

COMMUNITY News

**Community
Foundation**
FOR SOUTH CENTRAL NEW YORK

STAP's DEI Committee Gains Grant Writing Know-how

ALTHOUGH APPLYING FOR a grant isn't rocket science, it takes specific skills to do it successfully. Seven members of the staff at the Southern Tier AIDS Program (STAP) in Binghamton took the chance to hone those skills this year, when the Community Foundation offered them a private workshop on how to write a grant proposal.

The seven are all members of STAP's committee on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), whose role is to help their organization create a welcoming and just environment for all.

Each January, the Community Foundation holds a grant writing workshop that is open to anyone who wants to learn how to apply for support. "This year we had more than 80 people join us for that online workshop," said Stacy Mastrogiamomo, the Foundation's program officer. "We also record it so we can send it to people who aren't able to join us."

Among the 80 who took the workshop this year were Lisa Davis, STAP's volunteer coordinator, and Shakeema Brown, its housing care manager, both members of the DEI committee. "That started the wheels rolling," Davis said.

Davis and Brown had a project in mind and wanted to apply for support, but they wanted

to learn more about how best to develop a proposal. So they asked the Community Foundation to hold a small, in-person workshop for front line employees at STAP.

They got a quick and eager "yes" from the Foundation and then invited STAP's employees to take part. "We opened it to everybody in the organization originally," Davis said. But those who opted to attend all happened to be members of the DEI committee.

"We all were very interested in building the skill, because we are part of STAP and we're always writing grants, but also for personal and professional development," Brown said.

"Working at not-for-profits, grant writing is essential," said Kaity Margarum, health home program assistant at STAP. "I figured it was another tool set that I could add to my tool box,"

The workshop comprised about ten sessions, some held on Zoom but most in person at the Roberson Museum and Science Center. During those meetings, Mastrogiamomo and Tina Barber, the Foundation's executive director, walked attendees, one step at a time, through an actual grant application.

In that proposal, STAP requested \$5,000 to create a



set of welcome packages for new employees. The goal is to improve staff retention.

"One of the biggest problems in the nonprofit community is staff turnover," said Davis, adding that the issue has grown worse since the Covid-19 pandemic. Big corporations use sign-on bonuses to attract and retain talent, but STAP can't afford that strategy.

So instead, the DEI committee proposed giving each new hire a box packed with small gifts such as a notebook, a drinking cup and candy, plus a card with helpful hints to ease the transition into the organization. Those would range from suggestions for creating Google documents, to instructions on how to sign out a car for work-related transportation, to advice on how to politely ask about a co-worker's pronouns.

"We want to make it so the employee can feel empowered,

and so they won't constantly have to ask for help," Davis said.

Moving purposefully through each step in the grant application, participants learned about the kinds of questions one typically encounters and how to write effective answers. "A few times, we thought we were answering correctly, but they told us, 'That's not quite what they mean,'" Brown said. "Sometimes you don't know what you don't know, especially since for all of us this was our first time. It was great to have that one-on-one support."

Team members became deeply invested in the workshop, said Mastrogiamomo. "They sucked up every little bit of knowledge, and they had such thoughtful and interesting questions."

One aspect of the workshop

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Foundation Staff Gets Up To Speed On Estate Planning

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that Margaram enjoyed was the chance to work as part of a team. “We were able to float ideas off each other, take everybody’s ideas and condense them into what we felt was the best-conveyed message to get across what we were trying to achieve,” she said.

The workshop helped group members boil down suggestions from all team members into a clear, concise proposal, Brown said. “We had two pages for some answers, and it was interesting to see how we could draw that down to exactly what they were asking.”

In the end, the team’s hard work paid off: the Foundation awarded STAP the grant. Besides winning that support for a worthwhile project, members of the DEI committee gained expertise that they can to put to work in the future.

