

Community Services Fund of Nebraska Member Agency Stories

ACLU of Nebraska

Megan, a 16 year old ACLU of Nebraska client, shares her heartbreaking story of solitary confinement:

"My cell was about the size of a queen-sized bed. There was a small bed, a desk and a chair. There was no counselor to talk to about what I was going through. I was only able to talk to my mom every few days, sometimes for only three minutes. While I was at Geneva, I was in a constant state of depression. I had anxiety attacks and when I tried to get help for them, no one cared. While I was there, at least two girls attempted suicide and many others talked about it. I can honestly say that for the first time in my life, I thought about hurting myself too. Just like at Madison, I spent a lot of my time alone, confined to my cell, desperate for anything that reminded me of my old life. At different times while I was locked up in Madison and Geneva, I was not allowed talk with my lawyers and my family. Thankfully my family fought back to get me out and to help me share my story."

Angels Among Us

A cancer journey as told by Jackson's momma,

Jackson had just turned 5 in November of 2015, and we had been seeking answers from a GI specialist for years, because he was not growing as he should have been since birth. He began having severe headaches shortly after his birthday. Finally, in January 2016, he had an MRI done, that rocked our world! We were told he had a brain tumor. Pilocytic Astrocytoma to be exact. We had no idea what that meant, but it was the beginning of a long battle that he still fights to this day. He has been through several rounds of chemotherapy, over 20 surgeries and procedures, and too many hospital stays to count. Lots of sleepless nights full of seizures and pain, but despite all of that, he has never complained!

As his parents, we have struggled to pay the bills that pile up as a result of missed work and sick days. That is where Angels Among Us came in. We have been on the receiving end of their generosity more than once. Not only did they help monetarily, but with emotional support as well. We have connected with several families going through the same thing as us, and we no longer feel alone in this journey. Feb 7, of this year, will mark 3 years since his 1st brain surgery, which fell on Superbowl Sunday. Jackson's beloved Broncos would go on to win, and the day would be etched in our minds and hearts forever.

Jackson has been able to receive an experimental drug from St Jude's hospital, that seems to be slowing down the progression of his tumors, and he is thriving! He feels better than he has since this all began, and we are feeling hopeful once again. He still loves football more than anything, and still plans to be a punter someday. He is enjoying

the 2nd grade, socializing with family and friends, and loves video games like any other 8-year old boy.

The Arc of Nebraska

One of our members lived in an institution for the first 20 years of her life. She barely spoke when she first came to a dance hosted by a local chapter. Through engaging in the trainings we hosted, she became a strong self-advocate speaking out for all people with disabilities. This work gained eventually led to a job, a strong network of friends, and improved access to services.

The Archway

Since prehistoric times, the path along the Platte River through Nebraska, once known as the Great Platte River Road, has been an important travel route across the continent. From the Oregon Trail era to today, the Archway's family-friendly, historical experience brings the stories of the adventurers who traveled the Great Platte River Road to life.

Imagine the daring and determination of the people who first traveled the Oregon Trail, the high-spirited adventure of racing to California during the Gold Rush of 1849, the devotion of the Mormons who moved west in search of religious freedom, the entrepreneurial spirit that led to the creation of the Pony Express, the industry that built the Transcontinental Railroad and the cooperative effort that led to the creation of "America's Main Street," the Lincoln Highway and the Interstate Highway System. All this history happened right here, on the path along the Platte River in Nebraska and you can experience it all at the Archway.

Throughout our history, people of vision and courage found ways to work together to turn their dreams into reality and to contribute to an enterprise that was much bigger than themselves, the building of America. At the Archway, we salute the pioneers of the past and inspire the pioneers of today.

Audubon Nebraska

We had a young woman and her father visit Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center recently. She was a college student now and it had been 10 years since she visited the prairie with her 4th grade class as part of our Prairie Immersion education program, a partnership with Lincoln Public Schools. That visit made a lasting impression and, even though she had not been back, she had never forgotten it. A young adult now she was thrilled to come back and bring her father with her to share the prairie with him. That 4th grade visit to the prairie had taken her out of the classroom inspired conservation values and an appreciation of our environment that will last her a lifetime.

Autism Center of Nebraska (ACN)

Imagine a young man, approximately 20 years old, left at an Omaha homeless shelter by a family who was simply at the end of their rope. With limited language skills, and even more limited understanding of social boundaries, this young man began to approach a variety of men, asking for affection and hugs. The shelter representatives knew the dangers that awaited a young man with obvious disabilities and few personal boundaries. They contacted ACN. Without a funding stream, without any knowledge of what would happen next, ACN said "YES" and went to the shelter to pick him up. That same day he was settled into a group home with two peers. The next day he began receiving educational services from ACN. Today, he is learning how to handle stressors, making decisions, and participating in activities at home and in the community. ACN is here for those in need, and proud that other agencies look to ACN for assistance with persons with autism and other disabilities.

Bluestem Health

Bluestem Health had a patient that was suffering from a chronic disease and wasn't getting their medical condition under control. Both the provider and patient were frustrated with lack of compliance the patient was having with their medical issue. We had patient talk with our behavioral health consultant, met with our chronic disease nurse, and sent our Community Health Worker (who's also a Paramedic) to the home. We were able to identify many barriers to medications, food, exercise, etc. The patient just didn't have a great understanding of their illness.

With all of the resources that Bluestem Health has, we were able to help identify behavioral health & socioeconomic issues that prevented them from getting medications. Our 340B Pharmacy program was able to get them affordable medications, eventually, getting them on the Medication Assistance Program which allowed them to get free medications. We helped them get more organized in their home, worked with their behavioral health therapist, and with case management we were able to get their labs back into a "normal state" for their condition. We were also able to decrease the amount of times they went to the Emergency Room each year.

With your help, we can continue to offer a new way of treating patients and helping them overcome obstacles to getting quality health care.

Boy Scouts of America – Cornhusker Council

"I am very proud of the things that Saxon has learned in Cub Scouts! He started as a Tiger Scout in Den 1 and was one of the Founders of Pack 19 in Lincoln Nebraska.

An accident happened tonight in which Saxon kept calm and act quickly to save his 5-year-old brother from drowning.

Saxon was fishing from the dock in our back yard. Saxon had caught a large fish and so his younger brother and younger sister went down to the pond to watch. Apparently, Rowan, Saxon's 5-year-old brother, saw some moss that he wanted to touch and reached down to the water from the dock. Saxon, seeing his brother reaching down, started to say, "Rowan, you shouldn't"

And Rowan was in the water just that fast. Saxon dropped his pole and immediately laid down on his stomach, reached out grabbing Rowan's shirt and then arm and pulled him up onto the dock. Rowan was quite rattled by the whole incident. I heard him crying as they got close to the house.

Later in the evening, I asked Saxon how he knew what to do. He said, "It wasn't that big of a deal Mom, but I guess Scouts taught me some things, like laying down, reaching out, and to not become a victim yourself".

The Webelos of Pack 19 just finished their First Responder Adventure a few months ago. Words can't express how thankful I am that Saxon was quick to act and knew what to do in this emergency. I would like to thank the Cub Scouts for providing such an awesome curriculum/training and beneficial life skills to boys across America."

The Bridge Behavioral Health

Robert grew up in small town Nebraska. By the time he was 18, he regularly used alcohol, nicotine, cocaine, hallucinogens, PCP, Xanax, Opioids, meth. Life was a blur. Soon meth became his drug of choice. It was cheap, at first, and easy to get. And he was off to the races in his substance use disorder. More than once, he admitted himself for treatment to The Bridge. With the help of our counselors and professional team, he graduated after 10 weeks in treatment. He got his driver's license back. He has a good, steady job in construction. He rents a house with a peer who's also in recovery. He has responsibilities. He treasures a clean life. Without The Bridge, Robert says he wouldn't be alive. Any chance he gets, he tells his story of how the staff at The Bridge saved his life. Now when he gets stressed, he has coping skills he learned in treatment. He writes songs. He volunteers. He returns for continuing care meetings. He's planning a future, one day at a time. Now, he has hope. And he is grateful to the experts at The Bridge for turning his life around.

