THE WESTCHESTER INDEX
A Community Indicator Project for Regional Action

The Westchester Index is an equity-focused community indicators project with data and analysis spanning 6 topic areas and 65 individual indicators. Our aim is to provide information that the Westchester community can use to examine disparities across racial, ethnic and socioeconomic divides – and then work to eliminate disparities.

We know that these disparities have their roots in centuries of inequitable policies, practices and treatment. By examining the data, we can begin to work together to create a better future for all Westchester residents.
Community foundations exist to help individuals like you give back to their neighbors.

At the Westchester Community Foundation, we work with generous donors to support the causes they care about. Our staff and Advisory Board work for our neighbors in every corner of Westchester County. We are pleased to report that in 2021 the Foundation distributed $7.7 million, of which $3.3 million were grants from permanent funds to support local nonprofits, and $4.4 million from donor-advised, designated, and scholarship funds. In addition, the Foundation’s permanent funds have grown by 30 percent in the past two years. Through the legacy of permanent funds, we will expand our support to local nonprofits improving the quality of life for all in Westchester.

An Equitable Recovery

This newsletter’s theme – “At work for you” – reflects our ongoing commitment to creating opportunity for all. The stories in this newsletter are a sample of how permanent funds are put to work to address both immediate and long-term needs. Schoolchildren and their families in Ossining and Peekskill are receiving support to recover from loss, grief, and trauma as a result of the pandemic; young people involved in the criminal justice system are getting a second chance; technology assistance for individuals – and nonprofits – is bridging the digital divide; and workforce trainers are creating a stronger network of programs. We also report on how a memorial scholarship fund brought the legacy of a local leader to life for college-bound students.

The Westchester Index

The Foundation is committed to providing accurate information about our local communities to nonprofits, funders, government, and donors. That is why The Westchester Index, a free interactive website that provides data on racial disparities at the county and local level, was launched this spring. It is designed to show where disparities exist, where we are improving, and to help the county develop better strategies to achieve racial equity. Explore the Index at westchesterindex.org.

Our Board at work – for you

This summer was a busy one for our Board of Advisors. As life returned to normal, staff and Board have been meeting in person with grantees. A summer tour of New Rochelle explored the city’s downtown development, open space preservation, and its use of murals to make a statement about the city’s diversity and the power of the arts to build community. We were pleased to be joined by Amy Freitag, the new President of The New York Community Trust.

The Board and staff of the Foundation continue our work on behalf of Westchester and welcome your ideas for how we can improve our quality of life through philanthropy. Whatever your passion is, or where you are in your journey of charitable giving, we are here to help you.
Library system shrinks the digital divide
WESTCHESTER LIBRARY SYSTEM

The global pandemic and resulting stay-at-home restrictions highlighted Westchester’s ongoing digital divide. Many families struggled to accomplish everyday tasks and keep their kids connected to school because they lacked a computer, a strong internet connection, or familiarity with technology.

With support from our Covid-19 Response Fund the Westchester Library System (WLS) helped to bridge this gap by equipping 268 low-income families with a computer and internet connection. WLS also provided basic training on how to use the device and how to access online information and resources through their local library. Families used the computers to access housing applications, set up mental health appointments, and connect with job counselors.

Today, the WLS continues to bridge the digital divide through a number of initiatives. Reconnect with Tech is a digital access and training program for formerly incarcerated individuals and Digital Equity on the Road brings a mobile van and digital navigators to communities throughout Westchester.

Local school districts tackle mental health
OSSINING UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT AND PEEKSKILL CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

The widespread isolation people experienced due to the pandemic exacerbated a burgeoning mental health crisis among young people. School officials noted that students who had mental health issues and those who were experiencing loss, grief and trauma were more likely to skip school or have limited academic success.

To combat the crisis, the Ossining and Peekskill School Districts created an outreach program to provide more mental health support to students and their families.

A grant from the Foundation allowed the districts to employ a multi-tiered approach: adding behavioral health specialists to assess students’ needs; increasing the availability of mental health staff to work with students; and spreading the word in the community.

Dr. Raymond Sanchez, Superintendent, Ossining UFSD and Dr. David Mauricio, Superintendent, Peekskill CSD. “Our scholars’ social and emotional needs are paramount to their success in and out of school. Prioritizing the mental health and the social well-being of our students and their families takes a collaborative effort that synergistically allows us to accomplish greater impact together, especially in this period of immense need.”
Delivering effective workforce programs that position disadvantaged young adults for lifelong self-sufficiency is challenging. Programs need to offer effective instruction to clients and engage employers to keep training relevant and generate job placement opportunities.

