STAYING THE COURSE
Say Yes Buffalo Report to Community | 2019-2020
Siblings Sara and Bashar Kattan graduated as the valedictorian and salutatorian at International Preparatory at Grover Cleveland High School. Refugees from Syria, the Kattans started at Canisius College this year with their sights on the medical field.

Sara called the pandemic “another obstacle that I am sure will pass like all the other terrible circumstances that we all experienced at one point.”

Sara said earning an education has always motivated her, and that coming to Buffalo finally allowed her to pursue that dream.

“Whenever I had a goal, there was hope.”
FROM THE CHAIR OF THE SCHOLARSHIP BOARD

Welcome to Say Yes Buffalo’s 2019-2020 Report to the Community

Dear Say Yes Buffalo Angel Donors, Investors and Partners:

In the light of all the challenges the last year has brought, I could not be more proud to be a part of this organization and this movement that continues to fundamentally change the economic opportunities afforded to our greatest assets, the young people of our community.

It is because of your generosity and support that we continue to make progress toward our $100 million endowment goal which will fund the Say Yes Buffalo scholarship, forever. Thank you to everyone who has contributed and will continue to contribute to this bold goal. Buffalo is unique as a city in that it has an endowment for a promise scholarship for an entire school district. We are all proud to be a part of this spectacular promise that lifts our entire community.

Thanks to the generous support of the Say Yes Buffalo Scholarship Fund, we have awarded $15 million in scholarships to students since the first eligible graduating class in 2013, leveraging $150 million in federal, state and institutional aid.

As our whole community is deeply diverse in race, ethnicity, and religion, education access and opportunity as a racial equity strategy lies at the core of our mission; we have had over 1,500 Buffalo students achieve degrees and are now pursing their careers. One of those former students, Sydney Favors, you can read about in this report!

In response to covid-19 and the technology challenges our students faced with the abrupt transition to virtual learning, we implemented the covid-19 Technology campaign this year which surpassed our $100,000 goal to provide laptops for Say Yes scholars entering their first year of college. Thank you to everyone who supported this effort!

A few highlights from this past year that you can read more about in this report:

- **The Buffalo Public School 2020 high school graduation rate soared to 76 percent—a 27 point increase since 2012, the year prior to Say Yes Buffalo’s launch!**

- **With funding and organization from partners in Erie County government and Buffalo Public Schools, we established 51 “Virtual Learning Support Center” sites that served 1,796 children with crucial in-person, virtual learning support during the pandemic’s second wave, providing a safe place for students to attend remote school and relief to parents who were continuing to work.**

- **The Buffalo College Success Network—funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation—has established on-campus mental health counseling, near peer programming and mentoring which have contributed to an increase in persistence at three out of the four partner colleges after just two years.**

- **Say Yes Buffalo achieved an important milestone as of July 1, 2020 and is now an independent entity committed to serving Buffalo students and families and fully governed by our local board.**

In closing, I’d like to honor the life of Judge Hugh Scott. Judge Scott was an integral part of our formation, a key supporter during our growth, and valued member of our Scholarship Board for many years. His incredible service and commitment to young people and education in this community will be greatly missed and never forgotten. As the chair of this board, I am humbled and honored to do this work and further his legacy.

Sincerely,

Bill Joyce
Chair of the Say Yes Buffalo Board of Directors
FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Welcome to Say Yes Buffalo’s 2019-2020 Report to the Community

Dear Say Yes Buffalo Team:

It has become commonplace to wish 2020 a good riddance. While I’d like to echo that sentiment and put the worst of this past year behind us, 2020 has been a crucial year for any organization that puts people, community, and economic growth at the heart of what they do. Say Yes Buffalo is certainly one such organization and we’ve been humbled by the various ways our staff and our community has met this once-in-a-lifetime challenge. No doubt the foundation of what has been built this past year will resonate for years in the future.

And what is that foundation? When we watched our young people suddenly lose that physical connection with school in the heart of the college application season, we helped. When we saw our graduating seniors lose out on graduation ceremonies and proms, we helped. When we saw so many of our families face food insecurity, housing insecurity, and childcare breakdowns, we helped. In the midst of a pandemic, a civil rights crisis, and a turbulent political period like no other, we saw time and time again people stepping up and helping their neighbor.

To our frontline workers and supervisors at Say Yes Buffalo, who work with hundreds of vulnerable families in Buffalo Public Schools, we say thank you. These Family Support Specialists and Health Home Coordinators continued meeting with families throughout the year, ensuring they were safe and had access to food, medical appointments, devices and solutions for children to be successful in virtual school. We delivered food, personal protective equipment and supplies, even toys and games thanks to a campaign in conjunction with a local toy store, the Treehouse, to brighten a family’s day. You all stepped up in ways, big and small, loud and quiet, that will be remembered.

To our Community Schools and Parent Center staff, who were hired and trained to run community center-like programming out of 21 Buffalo Public Schools, we say great job. We held our first Virtual Saturday Academy on April 4, 2020, creating a series of virtual programs that offered academic enrichment, knowledge about vital community resources, exercise and fitness classes, arts and literary workshops, and cultural enrichment activities for all ages. Many Community Schools staff took to the streets last spring, volunteering to deliver thousands of meals from Buffalo Public Schools to families who signed up to receive them. Other staff organized multiple Virtual College Tour days, encouraging students to “Stay the Course” and continue on their way to the postsecondary opportunities at the heart of the Say Yes mission.

To our Breaking Barriers and Mentoring Program staff, we say thank you. How many lives were impacted with “Workout Wednesdays” and daily check-ins, how many more of our young people are more engaged in their education than they would have been, is hard to quantify, but we’ve been inspired by your efforts to bridge these gaps, to involve...
After sharing this post, we learned that Medaille College reached out to Antonio Gwynn, the recent Hutch Tech graduate featured in this post, and extended an acceptance and full scholarship, which Antonio accepted. Antonio said he wasn’t planning on going to college, but jumped at the opportunity to study business.

Sincerely,

David Rust
Executive Director of Say Yes Buffalo

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Executive Director of Say Yes Buffalo

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1. High school graduation rate hits 76% milestone

Our collaborative effort with Buffalo Public Schools hit a milestone this year: 76% graduation rate, having climbed 27 points from 2012 when Say Yes Buffalo launched its gamechanging partnership. While there’s still a lot of hard work in front of us to keep raising this number (the New York average is around 83%), Buffalo schools are going in the right direction. Behind the percentage points are thousands of young people who have increased access to postsecondary training and education.

2. Organization-wide response to COVID-19

Our mission is to remove barriers to educational attainment, workforce participation, and economic mobility for Buffalo students. Our programmatic growth since 2012 has been centered on meeting the needs of individual students and families to strengthen our mutual futures. The social and economic crisis created by the covid-19 pandemic has enabled us to pursue new paths that we’ve established and do our best to meet needs, family by family, student by student. It’s been all hands on deck across departments: from our essential services like our school-based family support and Health Home coordination teams kicking into high gear, to Community Schools holding virtual Saturday academies, to spawning multiple, stopgap development campaigns for our students and families. This year, we’ve had to get back to our roots, as individual staff and as a united team, opening and reopening pathways for success for our community.

3. Say Yes Buffalo transitions to local governance

Last spring, Say Yes Buffalo achieved an important milestone established at our inception in 2011. Beginning July 1, 2020, our local board formally assumed governance for all Say Yes Buffalo programs, personnel, and operations from Say Yes to Education, Inc. The Say Yes Buffalo Scholarship Board, originally established to raise money for and manage scholarships, is now the Board of the Directors and the local legal entity with responsibility for all aspects of Say Yes Buffalo. Say Yes Buffalo Executive Director David Rust will now report directly to this Board. Both Say Yes Buffalo’s program budget and scholarship budget will flow through this entity. Our work will remain strong as our organization transitions to independence and complete local operations.
4. Supporting students and families during covid-19

Almost as soon as the pandemic hit, staff transformed our largest conference room into a supply center for our Family Support Specialists to provide and deliver difficult-to-find cleaning supplies, food, personal care items, and family activity items like games and puzzles. We launched campaigns in conjunction with local small businesses Talking Leaves book store and the Treehouse toy store to supply families with games and toys to use at home as well as gift cards for books for graduating seniors. Several rooms of our offices remain filled with personal protective equipment, non-perishable food, and household items so we can continue to provide for our workers and families.