Bridges to Hope

Meet Frank. Frank served in the Vietnam War where he lost many of his friends and fellow soldiers. He lost his left hand in the war and still suffers from severe PTSD. Frank became addicted to the pain meds prescribed to manage the pain of his injuries. He also began to wash them down with bottle after bottle of whiskey. In order to support his habits, Frank forged his prescriptions and stole alcohol and tried to rob a bank. Frank was incarcerated for 7 years for theft, forgery and attempted armed robbery.

Frank was a law abiding citizen at one time in his life. He had a “normal” life. Unfortunately, he became desperate and turned to illegal activities when he couldn’t figure out how to cope with his situation.

He paid the price for his actions. Now that he has successfully completed the sentence imposed on him, he just wants to become a contributing, productive member of the community again. However, without the proper support systems in place after his release from incarceration, he is very likely to return to his old ways and end up facing jail or prison time once again. Frank acquired his own apartment, but without the help of bridges to hope, he would still be sleeping on the floor.

With your help, we can continue providing the necessities of setting up a new home while also giving people like Frank the second chance they need as they reenter an ever changing society.

Camp Confidence

I didn't realize how much I was positively affected by my experience with Camp Confidence until I was a grown up. More specifically, not until I was in the position to show off my experiences of overcoming my fears and making awesome memories to the young people I serve. Those who know me well find it unbelievable but my memories (and photos) prove my stories to be true. At the time, I didn't appreciate repelling off of the side of the mountain OR hiking 6 miles in the wilderness after having "bear training" OR whitewater rafting with my glasses strapped around my head for safety! (See, I lost them in the lake the night before, and my counselor wanted to ensure I didn't lose them again!) I cried many tears during that two weeks, but I can say, it exposed this city girl to a life beyond my wildest dreams literally.

Seeing moose for the first time, having to use the restroom (ahem...) outside of a restroom. It completely took me outside of my box. It opened my eyes to know there was more to live than just my part of the city. It made me want to explore and get to know how others. And my perspective on how I learned changed. I realized that if I didn't get an understanding in the classroom, I still had a chance, and it was my responsible to get it at home. I can see the definite correlation of how learning begins with self-confidence, and I became much more confident in my abilities during and after that trip. I even caught a fish with a stick and some string!! Can you believe that!!? I overcame so many fears during that camp!! I experienced things I never would have done on my own. I was pushed to succeed. Just enough for me to take ownership and now reap the benefits. I am a better person because of Camp Confidence. And, I thank them.

Capital Humane Society

A little 5 week old kitten arrived at our Admissions & Assessment Center from Lincoln Animal Control after they had picked him up. The kitten, barely more than a pound, was missing his back left foot and the end of the leg was infected.

Our veterinary team cleaned the end of his leg and made him comfortable through his required holding period. No one came forward to claim him during the holding period so our veterinary team moved forward with amputating his leg just above the knee.

After surgery, Timmy moved to foster care with one of our staff members so his leg could heal. A couple of weeks later, he returned for the veterinary staff to look him over and remove the staples before he was ready for adoption. It didn't take Timmy long to find a new home, given how sweet and cute he is, and he was adopted the first day he was available for adoption!

Center for Rural Affairs

Thirteen years ago, Maria wanted to start her own bakery. She had been working from home making cakes for friends and family, but always wanted to have her own shop.

In 2008, she started her own business, baking cakes out of her basement in Hastings. Maria and her sister delivered the cakes, and customers dropped by to pick up their order.

The cakes were custom made for weddings, Quinceaneras, birthdays, or just because. Besides doing the baking and delivery, Maria and her sister both held part-time jobs outside their home.

"I always wanted to have my own place, my own bakery. Customers asked when I was going to open my bakery," said Maria.

Our services were essential to realizing that goal. Maria qualified for two small business loans: one to purchase a van to transport the cakes and the other for remodeling a site for the new bakery.

Our Latino Business Center was able to provide technical assistance on the business plan and assist with required permits and services from the electrician, plumber, accountant, and even her attorney.

In 2015, Maria finally accomplished her dream. She opened her bakery in a storefront in Grand Island. She serves 12 items, which include Blueberry Cheesecake, Chocolate Cheesecake, Cappuccino, Carrot, and 3 Leches with Peach.

"Don't give up on your dream. Find the resources, ask the questions, and be persistent," she told us. We are thrilled to be a part of Maria's success.

CenterPointe

"I was living at the Regional Center on a mental health commitment following two suicide attempts the previous year. Although I was advocating for my best interest, my mental health know-how was very limited. I had lived with depression and other

symptoms of poor mental health since childhood and had unreasonable expectations of what a good life meant and the work it took to get there. I was very ashamed and desperate for a better life. For my reentry back into the community, I was referred to CenterPointe.

At CenterPointe I received a housing voucher, medication management, an individual counselor, caseworkers, and attended the day rehabilitation program. I should have been very successful the first time around. It took time and CenterPointe stuck with me.

It wasn't until I began working with a CenterPointe Peer Support Specialist that I could break down my unrealistic expectations and appreciate my reality. From there, I made better use of my resources and worked towards independence by taking small steps. Now, I have a stronger support network, a fulfilling job helping others who live with mental health challenges, and more courage today thanks to the support of a full staff of professionals and peers who helped me look after myself. I am so grateful."

Civic Nebraska

For 15 years, Toni Kuhn has been a familiar face to students at Omaha's Sherman Elementary School, where Civic Nebraska runs the after-school Community Learning Center (CLC) for more than 100 students every day. In addition to running the school cafeteria, Toni is a member of the CLC. In that role, she provides youths an evening meal while also leading the Sherman CLC kindergarten team. In her years at Sherman, "Ms. Toni" has forged a cross-generational reputation for kindness, generosity, and straight talk.

Everything we do is for the kids. I could do a million other things besides cooking, but I do it for them. I've seen children go through these doors who grow up and head out to middle school, then high school, they graduate, they start their own families. They'll come back with their kids and say "This is someone who took care of me when I went here." You see generations of this community come through our doors.

We probably spend more time with the community and the neighborhood than we used to. Family Nights are a good example. Now that's a popular event. It's for the whole neighborhood. All the kids bring their uncles, their aunts, and everybody else. I love to see parents get involved here at the school. That's what I see during Family Night.

Sometimes I go shopping at Goodwill and I might pick up a few things that I know the kids might like (points to a shelf with children's shoes, LEGOs, puzzles and other items on it). If I see a kid who I think might need something or one who is having a bad day, I'll take something down off the shelf and give it to them.

Some of them go through more stuff than some adults do in life. It takes special teachers and staff to relate to them. The staff here know what these kids' lives are about. I know the kids look forward to coming to school and to the CLC.

There was one kid who was getting in trouble quite a bit. Getting yelled at, at home and having trouble at school. One day I asked him if he could take a look at some of these Lego sets I have. He'd take one, really work on it. Sometimes he'd take one home and bring it back all done. He started to gradually do better. He started to search me out to see if I needed any more "help" getting all of my Lego sets built. Sometimes it's little things that can make a difference, I guess.

We've been invited to kids' graduations, get visited by grownup students who have gone on to college. That's community to me. That's family.

This is my relaxation. I love my job. I look forward to coming every day. The kids are my family in a way. They know when I'm upset. They know when I'm happy. They can see right through me.

It's so funny and so interesting to watch them grow up in front of your eyes. You never know what might turn out to be a life lesson for someone, or what someone might remember as an adult. Sometimes it's easy to forget that we're making memories and lessons for everyone who we watch over here.

I never really thought about how long I'd be at Sherman. I had a friend say, "You need to retire, Toni." I could've retired in October. I said, what am I going to do? Go home and sit around? No, I love my job. So I'm not going anywhere.

I hope people remember me for caring about them, and knowing that I was there for them, no matter what. That I was someone to talk to, someone who gave them a safe place.

Clinic with a Heart

Lorinda just moved to Lincoln with her five children. She moved to get away from a domestic violence situation. She and her kids were staying with her sister while she looked for work and an apartment. Before starting school, all the kids needed to get school physicals. There was no way she could afford to get that done, and the kids Medicaid was still pending.

They came to a special school physical clinic on a Saturday and all the kids had their physicals completed and dental exams. Not only did this help the kids start school on time, it relived much stress from this family trying to establish in a new community.

