

Outstanding Government Service



SIMONE CHESSA

Department of
Health and Human Services

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it became the norm to wear a mask when in close contact with others. But individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing often rely on lip reading to assist them when communicating.

That's where Simone Chessa came in. As a social worker at Broughton Hospital in Morganton, Chessa recognized early on the need for masks that would accommodate residents who were deaf or hard of hearing. Broughton is the only state hospital that houses a psychiatric program for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Knowing that much of the psychosocial treatment at Broughton is dependent on effective communication with patients, she set out to find masks that would be both effective against the COVID-19 virus and enable others to lipread speech.

But her initial research led her to a dead end; she simply could not find a company that manufactured the type of mask needed. Undeterred, she used a combination of clear vinyl and cloth to create a prototype.

Chessa eventually sewed masks for all staff and patients in the Deaf Services Unit and received rave reviews from users. Her innovative thinking and determination allowed Broughton to obtain much-needed personal protective equipment (PPE) for special need users at a time when such items were in short supply.



In addition, the sacrifice of her own time and resources showed her true commitment to those she serves.

Chessa went beyond the call of duty to serve others and ensure that much-needed services would still be available for those in need.