

SHARE:

[Join Our Email List](#)

[View as Webpage](#)

greater rochester
Health foundation



May 2026

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Elevating Youth Voice Through Lived Experience in Western New York

Buffalo Toronto Public Media | By Emyle Watkins
Published April 3, 2026 at 1:07 PM EDT

LISTEN • 46:10

Emma Pratt (left) and her mother Amanda Marie (right) pose for a photo in downtown Buffalo, NY in March 2026.

WNY Independent Living's Independent Youth Living Project is expanding access to family-centered services for youth with disabilities and their caregivers across Genesee, Orleans, and Wyoming Counties. At the Independent Living Center of the Genesee Region, this work includes hiring youth leaders who bring both professional skills and lived experience to the role.

Emma Pratt, an Independent Youth Specialist supported by a Responsive Grant from the Health Foundation, is one of those leaders. Drawing from her own experiences navigating the mental health system, Emma works directly with young people and families while also advocating for broader change.

Emma's voice has recently been featured in two news stories: In a Buffalo Toronto Public Media interview, she reflects on the challenges rural youth face in accessing mental health care and calls for more community-based support. Access the article [here](#). Emma is also highlighted in a Times Union article, which further explores her early experiences and continued advocacy; access the article [here](#).

Together, these stories underscore the importance of investing in youth leadership and ensuring that those most impacted by system gaps are helping to shape solutions.

Strengthening Rural Communities Through Connection & Collaboration

[Orleans Community Connects](#), formerly United Way of Orleans County, is helping reimagine how rural communities respond to local challenges through stronger collaboration and shared solutions. Their work was recently featured in Orleans Hub, access the article [here](#).

Under the leadership of Executive Director Nyla Gaylord and Board President Dean Bellack, the organization has expanded its role beyond traditional fundraising to convene partners, attract new investment, and address issues like affordable housing, digital literacy, broadband access, caregiving support, and homelessness. A five-year grant from Greater Rochester Health Foundation has helped strengthen this work, including initiatives like the Orleans Digital Literacy Initiative, housing development consulting, and countywide community planning. As Bellack shared, “Connected we are stronger. This is not a slogan. It is a strategy for rural success.”

From launching a warming center in Albion to convening the county’s first Affordable Housing Summit, Orleans Community Connects is focused on building long-term systems that help residents thrive. The organization is also creating new capacity for grant writing support, multi-partner project coordination, and stronger alignment across towns, villages, and nonprofits, ensuring more resources stay local and more communities have the tools they need to succeed.

Orleans Community Connects, formerly United Way, eager to address many local issues

By Ginny Kropf, correspondent Posted 29 March 2026 at 8:54 am

‘Connected we are stronger. This is not a slogan. It is a strategy for rural success’



Photos by Ginny Kropf: (Left) Kathy Blackburn, left, and Gabrielle Barone share a light moment during the gathering Wednesday night sponsored by Orleans Community Connects. (Right) Dean Bellack, board president of Orleans Community Connects (formerly United Way) and director Nyla Gaylord addressed invited guests to an informal gathering Wednesday night at Zambistro’s. Its purpose was to explain the name change from United Way.

HEALTH FOUNDATION NEWS

Connie O. Walker Recognized as Exemplary Example of Professionalism & Community Service

Join us in congratulating former Greater Rochester Health Foundation Board Chair and longtime board member [Connie O. Walker](#) for being recognized with the 2026 Adolf J. Rodenbeck Award from the [Monroe County Bar Association](#) for her outstanding professionalism and community service!

A respected legal leader and dedicated volunteer, Connie played a critical role in shaping the Health Foundations work, including serving two terms as Board Chair during the COVID-19 pandemic and



leading the executive search for the Foundation's current President & CEO Matt Kuhlenbeck.

Walker's leadership and longstanding commitment continue to leave a lasting impact across the legal, healthcare, and nonprofit sectors in our region.



Strengthening Our Commitment to Equitable Grantmaking

Last month, Health Foundation Program Officer Hannah Castelli and VP & Chief Financial Officer Justin Rand traveled to St. Louis for the PEAK2026 conference, celebrating the heart of philanthropy: the love of humanity. The convening theme, Rooted in Purpose, Growing Together, elevated how **PEAK**

members are spearheading innovations in data, technology, grantmaking and grants management, and working in true partnership to better care for the communities they serve.

Making Connections in the Community

Health Foundation Communications Officer Tiana Flynn attended the United Way's 10th Annual Community Leaders Breakfast, presented by United Way's Emerging Leaders Society in mid April. The event brought together community-minded leaders, fresh energy, and a shared commitment to making a difference.



