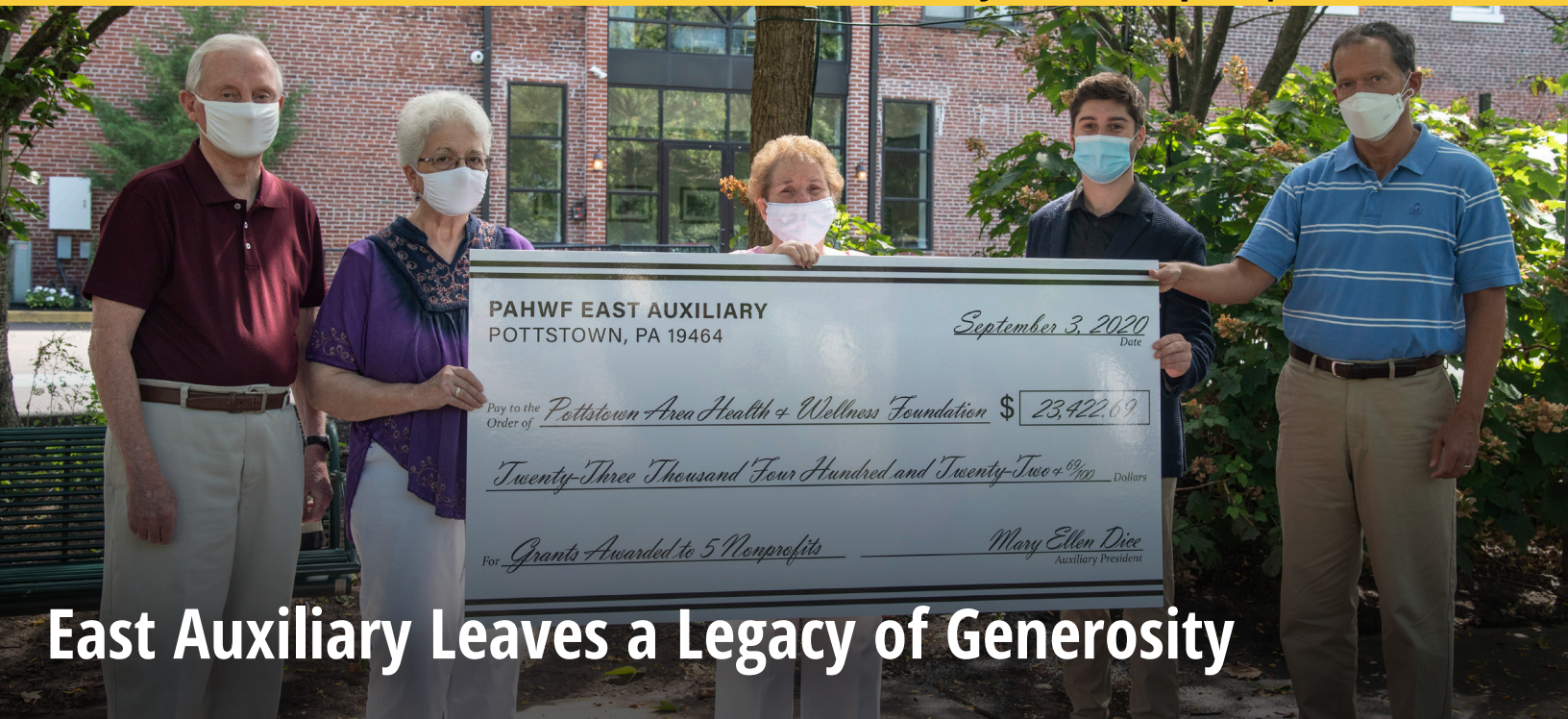




POTTSTOWN AREA HEALTH & WELLNESS FOUNDATION

Community Benefit Report | Winter 2021



East Auxiliary Leaves a Legacy of Generosity

After 85 years of service to the community, the Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation East Auxiliary is disbanding.

Since partnering with the Foundation in 2003, the East Auxiliary has consistently provided funding to groups including [Camphill Village Kimberton Hills](#), [Visiting Nurse Association Community Services](#), [Mission Kids](#), the [Tri-County Active Adult Center](#), and many others.

In recent years, the East Auxiliary's fundraising efforts have centered on running the hospital gift shop, which was established in 1990, in addition to craft shows held in the hospital's lobby around the Christmas and Easter holidays—with support from members of the community.

