Vaccinating our City

Irfan Hasan is The Trust’s newly promoted deputy vice president for grants; he continues to manage our health and behavioral health grantmaking.

“Many of us felt a collective sigh of relief when we saw the first COVID-19 vaccine in the U.S. administered to a critical-care nurse in Queens last December. It seemed like we had finally turned a corner. The unfortunate truth is that we still face several hurdles to getting past the pandemic, particularly the mass distribution of vaccines and overcoming concerns about being vaccinated.

We saw that The Trust could play a role in ensuring New Yorkers understand the value of inoculation and that scientifically sound messages are delivered to encourage vaccination.

The initial challenge was getting enough supply to meet the pent-up demand. Now, conversations are taking a different tilt as manufacturers deliver hundreds of millions of doses. The country—and New York—will still need to vaccinate those who didn’t eagerly seek out the shots, could not make or travel to vaccination sites, or remain hesitant.

There are a variety of concerns people have about the new vaccines, so we want to make sure that nonprofits can quickly respond to misinformation with science-based messaging. We also want to make sure that trusted messengers in the community can help people make decisions based on facts.

Many experts believe that even if vaccine availability is plentiful—and all those who want to get a shot receive it—the United States will still fall short of achieving herd immunity by the end of this year. Vaccinating New Yorkers must be a priority for months to come. But history shows us some groups—especially low-income New Yorkers and people of color—have often been at the tail end of receiving the latest developments in healthcare.

In response, The Trust has made $1 million in grants to six nonprofits to help us make progress locally. The New York Academy of Medicine will organize community and medical groups. CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Policy will develop a data dashboard to track hesitancy and help shape messaging. Public Good Projects will monitor social media and counter misinformation in realtime. The Fund for Public Health in New York will coordinate outreach efforts in several high-need neighborhoods. Community Health Care Association of New York State will work with its network of clinics to improve access to vaccinations, and will talk with clients face-to-face if they have hesitancy about the inoculation. Finally, VOCAL-NY will target a vaccine campaign for high-risk populations, including people with HIV or AIDS, and former drug users. Multi-directional communication is critical, so the grants require that groups convene regularly.

The issue is bigger than what a single foundation can do. We are joined by the New York State Health Foundation and the Altman Foundation, which have aligned their grants to bring additional resources to some of these projects. As the region’s community foundation, we often use this cooperative approach.”

Vaccine hesitancy is real—even in a place that was as hard-hit as New York. For example, a recent survey of Brooklyn residents noted almost 60 percent of respondents remained unsure about getting vaccinated, citing side effects as the primary concern. Science-based messaging to overcome this hesitancy is critical.

— Irfan Hasan
The COVID-19 pandemic has created a critical need for virtual cultural programming—and has exposed the stark inequities between the organizations that have the resources and capacity to create digital media content and those that do not.” — BRIC President Kristina Newman-Scott

Hang the pandemic struck, Energy Impact Partners (EIP) temporarily closed its offices on 47th Street and Third Avenue. “We’re fortunate we can do business remotely,” said Peter Fox-Penner, the corporation’s chief impact officer, “but the fruit vendors and restaurants around our office can’t.”

As an impact-focused investment firm, EIP wanted to do something to help locally. “We looked around and found exactly what we were looking for—a one-stop way to help those hit hardest,” Fox-Penner said. “We don’t have the expertise to divvy up our contributions to help with hunger, rent relief, or medical care. That’s why we chose The New York Community Trust.”

With enthusiastic support from his colleagues, Fox-Penner created a matching corporate giving program, bundling employee contributions with a company donation to help our COVID-19 response efforts.

Thankfully, EIP is in good company. We have combined its generosity with that of many others to help New York recover and rebuild in a range of ways. A few examples of the grants we made include:

- **Westside Campaign Against Hunger** is increasing the collective purchasing power and efficiency of emergency food providers across the city.
- **Local Initiatives Support Corporation** is hosting a citywide network of small business services to help retailers and other mom-and-pop shops in low-income neighborhoods reopen safely.
- **Jewish Child Care Association of New York** is helping improve remote learning for children at risk of being placed in foster homes.

If you are interested in helping our city come back from the devastating blow dealt by the pandemic, we encourage you to give directly to local organizations working in communities that have been impacted the most.

You also can join us in our efforts to address the ongoing effects of the pandemic. Give via credit card at nycommunitytrust.org/donate; send a check to The New York Community Trust’s Community Needs Fund; or donor-advisors can use MyNYCT and click on the “Community Needs Fund” tab to transfer money from their fund. 

