Addressing the ‘Opportunity Gap’ is a long-term project that needs our attention

The Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation has embarked on one of the most important efforts in its history.

The Community Foundation has identified, researched and now is working to fund efforts to address the “Opportunity Gap”—the vast differences in opportunities available to low-income and well-off children and families in Duluth and Superior.

A year ago, at the Community Foundation’s Annual Celebration, we heard the message about the Opportunity Gap from Harvard University professor Dr. Robert D. Putnam, whose best-selling book, “Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis,” highlighted the disparities affecting children, families and society across the country. Some of the research for “Our Kids” occurred in Duluth when members of Dr. Putnam’s team interviewed parents and children here.

The Community Foundation followed up on Dr. Putnam’s visit with a commitment to work to address Opportunity Gap issues locally, funded, in part, with a $1.5 million grant from the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation. A group of community leaders from the education, human services, public health and business sectors, among others, formed an Opportunity Gap Convening Committee. That group spent weeks researching how the gap plays out in the Twin Ports, including

The Community Foundation’s new Annual Report, to be distributed at the May 25 Annual Celebration, focuses on the Opportunity Gap Initiative work. For more information about the Annual Celebration, please see Page 5.

**INITIATIVE continued on Page 4**
President’s Letter

With your help, we can narrow ‘Opportunity Gap’

This is big.

We can say that about a lot of the work we’re fortunate to do at the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation. But “big” only begins to describe the work we have undertaken with our Opportunity Gap Initiative.

The work to narrow the Opportunity Gap in the Twin Ports—and perhaps beyond—is described in detail in this edition of The Touchstone. We also have been in the news recently, and we’ll devote our Annual Celebration on May 25 to these efforts.

We’re doing exactly what Harvard University’s Dr. Robert D. Putnam urged us to do when he spoke at our 2015 Annual Celebration: Get in the game.

We’re involved in a major way when it comes to addressing the Opportunity Gap that Dr. Putnam described in his best-selling book, “Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis.” It’s amazing, impactful and needed work, here and nationwide. And six months into it, we can say this for certain: It’s big.

The issue is complex. We won’t solve long-term poverty overnight. But what we have heard in a series of listening sessions across our community is that some basic steps can make a difference—a big difference.

Simply having another caring adult in the lives of more children can empower young people to see possibilities that they otherwise might not. It’s sometimes described as offering “ladders of support” to children.

One way to provide such support is through more—and more accessible—early childhood education. Educators tell us, and experience shows it to be true, that when children have a chance to start learning earlier, they are better prepared for school—and ultimately for life. Ensuring that children from all backgrounds have access to early childhood education is important.

Months into our Opportunity Gap work, we’re still in the early stages. But we have identified and begun to understand the issues. They have all the complexities of long-term poverty seen here and across the country. They have been with us for some time. The more we understand them, the more complex and difficult they can seem.

But we know this about our community: When we put our minds to a challenge, we usually find a solution. We have done that with issues as big as concerns about incivility in our public discussions and worries that young people were not connecting to and feeling welcomed by our region.

With your support, we have made progress on both fronts. Now we turn our attention to the Opportunity Gap. We know it’s big. But we know our community can do better.

—Holly C. Sampson

About Us

The Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation encourages private giving for the public good. We are a permanent community endowment, built with gifts from thousands of individuals and organizations.

Guided by a volunteer Board of Trustees, we make grants to nonprofit organizations and to individuals for scholarships and provide leadership on important community initiatives in Northeastern Minnesota and Northwestern Wisconsin.

Since our inception in 1983, we have distributed more than $47 million, and we currently hold more than 370 different funds, each with its own charitable purpose.

Regional affiliates of the Community Foundation are: the Two Harbors Area Fund (created in 1998), the Apostle Islands Area Community Fund (created in 2000), the Cook County Community Fund (created in 2003), the Hermantown Community Fund (created in 2005), the Evie Oh Area Community Foundation (created in 2008) and the Chequamegon Bay Area Community Fund (created in 2011).

Contact Us

Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation
Zeitgeist Arts Building
222 E. Superior St., Suite 302
Duluth, Minnesota 55802
218-726-0232
info@dsacommunityfoundation.com
Much of the work of the Opportunity Gap Initiative has been done by the Opportunity Gap Convening Committee, the 12-member group of local leaders from sectors including business, nonprofit, social services, health care, government and education.