"People would make baby blankets and all kinds of stuff. My hairdresser would make peanut butter and buttercream eggs for me to sell and didn't charge

me anything," said Mary Ellen Dice, East Auxiliary president. "We had so many people who were helping out that didn't belong to the Auxiliary, so we'd raise money that way for the Foundation."

The East Auxiliary made its final contribution to the Foundation in September in the amount of \$23,422.69. While the work of the East Auxiliary has come to a close, its members have made a lasting impact on the Pottstown community.

"The East Auxiliary's members leave behind a legacy of care and compassion," said Dave Kraybill, PAHWF president. "For decades, their generosity in supporting and serving their neighbors has made Pottstown and the Tri-County area a stronger, more inclusive community."

Founded in 1935 as the Junior Auxiliary in the home of Ms. Angelo Gallo, the group became the East Auxiliary

A Message from Our President



As we approach one year since pandemic lockdowns first began, I find myself reflecting on where we were at this time last February. Though few of us understood the full magnitude of the impacts ahead, we knew that we were facing unprecedented challenges. Now, considering the pandemic's toll, there is cause to grieve, but there are also reasons for celebration.

We've been encouraged by our school teachers and administrators who provided meal pickup and became tech experts when in-person learning paused. We've been inspired by doctors, nurses, and first responders who worked grueling hours despite the emotional and physical cost. We've been motivated by grocery store clerks and delivery drivers who masked up and went to work as the virus spread through our community. Most of all, we've been energized by our partners in the nonprofit community whose services were life-sustaining for many area residents. In short, our neighbors became our heroes.

Likewise, we have seen remarkable acts of generosity. Community members donated over \$20,000 to the Foundation's COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund, and when it became clear that Pottstown students could not continue their education without an immediate technology upgrade, the community stepped up. Donors quickly met and exceeded PAHWF's \$100,000 matching grant to the Foundation for Pottstown Education, which purchased 785 Chromebooks to enable remote learning for every student in the Pottstown School District.

We face the months ahead with a measure of uncertainty. But if there's one thing we've learned over the past year, it's that we live in a community full of extraordinary individuals: people who provide for their neighbors no matter the cost—people who embody the highest ideals of service and sacrifice.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "David W. Kraybill".

David W. Kraybill, President

when Pottstown's two hospitals merged in 1966. Since its founding, the East Auxiliary has been a fixture in Pottstown, bringing the community together to support healthcare initiatives.

"In the early days, the Auxiliary had fundraisers and dances down at Sunnybrook," said Dice. "In October of each year, we would have a festival on the hospital grounds. It started out really little, but we built it up and eventually we had a Ferris wheel and everything. We had face painting, pumpkin carving, scarecrows, and we sold a lot of crafts that people made to raise money for the hospital."

The group originally provided funds to purchase hospital equipment and facility upgrades, including providing funds towards a cancer center and childbirth facilities. When Pottstown Memorial Medical Center was sold in 2003, the Auxiliary's efforts shifted towards supporting community health initiatives through the Foundation grantmaking process.

"I thought it was so great that we could go out and support grants for people and places that needed it. We were giving money in a way that it went out into the community and that's something that I felt really good about," said Dice. "I appreciated being able to support the senior center because your elderly people go down there for lunches and activity—and I'm elderly—so supporting that made me feel good."

Mask Up. Look Up. Connect with a Smile.

Thanks to a collaborative effort among Tri-County Health Council Partners, area residents are being reminded to take time to connect with



those around them. The campaign also encourages those who need help during these difficult times to reach out to mental health professionals.

The message is being spread through billboards—including this one, located off of Route 100—posters, cards, and advertisements in *The Mercury*. Join us in spreading smiles by visiting the campaign's [digital resources page](#), which includes downloadable graphics and more information on how much a simple smile can mean to those around you.

Chris Wierzbowski Joins Foundation Team

The newest addition to the Foundation's staff, Chris Wierzbowski, is looking to use his skills and experience to serve the Pottstown area community. Having joined the team in January as the Foundation's grant



Chris Wierzbowski

A graduate of Ursinus College and a Public Allies Delaware alumnus, Wierzbowski previously served as director of government relations for [Best Buddies International](#), a global organization devoted to

writer, he's starting by reviewing studies and reports while sitting in on listening sessions and presentations with local leaders.

