

# 2022 SCAC Awards Program

This application is for:

J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award

**Project Title**

Comprehensive Expansion of Health Services in Oconee County

**County/Counties**

Oconee County

**Staff Contact**

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**Please provide a summary of your entry (no more than 100 words) to be used in a handout for the awards competition and included in press releases/publications. You may either type the summary in the text box or upload it as an attachment below.**

Oconee County leveraged resources and community partnerships to improve access to healthcare in Oconee County and to develop sustainable solutions to meet the needs of the community. The result of this project is the establishment of improved health services, including primary healthcare, addiction recovery and mental health support. Through this project, Oconee County coordinated and established resource development opportunities in healthcare to improve individuals' outcomes in health disparities and other quality of life challenges.

**Presentations may include more than one speaker; however, each speaker should be aware that the 10-minute time limit is strictly enforced. Please list the name, title, and e-mail address of each speaker:**

Name	Title	Email
Amanda Brock	Administrator	abrock@oconeesc.com

**To submit these attachments online, please upload Microsoft Word or PDF documents below.**

 Expansion of Health Services... .pdf

 SCAC Letter of Support.pdf

**Please check boxes for attachments you will submit as part of your application**

A concise Project Description to explain the purpose and significance of the entry (up to eight pages). Please follow the prescribed naming convention for your Project Description file.

J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award applications must include a letter of support from the county council chairperson or county chief administrative officer. Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Award applications must include letters of support from the council chairperson or chief administrative officer for EACH participating political subdivision.



Oconee County, South Carolina

# Comprehensive Expansion of Health Services in Oconee County

J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award Application

## **Oconee County, South Carolina**

### **J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award Application**

#### **Comprehensive Expansion of Health Services in Oconee County**

Oconee County is a rural community in the northwest corner of South Carolina. The County has one regional hospital and various smaller medical offices. While Oconee County has beautiful lakeside communities, it also has pockets of underserved areas and populations. The recent pandemic once again served to illustrate the gaps in healthcare delivery.

It is the mission of Oconee County to provide current and future citizens and visitors quality services while protecting our communities, heritage, environment and natural resources, in an ever-changing world.

Oconee County is home to five (5) municipalities: Town of Salem, City of Seneca, City of Walhalla, Town of West Union and City of Westminster. According to reports, published by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC), areas with a lower life expectancy in Oconee County are Westminster, Walhalla and portions of Seneca. The establishment and expansion of critical health services primarily focus in these areas.

Oconee County leveraged resources and community partnerships to improve access to healthcare in Oconee County and to develop sustainable solutions to meet the needs of the community. The result of this project is the establishment of improved health services, including primary healthcare, addiction recovery and mental health support. Through this project, Oconee County coordinated and established resource development opportunities in healthcare to improve individuals' outcomes in health disparities and other quality of life challenges.

This project included the establishment of a central data set of available resources through the public library system, the Clemson Rural Health Clinic in Walhalla, the expansion of the Rosa Clark Clinic (satellite location in Westminster and dental health clinic in Seneca), the establishment of Oconee Addiction Recovery Services (OARS) and the establishment of mental health services in the Oconee Law Enforcement Center. The establishment / expansion of these critical health services affects communities across Oconee County as a whole; however, each activity serves needs based on specific problems in Oconee County.

In 2022, Oconee County utilized grant funding to hire a licensed social worker and establish a central data set of available resources through the public library system. This system allows citizens, regardless of their ability to pay, access to a licensed professional who can educate them on services that are available to them for primary healthcare, social services, income assistance, housing assistance and more. The Oconee County Resource Guide currently provides information regarding one hundred and forty-three (143) agencies which are available to assist the public. The Oconee County Public Library further expanded its efforts for community outreach by hiring on a Spanish translator.

The expansion of healthcare services and the data set through the public library system allow citizens and residents to access healthcare and receive help when it matters the most. It can be challenging to ask for help, especially if an individual has a language barrier. Hiring a Spanish translator through the public library will also allow Oconee County to continue to reach even more of underserved population.