5. The establishment of Virtual Learning Support Centers

We launched 50 sites with funding from the Live Well Erie CARES Act Child Care grant, spread throughout the City of Buffalo. These centers offered students access to remote learning with internet, food, and supervision during the day. Using elements of our pre-existing summer camp infrastructure and with close partnership with Erie County, we launched the program within weeks in September. Opening most sites by mid-October for over 1,500 students, we served as a critical bridge to the classroom for some of our most vulnerable students.

6. #StayTheCourse

With so much uncertainty confronting our graduating seniors entering higher education, in May 2020 we began focusing on messaging to encourage them to stay the course and continue to pursue their goals. We worked closely inside the Buffalo College Success Network, a partnership between Say Yes Buffalo and five local colleges made possible by Gates Foundation funding, to craft a united push in media and social media. We aimed to incorporate the college readiness process, from financial aid documentation to application to registration. Over the summer, Say Yes staff undertook an initiative to attempt phone contacts to check in with our graduating seniors and scholars and offer support. The perseverance and resiliency of our young people facing these challenges head on inspired us to make the theme of our annual report “Stay the Course” in their honor.
8. Virtual College Kickoff

The 2020 College Kickoff was presented to Buffalo’s senior class with a spin! Due to COVID-19, the daylong college transition bootcamp was switched to a virtual format. To keep things fun and exciting, the event was hosted by 93.7 WBLK radio personalities Adri V and DJ Spin. The senior class got to hear from current college students and learn about their unique experience of taking college classes in a new virtual world. The students were then able to connect with other students heading to the same campuses in breakout rooms led by the college admissions teams. For their participation in the two-part event, students were given a free laptop to help them start their first semester in college off right. More than 150 graduating seniors logged in to participate in the event!

9. Community Schools go virtual

In three years, the Community Schools team had grown its Saturday Academies into popular bi-weekly events across 19 buildings designated as “Community Schools” that drew over 50,000 visitors in 2018-2019. We were on pace to hit a similar, if not greater mark in 2019-2020 until the pandemic forced an adaption to create Virtual Saturday Academies. In these academies, the people-centered Community School Navigators have brought their skills into the virtual realm, offering families activity and crucial community information and support. Our first Virtual Saturday Academy was April 4, and in the ten events that carried through the end of the school year, our Facebook metrics measured 36,685 engagements and 49,073 total views. The Community Schools team also presented three separate virtual college tours that featured presentations from more than a dozen schools, and a summertime “Pop In” event for high school students.
10. **Boys & Men of Color Initiative receives boost from the Oishei Foundation**

The John R. Oishei Foundation stepped up in a big way to support the work of Say Yes Buffalo’s Boys and Men of Color Initiative. Since 2017, the Breaking Barriers Youth Leadership Council has worked with young men of color helping to nurture their positive growth and development as they mature into men. Together, the young men have a unified voice that advocates for racial equity, social justice and policy change. Through the program’s short existence, so many young men remark on its importance in their day-to-day lives. Program leaders Tommy McClam and Daniel Robertson put an extra measure of care in ensuring participants feel a sense of brotherhood.

In the fall of 2020, The Oishei Foundation stepped in to support the program’s continued existence for years to come. As remarked later in this report, Oishei Foundation leaders see the value and the benefit the work has on the young men of color who participate. We are grateful to the Oishei Foundation for their continued support!

Last fall, the Buffalo Bills also showed the program some love when safety Micah Hyde selected Breaking Barriers as an Inspire Change Organization. Recent South Park High School graduate and Breaking Barriers member Shawn Collins also landed an internship with the team last summer.
Say Yes Buffalo is a landmark partnership that brings together the Buffalo Public School District, parents, the Buffalo Teachers Federation, the Buffalo Association of Administrators and Supervisors, higher education, the City of Buffalo, Erie County, and a diverse group of Buffalo area corporate, non-profit, and philanthropic organizations to organize people, time, money and resources to provide holistic, year-round support to Buffalo Public School District students throughout their K-12 years and beyond. The mission of the Say Yes Buffalo partnership is to remove barriers to educational attainment, workforce participation and economic mobility for students in public and charter schools in Buffalo, NY.

Say Yes Buffalo partners facilitate comprehensive supports, including tuition scholarships to one of more than 170 colleges and universities for those who meet residency, graduation and admission requirements. These supports are aligned with what research indicates is needed to enable every child in the program to achieve his or her potential and include:

- Summer programming
- College preparation supports
- College scholarships
- Health care
- Legal services
- Mental health care
- Mentoring
- Paid internships
- Social services and family supports
Social Services & Health Home Care Coordination
Say Yes Buffalo school-based staff, called Family Support Specialists (FSS), provide services to every school building. They are responsible for working with students struggling with attendance or behavior problems and their families to get back on track. FSS connect students and their families to physical health, mental health, after school, and basic needs programs. They also provide individual and group mentoring for the student and/or family and assist families with navigating school processes including registration, enrollment and parent-teacher conferences. Service is provided to students and families through two programs, school-based preventive services and Health Home care coordination.

Mental Health Care
Mental health counseling is available to students within their school buildings, clinic sites, and during the pandemic, virtually through Telehealth. Participation in counseling can be self-identified or referred by teachers, parents and other school building administrators. Services are provided by licensed clinical mental health professionals and are billed to the student’s health insurance, which includes Medicaid.

In-School and Mobile Health Care
Some schools have in-school health clinics that provide students with basic health care, including physical screenings and immunizations. Mobile Health buses are parked at various school locations to provide primary and reproductive health care to students where in-school services are not available. Services are provided by licensed medical professionals and are billed to the student’s health insurance (private insurance or Medicaid). Families who do not have health insurance will receive assistance obtaining it.

Legal Advice
Free legal advice is available for all Buffalo Public School students and families on non-criminal legal matters. While in-person clinics have been suspended due to covid-19, legal matters are currently being facilitated over the phone and online.
Summer Camp
Free Summer Camp is available for Buffalo Public School students in Pre-Kindergarten through 6th grade. These full- and half-day programs combine academics with fun enrichment activities and are located throughout the city at churches and community centers. In summer of 2020, Say Yes conducted this programming virtually.

Early Childhood Development
Our program provides services, resources, and free supports to families, caregivers, and educators to support children, birth through 6 years of age. We provide free developmental screenings ("Ages & Stages Questionnaire") to monitor child development, education on developmental milestones, and activities to support healthy development. We also provide connections to community-based organizations for resources such as diapers, clothing, parenting classes, counseling, and free training to educators and community organizations around social-emotional development and supports.

Strong Community Schools
A Community School brings together school and neighborhood resources to improve student learning and create stronger families and healthier families. It integrates academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement. Twenty one schools have become a hub of information and resources to meet the needs of students, parents, and community members. In the past year, Community School staff has brought its popular programming into the virtual realm, offering enrichment activity and vital community information.

Parent Centers
The Parent Centers are a part of the Strong Community Schools Strategy and are located at four Community High Schools (Bennett, East, Lafayette, and South Park). The Parent Centers provide families with education, resources, and programming that build parents knowledge, skills and networks for supporting and partnering in their child’s education. To achieve this goal a variety of activities, services, and learning sessions are offered daily and virtually in response to covid-19.

Boys and Men of Color
The Say Yes Buffalo “Breaking Barriers” Youth Leadership Council is a program of the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable’s Boys and Men of Color Initiative that is aimed at accelerating positive outcomes for boys and young men of color across the cradle-to-career continuum. Participation is open to young men 12 to 24 years. Participants agree to a one-year commitment where they learn how to elevate their voice to advocate for social justice, racial equity and policy change in our community. For more information visit breakingbarriersbuffalo.org.

College and Financial Aid Application Supports
Free services are available to students applying to college and for financial aid. Through the FAFSA Completion Project and the NYGear UP Program, students can get one-on-one help deciding what colleges to apply to, how to prepare a great application, and how to apply for financial aid. Services are available to every public high school building.
PROGRAMS & SUPPORTS
FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

Once a Buffalo public or charter high school graduate enrolls at any SUNY/CUNY or Say Yes partner private college, they become a Say Yes Buffalo Scholar. As a Scholar, they are eligible for additional supports and services after they graduate from high school.

College Kickoff for Incoming Freshmen
Each summer, Say Yes Buffalo hosts a free “College Kickoff” event to introduce students to college expectations and give them the tools to be successful. All graduating high school seniors are eligible to attend. This year’s event was held virtually in June 2020, and included technology giveaways so that students would be equipped for online classes.

