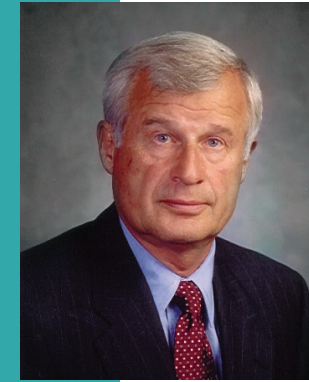


COMMUNITY
DETERMINATION
OPTIMISM
2020 HIGHLIGHTS

This report documents just a few of the admirable ways our scholars and grantees responded to the extraordinary trials of the year 2020. The Lee Foundation eagerly joined the **community of regional funders, corporations and philanthropists in creating an emergency fund to support nonprofits serving on the frontline. Faced with a completely unexpected crisis, mental health providers displayed remarkable **determination** to transform patient contacts from in person to virtual. Likewise, Lee Scholars preparing for mental health professions impressed us with their unflinching perseverance under most unusual circumstances. Our STEM scholars expressed unshakable **optimism** even as they sacrificed the once-in-a-lifetime experiences of campus life and entered an uncertain job market. We are honored to know them all.**



When we wrote to you last year, we did not know the full extent Covid-19 would have on our community and the world. In the face of the crisis, Western New Yorkers demonstrated the power of Community, Determination, and Optimism.

In mid-March, as the first cases of Covid-19 were identified in Western New York, local philanthropic agencies joined forces to launch the WNY Covid-19 Community Response Fund. Within weeks, the collaborative effort raised more than \$6M to support nonprofits working on the frontlines to meet the emergency needs of residents. Throughout the year, the funding partners continued to monitor the community's evolving needs and deploy additional grant funds.

The challenges brought on by the pandemic were especially daunting for mental health providers. Forced to transition care delivery from in-person to virtual in just days, our grantees demonstrated unwavering determination to maintain high quality care for their clients. Equipment was secured, staff trained on the new platforms, and extensive client outreach conducted to ensure no one slipped through the cracks. As the months wore on, the impact of isolation and financial uncertainty took their toll and community demand for mental health services began to rise. Again, our providers met the need. What they accomplished – and continue to accomplish – is nothing short of amazing.

Our Lee Scholars faced unique obstacles as they navigated their new reality. Classes were conducted remotely, work internships canceled and graduation ceremonies postponed. Since in-person meetings with scholars were not possible, we hosted a series of Zoom video calls. We expected to hear of their frustrations and disappointments; instead, we heard stories of resilience and optimism. Students spoke of helping younger siblings struggling with remote learning and securing part-time work to ease the burden on parents who were laid off. Despite these challenges, students remained optimistic about their futures. Our goal was to lift their spirits but, in the end, they lifted ours.

Buffalo has long been known as the “City of Good Neighbors” and, in 2020, we certainly lived up to our reputation. We are proud of what we accomplished together and we know brighter days are ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick P. Lee'.

Patrick P. Lee
Founder

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane M. Mogavero'.

Jane M. Mogavero
Executive Director

COMMUNITY

The Covid-19 pandemic

Our region is truly fortunate to have a philanthropic community that is collaborative as well as generous. As the pandemic severely curtailed mental health services, the need increased exponentially – to cite just one example, calls to the help line at one local agency rose by 50%. Our commitment to adults with serious mental illness inspired us to target 2020 grants to the most urgent need.

“The WNY Covid-19 Community Response Fund provided the critical resources and support we needed to rapidly respond to this urgent crisis.”

Elizabeth Mauro, CEO, Endeavor Health Services

“We are grateful for the quick action that supported our initial response to the pandemic. The grant enabled us to expand telehealth and obtain critical protective equipment to keep our staff safe as they continued to serve our patients. Horizon could never have reached this level of impact without the generous and strategic focus of our community partners.”

*Anne Constantino
President and CEO, Horizon Health Services*



WNY COVID-19 COMMUNITY RESPONSE FUND

The enormity of the pandemic’s impact on community services became apparent almost immediately. Several regional funders quickly came together to establish the WNY Covid-19 Community Response Fund, and the Lee Foundation was one of its first contributors.