Crane River Theater

Crane River Theater is established around the belief that lifting up the arts will only help in creating a richer and more vibrant community. The arts improve our quality of life. They remind us how to dream. They allow us to escape. They encourage us to fantasize about a world we aspire to. Our journey with Crane River Theater has witnessed this first hand on many occasions. Whether it is the child on the playground

that organizes rehearsals with her friends to recreate the joy she shared at one of our Yanney Park productions, or the high school student that has long been silent finding the strength to express himself for the first time in one of our workshops, or even the elderly woman that waits for an hour following each production to offer her gratitude to each and every performer for giving her the opportunity to reflect on her own life, the power of theater is limitless. Thornton Wilder once said “the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being is through the theater.” Please take a moment today to help us encourage the creativity of our youth, and remind us all why it is important to laugh, cry and reflect.

Food Bank for the Heartland

Partnership Builds Career Skills and Promotes Philanthropy Through a new partnership with Food Bank for the Heartland, students in Bryan High School’s Transportation, Distribution and Logistics (TDL) program are learning career-readiness skills while helping food-insecure children throughout Nebraska and western Iowa.

TDL students are packing 2,050 food bags on site at the high school each week for the Backpack program. This is approximately 25 percent of the total number distributed each week during the school year by the Food Bank.

In September 2018, Food Bank staff members Dave Love, distribution center director, and Spencer Cohorst, volunteer coordinator, met with students and faculty in the TDL program about the purpose and logistics of packing and distributing food bags for the Backpack program. The Food Bank also delivered materials necessary for packing the food bags and readying them for distribution.

Some students were familiar with the program because they had personally received Backpack meals as elementary students. TDL faculty members say that the students are invested in this partnership with Food Bank for the Heartland not only because they are learning valuable supply chain management skills but also because they know they are making a difference for the at-risk children who are participating in the Backpack program and are receiving the meals they packed.

Foundation for Lincoln City Libraries

A mother of five young children, with one of the children dealing with a serious illness, commented that she loves Lincoln City Libraries, because our libraries are free and are the ONLY options that her children have for books and entertainment.

Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools

Mike loved being a dad. He and his wife Kris, have always had good jobs and done well for themselves. When little Jayden came along, they couldn’t believe how much they loved being parents. The late nights and extra chores, all paled in comparison to their

perfect little girl. Soon she was in grade school, and everything was going right on track, Mike thought. Until the day Jayden ended up in the hospital with an unexpected medical complication that caused numerous outstanding medical bills. They couldn't believe how expensive it was, but at least Jayden was ok. Mike and Kris set up a payment plan for their medical bills, but couldn't pay them all, along with their rent and food bills - suddenly, they were on the verge of losing their home. Thankfully, they got help.

The Foundation and LPS worked with the family to pool the back rent and pay the landlord with the help of generous Foundation donors. Now the family is back on track, and they don't have to worry about uprooting Jayden from her school and home. Most families who receive assistance, only receive it once, due to unexpected circumstances. Assisting these families helps them to maintain stability over the long term.

Grief's Journey

"My husband was in a fatal motorcycle accident. Our girls at that time were 8 and 3 years old. We felt very nervous about sharing our story but I wanted to make sure the girls felt comfortable enough to talk about it and heal in the process. Grief's Journey has been life changing for our family. My girls are able to talk about their dad and although we are still in the grieving process we have made a lot of progress. It's been about 3 years now since our first support sessions and the girls still talk about how much they enjoyed it." - Maria

Habitat for Humanity Lincoln

Abdelkarim and his wife Sailwa are raising four young sons ages 2 – 11. They lived in a three-bedroom, 1- bathroom home that had a lot of structural damage. The windows were hard to open, and some are missing screens leaving them unusable. They had no air conditioning and only one window unit which was in the living room. The children would sleep together in the living room during the hot summer months.

The basement was unusable because of the leaking water pipes and overgrowing mold. The family battled against snakes and mice coming into the home. They tried traps and home pest control, but the problem remained. This home was one of the worst, in terms of conditions, the homeowner selection committee visited during 2018.

Abdelkarim and Sailwa applied for the homebuyer program so they could build a better future for their children. They wanted a safe home to raise their growing sons. They look forward to being good neighbors by taking care of each other, helping others out and becoming part of the neighborhood.

"I tell my kids today 'Grow up, go to school, be successful and then give back to your community that helped you.' It is important to stay involved with Habitat for Humanity who has given us so much."

In addition to celebrating the dedication of his home, that same week Abdelkarim graduated from Southeast Community College with his associate degree in Business Administration. His ultimate goal is to become a CPA.

Your donations supported Abdelkarim and Sailwa's dream of affordable homeownership. They will raise their young family in safe, affordable home. They have a place to study, pay an affordable mortgage and continue their educational dreams.

Houses of Hope of Nebraska, Inc.

Chad had struggled with serious alcohol and drug use for 28 years and was recently diagnosed with depression. He experienced legal problems, loss of employment, financial struggles and detachment and loss of family. Chad was referred to Houses of Hope to continue treatment for his substance use and mental health - and support as he learned life skills and discipline he would need to successfully transition back to the work force.

Chad participated in individual, group and family counseling sessions to improve interactions with others, to learn about his addiction, and to develop healthy ways to maintain his mental and physical health. With that foundation in recovery Chad was able to obtain two part-time jobs. After several months he found a full-time job that offered insurance benefits.

In the 11 months he was in treatment Chad remained sober, was able to get caught up on overdue bills, set aside money for a deposit on his own apartment, and for furnishings he needed for that move. Chad was successful in drug court and by the time of his graduation from treatment he had family members that were once again actively involved and supportive of his recovery efforts.

As he moved into his own apartment Chad was stable and using a strong sober support group in the community. Chad once again had hope for his future.

Humanities of Nebraska

Julia learned to explore different perspectives on global policies at Capitol Forum on America's Future. She is now a senator representing her home district at the Nebraska Unicameral.

Joaquin didn't like school and never read on his own. Now that he attends Prime Time Family Reading Time, he is interested in books, his grades have improved, and his mother has confidence he will graduate from high school.

Valerie found that hosting a Museum on Main Street exhibit from the Smithsonian increased the total number of visitors to the museum she manages by 20%, including a boost in out-of-town visitors who ate and shopped locally, giving her community a measurable economic boost.

Tameka found the courage to speak her mind and make an impact when a published poet mentored her school's Louder Than a Bomb slam poetry team.

Inclusive Communities

“[IncluCity] was a place of acceptance and honestly I was just being me... I felt accepted and I could freely be who I am,” recounts Isaiah, a 17-year-old junior who attended the camp in January. Since returning from IncluCity, Isaiah has made an intentional effort to be more welcoming to new students and those sitting alone at lunch. “[IncluCity] has truly tremendously affected me by allowing me to be open and accepting to other people around me who I’m not usually comfortable with, but now I’m able to see a different perspective of people,” he added. “After Inclusive Communities, I was brought into a light.”

Isaiah was one of two students selected to speak about his camp experience at the 2018 Humanitarian Brunch in April to a crowd of over 400 people. Although he was anxious at first, being told by his sister and other adults that he inspired them was an impactful and prideful moment. Isaiah has a special message to share with the IC staff and volunteers: “Thank you for believing in me and endowing me with this opportunity to allow my voice to be heard from a lot of people and to be that role model to some people.”

Junior League of Lincoln

The Junior League of Lincoln is working to support at-risk women transitioning to independence (ages 16-24). Transition-aged youth are a difficult population to reach, though this age can be a life-changing time. We know that young women who have stability in their lives are likely to have better outcomes such as better grades, high school graduation, and better pay; however, many transition-aged youth lack stability needed to succeed. These youth have faced a variety of challenges, for example, being in the foster care system since they were very young, criminal offenses, and/or mental health issues.

Further complicating the needs of transition-aged youth in Lincoln, is the long waiting list for adequate housing options, placing youth at risk of homelessness. For youth who are able to obtain housing, they do not have the financial ability to stock an empty apartment with needed goods.

For this reason, JLL established HomeStart, a “store” of household goods where young adults can shop for the basics needed to furnish their own apartment free of charge. Typical needs include shower curtains, cleaning supplies, linens, and dishware. JLL provides these items new or gently used. With basic household needs secured, transition-aged youth will be able to better establish themselves as independent adults by building resumes and/or pursuing further education. The store will remove barriers and support the stability of young women living independently.