Internship & Career Pathways Program
Buffalo Public School graduates who have completed their first year of college are able to apply for paid internships throughout Western New York. Students receive support with coaching, workshops, and trainings on topics such as resumés, preparing cover letters, interviewing skills, and networking. These opportunities have been cultivated specifically to provide a direct pipeline from college to career after students earn their degree. More information is available at SayYesToYourCareer.org.

Scholar Mentoring Program
Buffalo Public School graduates entering their freshman year at a Western New York college or university can apply to be matched with a mentor. The pair meets consistently for 18 months and the mentor guides the student through the transition to college.

Summer Success Academies
Say Yes Buffalo scholars who attend Buffalo State College, SUNY Erie or Medaille College have the opportunity to enroll in free summer programs prior to the start of their freshman college year to help acclimate them to college life and routines. Students are eligible to be paid for participating through the City of Buffalo’s Mayor Summer Youth Employment program.
Say Yes Buffalo Scholarship Eligibility

Say Yes Buffalo provides scholarships and grants to eligible graduates of Buffalo public and charter schools to all State University of New York (SUNY) and City University of New York (CUNY) and nearly 100 private colleges and universities. Eligible students who enroll at a Say Yes participating college can receive a scholarship to cover up to 100% of the cost of tuition after Federal, State and institutional aid have been applied.

Say Yes Buffalo Scholarships and Grants are Available to Students Who:

1. Reside in the city of Buffalo.

2. At minimum, complete grades 9-12, in consecutive years, at a public or charter school in the City of Buffalo or enroll in and complete the Buffalo Public School Adult Education College Career Institute.

3. Graduate from a public or charter school in Buffalo in June 2013 or after.

4. Enroll full-time at a Say Yes college within one year of high school graduation; and,

5. Apply for all federal and state financial aid programs available (FAFSA and TAP), including Selective Service as required by law.
The Say Yes Buffalo Impact Dashboard is a collection of data points that the Say Yes Buffalo Partnership identified collaboratively to measure the impact of their work. Individual data points are updated annually as data becomes available at SayYesBuffalo.org.
**SAY YES BUFFALO IMPACT DASHBOARD**

### 2018-2019* Buffalo Public School Student Demographics

- **45%** of students are economically disadvantaged
- **23%** of students have learning or physical disabilities
- **18%** of students are English language learners or limited English proficient
- **2%** of students are homeless

#### 2018-19 Buffalo Public Schools Enrollment

- **Asian**: 4%
- **American Indian or Alaska Native**: 1%
- **Black / African American**: 20%
- **Hispanic / Latino**: 21%
- **Multiracial**: 10%
- **Not specified**: 1%
- **White**: 83%

*2019-2020 data has not been released

#### Buffalo Public District Enrollment

- **2012-2013**: 30,750
- **2013-2014**: 31,815
- **2014-2015**: 32,165
- **2015-2016**: 31,359
- **2016-2017**: 31,398
- **2017-2018**: 31,203
- **2018-2019**: 31,050
Public School Graduation & College Matriculation Rates

Nationally, since 2012, postsecondary enrollments have decreased overall by 2% and in New York State they have dropped by 10%. But in Buffalo, the overall number of students who enrolled in postsecondary education has increased 8%.

Postsecondary Enrollment Rate

899 students in 2012

1,109 students in 2019

entering postsecondary education, a rise of 23 percent

High School Graduation Rate

49% in 2012

76% in 2019

27 percentage point increase since the launch of Say Yes Buffalo in 2012

FAFSA Completions

*FAFSA completions differ due to class size.

Operational Budget 2019-2020

14% Overhead costs (administrative personnel, office expenses, communications, events, etc.)

86% Student supports (programs & program personnel)

$10.7 Million

Say Yes programs and operations are funded through funding from public and private partners. A full list of program funders may be found on page 36.
Program Outcomes 2019-2020

In addition to monitoring the outcomes stated in the Impact Dashboard, Say Yes is also committed to regular evaluation of its supported programs. Below are outcomes of the 2019-2020 school year.

Community Schools
- **32,206 VISITS** to Saturday Academies by Buffalo Public School students and parents (before pandemic cancelled planned events)

Summer Camp Program
- **1,051** PRE-K THROUGH 6TH GRADE STUDENTS participated in free, four-week virtual summer camps

Preventive Services Program
- **3,004 FACE-TO-FACE contacts**
- **961 YOUTH served**
- **780 LINKAGES, including 51 for mental health**

Health Home Care Coordination Program
- **201 YOUTH served**
- **97%** of YOUTH served total students enrolled were up to date on well visits, & **99%** were up to date on immunizations

Internships & Career Pathways Program
- **36 STUDENT interns placed**
- **80+ STUDENTS received one-on-one support through internship application process**
- **20 STUDENTS completed the first cohort of the Career Preparation Certificate Program**

Mentoring Program
- **93 SCHOLAR PARTICIPANTS**
- **95% MATRICULATED to college**
- **80% PERSISTED from year 1 to year 2 of college**
  
  (Compared to 65% and 71%, respectively, for all Say Yes Buffalo Scholars)

Mental Health Clinics
- **796 INDIVIDUALS served 2018-2019**

Legal Clinics
- **146 FAMILY MEMBERS received help**
- **40 LOCAL ATTORNEYS volunteered services**

Program Outcomes 2019-2020
Racial equity and inclusion are top of mind in all that we do, as an employer, service provider, purchaser, and partner. We’ve worked hard to create a workplace that models these tenets and have put staff (trained diversity & equity coaches), practices and policies (purchasing guidelines that prioritize women and minority owned businesses) in place to help us maintain and grow our capacity with respect to these principles. To hold us accountable, we provide this annual snapshot of our work with an equity lens.

“Equity will be achieved when we can all just wake up and live freely; be valued and respected; live free from structural impediments based off of perceived racial characteristics; and, have fair representation and opportunity.”

-Collective Statement Developed by Say Yes Staff at 2019 Retreat
The Say Yes Buffalo Board of Directors focuses on fundraising and policy related to the program’s scholarships. This board is comprised of private individuals who are volunteering their time to raise the funds needed to provide the Say Yes Buffalo Scholarship in perpetuity. Scholarship Board members also determine eligibility and administrative guidelines and advocate on behalf of the program.

The Hon. Hugh Scott passed away in February 2021.
The Say Yes Buffalo Operating Committee meets every three weeks to monitor progress and ensure stability of programs. This body is comprised of city officials, the County Commissioner of Social Services, parent leaders, the Board of Education, Superintendent, teachers’ and administrators’ union presidents, higher education officials and leaders from the region’s two largest private foundations.
The Say Yes Buffalo Partnership gets much of its strength from the collaborative governance bodies that govern and guide its work. At the top of the structure is the Say Yes Buffalo Community Leadership Council, which is chaired by the Mayor, Deputy Erie County Executive, President of the Board of Education, the New York State Department of Education Regent, New York State Senator and New York State Assemblyperson for our region and the Say Yes Buffalo Board of Directors Chair. This body meets three times per year to tackle barriers to the work of Say Yes Buffalo, share updates on the partnership’s overall progress and provide opportunities for public input and dialogue.
The Say Yes Forever Scholarship Endowment Campaign Committee, chaired by Nick and Courtney Sinatra, focuses on fundraising for the Say Yes Buffalo Endowment Fund. The Say Yes Forever Campaign is a 5-year, $100 million campaign that is seeded by a $25 million anonymous challenge grant and will ensure the Say Yes Buffalo scholarship is funded in perpetuity. The committee is comprised of business, community, religious and parent leaders.
DONOR SPOTLIGHT
Pastor John Camardo
The Chapel

John Camardo is the executive pastor of The Chapel, a non-denominational congregation of churches located in Cheektowaga, Getzville, Lockport, and Niagara Falls. The Chapel’s mission is to ensure every man, woman, and child has repeated opportunities to hear and experience the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Chapel accomplishes this mission through the mobilization of God’s people and resources to meet the tangible needs of the community as an “extension of the love of Christ,” explained Pastor Camardo.

He takes great pride in The Chapel’s service to others and the many community partnerships it has established.

“Jesus taught us to love our neighbors, whoever they are,” said Pastor Camardo.

“These relationships allow us to have meaningful conversations and better understand one another so that we might fulfill the calling to help our neighbors.”

