

THE BUFFALO NEWS

Patrick P. Lee Foundation Awards \$1 Million in Grants for Mental Health Workforce

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For several years now, the Patrick P. Lee Foundation has prioritized grants to support the mental health workforce.

"I think Covid certainly put it on everyone's radar, but, truthfully, this has been a longstanding issue for the mental health community," said Jane Mogavero, the foundation's executive director. "The reimbursement rates are low. The expectations on people in the field is high."

Doubling-down on its commitment to the regional workforce, the foundation recently solicited organizations in Western and Central New York to submit proposals geared toward the recruitment and retention of mental health professionals.

The foundation ended up receiving \$3.6 million in funding requests, and this month announced it selected 10 of those applications for funding, totaling \$1.07 million.

"It reaffirmed that this is a top priority across not just Western New York but, honestly, the country is struggling with this," Mogavero said. "We heard from many more providers than we had in the past."

Four of the grants, at \$150,000 each, were awarded to agencies for training and recruitment efforts:

- BestSelf Behavioral Health received a grant that will allow it to create a "paid clinical internship pilot program focused on recruiting talented staff who are dedicated to working with individuals living with serious mental illness," BestSelf President and CEO Elizabeth Woike-Ganga said in a statement.
- Compeer Buffalo will use the funds to expand its internship program, "which provides college interns hands-on training and exposure to a variety of mental health care settings and practice levels," Compeer Buffalo CEO Cheri Alvarez said in a statement.
- Envision Wellness WNY will use the grant to recruit, train and retain counselors for severe and persistent mental illness.

- Jericho Road Community Health Center will use the funds for a paid behavioral health internship pilot program.

The remaining six grants, totaling \$471,936, went toward supporting staff development and wellness initiatives at six agencies:

- Family and Children's Service of Ithaca received \$150,000 for "CARES: Clinician Advancement and Retention through Enhanced Supports."

- Catholic Charities of Buffalo was awarded \$94,397 to strengthen the mental health workforce to reduce barriers to accessing services.

- Jewish Family Services of WNY received \$86,812, which will help the organization "continue to provide the best in culturally grounded and trauma-informed mental health care," JFS CEO Molly Carr said in a statement.

- OLV Charities got \$69,397 for an outpatient mental health clinic investment program.

- Christian Counseling Ministries of WNY received \$55,330 for a strategic training and retention initiative for clinicians.

- And Compeer Rochester got \$16,000 for direct service staff counseling and support.

In addition, for the 2023-24 academic year, the foundation is awarding about \$632,000 to support 30 scholars pursuing graduate degrees in mental health. That includes students, Mogavero said, at Canisius University, Daemen University, University at Buffalo and University of Rochester.

In the years ahead, Mogavero said the foundation, which has about \$50 million in assets, will keep supporting the mental health workforce.

"We've only each year increased what we've done," she said, "and I think when I look at 2024 and on, we'll continue to increase that investment."