



A YEAR IN STORIES

2025

Berkshire Taconic
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Table of Contents

Every year, we are inspired by the creativity and compassion of our nonprofits, educators, artists, students, donors and volunteers.

Beyond the dollars granted are stories of the dedicated people who shape our community and make it a better place to live every day.

Berkshire Taconic COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

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BTCTF Stands Strong on First Amendment Rights	3
Kara Mikulich Named President of BTCTF	4
Welcome Message from Kara Mikulich	5
Now is the Time to Activate Local Giving	6

CARING FOR OUR NEIGHBORS

BTCTF Guaranteed Income Pilot	8
Early Insights: BTCTF Guaranteed Income for Columbia County	9
New Preschool Launches in Hinsdale, Mass.	9
Immigrant-Serving Organizations Light the Way Forward	10
The Denise Kaley Fund Opens Pathways	12
School-Based Health Centers Expand Healthcare for Children	14

FOOD SYSTEMS

Over \$1 Million Strengthens Food Security Infrastructure	16
\$65K Boosts Access to Fresh and Healthy Food	18

CREATIVITY & RESILIENCE

Art Program for Seniors with Cognitive Challenges	22
Grant Expands Program that Heals Trauma in People and Horses	23
Community Art Project Celebrates the Immigrant Community	24
Local Artists Create Bold Work Supported by \$223K in Grants	26
Equity Grant Brings First-Time Storytellers to the Stage	29
Sound Healer Creates Nurturing Spaces for BIPOC Community	31

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN HOUSING

Creative Solutions for Housing Affordability Take Root	34
Two New Homes in One Day	36
Repairs Keep Residents Safe and Independent in their Homes.....	37

YOUTH LEAD THE WAY

Youth in Democracy Awards	40
Region One Marks Fourth Year of Free Summer Program	40
New Nonprofit Helps Immigrant Students Prepare for College	41
High School Musicians Train for Careers as Educators	42
Over \$910K in Scholarships Awarded in 2025	43

MANY WAYS TO GIVE

Eleanor Lord Leaves an Enduring Legacy to Her Community	46
Portrait of Generosity: Robert H. Wilder, Jr.	48
Five New Board Members Welcomed in 2025	49
Fund for Columbia County Celebrates 25 Years of Giving	50
Giving Forward: Scholarship Alums Serve on Committee	50
Aileen Meehan, Community Engagement Officer	51
Emily Bronson, Senior Community Engagement Officer	52
Joseph Baker, VP Finance & Administration	53
Jenny Lilienthal, Philanthropy Operations Manager	54
Alÿcia Bacon, Community Engagement Officer, Equity and Inclusion	55

BTCTF Stands Strong on First Amendment Rights for Philanthropic Organizations

June 2025—Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation (BTCTF) recently endorsed a “Public Statement from Philanthropy,” a national expression of support for First Amendment rights. The local philanthropic organization was the second signer in Massachusetts.

The public statement cautions funding agencies not to agree to “obey in advance” and bend to political pressure by pausing their efforts to assist community groups who need support and protection. This “is the best advice you can get when you’re in an environment in which a turn toward authoritarianism is looming,” BTCTF Interim President Kara Mikulich says in the journal article.

When Mikulich signed the statement, she knew it was the right thing. What she didn’t know is that her foundation would gain national attention in an article in the Nonprofit Quarterly, the leading national journal in the nonprofit sector. The “Public Statement from Philanthropy” announces that “as charitable giving institutions, we are united behind our First Amendment right to give as an expression of our own distinct values.”

“Signing on is an important expression of our principles as a community foundation,” says Mikulich. “We will always stay true to our values. We are sending a clear reminder about how much we care about our communities.”

As she states in the Nonprofit Quarterly, “That’s why foundations exist. We exist to strengthen the nonprofits that meet so many community needs ... and they’re especially vital for our most vulnerable neighbors.”

Guaranteed Income Program for Columbia County

On May 1, BTCTF opened applications for a new two-year pilot program that provides monthly payments of \$500 to single-parent/-caregiver households with children aged six and under: Guaranteed Income for Columbia County.

Two families in each town in Columbia County, for a total of 42 families, will be offered this opportunity via town



Kara Mikulich, interim president of Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, signed the Public Statement of Philanthropy in preemptive defense of community foundations' First Amendment rights. Photo by Sarah Kenyon.

lottery. Columbia County’s Greater Hudson Promise Neighborhood serves as the program’s administrative partner.

BTCTF Philanthropic Services Interim Director Kelly Sweet, who spearheaded the pilot, said, “I’m beyond thrilled to share that this dream, two years in the making, is now a reality—BTCTF Guaranteed Income for Columbia County opened its application on May 1 and received a strong response. This pilot is about more than monthly payments.” She added, “The Guaranteed Income Program establishes strong, stable foundations during early childhood, the most critical years of a child’s life, and changes what’s possible for families in Columbia County.”

This recent initiative is the latest in BTCTF’s focus on uplifting marginalized and vulnerable community members.



From left: Kara Mikulich, Alÿcia Bacon, and Gwendolyn VanSant at the Equity Fund Celebration. Photo by Kristen Blush.

Kara Mikulich Named President of Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation

Board cites steady leadership, national experience, and bold vision for the foundation's future

August 2025—The board of directors of Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation (BTCF) has unanimously appointed Kara Mikulich as president. Mikulich has served as interim president since September 2024, a period marked by renewed clarity, values-driven action, and strong collaboration.

“I’ve spent my entire career in the nonprofit sector—working in, advocating for, and raising support for organizations that community foundations like BTCF exist to uplift,” said Mikulich. “That grounding shapes how I approach philanthropy. I love being rooted in community and working at the intersection of generosity and impact.”

Mikulich joined BTCF in 2018 as Chief Philanthropy Officer, leading a six-person team that raised \$95 million over five years, doubled the number of new funds, and increased annual giving by 80%. These expansive increases took place through the difficult pandemic years, when many nonprofits struggled to maintain organizational momentum.

BTCF launched the Equity Fund, developed by Gwendolyn VanSant of Multicultural BRIDGE in 2021. The Equity Fund supports Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) leaders and organizations through a community-led grant-making program, targeted investments, and strategic partnerships.

In 2024, the Equity Fund’s first year of grant making mobilized nearly \$240,000 for 22 BIPOC grantees. This spring, BTCF renewed its financial commitment to the fund.

The “Public Statement from Philanthropy” was initiated by three large philanthropic organizations: the McKnight Foundation, the Freedom Foundation, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and was issued by the Council on Foundations, a 75-year-old nonprofit membership organization. ■

service leadership in 25 cities across the U.S.—all unified by a belief in equity and the power of community-led change.

In her role as interim president, Mikulich oversaw the foundation’s operations and served as team leader for 20 staff members. She invigorated the foundation’s strategic focus on economic opportunity with the launch of BTCF Guaranteed Income for Columbia County.

Before joining BTCF, Mikulich served as Vice President of Strategy and Development at Public Allies, a national service organization that prepares young adults for careers in public service. There, she led national fundraising, built a strong development team, and mentored local leaders to diversify support across 25 cities.

Her earlier roles include program officer at the Joyce Foundation in Chicago, director of the Jesuit Grants Collaborative in New Orleans, and regional development director at Single Stop USA, where she supported students at community colleges in the Gulf South. She began her career as a staff attorney at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago, representing

low-income clients in public benefits appeals and contributing research to a landmark class action suit defending access to care for women and children.

Mikulich holds a law degree from Stanford Law School, where she focused on social change lawyering and served as associate editor of the Stanford Law Review, and a bachelor’s degree from the College of the Holy Cross, where she graduated magna cum laude, was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and received a Fulbright Fellowship.

“This foundation is grounded in the values of place-based philanthropy, equity, and opportunity,” said Mikulich. “I look forward to building on that legacy by working closely with donors, nonprofit leaders, and community partners to strengthen our collective impact.”

Mikulich lives in Norfolk, Conn., with her husband, Alex, a social ethicist, award-winning author, and anti-racism facilitator and activist. They have two adult children, a son and a daughter, who live in New York. ■

Welcome Message from Kara Mikulich

August 2025—I am thrilled to be writing to you as the fifth President of Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation. Having worked with our talented staff, dedicated board, generous donors, and volunteers for the past seven years, I have a deep admiration and affection for the extraordinary people who bring our mission to life. It is the honor of my career to be charged with leading such a “dream team” in shaping the foundation’s future.

A connection to place is the guiding force and unique strength of every community foundation, and the area we serve has long held a special place in my heart. Our four counties, spanning three states, form one of our country’s most scenic regions, enriched by engaged citizens, fearless nonprofits, and a vibrant creative economy. This is also a place of great need, unaffordable and out of reach for so many who work here.

One of our foundation’s core roles is to fortify our region’s nonprofits, which meet a wide range of community needs and provide vital resources to our most vulnerable residents. We are living in a precarious and frightening time for so many

of our neighbors, who, along with the nonprofit sector—and civil society in general—are facing unprecedented threats and challenges.

At BTCF, we stand in solidarity with our nonprofit grantees and the people they serve. Our values will continue to guide our grantmaking, including our commitments to:

- The Equity Fund and its mission of advancing racial and social justice, with grantmaking by and for communities of color;
- Our Immigrant Support Funds, which provide direct cash assistance to families whose daily life is increasingly shaped by fear and threats of deportation, separation, and loss of income; and
- The recently-launched BTCF Guaranteed Income Pilot for Columbia County, to improve the financial stability and well-being of single parents with young children.

With our community by our side, we remain steadfast in our commitment to meet the challenges of the moment—and support our region’s essential work—with creativity and compassion. We look forward to harnessing our shared values and collective strength to guide our work in the months and years to come. ■

Now is the Time to Activate Local Giving

Community Commentary by Kara Mikulich, Aired on WAMC Northeast Public Radio

November 2025—Across our region, neighbors quietly care for one another every day through volunteerism and generosity, and their commitment sustains our nonprofits and communities. Yet the challenges we all face increase daily.

Federal policy changes and current and impending funding cuts are already exerting extraordinary pressure on food security, health, human services, and other local safety nets. And we expect that hardship will increase in the coming year. Thanks to the Urban Institute's October release of its Nonprofit Trends and Impacts Study, which determined that one third of nonprofits in the nation report a government funding disruption in the first half of 2025 we know that things are progressively difficult in the nonprofit arena. Add to that the 2025 survey finding by Philanthropy Massachusetts that 54 percent of nonprofit leaders in the commonwealth reported federal policy changes as unfavorably impacting their daily operations, and the prospect for their immediate futures dim.

Our hard-working nonprofit sector is diverse and essential, and their programs offer sustenance to both bodies and minds. They provide thousands of meals to families and deliver educational and after-school programs to our youngest residents. They offer literacy support, arts and culture, and quality health care. They are asking of our communities the most important question: "How can we do better?"

Most nonprofit organizations operate on narrow margins and limited reserves, relying on community support to sustain their work. Many of our local groups are very small, with fewer than 10 employees, shouldering heavy work for the rest of us. Every gift helps ensure their continued ability to provide essential services that strengthen our civic fabric and build shared resilience.

When you give locally, you see the benefits and feel the connection locally—in our schools and senior centers,

in our food pantries and libraries. A gift to a community health clinic, an arts nonprofit, or a neighborhood support center directly strengthens the people and places around you.

As the season of giving approaches, we encourage everyone to start locally. Reach out to the nonprofits you care about and ask what they need – most will tell you that an unrestricted operating gift is the smartest, most efficient way to support their work, and some might be seeking resources for emergency relief or an investment to fuel innovation.

Philanthropy is a collective act of stewardship, rooted in the belief that the well-being of our neighbors is tied to our own. Now is the time to build resilience for tomorrow. ■

► [LISTEN ONLINE, WAMC MIDDAY MAGAZINE 11/17/25](#)



CARING FOR OUR NEIGHBORS

BTCF Guaranteed Income Pilot for Columbia County

Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation and Greater Hudson Promise Neighborhood Launch Two-Year Guaranteed Income Pilot Supporting Families with Young Children

June 2025—A new pilot program will provide \$500 per month to single parents and caregivers across Columbia County, N.Y., thanks to a partnership between Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation (BTCF) and Greater Hudson Promise Neighborhood (GHPN). BTCF Guaranteed Income for Columbia County (BTCF-GICC) will deliver monthly payments to two families in 21 towns, totaling support for 42 households for the next two years. Guaranteed Income programs are a proven tool to stabilize household finances, support early childhood development, increase food security and expand opportunities for improved housing.