For years, The Chapel has partnered with many area churches and religious leaders like Pastor Jonathan Staples and First Lady Tanya Staples of First Shiloh Baptist Church. Pastor Camardo credits the Staples for helping to establish a partnership with Say Yes Buffalo and to opening his eyes to the growing needs of the community, especially from an educational standpoint. Through Tanya’s work as the Senior Director of the Community Schools initiative, she has firsthand knowledge of the talent and opportunities available to assist Buffalo’s scholars.

In late March, at the onset of the covid-19 pandemic, Pastor Camardo contacted the Staples and asked what The Chapel could do to help. “We recognized that we needed to act quickly and knew Say Yes was an organization that had preexisting relationships with the district, students and families and could point us in the right direction.” The team at Say Yes shared the significant gap in technology, access to libraries, and other basic needs that were serving as a barrier to the continued education of hundreds of students.

Since churches were still deemed essential, The Chapel staff was still at work and able to put out a call to its congregation with the needs. The response was swift and resulted in a collaborative effort that included parishioners and church partners.
like First Shiloh Baptist Church, Watermark Wesleyan, 716 Ministries, Eight Days of Hope and others coming together to donate food and technology. Through The Chapel’s “Kingdom Come” Foundation, it was also able to accept financial contributions that were added to its existing funds in order to make a significant gift to the Say Yes Buffalo Endowment Fund and the COVID-19 Technology campaign to fund the purchase of 200 laptops.

Pastor Camardo and his wife Donna are lifelong servants. They’ve lived in Western New York most of their lives with their four children. “Because of the way our community is divided geographically, it’s difficult to get to know one another and our needs. My own family and extended church family has learned firsthand that unless you have specific relationships, you are making assumptions. I encourage everyone to increase your network and make a conscious effort to build relationships that allow you to be a helper,” said Pastor Camardo.

Pastor Camardo and The Chapel look forward to continued partnership with Say Yes Buffalo and the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, among others, so that they can continue to serve their mission and in their words, “come alongside our neighbors to care for them.”
Hutch-Tech graduate Sydney Favors has come full circle.

As an eighth-grader at North Park Academy, she remembers her curiosity in social studies being sparked by her teacher, Barbara Bogdan. “I always found that interesting to learn about what has happened and why things are the way they are now.” Today, Sydney is in her first year of teaching social studies to today’s eighth-graders in Buffalo Public Schools while trying to fill the large shoes of Ms. Bogdan in her memory.

Favors remembers hearing about the Say Yes Buffalo scholarship as a sophomore at Hutch Tech, but it really came home for her when she was applying for college and was weighing acceptances from Spelman College in Atlanta, and SUNY Buffalo State. In the end, it came down to the tuition support provided by Say Yes and her mother’s advice to stay closer to home and attend Buff State. After kicking the tires on political science and a path towards law school, Favors settled in as a history major and path towards being someone else’s Ms. Bogdan.

After a month of teaching, Favors is trying to settle in and make connections with her students. “I’ve often thought it was easy to be a teacher, but there’s so much to it,” Favors said. “There’s data and how can I better support my students, I have to invest more time after school with my students. It’s multi-faceted.” And even more so challenging with classes being taught remotely. “It’s very different,” Favors explained, “when I was a student teacher last year at South Park, I liked doing interactive activities with kids for social studies, but with virtual learning, I haven’t been able to do, for example, the role-playing activities I would like to do. So now I’m trying to bring up that knowledge I got from college so I can foster different practices.”

Through the first month which Favors described as “stressful” and “draining,” she’s found support in her cohort of new teachers in the district who are going through the same experience and sharing in a group text and a strong family who “have been very instrumental and supportive. I have an anchor.”

And Favors will try to offer that anchor of support to her students and point them towards education and the Say Yes Buffalo
promise. “I just had a student tell me today she was going to drop out because Regents biology is hard. I know there is going to be points throughout the year where they want to quit, they want to give up and I know virtual learning isn’t helping that, but if you want to reach that next level, you need to go to school, you need to elevate your life.”

Sydney knows firsthand that Say Yes offers that upwards path. “Say Yes provided me with that platform to reach the next level in my life after college and thinking about what I wanted to do being involved with Say Yes, it made me want to be more deeply involved in education. I don’t plan to be a teacher the rest of my life, maybe I could get involved in a program like Say Yes, or if Say Yes is still around five years from now, be associated with that. It’s opened many doors and established connections for me, which I greatly appreciate.

“I think people need to recognize that Say Yes is doing a lot for the students that live here in Buffalo. It has improved the lives of so many of my classmates I went to high school with. Say Yes has helped create engineers, some of my classmates are doctors now, physician’s assistants; students that wouldn’t otherwise have had the opportunity to go to college without a program like this.”

#STAYTHECOURSE

Our crew of around 40 school-based Family Support Specialists split across our preventive and Health Home found themselves in a brand new world in March 2020 as essential, frontline workers going into homes to bring at-risk families much needed support and assistance. Here, three team members share a day in the life of their in the early days of the pandemic.

Ta-Tanisha Palmer

I spent the day doing welfare checks on my families, bringing essential supplies out, including water, paper towels, soap, toys, dish detergent, gloves, wipes, feminine products, and games for children.

Abdi-Kani Aden

I responded to an urgent need request from Buffalo Public Schools to deliver food to a family in need. I was in the field and more than willing to help! I was able to get to a school to get the food with only 20 minutes notice and met the family’s need.

Kissena Frazier

I spent the day making trips to students’ homes to drop off school work. My school social worker and I then made a trip to Wegmans and picked up 500 donated paper bags so that staff could pack lunches and breakfast. I’ll be checking in with families to make sure that have what they need.
Muhsinah Howlader knows where her strong work ethic comes from. Her parents immigrated to Queens, NY from Bangladesh in the 1990s. She lived there until 4th grade before arriving in Buffalo to attend the University School, a private, Islamic school on Genesee Street.

“I’ve always admired my parents. They’re so disciplined, and I know I owe a lot of who I am, especially my perseverance, to them,” said Howlader. Her dad is a businessman, and her mom works for the Census Bureau and as a driving instructor. “Immigrants often come to this country with credentials that don’t always align with American systems, and they sacrifice everything to be here. It’s a huge transition and requires determination. I’m proud of them,” she added.

And Howlader is well on her way to realizing her goals. She graduated from City Honors School in 2019. She is currently studying at the University at Buffalo and plans to graduate in 2023 and stick around at UB to pursue a medical degree in her quest to become a neurosurgeon.

“During my freshman year of high school, I attended public school for the first time. I loved the experience and my time at City Honors because I had an opportunity to see so many diverse people. I was also able to explore different courses and jump start my studies at UB,” said Howlader.

It was during high school that Howlader realized she wanted to pursue a career in surgery. During an internship at Roswell Park, she participated in a robotics surgery challenge. Through the program, she had an opportunity to work with a team of surgeons who allowed the interns to come into contact with the da Vinci Surgical System, an advanced robotic system that enables surgeons to provide minimally invasive procedures using the instruments as a guide.

“I absolutely loved this opportunity to witness the technology firsthand. A machine like this helps with healing time, the size of the surgical cuts and reduces the number of people involved in the surgery. The body is so cool and it even heals itself like a Band-Aid,” laughed Howlader.
Later in her high school career, she started looking at colleges and hearing rumblings about Say Yes Buffalo. “I always knew about college but didn’t realize how big of an expense it was or how long you needed to be in school to complete a degree program,” Howlader shared. “I honestly didn’t know that people paid for other people to go to college. I thought it was very generous.”

Howlader is forever grateful to Say Yes for opening her eyes to the philanthropy that exists in Western New York, the tuition support, and the internship opportunities that she’s been provided.

Through the Say Yes Buffalo Internship and Career Pathways Program, Howlader was able to gain experience at Jericho Road Ministries, which provides healthcare services to underserved and marginalized communities in Buffalo and across the world. “Imagine my surprise when I learned that not only is Say Yes willing to help students with tuition, but also with opportunities like the work I was able to do at Jericho. Truly, the more I worked with [Internships and Career Pathways staff] Stephanie and Johanna, I was convinced that Say Yes is a valuable resource for disadvantaged kids. Everyone on the team and their many partner organizations work hard and genuinely want everyone to succeed. It’s a ‘lift as you climb’ kind of place,” added Howlader.