Related: The United Way is currently accepting applications for its Leadership Development Academy; learn more [here](#).



Health Foundation Board Member to Present on Deaf Community Infrastructure at National Conference

This summer, Health Foundation Board Member Zachary Ennis, Founder and Executive Director of **Rochester Deaf Kitchen**, will present at the National Association of the Deaf conference as part of the workshop, "Building Deaf Community Infrastructure for Uncertain Times," held in San Francisco. The session will highlight how Deaf-led organizations can serve as trusted community hubs connecting people to food, healthcare, and essential

services during times of uncertainty.

Using Rochester Deaf Kitchen and its Deaf Community Food Pantry as a case example, the presenters will share the Community Anchored Trust (CAT) framework and practical strategies for building sustainable, community-led systems. Their work demonstrates how trusted Deaf organizations can strengthen local infrastructure while advancing food security, health equity, and access for Deaf communities. Learn more about the workshop and conference [here](#).

Recommended Resources

New York State Office of Mental Health recognized April as Deaf History Month -- a time to honor the history, culture, and contributions of Deaf and hard of hearing individuals, highlighting the importance of language access, communication equity, and the recognition of Deaf culture as a vital and valued part of our communities. They've shared the following resources as part of its commitment to ensuring that mental health services are accessible to individuals who are Deaf and/or hard of hearing through effective communication, including the provision of qualified interpreters, accessible technologies, and culturally competent care:

[New York State Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing Office Resources](#)
[OMH Language Access Services](#)
[OMH Language Access Plan](#)
[Best Practices for Working with an ASL Interpreter](#)

Healthy & Equitable Futures Parent-Led Systems Change Team Advances Community Connection Through Café Gatherings

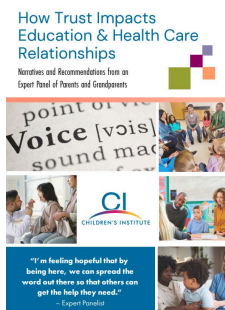


Our [Healthy & Equitable Futures initiative](#) Systems Change Team of parent leaders is partnering with [ROC the Future Alliance](#) to host seven community cafés this year focused on strengthening family and community voice.

The first café, held in partnership with [Adaptt Rochester](#), brought together approximately 24 families and community members last month to explore technology literacy and its role in daily life and learning. By the end of the session, more than 60 percent of participants reported a stronger sense of community connection, and several shared interest in staying engaged and continuing to build relationships.

Building on this momentum, Adaptt Rochester is now planning a follow-up workshop designed to deepen engagement and further strengthen technology literacy skills among participating families. Stay tuned for updates!

Recommended Resources



Children's Institute's new report shares insights from an expert panel on what builds -- and breaks -- trust in schools and health care systems. ***How Trust Impacts Education & Health Care Relationships: Narratives and Recommendations from an Expert Panel of Parents and Grandparents*** is a culmination of more than two years of listening, learning, and relationship-building with parents and grandparents who participated in the Get Ready to GROW program.

Rooted in lived experience, the report offers practical recommendations to strengthen communication, improve relationships, and create more respectful, responsive environments for families. The hope is that these shared lessons will support stronger trust and decision-making across both education and health care. Access the report [here](#).

LEARNING & ENGAGEMENT



Uplifting National Women's Health Week

Every May, beginning on Mother's Day, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office on Women's Health (OWH) leads National Women's Health Week (NHW).

This year, NHW takes place from May 10-16. This observance highlights women's health conditions and priorities and encourages women of all ages to prioritize their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Visit the OWH website for a wealth of resources related to women's health [here](#).

Caregivers Invited to Half-Day Wellness Retreat Focused on Renewal & Support

The Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities, in partnership with Mindful Tradition, will host an in-person half-day wellness event for caregivers of individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities from **1 to 6 p.m. on Saturday, May 16**. The free event is designed to help caregivers build sustainability and address burnout through mindful workshops, heart-opening conversations, gentle walks, and healing rituals. Registration is



CAREGIVERS RETREAT: RECLAIM YOUR ENERGY & JOY FOR CAREGIVERS OF PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL/ DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

You constantly pour into others—now it's time to refill your own cup. Join us for a **restorative Caregivers Retreat** to build sustainability and combat burnout and fatigue.