The program focuses on single parents and caregivers earning up to 80% of the area median income raising at least one child aged 6 or younger. Participants will be selected by lottery from a confidential application process. Applications are open now and will close on July 15, 2025. Applications are available in English, Spanish and Bangla.

“The simplicity of guaranteed income is powerful—it’s direct, effective, and rooted in trust,” said Kara Mikulich, Interim President of Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation. “This program is a bold step toward supporting families in a way that is both practical and transformative.”

“This initiative is about more than money—it’s about stability, dignity, and opportunity for families during the most important years of a child’s life,” said Kelly Sweet, Interim Director of Philanthropic Services at BTCF. “We’re proud to bring this research-backed solution to our region with no strings attached.”

GHPN, a trusted community-based partner, will serve as the program’s administrative lead and provide direct support to participating families. The organization operates HudsonUP, a successful guaranteed income program in Hudson that inspired this broader countywide initiative.

“I’ve seen firsthand how guaranteed income transformed lives in Hudson,” said Joan Hunt, Executive Director of GHPN. “We’re excited to expand this approach across

Columbia County to bring the same kind of stability and relief to more families.”

To enter the lottery: greaterhudsonpromise.org/btcf-gicc
Learn more at berkshiretaconic.org/btcf-gicc.

Eligibility at a Glance

- Single parents or caregivers with at least one child aged 6 or under
- Household income at or below 80% of the Area Median Income
- Must reside in Columbia County, N.Y.
- Application deadline: July 15, 2025
- Participants selected via lottery

Why Guaranteed Income?

Proven Results from Similar Programs

Guaranteed income pilots across the country have demonstrated the following benefits:

- Improved mental and physical health for caregivers and children
- Enhanced early childhood development
- Greater food and housing security
- Increased access to childcare and health care
- Stronger employment and educational opportunities for caregivers

Funding Partners

BTCF Guaranteed Income is made possible through the generosity of:

- The Community Fund at Berkshire Taconic
- The Fund for Columbia County
- Hudson River Bank and Trust Foundation
- Individual donors across the region

About Greater Hudson Promise Neighborhood

The Greater Hudson Promise Neighborhood Inc. (GHPN) is a community-based organization modeled after the Harlem Children’s Zone. GHPN works to support youth and families in the Hudson City School District, from cradle to career. ■

Early Insights: BTCF-GICC

October 2025—Forty-two local parents are finding new footing through Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation’s Guaranteed Income for Columbia County program (BTCF-GICC). The two-year pilot launched to reduce economic stress during children’s critical early years, now supports 40 mothers and one father. Among them are parents of newborns, as well as families with up to five children.

The impact has been immediate, ranging from one family that avoided eviction, to another that was able to buy new clothes for their children to start the school year with confidence.

While each family’s story is unique, the challenges they face share common themes. Parents have reported job loss, reduced work hours, or unreliable housing. Several are recovering from medical setbacks or navigating domestic violence and legal proceedings. Others are navigating school transitions, seeking reliable childcare, or advocating for children with special needs. Three families are simultaneously raising young children while coping with the death of a spouse or child.

Through extensive outreach, participants were referred to BTCF-GICC by foster care case workers, healthcare providers, and community organizations. Some discovered the program independently through online searches. Participants were selected by lottery to receive \$500/month and received their first payments in August. ■

New Preschool Launches in Hinsdale



February 2025—The Barbara and Gunther Stuhlmann Fund, administered by Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, contributed \$26K in startup costs to purchase curriculum, bookcases, chairs, tables, art supplies and more for a new preschool in Hinsdale, Mass. The school features developmentally appropriate curriculums, play-based learning, and outdoor play. Housed at Kittredge Elementary School and run by the Dalton Community Recreation Association, they are open five days a week and can accommodate up to twelve children, ages 2.5-5 years. ■



The team at Columbia County Sanctuary Movement. Photo courtesy of CCSM.

Immigrant-Serving Organizations Light the Way Forward

June 2025—At a recent panel event, Inginia Jackson, cofounder of Camino al Éxito in Dutchess County, was asked, “What is it that immigrants need?” Her response was direct: “What do all humans need? We need housing, food, and healthcare ... Where are the resources we already have in a community, and how do we make them accessible for everyone?” At the heart of immigrant-serving organizations is the mission of access and a redefinition of belonging. This year, communities have been destabilized by rapid shifts in immigration policy, including increased ICE raids. Yet, organizations like Camino al Éxito, Berkshire Immigrant Center, and Columbia County Sanctuary Movement remain rooted in purpose. They continue to provide services ranging from legal support to language learning, from food access to cultural celebration.

Founded in 2021 by wife-and-husband duo Inginia and Shannon Jackson, **Camino al Éxito** improves bilingual access to education, health, and legal resources in northeast Dutchess County. Their mission empowers both youth and adults while building community engagement.

After relocating from urban Westchester County to rural Dutchess County, the Jacksons noticed a stark contrast. “We knew there were immigrants and Latinos here, but they were behind doors. They didn’t feel like they belonged,” Jackson shared. After four years of operations, they’re beginning to see the results of efforts to integrate the community, and partnerships have been a key part of that change. “We’re collaborating with libraries, churches, and school districts to close the language gaps, and we want other nonprofits to know we’re open for partnerships. Leaders of bigger nonprofits ask us how we’re connecting so well with immigrant families.” Their answer: “A pipeline of trust.”

One of Caminos’ standout programs, Elevation of You, supports immigrant high school students through financial literacy, employment guidance, social-emotional learning, and college prep. Recently, eight teens also secured Special Immigrant Juvenile Status visas with help from a licensed lawyer arranged by Camino. “If it wasn’t for us, they wouldn’t have known they qualified,” Jackson said of this vital pathway to citizenship.

In the Berkshires, the **Berkshire Immigrant Center** (BIC) has helped immigrants navigate the path to citizenship for nearly 30 years. It is the only nonprofit in the county recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice with DOJ-accredited case workers. BIC serves over 800 individuals annually from more than 60 countries. “Our clients are family, friends, workers, and neighbors who want to follow the law and build their lives with dignity and stability,” said Executive Director Melissa Canavan, “Many face long, complex journeys, and the support they need is not just legal, it is human.”

In response to rapidly shifting federal policies in 2025, BIC has ramped up multilingual outreach and education, offering “Know Your Rights” sessions for immigrants and allies. “Collaboration is not a luxury; it’s a necessity,” says Canavan, extending gratitude for fellow nonprofits and funders who show up “even when the path is hard.” Partnerships with healthcare providers, housing advocates, employers, and faith leaders have been critical for meeting community needs. BIC was proud to open its doors at a new, expanded location on North Street in Pittsfield earlier this year. It has been transformative for their services. “It is more accessible and better equipped for the sensitive and complex work we do,” said Canavan.

Columbia County Sanctuary Movement (CCSM) was founded in 2016 “amidst intersecting crises and attacks on immigrant communities.” Since then, the organization has steadily built its support networks and capacity to respond to constituent needs. Today, it has six core program areas: community organizing, legal support, deportation defense, accompaniment and family support, community building, and food justice. CCSM hosted a virtual Emergency Funders Briefing in April that spotlighted its deportation defense program and a key innovation: building a decentralized training model to expand Rapid Response capacity. Co-Executive Director Bryan MacCormack shared that CCSM’s new Safety and Security Team has expanded workplace preparedness. “We’ve trained close to 300 individuals from nonprofits, businesses, and interfaith institutions to create business protocols for immigration enforcement activities,” he said. “That includes knowing the rights involved if ICE arrives, recognizing administrative vs. judicial warrants, what signage should be up, and who the point person is.” Demand for this kind of training continues to grow.

A regional leader in immigrant rights, CCSM has led rallies and trips to the state capital in support of the New York



Photo by CCSM Multi-Media Organizer Tony Ramirez.

for All Act, which the NYCLU says “draws sensible limits between local government and immigration enforcement.” “Now more than ever,” said MacCormack, “CCSM and immigrant-led organizations need community support to navigate the political landscape safely and effectively.”

Even in difficult times, joy and cultural pride are central to building community. In 2020, CCSM organized the county’s first-ever Latinx Parade and Festival. “This year will be our fifth,” said MacCormack, noting changes ahead. “Due to security concerns, the 2025 Festival will go on tour. We’re shifting to smaller private events that allow for controlled entry and expanded reach into new communities.” CCSM also launched a Caribbean Festival in 2024, which returns this year. Similarly, Camino al Éxito hosted its first Hispanic Heritage celebration in 2024, “Over 100 families were walking in town, proud of their culture. We even had government officials visiting us,” said Jackson. ■

By Jenn Frederick

The Denise Kaley Fund Opens Pathways to Empowerment and Dignity for Women in Cancer Treatment

June 2025—The Denise Kaley Fund for Berkshire County Women with Cancer is a unique and valuable local resource. What began as a vehicle to provide emergency financial assistance has evolved to encompass free ongoing access to health coaching. Monetary support, and health coaching that works in tandem with medical treatment, give women more control over their lives.

Sue Budz, Oncology Social Worker at The David Phelps Cancer Center in Pittsfield, Mass., has worked with The Denise Kaley fund for 10 years. Her colleague Amanda Bayliss, an Integrative Health Coach, has worked with the fund for 5 years. As conversational partners with women in treatment, they have seen a common theme emerge; as women are relieved of the burden of some urgent expenses, they can direct their attention to lifestyle improvements that support their physical, mental and emotional health.

The health coaching option is part of the Cancer Center's Integrative Health Program, which also provides access to free complementary therapies not covered by the fund such as meditation, yoga, art, exercise, nutrition, counseling and more to anyone in the county with a cancer diagnosis. Women in treatment say that having ways to reduce stress, express creativity, and connect with others in person are vital to their healing and overall well-being.

The fund was established 15 years ago by Denise Kaley and her close friend Barbara Bonner, a month before Kaley's passing from lung cancer at the age of 46. A much-beloved healer in the Berkshires, Kaley was mindful of wanting to use her illness to help others who would follow in what she called her "cancer journey." Bonner directs the fund's Advisory Committee, comprised of fellow members Ellen Casey Boyd and Beth Rose. Since 2010, the fund has helped over 375 women with emergency expenses. Five years ago, the fund began supporting free health coaching, which has served 50 women to date.



Missy from Pittsfield, Mass. was supported by The Denise Kaley Fund for Berkshire County Women with Cancer. Photo by Sarah Kenyon.

Normalizing Financial Help: Addressing "The Silent Symptom"

Starting treatment can necessitate leaving a job or working part-time, resulting in significantly reduced or non-existent income. Living expenses and medical fees not covered by insurance can balloon rapidly at a time when women are most vulnerable economically. Sue Budz calls this kind of economic distress "the silent symptom." Moreover, she sees financial need only increasing, and notes that many women still hesitate to ask for help. She is determined to normalize financial help for patients in need; caregivers at BMC and the Nurse Navigation Team are trained to inform women about the fund early on in their treatment and provide reminders along the way. The fund is among the few "safety nets" for patients. Just as meaningful, it shows them there is a community of people who care about them. Rolling, "real-time" requests for financial assistance allow bills to be paid quickly. In addition, \$100 food and gas cards are given to

any woman in cancer treatment in the county, whether they apply to the fund or not.

Listening to Women: The "Tender Work"

Many women share during their coaching sessions that facing a cancer diagnosis compels them to re-evaluate their entire life; they often need to navigate a new landscape of complex decisions for both their medical care and personal lives. Budz and Bayliss are seasoned listeners in this challenging and meaningful work. They help women identify their choices and connect them to additional resources. Budz says, "This is tender work."

Each woman's progress looks different. Some women need support to shift from being their family's primary caregiver to someone who can receive help from others. Many find the post-treatment phase one of the most difficult to navigate; that is why the fund provides free ongoing access to health coaching for women re-integrating into their lives.

Bayliss encourages women she coaches to envision their best life and health and ask themselves what they truly want in all areas of their lives. Budz says that answering those questions is when real changes start to take hold. "Spirituality, work/life balance, mindfulness, stress reduction, movement, rest, nutrition. All are intertwined and connected." Bayliss says. Sometimes, after tackling a challenge like improved sleep, women join a singing group or even get a new job. As women learn they can co-create a map of practices to support their health, they take ownership of those actions and gain more personal agency. They learn to trust themselves and their decision-making processes. Budz says, "It's a beautiful thing to watch."

