of 2020, the Board of Trustees announced in late October.

The building at 43 Woodland Street, Hartford, located at the Wheeler Family Health & Wellness Center campus at 43–49 Woodland Street, opened on January 8, 2018, the 50th anniversary of the organization, after a yearlong, \$5-million renovation that dramatically redesigned the interior to match Wheeler's philosophy of truly integrated health care services. It houses the majority of services offered on the campus, including primary care and behavioral health, addiction treatment, dental care, specialty care like OB-GYN, chiropractic, and complementary and alternative medicine, a full-service pharmacy and laboratory, and much more. Nearly 200 staff work at the center across a range of disciplines and specialties.

The center is currently undergoing extensive renovation, thanks to the state's Nonprofit Grant Program, which is increasing site safety, access to services, and efficiencies for the campus. Because of the construction, the official naming ceremony will occur when renovations are complete.

"Together, with my colleagues, past and present, we poured so much work, love, and sweat into getting Wheeler where we are today," Walkama said. "When I learned 43 Woodland Street would be named for me, I had no words to express how touched I was. It represents the vision that so many of us shared, and I feel so very privileged to have been a part of it."

Colleagues, Community Leaders, Friends Celebrate a Leader

A gathering at the Country Club of Farmington on October 29 honored Susan Walkama and offered guests an opportunity to share reflections on her accomplished career.



A state proclamation honoring Walkama's service was presented by state legislators. From left to right are State Representative Cathy Abercrombie (D-83), Susan Walkama, State Senator Matt Lesser (D-9), and State Representative Mike Demicco (D-21). State Representative William Petit (R-22) and State Senator Henri Martin (R-31) (not pictured) also signed and secured the proclamation.



Wheeler trustees, past and present, celebrated Walkama's leadership, including (from left) Richard E. Cartland; James Moylan, chair; Pierre Richard, treasurer; and Gary Thomas.

Delivering Complete Health Care

National Model Aligns Behavioral Health and Primary Care Delivery

Primary care patients at Wheeler's four Family Health & Wellness Centers have greater and more immediate access to behavioral health services through a unique national model that integrates behavioral health professionals into primary care services.



Adam Harrison, PsyD (right) works side-by-side with health care providers like Amanda Grasso, APRN (left) and Kristin Gardner, RN supervisor.

According to Teodoro Anderson Diaz, LCSW, LADC, vice president of Family Health & Wellness Center Outpatient Services at Wheeler, many people who come in for primary care services also have a behavioral health condition, and 70 percent of people have a co-occurring disorder and need for additional services, including opioid addiction and alternative pain management strategies.

“Traditionally, when individuals are referred to behavioral health specialists during a primary care visit, they don’t follow through for many reasons, from

transportation issues, to fear of stigma,” said Anderson Diaz. “We have integrated our behavioral health clinicians and consultants into our medical teams so that patients have immediate access to the care they need, and interruptions in care are reduced.”

Adam Harrison, PsyD, who worked for decade as a psychologist, and who is now part of the Wheeler integrated team, supports this model. “Behavioral health IS primary care,” Harrison said. “Our team works toward the same goal, across disciplines, responding to the same needs of the patient: to be well, to be healthy.”

Anderson Diaz said that among the changes are primary care and behavioral health staff working side-by-side to enhance the patient’s experience, eliminating the gap from when the referral is made, to when the patient sees a behavioral health provider. Behavioral health visits are shorter and more solution-focused, and intakes, appointments, and scheduling happen on the same day.

Anderson Diaz added that this innovative concept can be applied more widely to meet the needs of consumers. For example, if individuals come in as behavioral health patients, there are also options for them to receive primary care and dental services. “There are many doors to accessing care,” said Anderson Diaz. “The key is to create a memorable patient experience—to deliver something that differentiates us in the minds of the consumer,” he added. Read more at: WheelerClinic.org/whole-patient

Alternative Pain Management Strategies in Hartford



Wheeler is at the forefront of treating pain through alternative strategies, with specially trained staff who integrate behavioral health therapies and alternative approaches into plans of care at the Family Health & Wellness

Center at 43 Woodland St., Hartford. Treatment addresses conditions such as fibromyalgia, arthritis, and back, neck, and joint pain, and includes: meditation and mindfulness; acupuncture; cognitive behavioral and dialectical behavior therapy; methods using gate control theory; yoga; chiropractic care, and more.

Saturday Hours Launched in Hartford

To better meet the needs of individuals and families in Hartford and surrounding communities, Wheeler will launch Saturday hours at its Family Health & Wellness Center at 43 Woodland Street, Hartford, on December 7. Saturday hours will be from 9 a.m.–1 p.m. and include treatment for cold and flu symptoms, aches and pains, minor cuts and bruises, and behavioral health and addiction services.



