



Contact:
Jane Mogavero
Executive Director
jmogavero@lee.foundation
716.844.3100

For Immediate Release:

**Patrick P. Lee Foundation Awards \$1 Million in Grants to
Support the Mental Health Workforce**

Buffalo, NY – The Patrick P. Lee Foundation (Foundation), a private foundation that focuses its investments on education and mental health, is pleased to announce **10 grants totaling \$1,071,936** to promote recruitment and retention at mental health organizations serving western and central New York. **Since 2007, the Foundation has awarded more than \$23 million in grants and scholarships.** In the future, the Lee Foundation will benefit from a significant infusion of assets making it one of the largest private foundations in Western New York.

In 2016, recognizing the critical shortage of mental health professionals, the Foundation expanded its scholarship programs to include mental health professions. **In the 2023-2024 academic year, the Foundation will award \$632,000 to support 30 scholars pursuing graduate degrees in mental health.** These scholarships complement the Foundation’s mental health goals to strengthen the mental health workforce, ensure access to high quality care, and advocate for increased public funding for mental health treatment and services.

The challenge of recruiting and retaining mental health professionals is impacting communities across the United States. According to research conducted by the [Health Resource and Services Administration](#), over 155 million Americans – including approximately six million New Yorkers – live in mental health professional shortage areas.

The pandemic exacerbated the issue, leading to increased demand for services and placing additional strain on providers. A [fall 2021](#) survey of mental health and substance use treatment organizations, conducted by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, found that 97% of respondents experienced difficulty hiring new employees. Compounding this challenge, 82% of survey participants also stated that it was difficult or very difficult to retain staff.

As a demonstration of its commitment to the regional workforce, the Foundation invited organizations in western and central New York to submit proposals promoting recruitment and

retention of mental health professionals. The Foundation received \$3.6 million in funding requests, underscoring the urgency of the situation. Ten applications were selected for funding with grant amounts ranging from \$16,000 to \$150,000.

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“Supporting the recruitment and retention of mental health professionals is one of our top priorities,” said JANE MOGAVERO, Executive Director of the Lee Foundation. “The rising costs of higher education and historically low wages deter people from entering the field. For the dedicated individuals who do persist, they are often saddled with student loans, large caseloads, and demanding work schedules. These grants, which are focused on recruitment and retention, remove financial barriers for people pursuing mental health careers and invest in the wellness, success, and growth of those currently working in the field.”

To bolster training and recruitment efforts, the Foundation awarded four grants, totaling \$600,000 to the following organizations:

- **BestSelf Behavioral Health** (\$150,000) – Clinical Internship Program
- **Compeer Buffalo** (\$150,000) – Creating a Pipeline for the Mental Health Workforce
- **Envision Wellness WNY** (\$150,000) – Recruit, Train, Retain Counselors for SPMI
- **Jericho Road Community Health Center** (\$150,000) – Paid Behavior Health Internship Pilot Program

“We are grateful to the Lee Foundation for its commitment to addressing the mental health workforce shortage,” said ELIZABETH WOIKE GANGA, LCSW-R, President & CEO, BestSelf Behavioral Health. “Their grant will allow us to create a paid clinical internship pilot program focused on recruiting talented staff who are dedicated to working with individuals living with serious mental illness.”

Stated CHERI ALVAREZ, MS, CEO, Compeer Buffalo, “We are proud and grateful to have been selected as one of the recipients of the Lee Foundation’s grants. We will use the funds to expand our internship program, which provides college interns hands-on training and exposure to a variety of mental health care settings and practice levels. Our goal is to not only nurture future careers but also elevate the quality of mental health services throughout the region.”

In recognition of the dedicated individuals currently working in the field, the Foundation awarded six grants, totaling \$471,936, to support staff professional development and wellness initiatives at the following organizations:

- **Catholic Charities of Buffalo** (\$94,397) - Strengthening the Mental Health Workforce to Reduce Barriers to Accessing Services
- **Christian Counseling Ministries of WNY** (\$55,330) – Strategic Training & Retention Initiative for Clinicians
- **Compeer Rochester** (\$16,000) – Direct Service Staff Counseling and Support
- **Family and Children’s Service of Ithaca** (\$150,000) – CARES: Clinician Advancement and Retention through Enhanced Supports
- **Jewish Family Services of WNY** (\$86,812) – Improving Mental Health Care through Support for Providers
- **OLV Charities** (\$69,397) – Outpatient Mental Health Clinic Investment Program

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“Jewish Family Services is excited to partner with the Lee Foundation to expand the professional capacity of our exceptional counseling workforce as they respond to the growing behavioral health needs of our community,” said MOLLY CARR, Ph.D., CEO, Jewish Family Services. “Professional development opportunities like this ensure that we are flexible and adaptable in our approach to working with a diverse population of clients. With the support of the Lee Foundation, JFS will continue to provide the best in culturally-grounded and trauma-informed mental health care.”

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About the Patrick P. Lee Foundation

The Patrick P. Lee Foundation, is a private foundation dedicated to having measurable impact in two key investment areas – education and mental health. Since 2007, the Foundation has awarded more than \$23 million in grants and scholarships. In the future, the Lee Foundation will benefit from a significant infusion of assets that will make it one of the largest private foundations in Western New York.

The Foundation’s primary investments in education support students pursuing STEM careers achieve economic self-sufficiency without experiencing undue financial burden. To date, the

Foundation has supported more than 400 students through its scholarship programs. In mental health, the Foundation's initiatives focus on strengthening the mental health workforce, ensuring access to high quality care, and advocating for increased public funding for mental health treatment and services.

Media Contacts:

Patrick P. Lee Foundation

Jane Mogavero, Executive Director
716.844.3100; jmogavero@lee.foundation
www.Lee.Foundation

BestSelf Behavioral Health

Stephanie Perrotti, Director of Marketing & Communications
716.842.0440 ext. 1596; SPerrotti@bestselfwny.org
www.bestselfwny.org

Compeer Buffalo/International

Cheri Alvarez, MS, CEO
716.883.3331 Ext. 313; cheri@compeerbuffalo.org
www.compeerbuffalo.org

Jewish Family Services of Western New York

Lauren Maguire, Sr. Director of Development and Community Engagement
716.883.1914 ext. 307; LMaguire@jfswny.org
www.jfswny.org