

F. M. KIRBY FOUNDATION, INC.
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September 8, 2023

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Justin Kiczek



SUBJECT: Report of the Executive Director

Many years ago, something changed in my aunt, my mother's sister. Throughout my childhood, she had been a proud, cheerful mother of three, a lover of all things Disney, quilting, and the Beatles. But I noticed that, when she attended family events, if at all, she was far more withdrawn; now, the vibrant smile that used to light up a room would quickly vanish. I felt like there was something that my extended family was not sharing with me. I did not know how to understand the change until my mother explained to me that Aunt Debbie was going through a bout of depression.

Depression? As a child, I did not know what she had to be depressed about. Her three children – my cousins – were happy and healthy kids. Her husband was a kind and involved father. We were a tight-knit extended family that gathered every Friday night for pizza. Why would she be depressed?

I still think about that episode today, whenever I feel the impulse to tell someone to just cheer up or look at the positive side. Fortunately, we, as a society, have made tremendous progress in recognizing that depression and mental illness are not character defects but health conditions that require professional attention and compassion. And fortunately, this Foundation has long recognized, through our grantmaking, the vital role of mental health and well-being.

That said, the tolls of the Covid-19 pandemic, combined with other social and technological forces, appear to have contributed to a mental health crisis in our country. It is estimated that one in five adults live with a mental illness. The CDC recently reported that 60% of adolescent girls reported feeling sadness every day for at least two weeks, while one in three considered suicide. The U.S. Surgeon General recently declared that the American populace is beset with a "loneliness epidemic." With all of this in mind, Laura and I have planned on focusing on mental health for our September 15th Board meeting, where we hope to review how the Foundation already supports mental health and propose to you some strategies for expanding this support in new directions, to meet the needs of our time.

We are pleased to announce that the Board meeting will be held at the Peck School. A grantee since 1962, Peck has educated three generations of Kirby family members as well as countless other "Downies" and "Redheads" from this region. Though our topic for the meeting is mental health, the choice of Peck as our site is not unrelated, as the school environment is only second to the home in terms of influencing a child's mental well-being. Indeed, the very mission of Peck – to inspire "students to learn rigorously, grow in character, and lead healthy, productive, and principled lives" – elevates the idea of well-being and character as among the highest callings of the school.

To kick off our day, we will begin with an 11:00 am presentation from the Mental Health Association in New Jersey. Ruth Kaluski, Director of Strategic Programs, will offer an overview of Mental Health First Aid, a training that is now available at no cost to Morris County non-profits, schools, and community organizations due to a grant from the F. M. Kirby Foundation as well as nine other local funders. Ruth will share her perspective on the current crisis in mental health, particularly for youth, as well as explain how measures like Mental Health First Aid help equip the public with the knowledge needed to assist others.

After a break for lunch and an optional tour of the Peck campus, at 2:00 pm, Laura will begin a short Board of Members meeting. Upon its conclusion, Laura will invite all Board Directors, guests, and staff to our Board of Directors meeting. A virtual option will be available for those who cannot be on site.

We will continue the conversation about mental health during the meeting, by sharing with the Board and guests the Foundation's current support for mental health and our proposed strategy for expanding funding in this area. I am grateful for the assistance of Leigh and Laura, as well as staff members JoAnn Tiefau and Liz Crowley, in vetting organizations and preparing this presentation for you.

Since our last Board meeting, we said goodbye to Linda D'Addario, our former Executive Assistant / Grants Manager, and JoAnn Tiefau, our long-serving Program Officer. JoAnn and Linda had a combined 44 years of experience at the F. M. Kirby Foundation; we remain ever grateful for the service and commitment to excellence both Linda and JoAnn embodied.

While we wish them healthy and happy retirements, we look forward to introducing two new faces to you. Kim Mahoney joined us in July as our new Executive Assistant. Kim's experience in office management and executive assistance promises to ensure our office is running smoothly and efficiently. More recently, Wanda Miroslava Peguero joined us as Grants Administrator. Wanda comes to the Kirby Foundation with deep experience in grants management, having served in a similar role at the Ms. Foundation for Women, the JPB Foundation, and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, among others. In just a few weeks, Wanda has already made significant strides in maximizing the potential of our grants management system and preparing us for our online application portal. Considering all this change taking place, we included in your Board mailing an updated organizational chart, with photos, which should help clearly lay out each staff member's role within the organization. Speaking of changes, we hope you like the new look and layout of our website, which went "live" in August. I am grateful to Gina Beviglia for all her work on this major project.

The Board mailing includes a list of the grants awaiting ratification (\$75,000 and under) as well as recommended grants awaiting approval by the Board. Our Cumulative List of Referrals to the Board reports on ten grants, for a recommended cumulative amount of \$1,600,000.

We are putting forward, for either ratification or approval, a total of 76 grants, for a sum of \$3,766,000 in support. Among these many grantees, you will find four new organizations:

- **Black Inventors Hall of Fame (April):** This grant provided one-time support of a “pop-up” exhibit at Cornerstone Family Program's Morristown Neighborhood House, celebrating the inventions and innovations of Black and Latino inventors.
- **Duke Divinity School (Board Referral):** We are recommending a two-year pledge of \$100,000 in support of the Will Willimon Endowed Professorship at the Duke Divinity School. Professor Willimon is a long-time professor at the Divinity School and the former Dean of the Duke University Chapel. This endowed professorship will support a scholar of distinction at the Associate or Assistant Professor level of the Duke Divinity School. Jeff Kirby writes in support.
- **Morristown Festival of Books (July):** This grant provided general operating support to the town’s popular fall book festival, which has attracted marquee authors like James Patterson, Frank Bruni, Joyce Carol Oates, and Mary Higgins Clark. The Festival includes the ever-popular KidFest, a daylong celebration of children’s and young adult literature. Dillard Kirby writes in support.
- **Spring Street CDC (July):** With a one-time capital grant for the purchase of a refrigerated truck, this contribution helped support the Spring Street CDC’s Table of Hope, a food kitchen in the low-income census tract of Morristown that provides hot meals to families in need.

We look forward to sharing more with you about these grantees and others at the meeting.

Because my aunt was able to get the help she needed, she recovered from her depression and is now a doting grandmother, posting that same happy smile in almost daily Facebook updates. While she benefitted from an empathetic family, health insurance, and medical care, too many people in our country do not get the mental health care they need due to stigma, a shortage of licensed therapists, or lack of insurance. While we wait for the day that mental illness is treated by the public and the health care system like any other ailment – as an illness deserving of compassionate care – the F. M. Kirby Foundation will continue to support non-profit solutions. Furthermore, our grant portfolio acknowledges the vital roles that the arts, environment, education, and religion play in the overall well-being of people in the areas we serve.