Howlader has been taking courses online during the covid-19 pandemic, and says that she’s learned self-discipline through the experience, but truly hopes everyone gets educated about this virus. She is looking forward to her own career in healthcare where she can be part of the team looking to provide the public with necessary information to live a healthy and prosperous life.
At Say Yes Buffalo, a collaborative approach is essential to ensure Buffalo’s students have all the support, resources, and opportunities necessary to realize their proper place in Buffalo’s future workforce. One key player in this shared approach is The John R. Oishei Foundation.

The Oishei Foundation boasts a long history of serving as a catalyst for change in the Buffalo community, starting with its namesake and founder, John R. Oishei. A highly respected businessman whose company changed the automotive industry, and whose vision and generosity continues to impact all eight counties of Western New York.

“Education is one of our foundation’s largest investment areas,” said John R. Oishei Foundation President Robert Gioia. “But our efforts might fall short if it weren’t for strong community partnerships with organizations like Say Yes Buffalo. We realized early on and continue to witness the creative ways their leadership team and support staff work collaboratively to support students and their families.”

The Oishei Foundation’s relationship with Say Yes began when the organization was a just a dream and a five-inch binder. In 2011, Oishei Foundation Senior Vice President of Programs Blythe Merrill joined Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo President and CEO Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker for a presentation in Indianapolis with the Lumina Foundation about The Kalamazoo Promise and other Promise programs throughout the country. It was there that Merrill first met Mary Anne Schmitt-Carey, who was the President of Say Yes to Education. Merrill vividly recalls the binder that Schmitt-Carey brought to the breakfast meeting and the way she carefully walked them through the Say Yes model and turnaround approach.

“For years, the Buffalo Public Schools received negative press for its outcomes and low graduation rates. In that moment, Clotilde and I knew that this was the transformative approach that our community needed to have a real impact,” Merrill recalls.

Months later, an RFP was issued from Say Yes to Education for a new city-wide site. The response was collective and resulted in a competitive application that included $14 million to cover initial costs and strong
community support from the Oishei Foundation, Community Foundation, higher education partners, political leaders, Buffalo Public School officials, religious, union, and business leaders. The effort was successful, and Buffalo became the newest Say Yes to Education site.

“What so many of us admired about the Say Yes concept was that it was more than just a scholarship. The program was comprehensive and recognized that education is important, but there are other matters that are just so complicated and impede a student’s ability to get through the rigors of a school day. The wraparound supports Say Yes provides help students to focus on their learning,” added Gioia.

One example of the critical wraparound services that the Foundation admires in the Say Yes approach is the role of the Say Yes Family Support Specialists (FSS). Merrill recalled an occasion when she was told about a student who one of the FSS team members was working with who had been absent from school. When asked about it, the student explained that she didn’t have a coat. “Without hesitation, the Family Support Specialist bought the young lady a coat. That seems so simple but it’s a perfect example of how the staff at Say Yes operates and how much they care. That’s why we have and will continue to be involved in ensuring Say Yes is here in perpetuity.”

Merrill is also a founding member of the Say Yes Buffalo Operating Committee, which meets every three weeks to review progress, challenges, and opportunities related to Say Yes Buffalo and its work. “Say Yes operates with a great deal of transparency,” said Merrill. Even during this global pandemic, Say Yes regularly hosts community meetings to update the public on its programs and highlight students and their families. Prior to the shutdowns and need for social distancing, Say Yes held Community Meetings in various locations throughout the city so that everyone had access to the information and shared in the success.

During the initial planning stages, the Oishei Foundation made a $1 million commitment over five years to the Say Yes Tuition Scholarship, but recently shifted its investment to Breaking Barriers. A partnership with the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable, the City of Buffalo, Buffalo Public Schools, and Say Yes Buffalo, Breaking Barriers will expand the capacity of boys and young men of color to improve life outcomes and empower them to become agents of change in our community. “This was a natural fit for Oishei and our ongoing commitment to racial equity,” said Merrill. “We are also huge supporters of the program directors and Say Yes staff Tommy McClam and Daniel Robertson. They are exceptional leaders and have introduced us to so many amazing young men. It’s been a true honor to witness their graduations and other memorable moments.” Daniel is no stranger to the Oishei Foundation. He is a proud “Oishei High School Scholar” and was part of the inaugural class in 1998.

The Oishei Foundation has always looked for opportunities to support and sit face-to-face with Buffalo students to hear their stories and aspirations. Through these interactions, the team has witnessed the growing confidence in Buffalo’s students and the positive outlook that has been realized from the work that was done and continues to be done because of the Say Yes Partnership.

“This was not easy. Local partners, state education, public, private, higher education, city, county, local law enforcement, and so many others had to agree that Say Yes was the right initiative to be the gamechanger we needed. “I think our students and families and larger community are winning and that’s a great feeling that we will realize for generations to come,” said Merrill.

The Foundation also gives Say Yes Buffalo Executive Director David Rust high praise for his leadership, constructing a culture of doing more, and building an award-winning team they believe serves as a “best-in-class” model for other local nonprofits. “I just can’t lift Say Yes up enough. Each person on that team is willing to do whatever is necessary to help students and their families thrive. That benefits EVERYONE,” exclaimed Gioia.
For Morgan Williams-Bryant, relationships, community support, and education have been the sun, water, and oxygen for her growth into a tall tree. Between her family, friends, and the amazing educators who have made up her “village,” she was never allowed to question whether she could do whatever she pursued. “My family is my heartbeat, and my village is strong. At every point in my life I’ve been surrounded by love and encouraged to lead with kindness,” said Williams-Bryant.

And it’s this background, steeped in family and community, that informs her participation in the mission of Say Yes Buffalo and so many other worthy community organizations and efforts.

A product of the Buffalo Public School system, Williams-Bryant made an important connection with her seventh grade English teacher, Ms. Reynolds. “I was immediately drawn to her because I could see myself,” she said. “She was dark-skinned, cool, young, and smart. It was important for me to see her at that moment because I was feeling awkward and unsure of my place in the world.” She credits this relationship for opening her eyes to the world, and the catalyst for her application to the Buffalo Academy of Visual and Performing Arts for high school, which put her on track to attend Buffalo State College. “I could really tell she cared about my growth and success,” Williams-Bryant said.

Today, Ms. Reynolds is Dr. Ramona Reynolds, the director of the Office of Parent and Family Engagement for Buffalo Public Schools and is Williams-Bryant’s dear friend and fellow “soror” in Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

As a student at Buffalo State College, Morgan could feel herself blossoming. She was actively involved in a number of on campus clubs and activities. It’s a part of her life that has motivated her career and deep involvement with Say Yes Buffalo. “My college years were seriously some of the best in my life. I made so many friends and developed necessary leadership skills. It’s an experience that I hope every student gets to realize,” added Williams-Bryant.

When she heard about Say Yes Buffalo, it all came home for her. “I was immediately...
drawn to the mission, the resources, and the way their incredible team sought to empower students,” said Williams-Bryant. She could easily see how the Say Yes approach and programming aligned with the village that had been instrumental to her own upbringing. She immediately reached out to Executive Director Dave Rust to find out how she could get involved. He expanded her plans and recommended her to his former position as the Deputy Commissioner of Youth Services for Erie County, and tapped her for the Say Yes Operating Committee, which meets regularly to review challenges and opportunities related to the organization. She now serves on the Say Yes Endowment Committee, where she’s charged with assisting the organization to raise critical funds that will allow future Buffalo Public School students to go to college and expand their reach.

And Williams-Bryant’s reach is wide as she looks to “fulfill God’s plan” to elevate her so that she might serve others. “I’ve always loved the mantra, ‘lift as you climb,’” she added. In her work as the Chief Impact Officer at Girl Scouts of Western New York, she manages all aspects of membership, volunteer training and the development to girls’ programming across nine counties. Williams-Bryant is also an active member of Elim Christian Fellowship, a member of the board of trustees for Medaille College, Leadership Buffalo, and Sadie Strong, a breast cancer awareness and support nonprofit. She also serves as a board member and mentor for Women Who Lead, a volunteer for the Make-A-Wish Foundation, a member of the Buffalo Business First 40 Under 40 award selection committee, and a proud member of the Buffalo Chapter of The Links, Inc, a women’s group that provides programming and scholarships to youth.