Leadership Lincoln, Inc.

Part of our alumni engagement is an outreach program for any group or agency in the community that wants to develop a greater understanding of the issues related to poverty. Leadership Lincoln alumni volunteer to facilitate a poverty simulation to interested groups and then engage in a conversation with the participants following their experience helping them see the challenges facing those in the community experiencing poverty.

Often times the participants share, "I had no idea it was this much of a struggle" and "How do you find time for your kids?". It has been an extremely impactful exercise and one that is in high demand moving forward. Schools, churches, and businesses have reached out to schedule time for their respective staffs to experience this activity.

Lincoln Arts Council

Have you ever felt so inhibited that you were afraid to apply more than one color to a paper page? John did. He had received so much criticism in his young life that he was paralyzed. When he first arrived at the Lancaster County residential detention center, the staff thought he was mute. Terese was a perfectionist. When she was presented with materials to sketch or paint, she had to have a straight edge to make shapes. She would become agitated if the lines and angles didn't look "just right."

Now imagine the transformation for John, who is rising to greet the resident artist, looking her in the eye and engaging in positive conversation. Visualize the freedom for Terese when she finally "let go," and just began looping large free-hand circles on her paper. "Look at me! I'm drawing!" It may be difficult to imagine a life without the simplest of art materials. Harder still to comprehend an environment devoid of positive reinforcement or the opportunity to experiment and create. Just know this – for some people, experiencing the arts genuinely changes their life. This is the work we get excited about. This is the work you support with a donation to the Lincoln Arts Council.

Lincoln Children's Museum

Lisa and her husband Eric were living the good life. "We were both working, making good money and enjoying ourselves. We didn't really save for a rainy day...but, then again, who really does? I never thought that I would someday qualify for Medicaid or stand in line at a food distribution center."

Unfortunately, Lisa hurt her back and was unable to continue working in her chosen career field. Not long after that, Eric lost his job in construction. After months of looking, he found another job, but his take-home pay dropped significantly. It was during this time that Lisa and Eric took advantage of the Have A Heart program, a subsidized annual museum pass for households meeting income qualifications.

The impact of the Have A Heart program for Lisa was significant. "When our world seemed to be falling apart, trips to the Museum with my girls became a real respite. For a few hours I could forget about our problems and take pride in the fact that I could still be a good mom, still provide good educational experiences for my kids. I want to thank

all the donors who contribute to the Museum to make the Have A Heart program possible.”

Lincoln Children’s Zoo

Children at the Zoo (CATZ) is the Lincoln Children’s Zoo’s largest community outreach program and an enduring symbol of community partnership. This program empowers at-risk children and their families to visit the Zoo, encouraging them to enjoy and connect to each other and the natural world around them. In 2018 the Zoo partnered with 34 local human services agencies to distribute 20,000 free admission passes, as well as 1,000 family memberships for low income children and their families. The agencies that we work with serve a wide range of ethnicities, physical abilities, and ages,. Tickets are made available to children and families who would normally not be able to visit the Zoo due to their financial circumstances.

The program is simple in design. Nonprofit social service agencies and Title 1 schools apply for the tickets on behalf of their low income clients and students. Once their application is received, the Zoo grants free tickets to the limit of our ability. Those nonprofits, in turn, dispense the free tickets to their clients. Children and families can use those tickets to visit the Zoo at any time during the regular season.

Through partnerships with community organizations that have identified children from low-income families, the Lincoln Children’s Zoo is committed to creating opportunities for families to have firsthand experiences in the natural world, and with your help we can continue to provide this vital outreach.

Lincoln Community Playhouse

Theatre changes lives. For the past five years, the Playhouse has been privileged to be the first replication site of The Penguin Project. This unique program pairs children with special needs with peer mentors.

It has made a positive impact on the lives of Erik Betts, 13, and Trey Anderson, 11.

Erik, who has autism, has been an artist in The Penguin Project for the past three years, playing major roles including Troy in High School Musical Jr. This is Trey’s first year as a mentor. Although they go to the same school, they met and become friends through The Penguin Project.

“It’s super fun,” says Erik. “I’ve met lots of new people. They accept me for who I am.” “Erik has become more confident and happy,” says his mom Lisa Betts. “He’s not as afraid and intimidated, and he’s more comfortable around other people.”

Trey says he and Erik work great as a team. One night, Erik developed a nosebleed at the end of one of his scenes on stage. As they were trying to stop the bleeding, Trey realized he had to step forward and take Erik’s place on stage.

“He was more my mentor than I was his,” Trey said. “We work well together so we’re going to work together again this year.”

Lincoln Parks Foundation

Lincoln has an impressive community wide parks and recreation system that includes 128 parks, 85 playgrounds, 133 miles of trails, 10 pools, 5 recreation centers, and 5 public golf courses. Excellent amenities like these are important for our community's strong quality of life and economic development. The Lincoln Parks Foundation works in partnership with the Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department to sustain and improve our park system. We are grateful for the support of individuals, corporate donors, and other charitable foundations in this effort.

As part of our mission, we provide support for citizens, charitable groups, businesses, and neighborhood associations in making improvements to the park facilities in their neighborhood. In 2017, we supported six different community-led projects, including a free concert at Tower Square, yoga in Antelope Park, and a pollinator garden at Calvert Recreation Center. In 2018, we will work with an 8-year-old boy to add playground equipment to his neighborhood park, Bishop Heights. The work of the Foundation is magnified and amplified by the passion and care of our citizens. Each person can make a difference...we are here to help. We are grateful for your support!

Lincoln’s Symphony Orchestra

Lincoln’s Symphony Orchestra began working with Family Literacy (an English Language Learning program for parents and children through Lincoln Public Schools, serving the immigrant and refugee community) to provide a cultural literacy component in 2012. Participants attend Family Concerts free of charge, along with all family members living in the same household (totaling approximately 700 persons per concert). In addition, transportation is provided. Prior to the performance, LSO staff visit all twelve Family Literacy sites with translators to prepare them for the concert experience. Attendees receive information including concert etiquette, classical music history, instruments used in the concert, and a description of the story line.

Through the partnership with Family Literacy, members of the immigrant and refugee community that are otherwise unable to attend cultural performances will enjoy live symphonic music. Mexican, Russian, Sudanese, Iraqi, Vietnamese, Burmese, Kurdish families, and others, are in the program. Most are unable to attend not only because of the perceived cultural barrier, but because of the very true challenge of transportation and financial restrictions. This partnership ensures that participants experience all aspects of American culture, going beyond what is typically learned in an ELL program. This unique element, cultural literacy, is a portion of what helps Family Literacy participants more comfortable in American society.

Make-A-Wish Nebraska

Children are energized and encouraged by their wish. They can imagine, describe, plan, anticipate, and eventually rejoice in its fruition. Make-A-Wish encourages a child to envision a positive future and remain an active partner in treatment. One parent wrote these inspiring words about her daughter's wish:

"As a mom of a Wish Kid, I cannot tell you how much Make-A-Wish means to families. My daughter was diagnosed with cancer when she was 2 ½. After 10 months of surgeries, radiation, and chemo, she was able to go on her Make-A-Wish trip to Disney World. For that week, she was a happy, carefree 3-year-old. No doctors, no needles, no "ouchies". Just a "normal" child. It brought tears to my eyes to watch her have the time of her life. She had private meetings with the Princesses as well as private time with Barney, who hugged her non-stop. Make-A-Wish made sure that she was treated as a true princess. At the time, we had no way of knowing that she would be soon having an emergency surgery that would remove 18 inches of her intestine. During her recovery, we often talked about her wish. She would say, "Tell me the story again of when the princesses all hugged me." It is only with your help that Make-A-Wish can grant these types of life-changing moments for children."

The Mediation Center

One of The Mediation Center's newest programs is Victim/Youth Conferencing in the Lincoln Public Schools' Middle and High Schools. This program brings youth who have committed an offense during school and their 'victim' together in a face-to-face meeting to learn from each other's perspective and find a way to solve the conflict and provide restitution. By participating in this, the youth stays out of the judicial system for an offence that might typically land them in front of a judge and, hopefully, learns a little bit about peaceful conflict resolution.

