Wheeler
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Connecticut Department of Children and Families
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Wheeler
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IMPACT

The difference we make in our communities

WINTER 2026

Partnering for Good
Grateful for Community
How Corporate Partners Support Our Mission

COMMUNITY

Wheeler Receives Top Workplace Recognition
Ninth Time Since 2013

HEALTH

Cultivating Leaders
Wheeler's Residency Program

CARE

Early Childhood Programs
Resources, Support for Families

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE...

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Change the Script •
Expanded Autism Program •
Mobile HIV Care •

FEATURE STORY

Partnering for Good, Grateful for Community

Times are hard. But strong values prevail. Over the last year, Wheeler and our amazing providers, volunteers and corporations, have lived our values of teamwork and compassion, supporting our efforts to meet the behavioral health, primary care, and basic needs of those we serve.

"We are so thankful for the many individuals and organizations who are helping us meet the challenges of this moment," said Sabrina Trocchi, PhD, MPA, president and chief executive officer, Wheeler. "Their support makes our work possible."

Mott Corporation: Over the last year, Mott's Health Ambassadors have assisted at our New Britain Family Health & Wellness Center biweekly mobile pantry events with Connecticut Foodshare and Read to Grow Connecticut. They also annually support our annual holiday toy drive, fulfilling more than 150 gifts for Foster Care. In December, executive leadership from Mott and their parent company, IDEX, stuffed 1,000 personal care bags, wrote holiday cards, and helped to inventory Amazon toys. Every year, they send volunteers for the CT NAMI Walk, and this year, sent 15 volunteers for Wheeler's United Way Day of Caring. These amazing ambassadors also participate in other annual events, including the Rockwell Park Family Festival and Mum Parade in Bristol, Wheeler's Annual Golf Classic, and events focused on recovery.

Insperity: This national employee benefits and HR administration company held an employee giving drive in late summer to collect personal care items for Wheeler Family Health & Wellness Center patients.

M&T Bank: Dozens of employees have assisted at our New Britain Family Health & Wellness Center biweekly mobile pantry events. For the past two years, they have volunteered at our United Way Day of Caring.

ASSA ABLOY: Through a new philanthropic collaboration with Wheeler, ASSA ABLOY held its first employee donation drive this past summer to collect back-to-school items for our patients. Recently, this organization held an employee food drive to collect non-perishable items for holiday meals, as well as toys.

Cigna: With a new $250,000 multi-year grant from The Cigna Group Foundation, Wheeler is expanding health care in Harford through its mini mobile health van.

Americold LLC: This group of committed employees assisted with the Rockwell Park Family Festival and marched with Wheeler in Bristol's Annual Mum parade. Employees also have operated a holiday toy drive, donating toys for Wheeler families in need.

Amazon: Over the last two years, Amazon has provided six large pallets of toys for our holiday drive, benefiting children and families in our care. This year, they donated an extra two pallets to respond to the increase in requests from families.

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COMMUNITY

Wheeler Wins Top Workplace for Ninth Time

Wheeler has been awarded a Top Workplaces 2025 honor by *Hartford Courant* Top Workplaces 2025, the ninth time since 2013.

"This recognition is a testament to the deep level of engagement and commitment of our valued employees, most notably their commitment to each other and the individuals and families we serve each and every day," said Sabrina Trocchi, PhD, MPA, president and chief executive officer, Wheeler. "We are humbled to have received this recognition in 2025."

FACT: Wheeler received its first Top Workplace recognition in 2013.

COMMUNITY ROUNDUP

- **Melanie Hills, LMSW**, was named a **2025 *Hartford Business Journal* Healthcare Hero**. Melanie graduated from Fordham University, completing a practicum with East Hartford Youth Services and international work in London. She interned at Wheeler and now serves as a behavioral health consultant at the **Bristol Family Health & Wellness Center.**
- Wheeler's **Northwest Village School (NVS)** is celebrating the **40th Anniversary** of the construction of its building. The school has served students across Connecticut for more than 50 years. Recently, staff from all eras at NVS gathered to celebrate this milestone and each other.
- A new **$1.4M** grant from the **Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services** supports Wheeler's ongoing efforts to administer a statewide program that **expands public access to naloxone** to prevent opioid overdose deaths and **delivers education** about opioid risks, naloxone use, and the safe storage and disposal of medications and drugs. The statewide **Change the Script** campaign is also part of this **continued** effort.

HEALTH

Second Residency Class: Local and Global

Coming to Wheeler from as close as North Main Street in Bristol, to around the globe in Guyana and Pakistan, the four new residents in Wheeler's second annual class bring a wide and impressive set of backgrounds and perspectives.