When she’s not serving the community, Williams-Bryant is uplifting others and helping them to become Champion Made™ through her consulting business, MWB Ignites. “You only get one life, this one is not a dress rehearsal so it is important to maximize your potential now so that you can live out your dreams,” she laughed. Most recently, she took her message of empowerment for others to a national scale with the launch of her first book A Champion’s Prayer Journey. It’s available now for purchase on Amazon.

“My mom was always open to other people pouring into me. She didn’t know all the answers but encouraged me to surround myself with good people who would support my vision,” shared Williams-Bryant. “People don’t always know how to navigate the world, or how to react to the children of those who are just trying to figure things out. I’m one of those Buffalo kids who wanted and needed groups like Say Yes and the passionate people who support them to wrap their arms around me and help me win so that I can support others.”

Because of the pandemic, there were fewer opportunities for our scholars to take advantage of paid internships over the summer. But that didn’t stop Tierra Purdue from working with Jericho Road Community Health Center.

“Learning about yourself at a young age and figuring out your likes and dislikes before you graduate college is a great advantage to have,” she said. Say Yes gives their students that.”

Heidi Romer, the Director of Community Advancement at Jericho Road, challenges other organizations to participate in the program. “If you have money, time and capacity you should feel obligated to do so,” she says. “We have to be able to give back to our youth; they are our future leaders.”
DONOR SPOTLIGHT
Samantha Nephew

As early as she can remember, Samantha Nephew was involved in community building beyond her family structure. From as early as 7 years old, her parents would take her and her sisters, Cassandra and Shelby, to community events to hand out flyers and other literature. At the time, her mother, Zenna Nephew, was the program manager at Good Schools for All. Her father, Art Nephew, worked for Men of Color Health Awareness. Thanks to their mother’s influence, Samantha and Shelby are also founding members of the Community Foundation’s 21st Century Fund, a giving circle that is open to anyone who wants to give back to Western New York.

Her parents are two big reasons she values the work of Say Yes Buffalo.

These days, Nephew is having a full circle moment and fulfilling her late mother’s desire for her daughters to have a sense of ownership for the community. “It’s so rewarding to run into my parent’s old colleagues and have them reference her work in relation to my own path,” said Nephew.

Born and raised in Buffalo, Nephew is a product of the Buffalo Public Schools system. She attended the Native American Magnet School where she was entrenched in her culture. “At the school, being Native American was normal and I wasn’t mocked for being a minority. Differences were celebrated and it was an overall positive environment,” she added.

Upon graduating in 2003, Samantha went to Lafayette High School (class of 2007). While at Lafayette, she was involved in the school newspaper, Model UN, the swim program, and not surprisingly she was voted “Most Likely to Become President.” Her mother also advocated for her to enroll in courses at Cornell University during the summers of her sophomore and junior years of high school. “It was an insightful experience. I recall a moment when one of the teaching assistants asked us to write a thesis. Everyone in the course seemed to know what they were doing. I went to my room and cried because I was lost. At that moment I realized there was a lot that I didn’t know and immediately started to take my studies seriously,” said Nephew.
Since then, she’s earned a bachelor’s degree from Buffalo State College, a master’s degree from St. Bonaventure University, and is currently completing her second master’s degree in Public Administration from Buffalo State College.

Like many young people, Nephew’s career has taken many forms, but education, climate change, and policy work have been a constant and will hopefully continue to shape her career. From joining the Buffalo Parent Teacher Organization (BPTO) to serving as a substitute, she sees herself in today’s students and wishes Say Yes Buffalo were around during her academic career. “So many of my friends would’ve loved the connections, wraparound services, and the added tuition support,” said Nephew.

Through her involvement with the BPTO and Citizen Action of New York she was able to learn more about Say Yes and the policy side of education. Her passion for the organization might even be related to her connection to the physical office space. “So many formative moments in my life happened at 712 Main Street. I would sit in what is now the Say Yes Founders Room and work on volunteer work that my mom gave me,” laughed Nephew. Between her unique connection to the office and her own connection to the current Say Yes scholars who like her had trials to overcome, donating and advocating for the organization is an easy decision.

When Nephew wasn’t working on behalf of Buffalo’s students, she could be found working on the political campaigns of April Baskin, Nate McMurray, and various Common Council races. The connection to her childhood is just too obvious to ignore, as many of her middle school years were spent with her parents and sister working on Jeremy Toth and Sam Hoyt’s Assembly races in the late 90s.

Her career has also included working on racial justice issues for organizations like PUSH Buffalo. There, she worked in marketing and learned how race impacts environmental, housing, transportation, and other basic human needs. “Who I have become as a manager, volunteer, and a person was shaped by this experience and all the knowledge I gained. There are so many systemic issues that people experience, and I feel obliged to provide a better quality of life for all people,” said Nephew.

In 2015, she joined the inaugural Open Buffalo Emerging Leaders program. The experience taught her how organizations like Open Buffalo and Say Yes help people to identify the power of their own stories. Looking ahead, Nephew hopes to use her wide range of experience in community organizing, politics, event planning and communications to help her community, create policies that uplift people, and continue the long legacy of community work that is in her blood.
Thank you to our major public and private partners that help us fund programs and operations.

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Say Yes to Education
Simple Gifts Fund

FOUNDATIONS
Anonymous (2)
Amgis Foundation
The Baird Foundation
The Balbach Family Foundation
Bell Trust
Richard W. Bowen Fund
Buffalo Bills Foundation

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Friendship Baptist Church
Gerald Kelly Capital Corporation
Gibraltar Industries
Google LLC
Greater New Life Church
John Somers/Harmac Medical Products, Inc.
Harvard Business School Club of Buffalo
Hodgson Russ LLP
Hurwitz & Fine, P.C
JPMorgan Chase Bank
KeyBank Foundation
Lawley Insurance
Lougen, Valenti, Bookbinder, & Weintraub LLP
M&T Bank
Moog Inc.
Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary R.C. Church
Network for Good
Northwest Bank
Norton Rose Fulbright Canada LLP
Our Lady of Peace Roman Catholic Church
Pit Crew Marketing
Print2Web, LLC
Rand Capital
Rich Family Foundation
Sandhill Investment Management
Say Yes to Education
Sinatra & Company Real Estate
St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Clarence
St. Paul’s Church in Buffalo
State Farm
Friends of Crystal Peoples-Stokes
Target Corporation Employee Engagement Program
The Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo
Univera Healthcare
Walsh Duffield Companies, Inc.
When Seconds Count, Inc.

William S. Hein & Company Foundation
Winthrop Financial
WPO Ontario/SW-7
Zenner and Ritter, Inc.

PRIVATE LEGACY SOCIETY
Anonymous (S)

SAY YES BUFFALO LEGACY SOCIETY
Anonymous (S)

SAY YES BUFFALO ENDOWMENT FUND

NAMED ENDOWMENT FUNDS THAT BENEFIT THE SAY YES BUFFALO SCHOLARSHIP FUND
Charles G. Duffy Jr. and Virginia Leahy Duffy Scholarship Fund
Gary M. Crosby Endowed Scholarship Fund
Jacobs Endowment Fund

INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES
Anonymous (22)

David Adkins
David H. & Joan B. Alexander
Stephen & Margaret Anderson
Joyce & Stuart Angert
Monica Angle & Sam Magavern
Kaitlyn Anticoli
Amy Arena
Lisa Arnet
Cathrine Baczynski
Patricia Barrett
Rebecca Bass
Allan & Melissa Baumgart
Lauren Baynes
Landrum Beard
Dr. Maura Belliveau
Michael & Christine Belus
Rhonda Benton
Stephanie Beyer
Barbara Billings & Peter Neal
Anthony Birozes
Mr. & Mrs. Dennis Bischof
Andrew Blinkoff
Tommie E. Blunt
Kari & Paul Bonaro
Mark Boyd
Sharon Bradley
Michael Brady
Robert Brewer
Mr. & Mrs. Lavar Brown
Robert & Mary Ann Budin
Tara Burgess
Brian Burke
E.J. & Karen Butler
Mrs. Nicole C. Bycina
Brittany Calhoun
Roberta Callocchia
Peter & Sandy Cammarata
Anthony Carroll
Mr. & Mrs. Richard & Yvonne Carrow
Melanie Carthon
Michael & Carol Cassell
Meghan Cavanaugh
Dennis Chapman
Elizabeth Clark
Susan & Robert Conklin
Betsy Constantine Janowski & Joe Janowski
Helen Conteh
Joseph Contes
James Cooper
Linda Cornelius & Drew Neisser
Mr. & Mrs. James C. Cosgrove
Michael Cross
Shanna Crump-Owens
LaToya Cunningham
Leah Daniel
Kelli Daniels
Clotilde & Adrian Dedecker III
Prixita Del Prado Hill