With face-to-face sessions prohibited, mental health agencies were under great pressure to develop alternative ways to serve clients experiencing even greater stress. Telehealth was the best solution, but most agencies lacked the necessary technology and expertise. The Community Response Fund directed more than a third of its \$6.6 million in initial grants to mental health agencies, and most of that support expedited their capacity to provide therapy and counseling virtually.

NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS

Individuals with mental health conditions were not the only ones cast adrift by the pandemic; families of adult patients also found themselves cut off from essential resources and support groups. Without waiting to be asked, the Lee Foundation reached out to the local chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) with an unrestricted grant that enabled the nonprofit to deliver its programs online. The funding helped replace the revenue lost when NAMI – an almost entirely volunteer organization whose services are free – was forced to cancel its only major fundraising event.

MICHELE BROOKS

Executive Director, National Alliance on Mental Illness of Buffalo & Erie County

NAMI is “families helping families,” explains Michele Brooks. The volunteers who conduct classes, lead support groups and answer calls to the HelpLine all have loved ones with serious mental illness – their unique compassion and understanding come from direct experience.

Covid-19 restrictions disrupted the day-to-day routines that help patients and caregivers cope. “Families were distraught,” Michele says, describing the added stress of being sequestered at home without the escape valves of exercise, counseling or socialization. As the need for help increased, NAMI’s in-person services ceased.

Thanks to the Lee Foundation, NAMI was not only able to sustain its programs, it has even augmented them, adding classes and expanding its reach beyond Western New York. “We couldn’t have transitioned to online services without support from the Lee Foundation,” Michele concludes. “We were so grateful for the grant and honored that they would think of us. We could not have been able to maintain or grow our programs without it.”

DETERMINATION

Mental health scholarships

The Lee Foundation last year provided financial support to 18 students preparing for careers in mental health. At the University of Buffalo, we continue to support the internship for psychology doctoral candidates, now in its second year. Newly accredited by the American Psychological Association, the internship is unique in the nation in its focus on serious mental illness across a patient's entire lifespan.

We expanded our psychology nurse practitioner scholarship program, which began at D'Youville College, to the University of Rochester, where we welcomed our first cohort of students. UR's instruction strategy is particularly noteworthy. Its online format is designed to attract experienced nurses whose location and work commitments preclude attending class on campus, offering them a more accessible opportunity to further their career.

KAI MBEKE

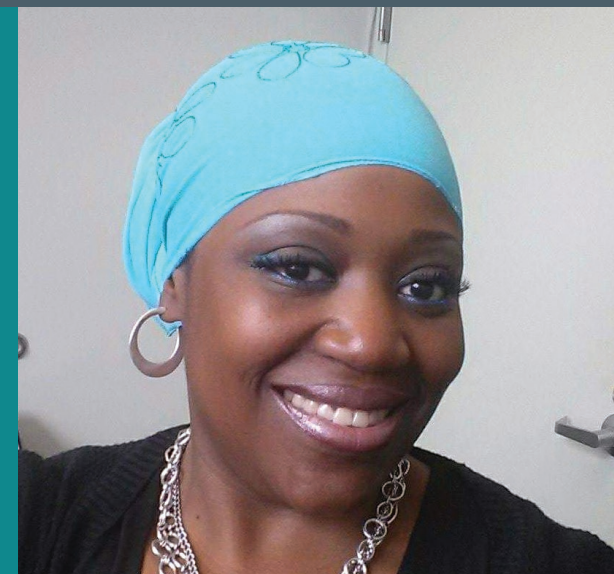
*Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner Student,
University of Rochester, '22*

After 20 years as a nurse, and urged on by her husband and two young sons, Kai Mbeke felt the time was right to take her career to "a new level" as a psychiatric nurse practitioner. Increasing her ability to provide care "has been a dream of mine for many years," she says.

Working as a community health nurse for the Buffalo Psychiatric Center "opened my eyes to the needs of the mental health population," Kai explains. "Their needs are vast. Our minds work, whereas theirs struggle. We have to help them do what they can't do themselves." Kai was recently honored by her employer with its All Star Certificate of Appreciation.