**CURRENT MAILING ADDRESSES FOR DONATIONS**

**For U.S. Postal Service**
Community Funds, Inc.
P.O. Box 22472
New York, NY 10087-2472

**Delivery services other than USPS**
JPMorgan Chase – Lockbox Processing
Attn: Community Funds, Inc. and 22472
4 Chase Metrotech Center
7th Floor East
Brooklyn, NY 11245
Businesses are seeing more customers and hiring back workers, and federal stimulus money is helping many make ends meet. But how can we build back a more equitable and vital city? The following are new grants that seek to improve life for struggling New Yorkers, and make sure we are ready for the next crisis.

FORGING VIRTUAL CONNECTIONS

Though many nonprofits now provide classes, assistance, and community over laptops and smartphones, some potential participants still lack access to these services. Older New Yorkers, who suffered from isolation even before the pandemic, often struggle to connect.

The New York Community Trust is working to change this. With a $116,000 grant, Brooklyn Public Library is holding virtual workshops for older adults, offering telephone support, and training staff on technology access so older adults are comfortable with technology and take more advantage of online offerings.

In Hunts Point in the Bronx, THE POINT Community Development Corporation has been supplying affordable wireless to local residents, using community-owned equipment to broadcast mobile signals. A $330,000 grant is helping THE POINT create more hotspots and train residents in hosting and maintaining the local network. The group also is researching the viability of community ownership for its network.

OPENING DIGITAL DOORS: An older adult at Brooklyn Public Library learns how to access online collections and other internet offerings before the pandemic. A Trust grant is helping...
Meanwhile, Community Tech NY is using a $250,000 Trust grant to support three low-income NYC communities of color as they promote digital equity and build internet tools and services as long-term, community-centered solutions to the digital divide.

PUTTING THE ARTS IN CITY PARKS
The city’s world renowned arts and cultural sector has struggled with the pandemic, shutting down offerings that are a source of inspiration, recreation, and comfort for millions. But if the pandemic has closed one part of city life, it has popularized another, with the use of green spaces blooming as New Yorkers look to do as much as possible outside.

With the upcoming summer shaping up to be one of heightened outdoor activity, we are helping arts and cultural groups stage more events in parks and plazas through Green/ArtsLive NYC. This program, created by the Open Culture Coalition and supported through a $250,000 grant to City Parks Foundation, will help artists navigate permits, provide microgrants to cover fees, and prioritize groups from neighborhoods disproportionately affected by COVID.

ADDITION TREATMENT IN LONG ISLAND
Long Island is the epicenter of the state’s opioid epidemic. People struggling with addiction often don’t get the help they need, and the pandemic has further limited their ability to get treatment. Our Long Island Community Foundation gave $20,000 to Well-Life Network to expand telehealth services to this community.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR EMERGENCY WORKERS
From the first days of the pandemic, emergency medical technicians and paramedics have been on the frontlines, working long hours as COVID hit New York hard. They continue to battle the effects of the virus even at the risk of their own health and lives. Despite suffering from elevated stress and trauma, many of these workers still don’t have access to mental healthcare. With a Trust grant of $130,000, the Regional Emergency Medical Services Council of NYC will create peer support groups and an emergency hotline, and connect emergency workers with mental-health providers.

MONITORING NURSING HOMES IN WESTCHESTER
New York State has failed to adequately protect residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities. Often, when a facility has been served a violation, New York State has neglected to ensure the problem gets fixed, an issue exacerbated by the pandemic.

“COVID-19 has had a catastrophic impact on nursing home residents and their families,” said Richard J. Mollot, executive director of the Long Term Care Community Coalition. “In addition to being the most vulnerable to the disease, nursing home residents have suffered unimaginable levels of neglect and isolation over the last year.”

The organization’s Tri-County LTC Ombudsman Program is using $40,000 from our Westchester Community Foundation to monitor care facilities in the county, support residents and their families, and advocate for better care and treatment with dignity.
A Historical Site Re-examines its Past

Trust grant helps uptown farmhouse share its roots

ow do we make history more inclusive and relevant to contemporary life? It’s a question the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum Alliance is examining with $70,000 from The Trust, as it delves into its own history, bringing to light the stories of enslaved and indentured laborers at the site and in the surrounding Inwood neighborhood.

The last remaining Dutch colonial building of its kind in Manhattan, the Dyckman Farmhouse was a fixture of the city’s agrarian past. Over time, the Farmhouse evolved, becoming a rooming house after the Dyckman family sold it, then a public museum. In recent years, the Alliance has taken steps to make programming more inclusive and relevant to the large Latinx population in Inwood—offering bilingual signage and programming and working with local groups to build audiences.