"When we work to include more people—when we work to include our stakeholders and make sure that everyone leads as part of that discussion, then we'll be stronger," said Wierzbowski. "That's how we build a strong foundation: we make sure there are no pockets of air there."

creating opportunities for friendships, jobs, leadership development, and inclusive living for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Now, as part of the Foundation team, he's looking to make a difference for the Tri-County area.

"This is what I've been wanting to do my whole career. It's working with an organization, serving its community, driving resources to increase capacity and serve more people," said Wierzbowski.

"I have a chance here to implement the skills and experience built through Ursinus College, honed through AmeriCorps, and hardened through years of service around the country. Now I get to bring it back here and that is exciting to me. There's a lot to the job, and I'm excited to make an impact, to listen, and to grow."

Wierzbowski brings a wealth of experience in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, and his long history of serving people with disabilities provides a unique perspective.

"For me, the thread through it all has been disability and understanding how the world thinks about and empowers people with disabilities," said Wierzbowski.

See page 6: Wierzbowski Joins Foundation

Board Profile: Dr. Therese Rinaldi

Joining the Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation's board in the summer of 2020, Therese Rinaldi, DPM, has a long history of looking after the health of area residents.

Rinaldi is a proud graduate of Pottstown High School and was inducted into the Pottstown High School Alumni Honor Roll in 2018. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing from Widener University and a Degree of Doctor of Podiatric Medicine from the Pennsylvania College of Podiatric Medicine.

"As someone who grew up in this community, and returning after several years away to practice here, I have seen so many changes that have taken place," said Rinaldi. "Through my work, I also have the opportunity to speak with many residents of the community and hear their concerns."

Rinaldi has raised four children in this community, and is currently partner and practitioner at the Foot and Ankle Health Group, P.C., which has offices in Pottstown, Boyertown, Sanatoga, and Royersford. She has over 30 years of experience assessing, diagnosing, coordinating care, and treating a broad range of medical and surgical conditions of the lower extremities.

"I was invited to the 15th anniversary with the Foundation and was so impressed with how far-reaching it is and wanted to be part of it. I was honored to be asked to be on the board, which is filled with dedicated problem solvers with broad experiences and diverse backgrounds that work tirelessly to improve the quality of lives in our broad service area," said Rinaldi. "Being part of the Foundation has expanded my way of thinking about addressing health and wellness in a more comprehensive meaningful way."

Rinaldi has for many years devoted time to volunteering with the Cat Angel Network, an all-volunteer organization dedicated to caring for abandoned cats



Dr. Therese Rinaldi

and providing education to the community about the proper care of felines—including spaying and neutering.

"We are proud to have Dr. Rinaldi on the Foundation's board," said Dave Kraybill, foundation president. "Her expertise and insight into the health needs of Tri-County residents will be invaluable to the Foundation's work."

Local Leaders Come Together for Vaccine Town Hall

Though COVID-19 vaccines are still in short supply, initiatives across the region are seeking to build confidence in immunization. Joining in that effort, the Tri-County Health Council (TCHC) and Montgomery County Immunization coalition made headlines last month with a conversation on race, trust in the healthcare system, and access to immunization. The Tri-County Health Council is a collaborative comprised of leaders from community organizations including Pottstown Hospital—Tower Health, Community Health and Dental Care, Creative Health Services, Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation, Tri-County Community Network.

COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted communities of color, and Black Americans have died at a rate 50% higher than whites. The virtual town hall, “The Importance of Vaccines: Building Trust within Communities of Color” brought together community leaders, experts, and health care providers for a conversation on how to move forward, [and is viewable here](#).

Stacey Woodland, executive director of YWCA Tri-County Area, noted that Black patients who have a regular care provider are more likely to get a vaccine, but for others, lack of trust is a major obstacle.

“Families that use the emergency room and don’t have trusted relationships with health care professionals are less likely to trust that the health care system is going to take good care of them,” said Woodland. “Many people in the Pottstown area know and love someone who was very negatively affected by the coronavirus and still have hesitation in saying that they are going to take the vaccine.”

Addressing some of the myths surrounding vaccination, Valerie A. Arkoosh, chair of the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners, emphasized that COVID-19 vaccine trial groups reflected the diversity in the general population and that the COVID-19 vaccine proved safe and effective for all groups. She noted the importance of getting information from trusted sources.

