

# CONNECTIONS



## Funds Find Resilience in NCF Network Ties

The full potential of the Nebraska Community Foundation network awoke in the face of a world-altering health crisis. With COVID-19 stressing economies locally and globally, relationships established through years—often decades—of hard work fostered opportunities for affiliated funds to do their part in leading, convening, caring for, and uplifting their communities.

Legacy Fund for Seward County was among the first affiliated funds to establish a COVID-19 response account, which allowed members to collect donations with the express intent of providing relief to communities facing the uncertainty brought on by the novel coronavirus. With immense community support, FAC members awarded \$38,000 to schools and senior centers as they navigated the new world defined by social distancing directives issued by state and local officials. In a second round of grants, the fund awarded more than \$24,390 to area schools, a child development center, and FoodNet to address growing food insecurity.

Legacy Fund for Seward County was not the only NCF affiliated fund to jump into action in the face of the pandemic. Much like in Seward County, affiliated funds in McCook, Norfolk, Butler County, Stratton, and Nebraska City utilized their response accounts to award grants to charitable organizations that play vital roles in their communities.

Following a model established by colleagues in McCook, Stratton Community Foundation Fund used its COVID-19 Response Account to kickstart the Stratton Stimulus Spending Program.



*A grant to the Utica Senior Center to address food insecurity among elders is one of many Legacy Fund for Seward County has made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

For every \$50 residents purchased in COVID Cash certificates, they received an additional \$20. The certificates could then be used at more than 15 participating local businesses, providing an economic boost during trying times.

“I’m proud of the fact we can help out local families and businesses when so many are hurting financially during the crisis,” said FAC member Lorrinda Cheatham.

McCook Community Foundation Fund redirected \$25,000 from its 2020 spring grant cycle to kickstart its account. Subsequent donations from MNB Financial Services and the Graff Charitable Foundation gave the response effort a total of \$125,000 within its first week. The fund then awarded grants to the school, local churches, and the local fire department, among other entities.

Food banks and a domestic violence support center received grants from Butler County Area Foundation Fund

(BCAFF) in March. The fund awarded money to churches, as well as \$1,500 to Genesis House, a support center for domestic violence survivors in Butler and Polk counties. The impact of that money was felt immediately.

“With the help of BCAFF relief efforts, Genesis House can carry our families through the difficult days ahead and help them continue working to achieve a life free from domestic violence and abuse,” said Nicole Gasper, program manager at Genesis House.

For decades, NCF volunteers labored to create resilient networks in their communities with a goal to foster long-term growth and prosperity—not necessarily to respond to a global pandemic. Those relationships, however, proved invaluable to reacting decisively and effectively. With such infrastructure in place, Greater Nebraska is poised to recover and learn from these historic circumstances. ■

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## The Roles Our Volunteers Play

On any given day, fund advisory committees play a variety of roles. In the face of a global pandemic, those functions have become critically important to community wellbeing. Here are just a few of the roles FACs are playing. →

This newsletter features dozens of examples of volunteer affiliated fund leaders springing into action—raising money, making grants, using existing relationships to do more, and serving as a beacon of good news and positivity in a time when we all desperately need it.

Meanwhile, a second pandemic is raging in America—inequity, injustice and systemic racism have long plagued our communities of color. When discussing these topics, I struggle with the right language to use. I've learned that these issues only get better when we talk about them—it's okay to say I don't know. The NCF network can be a platform for having the important and difficult conversations that will move us forward.

If you struggle with these issues like I do, then I hope you will join me in a learning



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journey. Do you know someone who isn't like you? Would you like to? Would you like to be part of a discussion or study group? A travel group? Please let me know what you're interested in learning or experiencing. ■

Jeff Yost | President & CEO

## Meet Our New Community Storyteller

Nebraska Community Foundation (NCF) proudly welcomes Michael Wunder of Lincoln to its growing network of community development professionals.

The Omaha native joined the staff March 19 as NCF's Community Storyteller. In that role, he will work with volunteers in the NCF network's more than 250 communities to share their stories of success and help promote their ongoing efforts to strengthen Greater Nebraska.



degree in journalism. Prior to joining NCF, he spent the last five years covering multiple southeast Nebraska communities as a reporter for two weekly newspapers, The News in Waverly and The Voice News of Southeast Nebraska in Hickman. During that time, Wunder received multiple writing and photography awards—including the Nebraska Press Association's 2017 Outstanding Young Journalist Award for weekly newspaper journalists.