- Mindful workshops
- Heart-opening conversations
- Gentle walks and healing rituals

UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER
16 MAY 2026
1PM - 6PM

- Free and limited to 70 participants - **must be a caregiver of a person with IDD to register**
- Space is wheelchair accessible
- Light refreshments offered
- Parking provided
- Childcare provided for a limited amount of children: ages 3-8, 9-12, and 13-21 (first come first serve)

Learn More  <https://redcap.link/caregiver-retreat-2026>

required and limited to 70 caregivers, with free on-site childcare for children and youth ages 3 to 21 across designated age groups. Click [here](#) to learn more.

United Way Seeks Volunteers & Nonprofit Partners for Day of Caring



United Way of Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes is calling on community members across the region to join its upcoming Day of Caring on **Thursday, May 21**. More than 5,000 volunteers are already registered, and there is a goal of reaching 6,000 participants, with many volunteer opportunities still available across Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Wayne, and Wyoming counties.

Nonprofit organizations are also encouraged to register projects so volunteers can be matched with meaningful opportunities to support local needs. As the region's largest community-wide volunteer event, Day of Caring brings together coworkers, families, and friends to support hundreds of nonprofits in a single day of service. Last year, the event mobilized 6,300 volunteers across 425 projects at 180 agencies, with participation from 200 workplaces. This year's effort continues to build on that impact, strengthening connections between volunteers and the organizations serving the region every day.

Nonprofits that participate will also have the opportunity to win one of two \$250 prizes by sharing before-and-after photos of their Day of Caring projects on social media between May 21 and May 22 and tagging United Way of Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes. The Health Foundation is excited to spend the day at **Villa of Hope!** Find out more [here](#), and register by May 14 to volunteer.

GRANT OPPORTUNITIES & RESOURCES



NEW: The Department of Labor is offering Employment and Training Grants for Native American Communities through its Indian and Native American Program, supporting employment services, education and training assistance, and supportive services that help Native Americans achieve economic self-sufficiency. Eligible applicants include federally recognized Tribal governments, Native American Tribal organizations, and Native-led nonprofits, including Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian organizations. Grants range from \$18,024 to \$5,998,062, with **applications due May 22**. Learn more [here](#).



Did you know? Greater Rochester Health Foundation curates a database of local, statewide, and national health/health equity-related grant opportunities that we share on our website. This searchable, curated list of grants is accessible [here](#).

In addition, our [Rapid Response Fund](#) provides short-term relief grants -- up to \$75,000 -- to help nonprofits continue their work in the face of immediate state or federal funding disruptions and is designed to swiftly address the critical needs of our community by supporting the organizations that serve our most vulnerable neighbors. **Applications accepted on a rolling basis.**



[Causewave Community Partners](#) is available to help small and mid-sized nonprofit organizations secure the funding to increase community impact. Learn more about the Grants Capacity Building Initiative offering free grant-writing support [here](#). The Health Foundation is proud to support this important initiative along with our local funders.

COMMUNITY BOARD

OPEN HOUSE

May 21, 2026 4-8 pm

with locally sourced food/beverages/gift bags and baskets

Program displays and staff on site



FINGER LAKES COMMUNITY ACTION
60 YEARS
and still going strong



greater rochester
Health foundation

Celebrating 60 years. This diamond anniversary honors achievements, reflects on challenges, and looks forward with optimism, showcasing the power of commitment and potential for impact.

RMSC MUSEUM & SCIENCE CENTER STRASENBURGH PLANETARIUM CUMMING NATURE CENTER EDUCATION & PROGRAMS JO

MUSEUM & SCIENCE CENTER > PROGRAMS & EVENTS

APIDA HERITAGE CELEBRATION

May is Asian, Pacific Islander, and Desi American (APIDA) Heritage Month! Come celebrate with hands-on activities and learning opportunities.

📍 Museum & Science Center

📅 May 23-24, 2026

Become A Member for FREE Admission >>



St. Joseph's
SINCE CENTER

An Evening of Legends

32nd Annual Pasting and Auction

An Evening to Remember
Wednesday, June 3rd, 2026 | 5:30 PM

A Place to Gather
Temple B'rith Kodesh, 2131 Elmwood Ave., Rochester, NY

www.sjncenter.org/annual-event



SPCC

39th ANNUAL CHILDREN'S CLASSIC GOLF TOURNAMENT

JUNE 29th 2026



12:30 PM SHOTGUN START
IRONDEQUOIT COUNTRY CLUB

Scan the QR code or visit the website below to register your team and check out the sponsorship opportunities on the back of this flyer!

SPCCGOLF2026.givesmart.com



Centered in equity, the mission of [Greater Rochester Health Foundation](#) is to pursue and invest in solutions that build a healthier region where all people can thrive.



Greater Rochester Health Foundation | 255 East Ave Suite 402 | Rochester, NY 14604 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!