



2014

Virginia  
McKnight  
Binger

AWARDS IN  
HUMAN SERVICE

30  
YEARS

THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

# about the awards

Since 1985, the Virginia McKnight Binger Awards in Human Service have been an annual tradition at The McKnight Foundation. The awards reflect McKnight's deep belief in the virtue and power of compassion. Including this year's group, this honor has gone to 283 Minnesotans. Each recipient has given time and effort to help others with no expectation of material reward. Each exemplifies the life-changing difference one person can make through service.

In 1995, McKnight's Awards in Human Service were renamed in tribute to Virginia McKnight Binger. Mrs. Binger served the Foundation for nearly 50 years as a board member, as president from 1974 to 1987, and then as honorary chair until her death in 2002. Although William L. and Maude L. McKnight established the Foundation, it was the compassion and personal generosity of their daughter that set the standard for such work.

Like Virginia McKnight Binger in her time, the recipients of these awards are acutely aware of others' needs. Each was nominated in confidence by someone familiar with their work.

Nominees live and volunteer in Minnesota and show commitment to helping others achieve a better life. This spring and summer, a committee of volunteers active in the human services researched and independently evaluated the nominations and recommended finalists to the Foundation's board of directors. Each approved awardee receives \$10,000.

For more information about The McKnight Foundation, visit [www.mcknight.org](http://www.mcknight.org).

# our mission

The McKnight Foundation, a Minnesota-based family foundation, seeks to improve the quality of life for present and future generations. Through grantmaking, collaboration, and strategic policy reform, we use our resources to attend, unite, and empower those we serve.

# celebrating 30 years

283

Number of  
Minnesotans who have  
received an award

1985

First year of awards

6

Number of awards  
given each year  
(currently)

\$1,910,000

Total amount awarded

94

Number of communities/  
cities represented

\$10,000

Amount of each award (currently)

1

Home state of all  
VMB awardees

87 out of 87

Number of MN counties served

30

Years of Human  
Service Awards

“Be good to those less fortunate  
than yourself. You’ll always  
find the greatest happiness and  
satisfaction in doing kind deeds.”

— Virginia’s mother, Maude L. McKnight

# awardees

brenda anderson Waseca

barbara fabre Ogema

liz kuoppala Moorhead

juan linares St. Paul

susan neis Minneapolis

melissa eagle uhlmann Rochester



## statement by board chair

Our 2014 Virginia McKnight Binger Awardees are unique in almost every way, from the communities they serve and how they serve them, to their compelling personal backgrounds that drive them to keep digging in day after day. As each contributes to our quality of life in diverse and powerful ways, they approach and inform their important work with a singular point of view. Those unique qualities, relationships, and perspectives are part of the magical composition that makes each of our awardees special. But there's something else that *also* makes them special, and that is what they have in common with each other and with those who came before them.

This group of six joins an elite club that this year celebrates 30 rounds of such recognitions. In the mid-1980s, The McKnight Foundation was led by Virginia McKnight Binger, daughter of the founders and the inspiration behind this award program. In an early announcement of the awards (which by 1995 would be retitled in Virginia's name), McKnight's 1986 annual report read:

*"On June 1, 1985, the Directors of the Foundation approved the initiation of the McKnight Awards in Human Service. [Awards] are given annually which recognize those individuals throughout the State of Minnesota who are making significant contributions in the human service areas by directly assisting others to become productive and participating members of the communities in which they reside. The goal of the program is to reward those persons who are doing the difficult jobs and tasks with a minimum of public recognition and with a minimum of financial remuneration."*

Despite the continuity in purpose the awards still share with Virginia's original vision, they have evolved steadily throughout the years — we've shifted the number of awardees, adjusted the dollar amount, and refined the criteria to better align with programmatic developments at McKnight. Throughout, we've aimed to ensure that these awards remain as relevant as the contributions of the dedicated nonprofit unsung heroes they honor.

