



Annually, Blandin Foundation shares with the community our work for the year. Given that this year is unprecedented in recent history, we have decided to take this space in acknowledgement of the collective spirit of philanthropy that surrounds us regionally. With a cascading and polarizing year of dilemmas, the Foundation responded to the Nonprofit sector by simplifying applications, expediting financial resources, rerouting spending to community, and listening to community members, leaders and front-line organizers. While it has been a terribly stressful year for most, we were reminded over and over again of Northern Minnesotans' resourcefulness, ingenuity, hard work, generosity and perseverance that characterize many of our lives, our families, our small communities, our schools, our health care systems and small businesses.

We are humbled and awed by the sweeping stories of philanthropy around us. While we may not know what the future holds, may we find comfort in the stories of each other's giving, of collective strength and the fortitude to continue. The Blandin Foundation will continue to listen, learn and respond to the emerging needs of our region as we all seek to navigate towards brighter days.

Whether our cups are too full, or our cups are too empty, we hope these reflections restore what you need right now.



Rachel Herring is the Anishinaabe Education Academic Tutor at Deer River Schools. Due to the schools' hybrid learning model, Rachel worked with community leaders to create "Learning Hubs" in Ball Club and Inger where students can access high-speed Internet to participate in distance learning. In 2020, Blandin Foundation awarded five grants totaling \$410,000 to address the inequities in the use of technology for students across the Itasca area.

Rachel Herring

The year 2020 has affected many different people across the nation, all in different ways. One thing that is common across our country is that we are all getting used to doing things differently. I have three children who are all school age, I work in education, and attend college myself. The biggest change that we have seen is getting used to the idea of distance learning. As an adult I still struggle through distance learning and it has been hard to see both my children and the students that I work with adjust to this new normal.

I am very thankful that I work and live in the community of Deer River. It is at times like this where we

can see the advantages of living in a community that has such close bonds. Many people within the community help each other out in times of need.

This same attitude towards helping your neighbor makes me feel hopeful about the future. I see our teachers and staff working hard to maintain connections with students. I see our teachers and staff coming together and brainstorming ways to make the school year safer and easier for the student. Deer River has been working towards aiding the education of the students in the best and safest way possible. Community outreach and accessibility is important.

Towards that end, our Anishinaabe Education Department working with the Full-Service Community Schools program has started what we call "Learning Hubs" in the surrounding communities of Ball Club and Inger. It is a great place for kids to catch up with work and connect with staff in a safe and controlled environment.

As this year of 2020 turns into the next, I am hopeful that my community and my school will continue to adjust and overcome each problem and trial as it is presented to us. Our strength is within our community; we are all in this together.

Cre Larson and Tom Gaffney

The year has presented many financial hardships and mental health challenges for ourselves, our families, neighbors, community members and many residents of our state. As we look around and pose the question of "what we can do to help" those we see suffering, it is often hard to "act" on our desire to be helpful when we are not sure of how to go about it. This feeling of not knowing what to do often elicits fear and avoidance as our reaction. Often when individuals are experiencing isolation, depression and other mental health symptoms triggered by ongoing stress and difficult situations like 2020 has brought, it is simply human connection that can bring relief from their pain.

You might ask next, what type of human connection can one offer in the face of COVID? Impactful connections can be gifted by a simple phone call, a letter, lending an ear, or even by ZOOM or facetime. Offering words of encouragement can be your greatest gift. Sharing

your own issues, struggles, and thoughts can quickly help someone realize they are not alone and that someone else understands. These conversations can lead to an understanding that gratefulness and grief can co-exist, and do for most of us.

The most impactful ACTION we can take is to reach out to others and make them aware of their value and worth by acknowledging what they have done for us or the role they have played in our lives. This expression of worth can not only lift them up, it helps us "walk in gratitude" and see this life through a more positive and hopeful set of lenses. In addition to reaching out to others, self-care and self-awareness is necessary and requires daily practice. My favorite visual aid is my Grateful Vase. This is a daily task in which I end each day by writing down some event, thing or person I am grateful for today and then place it in the vase. Each day as I add another piece of paper I visibly see the vase growing, my gratitude multiplying until it overflows. This



Cre Larson is the executive director of First Call for Help of Itasca County, a nonprofit that provides free, confidential and nonjudgmental crisis intervention, active listening and information and referral services. In 2020, Blandin Foundation awarded three grants totaling \$48,000 to increase access to mental health services for Itasca area residents during COVID-19.

vase helps me, even during hard and seemingly hopeless experiences, know it will pass and this strife will always be outweighed by all the reasons I have to be grateful.