“There’s so much incredibly wrong information on social media platforms, so I really urge you to talk to a health care provider you trust if you have one,” said Arkoosh. “There are places to get credible information and that’s where you should be doing your research.” Montgomery County maintains a comprehensive set of up-to-date [resources on vaccination](#) on their website.

Johnny Corson, president of the Pottstown NAACP, reminded the panel of how deeply distrust runs among many Black Americans, recalling unethical medical experiments spanning centuries, including the Tuskegee Study, where Black men were left untreated for a curable disease in order to study the progression of the illness.

“Historically, black enslaved men and women were used for medical research,” said Corson. “Among the older crowd, there’s fear and there’s a lot of doubt of taking the shot or being forced to take it because of underlying health issues. The younger black community—they’re more afraid of being used for experiments, and there’s not enough info coming out to justify them taking the shot.”

Likewise, there’s mistrust of the vaccine within the Hispanic community, in part because of increases in immigration enforcement.

Continued on next page

Town Hall Panelists



Valerie A. Arkoosh,
MD, MPH: Chair,
Montgomery
County Board of
Commissioners



Jonathan Corson:
President,
Pottstown NAACP
#2288



Nelly Jimenez-
Arevalo: Executive
Director and CEO,
ACLAMO Family
Centers



Richard Lorraine,
MD, FACP: Medical
Director, Montgom-
ery County Office of
Public Health



Irene Shepherd,
CPNP: Chief Medical
Officer, Community
Health & Dental
Care



Meghan Smith,
MPH: Planning and
Promotion Coord.,
Chester County
Health Department



Stacey Woodland:
CEO, YWCA
Tri-County Area

Continued

“They ask me if I go to get the second dose, will immigration be waiting for me?” said Nelly Jimenez-Arevalo, executive director and CEO of ACLAMO Family Centers, noting the importance of working through trusted voices in diverse communities to share information. “We have to become partners. We have to reach out to leaders in different communities so we can share resources and we can share messages.”

Rounding out the conversation with up-to-date medical and public health information were Irene Shepherd, chief medical officer at Community Health & Dental Care; Richard Lorraine, medical director at the Montgomery County Office of Public Health; and Meghan Smith, Chester County Health Department planning and promotion coordinator.

Behind the scenes, members of the Pottstown Area nonprofit community gathered information from area residents leading up to the event and compiled questions to address the community’s concerns.

Staff members from the Tri-County Community Network, YWCA Tri-County Area, Montgomery County Immunization Coalition, and Community Health and

Dental Care were instrumental in organizing the event.

The TCHC workgroup took a unique approach to hosting this town hall. Many community and regional organizations provided insight as part of the planning process, allowing for diverse perspectives, resource collaboration, and the cultivation of a dynamic, systematic approach.

“The workgroup members had immense dedication and grit during the planning process for this first town hall. We worked to organize and develop the event over the course of 3 months, including late night emails, weekends, and holidays,” said Ashia Cooper, program officer for capacity building and collaborations.

“There is immense positive power in collaboration, but it does take time, structure and a whole lot of patience. Every workgroup member continues to have a tremendous amount of investment in this critical work, which ultimately will serve to empower our area residents in their healthcare decisions. We are truly better together!”

The town hall was moderated by long-time Foundation consultant John Harris of Veralon Partners.

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Forrest Seeks Educational Equity

Supporting education in the Tri-County area has always been a priority at the Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation. And as community leaders and elected officials continue to work towards fair school funding, Dr. Myra Forrest has taken up a new role as the Foundation's education advocate to help advance those efforts.

Using a data-driven approach, Forrest is collaborating with an existing statewide advocacy group, Uniting for Action, to show the deficit in education funding. As part of that effort, she's authored a case study centered on the Pottstown School District.

"We are working to get this information out across the state using Pottstown School District as an example of what improper funding of a district looks like, and what the ramifications of that are," said Forrest. "It means that in Pottstown there are no elementary counselors. It means that there are no middle school language courses offered. It means that there are not nearly as many sports or coaches in Pottstown as in surrounding districts. The suffering goes all the way around, and it's a tale that needs to be told."