As we celebrate these six individuals' impressive accomplishments, deep dedication, and unsurpassed community engagement, I feel called to give thanks for the 29 rounds of amazing honorees we've celebrated in years past.

According to recent statistics, over 1.5 million Minnesotans donate time annually to serve their communities; our state frequently tops national lists for civic engagement and volunteering. This profound statewide dedication is a direct reflection, or maybe an inspired amplification, of the level of dedication found in our 283 Virginia McKnight Binger Awardees, including this year's outstanding six. And altogether, I believe committed contributors like them are a legitimate reason for why life in Minnesota is so good, in so many ways, for so many people.

On behalf of The McKnight Foundation and the awards committee, I commend our 2014 honorees for continuing this Minnesota tradition of deep engagement and selfless giving.

Ted Staryk  
Board Chair, The McKnight Foundation

# program

## the mcknight foundation

710 South Second Street, Minneapolis  
12:00 to 2:00 p.m.  
Wednesday, September 10, 2014

## welcome

Kate Wolford, PRESIDENT  
Erik Torch, AWARDS COMMITTEE

## presentation of awards

Erika L. Binger, BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## awards in human service committee

Terry Kalil, DETROIT LAKES  
Sue Liedl, BEMIDJI  
Rich Smith, CAMBRIDGE  
Erik Torch, DULUTH  
Daniel Yang, MINNEAPOLIS



# Brenda Anderson

WASECA



**B**renda Anderson doesn't consider herself a miracle worker, but the work she does with troubled youth is nothing short of miraculous. "I had this crazy idea that the system was broken and there had to be a better way," said Brenda, who worked for 17 years at a county agency. "I decided I wanted to work with kids who have been forgotten; helping them deal with their grief, loss, and trauma by reconnecting them with people from their past."

Moving to Anu Family Services allowed Brenda to fulfill her vision. As an intensive trauma specialist, she works with kids who have often lived in multiple foster homes and have lost contact with family, as well as former teachers, coaches, and mentors. Many have never had someone who believed in them.

"When I get a new referral, I just listen. I ask them to tell me their story," she said. "I also tell the kids that they get to hire me, and they can fire me. They decide."

This approach, combined with Brenda's patient, kind demeanor, has allowed breakthroughs even when others had given up. Brenda recalls working with "Tasha" who had 13 different placements in a single year, had been physically restrained more than 1,000 times, and had several therapists quit on her. Each week, after meeting with Brenda, Tasha decided they could meet again. After six months, the floodgates opened. Tasha, who hadn't cried in 16 years, ran into the street screaming, "Does anybody love me? Does anybody want me?" Brenda and Tasha cried together and that was the start of the healing.

During her career, Brenda has found permanent homes or connections for all but one of the youth with whom she has worked, and she still maintains contact with him today. "When these kids are given healing messages, they find hope," she said.

**"Brenda was born as an advocate of youth and families, of connections and permanence, and as a healer and promoter of wellbeing. Every part of her DNA is attuned to the passionate cry within her that says, 'It is every youth's birthright to have a safe, permanent family.'"**

—Amelia Franck Meyer, Anu Family Services





# Barbara Fabre

OGEMA

When Barbara Fabre got her first job as a child care teacher assistant on the White Earth Reservation, she had no idea it would launch a 27-year career advocating for early childhood training and development. Before she knew it, Barbara was promoted to director of the White Earth Child Care / Early Childhood Program and chairperson of a national group for tribal child care. “At the time, I was the only worker,” she said, “but it took on a life of its own.” The programs flourished under Barbara’s direction. She launched numerous initiatives to create a holistic approach to serving families and delivering exceptional child care options to the White Earth Tribe. Now with a staff of 15, the child care program has grown to offer other services such as parent mentors, Readmobile, literacy, Smart Play Spot, community events, and several child care services.



“It was exciting to get high-quality early childhood services on White Earth,” Barbara said. “People think of child care as babysitting. That’s not what it is. I am continuously educating and informing people at the local, state, and national levels about how critical tribal child care is for children, families, and communities. We have children under our care from 40 to 50 hours a week, so the need to provide our kids with safe and positive learning environments is absolutely essential.”