Point in fact: A student felt attacked by another student, certain that it was racially motivated, and responded physically. He was referred to a Victim/Youth Conference, led by The Mediation Center. During this conference he came to realize that his aggressive response not only negatively affected him but also negatively affected his family. This was a big "aha" moment for him. He worked with our facilitator and the other student to make it right while also working with our mediator on how to respond differently in the future. This type of positive outcome from a negative experience is precisely what the Victim/Youth Conference program works to achieve.

Mental Health Association of Nebraska

Lamont's story starts at a very young age. He has spent his entire adult life in prison for various crimes. Lamont met MHA peers while participating in WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) in restricted housing at TSCI. He kept in touch with MHA peers and upon release in November of 2018, was accepted into MHA's transitional program, Honu Home. After being incarcerated for almost 15 years, this adjustment proved to be very difficult and Lamont relapsed. He was asked to leave the Honu home, went on run, ended up at D&E for three weeks before going up before the parole board again. MHA peers went to the hearing and advocated for Lamont to try again at Honu Home. The

parole board agreed and he returned to Honu. In the months that followed, Lamont gained and maintained a full-time job as a maintenance man, saved enough money to get an apartment and was eventually hired on as an MHA peer in April of 2019 to "pay it forward" and help others who are in the same situation he once was in. Lamont is now going back into the prison system to facilitate WRAP groups with other MHA peers and feels blessed to be a part of the team.

MENTOR Nebraska

For more than seven years, MENTOR Nebraska has collected mentoring data across the community. Based on the information gathered, it was determined at-risk audiences, including juvenile justice and foster care youth, were not being reached in high enough numbers with formal mentoring services. It was also clear from the data that more could be done to serve youth living in some of the higher poverty areas of our community. In partnership with member programs, MENTOR Nebraska launched Youth Initiated Mentoring to reach at risk youth. The program helps youth identify a positive adult in their network to become their formal mentor.

Linda Rozo was asked by a youth she coached in basketball to be a mentor. "Mentoring has shown me the beauty of being someone else's cheerleader. I used to be so consumed with my personal, emotional, spiritual growth that I didn't pour into others around me. I guarded my time, energy, and resources for fear of depleting myself. And while I believe self-care and personal growth is incredibly important, I strongly believe that thinking outside of yourself is just as important. So, I went from being my own cheerleader in life, to finding great joy and significance in being hers." - Linda Rozo, Youth Initiated Mentor.

Merryman Performing Arts Center

On Tuesday, February 12 the Merryman Performing Arts Center (MPAC) in Kearney, presented Illusion Theater of Minneapolis theatrical adaptation of Willa Cather's My Antonia. Despite a last minute rescheduling due to inclement weather, MPAC was still able to host 12 schools; Riverside High School in Cedar Rapids, Elwood Lexington, Arnold, Arapahoe, Loup City, well as nearly 100 students from Kearney Catholic. Nearly 450 students attended the matinee performance. University of Nebraska Students also attended the public performance on Monday, Feb 11.

The Merryman provided post-performance surveys to students and teachers. These surveys asked for general impressions as well as specific comparisons to the novel. The students observed several different themes from the play from "the struggles that faced Nebraskans back in the day" to more personal resonances like "stay close to your old friends". Many of the students who had read the novel enjoyed the theatrical adaptation ("It was just like reading the book!") while other students were more critical of the liberties taken to condense Cather's story ("There was so much left out it didn't complete their characters").

Teachers commented: "So many rural kids don't get the benefit of a professional, live performance so I like to take them as much as possible!". Another teacher mentioned the benefits of attending live theater: "The [Illusion Theater study guide] was wonderful and provided a great resource for teachers/students. The students are so into technology, so a performance such as this pulls them into the world as it was". A few others commented specifically on how the play fit into their curricula. Several teachers used the play as an introduction the novel they were about to read and others asked students to compare the play to the novel.

MilkWorks

"Thank you so much to your organization! I came in with my 8 week twins a couple days after my husband left for a deployment for some extra help. They had been extra fussy lately and difficult. Not only did my IBCLC help with improvement almost immediately, she also reassured me I was doing a good job and at that moment it was everything I needed. I'll likely be back to make sure our issues are fixed/improving and that the girls are gaining appropriately. I only wish I had come in sooner and with my first daughter. It would've made the breastfeeding journey even better." - Caitlynn E.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)

When Jenna entered a room, it lit up, not only from her smile and personality, but from her willingness to help and inspire others. She was loved by her parents, family, teammates, friends, coaches, and really anyone she came into contact with. Jenna had a passion for sports ever since her mother could remember. Jenna's connection to sports allowed her to travel and compete against teams across the country. Her parents found joy in watching their daughter play sports, and spent many hours traveling and cheering her on.

On December 31, 2015, Jenna went to a New Year's Eve party with a group of friends. There was underage drinking at the party and even though people knew the driver had been drinking, they didn't stop him from driving. At just 16 years old, Jenna was killed after being ejected from a vehicle driven by a driver with a BAC of .208, more than twice the legal limit. The driver survived the crash. He pled guilty to criminally negligent homicide, and was sentenced to 5 years of probation. Jenna's parents were devastated by the courts decision. They believe that probation shouldn't be an option when someone kills someone else in a drunk driving crash. They continue to remain positive in honor of Jenna but would also like to see laws change to reflect the seriousness of the crime.

Jenna's mother, wishes she would have spoken to her daughter more about underage drinking, and encourages all parents to talk to their adolescents about the possible consequences. She believes drunk driving is a selfish act that is completely preventable. She hopes that Jenna's story will prevent others from making the same mistakes and save lives. MADD's Power of Youth works on creating intentional, ongoing, and potentially lifesaving conversations between parents and kids about

alcohol. Join us to learn valuable strategies for how to talk with your child or teen about not drinking and not riding with a drinking driver.

Museum of Nebraska Art

One aspect of the Museum of Nebraska Art's mission is to engage the public with Nebraska Art. MONA volunteers visit six care homes in the Kearney-area each month to show an original artwork from the Museum's collection and share a story about the artist or method used to produce the artwork.

One such volunteer is Jerry Gronewold, a retired art teacher with Holdrege Public School District. He has faithfully visited Mount Carmel Home every month for 8 years, except for those occasions when he and his wife go out of town to visit their children or take a vacation. His is such a familiar face at Mount Carmel that the residents have taken to calling him "Mr. MONA."

Jerry catches glimpses of what the artworks evoke within residents by their reactions and comments. Several have memory problems. "Mr. MONA" sees the faces of these folks light up when a particular painting, print, or sculpture triggers a meaningful memory that they just have to tell about. One charming lady told the group (averaging 12 monthly), "I so look forward to this visit because the art always cheers me up!" One of the gentlemen regulars mentioned "I would not miss seeing the art, it makes my day!"

Thank you, Mr. MONA, for helping the Museum bring joy to many!

NALHD – Nebraska Association of Local Health Directors

When we think of "health," a visit to the doctor comes to mind. But factors outside clinics or hospitals—in our homes, workplaces, schools, and communities—play bigger roles in our health. Many health problems can be avoided with cost-effective prevention programs. As the locally governed Chief Health Strategists in districts that cover from 1 to 11 counties, Nebraska's local public health departments (LHDs) develop programs and policies that promote safety, health, and wellness across entire communities. They work to keep their whole communities healthy and well by preventing diseases and by addressing public health emergencies. Resources to support LHDs are unpredictable and scarce. On average only 35% (and as little as 4%) of LHD revenues come from reliable state and local tax dollars.

Through NALHD, member LHDs secure additional resources and amplify their effectiveness. Since 2012, NALHD members have secured over \$2.5million in federal and private grants that are benefiting the 77 counties they serve. Through NALHD, members are providing military cultural competence training to over 500 rural providers, supporting veteran family-centered programs in rural communities, and helping LHD staff and partners hone their health communication skills with all community members, regardless of their English literacy.

An investment in public health system infrastructure, through NALHD, helps to prevent illness, reduce health care costs, and improve the quality of life for all Nebraskans.

The Nature Conservancy in Nebraska

Your donations help to support one of the most biologically diverse and beautiful places in Nebraska – the Niobrara Valley Preserve (NVP).