Missy's Story

Missy, a Pittsfield resident who owns a hairdressing business, is currently in treatment and has received financial assistance through the fund. She's been self-employed for over 30 years and is eager to return to work. She's just completed her fourth of 12 treatments at the Cancer Center, which will take 9 months to complete. She says, "I have good days and bad days."

Sue Budz guided Missy toward the fund to help with mortgage, electric, and gas bills. Missy shares that as she navigated her options for dealing with personal expenses, she found that while banks and utility companies sometimes offer temporary deferments or payment plans, there are often additional costs associated with those options. In

addition, there are barriers to accessing social security and disability benefits right away. Money concerns, Missy says, "are the last thing you want to deal with" when you are trying to focus solely on your health. The Denise Kaley Fund was the first resource she encountered that provided immediate relief, no strings attached. When learning of the support she'd get from the fund, she shared, "I just started crying."

Missy is fortunate to have some help from her aunt, sister and friends nearby; her co-workers at the salon have also been able to take care of her clients while she's undergoing treatment. Missy says she was "floundering" until she learned that there was a network of support she could tap into at the Cancer Center. Recently, she's participated in a few Meditation and Balance classes to relieve stress and support her healing.

Women Discover New Strengths as they Take Charge of their Healing Journey

Sue and Amanda underscore that it is the dedication of the female patients themselves to improve their own quality of life, incrementally, that is the most inspiring to them. Financial help without stigma gives women dignity and reduces stress. Through coaching, women learn new ways to advocate for themselves.

Wendy Krom, a breast cancer survivor, is a perfect example. Upon reaching one-year cancer free, she was inspired to support the fund by inviting family and friends to join her in walking the entire length of the Ashuwillticook Trail as a fundraiser. After completing medical treatment and health coaching, she found her way to a renewed lifestyle that includes daily walks and reconnecting with friends. She also decided to reinvent her work life to one that "nourishes my soul."

An Enduring Legacy of Care and Collaboration

A network of women comprised of the advisory committee, the BMC nurse navigation team, and Cancer Center staff all work in concert to honor Denise's vision. Denise's close friend Barbara shares that Denise, during the 18 months she could not work, "felt blessed to be surrounded by a loving and supportive family and an army of friends." In that spirit, The Denise Kaley Fund's work continues to show women that they are not alone. "Our role is to empower women," Budz says. "We are walking alongside them." ■

By Deirdre McKenna

School-Based Health Centers Expand Healthcare Access for Children

August 2025—In 2024, the Community Health and Wellness Center (CHWC) opened its doors in North Canaan, Conn.* As a federally-qualified health center, their presence helps reduce a significant gap the region faces—identified as a rural healthcare crisis—in accessing consistent, high-quality medical and behavioral health care.

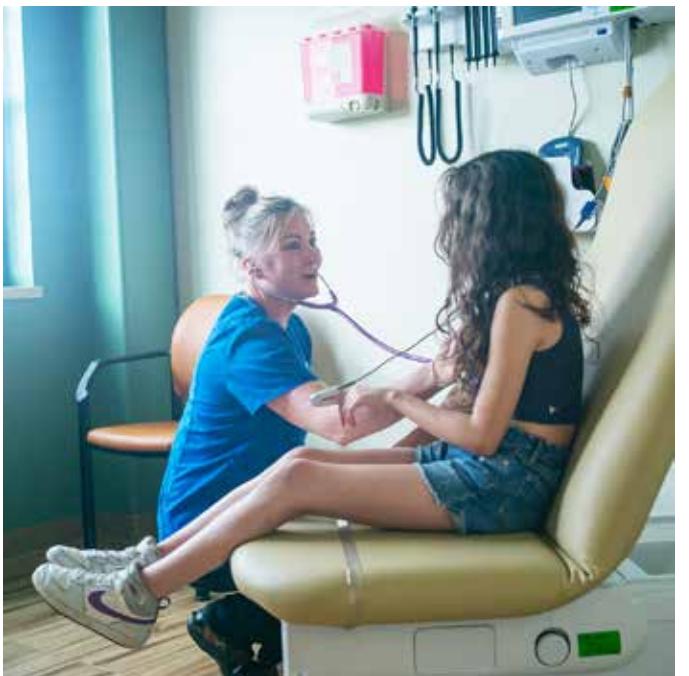
CHWC is now operating school-based health centers at three Region One schools —Housatonic Valley Regional High, North Canaan Elementary, and Sharon Center School. To date, the school-based centers have accommodated over 500 student visits.

The school-based model is working, says Rebecca Malone, pediatric APRN in the program, by improving health outcomes, supporting families, and reducing barriers for students to succeed academically. Language translation is also available if needed.

In a region where lengthy travel times for medical care may require parents to lose a day of work or students to miss classes, school-based health centers provide exponential benefits. Students receive treatment sooner and can focus on their education with fewer gaps in attendance.

There are never any out-of-pocket expenses, co-pays or deductibles for services, which alleviates financial stress for parents. Insurance plans, including Medicaid, are billed. If a family is not enrolled in a plan, providers will still see the student at no cost to the family. Region One school-based health centers have been funded entirely by a HRSA (Federal Health Resources and Services Administration) grant.

There are further benefits to on-site health care. Malone notes that having healthcare providers in the schools significantly improves continuity of care, as her staff can get to know the students. In addition to regular office visits, Malone and Suzette, a licensed social worker, can observe student behaviors in the classroom and on campus, which gives context and clarity to what students are experiencing and how they are coping. That informs what treatment interventions may be needed. “It really changes and improves my ability to diagnose.” Malone shares. “It’s a game changer.”



Community Health and Wellness Center. Photo by John Dolan.

Currently, behavioral health problems are presenting in greater volume than medical issues in the higher grades, though Malone notes both are interconnected. Eating disorders, anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation are prevalent. Some students grapple with ADHD or learning challenges. Malone and Suzette can get to the source of the symptoms and develop an action plan, collaborating with a network of local partners and specialists as needed. Conversations with students can reveal other contributing factors to their overall health, such as food insecurity or housing instability. With these insights in hand, staff can connect families to other essential community services.

Looking toward the future, CHWC would like to serve even more students. “I would love there to be school-based centers in every single school in Region One,” Malone shares. “Having the privilege of being in the schools where the children are, I realized that I am ten times a better provider...I am more accessible to them, there is an ease for the parents, and we are developing these really amazing relationships.” ■

By Deirdre McKenna



FOOD SYSTEMS



Leigh Davis, State Representative for the 3rd Berkshire District, Mass., visits the busy commercial kitchen at Elder Services (ESBCI) where they prepare and package over 1,000 hot meals per day for their Meals on Wheels program.

Over \$1 Million Mobilized to Strengthen Food Security Infrastructure

April 2025—Federal CARES Act* dollars granted through Berkshire Taconic from 2021 through 2024 have transformed day-to-day operations for 10 food access organizations in Berkshire County.

Berkshire Taconic focused its portion of food security CARES dollars on kitchen and warehouse equipment to ensure continuity of food access to lower-income households and strengthen the local food access network over the long term. Over \$1 million was mobilized to organizations serving over 50,000 residents.

Crucial equipment purchases, including extra refrigerators, stoves, warmers, and warehouse pallet jacks, have changed the game for CARES grantees. After over a year in use, we checked in with Elder Services of Berkshire County, Inc., and Berkshire Dream Center to learn how the new equipment has influenced their work.

Elder Services: Meals on Wheels

Elder Services of Berkshire County, Inc. (ESBCI) is a nonprofit organization providing a wide range of services and statewide resources to seniors and their caregivers for housing, nutrition, in-home care, and more. Their grant allowed new kitchen equipment and appliances to replace inefficient, 20+ year-old models beyond repair for their Senior Nutrition/ Meals on Wheels program. Kathleen Phillips, Planning Development Specialist at Elder Services, shares that the new walk-in coolers, kettles, stoves, sinks, and cutters contribute to “an amazing” fast-paced assembly line of meal prep and packaging of over 1,000 hot meals per day. Seniors, caregivers, and individuals with disabilities receive daily meal deliveries, as do 15 Council on Aging sites across the county.

Phillips says Elder Services’ kitchen staff is excited to work with the new equipment. Producing more meals in less time is vital, and there are built-in cost savings. The new appliances are energy-efficient, and there is no need for emergency repairs.



She notes that the upgrades and cost savings are even more essential, as the cost of producing each meal is rising alongside food insecurity. In addition, case managers are hearing from several seniors who are anxious about potential cuts to federal food assistance (SNAP). Despite this uncertainty, she says, “This is a good community. People are good at coming together to solve problems.” She shares that the federal CARES dollars “came at a perfect time” and that Elder Services could not have made any of these game-changing improvements without them. “It has made a difference to a whole operation.”

Berkshire Dream Center: Bright Morningstar Kitchen

Berkshire Dream Center’s (BDC) Bright Morningstar Kitchen also received federal dollars through BDCF. Housed in the former Morningside Baptist Church in Pittsfield, Mass., it is the neighborhood’s only restaurant-style soup kitchen. BDC provides various community programs that support children and families and is a SNAP provider.

BDC used its grant to purchase a walk-in cooler and freezer, steam table and warmers, a commercial ice machine, a meat slicer, and a commercial coffee maker. Founder, Executive Director, and Pastor Katelynn Miner shared that their food security project has seen “incredible growth and positive



transformation” and that “the number of people we serve each month has significantly increased.” She’s enthusiastic about the state-of-the-art commercial kitchen and continues to create local awareness for it, inviting professional chefs to prepare five-star meals for the community. Recently, local chef Chris Bonivier, a food security activist and philanthropist who appeared on Food Network shows “Beat Bobby Flay” and “Chopped,” visited to cook dinner for residents.

The dining experience is what sets its Morningstar Kitchen Project apart. “One of the most meaningful things we’ve heard is that people come to dinner not just for a meal but to avoid feeling isolated at home. Hearing them say they feel like part of a family and genuinely look forward to coming is at the heart of what we strive to create. With the rising cost of food and cuts to benefits, providing these meals has become even more important to them. Many individuals have expressed that they are truly struggling and rely on this to help meet their most basic needs.” Berkshire Dream Center’s goal is to expand its evening meal service from three nights per week to five, and the new kitchen has set them up perfectly to expand their program to meet increasing community need. ■

By Deirdre McKenna

*Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) are provided via Massachusetts’ portion of the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act funding from the federal government.



Staff and community members unload food for Columbia County Sanctuary Movement's (CCSM) weekly grocery distribution program, Comida Para La Gente (CPLG). Photo courtesy of CCSM.

\$65K Boosts Access to Fresh and Healthy Food

April 2025—Grants totaling over \$65K have been distributed to thirteen community partners in Columbia County that provide access to fresh and healthy food. Supported programs that benefit families with limited financial resources include free community fridges, food pantries and family cooking and nutrition classes. Some grantees are also expanding their networks of local farm partnerships.

Fresh and Healthy Food for All in Columbia County is founded on the commitment to an equitable food system that ensures that all people in the county, especially those in lower-income households, have a right to access healthy food. The program includes providing immediate access to food while simultaneously transforming the food system's through-line, from farming to distribution to kitchens. Community members, volunteers, farms, nonprofits, churches and libraries have created a network of services that support this mission.

2025 GRANTS

Columbia County Recovery Kitchen: \$7,500 for Preschoolers and Parents: Cooking & Learning Together. Expanding nutrition education program to two additional sites the program will serve thirty families, working with HeadStart and Cornell Cooperative Extension Service. Families meet for two-hour cooking classes once per month and are provided with recipes and all the ingredients to prepare healthy meals at home together.

Columbia County Sanctuary Movement: \$7,500 for Comida Para La Gente—Food for the People. This program delivers 60 fresh food boxes and 36 culturally desirable meals weekly to vulnerable populations, including some rural families and immigrants. CCSM/CPLG is also increasing farm partnerships with QTBIPOC and women-owned farms, and works with Farm Access Partners (FAPs) in Hudson Valley. Their goal is to source 80% of their produce from these partnerships.

Columbia Opportunities, Inc.: \$7,500 for Feed Columbia Food Pantry. Ninety-five percent of those served report receiving SNAP and temporary assistance benefits, which have been reduced. In addition to receiving food, participants are linked to other mainstream benefits and food resources.