Among her many accomplishments, Barbara launched the Communities Collaborative Brain Development Conference, which brings experts in child development and research together to share their knowledge. Now in its 14th year, the conference continues to draw acclaim.

“My goal is to have more people aware of what affects a child. The environment — the negatives and positives — what they say, what they do, how they teach, the policies they set — it all affects the children.”

**“Barb is driven to make changes by connecting not only with parents and community stakeholders, but also those in higher state and national positions who can change policy to make a difference at the local level. She has a passion for improving the lives of Native American children and families.”**

—Tamie Finn, Leech Lake Early Childhood Development

# Liz Kuoppala

MOORHEAD



**L**iz Kuoppala doesn't find her sacrifices extraordinary. Becoming the director of the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless in 2009 — as the economy collapsed — was a matter of service. As the only staff member at the time, Liz was scarcely paid, yet she quietly pulled the organization from financial crisis, developing a powerful voice for homeless Minnesotans at the State Capitol.

A private and determined Iron Ranger, Liz often slept on a shelter mat in her St. Paul office during the legislative session. She cut her pay to hire a policy director. When the government shut down in 2011, Liz worked through the Fourth of July holiday to prevent homeless services from stopping — navigating the courts without a law degree.

“I'm in this work for the 14,000 Minnesotans who are homeless,” she said. “I believe we can fix the underlying issues and systems that are causing homelessness.”

During her 13-year tenure with the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless, Liz has been a driving force for change. Former board members say Liz always saw a path forward. She had a clear vision of potent, unified advocacy at the State Capitol. She worked diligently to promote coalitions, instead of competition, for critical public funding.

In 2011, Liz helped launch one of the most effective alliances of advocates in Minnesota: Homes for All. As co-chair of Homes for All, Liz was a driver behind bold, successful legislative campaigns for housing and services. This year, Homes for All passed an unprecedented \$100 million in bonds for housing.

“If we asked people to draw a picture of the community they want to live in, no one would draw homelessness,” said Liz. “We need to fight for good housing, find common goals, and be relentless in the pursuit of our vision to end homelessness.”

**“Motivated to get things done, Liz is an authentic, hard worker. Because she is not someone who seeks the spotlight, people listen to and respect her. These traits make her an effective leader who is able to unite people around big visions.”**

—Kenza Hadj-Moussa, Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless





# juan linares

ST. PAUL

**F**or more than 30 years, Juan Linares has worked to strengthen the voices of underrepresented communities. He immigrated to Minnesota from Mexico in 1977, and as a natural leader with bilingual skills, soon became a “go to” person for other Latino immigrants and migrant workers. “They didn’t speak the language and had a lot of barriers,” said Juan. “I helped them navigate the system.”

As a community organizer, Juan helped establish weekly services in Spanish at Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, the first church in the Twin Cities to do so. Today, this congregation is the core of a thriving immigrant community in South Minneapolis, and its success spawned more than 20 churches in the Twin Cities with Spanish services.

Juan was also a driving force behind the development of Mercado Central, a marketplace on the corner of Lake Street and Bloomington Avenue in Minneapolis. “Everybody was excited and ready to go, but we needed access to capital,” said Juan. “We became very intentional about building relationships with the entire community.” Eventually with business plans ready and investments from the business owners, the group received financing and Mercado Central was born. Today, the marketplace houses 40 businesses and has become a national model for community-based business development.

“The whole idea was creating jobs,” said Juan. “Now these folks are employing people.” The business owners are currently in negotiations to take lead ownership of the property. “We were not only successful in teaching how to fish. We’re teaching them how to buy the pond,” he added. With Juan’s support, a second marketplace, Plaza Latina, opened in East St. Paul.

“Tapping into folks’ own power; that’s the key ingredient,” said Juan. “We need to take advantage of each other’s talents, skills, and abilities. Once we do that, we can take action and do it.”