Taking care of ourselves and reaching out to others are ways we can all stay on a healthier path to walking through the challenges of 2020 and mental health symptoms

we may be experiencing. This path can be made easier by linking those you care about or are worried about to services to support them. First Call for Help (326-8565 or 2-1-1) is available 24 hours a day to provide you with emergency resources, community counselors and links to support services to help you "Act" and be the connection others may be desperately waiting for.



Blandin Foundation 2020 Itasca Area Grants

Blandin Foundation stands with local leaders to build healthy rural Minnesota communities, especially in the Itasca area. The Foundation awards grants, provides community leadership training, and engages rural communities on topics such as early childhood care and broadband. At least 60% of grant funding is dedicated for the local communities. The following are grants and donations awarded in 2020.

Advocates for Family Peace

Project support for domestic violence prevention – **\$20,000**

Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency

Operating support for the Adult Scholarship Program in 2020-22 – **\$400,000**

Bigfork Improvement Group

Capital support for the Edge Center Landscaping Project Project support as part of the Blandin Community Leadership program in rural Minnesota – **\$1,000**

Bigfork Valley Foundation

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for the hospital and to establish a low-interest Business Loan Program – **\$35,000**

Bovey Farmers Day Association

Donation for the 2021 Bovey Farmers' Day – **\$1,000**

Boys & Girls Clubs of Grand Rapids and Greenway

Project support for New Year's Eve Community Celebration at Longyear Park in Coleraine – **\$6,500**

Buck Lake Improvement Club

Donation in support of building upgrades – **\$1,000**

Calumet Public Library

Donation in support of new children's books – **\$1,000**

Children's Mental Health Services/REACH

Donation in support of Children's Mental Health Services 8th Annual Stomp on Stigma 5k – **\$500**

City of Coleraine

Project support for rain gardens as part of the Blandin Community Leadership Grants program – **\$5,000**

City of Grand Rapids

Donation in support of the 2020 annual Independence Day fireworks on Pokegama Lake – **\$1,000**

City of Nashwauk

Capital support for COVID-19 emergency assistance to hold City-led meetings virtually – **\$5,000**

City of Warba

Donation in support of the Warba Fire Department's Summer Celebration event – **\$300**

Cohasset Economic Development Authority

Program-related investment for COVID-19 emergency assistance for small business development – **\$50,000**

Depot Commons Association

Capital support to upgrade the heating systems at the Chamber of Commerce and Welcome Center building – **\$6,000**

Edge of the Wilderness Community Center

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance to hold virtual art events – **\$5,000**

Edge of the Wilderness Discovery Center

Project support for capital and capacity building support – **\$10,000**

ElderCircle

Donation in support of the 2020 community Thanksgiving dinner – **\$1,000**

First Call for Help of Itasca County

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for supplies and equipment – **\$10,000**

Forward Health Foundation

Project support to start a Community Paramedic Program – **\$12,500**

Grace House of Itasca County

Project support for the Minnesota Homeless Winter Initiative – **\$10,000**

Grand Itasca Foundation

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for phase 2 of the Keep Itasca Healthy Campaign – **\$8,000**

Grand Itasca Foundation

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for the Keep Itasca Healthy Campaign – **\$8,000**

Grand Rapids & Itasca Mountain Bicycling Association

Project support for the Tioga Recreational Public Art Sculpture project – **\$2,500**

Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation

Project support for the Sharing Fund to help low-income residents with essential needs – **\$137,000**

Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation

Project support for a mobility/accessibility transportation voucher program – **\$5,000**

Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for the Itasca Area Crisis Fund – **\$150,000**

Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation

Donation in support of Grand Rapids High School 2020 Post Prom event – **\$750**

Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance to strengthen access to mental health – **\$13,000**

Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation

Project support for continued support of the Itasca County Trails Task Force – **\$150,000**

Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation

Project support for an accessible park for Ball Club community members – **\$22,000**

Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for the Itasca County Sharing Fund – **\$150,000**