“Will I want to do this again? Definitely,” said Brown, explaining that her new grant writing skills could be useful not only in the nonprofit world, but also in her other role, as a business consultant. In the past, when some clients have asked for help with grant proposals, she’s had to tell them she couldn’t offer that assistance. “Now I can add this to my skills, once I build it up a little bit more,” she said.

The Community Foundation is pleased to run this kind of private workshop because it’s important to do more than just give grants, said Mastrogiacomo. “We think it’s important to build the capacity of these organizations.” That’s particularly true for organizations led by people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals or other underserved populations, or organizations that serve those groups, she added. “We want to provide support in ways beyond the money.”

OVER THE YEARS, the Community Foundation has worked with financial advisors, lawyers and insurance agents whose clients want to leave a lasting legacy in their communities.

Hoping to forge even more of those ties, and to make the relationships more productive, two members of the Foundation’s staff are pursuing a professional designation called Chartered Advisor in Philanthropy (CAP). Tina Barber, our executive director, and Darlene Cempa, our finance officer, learned about the program from the Foundation’s new financial investment firm, Cornerstone.

“This program brings professional advisors and folks in philanthropy together so we can have a common vocabulary when working with potential donors,” Barber said. As advisors and foundation executives get better acquainted, they develop relationships that can help donors in the future, she explained. “Say a trust attorney is working with a client on their legacy, and the client has philanthropic goals. They can bring us in as a part of the planning team for that particular client.”

Barber and Cempa are taking the CAP program through the American College of Financial Services. The program consists of three online graduate level courses: Planning for Impact in Context of Family Wealth, Charitable Giving Strategies and Gift Planning in a Nonprofit Context. The two expect to earn their CAP designations by the end of 2023.

Before she retired as executive director this year, Diane Brown handled most of the Foundation’s work with professional advisors and their clients who wanted to become donors. Barber and Cempa are using the

CAP program to help them take over that role.

“The course brings us a lot of knowledge around things like insurance and the many kinds of trusts, so we can better understand what vehicles are available,” Cempa said. That helps the Foundation better respond to professionals whose clients want to use specific vehicles for giving.

“The purpose is to be more educated, so we can better steward a donor in the correct direction.” –DARLENE CEMPA

Barber and Cempa are getting to know professional advisors beyond our own community through an online study group connected with the course. Members of that group learn how people on the other side of the equation work with donors, and they get a chance to see the world of philanthropy through one another’s eyes.

These new insights will help the Foundation work even more proactively with advisors and donors than it has in the past, said Barber. “The CAP program equips Darlene and me to do some very targeted outreach and messaging about what we can bring to a team.”

Knowledge they gain in the program will also help Foundation staff take a deeper dive when they talk with donors about leaving a legacy. “We tend to talk about the ‘how’ of estate planning—for example, how do you avoid taxes,” Cempa said. “But we’re learning about the ‘why.’”

Advisors and foundation executives need to help donors understand their goals, Cempa said. Say, for instance, that a donor wants to promote education. Does that mean they

want to support early childhood programs, adult literacy, a university or something else entirely? “By asking those questions, we’ll be better able to serve their needs.”

The purpose of such conversations is not just to bring money into the Foundation. “The purpose is to be more educated, so we can better steward a donor in the correct

direction,” Cempa said. In some cases, when a direct gift to an institution looks like the best way to serve the donor’s goal, the solution might not even involve the Foundation.

For donors who have not yet considered how to leave a lasting legacy, a brainstorming session with Barber might get things started. “They should e-mail Tina and set up a meeting, just to talk about what their thoughts are,” Cempa said.

“We can bring all our relationships with professional advisors to bear on helping them achieve whatever charitable goal they have identified,” said Barber. Professional advisors who haven’t worked with the Community Foundation are also welcome to get in touch. “Many of them don’t know that a community foundation can help their clients who have charitable interests,” Barber said. With the expertise they’re gaining in the course, Barber and Cempa can more easily approach that community, to help advisors understand what the Foundation can offer. “It’s a signal to them that we take these things very seriously,” she said.