When pandemic budget pressures compelled a state program to stop reimbursing her tuition payments, Kai had to decide whether to deplete her savings or take a semester off. Receiving the Lee Scholarship "was a defining moment," she says. "It told me, 'this is what you are meant to do – keep going!'"

"I'm so extremely grateful to the Lee Foundation," Kai concludes. "I feel honored ... like I have a higher sense of duty to really make this work."



“Receiving the Lee scholarship told me this is what you are meant to do – keep going!”

Kai Mbeke

JOSH ANDRZEJEWSKI

*Counseling Psychology Ph.D.
Candidate, State University
of New York at Buffalo, '21*

Before UB started its unique internship, "this opportunity did not exist in Buffalo," says Josh Andrzejewski. The "lifespan approach," with its "richness of experience," allows him to "see how psychological problems manifest over a lifetime, and address the challenges that come up along the way."

Josh found that the Lee Foundation's mission to alleviate serious mental illness aligns well with his own. He appreciates our "focus on social justice, community action, homelessness, economic inequality and the difficulty accessing care."

Some of Josh's "most challenging and rewarding work" has been with patients of Erie County Medical Center. He first encounters them as inpatients admitted "after significant upheaval in their lives," he explains. Through an outpatient clinic, he can maintain contact after they leave the hospital. "Once their immediate concerns have been resolved, I can continue to help them manage their illness or their symptoms."

Josh's ambition is to give back to "the community I've lived in all my life," and he is grateful that his Lee Scholarship has helped to make that possible.



“I appreciate the Foundation's focus on social justice, community action, homelessness, economic inequality and the difficulty accessing care.”

Josh Andrzejewski

OPTIMISM

STEM scholarships

Internships, service projects, friends, travel – not to mention graduation and all the attending celebrations. The pandemic forced Lee Scholars to forgo many of the most enjoyable aspects of college life. They did so without complaint and, indeed, with a positive outlook.

The inability to gather in person did not deter anyone from either studying or networking. Current and past Lee Scholars stayed connected to the Foundation and each other through virtual platforms. In addition to Zoom meetings, we launched the Patrick P. Lee Foundation Scholars group on LinkedIn.

Through our longest-running program, established in 2010, the Foundation has supported a total of 317 Lee Scholars. In 2020, we awarded 64 engineering and technical scholarships. We continue our partnerships with Niagara County Community College, Rochester Institute of Technology, St. Louis University, SUNY Erie and University of Rochester.

MIKE MCCANN

A.A.S., Radiation Therapy Technology, SUNY Erie, '18

From teaching English in Taiwan to marketing for clients in Australia, Mike McCann ventured down several career paths before settling on radiation therapy. He received a Lee Scholarship just when he needed it most.

“We were definitely in a rough place,” Mike recalls. He and his wife had just had twins when he began his studies at SUNY Erie and, despite his full-time job, “there was never enough money in the house.”

“That scholarship alone was able to provide for the family,” Mike recalls. “It allowed me to focus on school without the dark cloud of finances. It gave me a sense of purpose, too, knowing that the Foundation believed in me. It was great to have that support.”

As for 2020, Mike feels fortunate that he could both work and attend school remotely. He is completing a master’s degree at John Patrick University, and clinical requirements at University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. Mike recently received a promotion to trainee in medical dosimetry, a highly specialized component of radiation therapy. “I’m grateful for all of this, too,” he says. “We’ve made the best of these sad times.”

INTRODUCING THE DISTINGUISHED LEE SCHOLAR AWARD

To recognize the most exceptional among our scholarship recipients, we have established the Distinguished Lee Scholar Award. This prestigious honor recognizes a student who has successfully integrated the Foundation’s values of integrity, leadership and service to others into their personal and academic endeavors. The recipient is a leader in and out of the classroom, helps foster the community of Lee Scholars, and finds meaningful ways to give back to others.

Our 2020 Distinguished Lee Scholar Award winner is Crystal Bell. A Lee Scholar who graduated cum laude from St. Louis University, Crystal will receive a master’s degree in civil engineering from SLU in May 2021.