Michael graduated from the University of Nebraska-Omaha with a bachelor's

Email affiliated fund story ideas to [mwunder@nebcommfound.org](mailto:mwunder@nebcommfound.org) ■

# Summer Internships Bring Greater Nebraskans Home



Lexi Gross, a student at Fort Hays State University, will spend her summer internship using video, audio and written pieces to help tell McCook's story.

Thirteen students are being welcomed to their Greater Nebraska hometowns for summer internships that will further the community-building work of local Nebraska Community Foundation affiliated funds.

The opportunity to host a summer intern came about through NCF's Hometown Internship Program which offered challenge grants in partnership with NCF's board of directors to ensure students would be compensated for their work.

As part of the program, interns are asked to discover and document the assets and abundance of their homeplace. They will help facilitate conversations with

community members regarding these assets and opportunities, and they will co-create opportunities to mobilize these local assets to increase community quality of life.

"Connecting young people to opportunities in their hometowns is critical to Nebraska's people attraction efforts," said Jeff Yost, Nebraska Community Foundation president and CEO. "Thirteen bright, young, ambitious Nebraskans will return to their communities for the summer and while I am certain they will gain invaluable learning experiences, we also have much to learn from these students about what they are looking for in the places they ultimately decide to call home." ■

## It's Not a Trap

The following are excerpts (edited slightly for clarity) from an editorial penned by NCF and Hebron Community Fund Hometown Intern Dakota Cherney. It ran in the Hebron Journal-Register in June 2020. Visit [www.necommfound.org](http://www.necommfound.org) to see the full article.

There's a certain stigma in today's day and age that moving back to your hometown is a bad thing. Are there any jobs? Will I be considered a failure? Do I want to raise my kids here?

You see, it took me to move away [to college] and come back [this summer] to realize just how much I value what we have here in Thayer County.

As an intern for Nebraska Community Foundation and the Hebron Community Fund, I can say we truly value Nebraska communities and the things that make them so special.



Dakota Cherney, Hebron Hometown Intern.

With the help of Nebraska Community Foundation's resources, we together as a group, can truly create the hometown of our dreams and sustain this area for generations to come.

Make Thayer County a place that people want to move back to. Reach out and specifically tell youth in your area and in your school system you want them back here and each and every one of them is valued.

To this day, I have never been asked to move back to this area. If the young adults of my generation are not invited to move back home by you, then who is going to ask them?

They are the future of this spot we call home, an area that is filled with plenty of opportunities to grow, and a place that I am proud of to be from.

Does it sound like a trap to you? ■

*I feel connected to my hometown.*



## Surveying Our Youth

One thousand, three hundred thirty-nine Nebraska high school students have lent their voices and perspectives to a Youth Survey effort co-created by Nebraska Community Foundation and the University of Nebraska Omaha's Center for Public Affairs Research.

Survey respondents representing eight Greater Nebraska communities, 10 schools, and four grade levels were asked for feedback regarding their plans for the future, stigmas attached to returning to their hometowns, and features of their ideal community.

NCF and UNO will begin releasing the insightful and exciting findings this summer. Stay tuned!

# AFFILIATED FUND UPDATES



Community members pose for a photo for Leigh Legacy Fund's "Bear Hunt" in March. The event created a way for residents to interact safely during the pandemic.

**Leigh Legacy Fund** and Leigh Community Club made social distancing a bit easier to bear with a special scavenger hunt for Leigh residents. The fund asked all residents to place stuffed teddy bears in their windows or on their property one evening in March, then encouraged families to cruise through town on a "Bear Hunt" that night and during the following week. The fund hailed the event as a success, estimating that more than 95 homes participated and displayed more than 150 stuffed animals overall. Members have since organized an Easter egg hunt and a cruise night to continue playing their part in uplifting the community. ■

**Norfolk Area Community Foundation Fund** demonstrated the potential of convening and connecting through its work with Our Savior Lutheran. Their partnership resulted in \$28,000 in grant money for seven area nonprofits. The church dedicated a portion of its Easter service collection to the effort, and multiple community contacts joined the initiative. The fund provided \$7,500, allowing for each organization to receive \$4,000. Recipients included Orphan Grain Train, Project Homeless Connect Norfolk, Bright Horizons, The Salvation Army, Norfolk Rescue Mission, Northeast Nebraska Community Action Partnership, and Good Neighbors. ■

Norfolk Area Community Foundation Fund member Tracey Buettner presents a donation to Allene Johnson of Good Neighbors.