Grant Saves Horse's Life

BETTY IS A BEAUTIFUL, healthy Belgian horse. But a few months ago she was failing fast. The neighbors who spotted her among a group of horses in a pasture in the hamlet of Schenevus were alarmed by what they saw, but they were also mystified. "There were two emaciated horses, but the other five looked fine," said Stacie Haynes, executive director at the Susquehanna SPCA (SQSP-CA) in Cooperstown, whose Animal Cruelty Hot Line received a call about the animals in danger.

The SQSPCA asked law enforcement to check out this case of suspected animal cruelty. The rescue that followed came thanks in part to a \$993 grant from the Community Foundation's Dona Davey Forget Me Not Fund.

When a sheriff's deputy tracked down the horses' owners, the puzzle pieces started to snap into place. "The owners live on Long Island," Haynes said. They come to Otsego County periodically, buy farm animals at auction, put them in their pasture and pay local people to provide them with food and water. "But they're unaware of the associated husbandry. They're not trimming hooves or doing their teeth."

The owners were shocked to learn about Betty's condition. Because they themselves didn't feel able to give the horse the care she needed to return to good health, they agreed to surrender Betty to the SQSP-CA. With help from the Forget Me Not grant, the organization transported Betty that night to be fostered on a farm in Bainbridge and sent a veterinarian to see her the next day. The vet found that Betty did indeed need work on her teeth.

"They were so bad that it was painful for her to eat," Haynes said. The caregivers made



plenty of food available, but even so, she was starving. The grant saved Betty's life, she said. "It enabled us to get her to a farm that was going to provide her with the veterinary and dental care she needed."

Betty is doing very well now, Haynes said. "She's gaining weight steadily, and she has an adopter who is going to be taking her home in early August."

The second emaciated horse faced a completely different situation, as he seemed to be eating and drinking. When the owners on Long Island arranged for a vet to examine him, the doctor found that he had Lyme disease and an endocrine disorder called Cushing's disease. Unprepared to care for an animal in this condition, the owners asked the SQSPCA to rescue that horse as well.

Luckily, the group managed to find him a spot at the Spring Farm CARES Animal and Nature

"She's gaining weight steadily, and she has an adopter who is going to be taking her home in early August." -STACIE HAYNES

Sanctuary in Clinton. "They took this horse in because they were able to provide him with what is going to be lifelong care to handle his Cushing's, his Lyme, and of course all the other, normal husbandry needs a horse requires," Haynes said.

The grant that the SQSPCA used to rescue Betty is the third the group has received from the Dona Davey Forget Me Not Fund. In 2022 it used a \$760 grant to rescue a pair of horses named Ashley and Beauty, and earlier in 2023 a \$3,000 grant helped rescue a pregnant mare named Buttercup.

Dona Davey was an animal lover who rescued horses, giving several of them a home on

her farm in Chenango County. After her death in 2020, the Community Foundation learned that she had bequeathed more than \$1 million to create the Forget Me Not Fund, which supports several kinds of animal welfare initiatives.

The fund has made a huge difference in the work of the SQSPCA, Haynes said. "As the executive director of a non-profit organization that relies on the support of individuals and foundations to get our work done, we have to be careful about what kind of work we step into. The only reason I can have confidence in providing support for horses in need is because of the Forget Me Not Fund."

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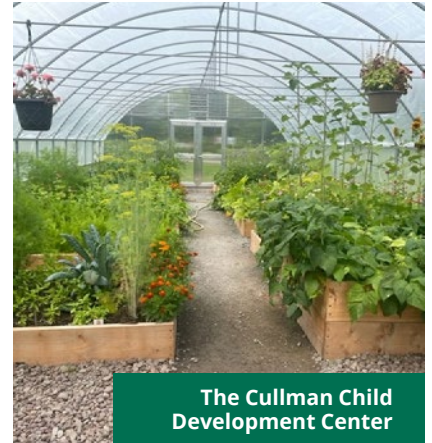
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