



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 2, 2023

Contact: Kyle Rogers

716-341-3184

Kyle.Rogers@highmarkhealth.org

Highmark Awards BestSelf, Say Yes Buffalo Major Equity-Focused Grants

-Announces \$1.2 million investment and opening of 2023 Blue Fund grant cycle-

Buffalo, N.Y. – As part of its long-term commitment to improve racial and health equity, Highmark BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York today announced grants totaling \$1.2 million to Say Yes Buffalo and BestSelf Behavioral Health.

This includes **\$1 million** to Say Yes' Forever Scholarship Endowment and **\$200,000** towards the expansion of BestSelf's Child Advocacy Center program.

"As the region's largest not-for-profit health plan, we're committed to supporting initiatives that strengthen and enrich our community," said Michael Ball, Vice President, Community Affairs, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of Western New York. "This commitment builds on our long-standing partnerships with Say Yes and BestSelf and their important efforts to close equity gaps in our community."

In total, the health plan invested over \$7 million dollars in 2022 to improve the health, wellness and resilience of families, individuals, and communities across its Western and Northeastern New York markets.

\$1 million to Say Yes Buffalo

Funds will be used to grow Say Yes' endowment that provides scholarships and other student supports, furthering the education opportunities of Buffalo Public School students.

The health plan was a founding corporate donor of Say Yes Buffalo, with an initial commitment of \$1 million to Say Yes in 2011. In total, Highmark BCBSWNY has invested more than \$2.5 million into the organization. This included a Blue Fund grant in 2018 to pilot the Say Yes Health Home Care Coordination, and another Blue Fund grant in 2020 to expand the program.

Today, the program continues to grow, providing school-based comprehensive care coordination, health promotion, patient and family support and service referrals to local

students in need. The health plan was also a founding partner of Say Yes Buffalo's Career Pathway Program, employing dozens of interns since 2015.

"Time and again, Highmark BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York has stepped up and made significant investments in the educational and career attainment of students in Buffalo," said Say Yes Buffalo CEO David Rust. "Their commitment to improving racial and health equity in our community is exemplary and we are humbled by the trust they continue to place in our team to deliver scholarships, apprenticeships, and critical services for young people in our city."

\$200,000 to BestSelf Behavioral Health

BestSelf Behavioral Health, the largest community behavioral health provider in Western New York, will use the \$200,000 investment toward relocation of the Child Advocacy Center at BestSelf to its new location at 899 Main St. on the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus. The centrally located facility will ensure all children who are victims of sexual abuse, violence, and trauma, will receive the services they need immediately. The 899 Main Street facility will also house BestSelf's administrative offices and a community training center that will help with workforce development efforts.

In 2022, Highmark BCBSWNY also donated \$25,000 to help BestSelf support the behavioral health needs of the East Buffalo community following the May 14th Tops Market shooting. Highmark BCBSWNY has closely partnered with BestSelf and other local behavioral health providers through the region's first -based payment agreement with Value Network — a collaborative with more than 100 area providers.

"We are delighted to receive this grant award from Highmark and want to commend the health plan for committing these much-needed funds to our Child Advocacy Center program," stated Elizabeth Woike-Ganga, President and CEO, BestSelf Behavioral Health. "Our 899 Main St. building is moving along toward its fundraising goal because of commitments like these and thanks to strong partnerships in the community like the one we have with the Highmark team."

2023 Grant Cycle Window Now Open

The health plan also announced that it's now accepting applications for 2023 Blue Fund grants through March 3, 2023.

Blue Fund will consider requests for \$100,000 to \$300,000 grants from not-for-profit organizations in the eight counties of Western New York for initiatives that address its key focus areas. This includes behavioral health, cardiovascular health, health care workforce development, healthy children, and maternal health.

Submitting a brief letter of intent (LOI) using Blue Fund's online application system is the required first step in the grant-making process. Selected applicants will then be invited to submit a full application, with funding decisions announced in the fall of 2023.

Organizations interested in applying are encouraged to review program guidelines and focus areas as they may have changed from previous years. Visit bcbswny.com/bluefund to learn more and to submit a letter of intent online for the 2023 grant cycle.

##

About Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of Western New York

Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of Western New York is a trade name of Highmark Western and Northeastern New York Inc., an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association. Since 1936, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of Western New York has helped millions of people lead healthier lives. Blue Cross Blue Shield offers a full range of insured, self-insured, and government programs and services covering businesses, families, and individuals, as well as dental and vision plans and stop-loss coverage. Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield employs more than 1,500 people and serves as a key economic driver in the region. As a community-based, not-for-profit health plan, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield contributes significantly to organizations that strengthen and enrich the health of the community.

For up-to-date news, facts, and information about the company, leadership, and industry, please visit bcbswny.com or follow us on Twitter.

IPL42PRTXT