Celebrating 45 Years of Community & Collaboration

A Message from Board Chair Mary Frey Bennett

This year marks 45 years of grantmaking at the Frey Foundation! We are thrilled to be reaching this milestone. Through three generations, the Frey Foundation has centered its philanthropy through the lens of community. A sense of place is at the heart of our work and we are forever grateful for this opportunity.

Over the years, a lot has changed. The field of family philanthropy has grown and matured, as has our foundation. Through it all, important hallmarks of our organization have remained true, including our commitment to place and collaboration.

Place is core to the Frey Foundation’s identity. West and Northern Michigan communities connect our family to its history and legacy. For us, place is the tie that binds, and we are intentional about keeping community at the heart of our philanthropy. In fact, we believe that the best neighborhoods intentionally make room for everyone and create a sense of belonging.

In 2015, our board of trustees began a journey to reexamine our grantmaking in one of our key program areas—Building Community. We wanted to dig in deeper to be a part of creating meaningful impact. We focused on listening and learning from the communities we serve in order to understand the current challenges and also identify great programs and solutions that were already working.

Ultimately, we saw the opportunity to build on efforts that improve housing affordability and accessibility, understanding there is no single response to this issue and that different communities require different approaches. Continuing an attribute of the Frey Foundation passed down from our second generation to the third generation, the team began convening and collaborating with partners in both regions to identify innovative new ideas.

In this report, you will see some of the results of these efforts. You will also hear from some of our stellar partners who are leading the way in the quest to ensure all community members have access to quality housing that they can afford.

On behalf of our board and staff, it is an honor to serve alongside you in this work. Together, we are fostering innovation and strengthening communities where families can thrive. Just imagine what we can all accomplish in the next 45 years!

With thanks and appreciation,

Mary Frey Bennett

“For us, place is the tie that binds, and we are intentional about keeping community at the heart of our philanthropy.”
Investments Guided by Placemaking & Partnerships

A letter from our President Holly Johnson

What makes a place a community? What makes a house a home? What makes an office a hub of innovation? We think that part of the answer is placemaking and it’s been an important part of our work at the Frey Foundation since our beginning.

Placemaking adds nuance to grantmaking. We like to think of it as doing with community rather than doing to community. And this concept applies across our program areas—Building Community, Children & Families, Community Arts and the Environment.

Here are two recent examples: When we awarded a grant to Habitat for Humanity of Kent County’s Bright Future Campaign—beyond considering the prospect of increased supply of safe and affordable housing in the Roosevelt Park neighborhood, we also considered how the project would improve access to services and opportunities for families there. We liked that the project would create homes. We liked that it would preserve and attract new energy into the neighborhood. We loved that the voices of the people who live there informed the plan.

I invite you to take a moment to watch the video about Ebony Road Players that is part of this report. Ebony Road recognized the powerful stories of young people within the community and saw the opportunity to create a place for expression. Alongside the local youth they serve, Ebony Road creates impact that is informed by community, centered on lived experience, and invaluably grounded in PLACE.

“At its essence, placemaking is about creating communities where all people can thrive.”

At its essence, placemaking is about creating communities where all people can thrive. Because of the Frey family’s commitment to a place-based approach—and the longevity of the foundation—we benefit from deep community knowledge and strong relationships with stellar partners. This is an advantage that allows us the opportunity to help move the needle—affecting real and lasting community change throughout Charlevoix, Emmet and Kent counties.

Over the last few months, our world has endured a global health pandemic. We know that it will take time for our community to build back what has been lost. Still, as I look around our community, I’m encouraged to see steady progress underway on many fronts. With our partners, we are delighted to be a part of breathing new life into vital civic spaces and ensuring that all of our neighbors are supported as they rebound and rebuild.

Here’s to a new decade of grantmaking that connects, engages and impacts our community.

Thank you for your partnership,
2019 RESULTS
celebrating 45 years of placemaking

TOTAL GRANTS AWARDED $4,195,812

STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS IN WEST & NORTHERN MICHIGAN

Building Community
$1,296,250
20 grants

Children & Families
$1,137,600
14 grants

Community Arts
$424,300
9 grants

Environment
$52,000
8 grants

Family & Philanthropy
$373,500
8 grants

TYPE OF SUPPORT
by amount granted in dollars

- $1,475,000
- $622,000
- $323,000
- $15,000

GRANT SIZE
by number of grants awarded

- $10-99k: 31 grants
- $1-9k: 19 grants
- $500k+: 1 grant
- $500k-499k: 8 grants

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