Grand Rapids Band Boosters

Donation in support of the 2020-21 Grand Rapids Band Activities Calendar – **\$550**

Grand Rapids Economic Development Authority

Program-related investment to purchase two vacant commercial lots – **\$140,000**

Grand Rapids Economic Development Authority (2)

Program-related investments (2) for COVID-19 assistance for the Emergency Capital Loan Fund – **\$650,000**

Grand Rapids FFA Alumni and Supporters

Project support for Knock Out Hunger as part of the Blandin Community Leadership program – **\$5,000**

Grand Rapids Public Utilities Commission

Project support for completing research that identifies ways of reducing effluents and solids to waste treatment from UPM Blandin – **\$15,000**

Grand Rapids Summer Celebration Inc

Donation in support of the 2020 Tall Timber Days Festival – **\$1,000**

Great Minds Learning Center

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance to implement specialized online learning for children – **\$8,300**

Independent School District 2

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for virtual graduation assistance – **\$500**

Independent School District 316

Operating support for Children First! activities through June 2022 – **\$6,000**

Independent School District 316

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance to address the inequities in the use of technology for students across School District 316 – **\$75,000**

Independent School District 318

Donation in support of Family Night benefiting Native American students and their families – **\$1,000**

Independent School District 318

Donation in support of advertising the 2020-21 Blandin Education Grants Program in the Grand Rapids High School yearbook – **\$300**

Independent School District 318

Operating support for Children First! activities through June 2022 – **\$45,000**

Independent School District 318

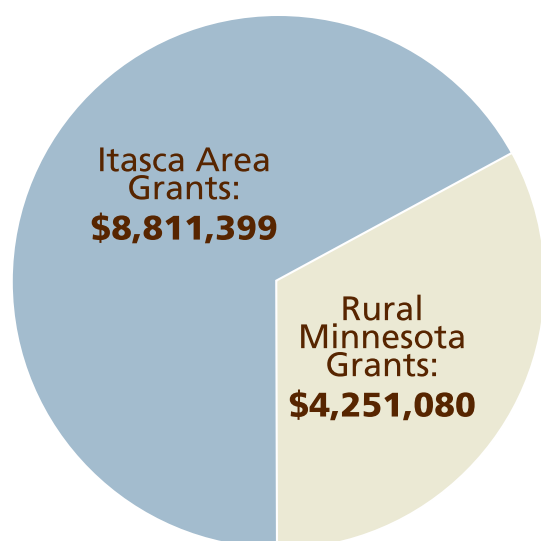
Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance to address the inequities in the use of technology for students across School District 318 – **\$150,000**

Independent School District 318

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for essential technology infrastructure to support distance learning – **\$150,000**

Independent School District 319

Donation in support of the Nashwauk-Keewatin All Night Grad Party – **\$400**



Awarded Grants and Donations

Total 2020 Grants **\$13,062,479**

January 1 – December 31, 2020



Independent School District 319

Project support for Anishinaabe Worldview Training for educators, administrators, and other community leaders in Nashwauk and Keewatin – **\$16,175**

Independent School District 319

Operating support for Children First! activities through June 2022 – **\$6,000**

Independent School District 319

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for essential technology infrastructure to support distance learning – **\$10,000**

ISD 317 Deer River

Operating support for Children First! activities through June 2022 – **\$6,000**

ISD 317 Deer River

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for a summer food distribution program – **\$30,000**

ISD 317 Deer River

Project support for cultural building efforts for students within the School District – **\$10,000**

Itasca Area Schools Collaborative

Operating support for continuation of Invest Early through June 2021 – **\$2,100,000**

Itasca Area Schools Collaborative

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for child care for children of medical and service industry workers – **\$15,000**

Itasca Community College

Project support for financial aid assistance to students – **\$407,500**

Itasca Community College

Project support for the 2020 Career Fair – **\$10,000**

Itasca Community College

Project support for cultural programming for Native American students – **\$9,300**

Itasca Community Television

Operating support for 2021-2022 – **\$170,000**

Itasca County

Capital support for safety and electrical upgrades to a multi-purpose building at the Fairgrounds – **\$10,000**