Wendy Diina
Leah Dokos
Rashida Dowell
Melinda DuBois
Adam Dunning
Hon. Susan & James Eagan
Ross & Mary Alice Eckert
Robert Elardo & Elizabeth Tommaney
Maurine Falkowski
Wendy Fechter
John & Paula Feroledo
Aly Finkle
Dr. Bobbie Finocchio
Donald & Denise Fishback
Michael Flannigan
Lawrence & Deborah Franco
Kara Fraser
Pastor & Mrs. Charles & Denise Fryer
Scott W. & Dr. Danis J. Gehl
Richard George
Mr. Robert Glaser
Dr. Philip Glick & Dr. Drucy Borowitz
Grant Golden, MD & Deborah Goldman
Susan Gosden
Ellen E. Grant, Ph.D., LCSW-R
Alex & Jennifer Gress
Denise Gueli
Matt Gueriglia
Sheila Guggins
Majorie A. Hagberg
Melissa Hall
Sarah Ham
Tom Harmon
Leona Harper
Jennifer Harris
David & Donna Hartney
Ashanti Haynes
Amanda Hays
Mr. & Mrs. Andrew Hays
Jonathan Herdlein
IN HONOR

Elizabeth Danahy, in honor of Emily Wyckoff
Julie & Cutler Greene, in honor of Emily Wyckoff
Molly & Rob Greene, in honor of Emily Wyckoff
Jerilyn J. Hickey & Eric R. Frasch, in honor of Morgan Williams-Bryant
Tony & Kate Masiello, in honor of Dr. Elizabeth Conant & Ms. Camille Cox
Alexandra McPherson, in honor of Emily Wyckoff
Grace O’Connor, in honor of Emily Wyckoff
Anthony Pendergrass, in honor of Tanice R. Pendergrass
Susan & David Schubbe, in honor of Vincent & Mary Walsh
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Chip Berry
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Kevin Brinkworth
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Gary Burns
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Christopher & Mary Collins
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Philip Corwin
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of John Militello & Duane Cady
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Walid Daham
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Edmund Eaves
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Tom Fahlund
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Richard Ferranti
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Todd & Cindy Goldstein
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Gordon Gross
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of John Grabski
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Mark Jaquet
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Kenneth Edward Barrett
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Kert King
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Lee Marc
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Larry Mattar
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Luis & Natalie Mendez
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Michael Militello
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Anthony Nanula
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Philip Nanula
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Steven Nanula
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Christopher O’Donnell
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Mark Ogiony
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Paul Nanula
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of Eric Reich
Sinatra & Company Real Estate, in honor of William & Carol Lorenz

IN MEMORIAM

Corrine Barr, in memory of Dr. James “Moose” Dempsey
Mrs. Beverly Blue, in memory of Mr. Sandree Blue
Marilyn G. Carmichael, in memory of James “Moose” Dempsey
Katrina Butzer, in memory of Mary Anne Ditsious
Bob & Kathy Chyka, in memory of Mary Anne Ditsious
Mr. & Mrs. Timothy & Eileen Conboy, in memory of James “Moose” Dempsey
Lisa Conn, in memory of Joseph T. Murray
Argery Cooke, in memory of Mary Anne Ditsious
Gail Cronin, in memory of Mary Anne Ditsious

IN HONOR
Ditsious
Eileen Crotty in memory of Mary Ellen Crotty
Kevin D. & Mary Dobson McDonald, in memory of Susan R. Bean
Dr. Bonita Durand in memory of Dr. Henry J. Durand
Sue S. Gardner, in memory of Arnold B. Gardner
Elizabeth Girardi, in memory of Joseph T. Murray
Jill Jacobs, in memory of Dr. James “Moose” Dempsey
Isaac Johnson in memory of Florence & George Johnson
Mary Ann Johnson, in memory of Dr. James “Moose” Dempsey
Joseph M. and Martha R. Jennings Trust, in memory of Dr. James “Moose” Dempsey
Sharon Lomison in memory of Mary Ann Ditsious
Florine Luhr in memory of Patricia Sheehan Evans
Margaret Murray, in memory of Joseph T. Murray
Deanna Myers, in memory of Mary Ann Ditsious
Robert Myers, in memory of Mary Ann Ditsious
Dr. Barbara Nevergold in memory of Dr. Kenneth Seals, MD
Ryan Nolan, in memory of Dr. James “Moose” Dempsey
Cail Cronin in memory of Mary Ann Ditsious
Patricia Reeder, in memory of Joseph T. Murray
Analiese Reigstad, in memory of Joseph T. Murray
San Bor Sports, Inc. in memory of Santo (Sonny) Bordieri
Anne Schaefer, in memory of Joseph T. Murray
Phillip Stevens, in memory of Dr. James “Moose” Dempsey
Christine Sustar in memory of James “Moose” Dempsey
Mrs. David Wasik in memory of Dorothy “Dutch” Podruza
Marci Wiseman in memory of Naomi Rosenhoch
SJM3 Fund
VMware Foundation on behalf of Michael O’Neill
The Vogt Family Foundation
The Watson Billings Family Foundation
Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation
Matching Grants Program

FOUNDATIONS
The Henry E. and Susan W. Beamer Endowment Fund
Chur Family Foundation
The Robert and Patricia Colby Foundation
Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo
The Davis Family Foundation
Foundation for Jewish Philanthropies
Gallogly Family Foundation
The Joseph and Anna Gartner Foundation
The Josephine Goodyear Foundation
The Carlos and Elizabeth Heath Foundation, James M. Wadsworth, Trustee
The Seymour H. Knox Foundation
The Kenneth L. and Katherine G. Koessler Foundation
The Lewis Family Fund
The Margaret L. Wendt Foundation
Arlene & Ruth Mathews Fund
The Mulroy Family Foundation, James M. Wadsworth, Trustee
The Pierce Family Charitable Foundation
The Pinto Family Foundation
Say Yes to Education

BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS
Adams Actuarial LLC
Bailie Lumber Company
Bank on Buffalo
Boland + Partners Real Estate
Buffalo Bills Foundation
Buffalo Printing
The Chapel Curbell, Inc.
Edison Street Baptist Church
Emmanuel Temple Church of God
Evans Bank
First Shiloh Baptist Church
Fruit Belt Advisory Council
G&G Empowerment Group
Gerald Kelly Capital Corporation
Grace United Church of Christ
Harvard Business School Club of Buffalo
Hodgson Russ LLP
Lawley Insurance
Milk for Health on the Niagara Frontier
Miracle Missions Full Gospel Church
Moog Inc.
Network for Good
Open Buffalo
The Pike Company, Inc.
Print2Web, LLC
St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Clarence
TechNet MSP
Zenner and Ritter, Inc.

COVID-19 TECHNOLOGY CAMPAIGN
Anonymous
Joyce & Stuart Angert
Rebecca Bass
Allan & Melissa Baumgart
Lauren Baynes
The Henry E. & Susan W. Beamer Endowment Fund at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo
Ann & Dennis Bischof
Buffalo Bills Foundation
Bob & Kathy Chyka in memory of Mary Ann Ditsious
Elizabeth G. Clark
Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo
Lisa Conn, in memory of Joseph T. Murray
Cail Cronin in memory of Mary Ann Ditsious
Michael Cross
The Davis Family Foundation
Clotilde & Adrian Dedecker III
Mr. Scott & Dr. Danis J. Gehl
George Weiss Trust
Elizabeth Girardi, in memory of Joseph T. Murray
Susan Gosden
Mr. & Mrs. David & Donna Hartney
Garrett Hodgson
Mary Jo & Peter Hunt
Catherine Irish
Todd Joseph & Barbara Ostfeld
Bill & Anne Joyce
Mary Beth Karr
Ms. Kathryn Kauffman
Cheyenne Ketter-Franklin
Robert Kieffer
Sylvia Lloyd
Sharon Lomison in memory of Mary Ann Ditsious
Aaron Lowinger

