



2023 HIGHLIGHTS & HAPPENINGS

setting ideas in motion

Breakthrough project partners win honors

Two partners involved with the Safe and Healthy Families Initiative, which received Woods Charitable Fund’s 2021 Breakthrough Initiative Grant, have received state and national honors this fall.

The Initiative facilitates a community-based coordinated response among several partners for domestic violence-related child maltreatment cases in Lancaster County. It provides training and consultation for those working within the intersection of domestic violence and child welfare to improve child safety while strengthening partnerships with parents.

In collaboration with the Initiative, Lancaster County Separate Juvenile Court Judge Elise White launched the state’s first problem-solving domestic violence-centered child welfare court in 2022, called the Safe and Healthy Families Court. In October, Judge White received a 2023 Distinguished Judge Award for Service to the Community and Improvement of Community Relations from the Nebraska Supreme Court for creating this court. The award notes the court has resulted in better outcomes for children and families with enhanced communication and collaboration between the court, advocates, families in the court system and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. Data analyzed in 2023 shows that cases in the Safe and Healthy Families Court are more likely to close with children in parental custody than other cases, and that parents in this court are more likely to report feeling respected and heard through the process.

The Children and Family Services division of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services plays an important role in the Safe and Healthy Families Initiative and the goal of keeping children with their non-offending and protective parent. Beth Buhr,

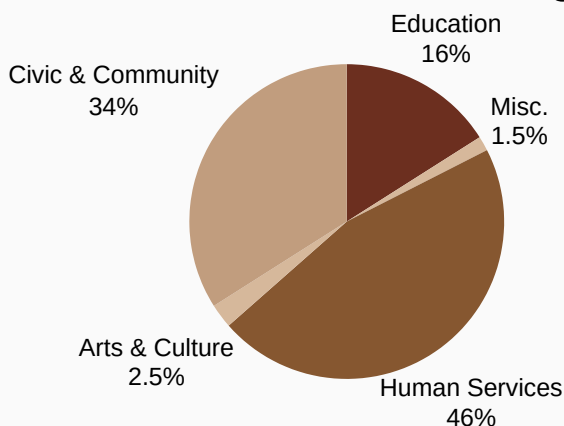


Beth Buhr from the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (left), and Lancaster County Separate Juvenile Court Judge Elise White.

Administrator for the division’s specialized domestic violence teams, has been honored by a national organization that advocates for child-centered practices. This fall, Beth received the Safe and Together Champion Award for Excellence in Case Practice at the Safe and Together Institute’s national fall conference. The organization believes that children are best served by efforts to keep them safe and together with the non-offending parent.

The Family Violence Council received a 3-year WCF grant of \$300,000 per year in 2021 to coordinate the Safe and Healthy Families Initiative. The grant also supports Voices of Hope, Friendship Home, CASA of Lancaster County, BraveBe Child Advocacy Center and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Center for Children, Families and the Law in these efforts.

2023 Grant-making at a glance, to date



2023 grants paid to date: \$1,067,100

Number of grants paid in 2023: 40

Average number of proposals reviewed in 2023's 2 grant cycles: 15

Average size of grants paid: \$26,678

Largest grant paid in 2023: \$200,000

Smallest grant paid in 2023: \$600

Spotlight on leadership: Michael Tavlin

Michael Tavlin has been a pillar of Woods Charitable Fund's leadership since helping to guide its investment policy and management when it divided into two foundations in Lincoln and Chicago 30 years ago.

He served on the WCF Board from 2000-2006 and as Chair from 2005 to 2006, and has been Assistant Treasurer since 2007.

When and how did you become associated with WCF? It was 1993. Chip Woods and I worked together and had next-door offices at LT&T (we'd known each other since we attended Lincoln Southeast High).

Chip walked into my office one day, told me about the decision to divide Woods Fund into two separate legal entities, and asked if I would help him with legal, accounting, financial and investments. Everything. I replied, "Of course, let's discuss how I can help!"

What have been your favorite aspects of this work in your various roles? My favorite aspect over all these years has been helping and supporting the mission of Woods. Grant review, site visits, funding decisions, supporting the fund through investment growth — all are important. A former board member and I used to say to each other: "Why do we seek to increase the size of the fund? So the directors can make more grants!"

What has surprised or challenged you? I can think of two pleasant bright spots. One has been the dedication and commitment of grant seekers. The casual observer might not see much going on in our community, but if one takes the time to look just below the surface, one will see a hustling and bustling cadre of serious and sincere-minded folks working diligently to improve the lives of others. The other has been the consistent leadership of the Woods family, and the staff and board of Woods Fund in supporting those grant seekers.

Do you have favorite projects or organizations that WCF has funded in your tenure? Or any that have meant a lot to you personally? Most folks don't know that my undergraduate degree is in music, or that Marvona, my wife and also a music major and an elementary school teacher, and I met in sophomore music theory. The early years in the life of a child are so vitally important to child development. Any grant or organization that is involved with the arts or with children (especially younger children) is very likely to wind up on my list of most favorite projects.



Suarez departs board; Abourezk elected

This year marked the end of Michelle Suarez's term on the Woods Charitable Fund Board, which began in 2018. Before retiring in December 2019, Michelle had been an elementary school principal and teacher with Lincoln Public Schools and the Early Childhood Developer for the Prosper Lincoln initiative, which supports efforts to improve early-childhood development. Beginning in January 2023, she served an appointed term on the Lincoln City Council. During Michelle's six-year term, WCF has awarded 310 grants totaling \$10,218,250, and for her parting allotment in designated grants, she awarded \$10,000 to Lincoln Littles and \$15,000 to El Centro de las Américas.

Kevin Abourezk was elected at WCF's November meeting to serve as its newest board member. Abourezk, a citizen of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, is a journalist and Deputy Managing Editor of ICTNews.org, which features Native American news and information. In his nearly 25-year career, he has written about Native American people and stories, and he has been an editor and reporter at the Lincoln Journal Star. He has received many national awards and been a mentor with several Native journalism and leadership organizations. He received a Master's degree in Journalism and Mass Communications from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the University of South Dakota, and he has served on several community and national boards.



Organizations paid grants in 2023

Asian Community and Cultural Center
Big Brothers
Big Sisters Lincoln
CASA for Lancaster County
Cause Collective
Center for Legal Immigration Assistance
Center for People
City of Lincoln - Lincoln Police Department
Civic Nebraska
Community Action Partnership of Lancaster and Saunders Counties
County of Lancaster, Human Services
Educare of Lincoln, Inc.
El Centro de las Américas (2)
Family Service Association of Lincoln (Community Crops)
Family Violence Council
Food Bank of Lincoln, Inc.
Good Neighbor Community Center, Inc.
History Nebraska Foundation
HopeSpoke
Indian Center, Inc.
Leadership Lincoln
Legal Aid of Nebraska
Lincoln Arts Council
Lincoln Community Foundation, Inc.
Lincoln Literacy Council
Lincoln Littles (3)
Lincoln YWCA
LUX Center for the Arts
Malone Community Center
Mourning Hope
Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest, Inc.
Northeast Family Resource Center
OutNebraska
Planned Parenthood of the Heartland, Inc.
St. Monica's Home
The Set Me Free Project
Visionary Youth
Yazda