The result of this activity is that those in need will be better informed about the resources that are available to them for primary healthcare, social services, income assistance, housing assistance, and more. By utilizing the public library system, residents can feel more confident in seeking out and utilizing healthcare providers and other community partners through a system they are already familiar with. This holistic approach helps to improve the health and well-being of the entire community.

Since June 2022, the social worker at the Oconee County Public Library has assisted 32 individuals directly and recorded 210 program participants. By reaching out to various organizations, she has help cultivate 58 community partnerships. Through this program, rides to health appointments have been provided for individuals in need of medical assistance. She has created six health displays throughout the library, attended five trainings and distributed 60 mental health / health education handouts.

To continue to find solutions to meet the needs of the public, Oconee County partnered with Clemson Rural Health and Rosa Clark to establish healthcare facilities for the underserved, underinsured or uninsured population throughout the County.

Clemson Rural Health is part of the Clemson University College of Behavioral, Social and Health Sciences. This event marked the beginning of a new chapter for Clemson Rural Health, highlighting the partnerships that made continued outreach possible. The partnership with Oconee County established a full-time, fully staffed primary care facility that services the entire community and focuses on treating chronic diseases for a diverse population. This partnership provides affordable healthcare services in Walhalla, South Carolina.

To expand healthcare services, Oconee County leased properties that were already owned by the County, but no longer used for their initial intended purposes. The Clemson Rural Health Clinic was the former Health Department building that housed vital records. These records were moved to Anderson by the State of South Carolina and the building was used for storage of certain County records. The space in the building provided an opportunity to open the clinic in Walhalla, the county seat of Oconee County.

On September 29, 2022, the Clemson Rural Health Clinic at Walhalla celebrated its grand opening and ribbon cutting. In the last 12 months, the Clemson Rural Health Clinic reported 3,771 patient visits for primary care services.

“Oconee County and Clemson Rural Health have successfully collaborated to create the Clemson Health Clinic at Walhalla that has dramatically improved access to care for

underserved rural patients. Restoring an aging building, staffing with a multidisciplinary team (with bi-lingual providers and translators), leveraging fiber optic connectivity, telehealth and mobile health units. Patients receive primary care, chronic disease care, acute care, and access to wellness services (e.g., produce prescription boxes, health education).” – Ron Gimbel, PhD, Professor & Director, Clemson Rural Health.

In 1993, the Rosa Clark Medical Association leased a County-owned facility for the purpose of establishing a primary care clinic in Seneca. Oconee County continues to be a vital partner with the Rosa Clark Medical Association and has provided \$80,000 a year that is used to match federal funds. This funding along with letters of support from the County enables Rosa Clark Medical Association to leverage approximately \$2 Million a year in Federal recurring grant funding.

Oconee County amended its lease agreement to allow the building to be retrofitted and Rosa Clark Medical Association received grant funds to expand services to include a dental clinic. This project offers an opportunity for affordable dental care to citizens who otherwise could not afford independent rates of private dental practices in the area. It also provides a local option to our citizens who are unable to travel to outside Oconee County for dental services. The Cat-bus is a fare-free transportation service that has with a drop-off location that is a 12-minute walk to the Rosa Clark Dental Clinic.

The Rosa Clark Dental Clinic completed its first full year of accepting patients in December 2021. Since then, the Rosa Clark Dental Clinic has served approximately 3,000 Oconee County residents annually.

In April 2023, Oconee County Council approved Ordinance 2023-04 for the execution of another lease agreement between Oconee County and the Rosa Clark Medical Clinic Association. This lease is for a county-owned property in Westminster for the purpose of establishing another primary care facility in Oconee County. With Council approval of the lease agreement, renovations will begin for the Rosa Clark Medical Clinic in Westminster. Upgrades to the facility will establish exam rooms, offices and pharmacy accommodations.

It is projected that the Rosa Clark Clinic will also provide services to approximately 800-1000 Oconee County citizens at the approved Westminster location. Both clinics provide much need services to the underserved, underinsured or uninsured persons in Oconee County.