Over thirty years ago, The Nature Conservancy made a huge strategic investment in the conservation of the Niobrara River and its iconic valley. With the purchase of two ranches from willing sellers, the Conservancy created what is still the largest nongovernmental wildlife area in the state: the Niobrara Valley Preserve. This is particularly significant in Nebraska, which has the lowest percentage of conservation land of any state except Iowa. The investment was strategic, too, because it helped secure permanent protection for 26 miles of the Niobrara River.

The Preserve is a keystone of a 30-mile segment of the Niobrara River that biologists call the biological crossroads of the Great Plains. Six ecosystems converge there. More than 600 plant species and 85 butterfly species have been documented on the NVP. 268 species of birds have been reported, making it one of Nebraska’s most bird-rich regions. This land, with its unique stands of aspen and birch, is known for its prairie grasses and species adapted to those grasses.

Visitors to the Preserve enjoy two nature trails. Two bison herds help manage acres of prairie that stretch as far as the eye can see. While the Preserve is operated as a working ranch, donations help the Conservancy host groups of students and researchers and meet our management goals so that this special place reflects Nebraska’s natural heritage – forever.

Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers

The mission of the Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers is to enhance Nebraska’s response to child abuse. This means caring for not only child victims and their families, but also the professionals who work tirelessly every day to keep children safe and help them find healing and justice.

Years of investigating cases of children who are sexually abused by adults they trust, cases of severe physical abuse, and more, take their toll. First responders to child abuse and neglect cases often experience vicarious trauma and secondary traumatic stress. This stress affects them individually, often impacting their personal mental health and home lives. It also influences their ability to continue the important work they do and their professional relationships.

This year, the Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers piloted “Building Resiliency” training across the state to ninety-six professionals from child protective services, law enforcement, prosecutors, mental health and medical providers and child advocacy center staff. This training gave these professionals the tools they need to

understand how trauma impacts their work. It also provided them with tools to take individual and collective action to better support those responding to child abuse and neglect. Training participants reported they enjoyed the team-building activities, having a non-judgmental safe environment for sharing, and felt the training was valuable. Due to its success, the Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers will continue to offer this training and engage professionals in healthy ways to face adversity.

Nebraska Appleseed

For years, Caroline fought a chronic illness and fought to stay employed, taking on multiple jobs to help pay for her medical bills. But her disease often kept her from being able to work. Unexpected medical emergencies and expensive medications threatened her life and made it impossible to make ends meet. Like nearly 100,000 Nebraskans without health insurance, she was faced with impossible choices, every day.

When Nebraska Appleseed began efforts to expand Medicaid began in 2013, Caroline was one of the first to join the Medicaid expansion fight. She quickly became a driving force alongside Appleseed, taking on a leadership role as she worked to find a solution to the problem that she and so many others faced.

Early on, Caroline spoke with a woman who, like herself, couldn't get affordable health insurance. The woman's expression changed from one of frustration to amazement as Caroline explained how nearly one-hundred thousand Nebraskans were hurting, sick, and unable to get the care they so desperately needed. She helped the woman realize, for the first time, that she was not alone.

Nebraska Appleseed is proud to fight alongside advocates like Caroline every day, who want to make their voices heard and impact their communities for change. Whether that means taking Caroline's fight to the courthouse, advocating for change with her lawmakers, or building community support, Nebraska Appleseed exists so that when Nebraskans like Caroline fight for justice, they're never fighting alone.

Nebraska Association for the Education of Young Children

Christina graduated at the end of the Winter 2018 term with her Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education from Metropolitan Community College in Omaha. She was first awarded a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship in the Fall 2015 term. She completed 102 credits on the quarter system at Metropolitan Community College and graduated while working full time as a teacher in a child care program in Elkhorn.

Christina says, "The first time I heard of the T.E.A.C.H. program was two and a half years ago. At first it sounded a little too good to me true to have assistance with school as long as I can continue working at the same center. I decided to apply for it anyways and go for it. The T.E.A.C.H. program has meant so much to me and my family. Without it I would not have been able to complete all of my classes within this last two and a half years. I would be taking one class at a time, hoping to be able to pay for the tuition and books. Because my job sponsored me, I felt that I had a much better support system

this time attending college. While this journey has not been easy, I have learned so much, and I am glad I found out about this opportunity."

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

Barb, a single mom, was being evicted. She was overwhelmed and didn't know where to turn. She was down on her luck but was, thankfully, referred to a local Community Response Navigator, a strategy of Nebraska Children's prevention efforts.

Community Response (CR) connects families to local supports and provides preventative funding for services so that families are strengthened and can avoid unnecessary involvement in governmental systems such as child welfare.

The CR navigator worked with Barb to create meaningful change in her life. They collaborated to establish a budget and sustainability plan. The CR team helped Barb contact her landlord, who granted her a flexible payment plan for her past due rent. Now, Barb and her children could stay in the home they loved. Soon, Barb was saving money and keeping up with her commitments. She felt empowered by her new set of strengths and learned lasting skills.

If Nebraska Children's Community Response prevention strategy had not been implemented, Barb would have been homeless, and her child could have been removed. This new way of thinking saved heartache for Barb's family, and money for the child welfare system.

Nebraska Children's Home Society

There was a time in my life when Mother's Day was very difficult. I wanted nothing more than to be a mom and celebrate that day by waking up to a "Good morning mommy!" and maybe a finger-painted card next to a barely edible breakfast. My husband and I had been trying to have a baby for a few years, and though I had received the green light from my fertility care doctor, month after month, year after year no baby came. So we filled up our time volunteering, working and traveling.

After a life changing mission trip to a children's home in Guatemala, my husband and I knew we were called to pursue adoption. We looked at several agencies and choose Nebraska Children's Home. We were attracted to their vision of caring for the women that come to them, whether they decide to parent or choose to make an adoption plan. We learned so much about adoption while going through the education and home study process, and our caseworker became someone who walked beside us on our journey.

When I finally got 'the call' I was sitting at work on a random Tuesday. My heart raced and my hands shook as I listened to the details of the pregnant birthmom interested in meeting us. I called my husband and said "It's a boy!". Two days later we met our son's birthmom. We were so nervous but her caseworker was there to help facilitate the conversation and put everyone at ease. We hit it off and a week later were by her side

as she delivered our son. My husband cut the umbilical cord and I was the first one to hold him. The hospital was kind enough to allow us to stay there with them and everyone kept asking if our son's birthmom and I were sisters because of the solid bond we had.

Several years have passed since then and our son now has a little brother. Presently, my Mother's Days are filled with wrestling matches, dandelion 'flowers' and little finger-painted butterflies. I am so grateful NCHS walked with us on our journey to becoming a family and they continue to walk with us today.

Nebraska Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence

The Nebraska Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence envisions a world where domestic violence and sexual assault are a distant memory and healthy relationships prosper. To this end, we are committed to social change work through innovative thinking. Our Catalyzing Change project has allowed us to work collaboratively with our member programs and allies to develop a shared vision of the world we are trying to create, and foster a sense of inter-connectedness. This focus has permitted us to provide the opportunity for advocates to embrace and learn about a larger movement, giving a purpose and meaning to work that may otherwise feel isolated. Advocates have been supported in building leadership skills, developing the future leaders for our state and ensuring growth of individuals as well as our social change momentum. Through this project we have centered the importance of self-care, to prevent loss of those who we have trained as leaders in our movement. We have also strengthened the ability of advocates to provide services and safety for survivors in Nebraska, while also addressing the root causes of violence in our communities.

Nebraska Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association

A volunteer in rural Nebraska was serving as an advocate for small children who had been removed from their mother's care. Mom's addiction issues kept her from providing a safe home. The CASA volunteer, assigned by the Judge to watch over these small children, reported to the court on their safety and well-being.

This case proceeded with mom fulfilling the requirements to reunify with her children. The children were eventually returned to live with mom. The case was set to close soon, but the CASA volunteer felt she needed to make one more visit.

What she found was a mom who was so high, she was unable to stand. Mom had been using drugs that were undetectable on her required drug tests and fooling everyone in regard to staying sober.

Had the children's CASA volunteer not taken that last final step to make a visit, the case would have closed with no one providing oversight for these small, helpless children.