**“Juan is by faith, training, and personality a collaborative builder and organizer. He often says, ‘We do not empower people, people empower themselves.’ With this worldview, Juan inspires people to work toward goals much bigger than themselves and unite forces for projects that build community.”**

—Barbara Raye, Center for Policy, Planning, and Performance



# susan neis

MINNEAPOLIS



Susan Neis had four small children when she found the courage to leave her abusive husband in 1972. Looking back, she feels fortunate because she had the support of her extended family and was able to escape. However, she didn't know at the time that she would become the support for countless other women, men, and children who are the victims of domestic abuse.

Susan joined Cornerstone Advocacy Service in 1985, when the organization was located in a tiny room in a local church in Bloomington with a handful of volunteers. With Susan as its executive director, Cornerstone has since expanded to a staff of 80. The team provides 24/7 crisis counseling, emergency shelter services, a transitional housing program, and innovative programs for children in schools and therapeutic settings.

"Children in an abusive environment live with a lot of sadness and anxiety," said Susan. "We've done a lot of work to build therapy and enrichment programs for children. Helping children offers the most potential for changing the trend of domestic violence."

Cornerstone now provides services to victims in 10 cities across Hennepin County and is on track to serve 4,000 individuals in 2014. Susan's bold vision engages individuals in schools, legal systems, counties, private foundations, businesses, and other nonprofit organizations to make systemic changes that create a safer community. Her collaborative approach was also instrumental in opening the first transitional housing program for battered women in 1989.

"We've always tried to look at what families needed and figure out how to provide those services," said Susan. "Crisis work is not an easy job, but the reward of seeing people get to start their lives over and develop healthier relationships makes it all worth it. I still sing on my way into the office and am happy to come to work every day."

**"Susan is truly interested in learning everyone's story. As someone with her own story, her genuine dedication to advocating for and supporting those affected by domestic violence allows her to empower clients and staff. Her enthusiasm for Cornerstone's mission is contagious. Susan will spark a passion for our cause in anyone she meets."**

—Maureen Scallen Faylor, Bloomington Chamber of Commerce





# melissa eagle uhlmann

ROCHESTER



**W**hen immigrants come to America, they face daunting challenges. Melissa Eagle Uhlmann has made it her mission to help make their transition easier. For five years she has volunteered 15 to 20 hours a week at the Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association (IMAA), in addition to her roles as a registered nurse, wife, and mother of five. During her tenure at IMAA, Melissa has developed curriculum and served as an instructor of pre-certified nursing assistant and nursing assistant training courses and a medical interpreter training course.

“Amira,” a young refugee from Iraq, was one of Melissa’s students. Amira had little education, but knew she didn’t want to be on public assistance. She found the coursework very challenging, so Melissa stayed after class to review the material with Amira. Eventually she passed her exam and landed an entry-level job as a nursing assistant. Melissa ran into Amira a short time later and one of her first comments was: “Now I can walk into Walmart, and I can buy stuff!”

“Wow. That’s life changing,” said Melissa.

Melissa also tutored a man from Sierra Leon who had been a respected teacher in his home country. As he struggled with the language barrier, he started to say things like, “I’m stupid. I’m never going to learn this.” Melissa reassured him that wasn’t true. Eventually he passed the exam and came back to thank Melissa. “You believed in me,” he said.

“To see someone go from not believing in themselves to saying, ‘Yes, I can,’ that’s powerful,” said Melissa. “I’ve heard stories from students who have come through horrifying situations. I don’t know how they get out of bed. If I can be part of making that better, even if it’s just encouraging a woman to learn how to read, that rocks my world.”