“Oconee County and Rosa Clark Medical Clinic are partnering together to provide the most vulnerable residents of Oconee County access to life sustaining medical services. These in-kind contributions and use of County facilities provide the required match for Federal funds. All Federal revenue will now be used completely for program services. This model is sustainable, can be replicated, and clearly makes a difference in the quality of life for thousands of people in our area. This partnership and will provide a great community impact now and in the years to come.” - Vicki A. Thompson, CEO of Rosa Clark Medical Clinic.

On January 24, 2022, the Oconee Addiction Recovery and Solutions (OARS) Program began taking clients into the 30-day residential program and completed its first full year of the program in January 2023. The first steps toward initiating this program began in 2016 when the Oconee County Sheriff's Office and Christ Central Ministries announced plans to convert the former Oconee County Detention Center to an Oconee Resource and Solution Center. The program was designed for the purpose of developing transitional housing and addiction recovery support for individuals coming out of the Oconee County Detention Center. The former detention center was renovated and converted into transitional housing through grants and additional funding resources procured to support this program.

The renovation of the former Detention Center proved to be a larger endeavor with the addition of a sprinkler system and other necessary improvements. Oconee County, OARS staff, volunteers and program participants have worked on the facility so that it may meet the needs of the program.

OARS continues to assist individuals in improving their lives and the lives of their families by providing teaching and training in areas needed for rehabilitation, recovery support, to secure and retain employment, stabilize their family and develop Christian character. This project provides an opportunity for males suffering from substance abuse and homelessness to improve their lives by committing to a 30-day in-patient rehabilitation program that focuses on providing life skills and successful substance abuse recovery in a faith-based setting. It is a response to a County-wide need for a solution to homelessness and drug abuse.

In 2016, the community voiced concerns regarding the conversion of the old Detention Center to an addiction recovery and solutions center. The concerns of the public were addressed in public meeting and OARS established rules for its participants that helped to reduce the risk of potential issues.

In addition to leasing the former detention center to OARS, Oconee County acts as a pass-through entity and grant management for funds to help pay for the program. The Oconee County Sheriff's Office and OARS work together to train law enforcement personnel on diversion and other tactics to help repeat offenders find assistance. This program has a focus on getting individuals the help they need to reduce their chances of having additional arrests and charges in the future.

In 2022, the Oconee Addiction Recovery and Solutions Center reported 64 clients served through the 30-day program with a 75% graduation rate. The graduation rate of this program is significantly higher than the National Average (47%) for completion of Drug and Alcohol rehabilitation centers. This program offers an alternative to incarceration in some instances, it also offers food and shelter during the recovery process to homeless citizens.

The Oconee Law Enforcement Center continues its efforts to help individuals from initial booking through exiting the facility. The Oconee Law Enforcement Center began training personnel to assist with identifying repeat offenders with substance abuse disorders who may

be eligible for the OARS program. Additional screening, upon booking, helps to identify potential mental health disorders to help individuals with reoccurring arrests to receive proper treatment.

In 2023, the Oconee Law Enforcement Center implemented the Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program and executed agreements with a grant / project manager consultant and part-time mental health professional to assist inmates to meet their mental health needs. Through this program, the Oconee Law Enforcement Center intends to continue to gain insight / data as to why individuals are incarcerated and prevent reoccurring arrests through diversion, alternative resources and proper treatment.

As the program is in its early phases, an accurate account of the impact is difficult to determine. However, the inmates have expressed that they are enjoying counseling and early indicators suggest that the program is reducing stress levels for many of the participants who may never have had an opportunity for counseling.

The Oconee Law Enforcement Center will continue to work with available resources and look for additional options for individuals who require continuing services after release. Oconee County continues to search for other funding opportunities to help individuals with substance abuse and mental health disorders and partner with non-profits across the County to increase the availability of these services in Oconee County.

"Currently, through the Federal Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program grant, the Oconee County Detention Center has two counselors. By providing inmates with counseling and mental health services such as individualized and group therapy, our goal is to identify those with mental illness. Treatment of those identified as having a mental illness can reduce recidivism and make Oconee County a safer place." – Sarah Mead, Consultant/Project Manager.