Ghent Food Pantry Inc.: \$1,500 for the Veggie Connect program to serve 80 households per month. This program will augment the existing food supply from the regional food bank with locally grown, certified organic vegetables from MX Morningstar Farm in Claverack. All produce is USDA-NOP certified organic by NOFA-NY and ROP Certified. ROP Certified produce is certified by the Real Organic Project (ROP), a farmer-led movement that aims to distinguish soil-grown and pasture-raised products. ROP certification is an add-on to the USDA Certified Organic Program.

Hudson Sloop Club, Farm to River: \$5,000 for Common Hands Farm Partnership with Waterfront Wednesdays. A weekly farmers' market at centrally located, popular community gathering will provide access to fresh, locally grown produce for low-income residents, and support local farmers and food vendors.

Long Table Harvest: \$5,500 for The Gleaning Program, in its tenth year. TGP works with over 60 farms and 35 distribution sites to be a consistent and reliable source of high quality, fresh food for lower-income residents.

Philmont Public Library/Village of Philmont: \$2,500 for the Philmont Free Fridge which is housed inside the library and assisted by a community group, Purpose Pantry. As a community hub, the library's mission encompasses responding to local needs, including food security. Fridge food is available for low-income and financially stressed residents, which includes seniors at a nearby apartment building and children who visit after school.

Rock Solid Church: \$5,000 for Feed the Need - RSC Food Pantry to purchase more food and augment operating expenses. RSC is seeking to establish new relationships and partnerships with local farms. The mission is to continue to expand operations capacity to serve residents experiencing food insecurity and economic instability.

Rock Steady Farm and Flowers: \$5,000 for Rock Steady Farm and Ancramdale Neighbors Helping Neighbors Fresh Food Distribution. The program will provide full CSA shares free of cost to 16 families in Columbia County all season via ANHN's weekly mobile

food pantry delivery program. Rock Steady Farm is a queer and trans led multiracial worker cooperative and nonprofit focused on creating a more equitable food system. They grow culturally meaningful nutritious foods and train QTBIPOC farmers in sustainable farming and land stewardship practices in their flagship Pollinate! program.

Sky High Farm: \$7,500 for Food Access Program: Fresh Eggs & Chicken. This program directly addresses issues of nutrition, food security and community health in the context of the current bird flu epidemic. Fresh eggs and chicken will be provided to low-income individuals and families in primarily rural locales. With CDC and USDA guidance, Sky High is implementing new biosecurity protocols to be able to provide a steady and safe supply of fresh eggs and chickens. Grant funding will cover expenses for new chicks, processing fees, isolated water drinkers, and fencing equipment to comply with the protocol.

Taghkanic Climate Smart Committee: \$2,500 for the Taghkanic Free Community Fridge. In operation since 2022, this program seeks to reduce food insecurity and food waste, and to build a stronger, more connected community. Barriers to food access are reduced; there is no eligibility process or registration required. The fridge provides fresh produce, groceries and pantry goods to the community, and partners with the Columbia County Recovery Kitchen for fresh prepared meals 3 times a week. The fridge, located next to Taghkanic Town Hall, is open 24/7 and needs to be restocked daily.



Columbia County Sanctuary Movement members collaborate with Sweet Freedom Farm to plant garlic and distribute a portion of the harvest through Comida Para La Gente, a food distribution system that includes a network of seven farms.

The Freedom Food Alliance Inc.: \$5,000 for Sweet Freedom Farm Providing Fresh Food Access and Food Sovereignty in Columbia County. Sweet Freedom is a Black-led farm committed to regenerative agriculture, with a dual focus on immediate food access and long-term community empowerment. They donate fresh produce throughout the growing season to local food access organizations. In addition, their Seedling Distribution program provides seeds, gardening supplies, education and technical assistance to families who wish to cultivate their own garden plots. Community members served are new immigrants, longtime Columbia County residents, young people, and individuals impacted by the prison industrial complex.

Valatie Ecumenical Food Pantry Inc.: \$2,500 for Valatie Ecumenical Food Pantry Assistance in Fighting Food Insecurity for purchase of a new freezer and fridge to store more fresh foods for clients. In 2024 the pantry



Volunteers at the Corner Food Pantry in Lakeville, Conn. organize items for the drive-through pick up program. Photo by Sarah Kenyon.

served 1260 households, which includes 638 senior citizens and 1,770 children. The pantry, located at the First Presbyterian Church in Valatie, has increased the number of residents served by more than 69% over the past five years. ■



Art Program for Seniors with Cognitive Challenges Engages on a Deeper Level

June 2025—The Happy Club Heart to HeART art program* at the Pittsfield Senior Center is the creation of Jennifer Reynolds, Director of Pittsfield's Council on Aging. She noticed that seniors with cognitive challenges (dementia, Alzheimer's) and/or physical disabilities were responding to multi-sensory creative classes with a deeper level of engagement than during traditional recreational activities. She observed that hands-on, tactile, and varied creative activities gave seniors new outlets for personal expression and brought a sense of connection and calm to their lives. This inspired her and her colleague, Janie Bates, Supportive Day Program Coordinator, to "dream bigger" and expand their repertoire of programs. They chose immersive experiences that allowed for emotional and creative release—especially important for participants who struggle with speaking or writing and need to find alternative ways to connect with others.

Art, music, dance, and crafts are uniquely suited to tap into the "whole person," she says, and honor individuality in an uplifting environment.

Recent classes have included a terrarium-making class with Pittsfield Plant Connector, which allowed participants to gain a sense of purpose and pride; seniors brought home their terrariums to care for them. Creative writing is offered; facilitators listen to a story and write down the ideas of participants who can no longer write by hand and work with them to shape a final piece which is shared aloud with people at the center. A painting class yielded an art show of senior works displayed during Pittsfield's First Friday celebration.

Aimee Gelinas and the Tamarack Hollow drummers conduct a popular class at the center. The non-verbal, "shared language" of rhythm, Jennifer says, allows for emotions to be felt more deeply, reduces isolation, and can stimulate memory. "It is almost like they are traveling back in time," she says of the seniors. The music "re-invites that joy, even at an elderly age." ■

By Deirdre McKenna



Senior Activities Leader Alexandra at left with Genevieve's terrarium created in the Heart to HeART art class with Plant Connector.



Senior Activities leader Nicole, at left, with Linda and the terrariums she created. Photos courtesy of Pittsfield Senior Center.

*Supported by a BCTF Arts Build Community (ABC) Incubation Grant.

Grant Expands Program that Heals Trauma in People and Horses



June 2025—I3 Hands Equine Rescue in Clinton Corners, N.Y., rescues abused and abandoned horses to rehabilitate and re-home. The 100+ acre-farm cares for "equine therapist" horses in a program that helps people with PTSD, anxiety, depression and other mental health challenges. "It all starts with a second chance—giving rescued horses the care they deserve and helping people rediscover trust, strength, and confidence," said Katherine Feldhouse (pictured above), who works in Programs and Education at the farm. I3 Hands is supported by a grant from BCTF's Northeast Dutchess Area Fund. ■



Photos by Sarah Kenyon.



Community Art Project Celebrates the Immigrant Community

June 2025—Berkshire Taconic's Arts Build Community (ABC) Incubation grants support the testing of new ideas to increase community engagement through the arts. Projects that serve Berkshire communities of color, youth, immigrants, or residents who have not felt included in the arts due to barriers such as transportation or cost, are eligible to apply. In 2025, \$67,000 was awarded across 12 Berkshire nonprofits for ABC Incubation projects.

Grantees Manos Unidas Multicultural Educational Cooperative* shared their inspirations and process for their project.

Manos Unidas' Cosmic Butterfly Procession: Colorful Art on Parade Celebrates the Resilience and Creativity of the Immigrant Community

Manos Unidas is a Pittsfield-based community nonprofit established 28 years ago that uses education and the arts to create cultural awareness and unity. This year, co-founder Anaelisa Sophia Jacobsen was inspired to create a project that brought creativity, positivity and awareness to the local Latino and immigrant communities. Recognizing

“the pain that our Latino communities are moving through right now,” she wanted to offer a new lens through which to view her community that demonstrated the hope, beauty, and resilience she sees, centering the people most affected by harmful narratives.

She envisioned a creative process that could provide healing with “The Cosmic Butterfly Procession.”



Ideas and feelings generated from a series of workshops with the community were displayed on colorful butterfly signs at the procession. Photo by Marina Dominguez.

Anaelisa, co-sponsor Cosmic Coarte*, and fellow artist-collaborators Jean Minuchin and Beth Fairervis designed a series of workshops leading up to the parade that provided safe spaces where people could be vulnerable and explore complex thoughts and feelings. To facilitate conversations, each stage of a butterfly's growth and its global migratory pattern was used as a prompt. The larval stage invited people to consider what kind of nourishment and resources they needed to thrive—the chrysalis, what protections they required—the full-grown butterfly, what dreams they wanted to bring into the world.

Select workshops included writing, guided meditations, butterfly cape-making, and the creation of butterfly-shaped parade signs. The artworks were displayed during a colorful procession during Pittsfield's First Friday in June, and children performed a short skit.

One workshop participant, Katiria, an 8-year member of Manos Unidas, wanted to challenge herself to get out of her “safe zone” through art and connect it to the need in her community for compassion and understanding. Another participant shared that anyone who has migrated has undergone a transformation themselves and gone through a phase of needing protection and support. Aisha, an immigrant from Trinidad who became a U.S.

citizen four years ago, is new to Manos Unidas. This project resonated with her, she shared, because she has experienced all the stages of being an immigrant and the long journey to achieve citizenship.

Co-founder Anaelisa believes that arts experiences like The Butterfly Procession can embody resilience, pride and shared humanity as “the heart of who we are,” which, she says, “is more important than ever.” ■

By Deirdre McKenna

*Manos Unidas partnered with co-sponsors Cosmic Co-Arte Cooperative, World & Eye, Berkshire Art Center, BEAT, Gustito Boricua, Las Cocineras Latinas, So It Flows, One Water, Water Celebration, and Island Frye for the Cosmic Butterfly Procession.





Artist grantee Kiyani Douglas' solo show at The Center for Peace Through Culture in Housatonic, Mass., entitled, "Antebellum: Peace as Privilege, Justice as Resistance"

Local Artists Create Bold Work Supported by \$223K in Grants

August 2025—Each year, over 30 local artists launch new projects and propel their work forward with support from The Martha Boschen Porter Fund and Artists Resource Trust (A.R.T.). In 2025, grants totaling over \$223K were awarded to thirty-one artists and four organizations that support artists. This year's winners—each through their own lens—are navigating history, culture, identity and powerful emotion in their work. Each bring an innovative approach to their medium.

Mara Superior combines traditional pottery techniques with satire to create contemporary pieces of biting social commentary. Painter Annika Tucksmith harvests memory and liminal moments in nature to develop evocative twilight landscapes in oil. Kiyani Douglas' portraits give dignity and complexity to representations of people of color, past and present.

Artist Spotlights

MARA SUPERIOR A.R.T. Grantee

Ceramicist Mara Superior creates highly detailed and intricate paintings on white porcelain using words and

images she calls her “visual diary.” Lately, she has felt compelled to illustrate thoughts and feelings that “rise to the surface” as she observes events in America and on the world stage. Her recent works explore global warming, democracy in peril, and reproductive rights. She sees her political and environmental work as an artistic act of resistance.



“Wake Up! America/Save Democracy” by Mara Superior. Ceramic.

Superior's fascination with using ceramics to engage in social commentary is part of a tradition she observed in British 18th-century royal commemorative pottery produced at pivotal moments in history: the rise of a new political leader, a war, a ship christening. Designs depicting solemn events were often infused with humor to great effect; she also enjoys pairing humor with serious ideas to amplify her message. Other inspirations include the work of 18th century British printmakers William Hogarth and James Gilray, political and social satirists, as well as Grecian and German Meissen ceramics that use imagery to tell stories.

While Superior's work pays homage to the history of pottery, it also subverts it. By using her unique visual vocabulary to communicate deeply held personal beliefs, she can address this moment in history through her lens.

Superior also creates works that celebrate “beauty for beauty’s sake,” that hold a reverence for nature, art history, and the literary world. She looks forward to revisiting these rich sources of inspiration to spark ideas for new pieces and balance the darker subjects with more joy.

She recently toured the home gardens of England’s Bloomsbury Group of artists and writers. She found the gardens exciting and artistically stimulating—especially Virginia Woolf’s—viewed at a time when The Louvre announced that it would move da Vinci’s Mona Lisa to “a room of her own.” Headlines, juxtaposed stories, and colorful visuals “provoke ideas and pieces,” she says.

