AUSTIN – The Texas Health and Human Services Commission today announced the recipients of the “All on DEC” awards, highlighting the value of volunteers during National Volunteer Month.

The “All on DEC” awards are named for the Deputy Executive Commissioner who oversees the state hospital and state supported living center systems and approves the selection of recipients for this high-profile award. The volunteer service awards underscore the importance and value of volunteers and the role they play in supporting the people served by Texas state hospitals and state supported living centers.

“Volunteers are critical to our mission of providing high-quality, individualized services to Texans,” said Mike Maples, Deputy Executive Commissioner for HHSC. “Whether it’s hosting events, raising funds to enhance our campuses, or simply being a friend to the people we serve, they provide extraordinary experiences for our clients. Our All on DEC award winners go above and beyond by generously sharing their time and talents and help serve as goodwill ambassadors for our facilities.”

The awards are handmade bowls featuring painted bluebonnets on the side and a Lone Star inside the bowl, and they were fashioned by patients at the Kerrville State Hospital.

This year’s recipients of the “All on DEC” Volunteer Service Awards are:

**The Volunteer Council for Rusk State Hospital (Volunteer/Advocate of the Year):**
The 15 members of this nonprofit service organization have gone above and beyond in their service to Rusk State Hospital patients. In addition to ongoing activities like providing a monthly birthday party for the patients and giving gifts and money donations to patients’ trust funds at Christmas, the council’s members have restocked the lake at the hospital’s wilderness camp and purchased a pontoon boat for use by the patients. The generosity of this group of volunteers has been recognized by the patients of the hospital who awarded
the Volunteer Council with its first ever “Patient Choice Award” at the annual volunteer and donor appreciation luncheon in 2018.

**Dan Maxwell (Volunteer/Advocate of the Year):** In addition to his volunteer work at the Austin State Supported Living Center, Maxwell makes the monthly 425-mile roundtrip from his hometown of Austin to Lufkin to volunteer at the state supported living center there. A retired SSLC employee, Maxwell continues to give to the SSLC system by offering his music and video production skills built up over his decades of service to the state. He continues to be active with the annual Follow Your Dreams Music Festival, which is open to participation by SSLC residents and state hospital patients. He also worked with the Lufkin SSLC to produce a short documentary about the 50th anniversary of the center.

**Dyess We Care Team (Veteran Contribution Award):** Composed of active duty and retired military from Dyess Air Force Base, this team of a few dozen volunteers has most recently painted three homes for residents of the Abilene State Supported Living Center. The group was founded in 2000 and over the past 19 years, the volunteers have given their time to help individuals who cannot afford or are not able to do the work themselves. Their work has extended beyond what they have done at Abilene SSLC to other homes and nonprofits in the Abilene area.

**Rusk High School (Spirit of Youth Award):** The students of Rusk High School are recognized for their work individually and through several student groups – the Rusk High School Instructional Practice, Student Council, Peer Helpers, Lady Eagles Basketball Team, Eagles Football Team, and the Eagles Cross Country Team – in service to the patients of Rusk State Hospital. In all, the students have logged a combined total of more than 2,000 volunteer hours and donated $550 worth of food, goods, and money. Through their work, these groups have helped to erase the stigma of mental health in their community and spread the word to their friends, teachers, and family that patients are people.

**About State Hospitals and SSLCs**

For more information about HHSC’s Health and Specialty Care System, which includes state hospitals and state supported living centers, visit the state hospitals and state supported living centers pages on the HHS website.