The greatest opportunity for changing the funding picture is through communicating the importance and urgency of educational inequity, especially as new lawmakers take office in Harrisburg. Forrest is collaborating with Uniting for Action to implement a letter-writing campaign—one that will make a connection with each and every lawmaker from across the commonwealth.

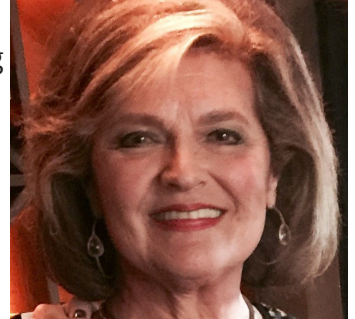
"People coming into Harrisburg need to be apprised of this issue. If you live in a school district that's well funded and your children are getting a fine education,

I don't think that people pay too much attention to it because your needs are being met," said Forrest. "We need to educate citizens across Pennsylvania about these discrepancies so that they can encourage legislators to do something about it because I believe what's going on is unethical, and it's immoral."

In addition to communicating with lawmakers, Forrest is working closely with organizations across the region that have a track record of effective advocacy. Those partnerships dovetail with the existing collaborations at the Foundation—initiatives aiming for long-term impact on the community as a whole.

Forrest has been a voice for advancing education in the region for decades. She has taught students at every level from nursery school to doctoral programs and was a teacher and administrator in the Pottstown School District from 1992 to 2005. More recently, she has served as the Foundation for Pottstown Education president, Owen J. Roberts School District superintendent, and associate professor of education at Immaculata University.

"Ensuring that every child in our community has the benefit of excellent programs, counselors, and educators is vital not only to setting children up for success, but for creating a more prosperous and vibrant community," said Dave Kraybill, Foundation president. "Myra's experience and expertise will be vital to this effort."



Dr. Myra Forrest

Wierzbowski Joins Foundation

Continued from page 3

"Let's look at these little things we can change—it's like flicking a switch. So suddenly, you make one small change to a website, for example, and then people who are low vision or blind can read what you're writing."

Before a move in the summer of 2019, he had served as the coach for the Ursinus College Men's Rugby Club for four years. Through this volunteer work, he helped athletes build rugby and leadership skills on and off the pitch and helped strengthen alumni engagement and support.

"Coaching is a huge part of who I am, and a lot of my personal ethos is derived through both the player-centered coaching philosophy of rugby and the asset-based community development approach I learned about during my year of service in Delaware," he said.

A husband and father, Wierzbowski also enjoys

spending time in nature with his family fishing, hiking, or boogie boarding.



Seen here with members of the Ursinus College Men's Rugby Club, Wierzbowski coached the team's athletes from 2015-2019.—Photo courtesy of Chris Wierzbowski.

Foundation Initiatives & Partnerships



The 2021 Home Garden Contest

With categories for gardeners of all ages and abilities, the 2021 Home Garden Contest is open to residents of the **boroughs of Boyertown and Pottstown**. If you're interested in being more active, beautifying your community, and possibly winning a little extra cash, then we say...**Grow For It!**

To enter or for more details, visit www.HomeGardenContest.com.

Mark Your Calendar

- May 3: Registration Opens
- June 25: Registration Closes
- July 9-19: Garden Judging
- September: Awards Luncheon

This Year's Categories

Young Gardener	General Garden	Vegetable Garden
Outdoor Oasis	Pleasant Porch	People's Choice
Best Block		

2021 Checklist Challenge Encourages Kids to Mask Up

As part of this year's School Checklist Challenge, students across the area have been creating their own custom face masks to promote wellness and responsibility, while boosting school spirit and a sense of pride in their communities.

All students in the 35 elementary, middle and high

schools throughout the Tri-County Area that are participating in the 2021 School Wellness Checklist Challenge are eligible to participate.

Categories include better nutrition, being physically active, and the social and emotional learning themes of self-awareness, self-management, responsible

decision-making, and social awareness. Students entering the contest have the chance to win cash prizes for themselves and their schools. The contest is open to entries through March 5.

The School Wellness Checklist is a program by the Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation in partnership with Medical University of South Carolina's Boeing Center for Children's Wellness.

For more information, [visit our website](#), and vote for your favorites at Facebook.com/PAHWF. Hurry, online voting ends March 19.



See all the face mask contest entries and vote for your favorite on our Facebook page: facebook.com/PAHWF.