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Kate & Tony Masiello
Elizabeth Murphy
Margaret Murray, in memory of Joseph T. Murray
Michael Nanfara
Jerri Nevilles
Sanford & Margery Nobel
Valerie Nowak
Alphonso & Marcia O’Neil-White
Shannon Patch
Norvella Pendergrass
Print2Web, LLC-Gene Szerbiak
Colden Ray
Linda Ray
Patricia Reeder, in memory of Joseph T. Murray
Analiese Reigstad, in memory of Joseph T. Murray
Peter Rindfuss
Hugh & Linda Russ
Dr. & Mrs. Paul Rutecki
Anne Schaefer, in memory of Joseph T. Murray
Donna Sholk
Nicholas & Courtney Sinatra
SJM3 Fund
Brandi Smith
Tanya Staples
Dr. Richard A. Stockton, Jr.
Steve & Nicole Swift
TechNet MSP
Dr. Maria Testa & Thomas Petrocelli
Jack Walsh
Erin Warford
Morgan Williams-Bryant
Tamara Zabawa
Rev. Vicki Zust

HELP SAY YES SCHOLARS
BUY BOOKS AT TALKING LEAVES CAMPAIGN

Tamara Alsace
Judith Brown
Neglia Ballet
Rebecca Bass
Melissa & Allan Baumgart
Leslie M. Bixby
Mildred Blaisdell
Meghann Boltz
Sarah Borer
Katie Campos
Edmund Cardoni
Cathleen Chaffee
Mick Cochrane
Matt Corey
Amy & Dan Cross-Viola
Emily Deisig
George DeTitta
Amber Dixon
Kelly Dodd
Peter Dow
Malcolm Ertha
Audrey & Michael Ettinger-Finley
The Norward Family
Lou Jean Fleron
Rebecca French
Jesana Gadley
Mr. Scott & Dr. Danis J. Gehl
Lise Gelernter
Katie Geoffroy
Mark Goldman
Janet Goodsell
Gene Grabiner
Margaret Guillaume
Katka Hammond
Kate Haq
Barbara Hart
Nan Haynes
Erin Heald
Ed Healy
Barbara Henderson
Paul & Barb Hogan
Stacy Hubbard
Peter & Mary Jo Hunt
Kathy Hussey
Thomas Hyde
Joan Hyman
Nancy Irwin
Michael Jason
Jonathan Johnsen
Linda Johnson
Luella Johnson
Bruce & Gail Johnstone
Melanie Kaczmarek
Olga Karman
Matthew Kauffman
Erin Kelly
Maria Kempner
Derek King
John Kolaga
KC Kratt
Larry Lantinga, PhD
Melissa Leonard
Cindy Letro
Joe Lin-Hill
Aaron Lowinger
Nicholas Lustig
Molly Magavern
David Magavern
Sam Magavern & Monica Angle
Lynn Magdol
Sue Mann Dolce
Carrie Marcotte
Pamela Marcucci
Helen Marlette
Charles Massey
Megan McNally
Bernadette Medige
Dr. Robert Milch
Bondi Miller
John Mitchell
Alexandra Montante
Kevin Moran

Morgan Morris
Heidi Neglia
Dr. Philip Niswander
Anne Noble
Jill Norton
Breonna Norward
Ann Philippone
Stephanie Phillips
Diane Picard
Erwin Rakoczy
Linda Ray
Gary Earl Ross
Marvel Ross-Jones
Stephanie Rothenberg
Dave Ruch
Sean Ryan
Christine Sabuda
Lynda Schneekloth
Geoff & Melissa Schutte
Lawrence Scott
Sarah Signorino
Cynthia Silverstein
Jessica Silverstein
Nan & Walter Simpson
Anthony Siu
Kristi Sokol
Elizabeth Stanton
Joyelle Tedeschi
Susan & John Thomas
Jack Walsh
Claude Welch
Marion Werner
Gaye Whyte
Elizabeth Meg Williams
Kari Winter
Barbara Wolff-Reichert
Margaret Wooster
Judy Zeckhauser
Leslie Zemsky
Rev. Vicki Zust

*deceased
Our Team

Abdi-Kani Aden
Family Support Specialist

Ahlam Ahmed
Community School Navigator

Durgham Alyasiri
School Zone Leader

Osa Amadasu
Family Support Specialist

Daytuan Antonetti*
Community School Navigator

Shaera Armprester
Family Support Specialist

Tereka Baltimore*
Mentoring Supervisor

Laura Bannon
Family Support Specialist

Dalisha Bass
Family Support Specialist

Betsy Behrend*
Senior Director Operations & Communications

Stacy Bisker
VLSC Program Coordinator

Sarah Blish
Family Support Specialist

Alex Brady
Family Support Specialist

Deborah Brannon
Family Support Specialist

Kirby Briggs
Community School Navigator

Amedria Byrd
Family Support Specialist

LeRondra "Lee" Byrd
Family Support Specialist Supervisor

Johanna Caplan*
Internship & Career Pathways Supervisor

Erika Carpenter
Family Support Specialist

Hope Coddell
Family Support Specialist Supervisor

Anna Cole
Family Support Specialist

Cindy Collins
Parent Center Liaison

Cynthia Collins
Parent Center Liaison

Kimberley Costner
Early Childhood Assistant

Thomas Cranston
Family Support Specialist

Jamil Crews
Digital Communications Manager

Dan Cross-Viola*
Extended Learning Time Supervisor

Kari Cunningham*
Family Support Specialist

Van Daniel
Community School Navigator

Jerrica Delaney
Community School Zone Leader

Korin Frantz
Senior Accountant

Kissena Frazier
Family Support Specialist

Levi Galbreath
Communications and Office Specialist

Danielle Galeski
Early Childhood Supervisor

Isaiah Gary
Community School Navigator

Yolanda Gatewood*
Scholarship Coordinator for College Outreach

Collin Gehl
Talent Acquisition and Development Manager

Marisol Gomez
Community School Navigator

Gabriella Hall
Say Yes Intern

Sarah Hanley*
Family Support Specialist

Jesse Harmon
VLSC Health Coordinator

Ericka Heary
Summer Camp Specialist

Aaron Jackson
Family Support Specialist

Nikia Jackson
Family Support Specialist

Kameron Jackson
Community Schools Navigator & Executive Administrative Assistant

Amelia Jordan
Administrative Assistant

Michael Katilus*
Family Support Specialist

Jon Krol
Family Support Specialist

Kameron Jackson
Community Schools Navigator

Christopher Lee
Data Director

Shawn Leonard
Family Support Specialist

Megan Lewis
Community School Navigator

Ashley Licata
Family Support Specialist

Madeline Little
Say Yes Intern

Sylvia Lloyd
Family Support Specialist Supervisor

Aaron Lowinger*
Communications & Graphics Manager

Tabatha Lumley
Family Support Specialist

Courtney MacVie
Family Support Specialist

Eric Maldonado
Family Support Specialist Supervisor

Lachandra Martin-Rodgers*
Family Support Specialist

Tommy McClam*
Boys and Men of Color Senior Director

Emily Melendez
Family Support Specialist

Elizabeth Minns*
Family Support Specialist

Jessica Misiejuk
Family Support Specialist

Linda Morgan
Family Support Specialist

Derek Newsome
Family Support Specialist

Daun Nicholas
Community School Zone Leader

Breonna Norward
Community School Navigator

LaKea Palmer
Family Support Specialist

Ta-Tanisha Palmer
Family Support Specialist

Nikki Parlato
Community Schools Navigator

Adriene Parrish
Parent Center Liaison

Amanda Paul*
Senior Director of School-Based Programming

Stephanie Peete*
Internship & Career Pathways Supervisor

Tanice Pendergrass
Development & Strategic Partnership Manager

Amber Quinney
Executive Administrative Assistant

Stacy Rankin
Scholarship Coordinator

Jennifer Ray
Internship & Career Pathways Assistant

Icheiry Rivera
Near Peer Mentoring Supervisor

Daniel Robertson
Boys and Men of Color Program Director

Denise Rodriguez
Family Support Specialist

Aracely Rodriguez-Perez
Community Schools Navigator

Daphne Ross*
Senior Director of College Success and Communications

David Rust*
Executive Director

Prennessia Salder-Lambert
Community School Navigator

Elmer Santos
Community School Navigator

Seraphine Sargent
Family Support Specialist

Gellenia Smallwood*
Parent Center Director

Joelle Stubbe*
Community School Navigator

Joel Stubbe*
Community School Navigator

Tanya Staples*
Senior Director of Community Schools

Joyce Stilson*
Community School Navigator

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* Denotes staff who are also an active donor to the scholarship fund.