Superior's work is currently on view in a solo show in Vermont at the Shelburne Museum: Porcelain Love Letters: The Art of Mara Superior.

ANNIKA TUCKSMITH Martha Boschen Porter Fund Grantee

Annika Tucksmith’s figurative oil paintings have a dreamlike emotional quality to them, often depicting vast rural landscapes during a sunset or at night, with only a few people there to witness the moment. Nightscapes evoke memories and capture her imagination. She is drawn to create visual narratives that feel like they are “one step out of the familiar—removed from everyday life,” she shares.

Tucksmith has been inspired by her connection to nature since youth. She grew up in rural upstate New York near several wooded areas “to disappear into.” She culls ideas for new pieces from family photo albums, childhood memories, and her own photography. She seeks to recapture sublime experiences she’s had, such as a



“The Rabbit” by Annika Tucksmith. Oil on canvas.



“The Cow” by Annika Tucksmith. Oil on canvas.

fleeting encounter with a deer up close, or the emotional sensation evoked by a color combination in the landscape. One of her paintings depicts silhouetted children petting a lone cow in a field under a blue and pink sky—another, teenage girls doing handstands at night, illuminated only by a friend’s flashlight.

Tucksmith was completing her Master of Fine Art degree at Columbia University when she learned of her Boschen award. The grant, she shares, is directly correlated to bolstering her artistic practice—it provided the valuable resource of time and financial security to be able to focus primarily on her art, and helped pay for art supplies.

Tucksmith recently expanded her technical repertoire by learning monotype printmaking at a residency at The Macedonia Institute in Ghent, N.Y.

She painted directly on a plexiglass plate, covered it with dampened paper, and ran it through a printing press. Because there is only one chance to create the final piece with this method, there is an aspect of experimentation and the unknown. She used the shorter window of time the technique requires to explore one image in a variety of ways to discover the unique qualities of that medium.

Tucksmith continues to explore new ways to create visual stories that capture the wonder and discovery of special moments. Her upcoming solo show in Boston at the Steven Zevitas Gallery will feature a new series depicting girls skipping stones. Tucksmith's paintings are also currently available through the Carrie Haddad Gallery in Hudson, N.Y.

KIAYANI DOUGLAS A.R.T. Grantee

Kiayani Douglas calls herself a "Black Identity Enthusiast." She paints portraits of people of color—some well-known historical figures, some lesser-known, and some inspired by present-day family and friends. She explores the connections that black history, race and gender have to the way present-day personal identities are self-created and perceived by others.

As an artist, Douglas has the power to decide who is seen and whose stories are shared—and just as significantly, how those narratives are shaped. It is an intentional "living, growing archive," she says, for herself, her children, and her community.

Douglas' solo show at The Center for Peace Through Culture in Housatonic, Mass., "Antebellum: Peace as Privilege, Justice as Resistance," is comprised of 30 portraits and is on view through August 2025. It brings together work from two series: "Women of the Antebellum" and "If All Black Men Were Pacifist."

Some portraits at first glance appear to be realistic depictions. Upon closer inspection, the subject's skin is heavily patterned with symbols and recurring motifs, like the black power salute. Some portraits have colorful patterning activating the background in the form of question marks, keys or bullet holes. Douglas creates her own patterns and recontextualizes some from African textiles, historic wallpapers, or protest ephemera. "They offer clues, interruptions, and sometimes even warnings" she says.



"Women of The Antebellum: Maria Felipa De Oliveira"
by Kiayani Douglas. Maria Felipa De Oliveira was an Afro-Brazilian independence fighter from the island of Itaparica, Bahia.

Artist Emory Douglas (no relation), Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party, is one of Douglas' inspirations. He used inventive techniques and a bold graphic style in the organization's newspapers in the 60s and 70s to increase awareness of what communities were facing, and to foster activism. "He revolutionized access to art," she says. Inspired by this, she created "The People's Catalog" to accompany her show, which includes portraits, writings, and a call to action to post a portrait from the book in public.

"Feeling the weight of what's happening in the world," Douglas says, compels her to create a response through her art, centered in empathy, that embodies the complexity and beauty of personal identity. ■

By Deirdre McKenna



Timothy Olver shares his story in Adams Theater's Northern Berkshire Story Slam, 2025. Photo by Sofi Taylor.

Equity Fund Grant to Bring First-Time Storytellers to the Adams Theater Stage

October 2025—When architect, artist, and finance professional Yina Moore saw the vacant Adams Theater for sale, she had a vision to give it a new life as a cultural hub for top-tier performances and community events where everyone was welcome. She purchased the landmark building on Park Street in 2021, and in 2023, as Artistic Director, opened the doors to the public on a transformed venue that could seat 300 people.

Berkshire Taconic has supported the theater's revitalization with a variety of grants from the outset. The William J. and Margery S. Barrett Fund for Adams, Cheshire, and Savoy provided over \$55,000 for structural improvements and additions, which included pipe work, lighting, and a professional console to support performances. In 2024, our Arts Build Community (ABC) Incubation grant supported the theater's Artists Residency Program, which encourages underrepresented artists to experiment and engage the community in their creative process. This year, Adams Theater has been awarded its first BTGF Equity Fund grant to host visiting artists, Arts for Social Cohesion, to facilitate community workshops for first-time storytellers.

The upcoming storytelling workshops kick off in October and will build on the success of a six-month Story Slam project the theater hosted this past summer, in partnership with New York-based Lifejacket Theater. Lifejacket's mission, in alignment with the theater's, is to bridge cultural divides and uplift historically marginalized stories. Nine local storytellers worked with coaches and were given tools to transform their personal life experiences into expressive narratives.

In August, these storytellers bravely entered the spotlight to share "really authentic and beautiful stories," Moore says, interpreting the theme of resilience to an audience of over 200 people. "Our rural community faces cultural isolation, economic disparity, and a lack of inclusive artistic spaces. Many residents—especially those from low-income, immigrant, or historically marginalized backgrounds—lack access to high-quality arts experiences that reflect their lives." Moore, who emigrated to America from China at 18, shared her experience of navigating shifting family dynamics as an immigrant.

Some storytellers crafted narratives about their relationship to the Berkshires and how they learned to



Massachusetts' Poet Laureate Regie Gibson leading a Ponder to Page workshop. Photo by Elizabeth Friar.

create meaningful lives in Adams. A high school junior shared their story of overcoming anxiety to fulfill their dream of becoming a writer and stage performer. Each story was an invitation for audience members to see a part of their own life experience reflected back to them from the stage.

The personal stories, and the courage harnessed to share them, Moore says, showed the community "how powerful storytelling can be just for a normal person," and just as importantly, that Adams Theater could be a place where they could learn how to do it themselves. Moore asked herself, "How do we expand this impact? How do we build upon this?"

The theater's next storytelling project, supported by the Equity Fund grant, is the answer. Boston-based Arts for Social Cohesion (ASC) Co-Artistic Directors Guy Mendilow, musician and composer, and Regie Gibson, Poet Laureate of Massachusetts, will facilitate workshops for first-time storytellers. Moore says that workshops like these allow the facilitators to "introduce themselves to the community," and establish trust by explaining their methodology.

The first of their two workshops, Ponder to Page, takes place October 21. Mendilow and Gibson will show participants how to transform everyday moments into resonant stories that foster empathy and emotional connection. The second workshop, To Those Who Shape Us, will take place in June 2026 in the form of a storytelling dinner; participants are invited to reflect and share over a communal meal. Each guest will tell a short story about someone who shaped who they are; the evening will conclude with a celebratory toast dedicated to those



Xavier Jones shares his story in Adams Theater's Northern Berkshire Story Slam, 2025. Photo by Sofi Taylor.

people. The project will culminate in the June 2026 ASC show, Different Ships, Same Boat, which blends narration, poetry, and music to explore themes of identity, migration, and belonging.

Moore believes that art and inclusivity are crucial ingredients for community-driven revitalization and social connectivity. The theater, led by a board that is 40% BIPOC, seeks to offer events that allow audiences to take joy in the creative process and experience connection across differences. Moore finds it gratifying to see increasing numbers of people from within and outside the county, with a variety of interests, visit the theater and see it as a touchpoint for themselves. With each event, she says, "we can expand the circle we want to reach." ■

By Deirdre McKenna

Sound Healer Creates Nurturing Spaces for BIPOC Community

Sister Red Hawk's Native and African American Ancestry Inform Sound Healing Workshops

December 2025—Sound Healer Sister Red Hawk (Nea McKinney) of Hudson, New York is the first Native American to receive a grant from BCTF's Equity Fund, which supports projects that are led by and/or holistically serve the BIPOC community. Her grant provided partial funding for a week-long residency she was awarded by High Desert Test Sites, an artist retreat and learning center in Joshua Tree, California. That learning is the foundation for two BIPOC community healing workshops she'll create for the Hudson area in 2026: one for adults and a second for youth aged 12-18.

Sister Red Hawk is excited about creating a greater awareness of the healing properties of sound within the BIPOC community. Her identities as both a Native American and an African American inform and inspire her work. "BIPOC individuals often carry the invisible weight of microaggressions, discrimination, and systemic inequalities," she shares. "Sound baths offer a nervous system reset—allowing the body to shift from survival mode (fight or flight) into deep rest and repair."

Access to restorative therapies and mental health support can be challenging for the BIPOC community. For many, she shares, "traditional mental health care can feel inaccessible due to financial barriers, stigma, or a lack of culturally competent providers." Sound healing workshops in community spaces create more accessible entry points. "It's experiential...and it doesn't rely on verbal processing alone, which can sometimes feel overwhelming," she says. They can offer a safe environment for memories and emotions to re-surface and "unlock" from the body.

Sister Red Hawk believes that sound healing extends beyond its physical and mental health benefits; it can lay the groundwork for deeper self-awareness, reflection, and spirituality. Drawing on her family lineage in the Narragansett, Shinnecock, Pequot, and Wampanoag tribes of New England, she uses sound as a sacred tool to honor spirituality and ancestry. Rattles and drums often represent elements such as air, water, land, and fire, evoking a sense of grounding and belonging to nature. From her African American heritage, she brings call-and-response, voice and rhythm into her practice. "The drum itself has always been

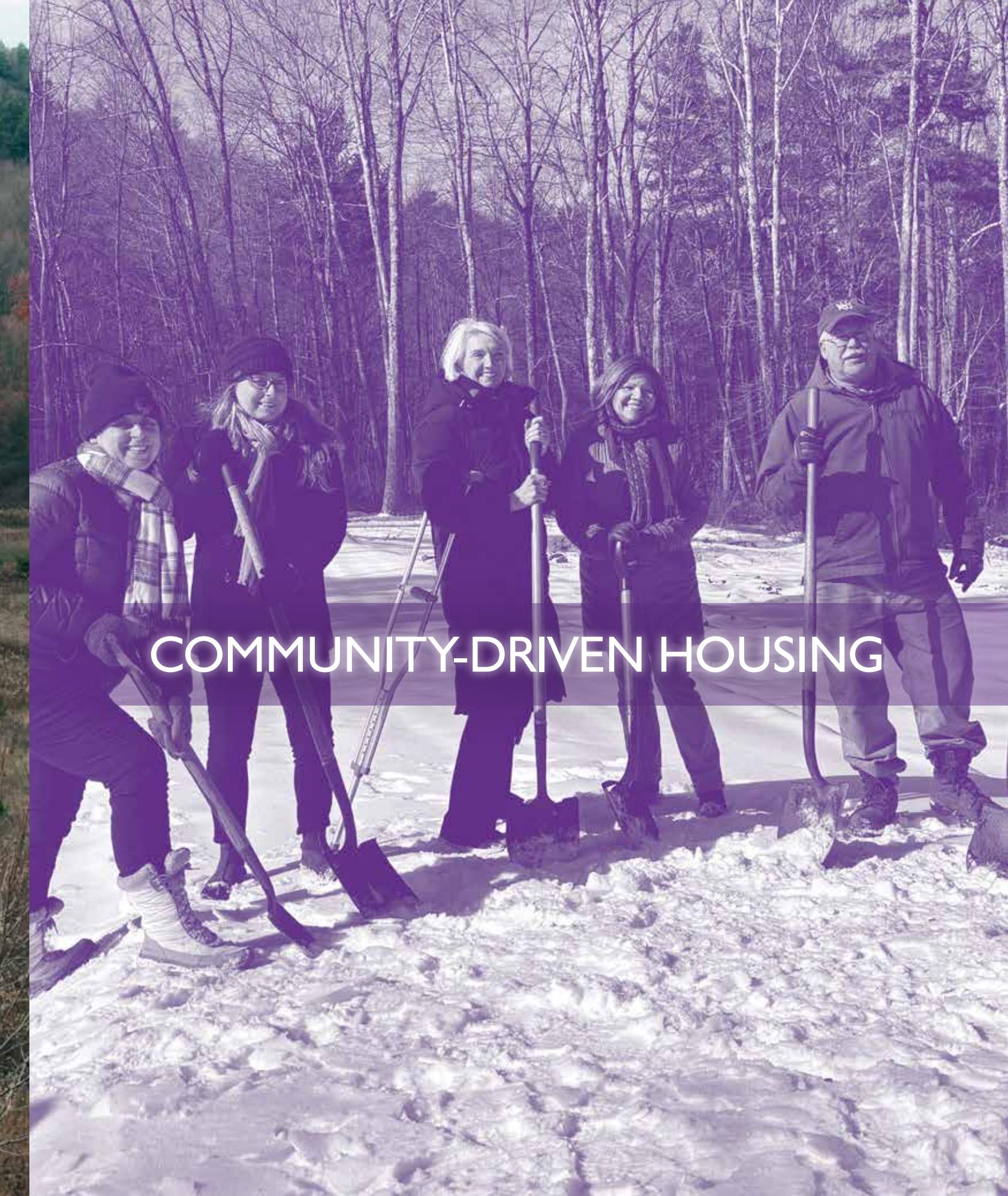


Photo courtesy of Sister Red Hawk. She can be reached through her website, natural7alchemy.com

a heartbeat within diasporic African culture not only for sound, but for contact, communication, and grounding," she shares.