They have spent hours listening to and talking with individuals who experience the daily realities of the Opportunity Gap, as well as groups whose mission is to work with these individuals. How has what they have heard affected and motivated them?

“During our meetings, and since then, I have felt a need to reach out and connect to other agencies so we can discuss how we can work together better,” said Superintendent Janna Stevens of the Superior Public Schools. Those conversations, she said, have included discussions with the Boys & Girls Club and the City of Superior. “We can take action now to determine where the gaps are and what we can do to fill them,” she said. “We’ve already made changes to help improve services for our children.”

Convening Committee Chair James Zastrow said he is amazed at how his perspective has changed, even though he has long called the Twin Ports home. “Many of us really don’t see the issues that other people are dealing with,” he said. “We do live in parallel worlds. This experience has opened my eyes. I’m more observant about some of the hardships—how something as simple as a lack of transportation can be a huge barrier.”

Committee member Lyn Clark Pegg, a retired psychologist and educator, said she is hopeful that this work will break through the “wall” she says has impeded progress to address the Opportunity Gap, particularly as it relates to people of color. She likes the wording in the grant guidelines seeking involvement by and with the people for whom the grants are designed to support.

“By, for and with people of color and Native Americans is critical if we are going to change the dial,” she said.

For a full list of Convening Committee members, see Page 4.
through interviews with individuals and families living in the gap daily. Local nonprofit groups also added significant input.

Now, the Community Foundation has solicited letters of intent from potential grantees and is in the process of working to identify the best grant ideas and to begin funding them, with work scheduled to start as early as July.

“This is the start of a project that we envision lasting for the next several years,” said Community Foundation President Holly C. Sampson. “The Opportunity Gap is a huge issue affecting every community in the United States, including ours. But we believe, as Dr. Putnam said when he spoke at our Annual Celebration last year, that we have a track record of addressing these kinds of issues in our region. We can find solutions that work here and elsewhere.”

Key to the work, Sampson said, have been the listening sessions in which the Opportunity Gap Convening Committee heard directly about how the gap affects lives here.

“Our findings from those sessions included solutions as simple but as powerful as the need for more children to have another caring adult in their lives who nurtures and believes in their futures,” she said. “Young people need to have more caring people in their lives who can introduce them to opportunities and provide ladders to success.”

James Zastrow, Chair of the Opportunity Gap Convening Committee and a member of the Community Foundation’s Board of Trustees, said: “One of the most important findings in our listening sessions was that the families and individuals need to be involved in shaping support programs. For the work of these new grants to be successful, individuals and community supporters emphasized that it has to be ‘for us, by us and with us.’”

In addition to Zastrow, other members of the Opportunity Gap Convening Committee are:

- Kevin Breen, Head of School, Marshall School
- Ann Busche, former Director of Public Health and Human Services, St. Louis County
- Melanie Goldish, Vice President, Flint Group
- Bill Gronseth, Superintendent, Duluth Public Schools
- David A. Kropid, attorney
- Scott Lyons, retired educator and former Duluth Police Chief
- Lyn Clark Pegg, retired psychologist and educator
- Janna Stevens, Superintendent, School District of Superior
- Reverend Bill Van Oss, Rector, Saint Paul’s Episcopal Church
- Robin Washington, journalist
- Anthony C. Yung, Sieh Yung Group, Merrill Lynch

The Opportunity Gap Initiative has been inspired by Harvard University’s Dr. Robert D. Putnam and his best-selling book, “Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis.”

Initiative, from page 1

After months of listening, deliberation and discussion, the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation has developed grant guidelines for awarding funds to do the work envisioned by the Opportunity Gap Initiative.

The Community Foundation released those guidelines and held a grants workshop this spring with local nonprofit groups, government agencies and others interested in learning more about the project. Those with grant ideas were asked to submit initial letters of intent describing their plans.

Organizations that the Community Foundation encouraged to take the next step submitted grant applications by May 2. The Community Foundation will spend the next several weeks reviewing the grant applications and determining which organizations and agencies will receive funding in the grant round.

“We have been encouraged by the interest and participation so far,” said Director of Community Philanthropy Keri Cavitt. “We saw a lot of activity and a lot of discussion happening during our grants workshop. One of our goals is to connect groups with similar interests and complementary skills so they are aware of each other’s strengths and might consider working together.”