The Workforce Professionals Training Institute (WPTI) has trained workforce development practitioners and organizational consultants since 2004. The program’s goal is to provide pathways out of poverty through job training and other employment and career opportunities.

With Foundation support in 2021, WPTI engaged 37 workforce development professionals with a customized curriculum for peer learning and collaboration. The 10 days of training over 10 months emphasized core principles of youth development, the use of data to improve results, and understanding client trauma. With a second grant in 2022, WPTI will provide additional training to the professionals to develop stronger strategies for employer engagement.

The switch to remote work in 2020 revealed the lack of adequate technology at many nonprofits. They lacked the appropriate hardware, software, and cybersecurity protocols. Few had full-time IT support to guide them through the transition.

In response, the Foundation worked with local IT providers ServiceByte, Computer Experts, and Smart IT to develop a program for information technology support for nonprofits. Launched in 2021, the one-year program provided six local agencies with an IT needs assessment and up to one year of support from a vetted IT managed-service provider, along with necessary hardware and software upgrades.

Kish Melwani, CEO of ServiceByte. “It was great to see nonprofits receive the help they very much deserve. Many have limited budgets and end up underinvesting in their technology. We’ve helped them modernize their technology, harden their security, and provide them with resources to optimize their businesses.”
Lessons learned, and the importance of second chances

Young people who become involved in the criminal justice system often have acted on impulse, a characteristic of the still-developing adolescent brain. Their involvement in the criminal justice system can lead to disastrous results that follow them for the rest of their lives, making it hard to land a job, continue their education, and become self-sustaining members of the community. And without additional supports, they are likely to reoffend.

In 2016, the Foundation began its efforts to support these young people. We supported the Westchester Children’s Association as it led the county’s youth advocacy efforts in the statewide Raise the Age campaign, which raised the age of criminal responsibility to 18. And since then, the Foundation has supported a continuum of services for young people at risk of incarceration or already in the justice system. The prevention programs work within the court system to offer justice-involved young people the chance to get mental health and substance use services, educational interventions, housing, and job training instead of going to prison or detention. Programs for young people who have been released help them identify goals and plan for a future that includes education and/or entry into the workforce.

“The Foundation’s investments aim to reduce incarceration and recidivism rates among young people and build the case for reform,” notes Program Officer Robin Melén, who oversees the Foundation’s youth development programs.

At CLUSTER, practitioners are trained in mediation to help young people take responsibility for their actions, as well as repair and prevent harmful behavior. A meditation and mindfulness training program provided by Finding Peace Within is introducing young people at the Westchester County Jail to use these tools and techniques.

For those who have been released, 914United offers peer mentoring, education and case management as well as job training, and Westhab helps young people clear their records and attend workshops that address their rights in the workplace.

Court-based programs are preventing young people from entering jail and helping them pursue better opportunities. These programs are proving to be promising models that incorporate mentoring, mental and behavioral supports, and wraparound services. In New Rochelle, grants to the Center for Court Innovation have helped launch the new Opportunity Youth Part, and in Mount Vernon, funding is supporting the Emerging Adult Justice Initiative led by the Youth Shelter Program of Westchester.
HONORING THE LEGACY OF YONKERS MAYOR NICHOLAS C. WASICKO

The late Nicholas Wasicsko was 28 years old when he was elected as the 37th mayor of the City of Yonkers in 1987. At the time, Yonkers was under a consent decree as a result of a lawsuit against the City by the Yonkers NAACP and the U.S. Department of Justice, which challenged segregated housing in the city. As mayor, Nick Wasicsko fought to persuade the City Council, which sought to defy the terms of the decree, to develop a plan for integration instead. Nick Wasicsko’s struggle to move the city he loved forward are documented in the HBO series “Show Me A Hero” and the documentary “Brick-by-Brick, A Civil Rights Story.”

Three months after Nick was found dead from an apparent suicide in 1993, his widow, Nay, established a fund in the Westchester Community Foundation to honor his memory and values. The Nicholas C. Wasicsko Scholarship Fund provides scholarships for college-bound Yonkers residents interested in government, law and/or law enforcement. Earlier this year Nay met Mia Williams, a recent scholarship recipient who is a sophomore at Howard University. Mia is a graduate of programs provided by Yonkers Partners in Education, which prepares students for college success. At the meeting, Mia shared her college experience with Nay and her interest in pursuing a career in law. Nay shared her passion for providing opportunities for young people and how other scholarship recipients are carrying the legacy of Nicholas Wasicsko into the world.