The Bennet Area Community Foundation Fund encouraged residents to display pictures of paw prints in their windows for a community Panther Paw Hunt.

**Bennet Area Community Foundation Fund** leapt into action and assumed its roles of grantmaker, fundraiser, and community cheerleader and champion in response to COVID-19. Fund advisory committee members sought to uplift spirits by encouraging residents to take part in a Panther Paw Hunt by driving through the area looking for panther paw art, inspired by School District OR-1's mascot, on display in neighbors' windows. Additionally, BACFF utilized Nebraska Community Foundation's Bridging the Homework Gap opportunity (see page 7) to purchase Chromebooks and accessories that would better equip local students for their new virtual reality. ■

PHOTO COURTESY OF A.P. PHOTOGRAPHY



Friend Community Healthcare System employees stand outside Warren Memorial Hospital. Friend Area Fund and the Warren Memorial Hospital Foundation arranged for A.P. Photography to take the photo, as well as photos of community members posing in front of their homes.

**Friend Area Fund** put pre-established community connections to work in convening meetings with other leaders to determine how to best meet area needs. In a conversation with local school administration, they learned that providing meals to the newly homebound students was the most urgent need. The fund awarded a grant to help offset the cost of the school providing free breakfast and lunch. Within a week, meals were being delivered to more than 100 students in the district. The fund also worked with a local photographer and the Warren Memorial Hospital Foundation to take photos of families on their porches as a fundraiser to purchase telehealth equipment. ■



The McCook Community Foundation Fund worked with local organizations to start a mural project which was painted by local artists in front of Sehnert's Bakery.

**McCook Community Foundation Fund** bolstered community spirits by convening area artists and businesses to inspire McCook. Joining together with local businesses and non-profits, MCFF spearheaded a temporary mural project focusing on "We are One," a common theme at the local high school. The effort resulted

in a mural in front of Sehnert's Bakery where businesses and residents can add names. "Down the road, we would like to consider more permanent murals on a larger scale," said FAC member Ronda Graff. "We hope these short-term murals lift everyone's spirits on even just a small scale and show that we are all in this together—that 'We are One.'" ■

**Nebraska City Community Foundation Fund** hosted events to honor essential workers and recognize seniors at local high schools. Fund advisory committee members organized nights for residents to showcase their community pride, including cruising up and down Central Avenue, a main thoroughfare in the southeast Nebraska town. The community pride events were intended to not only invigorate the public but to also express gratitude for healthcare workers, first responders, and essential service workers in the community. The fund didn't forget the Class of 2020 either—members had yard signs made to honor graduating students at the Nebraska Center for the Education of Children who are Blind or Visually Impaired, Nebraska City Public Schools, and Lourdes Central Catholic School. ■



Jenice Bergstrom and Linda Fecht delivered 180 muffins to employees at Mosaic Bethphage Village in Axtell.

**Axtell Community Fund** delivered support in the form of baked goods to community members doing vital work in the south central Nebraska town. Fund members brought 180 muffins to employees at Mosaic Bethphage Village in Axtell, where essential workers provide assistance and education to individuals with intellectual disabilities. The Mosaic in Axtell is the only certified autism center in Nebraska, and one of a handful of such centers in the United States. The muffins included notes of gratitude reading "You are appreciated for who you are and what you chose to do each day." ■



## #TogetherApart a Greater Nebraska

Though directive health measures had many Nebraskans staying home this spring, they didn't keep members of the NCF network from continuing their work to build stronger communities and a Greater Nebraska.

Throughout the months of April and May, NCF hosted weekly and bi-weekly virtual gatherings which brought dozens of volunteers from across the state together to discuss everything from food traditions to pandemic silver linings. Dr. Bob Rauner, whose YouTube channel has served as an invaluable coronavirus resource for Nebraskans, joined the network twice to share expert insights and predictions for what the future holds.

Coined #TogetherApart a Greater Nebraska, each conversation was loosely facilitated and lasted 60-minutes. Attendees were invited to "come as they are" (with a beverage of choice in hand), reconnect, reflect, and reaffirm our shared purpose as a grassroots statewide network.