**“Everyone who knows Melissa agrees that she has an unmatched ability to empathize and a seemingly endless reserve of compassion for those society is satisfied with ignoring. I have never met anyone who has equaled her ability to sense the needs of others or her willingness to continuously give of herself to meet those needs.”**

—Ron Buzard, Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association

# virginia mcknight binger awards in human service

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**T**he McKnight Foundation is committed to the protection of our environment, a philosophy that underlies our practice of using paper with postconsumer waste content, and where possible, environmentally friendly inks. This book was printed on paper containing 100% post-consumer fibers using soy inks. Wind energy credits were purchased for its production. Additionally, we partner with printers and use papers that are Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified. The FSC standards represent the world's strongest social and environmental systems for guiding forest management and the use of paper resources toward sustainable outcomes.

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## the mcknight foundation board of directors

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## about the mcknight foundation

The McKnight Foundation, a Minnesota-based family foundation, seeks to improve the quality of life for present and future generations. Through grantmaking, collaboration, and encouragement of strategic policy reform, we use our resources to attend, unite, and empower those we serve. Program interests include regional economic and community development, Minnesota's arts and artists, early literacy, youth development, Midwest climate and energy, Mississippi River water quality, neuroscience research, international crop research, and community-building in Southeast Asia. Our primary geographic focus is the state of Minnesota, with significant support also directed to strategies throughout the U.S. and in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America.

Founded in 1953 and endowed by William and Maude McKnight, the Minnesota-based Foundation had assets of approximately \$2 billion and granted about \$86 million in 2014. More information and program-specific grantmaking guidelines are available at [www.mcknight.org](http://www.mcknight.org). Follow us on Twitter and Facebook.



# previous recipients

Since 1985, The McKnight Foundation has honored 283 recipients of the Virginia McKnight Binger Awards in Human Service, including this year's honorees.

**2013** Sunny Chanthanouvong • Brian Mogren • Kim Randolph • Fatima Said • Cheryl Steeves • Ernesto Velez Bustos **2012** Mary Farley • Ibrahim Hussein • Diane Kinney • Cheryl Meld • Gino Nelson • Gada Roba **2011** Jeff Corey • Joan Jarvis Ellison • Joani Essenburg • Sy Vang Mouacheupao • Fartun Osman • Helen Skutley **2010** Abdi Ali • Jerry Fleischaker • Dan Hunt • Peg Johnson • Cynthia McArthur • Berlyn Staska **2009** Nancy Guenette • Mohamed Hassan Osman • Ken Porwoll • John Poupart • Linda Riddle • Renee Tomatz **2008** Ibrahim Ayeh • Isaac Combs • Robin and Starla Krause • Jimmy Longoria • Patricia Melody • Steve O'Neil **2007** Ada Beh • Johanna Christianson • Virginia Clark • Bernice Cowl Gordon • Charlinita Ellis • Rachel Kincade • Darcy Knight • Barbara Lewis • Mary F. Nelson • Mark Ochu **2006** Dee Cotten • May Pa Heu • Russ Irvin • Shegitu Kebede • Sarah Mollet • Vivian Peterson • Erik Rodriguez • Jim Soderberg • Jodi Townsend • Patrick Wood **2005** Said Salah Ahmed • Linda Brown • Wafiq Fannoun • Melvin Giles • Ora Hokes • Beth Holger • Curtis Levang • Larry and Noreen Luck • Sister Jean Thuerauf • Hedwidge "Hedy" Tripp **2004** James Andre • Elsie Dugar • Mahmoud El-Kati • Donna Gillen • Mary Gnerer • Daniel Hawkins • Rayome Clark Koehler • Mary Maas • Margaret McBride • Christine Norton • Kay Trainor • Carol Voss **2003** Cal Appleby • James Dodge • Jayne Frank • Linda Jemison • Cindy Johnson • Nathaniel Khaliq • Nancy Meyers • Rajiv Shah • John Siegfried • Char Thompson **2002** Andrew Benjamin • Martha Cardenas • Bonham Cross • Mohamed Essa • Ann Hooley • Jacqueline Kavanagh • Ed and Fern Ostberg • Ron Schwartz • Margaret Smith • Gail Weigle **2001** Susan Baxter • George Failes • Bertha Givins • Maria Inés Hitateguy • Barb King • Marge Melich • Kristine Reiter • Muriel Simmons • V.J. Smith • Sang Vu **2000** Jean Andrews • Melvin Carter, Jr. • Sylvia Carty • Richard Endres • John and Julie Funari • Hazel Jacobson • Raleigh Kent • George Nelsen • Delroy Schoenleben • Manuel Zuniga **1999** Henry Bruns • Ernesto DelVillar, Sr. •