Nebraska Recycling Council

Our children are not thinking about micro-plastics in our drinking water, hazardous waste management, or the trillions of pounds of trash and valuable resources filling up our landfills. We do that for them. Nebraska Recycling Council works towards a future in which all materials and resources are reserved for the highest and best use and landfill disposal is the last resort. In 2018, we educated 15,213 people through webinars, presentations, meetings and outreach. We collected 13,260 pounds of recyclables at our first Lincoln Earth Day CHaRM event (hard to recycle materials), and had 8,676 visitors to our online recycling guide (where to recycle anything). We support the future generations.

Nebraska Sports Council

"I got my start in the Cornhusker State Games when I was 8 years old and that was my first introduction into competitive athletics and I've loved it ever since all the way up to the Olympics. I would encourage everyone to get involved whether you're an Athlete...young or old...recreational or competitive or a Volunteer or a Sponsor and support the Nebraska Sports Council" ~Olympic Gold Medalist, Curtis Tomasevicz

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum

Every landscape we help develop has a story—and many dedicated people—behind it. Humboldt's Southeast Nebraska Cancer Garden is the newest affiliate of the Arboretum. Their goal was to create a tranquil arboretum in tribute to cancer survivors, those still fighting it and those who have lost their battle to cancer... to offer a sense of physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. That's precisely what happened. This tranquil garden with trees, shrubs, flower beds, hardscape paths, rockwork, a pergola and a waterfall is a gift that brought together the whole community in its development and now the gift spreads to all who visit it.

Nebraska Trails Foundation

A young engineer, looking to move away from the big cities on the east coast, began a journey across the United States with his bicycle and a resume. After visiting many communities between New England and Nebraska, this promising young man decided to stop in Lincoln. He visited the State Capitol and received a free map of the multi-use trails in Lancaster County and greater Nebraska. He was impressed with the network and connectivity of the trails across the state. At a job interview, the interviewer looked at his resume and seeing his previous address in New England asked, "What made you decide to move to Nebraska?" His answer was that one of the key factors was the trail network. He described how he decided this would be a perfect place to raise a family. He said the network of trails would provide a safe place to exercise, bike to work, ride and walk safely with children.

The Nebraska Trails Foundation (NTF) is an important partner in the acquisition, development, and promotion of multi-use recreational trails across Nebraska. NTF participates in the purchase and acquisition of abandoned railway lines to be used for multi-use trails. The trails are used by the public for transportation, recreation, and promotion of healthy lifestyles, all while preserving the environment.

NET Foundation for Radio

Love for Radio and Television Inspires Gift A rich accent is the first clue that Scottsbluff wasn't Rae E. Whitney's first home. She was born in England in 1927, so it's no surprise that some of her favorite television programs on NET are ones about her home country. British dramas are her favorite, but she also enjoys BBC World News, as well as history and science programs such as NOVA. "I enjoy most of it," she added.

In England, Rae graduated with honors from the University of Bristol and taught secondary school English and religion. She met her husband Clyde E. Whitney during a trip to Italy in 1960 where he romantically proposed after knowing her just a week. They were married six months later and she returned with Clyde to Nebraska, where he had been a priest at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Scottsbluff since 1944.

"Clyde enjoyed public radio very much," according to Rae. He first heard it on a trip through Iowa and was pleased when the statewide network launched in Nebraska. Clyde died in 1992, and years later Rae had the idea to support the radio he enjoyed and the television she still watches. "I wanted to do something for NET because my husband loved it so well and so do I," she said.

Rae had money in a certificate of deposit that wasn't earning much, so she explored several options, originally choosing to arrange a charitable gift annuity to benefit NET. "I felt like we owed quite a debt to NET and this way we both win," she explained. "I get more income right now and NET benefits when I die."

Rae says her life is good and hopes to live longer. She keeps busy teaching classes at Episcopal and Presbyterian churches, and enjoys book club and a philosopher's club at the retirement community where she lives. She has written hymns most of her life, penning more than 500 texts, a number of which have been published in hymnals and supplements.

NET Foundation for Television

Nathan Jensen, Lincoln (As appeared in May 2018 INSIDE NET)

Nathan Jensen grew up watching Sesame Street when he was young and later enjoyed science programs like NOVA and History Detectives with his family around the television set in Omaha. Now he watches his favorite programs on his laptop via NET Passport, an online viewing library boasting more than 1,500 episodes of PBS and NET shows which are available anytime.

“My uncle served in Vietnam, so when Ken Burns’ The Vietnam War came out, I wanted to watch the new documentary to educate myself about his experience,” Nathan explained. NET Passport gave him the opportunity to watch the 10-part series as his schedule allowed. Jensen, a senior mechanical engineering student at the University of NebraskaLincoln, made a commitment to support NET and is setting the pace for his own generation. “I feel like I am giving back to something that helped to educate me, and I want to help others, it feels good,” Nathan explained about his recent contribution. After graduation this month, Jensen plans to return to UNL and begin his master’s degree. He hopes his studies will lead him to a future career with NASA. “I had an internship with them last year at the Ames Research Center near San Francisco. My dream would be to work for NASA after I graduate,” he added.

Nonprofit Association of the Midlands (NAM)

We help nonprofits help their communities. There are thousands of nonprofits in our area – each trying to make a difference on their own. We bring them together so that each member can benefit from our collective strength.

Nonprofit Association of the Midlands (NAM) is the only membership organization in the state dedicated exclusively to working with nonprofits in the Midlands. By connecting organizations with information, education, advocacy and collaboration, we help members focus their energy on the people and communities they serve.

Omaha Zoo Foundation

Conservation of the world's most precious species and habitats is at the core of the mission of Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium. From rescuing elephants from drought-stricken Swaziland to creating protocol for increasing the population of Amur Tigers, Omaha's Zoo strives to inspire learners of all ages.

Building first class exhibits to bring visitors closer to the animals in the Zoo's care, is one of the first steps in mission fulfillment and something that was at the forefront of rescuing the elephants. Preparing for their arrival included supporters of every kind. From every single donor who helped build the largest indoor herd room in North America, to the vet team who cared for them during transport, the multiplying effect of Omaha Zoo fans safely delivered them to their new home where they are thriving. Additionally, the genetic diversity offered by these elephants allows breeding efforts that will help sustain this species for generations to come.

Open Door Mission

Donna realized her addictions to alcohol and painkillers were becoming life-threatening dangers to her children and herself. At the recommendation of a few friends, she came to Open Door Mission for help. Marti, one of the Mission’s case managers, recognized that Donna was tired of the instability that marked her life. Marti encouraged Donna to try an addiction recovery program at the Mission.

“Open Door Mission opened my eyes to a lot of things I wasn’t dealing with in the right way,” Donna said. “Just like everyone else, I needed some structure in my life. Getting real about that helped me feel better about my future in just a few weeks. “I was afraid I was somehow out of God’s reach, but that wasn’t true at all. Getting my life together and establishing this relationship with God and are the best gifts I could have.”

Today, Donna is well on her way to completing her GED and furthering her education. “My children and I can look to the future with confidence now,” she says. “I know that I count now. I have people at Open Door Mission and my church who remind me that I count every day.”

Thank you for your part in helping Donna and dozens like her achieve sobriety and job readiness through Open Door Mission each year.

OutNebraska

When Nebraska's LGBTQ+ community needs to be heard in government and with community leaders, OutNebraska can provide a voice. From fighting so no one is fired because of who they are or who they love to working to give government employees fair and equitable benefits, OutNebraska has brought the stories of LGBTQ people to these and many more important conversations. Through our work, some of Nebraska’s most influential elected officials, faith leaders and business leaders have stood by the LGBTQ community. One of the individuals who shared their story with OutNebraska said "I moved from Lincoln and never thought I could consider moving back. Thanks to you, I might be able to call Nebraska home again one day."

Partnership for a Healthy Lincoln

Childhood Obesity rates have tripled since the 1970’s resulting in kids living shorter, sicker lives. Kids in lower income neighborhoods are affected even more. We work to combat to the epidemic by (1) supporting school and afterschool nutrition and fitness programs and (2) partnering with medically under-served neighborhoods on a project that promotes physical activity. Our 2017-2017 Streets Alive! Community Development Project raised funds to build an outdoor living and learning center in Belmont Park.