Lidia Borer and Melissa Turner hand out yard signs and letters to high school seniors.



#TogetherApart a Greater Nebraska

# COMMUNITY IMPACT

## Sidney Community Donor-Advised Fund Invests \$184,000 in Local Childcare Providers

A \$184,000 community investment by the Sidney Community Donor-Advised Fund is protecting local childcare and early childhood education capacity in Nebraska's Panhandle. Five grants were made to local childcare providers—the largest are benefitting Here Wee Grow Child Development Center and Kid's Korner Early Child Development Center. When combined with the federal government's Paycheck Protection Program, both facilities have been able to compensate and retain high-quality staff members, even as revenues declined due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Here Wee Grow Director, Rhonda Schuessler, "It has been a time of uncertainties and unanswered questions." She calls the grant from the Sidney Community Donor-Advised Fund "a miracle of hope." It will help

Here Wee Grow cover operating expenses, payroll, and continue to provide services in the future. Here Wee Grow's dedicated staff and high-quality services have earned the center a Step 4 rating, defined by Nebraska's Step Up to Quality program, one of only 47 providers statewide.

Kid's Korner Early Child Development Center, which has also earned a Step 4 rating, has been caring for children living in the Sidney area since 2003. According to Director Tiffany Jones, "Kid's Korner is humbled and appreciative to the Sidney Community Donor-Advised Fund of Nebraska Community Foundation. The impact of this grant has given us the opportunity to continue to support and retain our long-term, educated providers and assist in the daily operations of our



childcare center. It has also ensured our vitality of continuing to offer our community high-quality childcare as we reopen our doors." ■

## Understanding the CARES Act

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress passed three economic stimulus packages to support our nation. One of these, the \$2 trillion-plus CARES Act, does many things, including providing direct cash payments to Americans, pushing back income tax filing and payment deadlines, and encouraging charitable giving.

### **Above-the-Line Charitable Deduction**

To encourage cash gifts to nonprofits, there is a \$300 above-the-line income tax charitable deduction that is available beginning in 2020 to those who claim the standard deduction. Only about 10 percent of donors itemize their deductions; for the 90 percent who take the standard deduction, this may motivate them to make charitable gifts. This deduction is not allowed for contributions to donor-advised funds.

### **Temporary Waiver of Required Minimum Distributions**

There are many changes in the CARES Act that impact qualified retirement plans, including RMDs. One change that may affect charities like NCF (and its affiliated funds) is that RMDs do not have to be taken for 2020, which may reduce the incentive for donors to make qualified charitable distributions (QCDs). However, donors are still allowed to make QCDs from their IRAs of up to \$100,000 beginning at age 70 ½.

### **100 Percent Charitable Deduction**

For 2020, individual donors may deduct cash gifts to charities up to 100 percent of their adjusted gross income (AGI). This gets complicated and should be addressed with a donor's professional advisor for each individual situation. The 100 percent limit is reduced dollar-for-

dollar for each non-cash gift (i.e., highly appreciated stocks or property) and is not available for cash gifts to donor-advised funds. In normal years, donors can carry forward charitable deductions if they go above 60 percent of their AGI, and that might still be a good idea. The taxpayer must make an election on his/her tax return to take the larger deduction. Again, this may be a good opportunity for some donors, but it is important to seek professional advice.

### **Other Considerations (Not Related to the CARES Act)**

#### **Estate Planning Attractiveness**

There have been reports of increasing interest in getting estate plans in order. NCF has many tools to help individuals get started on their plans, including our free online Wills Guide available at [nebcommfound.giftlegacy.com](http://nebcommfound.giftlegacy.com). ■

## Narrowing the Homework Gap

“Seven in ten teachers assign homework that requires access to broadband, but one in three households do not subscribe to broadband service. Where those numbers overlap is a new digital divide—call it the homework gap” stated Jessica Rosenworcel of the Federal Communications Commission in 2016.

Thanks to an anonymous donor and the Alice DeVoe Donor-Advised Fund, Nebraska’s homework gap is getting a little smaller.

Lack of access and prohibitive cost of both high-speed internet and properly equipped devices are just a couple of reasons for the disparities experienced among Nebraska students. In response, thirty-one Greater Nebraska schools are receiving grants totaling more than \$263,000 through affiliated funds of Nebraska Community Foundation. The opportunity for funding was made available exclusively to affiliated funds in the NCF network and required a 1:1 local funding match.