SAY YES TO EDUCATION

We have concluded our \$1 million commitment to this program, which encourages young people to finish high school by supporting their postsecondary education. With an average scholarship of more than \$3,000, Lee Scholars studying for associate’s or bachelor’s degrees in STEM have achieved a persistence rate of 72%.



CRYSTAL BELL

2020 Distinguished Lee Scholar

Crystal Bell was thrilled to benefit from a Lee Scholarship in her junior and senior years at St. Louis University. Now, as a Distinguished Lee Scholar, she appreciates the opportunity to work toward a master’s degree in civil engineering, and to represent the Foundation as a Lee Ambassador. Fortunately, the pandemic has not interrupted her studies. “I feel very lucky and privileged – I’m still pursuing my education in a school that I love.”

A chance experience in her freshman year sparked Crystal’s interest in water advocacy. Tagging along with friends to a meeting on campus, she was outraged by inequities both in the U.S. and in Central America. A service trip to Belize reinforced her decision to make water resources and filtration technologies a focus of her master’s studies.

Crystal expresses “overwhelming gratitude” to the Foundation. “Life-changing is a word I don’t use lightly,” she reveals, “but I’m in such a better place because of this scholarship. Instead of having to figure out my finances, I can concentrate on figuring out how to achieve my goals. I can focus on giving back.”

ADVOCACY

Think Bigger Do Good

This collaboration of four behavioral health funders – the Scattergood Foundation, Peg’s Foundation, Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation and Patrick P. Lee Foundation – recorded significant achievements in 2020. An advisory council of 40 national policy experts meets annually to determine which mental health issues to prioritize for state and federal policy reform.

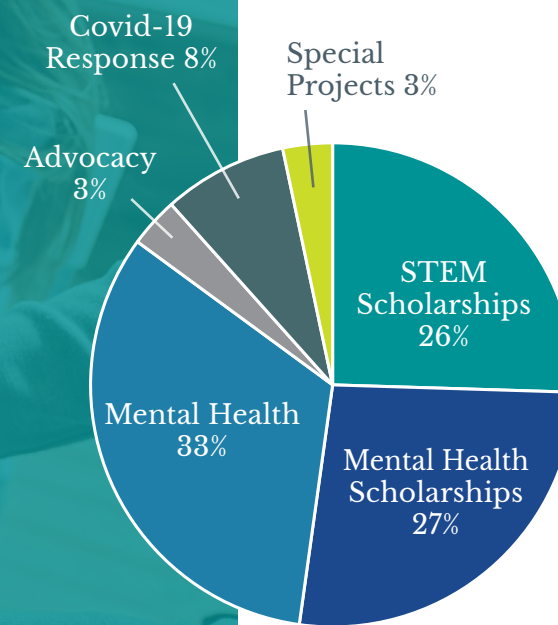
In addition to a new website, Think Bigger Do Good introduced a series of timely webinars in which mental health practitioners discuss current policy concerns such as racial disparities in crisis care and in interactions with law enforcement.

Eight solution-oriented papers were published, covering topics that include youth suicide, crisis care, housing, health insurance coverage of mental health care, and ways to minimize interactions between people with mental illness and the criminal justice system.



CALL 988 FOR MENTAL HEALTH CRISES

A key advocacy effort of Think Bigger Do Good was to establish a national emergency hotline – a 911 for mental health. Thanks to a law signed in 2020, the memorable 988 number will be operational in 2022, making it easier for more people in crisis to access care.



2020 COMMUNITY INVESTMENTS

Advocacy

Think Bigger Do Good

Covid-19 Response

WNY Covid-19 Community Response Fund

Mental Health

BestSelf Behavioral Health

Buffalo City Mission

ECMC Foundation

Lt. Col. Matt Urban Human Services Center of WNY

NAMI Buffalo and Erie County

WNED/WBFO

WNY Human Services Collaborative

Mental Health Scholarships

D'Youville College

University at Buffalo Foundation

University Psychiatric Practice

University of Rochester

Special Projects

Albright Knox Art Gallery

STEM Scholarships

Niagara County Community College

Rochester Institute of Technology

Saint Louis University

Say Yes to Education Buffalo

SUNY Erie

University of Rochester



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