Marcelle Diedrich • Darlene Edwards • Denise Gubrud and Margarita Reese • Phoenix Hill • Geraldine Hull • Ardis Knutson • Yako Myers • Joyce Segelbaum 1998 Christine Barich • Dawn Glaser-Falk • Joe Huber • Michael Kirk • Kevin L. Perez Rodriguez • Edwin Reich • Scott Schlaffman • Choua “Mindy” Thao • Georgeanna Toftum • Clorasteen Wilson 1997 Marjory Aldrich • Jim Christy • Dianne Kimm • Allan Law • Sue Liedl • Larry Cloud Morgan • William Radueg • RaeAnn Ruth • Frankie and Velma Tyson • Peggy Wells 1996 Vivian Blount • Cynthia Hawkins • Gregory Horan • Dale Hulme • Joe LaGarde • Percy and Lillian Olson • Joan Peterson • Jody Porter • Dave Ronning • Georgia Theis 1995 Laurice Beaudry • Dianne Binns • Leonard Gloeb • Fran Heitzman • Algjuan Hixon • Bruce Lubitz • Mary Robillard • Bill Rowe • Pat Schwartz • Jamie Slattery 1994 John Bobolink • Lori Ellis Boswell • Bill Driscoll • Janet Gostanczik • Shirley Ellen Jensen • Art Johnson • James Francis Kelly • Katherine G. King • Forrest R. Osterholm • Fred Rupp 1993 Eileen Bohn • Francisco Caballero • Sandra Gessler • Frank R. Johnson • David Lund • Don Mooney • Tyrone Smith • Art Stoeberl • Sheila WhiteEagle • Eleanore Whitmyre 1992 Peggy Holmes Bellecourt • Dorothy Bilheimer • Jane Blattner • Eugene Chelberg • Dr. Kenneth and Grace Covey • Dorothy Haynes • Norma Schleppegrell • Roger and Donna Urbanski • Quang Vu • Glen Wilfong 1991 Cynthia Ann Barry • Shirley Benitez • Julia Dinsmore • Dan Edgar • Terry Ford • Alice McHie • Kouthong Vixayvong • Walter White • Marie Wing • Mary Stier Winkels 1990 Ruby Alexander • Dan Celentano • Cheryl Ford • Muriel Gaines • Patrick Hartigan • Tri Dinh Nguyen • Phillip Sayers • Sister Leanore Stanton • John Stone • Diane Williams 1989 David L. Asmus • Lois V. Boylan • Ron Cronick • Phyllis Gross • Loeung Khi • Dana Lehrer • Sister Charlotte A. Madigan • William O’Connell • Leo Treadway • Diane Ziegler 1988 Jewell Anderson • Willard A. Brunelle • Dollie D. Foster • Carol LaFavor • Kwame McDonald • Rosita Meehan • Marvin S. Moe • Anastasia Sery • Ray Wilson • Winona Wilson 1987 Robert L. Buckley • Linda Byrne • Mary Jo Copeland • Kathy J. Davis • John Fields • Sandra Huff • Mazi E. Johnson • Lou Anne Kling • Norma P. McDuffie • Pat Schmidgall 1986 Barbara J. Colhapp • San Juana Flores • Bernice E. Genereux • Flo Golod • Louise T. James • Maxine M. Kruschke • Robert Russell • Dana Lee Shato • Vernell Wabasha • Dellie Walz 1985 Ruth G. Andberg • Laurie Colbeck • Alieene Davis • Juanita G. Espinosa • Debra Jones • Elaine La Canne • Grace L. Sandness • Lucille T. Silk • Connie Strandberg • Justina Violette



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