While the homework gap has long existed, COVID-19 exacerbated the divide between Nebraska students.

Grants are supporting a wide range of methods to bridge the homework gap. For instance, schools in communities such as Auburn, Dorchester, Keith County, Shickley, Thedford, and Verdigre are purchasing new devices for students. Grants in communities like Norfolk, McCook, and Ralston are addressing access to high speed internet. The grant in Brown County will finance a summer program to help students with unfinished learning. In Columbus, a large portion of the grant will be used to help staff address the mental health needs created by the disruption of COVID-19.

“We’ve had major changes for these kids and their home life and school life since March and we don’t know what effect that’s going to have.” said Nicole Anderson, an employee of Columbus Public Schools and member of the Columbus Area Future Fund Advisory Committee.

Of the 23 applications received, all were granted full funding by a volunteer fund advisory committee whose members have vast experience in education and represent communities of all sizes across the state. ■



*The impact of an anonymous donor and the Alice DeVoe Donor-Advised Fund is being felt in homes all across Greater Nebraska.*

NEBRASKA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION  
2020 ANNUAL CELEBRATION  
TRAINING EXPO BANQUET

*Dreams Welcome*

## Changes to 2020 Annual Celebration NOVEMBER 12, 2020

To protect the health and wellbeing of the NCF network and ensure that all members can participate, Nebraska Community Foundation will host the 2020 Annual Celebration (originally planned in McCook) on virtual platforms, through regional in-person gatherings, or a combination of the two.

As we work out the details of 2020’s Annual Celebration, we will be keeping the network informed via social media and our e-newsletter. Subscribe at our website [www.nebcommfound.org](http://www.nebcommfound.org).

### About Our Annual Celebration

NCF’s biggest event of the year draws hundreds of community builders from across the state to share ideas, learn from one another, and work together to achieve their dreams!

In 2020 we set our sights on making Greater Nebraska a place where everyone belongs. Bring your biggest passions and your brightest ambitions.

*All dreams are welcome here!* ■

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

## BACK TO OUR HOMETOWNS

*NCF reserves the back page of our newsletter to share stories and insights from NCF volunteers who are making a home in Greater Nebraska.*



*Originally from Spalding, Dr. Hilary Miller now resides in Ord. "Whether you're sick or need to borrow the tractor, everyone is always very willing to help others in need."*

Doctor Hilary Miller of Ord is busy. Really busy. In addition to her duties as a physician in the Valley County Health System's emergency room, hospital, clinic, three nursing homes, and one assisted living facility, she also serves as the medical director for emergency medical services in Valley County and seven surrounding counties.

She says her duties in the ER are particularly fulfilling. "Being a farm kid, I know how important it is to have an ER service. Some people drive 50 miles to get to an emergency room."

Miller began her education at the University of Nebraska Kearney and completed it at the University of

Nebraska Medical Center. Social media wasn't part of Miller's curriculum but it would have come in handy. Her personal Facebook page is one of the main ways she remains in contact with her community and it has proven particularly invaluable in a global pandemic.

"There is a lot of misinformation floating around, especially on Facebook." She hopes her voice will help guide community members in making better decisions about protecting themselves and neighbors from the coronavirus. "I'm trying to be that conduit to get better information to the public."

Her feed is full of directed health measures updates, information on new confirmed cases, and pleas to mask in public and physically distance. Miller says for the most part, it's been an easy sell thanks to the community-centric mindset of Valley Countians which existed long before "coronavirus" entered the lexicon. "Our neighbors are our friends and family. I'm not

protecting me to protect me. I'm doing this to protect others," she said.

When Miller isn't at the hospital (or in the ER, or clinic, or visiting a neighboring county, etc . . . ), she spends her time volunteering for the Valley County Community Foundation Fund. She is one of three young women recently invited to join the Fund Advisory Committee. "We offer a fresh view of what the community needs." Beyond her millennial and newcomer status, Miller also offers representation of the healthcare community, a perspective the group had been missing.

Among the many projects VCCFF is involved in, Miller is particularly excited about its efforts to bring quality childcare and early childhood education to Valley County. She thinks it could be a real attraction point for other young newcomers to Valley County. "When people are shopping for a community, this could be a major feather in our cap." ■