Promoting Futures, Guiding Youth

Easing the Transition to Adulthood



Members of Wheeler's YV Lifeset Program team.

Imagine that you are 18 years old and preparing for life as an independent adult outside of the foster care system. The prospects may be scary but made easier by a Wheeler program to help emerging adults navigate the journey.

Funded by the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Youth Villages LifeSet model gives young adults, ages 17–21, the support and guidance they need to make a successful transition to adulthood. Wheeler works with the DCF office that serves Region 6, New Britain/Meriden.

“There are many challenges that young people in foster care face as they prepare for life as independent adults,” said Elisabeth Cannata, PhD, vice president, Community-Based Family Services and Practice Innovation at Wheeler. “This program provides supports and services to facilitate this transition, to ensure that youth have the skills to become more independent, but also the ongoing connections and supports that we all need.”

“Young people who have experienced foster care have so much potential, but without support may struggle to overcome childhood adversity as they move toward adulthood,” said Patrick Lawler, CEO of Youth Villages. “In a randomized, controlled trial, LifeSet was shown to positively impact many aspects of a young person’s life, helping them identify and reach their adult goals, guiding them each step of the way.”

Staff work with youth as they:

- Strive to finish high school or earn a GED
- Apply for college and scholarships and begin a college career
- Find suitable and stable housing
- Learn money management skills
- Find and maintain employment
- Apply for medical insurance and seek physical and mental health services
- Access community resources
- Build and maintain healthy relationships
- Learn about sexual health and well-being, with a focus on pregnancy prevention
- Develop strong parenting skills
- Establish life-long connections with caring adults



Family members or other supports are an essential part of the young adult’s path to success. Reconciliation with family members and development of new relationships and lifelong connections with caring adults are encouraged.

Fostering Connections, Making Change

November was National Adoption Month, an observance that underscores the need for foster and adoptive parents for thousands of youth in Connecticut. The story below, told by Wheeler Foster Care Senior Recruiter Chris Popilowski, highlights one Wheeler foster parent’s journey, which took her from a desire to help, to the role of a loving adoptive parent.



When Eileen Bodington came to Wheeler Clinic Foster Care, she was no stranger to the world of adoption. The mother of five children, of whom she had adopted four, Eileen knew about challenges of parenting children with varying degrees of mental health needs.

When her children were grown, Eileen began working at a clinical day school to pursue her passion of helping children. She eventually became a teacher in charge of her own classroom, and it was there that she met her future foster child. This boy had his share of challenges. He was very withdrawn, incredibly fearful of anyone touching him, hypervigilant and, at times, physically aggressive.

After reading about the trauma he endured, Eileen viewed his behaviors as products of trauma and immediately recognized his strengths. She saw a child who was incredibly resilient, a leader among his peers who could have many positive interactions with school staff when he was at his best.

Eileen knew that developing a connection with him would take time. She always asked him how his basketball games went, even though she knew nothing about the sport. One day, he asked if she would attend a game, and she agreed. She knew how important it was to not let him down. She continued to attend his games to watch him play, and when he didn’t acknowledge her or admit he saw her in the stands, she didn’t take it personally.

(Continued on Page 6.)

Raising Awareness, Changing Lives

Purple Tie Tuesday

In late October, Wheeler's Community Justice teams and many others sported purple to raise awareness of domestic violence. For example, the Intervention Unit, operating both the Explore and Family Violence Education (FVEP) programs, encouraged Wheeler employees to show their support for combating domestic violence and raising awareness by: wearing purple; sharing supportive resource material; and engaging in important conversations with community partners and Wheeler consumers.

Wheeler offers programs designed to help adults and families navigate the challenges of intimate partner and family violence through intensive in-home services and community-based treatment, including its Multisystemic Therapy-Intimate Partner Violence (MST-IPV) program, among the first in the nation. In addition, Wheeler serves court-involved individuals with domestic or family violence issues through its Explore and FVEP programs, as well as its Alternative in the Community (AIC) programs.

Learn more at WheelerClinic.org/Community-Justice



Foster Care in the Community

From chili festivals to chamber meetings, Wheeler's Foster Care team took part in many community events in late summer and fall to promote the benefits of becoming a foster parent.



Foster care staff attended the 5th Annual Simsbury Spooktacular Chili Challenge at the Simsbury Meadows Performing Arts Center on October 20.