Wheeler's innovative residency program for nurse practitioners and physician assistants is designed to cultivate clinical leaders in community health. Two residency tracks, primary care and psychiatry, provide a high-quality, patient-centered training and mentoring environment within an innovative Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) setting and in Wheeler's programs across the state.

"More than ever, we need skilled, dedicated practitioners in community-based care, who understand how the social determinants of health affect wellness," said Rebecca Eleck-Bruce, MD, Wheeler's primary care medical director. "I know that we will watch our new class of residents enthusiastically take on the challenges that health centers face every day. I'm excited."

FACT: Wheeler's Family Health & Wellness Centers have seen a 6 percent increase in patients over the previous year.

HEALTH ROUNDUP

- Wheeler received a **$142,770 grant** from the **Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)** to support **ReConnect: Mobile HIV Care**. The program is designed to identify, engage, and re-engage people living with HIV who have fallen out of care in **Hartford**. The program will deploy a fully equipped mobile health van; provide whole-person care; address key barriers to care; and establish and strengthen strategic partnerships.
- A **Connecticut Department of Public Heath** three-year grant in the amount **$1,099,545** will help Wheeler address **tobacco-free living (prevention** and **cessation)** statewide. Coalitions will be formed with an emphasis on the **LGBTQ+** and **adult black communities**. Educational materials and trainings will be developed to enhance provider screening and access to cessation services.

CARE

Strengthening Foundations of Early Childhood

Early childhood is often a promising, challenging time for young children, parents, and caregivers. Wheeler's Early Childhood programs, serving children birth to five, help families to navigate this chapter by providing tools and interventions that foster child learning, growth, and development. Offered with support from state and federal funders, these programs address behavioral health and developmental issues in young children and provide family-strengthening tools for parents and caregivers to help young children thrive.

According to Melissa Mendez, LCSW, senior director, Community, Crisis, and Prevention Programs, Wheeler's services are flexible and delivered to address gaps in care. "Sometimes, families need intensive levels of support through our largest programs such as Child First or HealthySteps. Other times, they may need limited consultation. Whatever the need, we're here to help young children thrive from the pre-natal stage up to age five," said Mendez.

Mendez said the common threads running through all of these programs are efforts to engage families as strong partners in their child's lives and development.

FACT: Wheeler's Early Childhood programs expanded significantly in 2010 with a five-year, $3.2M federal grant from SAMHSA to serve New Britain's young children and their families as well as early childhood professional providers.

CARE ROUNDUP

- Wheeler received a **$404,000 grant** from the **Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF)** to support the **Autism Spectrum Disorder/Intellectual Disabilities (ASD/ID) Framework Project**. Using the resources of the grant, Wheeler will develop suggested **practice guidelines and training** for DCF to enhance and guide work with children presenting with autism/intellectual disabilities needs and challenges. Wheeler will also provide **consultation** to area DCF offices on specific cases with potential ASD/ID needs.
- Wheeler received grants in the amount of **$1.3M+** from **DCF** to fund **Multidisciplinary Examination Clinics (MDEs)** in Site 6, Waterbury, Danbury, and Torrington; and 7, New Britain, Meriden, and Middletown. The clinics serve **children entering DCF custody**, ensuring timely identification, assessment, and treatment recommendations.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Wheeler
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As a new year begins, I think about all of the reasons for which to be grateful. We are so thankful for our donors and partners, our volunteers, and our dedicated employees who are committed to delivering the highest levels of care to vulnerable individuals and families, especially now.

This time has not been easy, and, as the lead story of this issue suggests, we've responded to these challenges through collaborative partnerships with organizations like Connecticut Foodshare and Holcomb Farm, as well as Gnazzo's Supermarket and more, to ensure that the very basic needs of our patients are addressed.

This edition of *IMPACT* also highlights how our skilled, compassionate Early Childhood team is making a difference in the lives of youth, as well as our receipt of the *Hartford Courant* Top Workplace Award for the ninth time, and much more.

I look forward to the new year with a sense of hope and purpose, and I know that whatever we face, we will be stronger together. We will determine our own fate, as long as we can, in every degree we can.

Thank you for your support and all you do to encourage health, recovery, and growth in the lives of the people we serve across Connecticut.

Sabrina Trocchi, PhD, MPA
President and Chief Executive Officer

PLEDGE

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.
YOUR support, YOUR commitment, YOUR vision can change, and literally save, lives.

Yes! I want to support:

Basic Needs Fund ..... $ _____
Basic Needs Fund, Northwest Village School ..... $ _____
Other ..... $ _____
Enclosed is my total gift of ..... $ _____

☐ Check Enclosed *(Please make payable to Wheeler.)*

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Exp. Date _____ Security Code _____
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My gift is in memory of: _____
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☐ My employer will match my contribution. I have enclosed a matching gift form.

☐ Please send me information about Planned Giving.

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Or scan this QR code to make a donation.