“For centuries, the legacy of enslavement has left an indelible mark on this country,” said Meredith S. Horsford, executive director of the Alliance. “Generations have ignored the stories of the enslaved people whose contributions helped build this country.” The Alliance used a Trust grant to launch DyckmanDISCOVERED, an examination of the history of slavery at the site, conveyed through installations and community programs.

Research has uncovered new accounts of people associated with the Farmhouse, including Francis Cudjoe and Gilbert Horton, two of the enslaved people whose full names were found in the Dyckman family’s records.

With these discoveries, the Alliance is adding new stories to the tours of the Farmhouse and offering a series of talks on the intersection of race, history, archaeology, anthropology, music, and dance. For Peter Hoffmeister, one of the artists who created an installation at the Farmhouse through DyckmanDISCOVERED, the project is a way to highlight slavery’s reach beyond the American South. “It was important to amplify the story of those enslaved at the Farmhouse,” he said. “Taking what had been treated as a footnote, and turning that into the story.”

“Generations have ignored the stories of the enslaved people whose contributions helped build this country.”

— Meredith S. Horsford, Dyckman Farmhouse Museum Alliance
Self-care Is More Important than Ever

Kimberly Williams, the president and chief executive officer of Vibrant Emotional Health, offers some tips to help us navigate the mental and emotional challenges brought on by the pandemic.

"With the support of The Trust, Vibrant expanded its services to provide nonprofits with the tools they need to help their workers manage the increased anxiety of the past year. We particularly targeted front-line staff of social-services providers to make sure they are doing well themselves before they try to help others do well.

We’re also helping everyday New Yorkers address the profound effects of the pandemic on their mental and emotional health.

Whether your job is to help others or you are attending to your own loved ones, a critical and often overlooked tool for any caregiver facing stress is self-care.

REMEMBERING THE BASICS

Here are a few basic tips to maintain your wellness: eat a healthy diet, add movement or exercise to your routine, get enough sleep, and set aside time to relax. And, remember to include something in your day that brings you joy, or just makes you laugh.

Your surroundings also can affect you, so take time to clean, organize, and beautify your work and living spaces. And, spend time with people you care about—even if it is not in the typical way.

Connecting with colleagues about more than work is also important. Find time to have some fun together, because the usual in-person banter that happens normally at work is missing. From my own experience, I can tell you that parents are under more stress than usual. Parents need to find some time, even if it is five or ten minutes, to do something that makes them feel good. If that means waking up a little early or going to bed a little later, it will be worth it.

CARING FOR OTHERS

Teenagers are particularly challenged now because socialization is so key to their development. They are wired to be with other people. Parents should not be afraid to talk frankly about emotional health with their kids, as it’s unlikely that they will open up without being asked. As parents, we can help them find ways to engage with their peers, even if it is not in the typical way.

Many older family members were isolated even before the pandemic, and are more so now. You may want to check in to see how you can be supportive and to help make sure that they are connecting with others. The social isolation that many have been dealing with is quite daunting.

While all of these actions are relatively easy to do, they are also very easy to overlook. I hope that whatever your personal situation is, you will take a moment to take stock of your own well-being. By making a few adjustments, you’ll be able to lessen your stress and reset your equilibrium."

First Person: Kimberly Williams

Our Commitment to Mental Health:
The Trust has called on Vibrant Emotional Health to help New York respond to crises for more than two decades. Our support has helped the organization serve on the frontlines in New York, including in the aftermath of September 11th, the Great Recession of 2008, and superstorm Sandy—and, of course, COVID-19.
Kelitha is a poet and an aspiring nurse practitioner who lives in Flatbush, Brooklyn, with her aunt and younger sister. When she moved here five years ago at age 12, she had left her mother behind in Haiti, and spoke no English. Isolated and homesick, she discovered the Flanbwayan Haitian Literacy Project through her school. The group, named after a tropical flowering tree, has been a lifeline for her.

“I found a community that has been central to my life,” Kelitha said. “Now I also work there after school, recruiting young women into a program that helps us figure out how to prepare for, finance, and survive in college. What’s more, we advocate for the rights of Haitian women and all immigrants.”

During the pandemic, she led this college prep program virtually and used the group’s offices for her own remote schooling because her home does not have Wi-Fi.

Kelitha’s work for Flanbwayan is made possible through a $120,000 Trust grant, which we were able to make thanks to our Mildred Anna Williams Fund—created more than 80 years ago to support young women and girls. We think Ms. Williams would be proud of Kelitha and the organization she considers a home away from home.

To start your legacy of generosity today, contact giving@nyct-cfi.org.

A PLACE TO THRIVE: Kelitha in the library at Flanbwayan’s office in Brooklyn.