Through the generosity of Nay Wasicsko, right, students like Mia Williams, left, are sure to contribute to a brighter future in Yonkers.

ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED IN 2021

- Action Center dba Energy Justice Network
- African American Men of Westchester
- Bethany Arts Community
- Boys and Girls Club of Northern Westchester
- Boys and Girls Club of Mount Vernon
- Boys and Girls Club of New Rochelle
- Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts
- Caritas/Meals on Main Center for Court Innovation
- Center for Governmental Research
- Children’s Environmental Literacy Foundation
- City of White Plains Youth Bureau
- Clay Art Center
- CLUSTER Community Services
- Community Capital New York
- Community Center of Northern Westchester
- Community Resource Center
- Community Voices Heard
- Copland House
- Episcopal Charities of the Diocese of New York
- Family Service Society of Yonkers
- Family Ties of Westchester
- Federated Conservationists of Westchester County
- Fine Arts Orchestral Society of Yonkers
- Generation Citizen
- GOOD For Girls
- Groundwork Hudson Valley
- Her Honor Mentoring
- Hillside Food Outreach
- Hoff-Barthelson Music School
- Hudson Chorale
- Hudson Valley Justice Center
- Jacob Burns Film Center
- Jazz Forum Arts
- Long Island Sound Stewardship Fund
- Make the Road New York
- Neighborhood House
- Neighbors Link
- New Choral Society
- New Era Creative Space
- New York State Census Equity Fund
- New York-Presbyterian Lawrence Hospital
- Nonprofit Westchester
- Osining Union Free School District/Peekskill City School District
- Pace University Women’s Justice Center
- Riverkeeper
- Rockwood Leadership Institute
- Rye Nature Center
- Save the Sound
- St. Vincent’s Hospital/St. Joseph’s Medical Center
- The Acceleration Project
- The Advocacy Institute
- The Guidance Center
- the harris project
- Picture House Regional Film Center
- Town of Greenburgh
- Tri-State Transportation Campaign
- UFSD of the Tarrytowns
- Westchester Jewish Community Services
- Westchester Land Trust
- Westchester Library System
- Westchester Medical Center Foundation
- Westchester Oratorio Society
- Westchester Parks Foundation
- Westhab
- Worker Justice Center of New York
- Workforce Professionals Training Institute

NEWSLETTER DESIGN: BRIAN SISCO, 115-STUDIOS.COM
2021-2022 Westchester Community Foundation Funds

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Lee Tucker Memorial Fund • Arno and Peppe Ucko Family Fund • Waizer Walsh Family Fund • Bernice and Irwin Warshaw Fund • Rita and Stanley Wecker Fund • Westchester Annual Fund • Westchester Cultural Research Fund • Westchester COVID-19 Response Fund • Westchester Cumulus Fund • Westchester Fund for Women and Girls • Westchester Health Fund • Westchester Opportunity Fund • Westchester Poetry Fund • Westchester Wilderness Walk Fund • Westchester Workforce Fund • Dharma Wolf Wild/Amelia Miller Memorial Fund • Who’s On First Fund • The Frank E. Wigg Charitable Fund • Wilstock Fund • Evelyn G. Zamboni Fund • Madeline and Sanford S. Zevon Fund • Corinne & Neil Zola Fund •
Murals tell a story of inclusion in the City of New Rochelle.
New Ro Strong by Dragon76, Library Parking Lot/One Memorial Highway

Front row: WCF Board member Marjorie Hsu, New Rochelle Mayor Noam Bramson

Second row: WCF Board member Andrew Herz, WCF Executive Director Laura Rossi, NYCT President Amy Freitag, Becky Mazzanobile & Mary Jo Jacobs (Boys and Girls Club of New Rochelle), Theresa Kump Leghorn (New Rochelle Council on the Arts)

Back row: WCF Board member Anthony Bailey and Alvin Clayton of Alvin & Friends Restaurant
EXPERIENCE
THE BENEFITS OF GIVING
THE POWER OF GIVING
THE JOY OF GIVING

Support the nonprofits that make this region a great place to live, work, and play. When you give, you make a difference.

JOIN US.