Chris Popilowski, senior recruiter, was featured in an Exvadio Media podcast, highlighting the need for foster families for youth and how to start the process. Visit the news section of our website for a link to the podcast.

Fostering Connections (cont.)

Eileen learned that her student would eventually leave the residential program to live in a group home, and she became very concerned about his future. She reached out to the Department of Children and Families to see if she could be a visiting resource. Upon approval, they started visiting outside of school. He was still very quiet and not incredibly responsive, but she knew that her patience was what he needed. Soon Eileen began taking Wheeler's TIPS-MAPP foster and adoptive classes. After she prepared herself to be a foster parent, she again put his needs first, allowing him to decide if he wanted to be her foster son, to which he eventually agreed.

Over time, Eileen saw amazing changes. Her son was less anxious and becoming more independent. She supported his connection with his birth family, which, in turn, strengthened his connection with her. When problems arose, she focused on his strengths. All of this culminated in his adoption during the summer of 2019. Eileen's selflessness and unconditional love cannot be understated. She patiently and consistently worked to understand her child's needs and to find the best ways to meet them.

To learn more about becoming a Wheeler foster parent, call 860.793.7277, or visit WheelerClinic.org/Foster

Dollars and Change

One Season, Many Ways to Give

This season, consider the many ways that you can make a difference in the lives of the individuals and families we serve. Fill out the adjacent pledge form or visit WheelerClinic.org/Give

Give to the Basic Needs Fund



Wheeler's Basic Needs Fund addresses a range of environmental and social factors that interfere with a patient's health and well-being, but are not addressed by other means of funding, for example food, transportation, clothing, shelter, medications, or other items or activities that cannot be accessed through a patient's own resources and/or community-based social service programs.

The fund is used when a patient's physical and emotional well-being are affected by lack of the needed resources and, as a consequence, the patient's health condition may deteriorate, and health outcomes may not improve. Any patient at Wheeler's Family Health & Wellness Centers is eligible if they have: an urgent social or physical unmet need that could potentially worsen their health status and delay treatment; the patient is actively engaged with health center staff; and the patient has no other means or has exhausted all other efforts to obtain the needed resources.

Matching Gift to Honor Susan Walkama



A matching gift campaign honors former Wheeler President and Chief Executive Officer Susan Walkama and raises support for Wheeler's nutrition programming, which she envisioned and implemented. The anonymous gift pledge, from a longtime supporter and dedicated former Wheeler trustee, will match, dollar-for-dollar, gifts made in Walkama's honor for the program,

up to \$25,000 in total, through December 31, 2019. *(See cover story.)*

Wheeler's Innovation Fund



Peter and Mary Fran Libassi were innovators throughout their long careers. Today, their support of Wheeler through the Libassi Innovation Fund allows our staff to experiment with new ideas, like alternative approaches to pain management. Your contribution to this fund ensures that creative problem-solving is encouraged and nurtured, from idea to implementation, to benefit the consumers and communities we serve.

More about Peter and Mary Fran Libassi and this unique fund at WheelerClinic.org/Innovation

Will You Help?

Giving Match in honor of Susan Walkama, LCSW \$ _____

Raises support for Wheeler's nutrition programming and will be matched dollar-for-dollar by an anonymous donor. (See cover story.)

Basic Needs Fund \$ _____

Your donation provides for the supports and services that insurance and other funding doesn't.

Wheeler Innovation Fund \$ _____

Your dollars allow our staff to experiment with new ideas and address issues with innovative approaches.

General Support \$ _____

Support the care of individuals, families, and communities across our state each year, through Wheeler's continuum of more than 100 services and programs.

Name (as you wish to see it printed)

Address

City State Postal Code

Telephone

Email

Enclosed is my total gift of \$ _____

Check enclosed **or** Charge my credit card

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Account Number

Exp. Date

Security Code

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GIVING MATCH IN HONOR OF *Susan Walkama, LCSW*



In her more than 12 years as president and CEO, Susan Walkama, LCSW, had a transformative approach to whole-person health and integrated care, including alternative approaches in pain management, incorporating dental services, a partnership with Holcomb Farm for fresh vegetables, creating and expanding a team of community health workers, and more!

We believe Wheeler's nutrition program, which Susan envisioned and launched, represents the perfect choice to support and honor her legacy. Through December 31, an anonymous, dedicated former trustee will match, dollar-for-dollar, up to \$25,000 in total, any donations made in Susan's honor to support Wheeler's nutrition programming.



To donate, visit www.WheelerClinic.org/Walkama or contact Wheeler's Marketing Communications and Philanthropic Giving Department at 860.793.4214 or giving@wheelerclinic.org.