Sister Red Hawk has worked with every age group, including infants and their parents; babies are often "magically" lulled to sleep. She recently conducted a sound immersion workshop at the Germantown Library, where teens from Operation Unite in Hudson were also in attendance. At first, teens were a bit skeptical and fidgety, but soon became extremely relaxed. In her work with adults, some participants say their creative minds are activated, and that sound has a direct and powerful relationship to imagination and artmaking. Some, with eyes closed, "see" colors. Some feel they are tapping into a "greater power." Some simply experience a sense of peace that is lacking in other areas of their lives and reconnect with themselves. She says, "People need ways to access opportunities for mental health care and healing in nurturing spaces where they can just be." ■

By Deirdre McKenna





Groundbreaking ceremony for the Litchfield County Affordable Homeownership program. Pictured left to right: Jennifer Kronholm Clark, Salisbury Housing Trust; Jocelyn Ayer, Litchfield County Center for Housing Opportunity; Maria Horn, State Representative, 64th District; Seila Mosquera-Bruno, Commissioner, Conn. Department of Housing; Gordon Ridgway, First Selectman, Town of Cornwall; Beth Frost, Cornwall Housing Corporation (and her grandson, Jack); Carla Weil, Capital for Change.

Creative Solutions for Housing Affordability Take Root

Community Partnerships Combat Rising Rents, Keep People Housed and Chart a Sustainable Path Forward

February 2025—As rents and housing prices rise rapidly across the country, housing advocates, local municipalities and nonprofits are working double-time to find as many solutions as possible to keep people housed safely and affordably now. At the same time, they are laying the groundwork for future housing affordability and stability in our towns.

Though it takes time to design solutions and for projects to come to fruition, housing advocates collaborating across the sector are encouraged to see their efforts gain traction. Berkshire Taconic supports projects generated from a variety of perspectives across our four-county region.

Creating Achievable Paths to Home Ownership

Multiple Grants Boost New Housing Nonprofit in Columbia County, N.Y.

Our Fund for Columbia County (FCC) is supporting a new nonprofit working in the housing sector, Trillium Community Land Trust (TCLC). In 2023, FCC contributed funds to TCLC to achieve 501c3 status. In 2024, Trillium received two types of grants to further develop their organizational capacity and efficacy: a New Nonprofit grant and a Planning and Technical Assistance grant. These grants go toward a pilot program with Hudson River Housing (HRH) to assess and identify properties suitable for

affordable housing development. Their approach is part of a growing awareness of the potential to find solutions that support both conservation and the need for permanently affordable housing to keep communities whole. Trillium's mission is to empower community-based ownership of land for housing and related residential needs (community centers, daycare centers, farms, etc.) in Columbia County. Their decision-making structure incorporates community voices to foster trust and lay the groundwork for success.

Trillium's Board President Michelle Tullo shares that their project model requires "affordability in perpetuity," which means that if any of their affordable homes are re-sold, they must be offered at a price supported by a low-to-moderate income range forever, rather than the thirty-year model offered by most other state programs. Their first project will provide affordable homeownership, targeting households "making up to 100% of Columbia County Area Median Income (AMI), which is currently \$85,000 for a household of two." For rental units, rents will be capped to be affordable to low-to-moderate income levels, determined by a variety of factors, including AMI.

Breaking Ground for Ten New Affordable Single-Family Homes in Connecticut

In 2023, BTF contributed with the Foundation for Community Health and Litchfield County Center for Housing Opportunity (LCCHO) to launch the Create Housing Grant Opportunity for the Northwest Corner of Litchfield County, Conn. to facilitate housing solutions through a similar collaborative lens: merging the need for housing and economic growth with long-term commitments to conservation of the region's natural beauty. The first grants were awarded to Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative and Kent Affordable Housing, with technical assistance provided by LCCHO.

The Greenprint Collaborative is a partnership of 30+ conservation and land trust organizations that has developed a strategy to guide their collaborative work. During 2024, over sixty representatives from local and regional housing, town planning and conservation organizations, as well as Habitat for Humanity, have met to discuss ways to generate affordable housing.

Now in its second phase, the program's efforts are paying off. In February of 2025, a groundbreaking celebration for The Litchfield County Affordable Homeownership Program in West Cornwall, Conn., kicked off a project of 10 new homes. Sale prices will be in a range supportable by households earning under the AMI in Litchfield

County. The construction phase will take approximately nine months to complete. Local housing non-profits will continue to own the land under these homes and will ensure their continued affordability over time.

Twelve New Townhomes to be Built on the West Side of Pittsfield, Massachusetts

Tony Jackson, founder of Pittsfield's Westside Legends (WSL), shares that WSL plans to break ground in March 2025 for The Legacy Collection: twelve single-family townhomes. BTF's Community Fund contributed \$30,000 toward the launch and predevelopment phase of this project, which will generate more achievable paths to home ownership than traditional models. This is one of Westside Legends' many programs focused on revitalizing, stabilizing and celebrating the west side of Pittsfield.

Addressing Immediate & Severe Need for Renters and the Homeless

Volunteer Fire Department and Housing Advocates Join Forces in Connecticut

Justin Potter, President of Kent Affordable Housing in Northwest Litchfield County, Conn., shares that local employees and volunteers for the Kent Fire Department and other key organizations are being forced out by the lack of affordable housing. He notes that New York State fire departments that have created housing for their volunteers have developed "a great asset for recruiting, retention, and improved response times." Lack of housing incurs another cost. The town has had to hire outside EMS coverage to meet need, at a cost of over \$320,000 per year.

A committee meets regularly to brainstorm solutions, with representatives from the Kent Fire Department, Kent Affordable Housing, Jocelyn Ayer from LCCHO, and David Berto from Housing Enterprises. They are exploring multiple options for providing housing that would be affordable to fire department volunteers.

Data-driven Program Identifies Severe Need

Berkshire Taconic contributed \$10,000 from its Community Fund to Community Action of Pioneer Valley (CAPV) for Berkshire County housing support. CAPV's work prioritizes addressing severe need, housing instability and homelessness. Individuals and families are connected to housing, services, and benefits. CAPV

identifies need and severity data via the HMIS (Homeless Management Information System). BTF's grant supports staff in this effort. Staff will be trained on the HMIS system, meet regularly to discuss cases and conduct the annual Point-In-Time (PIT) count in Berkshire County. PIT is a count of the homeless population on one night in January and includes providing cold-weather items such as hats, gloves, thermal underwear and socks for unsheltered people.

Local Journalism Reveals the Breadth of Need in Berkshire County

The Berkshire Eagle Local Journalism Fund supports journalist Claire O'Callahan who is shining a light on emerging developments in housing. A recent story covered the rising rate of Pittsfield high school students identifying themselves as homeless. Another, raised rents under new ownership for an apartment complex in Great Barrington catering to seniors. As the community conversation around housing expands in scope, investigative journalism supported by BTF reflects the experiences of residents and holds authorities accountable.

Emergency Rent Assistance and Resources Stabilize Housing in Northeast Dutchess County, N.Y.

NEDCorps, an initiative of BTF's Northeast Dutchess Area Fund, started the Housing Stabilization Fund in 2024. The program is twofold: one-time funding assistance for renters, (up to \$5K per household, up to 12 households), and counseling on additional support services as needed, including legal services. NEDCorps partners with the North East Community Center (NECC), a nonprofit based out of Millerton, N.Y. NECC provides case managers that advocate directly for tenants. They also liaise with landlords to ameliorate and resolve any issues of misunderstanding, contention or mistreatment by landlords. Case managers work with renters over the course of six to twelve months to ensure tenants can assume the full cost of their rent once the grant is expended, and encourage landlords to work with the program, as improved relations and a stabilized environment have long-term benefits for everyone.

People First

The compassion, dedication, and collaboration of volunteers, housing advocates and town governments continues to keep residents' right to affordable housing

front and center in their decision-making. With relationship-building and well-developed strategies, these collective efforts emphasize sustainability, economic growth, and the long-term well-being of our communities. ■

By Deirdre McKenna

Two New Homes in One Day

June 2025—Litchfield County's Centers for Housing Opportunity (LCCHO) recently constructed two new homes in Salisbury—in one day! This is one of 10 upcoming build sites in a cross-county “scattered site” housing development. The next sites will be in Cornwall, Norfolk, Washington, and North Canaan. “LC-CHO has been able to provide more houses than any of the individual towns would be able to do on their own,” said Ginni Block, President, Cornwall Housing Corporation. See how this collaborative approach is outpacing standard housing development, achieving in months what typically takes years.



Image courtesy of Ted Perotti, Pig Iron Films.

► WATCH
VIDEO



Crucial Repairs Keep Residents Safe and Independent in their Homes



Consigli Construction's volunteers for Rebuilding Together Hudson Valley. Photo courtesy of RTHV.

October 2025—Rebuilding Together Hudson Valley (RTHV) has been granted \$7,500 from BTF's Northeast Dutchess Fund to provide major repairs to two homes during its Rebuilding Day Program. As a national affiliate of Rebuilding Together, RTHV joins a network of housing organizations that fix homes across the country every year on the last Saturday in April. Low-income, aging, and vulnerable residents in the rural towns of Pine Plains, Dover, and Amenia are eligible for RTHV's program. By providing large-scale home repairs necessary to maintain a safe and healthy living environment, residents can stay in their homes.

Repairs include critical services such as roofing, plumbing, electrical work, energy efficiency upgrades, and accessibility modifications, including ramps, grab bars, and stair lifts. The program utilizes a volunteer base of skilled local contractors and receives in-kind donations for services and materials from partner organizations.

RTHV Executive Director Darcy McCourt says, “Community bonds and empathy are strengthened as volunteers interact with homeowners,” and “provide a sense of belonging” for all involved.

RTHV's work extends beyond the national building day; they organize several local “Rebuilding Days” throughout the year. To stay informed and responsive to community needs, they engage residents with town hall meetings and listening sessions. RTHV's community advisory board comprises past residents of services, contractors, and volunteers dedicated to expanding outreach.

Project by project, RTHV sees the ripple effect of repaired homes improve the quality of life for individuals, stabilize neighborhoods, and lay the foundation for a future generation of homeowners. ■

By Deirdre McKenna





Youth in Democracy Fellows Honored

April 2025—Berkshire Taconic's Youth in Democracy Fellowship provides a platform for young adults to explore issues they are passionate about. Supported by a youth-serving organization and mentor, they work with local government on year-long projects to create positive change at the local level.

Youth Fellow Daniel Moran recently presented his drone camera project to the community. Cameras will assist firefighters in the North Canaan Fire Company in their search and rescue missions. In attendance were program director Paul Marienthal of Bard College, local firefighters, Berkshire Taconic staffers and residents. Daniel worked in partnership with 21st Century Fund-Hudson Valley Regional High School. Trainings for fire department personnel are scheduled.