Itasca County Family YMCA Inc

Operating support for 2021-2022 – **\$250,000**

Itasca County Historical Society

Donation for a 2020 Winterglo Festival – **\$1,000**

Itasca County Historical Society

Project support for the Avenue of the Pines Video Mapping Project – **\$3,000**

Itasca County Housing/Redevelopment Authority

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for a Revolving Security Deposit Fund – **\$60,000**

Itasca County Land Department

Donation in support of safety fencing at Gunn Park – **\$1,000**

Itasca County Public Health

Project support to address community-based solutions to addiction – **\$25,000**

Itasca Cty Health & Human Serv

Project support to update the Bridge to Health survey – **\$5,000**

Itasca Economic Development Corporation

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for the Itasca Strong campaign to support local businesses – **\$5,000**

Itasca Economic Development Corporation

Project support for the Thrive Up North campaign – **\$20,000**

Itasca Economic Development Corp.

Program-related investment for COVID-19 emergency assistance for the Itasca Small Business Relief Fund – **\$500,000**

Itasca Hospice Foundation

Donation in support of end-of-life care training – **\$1,000**

Itasca Life Options

Capital support for COVID-19 emergency assistance to offer remote learning services to clients – **\$11,850**

Itasca Ski & Outing Club

Project support for Itasca Ski and Outing Club for safety equipment at Mt. Itasca – **\$2,500**

KOOTASCA Community Action, Inc

Project support for Circles of Support, Teenage Parent Program, Community Engagement, and Transitional Housing programs – **\$529,920**

KOOTASCA Community Action, Inc

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for computers and internet service for area low-income families to ensure immediate access to new, state-mandated online K-12 education – **\$25,000**

KOOTASCA Community Action, Inc

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance to support of local families in need throughout the winter – **\$80,000**

Legal Aid Service of Northeastern MN

Operating support for 2021-2022 – **\$454,000**

Lets Go Fishing of MN

Donation in support of the 2020 Let's Go Fishing with Seniors program – **\$1,000**

MacRostie Art Center

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for operating support – **\$30,000**

MN Assistance Council for Veterans

Project support for programming and services to veterans – **\$10,000**

MN Diversified Industries

Capital support to expand employment opportunities for people with disabilities – **\$675,000**

North Central MN Farm & Antique Assoc.

Capital support for upgrades to buildings at the Blackberry site – **\$5,000**

Northern Community Radio KAXE

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for remote operating equipment – **\$19,314**

Northland Area Family Service Center

Project support for strategic planning for the Northland Early Childhood Collaborative – **\$7,500**

Northland Area Family Service Center

Project support for strategic planning to advance the Northland Early Education Collaborative – **\$15,000**

Northland Counseling Center Inc

Program support for Northern Opportunity Works program – **\$87,240**

Northland Counseling Center Inc

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for technology and internet upgrades to serve mental health needs – **\$25,000**

Northland Foundation

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for the Emergency Child Care Grant Program – **\$30,000**

Pengilly Booster Club

Capital support to upgrade the community center exterior – **\$3,000**

Reif Arts Council

Project support for The Reminders and Shaun Boothe performances – **\$2,500**

Reif Arts Council

Donation for COVID-19 emergency assistance for drive-in concerts – **\$500**

Second Harvest North Central Food Bank

Project support for COVID-19 emergency assistance for food packaging and distribution – **\$10,000**

United Way of 1,000 Lakes

Project support to strengthen nonprofits – **\$5,000**

University of Minnesota Foundation

Project support for youth engagement, youth programming, and youth program quality assessments – **\$250,000**

Blandin Foundation Education Grants

354 local students from 11 different schools were awarded grants of up to \$4,500 – **\$1,126,800**



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Susanna Elsen

As I think through the biggest impact that COVID-19 has had, there are many small things that pop into my mind. These small things combined have created a unique song and dance as a childcare provider. Young children get sick often. Knowing how to decipher the usual cold or sickness from COVID-19 is one of these “small” ways we been impacted.

Helping to continue to provide care for these children while still supporting my own family at the same time is another way we have been affected. Although I have a teaching degree, helping to teach my son during distance learning last spring, while caring for four other children of varying ages at the same time, proved to be a new and interesting situation for me.

I feel that we have had to ask ourselves so many questions regarding what we do in and out of daycare hours to ensure we’re all helping each other stay healthy and well. The families I work with are fabulous and I am grateful for all they are doing! We have learned that we are all in this together in some ways.

