

Recorded December 9, 2020. [Listen to it here.](#)

JOAN BANKS-SMITH: 00:04 [music] This is Joan Banks-Smith, creative producer for Kessler Foundation. In May of 2020, Kessler Foundation awarded nearly \$1 million in COVID-19 emergency grant funding for nonprofits faced with the challenges of serving people with disabilities in New Jersey. The recipient organizations were current or former grantees of Kessler Foundation's Employment Grant program. Kessler Foundation provided 37 grants of 10,000 to 40,000 dollars to help with unanticipated needs and expenses. In this miniseries, we talked with grantees, past and present, who received emergency funding to help offset the cost of both technology and personal protective equipment. The various organizations had to adopt alternative ways of connecting people with one another and keeping staff and clients safe. In this episode, I interviewed Marie Caliendo, Director of Philanthropy, at Eva's Village in Paterson, New Jersey. Marie, can you tell us about the organization and how it serves those with disabilities?

MARIE CALIENDO: 01:09 Yes. Thank you for the opportunity. Eva's Village was founded in 1982 in Paterson, New Jersey. And Paterson is an area of the states that is socioeconomically disadvantaged overall in every measurement there is. And one of the things that we realized very early on was that people were hungry, and our founder decided to start feeding people because people were knocking on doors asking for food. And so everything started with a meal and then came the questions. "Why are you homeless? Why are you in poverty? Why are you hungry? What do you need?" And from that first simple act of trying to understand where someone is accepting where they are in life and seeing if they are ready to take the next steps forward. One of the overriding issues among people in poverty is homelessness. And when you look at the reasons for homelessness, a huge percentage are either suffering from substance use disorders and/or co-occurring mental health disorders. And so all of Eva's programs have basically stemmed from trying to find out where a person is in life and how do we get them to the next level of stability. As we know, presentation of a physical disability can really throw someone and their family into poverty. In terms of how Eva's Village serves that population, we really do try to provide as many services as we can on-site, but we also have great partner organizations and other nonprofits that we work with. So that if we don't have any services on-site, we can refer and drive people over to St. Joseph's Health or some of the other organizations that provide treatment and services.

BANKS-SMITH: 03:32 Since receiving the emergency grant, how has it helped the organization during the pandemic?

CALIENDO: 03:37 Oh my goodness. Can I just say, first of all, when we got word that Kessler was approving the grant because-- and it happened so early on during COVID. It really was like a lifeline to us to have this support and to have it early. When, really, we were all struggling and running around trying to figure out, "How are we going to address these needs?" That was like a lifeline to all of us. And to say we're grateful to the trustees of the Kessler Foundation for the support is a total understatement. Secondly, we have residential treatment programs. So that means people are living

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together in communal housing. And trying to keep them safe, trying to keep everyone distanced, trying to maintain treatment during the pandemic was challenging. And even though you get, say, CARES Act, forgivable loans, for things like PPE, there's also tremendous other costs associated with maintaining housing and treatment and connection to people. So the grant from the Kessler Foundation helped us, yes, with PPE, but also with increased food and supply-demand from our residences and the community. Masks, of course. Other protective investments.

CALIENDO: 05:12

But it's important to understand with substance use disorders-- we love this saying by a journalist. He said, "The opposite of addiction is connection." And one of the things that we offer people with substance use disorders is the connection to a community of support. Of people who you can trust. Building that trust so that someone would listen to our counselors and really hear what they're saying and understand our counselors are trying to help them. And those connections, those meetings, those group meetings, are vital to keeping someone in recovery. And so with social distancing, with not being able to have group meetings early on, we needed to pivot very quickly to a telehealth model. And so our counselors needed to have the technology - the iPads, the platforms, the IT platforms - to call up our clients on their cell phones and say, "Okay. This is our time. Let's video chat." I know everyone's crazy done with Zoom right now, but we really worked very hard to pivot toward this whole telehealth platform and really help maintain those connections to people. There are two very alarming rates of increases in hunger and in overdoses. I think overdoses were up 17% in the first half of the year alone because of the social distancing. And so being able to have the grant to support that IT infrastructure, not to mention extra security around the grounds, crazy cleaning every day, every surface because it's used by so many people trying to keep everyone safe, it was just invaluable to helping us maintain our connection to our clients with substance use disorders.

BANKS-SMITH: 07:22

Thank you so much for sharing about Eva's Village.

CALIENDO: 07:25

My pleasure. We're just all so grateful to the Kessler Foundation for their support. It's through these partnerships that we can really affect some really meaningful change in our communities.

BANKS-SMITH: 07:38

Learn more about Kessler Foundation Center for Grantmaking and Eva's Village in the program notes. For more information about Kessler Foundation, go to kesslerfoundation.org. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Listen to us on Apple Podcast, Spotify, SoundCloud, or wherever you get your podcasts.