Pictured: Youth in Democracy fellows Alex Wilbur (left) and Daniel Moran (center) with Connecticut Senator Stephen Harding, received special citations: Alex created a dedicated recycling project for empty prescription bottles to be redistributed to developing nations. Daniel created a drone camera project to assist the North Canaan Fire Company.



Region One Marks Fourth Year of Free Summer Program

October 2025—The Summer Mountaineer Experience, now in its fourth year, unites middle schoolers from different schools for a two-week program that combines social-emotional learning with physical, academic, and creative activities. Activities such as hiking, paddle boarding, canoeing, rock climbing, flower-pressing and pottery are offered. The Fund for the Northwest Corner is a key supporter of the summer program.



Summer Mountaineers, 2025. Photo by Luca Pearl Khosrova.



R.I.S.E founder Mark Clizbe with students.

New Nonprofit Helps Immigrant Students Prepare for College

August 2025—A new nonprofit in Northeast Dutchess County—Rural Immigrant Student Empowerment (R.I.S.E.)—is providing academic mentoring to students from immigrant families and helping high schoolers prepare for college. The goal of R.I.S.E. is to empower youth from families that speak almost exclusively Spanish or Q'eqchi', a Mayan language, to become more independent, confident, and successful learners.

Founder Mark Clizbe helps families set ambitious and achievable educational goals for their children—and aims to bolster confidence in each student's academic journey. "Even talented and engaged students can be discouraged if they lack the English-language skills needed to participate in class," he says. "We support the efforts of schools by identifying gaps in basic knowledge that regular classes can't always fill, and encourage students to recognize their own ability to succeed."

BCF's Northeast Dutchess Area Fund and the Immigrant Support Fund have granted a total of \$15K to R.I.S.E., an affiliate of Rural and Migrant Ministry. R.I.S.E. is comprised of two main programs: the Academic Mentoring Program (AMP) and a high school student forum called Perspectivas, where students in Dover and Pawling can share their experiences. The Academic Mentoring Program served 71

students from 41 families within the last year.

The majority of AMP tutoring occurs in the students' homes in rural eastern Dutchess County, including the Dover, Millbrook, Pawling, Pine Plains, Red Hook, Rhinebeck, and Webutuck school districts. The mobility of services is crucial; neighborhood libraries or public meeting spaces within walking distance of a family's home can be used, and some schools provide space during or after the school day.

R.I.S.E.'s support extends beyond helping students prepare for standardized tests and get ready for college—they help parents understand and respond to school communications, support their children more at home, and advocate for themselves. R.I.S.E. also connects families to resources to pay for tuition and expenses and offers tutoring after students reach college.

Omayra, mother of students in grades 6 and 9, and a college freshman, shares, "My kids always look forward to the days Mark comes...my son hated reading, but Mark made it fun. My oldest never thought she could go to college, but Mark convinced her that she could, and now she is going to college in the fall." ■

By Deirdre McKenna



Teaching Assistant Jack Silcock, center (in shorts) helps students prepare for their final concert at Harmony Project Hudson.



Teaching Assistant Laila Eschel guides a violin student in her studies.



Teaching Assistant Jack Silcock works with a student in the summer program at Harmony Project Hudson.

High School Musicians Train for Careers as Educators

August 2025—Harmony Project Hudson (HPH)—whose mission is to provide free music lessons to youth in Columbia County—has created a summer teaching program that gives teens a way to share their knowledge and passion for music with younger students.

Harmony Project alum Laila Eschel has studied the violin for several years and has been assisting HPH teachers for three years. “Watching the kids work through challenges and grow as musicians was so rewarding, and reminded me of what I love about music” she shares. “I am grateful for Harmony Project for helping me connect with violin in a new way.”

HPH gives teaching assistants hands-on classroom experience to teach music, working alongside seasoned teachers. Assistants provide one-on-one instruction to students studying string instruments (ages 6-10) and help them prepare for their final concert. They also assist HPH teachers with theater games, choreography and art classes. Throughout the summer, they develop skills in music instruction, curriculum development, classroom management, and team building. The program’s primary goal is to further careers in music education; however, assistants gain skills and work experience valuable across all careers.

Josh Aronson, Harmony Project’s founder and board president, sees a continuum between HPH’s original core mission of expanding youth’s access to music education, and the students who are now taking the lead in guiding the next generation of learners. “It has been one of my life’s joys to witness our growth to a program now offering music, dance and theater to over 300 students through the school year and several weeks in summer. The power of our program is easy to see over time, through the maturation and blossoming of the many students who have been with us through these years.”

Teaching Assistant Jack Silcock has been a student with Harmony Project since the 2nd grade and is interested in pursuing a career as a music educator. “Working as a TA with Harmony Project Hudson has helped me explore the possible career as a music/band teacher,” he says. “I really love sharing my love of music.” ■

By Deirdre McKenna

Over \$910K in Scholarships Awarded in 2025

October 2025—Two hundred seventy-one exceptional students received awards this year! They come from towns and cities across our region and embody talent, ambition, and purpose. Scholarships do more than bridge financial gaps—they send a powerful message: your community sees you, believes in you, and is invested in your future. Each recipient reminds us why this work matters. Congratulations to all of our amazing students!



Student Spotlights

Halimah Hotbani of Hudson, N.Y., is the winner of the Emma M. Kirchhofer Scholarship and is attending Cornell University. Her professional and educational goals include becoming a pediatric dentist, a B.A. in Biological Sciences or Biochemistry, and to advocate for equitable healthcare access. School activities included: National Honor Society; VP and Secretary, Multicultural Club; Class Secretary; Varsity Club President; Student Council; Model UN; Hudson Muslim Youth.



Ren Babcock of Pine Plains, N.Y., won the Northeast Dutchess Scholarship and is attending Vassar College. Her professional and educational goals include becoming a script writer for TV and film, and earning a B.A. in Film with additional studies in creative writing and Women's Studies. School Activities: Class Treasurer; Student Council Treasurer; VP of Sci-Fi Club; Co-Editor in Chief of Literary magazine; National Honor Society Co-Chair; Period Poverty Committee; Math Honors Society; Student Activism Team Secretary.



Lou Wilder Haemmerle from Salisbury, Conn., won the Ben Paley Scholarship and is attending New York University. Her professional and educational goals include training as a musician and vocalist, becoming a music producer and sponsor of emerging artists, and earning a B.A. from NYU's Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music, Tisch School of the Arts. School Activities: National Honor Society; Housatonic Musical Theatre Society, Sound Technician; Yearbook Editor, Graphic Designer, Journalist, Sales Manager; Varsity Soccer Captain.



Zoe-Ruth Brizan from Pittsfield, Mass., won the Pittsfield and Guido's Fresh Marketplace scholarships and is attending Howard University. Her professional and educational goals include earning a B.M. in Classical Piano Performance with a double minor in entertainment law and music business, and becoming a music attorney. School Activities: PHS Orchestra; Advancing Minds of Colour; Class Council; Leaders in Action; Best Buddies; Mock Trial; Varsity Track & Field.



Leighana Williamson of Pittsfield, Mass., is the winner of the William Stanley Scholarship and is attending Southern New Hampshire University. Her professional and educational goals include earning a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice with a concentration in human services and advocacy, and becoming an attorney. She has been employed as a full-time paralegal in the Pittsfield, Mass., law offices of Martin Hochberg & Cianflone, PLLP, since 2024.





L-R: Jill Cancellieri (former Director of Philanthropic Services), Julia Lord, Ronda Parish (family attorney), Rebecca Lord and Kara Mikulich (Interim President, BTF).

Local Artist & Activist Eleanor Lord Leaves an Enduring Legacy to Her Community

Her Daughters are Poised to Guide Her Vision into the Future

June 2025—Julia and Rebecca Lord, daughters of Eleanor Lord (1929-2024), have recently made a bequest of \$1 million from their mother's estate to The Eleanor Lord Fund at Berkshire Taconic. With this gift, they can sustain and significantly expand upon their mother's dedication to helping her community with a fund she established in 2012. Eleanor's giving focused on the issues she was most passionate about: women's rights, the arts, environmental protection, immigrant support, healthcare access and affordable housing.

A Life of Listening, Learning and Service

An artist and social justice activist, Eleanor was naturally curious, creative, and responsive to her times. Her daughters describe her as someone who was simultaneously soft-spoken and equally committed to speaking out about issues she cared about, at a local or international level. In the seventies, Eleanor attended

marches in support of civil rights and women's rights and against the Vietnam war. She was an accomplished scholar, with a bachelor's degree in economics from Vassar and a master's degree in international affairs from Columbia University. In New York City, she wrote the international column for the Morgan Guaranty Bank newsletter.

Eleanor's education and experiences provided fertile ground to build upon when she reached the Berkshires. Originally from Connecticut, she and her young family moved to Egremont in 1957 and finally settled in Stockbridge in 1959. It was in the Berkshires that she found great personal satisfaction in volunteer work with several women's organizations. This enabled her to further develop her feminism and hone her areas of focus for social justice work.

Eleanor was a founding member of the Elizabeth Freeman Center, an organization devoted to protecting people from



Pastel by Eleanor Lord.

domestic and sexual violence. She was interested in doing the hands-on, challenging work that required compassion and sensitivity. At one point, she answered the women's crisis hotline at the center. She personally assisted women navigating the process of getting help and accessing crucial services. Inspired by her example, her daughter Rebecca went on to volunteer and march in EFC's "Take Back the Night" event.

In the late nineties, Eleanor was proud to be asked to serve on the board of The Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts in its first stages of development. She was drawn to its comprehensive perspective on advancing gender equity and its collaboration with community nonprofits.

Later in life, when her children were grown, and after decades of service to her community, Eleanor discovered a passion for painting. Her daughters saw her dive into artmaking like "a duck to water." Eleanor worked in oils and watercolor and then found her niche in vibrant pastels.

A fellow artist and mentor described Eleanor's artwork as brave and confident. The Berkshire landscape was her favorite subject, in all seasons. She exhibited her work in art shows in Berkshire County and in a gallery in Hudson. She was thrilled to take her place in a community of other artists.

Bringing Eleanor's Vision into the Future

Rebecca and Julia are deeply grateful to their mother for empowering them to make a positive difference in their own community. They feel that her trust in them to realize her vision and steward her fund into the future is one of the greatest gifts their mother could have given them.

Taking their mother's lead, they are embracing their personal values and developing a plan of action for the future of the fund. Both have personal connections to people in their community that are becoming more and more vulnerable on various fronts. With the conviction that "safety nets" need to be shored up, they will use the fund to fortify food security (local farms, food banks), immigrant support, healthcare resources, literacy and housing. In addition to financial support, Rebecca, a social worker, and Julia, a literary agent, are taking steps to free up more personal time to devote to local organizations. They find this is the most valuable and gratifying way to gain insight into what people in the community need most. ■

By Deirdre McKenna



Pastel by Eleanor Lord.

Robert H. Wilder, Jr.

Expanding Opportunity for Young People and Making Connections

June 2025—Bob Wilder, a 20-year resident of Stanfordville, N.Y., has given generously over the years to causes he is passionate about, primarily animal welfare and land conservation. In 2006, he sought to deepen his philanthropy by connecting with people who had broad-based knowledge about local needs in the region he calls home. He established a relationship with Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation and steadily expanded his giving to include significant donations to the Northeast Dutchess Area Fund (NED), with a special focus on the Northeast Dutchess Scholarship Fund.

Wilder has donated over \$199K to NED's Scholarship fund. To date, this fund has provided \$5,000 per year to over 30 student winners for their tuition. Scholarships are also renewable for each of their college years. His focus on education for Northeast Dutchess youth, he shares, is a way to expand opportunities for young people to pursue their interests and discover new talents. "There's a whole world out there," he says. Educational support is one way to help students step beyond the familiar ground of what they know and imagine a new future for themselves.

Additionally, he has directed \$6,000 to the NED area fund, which supports a variety of community-enrichment initiatives, including housing, food security, and more.

Bob has many interests he avidly pursues. He likes to ski, has an award-winning vintage car collection, and collects large art sculptures for his property, which includes a farm



NED Scholarship Recipient: Shane Benziger

Shane received a NED scholarship in 2019 and earned a Bachelor's in Aerospace Engineering from Clarkson University in 2023. He's currently pursuing a Master's in Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering at Georgia Tech while working full-time at GE Vernova. "If you pursue what you're really passionate about, the hard work will be worthwhile," Shane says. "If you love what you're doing and really bet on yourself...it makes the achievements on the other side all the more rewarding."