The community has done so much during this pandemic that has made me feel so grateful to live in a smaller community. My husband works at the high school and I have many friends who are educators. Teachers and school staff are working hard to navigate the “new normal” since March. I am thankful for a community that has worked hard to step up during a difficult time.



Susanna Elsen is a childcare provider in Hill City. In 2020, Blandin Foundation awarded three grants totaling \$50,000 to support childcare providers in the Itasca area.

As I look ahead to 2021, I am hopeful for the vaccine. I am hopeful for health. I am hopeful for moving forward in life using the life lessons and perspective I gained during this time. Some of

these lessons are ones that I can, in some way, share with others. The perspective will be something that will carry my family and I through what we will face in the future.



Ron Maki owns and operates the Locker Room Bar & Grill in Coleraine. This year Ron took out a loan from the Itasca Economic Development Corp. Small Business Relief Loan Fund to assist with the impacts of COVID-19 on his business. In 2020, Blandin Foundation repurposed more than \$1.6 million in investments to establish loan funds for small businesses across the Itasca area.

Ron Maki

The impact of COVID-19 on my business is felt across our community. The Locker Room is a community meeting place. It's where people gather before the big game. It's where high schoolers come and grab a quick basket of fries and pop with friends. It's where we connect with family over the holidays. We no longer have that. The pandemic hit us hard right at the beginning and it hasn't stopped.

Though people across our community are living through financial and mental stressors, especially during the holidays, it's amazing to see how people have showed up for us and for each other during this year. We've

received cards of support from friends and neighbors. We've seen people spending hundreds of dollars a week to help keep local businesses afloat. The community has been overwhelmingly supportive and, without them, we would have been dead in the water months ago. It's a testament to how much people depend on a local watering hole.

As we turn to 2021, I'm looking forward to nobody else getting sick. Safety of our community is always number one. And I'm looking forward to seeing cars in front of the bar again. We're not out of the woods yet, but if we can find new ways to support our businesses, we can make it through.

Megan Perrington

The challenges and changes of 2020 have greatly impacted the people I work with, those living with disabilities. They have experienced abrupt shifts in work opportunities, specialized services, as well as decreased socialization. Though these challenges are difficult, I've seen our community – providers, caregivers, and family members – stand up to help the people I serve overcome their hurdles daily. Their acts of kindness give me hope that, with the new year, more opportunities, increased social interaction, and inclusion for people with disabilities will come.



Megan Perrington is a social worker for Itasca County Public Health. Through her work, children and adults with disabilities can live as independently as possible through the delivery of home- and community-based services. Blandin Foundation awarded a \$11,850 grant to offer remote learning services for individuals with disabilities living in the Itasca area during 2020.

Sherry Frick

Working through Covid19 has had many challenges for us, as it has for most. We were fortunate to be able to remain open during the shutdown because we print for many essential businesses. We were very honored to be able to continue to offer our services to those that needed it. We did lose significant revenue from not having orders from our client base that was forced to close during the

shutdown and it has been slow to come back.

Our biggest challenge during Covid19 has been staffing. We are a small, staffed business and it has been exceedingly difficult not being able to have staff work on site. Working remotely works for some portions of our business but having the team work together on location is the best way to service our

clients effectively and efficiently. Not having full staff caused some delays in our production cycles; our other struggle was the supply chain. We experienced back orders, longer delivery times, and increased shipping cost which affected our bottom line. The loss of events in the area has been our biggest hit to our sales volume; we have been able to make some of it up with the sales of the Covid19 signage that businesses have needed to operate safely for staff and customers.

I am so thankful to have been a part of the Itasca Strong Task Force and helping bring the message of strength, hope and support to Itasca County residents and businesses. It has been so awesome to see so many individuals and business step up and take the Itasca Strong pledge. I honestly believe we live in an amazing area of Minnesota that has a community of giving, respectful and kindhearted individuals who love where they live, work, and play. I am so proud to be a part of that mission.



Sherry Frick (Blandin Leadership alumna) and her husband Paul have owned and operated Minuteman Press in Grand Rapids for 20 years. Sherry is a driving force behind the Itasca Strong initiative, supported in part with a \$5,000 Blandin Foundation grant.

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