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. 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,

Holly Johnson

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