One of the biggest challenges with mental health and addiction recovery services is the lack of resources available for continued treatment or support. Neighboring Counties may have services but lack availability for new participants or limit their service area. Oconee County continues to search for funding resources, such as the South Carolina Opioid Recovery Fund, to further assist with the establishment / expansion of these services in Oconee County. Oconee County has provided transportation to individuals to facilities in Greenville or neighboring counties to get them the treatment and support they need. Oconee County does not currently have a substance use disorder treatment facility for women.

Many of the organizations found funding sources, staff and/or volunteers to assist with the expansion efforts. Organizations worked with County personnel to apply for grant opportunities, attended training and certification classes, compiled reports and assisted with identifying the needs of the community. Contracts and other agreements were drafted and reviewed by all parties. Groundbreakings and other events were hosted to notify the public that these services are available in their communities.



Organizations continue ongoing efforts for community outreach and support and partner with the library as part of the healthcare collaboration for improved services. Clemson Rural Health also assisted with hiring and project training for the social worker at the Oconee Public Library and for mental health services at the Oconee Law Enforcement Center.

Oconee County and its partners continue to identify ways to meet the needs of its citizens. Clemson Rural Health Clinic and OARS are looking to expand their services within unutilized space in the County-leased facilities they currently occupy. OARS is renovating space to expand its program from a 30-day program to a 60-day program and six beds will be added in the facility to accommodate more men in recovery.

Transparency and discussing any concerns with the public have been vital to the success of these projects.

By leveraging County resources and partnering with various agencies, Oconee County has helped to expand healthcare services though out the County as a whole. However, data compiled by the departments and healthcare agencies represent the daily impact these services are having on those that reside in the Upstate.

To accomplish its objectives, Oconee County cultivated partnerships with public and private entities. Through administrative and financial support, Oconee County has helped various agencies put down roots and/or expand into areas throughout the County to provide services to its citizens. Oconee County has also provided in-kind contributions, including labor and materials to support these agencies and local non-profits.

Oconee County has extended long-term lease agreements for County-owned properties to house essential healthcare services and allowed for building renovations, upgrades and retrofitting to support the services provided. Oconee County has executed lease agreements for the Clemson Rural Health Clinic, the Oconee Addiction Recovery and Solutions Center and the Rosa Clark Dental Clinic and Westminster expansion.

The social worker and mental health professionals were hired using grant funding. To continue these services, additional funding opportunities or County Council approval of a new position may be required.

While public-private partnerships may not be a new idea, the partnerships built between Oconee County and Clemson Rural Health, Rosa Clark Medical Association and OARS go above and beyond expectations. The partnerships between Oconee County and these organizations are representative of "Small Town USA." Oconee County represents a close-knit community, a place where everyone knows everyone and people look out for each other. Oconee County believes all its citizens should have access to healthcare and a rich quality of life.

**Oconee County  
Administration**

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April 21, 2023

South Carolina Association of Counties  
1919 Thurmond Mall  
Columbia, SC 29202-8207

RE: Oconee County J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award Application

To whom it may concern,

I am pleased to provide this letter of support for Oconee County's application for the J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award. Oconee County is committed to the health and wellbeing of all citizens. By leveraging County resources and partnering with various agencies, Oconee County has helped to expand healthcare services throughout the County as a whole.

As demonstrated throughout the application, Oconee County has developed partnerships with various healthcare agencies to bring necessary resources to our communities. Through these partnerships, we are now able to extend a wide variety of healthcare options to the diverse population. It is our goal to help support quality healthcare services, so that every citizen has access to care in safe and comfortable environments.

It is the mission of Oconee County to provide our current and future citizens and visitors quality services while protecting our communities, heritage, environment and natural resources, in an ever-changing world. Oconee County continues to foster and/or create new partnerships to further this mission and improve the quality of life for all who reside in the Golden Corner.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of the Oconee County application and for the opportunity to highlight the County's efforts to bring healthcare services to its citizens.

Sincerely,

Amanda F. Brock  
Administrator