The Community Foundation expects to award initial grants later this year, but the work of the Opportunity Gap Initiative has just begun.

Grants will be awarded in the range of $100,000 to $300,000, and possibly, higher, depending on the suggested program or scope of work, and with possible funding over several years.

With project underway, funding decisions come next
The Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation will hold its 2016 Annual Celebration on May 25 in the Harborside Ballroom of the Duluth Entertainment Convention Center.

Doors open at 3:30 p.m., and the program begins at 4 p.m., lasting about an hour. The evening concludes with a reception from 5 to 6 p.m.

This year’s Annual Celebration theme is “The Opportunity Gap: Voices from the Community.” The program will focus on the Community Foundation’s ongoing Opportunity Gap Initiative work, designed to narrow the gap in opportunities available to low-income children and youths from more comfortable backgrounds.

The work was largely inspired by Harvard University professor Dr. Robert D. Putnam, who was the featured speaker at the 2015 Annual Celebration, where he discussed his best-selling book examining the Opportunity Gap, “Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis.”

To register

For more information about or to register for the Annual Celebration, please go to dsacommunityfoundation.com. A registration form is available on the website. There is no charge to attend the Annual Celebration.

President Holly Sampson of the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation announces creation of the Opportunity Gap Initiative at a news conference in December. In about six months, much work has been accomplished, and the first grants will soon be announced.

Don’t miss these grant application deadlines

Deadlines are approaching for applications seeking grants from funds of the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation. Go to dsacommunityfoundation.com/grants to learn more about or to apply for a grant.

August 1 application deadline, with funds available in October:
- John T. and Elizabeth C. Adams Arts Fund
- Anishinabe Fund
- Samuel F. Atkins and Barbara H. Atkins Memorial Fund
- Central Mesabi Fund for Human Services
- Eveleth Area Community Fund
- Global Awareness Fund
- Hermantown Community Fund
- Lakeview Arts Fund
- Riverfront Community Fund
- Henry and Sarah Wheeler Historical Awareness Fund

October 1 application deadline, with funds available in January:
- Business Leaders Fund
- Community Opportunity Fund
- Community Parks and Recreation Program Fund
- Douglas County Disaster & Welfare Fund
- Fair Chance Fund
- C.E. Fuller, Jr. and M.K. Fuller Fund
- Fund for the Environment
- Hermantown Community Fund
- Knight Foundation Fund
- Morgan Fund
- Second Chance Fund
- Superior Douglas County Arts Fund
- Dale Heimbach Wheeler Fund
- Young Leaders Fund
The Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation recently welcomed two new employees, Kursula Harris and Meghan Dennison. Here is information about them. The next time you are in the Community Foundation’s offices in Duluth or Bayfield, please say hello to them!

**Say hello to...**

**Name:** Meghan Dennison  
**Title:** Affiliate Officer, working with the Community Foundation’s affiliate funds and based in Bayfield.  
**About you:** I bring a background of non-profit management and fundraising to the team. Most recently, I served as Executive Director of a regional environmental nonprofit. I have a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science from Western State Colorado University. When I’m not at work, I love being outside running, hiking, skiing and camping. My husband, daughter and I live in Washburn.  
**What I love about my work:** Connecting communities with philanthropy.

**Name:** Kursula Harris  
**Title:** Program Assistant, working with nonprofit organizations for grant requests.  
**About you:** I have a background in operations management and administrative support. As an adult student, I earned my Bachelor of Science Degree in Kinesiology, with a minor in Psychology, from Pennsylvania State University. I have six siblings, and I enjoy spending time with my nieces and nephews. I also enjoy volunteering in the community, working on DIY projects, hiking and traveling the world.  
**What I love about my work:** Knowing I’m contributing to positive outcomes in our community.

**Coming up in The Touchstone**

Don’t miss the upcoming editions of The Touchstone, in print and online. Our summer edition is an online edition, with notification by email. Our fall edition will be available both online and in print. We look forward to sharing the stories of the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation with you. It is work that you make possible through your support and generous giving.

For more information about signing up for email notifications or joining the print edition mailing list for The Touchstone, please contact us at info@dsacommunityfoundation.com or call 218-726-0232.