Five New Board Members Welcomed in 2025

October 2025—BTCF welcomed five new board members this year! A.J. Enchill of Pittsfield, Mass., a civic leader committed to inclusive economic growth, brings deep experience in community engagement and public service. Deborah Lans of Austerlitz, N.Y., adds her legal expertise, nonprofit leadership, and regional collaboration. Jamal Ahamad of Adams, Mass., an educator and advocate for arts and culture in Berkshire County, offers a strong programmatic perspective

and passion for community vitality. John O'Brien of North Canaan, Conn., a seasoned financial executive with global investment experience, strengthens the board's investment team. Gary Schiff of Lenox, Mass., a trusted leader in the region's financial and nonprofit sectors, contributes valuable knowledge in finance and community partnerships. ■



Jamal Ahamad



A.J. Enchill



Deborah Lans



John O'Brien



Gary Schiff

Fund for Columbia County Celebrates 25 Years of Local Giving



Fund for Columbia County committee members pictured L-R: Jeffrey Mousseau, Didi Barrett, Jodie Moore, AnnaMaria Assevero, Peter Frank, Tanu Kumar, Katharine Millonzi.

Giving Forward: Scholarship Alums Serve on Committee

June 2025—In March 2025, the youngest advisory committee at BDCF gathered for the first time. The committee for the \$100,000 Margaret Derwin Scholarship was made up of former recipients, now young professionals, who once navigated the same Housatonic Valley hallways as the applicants they reviewed. Their insight and energy added a meaningful new layer to the committee's deliberations. Volunteering for the committee embodies the spirit of generosity that shaped their lives. ■

L-R: Committee members Emily Sullivan, Shelby Washburn, Alexa Curtiss, Cristian Umana, Becket Harney, and 2024 awardee Katerin McEnroe. Photo by Sarah Kenyon.



October 2025—Fueled by the generosity of community members, the Fund for Columbia County has quietly powered progress for 25 years, building a permanent resource to address everything from basic needs to broader opportunity across the county.

In just the past five years, FCC and BDCF have supported over 40 health and human service organizations; awarded over 500 education-related grants; invested in over 30 arts and culture organizations; and funded more than 20 food pantries, farms, and hunger-relief efforts. ■

Aileen Meehan

Community Engagement Officer for Northeast Dutchess & Northwest Litchfield Counties



March 2025—Can you share an overview of your role at BDCF?

As a Community Engagement Officer at Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, my role is to serve as a connector. I link the foundation to two key area funds—Fund for the Northwest Corner and Northeast Dutchess Fund—while also bridging these funds with the local grantee partners. Additionally, I foster connections among organizations, encouraging collaboration to enhance, expand, and develop more comprehensive services for the community.

Beyond relationship-building, my responsibilities include managing the administrative aspects of grantmaking and advising nonprofit development directors on potential funding opportunities. Community Engagement Officers also play a crucial role in connecting donors to causes that both strengthen the community and align with their charitable giving plans.

In addition, as the lead staff member for BDCF's Center for Nonprofit Excellence Fund, I help organize workshops for nonprofit leaders and board members, helping to strengthen our local nonprofit sector.

What unique strengths and needs currently exist in the counties you work with?

The challenges facing rural areas are often universal—transportation, affordable housing, healthcare, food security, and sustaining a dynamic economy by keeping younger generations engaged and employed in the area.

In both counties where I work, the area funds are deeply invested in the nonprofit community. Grantmaking dollars support a wide range of organizations that provide essential services, from addressing basic needs to enriching the community through the arts.

Ultimately, the greatest strengths of these communities are their dedication and deep concern for one another.

In your time with BDCF, is there a memory or accomplishment that is especially meaningful to you?

Celebrating the holidays with our network of partners—including board members, staff, donors, nonprofit organizations, community leaders, and volunteers—is a wonderful opportunity to come together and recognize all that we accomplish beyond our daily work.

What interests do you have outside of work?

Outside of work, I spend much of my time with family and friends—often over a great meal or a walk with our dogs. I enjoy hiking, yoga, and traveling, as well as exploring my passions for architecture and photography. I'm also drawn to the world of storytelling, whether through independent films or live theater. I also share my life with one wonderfully mischievous black lab named Romeo, whose playfulness brings me endless joy. When it comes to treats, nothing beats the best bones in town from Freund's in East Canaan, Conn., and maybe the key lime pie he got into last weekend! ■

Emily Bronson

Senior Community Engagement Officer for Initiatives & Special Projects



April 2025—Can you share an overview of your role at BTCF?

At BTCF, I manage special projects and initiatives. This keeps my work ever-changing, always interesting and I need to constantly be learning about different topic areas! Some areas I am currently working on include food security, early literacy, community engagement in the arts, the foundation's poetry residency and working closely with donors and other funders.

What is special and unique about the programs and people you work with in the community?

I am humbled by the tireless work and commitment of nonprofits and their leaders to test and try new ideas which improve the communities and lives of those that live here. Without donors and other funders who believe in the potential of this work, it would be hard to make it come to fruition.

In your time with BTCF, is there a memory that is especially meaningful to you?

Witnessing seeds of ideas- and the testing of ideas- sprout into large, impactful projects through the hard work and vision of those that work on them. Rolling Grocer 19 in Hudson [that uses a fair pricing model to expand access to fresh food] is an incredible example of that. Working with generous donors that trust and believe in these visions and provide funding for them to come to fruition is such a joy.

I have specific memories of how funds have impacted individuals' lives. The two that come to mind are The Jane Lloyd Fund and Margaret Derwin Scholarship Fund. In prior positions at the foundation, I was able to work closely with both of these funds and had the great fortune of notifying a Derwin recipient. It was so clear that receiving the scholarship was going to change the trajectory of that individual's life. I also remember the kindest, most moving thank you note from a Jane Lloyd recipient, sharing their gratitude for the fund to make it possible for them to be able to live at and keep their home while dying of cancer. The fund paid for their mortgage at the time.

What interests do you have outside of work?

My time out of work is spent predominantly outside: playing with my daughter who is six, in my vegetable garden, cross-country skiing and sledding in winter, swimming and kayaking in summer and walking our old rescue dog.

What is your favorite local place to visit?

In the Berkshires, Umpachene Falls and Campbell Falls are funs spots to visit in the summer- and going out for ice cream after, of course! ■

Joseph Baker

Vice President, Finance & Administration



August 2025—Can you share an overview of your role at BTCF?

My role at BTCF is to bring together finance, investments and administrative staff and volunteers to produce high quality financial results, services and information for the people and communities we serve. We manage hundreds of thousands of accounting and investment transactions each year and administer over 550 charitable fund relationships. The work is both simple and complex- simple as we are guided by our values and charitable fund relationships and complex as we cultivate relationships, processes and systems that work better for the fund holders, nonprofits and people we serve.

What is special and unique about the programs and people you work with in the community?

Working at a Community Foundation puts you contact with many caring people. Whether they are donors, staff, or nonprofit organizations, they are looking to make things better. The Foundation's Equity Fund, now in its second year, is a good example. By bringing together leaders of

color, individual donors and grant applicants, the fund expands access to resources for communities of color and trusts them as the experts to make improvements relevant to their community.

In your time with BTCF, is there an accomplishment that is especially meaningful to you?

What I most enjoy at BTCF is learning and growing with my colleagues. We build stronger communities when we hear and support each other.

What is your favorite local place to visit?

My favorite place to visit is in Ashley Falls. I jog past Twin Rivers Farm, Bartholomew's Cobble, and the Ashley House, and watch for turtles and Great Blue herons. It is so peaceful. ■

Jenny Lilienthal

Philanthropy Operations Manager



Jenny, far left, singing with Berkshire Hills Chorus, a 4-part a cappella group for women's voices.

October 2025—Can you share an overview of your role at BTCF?

I manage donations coming into funds at Berkshire Taconic, and I work with donors who have charitable funds at BTCF, to help them access and manage their funds. In addition, I manage portions of the database and I create many of the custom reports that guide our outreach for targeted mailings, e-News, print newsletters, and event invitations.

What brought you to BTCF?

In my early career, I worked in banking, starting as a summer teller, and finally managing federal funds and reconciling all branch teller cash and ATM's daily. After my career as a bank accountant, I was an accountant at a Berkshires nonprofit before I "crossed over" into philanthropy. I've worked at three other Berkshire nonprofits doing fundraising—VIM Berkshires (Volunteers in Medicine) being the place where I can say my work had the most impact.

In your time with BTCF, is there a memory or accomplishment that is especially meaningful to you?

The best memory for me since I started at BTCF 5 1/2 years ago happened in the fall of 2024. Every summer we hold an Arts Build Community event to highlight our ABC program that helps diversify the audiences that are reached by the Berkshire arts and cultural scene. The 2024 event was at Shakespeare & Company, a favorite of mine. I had an opportunity to speak to—and thank!—one of the organizers of the amazing program that has brought Shakespeare into Berkshire high school classes for many years, benefiting thousands of children over the years, including my own.

What interests do you have outside of work?

Outside of work, I sing in the Berkshire Hills Chorus, a 4-part a cappella group for women's voices. We perform all over Berkshire County. Sometimes this means carefully planned programs at large venues. Sometimes we sing at nursing homes. Sometimes we even sing on the street, (especially during the holiday season!). ■

Alycia Bacon

Community Engagement Officer, Equity and Inclusion



December 2025—Can you share an overview of your role at BTCF?

I serve as the Community Engagement Officer for Equity & Inclusion. I help guide our Equity Fund, which supports grassroots groups and community leaders working toward racial justice and shared prosperity. A recent project I led was our participatory grantmaking process—bringing together residents to review proposals and decide which initiatives to fund. It's about shifting power and trust directly into the hands of the people most affected by inequity.

What interests do you have outside of work?

I have many (maybe too many!) interests, including martial arts and the arts in all forms: writing, acting, photography, and painting.

One of my deepest passions is ancestry. It's personal and transformative. I've traced living relatives, rediscovered forgotten ancestors, and reconnected with the lands that shaped them. My ancestral research has yielded several discoveries, including lineage that connects to Sudan as well as the Gullah communities of North Carolina and Florida. I found the emancipation document of my fourth great-grandfather, Daniel Bacon—a tangible piece of freedom in my family's story. I also discovered that my maternal grandmother, from the Ashby family (in America since 1727), was an English woman who bore two free sons by an African

man, though they were indentured until age 30. That line produced two remarkable men. John W. Ashby, an oysterman, enlisted in the Union Army in 1864 as part of the 43rd Colored Infantry regiment. At age 40, he carried a flag reading "Freedom—FREE AT LAST" in Galveston, Texas, as he helped free the last enslaved people—an act now remembered as part of Juneteenth.

A generation later, William Mobile Ashby, likely his nephew or son, went on to have an esteemed career in community service, including roles as New Jersey's first Black social worker, and one of its earliest sociologists. After graduating from Yale, he founded the Newark Welfare Foundation and Community Chest (1923), forerunners of the Newark United Way. He later served as director of the N.J. Urban League offices and served on the state's Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and was co-founder of the Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee, among many other accomplishments.

Uncovering this history has been a deep source of pride, perspective, and strength. It reminds me that the freedoms we enjoy were won through unimaginable courage, and that the work continues. Their stories give me hope and courage to meet the challenges of this moment, and perspective on the gains we've inherited through the battles they fought. My Master's in Africana Studies has become a living part of my daily work—BTCF has given me the space to use that expertise in countless ways through the Equity Initiative.

In your time with BTCF, is there a memory or accomplishment that is especially meaningful to you?

I'm honored to continue my family's legacy of service by helping fund community through programs and partnerships. Over the past two years, the Equity Fund has moved more than \$300,000—feeding families with fresh, locally grown food, paying artists, mentoring children, supporting families, and helping Black and Brown residents build solidarity and realize their dreams; together, we practice liberation in real time.

It cannot be overstated how incredible it feels for someone who once took a risk leaving home for the first time, only to be reborn in Schenectady—sleeping on the floor of a shared two-bedroom apartment on Hamilton Hill—to now be following in the footsteps of my ancestors and bettering my community in ways I never imagined possible. That was my deepest hope as a young adult: to make a difference in the lives of others. I've always believed that service to others is divine love. ■



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