



Leading While Listening & Collaborating

A Message from President Holly Johnson

When we reflect on 2020 there will always be a collective sigh with memories of isolation, worry and stress. But I hope it also will be remembered as an inflection point where we built new muscle, better understood the barriers that foster inequity and deepened meaningful relationships.

I am grateful for the Frey family's long-term commitment to listening and engaging with trusted partners in West and Northern Michigan. When the pandemic descended, we leaned on established partnerships to coordinate a collective response and survey our community. We reminded ourselves to listen far more than we spoke. We asked grantees to honestly share their deepest challenges and fears and authentically tell us what they needed. Thanks to deep trust built over the years, we were able to quickly dismantle internal hurdles and granted nearly half a million dollars in crisis funding in the early weeks and months of the pandemic.

We also remained committed and stayed with our work of designing a more nimble and user-friendly grantmaking system to streamline the grant seeking and management process for our partners. We also invested in upgrades to our office. Our gathering space will now offer multiple configurations for social distancing and increased technology for local nonprofit partners to use when it is safe to do so again.

Throughout this past year, I have been in awe of the resiliency of our community; the collaborative and entrepreneurial approaches that were used to reach and help those most in need, the creative ways organizations gathered their constituents for virtual events and the positive outlooks so many shared during very dark days.

We also witnessed historical racial inequities come to a head and the resulting social unrest that played out in our streets. Our office overlooks Monroe Center Street NW, which was recently renamed Breonna Taylor Way in honor of the Grand Rapids native. We use this as a daily reminder to look within and commit to a deeper journey to understand our own implicit biases and how our collective work must keep equity at the center.

“Our old normal cannot be our new normal—we must be better.”

In light of where we have been and where we hope to go, we have resisted the urge to say, “*when we get back to normal.*” Our old normal cannot be our new normal—we must be better. We realized through this crisis that while our old normal might feel comfortable, it is not where we want to be. We want to be more engaged, more aware, more committed to fighting for social justice by elevating and amplifying diverse voices and insisting that everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Holly Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

FREY FOUNDATION