Breastfeeding means not only healthier moms and babies, but a healthier community. Recent research shows that if 90% of families breastfed exclusively for 6 months, nearly 1,000 deaths among infants could be prevented. While over 90% of Nebraska moms intend to breastfeed, under 26% continue to the 1 year recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Clearly, Moms need help and support. Our Community Breastfeeding Educator program has tripled the number of peer educators in the past 2 years to meet the needs of low-income moms in city.

Patient Outreach Nebraska had one of the lowest cancer screening rates in the country. As a result, we and our partners created the Nebraska Physicians Cancer Screening Initiative to help implement systematic changes that would save lives by identifying and

screening more patients for breast and colorectal cancer. The multi-year project improved screening rates with the latest data showing that Lancaster County now has the highest screening rates in the Nebraska.

Planned Parenthood of the Heartland

A single mother needs affordable, effective contraception. A young man thinks he has an STD, but he doesn't want to tell his parents he's having sex. A woman is embarrassed about a health condition, and she's close to giving up on ever finding treatment. A teen often feels pressured by her boyfriend to have sex without a condom, and she doesn't know how to say "no."

Planned Parenthood in Nebraska is here for these people and thousands more who count on our expert, nonjudgmental reproductive health care. They trust we will treat them with respect, no matter what, that we will offer medically accurate information about their health and will support them as they work to build stronger relationships. They know that, together, we can find a health plan that works for them and be there for them when they have questions.

One patient recently told us, "I get tears in my eyes because of how grateful I am to have Planned Parenthood. I've been on and off insurance for years now, so it is very overwhelming to know that even without insurance, I don't have to worry about how to pay for birth control, annual exams, and STI screenings. Thank you so much for all that you do."

Rabble Mill (The Bay, Hear Nebraska, Skate for Change)

In 2018, we were able to accomplish a long-standing goal of beginning job training in our coffee bar when we hired a 17-year-old barista, William. He's the oldest of seven kids, who live with their single mother, a refugee from the Sudan. Over the last seven years, we have worked to get the mother three vehicles, and when they were evicted on Christmas Eve two years ago, we helped move them to another home for which we signed the lease.

William started skateboarding at The Bay at 10, whose hours (open till 10 p.m. weekdays and midnight on weekends) helped keep him out of potential trouble. The culture of Bay skateboarding taught him how to fail, and to persevere, and as he put it "connected me to a community of other people just like me." While the skills he is learning as a barista could directly serve him in the future, it's the interpersonal skills he's gaining — making eye contact and conversation with customers, showing up to work on time and as scheduled, and building relationships with his co-workers — that we expect will prove invaluable.

Ronald McDonald House Charities in Omaha

Jonathan and his mother, Violeta, spent nearly the entirety of 2018 in our House. 353 days, to be exact. The stay wasn't supposed to last that long, but as the recipient of three donated organs, Jonathan's condition leaves his immune system compromised. He had several bouts of various infections, complications from medicines, and even a fractured back last year. And that followed a year in which Jonathan spent months in and out of the hospital, eventually forcing doctors to explant an organ his body was rejecting.

Through all of this chaos, Violeta was able to lean on RMHC in Omaha to help her find a sense of normalcy. Being surrounded by other families experiencing the same things provided invaluable emotional support. Volunteer-prepared meals gave her one less thing to worry about each day. Even something as seemingly simple as 24/7 laundry facilities made an impact, as Violeta says, "It was all very stressful, but knowing you can come to the House and do laundry... it's amazing what clean clothes do for you." Because of incredible supporters, families can enjoy those times where life feels ordinary.

When Jonathan wasn't in the hospital, he had time to play with friends, go to school, and participate in programming provided by collaborative partners. While our House is a thousand miles from their home, Violeta is always confident that she and her son will be well taken care of whenever they need to travel here. "We know that we can always count on the Ronald McDonald House. This is where we belong."

Seniors Foundation

The Seniors Foundation is excited the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has selected the VA Campus as the site to build the Lincoln Community-based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), a decision that opens the door to further development on the historic east Lincoln site.

This decision ends nearly a seven-year process for the Seniors Foundation, who has been working in public-private partnerships and negotiations with the City of Lincoln, developers, the local engineering, construction company and the Veterans Administration.

The new VA Clinic joins the arrival of the Veterans Assisted Supportive Housing (VASH), housing development, which opened its doors on the VA Campus in November 2017, with 70 apartments to provide homes and support for veterans in transition.

This is perhaps the first time the VA has partnered with a non-profit organization, like the Seniors Foundation, and this will serve as a model for other communities across the country. The Seniors Foundation hopes to add even more services and programs for our seniors and veterans to the development of the VA Campus.

ServeNebraska

A two-year-old autistic child enters the ACT clinic and is assessed for verbal and behavior milestones by an AmeriCorps member; the child scores a 19. After working with the child for 6 months the assessment was given to the child again, this time the child scored a 76 on the same assessment. The child made such huge gains in his verbal and behavioral activity the child's mother became even more engaged and wanted to learn what she could do at home to increase the verbal and behavior milestones. Early intervention with Autistic Children makes huge differences in their adult lives, AmeriCorps makes a difference in lives and impacts communities.

Sunrise Communications – KZUM

KZUM makes supporting our local arts scene a priority. Through events coverage, live performances and programming designed to highlight visual arts and local music, we promote more local arts than any other station in the area. As of March 2018, KZUM has created paid performance opportunities for 40 different local music acts. Sixteen of these opportunities offered promotion on an international stage through the SXSW Music Festival in Austin, Texas, and the Folk Alliance International Conference in Kansas City. In addition to music, KZUM provides promotion for Lincoln's visual arts scene. Our organization creates a monthly arts map that highlights special events showing at galleries around town and our program schedule has three shows that feature visual and performing arts. Promoting our local arts scene is promoting the vitality and heart of our community.

Tabitha

Your assistance helps individuals like Carl. Carl and his wife, Suzanne, were married 50 years before she passed away. When Suzanne became ill, the couple spent most of their retirement savings on her care. As a veteran, Carl had gone from his mother's home to the military to his wife's cooking, which left him without much knowledge of nutrition or how to prepare meals. When Carl's children came to visit, they noticed he was struggling with his own health issues, had lost weight, and was having trouble getting out to buy groceries. They contacted Tabitha Meals on Wheels to ask for help, knowing their father could not pay the entire cost of the meal. Thanks to generous community donors, Tabitha Meals on Wheels offered Carl a significantly reduced rate and helped him remain independent in the home he and his wife shared together.

University of Nebraska Foundation

Alyssia Casillas was a 14-year-old with intelligence and drive. She had good people in her life, like her mom – a single mother who worked hard to raise her three kids. But Alyssia's lack of confidence had led her to make bad choices. Friends were getting pregnant. She was hanging with a rough crowd. So when a big, handsome envelope with her name on it arrived at her Grand Island home, she was surprised. She was even more surprised when her mom read the letter inside and screamed.

“You got it! You got it!”

“I’m either in trouble or I did something really good,” Alyssia thought at the time. That was a decade ago. The letter inside announced that Alyssia had been selected for the Nebraska College Preparatory Academy, a program through the University of Nebraska-Lincoln that nurtures and mentors promising first-generation, low-income students like Alyssia through high school and college.

Alyssia graduated from UNL last year. She now is studying dental hygiene at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

“For me, the NCPA was huge,” she says. “It made that college experience that might have been extremely scary and hard so much more exciting and comfortable and enjoyable for me. “It helped me defy the odds.”

Volunteers of America Western Nebraska

Volunteers of America Western Nebraska recently worked with a single father, who had been experiencing domestic violence within his home. Our connection to him came through our home visitation program, focused on engaging parents as the first and most important teachers in their children’s lives. After experiencing a crisis situation, the father found himself in an unstable living environment with his 8-month-old child. Our agency was able to help coordinate services to help him move forward. Volunteers of America Western Nebraska was able to provide case management, navigate resources for legal representation, as well as make the initial payments to secure housing for two months so that he could build a better path, for himself and his child. The client recently reached out to our office with a message stating the following: "It's all seeming to come together but the help we got from Volunteers of America Western Nebraska is what made it all possible."

The Volunteers of America story is long and rich. And widely unknown. But we are not chasing fame or glory. Our lives are meant for service. We help because we are impassioned. We are honored.