

2020 Annual Report: A Year of Dreaming Big



ASSIST • EMPOWER • ELEVATE



RURAL OUTREACH CENTER

Executive Summary

It's a familiar refrain, "2020 was a different year." While the pandemic certainly made 2020 different for the ROC, in some ways, it was not so different. The ROC has always responded to the evolving needs surrounding our mission – to Assist, Empower and Elevate our rural population.

In 2020 the ROC quickly pivoted to respond to COVID-related needs. The distinction between responding to short-term pandemic-related versus to pre-existing, but pandemic exacerbated, problems has been a critical factor for our work in 2020, but more importantly for our work moving forward.

For instance, by April 2020 it became clear that the over 100 ROC children were struggling to meet pandemic-related academic demands. We responded by working for increased technology availability. Parents who were forced to choose between jobs or helping their children were given the support they needed. Critically, we examined our response with a view to the pre-existing lack of academic support structures that these children need to thrive moving forward.

So, beyond addressing immediate needs, our new "Dream Big!" summer and "Think Big" academic year experiences integrate academic with social-emotional supports that take advantage of programmatic, counseling, and other experiences already available through the ROC.

This integrated approach is leading to powerful changes in behavior, school performance, but more importantly, greater hope and higher aspirations for the future.

Similarly, in another forward-looking effort, we quickly pivoted to offer budgeting and financial literacy programs in conjunction with career development experiences for adults. Persons who had been homeless within the past 3 years became fully employed and had moved into stable housing.

Strategically, we are becoming less dependent on foundation support. Greater revenue-generating capacity through contracts with counties we serve and with public and private health insurers will provide a steady income moving forward. We continue to expand this effort to the state level.

It is gratifying that our empowerment, outcome-driven, life-transforming model of care has been recognized in New York State and beyond as a model that should be replicated.

Of course, much effort in 2020 was dedicated to completing the new building design and the fundraising for that building. More on that elsewhere in this report.

I attribute our success in transforming lives and our way of addressing poverty to the attention to God's call on the lives of faithful people who have been moved to create a more just space for all peoples in our communities.

Speaking of people, the ROC would not be what it is, nor what it is becoming, without the collaborative effort of thousands of people. From financial support to in-kind donations, to volunteers to an amazing dedicated, passionate staff and board, the ROC has developed beyond what we might have imagined a few short years ago and will continue to serve our communities into the future.

For all of you, we are grateful. Thank you.

Frank Cerny, PhD, MDiv
Executive Director





Mission

ROC's mission is to break the cycle of rural poverty by accompanying people towards self-sufficiency. We assist, empower, and elevate.

Vision

The Rural Outreach Center improves the lives of the rural poor in southwestern New York by breaking the cycle of generational poverty.

Board Members: January 2020-December 2020

Vicki Feine, Chair

Mike Sawicki

Cliff DeFlyer, Vice-Chair

Brian Maze

Jane Vosseller, Treasurer

Aaron Hejmowski

Andrew Lipp, Secretary

Katherine Daley

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Paul Babbitt

Norm Merriman

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Peter Dechert

Marcia Keller, Recording
Secretary

Dreaming of a Better Life

Trevor first came to the ROC in late 2019. He'd been homeless on and off for the past five years, surviving by squatting in abandoned properties. A hit and run left Trevor badly injured. When he was released from the hospital, he came to the ROC's Code Blue inclement weather shelter to recover further. Once there, the ROC's team of care coordinators helped Trevor identify his goals and decide what his next steps were to get his life back on track.

As Trevor healed, he started job searching. Before COVID-related closures, he was working at a local restaurant and putting aside money so he could move into more permanent housing. By June, Trevor was thrilled to announce he was in his own place.

Trevor was one of many people in our community who lost their job when COVID began impacting the restaurant industry. Trevor was disappointed - but he didn't give up. He joined U ROC, a program at the ROC focused on assisting adults as they gain the skills they need to get out of poverty. There, he learned how to budget so that the job loss would not impact him too greatly. He also worked with a care coordinator on his resume and various job skills. Soon enough, Trevor was once again employed. He continues to stick to his budget and his savings have grown significantly in the past year.

Trevor would be the first to tell you just how different - and how much better - his life is just a year later.



Dreaming of a Place to Belong

"You aren't welcome here."

That was the message that Megan heard over and over throughout her short life. She suffered abuse at the hands of those who were supposed to keep her safe. Now living with other family members who were desperate to provide Megan the support and stability she needed, Megan was told that her behavior was too extreme. She wasn't welcome in her classroom with her peers. Various community programs said they couldn't help her. Megan was told again and again that she wasn't welcome.

When Megan arrived at the ROC she waited to be told that, yet again, she wasn't wanted here. She even acted out - after all, it would hurt less to leave if it happened sooner rather than later. It took weeks to convince Megan that the ROC wanted her - that she was safe and loved and celebrated for the amazing individual she is.

Megan's social worker works with her weekly to help her process her past trauma. She has learned how to set boundaries, how to cope when something reminds her of her past, and how to relate to others. Megan now attends many programs at the ROC and greets everyone with a big smile.

The ROC is so grateful to be able to welcome Megan each and every time she walks through our doors.



"I am so lucky to have my kids come to the ROC. You really help them, and they feel safe."

Dream Big! Summer Enrichment

On any given day during the summer of 2020, the ROC property was filled with the laughter and chatter of twenty kids as they built forts, conducted science experiments, made their own movie trailers, did relay races, and so much more.

The final three months of the 2020 school year were exhausting for kids. They hadn't seen their friends or teachers and they were struggling with spotty internet and having to turn a shared bedroom into their classrooms. The ROC's solution was Dream Big!, a summer program focused on giving kids opportunities to learn through play in a safe environment.