Fall 2020 Grant Round

Twice a year, the Foundation seeks grant proposals that are consistent with our identified mission of improving health outcomes in the Pottstown region. The Foundation has awarded \$1,219,117.50 to 32 nonprofits, schools, and municipalities during the fall 2020 grant round. The grants were divided among five program areas: Healthy Behaviors-Schools, Healthy Behaviors-Parks, Healthy Behaviors-Networks, Physical and Emotional Health, and Strengthening Non-Profits.

Priority 1B: Healthy Behaviors—Parks

\$143,000 was awarded to fund six projects with the aim of improving parks, programming, and the built environment to increase access to physical activity.

Borough of Pottstown

Spruce Street Park Basketball Court Renovation Project

Lower Pottsgrove Township

Gerald Richards Park Renovation Project

Pottstown Area Regional Recreation Committee

Circuit Rider Program: Onboarding and Training of Regional Parks Planner

Schuylkill River Greenway Association

Pottstown Recreation Hub

Township of Upper Pottsgrove

Hollenbach Park Master Plan Project

West Pottsgrove Township

Murgia Park Bridge and Trail Engineering Project

Priority 1C-Healthy Behaviors—Networks

\$807,617.50 was awarded to fund 16 projects. These projects are intended to create and promote social networks involving healthy living.

Borough of Pottstown

Create With a Cop

Boyertown Area Multi-Service, Inc.

Food Access and Wellness Programs

Centro Cultural Latinos Unidos Inc

Five Points to Achieve a Healthy Latino Lifestyle

Family Services of Montgomery County

Strengthening Pottstown's Families Project

Hedwig House Inc.

Food First and PREP Through Tech

Pottstown Area Police Athletic League

Building Sustainable Options for Youth Sports

Pottstown Athletic Club

Fitness USA - The Armory

Pottstown Cluster of Religious Communities

Promoting Nutrition; Creating Strong Social Networks; Developing Learning Opportunities for PCRC Staff & Board

Pottstown FARM

Farmers Market

Preservation Pottstown, Inc.

Mosaic 2021 Grant Request

Royersford Outreach, Inc.

General Operating Funds for Building and Program

Save Alliance Foundation/GreenAllies

Pottstown Area Food Collaborative Design Process

Trellis For Tomorrow

Advancing Pottstown Area Food Security

TriCounty Active Adult Center

Prime Time Health for Older Adults

YWCA Tri-County Area

2021-22 Capacity Building and Healthy Pathways Project Program Support

YWCA Tri-County Area

VISTA Youth Empowerment Study Year 3

Priority 2-Health Access

\$158,500 was awarded for seven projects offering learning opportunities for physical and emotional health.

Camphill Village Kimberton Hills

General Operating

Carson Valley Children's Aid

Women's Voices Healthy Choices

Child Advocacy Center Of Montgomery County/Mission Kids

Fostering Resiliency through Family Advocacy

Developmental Enterprises Corp./Pottstown Training Center

Healthy Eating, Healthy Living

Health Care Access

Health Care Access Programs

Maternity Care Coalition

Pottstown Area Early Head Start (EHS) and Parenting Initiative

Visiting Nurse Association Community Services, Inc. (VNA)

Personal Navigator Program

Priority 3-Strengthening Nonprofits

\$110,000 awarded for three projects offering learning opportunities & strategic planning to strengthen non-profits.

The Salvation Army, Pottstown

Pottstown Works

TriCounty Community Network Inc.

C2- Community Camp

TriCounty Community Network Inc.

MontCo Anti-Hunger Network: Request for General Operating Funds

Key Grant Cycle Dates

Spring 2021

- Move Ahead Notifications: Week of March 1, 2021
- Application Due: April 2, 2021
- Final Approval and Declination Notifications: Week of May 31, 2021
- Grant Term Start Date: July 1, 2021
- Interim Report Due: January 15, 2022
- Final Report Due: July 15, 2022

Fall 2021

- Letter of Intent Opens: July 1, 2021
- Letter of Intent Due: August 1, 2021

The Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation's community benefit report is published three times each year. All content is produced by Foundation staff unless otherwise noted. Please direct any inquiries, suggestions, or news items to [John Robertson](#), communications specialist. Copyright©2021 Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation, 152 E. High St., Pottstown, PA 19464.