The summer program was designed to offer ROC kids a chance to heal from the stress of the past several months. It ended up doing so much more. ROC kids formed new friendships. They told their stories and learned to speak up for themselves. They learned that their voices were deserving of being heard. They learned to Dream Big! - and dream big they did. The kids ended the summer a happier, more confident group ready to tackle whatever lay ahead of them.



Staff

Staff Members

Frank Cerny, Executive Director

Amelia Leggett, Program Director

Monique Brannon, Development
Director

Kelly Shanahan, Care Coordinator

Maria Knickerbocker, Director of
Counseling

Nichole Barrett, Academic Programs

Camille Arth, Director of Care
Coordination & Code Blue Director

Ryan Konotopskyj, U ROC Coordinator

Shauna Kelsey, Social Worker

Chris Popek, Finance Officer

Christina Boccio, Social Worker

Tara Przybyl, Care Coordinator



Summer program staff test activities before the kids arrive for the day.

Rural Outreach Center staff posing with the State Rural Health Award they received in 2020 for the ROC's work in addressing social determinants of health for rural populations.



COVID-19

COVID-19 made visible the rural poverty that already exists in our community. The ROC has long known about the issues facing our rural neighbors, such as transportation barriers, unreliable (or no) internet, and limited resources for support. While COVID made it clear that one agency alone cannot solve these issues, it also showed that a community working together can make a massive difference.

Volunteers distributed food donated by local companies. Supporters donated funds to ensure children could have the devices they needed to learn online. Social workers and care coordinators undertook additional safety measures to meet Participants in-person. The needs of those living in rural poverty were seen by our community, and the response was heart-warming.

Volunteers

Volunteering in 2020 was a challenge - but ROC volunteers persisted!

Throughout COVID, stalwart volunteers - wearing masks and social distancing - stepped forward to distribute produce, meat, dairy, and bread to community members in need. No matter the weather, these volunteers were there to help their neighbors.

Our volunteers packed school backpacks, distributed new winter clothing and Christmas presents, supplied weekly SnackPacks, and stocked Sarah's Pantry - an emergency needs pantry - with basic human needs such as toilet paper and diapers. Some of our most dedicated volunteers answered phone calls, managed the New Paths Furniture Redistribution Center, and more.

The ROC could not exist without our volunteers. We salute you, and thank you with all of our hearts.

Social Work

The ROC's team of licensed social workers provides mental health services to adults and children, helping them address a variety of issues ranging from trauma-related stressors, anxiety, depression, behavioral concerns, and more. In 2020, social workers at the ROC took trainings for interventions such as EMDR, Progressive Counting, and Theraplay.



357

Average number
of people engaged
in ongoing ROC
services

1,474

Total child mental
health sessions at
the ROC



1,175

Total adult mental
health sessions at
the ROC

Care Coordination

Care Coordinators at the ROC offer support for individuals looking to break the cycle of rural poverty by providing assistance with obtaining benefits, job searching, education and training, and financial literacy.



85

New intakes for
individuals wanting
to receive ROC
services

134

Instances of
transportation
provided



872

Crisis calls from
Participants and
community
members



Code Blue

The Code Blue Shelter provides nighttime shelter and daytime warming to homeless individuals of southern Erie County. The shelter is part of Erie County's Code Blue inclement weather shelter program that runs from November to June, having been extended due to COVID-related housing needs. Individuals at the Code Blue shelter receive additional support to find permanent housing, employment, and more.



34

Total number of individuals who received shelter

615

Total occurrences of nighttime shelter provided



131

Nights of shelter provided.

Community Events

During COVID-19, the ROC increased its community presence to support our neighbors through various community outreach events, including food distribution, the New Paths Furniture Redistribution Center, and the annual Winter Prep program.



5,060

Boxes of food distributed to community members in need

312

Children received new winter coats, boots, and snow pants



4,897

Community members who benefited from food distribution



Scott R. Bieler Foundation Rural Outreach Center



2020 saw significant progress being made in the Reaching Out Capital Campaign. The ROC has experienced rapid growth over the past several years - a sign of the need in our community and the willingness of our neighbors to support each other.

Plans for the new building - now called the Scott R. Bieler Foundation Rural Outreach Center - include space for mental health counseling, play therapy, community gatherings, and programming. An accessory building will provide space for the New Paths Furniture Redistribution Center and other efforts.



By the end of 2020, the Capital Campaign raised over \$635,000 of its \$4.2 million goal. Many community partners and individual donors have stepped forward with significant contributions and pledges for the Campaign. The ROC looks forward to starting construction in 2021.

2020 Finances

Statement of Financial Position

Assets

Cash and Cash Equivalents*	\$1,242,608
Accounts Receivable	505,110
Property and Equipment	165,533
Prepaid Expenses	13,214
Total Assets	\$1,926,465

Liabilities

Accounts Payable	\$80,394
Total Liabilities	\$80,394

Net Assets

Unrestricted	\$558,356
Temporarily Restricted	1,287,715
Total Net Assets	\$1,846,071
Total Liabilities/Net Assets	\$1,926,465

Statement of Activities

Public Support & Revenue

Grants	\$1,346,647
Contributions	699,132
Services	147,825
In-Kind	53,684
Other (PPP Loan)	72,970
Special Events	12,931
Investment Income	12,519
Total Public Support & Revenue	\$2,345,708

Expenses

Program Services	\$682,032
Management & General	170,996
Fundraising	112,000
Capital Project	9,331
Total Expenses	\$974,359
Change in Net Assets	\$1,371,349

*This amount reflects funds raised for the COVID-19 response as well as gifts towards the \$4.2 million capital campaign.

Thank You for Your Support



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RURAL OUTREACH CENTER

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www.theroc.co