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SHOULDER-TO-SHOULDER TO SOLVE THE OPPORTUNITY GAP

New Hampshire is a state that does extraordinarily well by many measures — low unemployment, high median income, safe communities. But we also have some real challenges. Two among them: vastly unequal access to opportunities and prosperity, and a workforce shortage.

The two are directly related: if we can fix one, we can fix both.

That was the spirit recently around our table at the Foundation. Leaders from business, education and philanthropy were here to strategize about “65 by 25,” a shared state goal to make sure that 65 percent of working-age adults in New Hampshire have a high-value degree or credential by 2025 (Article, p. 6).

The current “opportunity gap” facing too many of our young people — opportunity for education, training, for learning the “soft skills” that help ensure workplace success — is not only just plain wrong, it is also an existential threat to the future of New Hampshire’s workforce. And the business community is responding, collaborating and digging into the causes and solutions.

In my 35 years of working in New Hampshire’s nonprofit sector, I have never seen the concerns and aspirations of business leaders align so perfectly with the concerns of those in education, philanthropy and social services.

Efforts are emerging and ongoing all over the state: Safran Aerospace Composites is partnering with Great Bay Community College and the Rochester schools to put kids on the road to a degree and a career. Hypertherm has a partnership with River Valley Community College for students to get credit for their job training. The Foundation and the Business and Industry Association are co-funding a “workforce accelerator” to increase work-based learning partnerships between schools and employers.

Businesses like Eastern Bank and longtime business owners like Dick and Lorraine Lavalliere have created scholarship programs that are helping put people on the fast track to stable careers with good earnings potential. And so many more.

In the past, we relied on thousands of people moving into New Hampshire, with college degrees or trade credentials in-hand, to drive our economic growth. We know now that was not sustainable, and we cannot rely on it happening again.

But even if we could, that would not look like success. We have to do a much better job of ensuring that the kids who grow up in the most challenged neighborhoods and communities of our state have the same shot at opportunity, the same shot at the American Dream, as the kids who grow up in the wealthiest ones. It is just the right thing to do.
Young people are stepping up to take on direct decision-making roles in their communities by participating in the Empower Coös Youth Grants Program. The program, an initiative of the Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, gives high school students the opportunity to design and award grants that support local programming important to youth. The program aims to increase opportunities for young people, deepen their connection to place and help them build leadership skills by giving them a voice in local grantmaking. The committee is advised by Tillotson Fund staff and advisors. The 11 young people on the committee are from Coös County, New Hampshire and Essex County, Vermont, and represent a diversity of life experience, regional knowledge and personal interests.

A year-long series in the New Hampshire Union Leader is applying a “Solutions Journalism” lens to reporting about the state’s behavioral health and addiction crises. The series, “Beyond the Stigma,” is sponsored by the New Hampshire Solutions Journalism Lab at the Nackey S. Loeb School of Communications and funded by the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, the New Hampshire chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness and private individuals.

Rene J. Lacasse immigrated with his parents to Claremont in the 1920s. He discovered a uniquely American sport — basketball — that he adored. He played for St. Mary’s High School and helped his team win a state championship in 1939. He served in the Navy during World War II and returned to Claremont to work for four decades as a steel worker. After his wife died from cancer, he raised their six children with support from extended family. Lacasse was dedicated to his community, and understood the value of sports and other group activities in children’s lives. He thought all kids should have the opportunity to participate, so he coached youth sports and — long before girls and young women were encouraged to be athletes — he helped start and run a girls’ basketball league.

INVESTING IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Twin Pines Housing is building energy-efficient affordable housing with help from an impact investment from the Foundation. The Tracy Street Housing complex in West Lebanon will provide housing to 29 families in one of the tightest housing markets in the state. It will be the first “net zero” multifamily building in New Hampshire. The building will be next door to the public library, accessible to public transportation and within easy walking distance of shopping and services. The $500,000 line of credit extended to Twin Pines through the Foundation’s impact investment pool helped kick-start the project, which is slated to be completed in the summer of 2019. The impact investing pool is a portion of the Foundation’s assets that are invested in local organizations and companies that are improving people’s lives.

JOURNALISM FOCUSED ON SOLUTIONS

A year-long series in the New Hampshire Union Leader is applying a “Solutions Journalism” lens to reporting about the state’s behavioral health and addiction crises.

Joe Reilly, former Foundation director, received Neighborworks Southern New Hampshire’s 2018 David P. Goodwin Outstanding Neighbor Award.

Katie Merrow, vice president of community impact at the Foundation, received a 2018 Above and Beyond Award from the Business and Industry Association of New Hampshire.

James Vara, chief of staff and associate attorney general at the New Hampshire Department of Justice, was named the 2018 recipient of the Caroline and Martin Gross Fellowship.
ALEIAH Douglas will graduate high school with her associate degree halfway finished and a certificate in advanced composites manufacturing. She will walk in her cap and gown on a Friday — and, on the following Monday, be able to step into a job making $19 an hour, in a high-demand field in New Hampshire.

Aleiah is one of 13 students in a pilot program in Rochester that gives young people the opportunity to train for careers in advanced manufacturing. The program is a partnership between Spaulding High School, Great Bay Community College and Safran Aerospace Composites — which has equipped a lab at GBCC and guaranteed each student a job interview. The curriculum includes significant lab time spent operating the same equipment that employees use at Safran. Students split their time between high school and college for their senior year. The program is free for participants.

“TODAY’S OPPORTUNITY, TOMORROW’S WORKFORCE”

Giving hard-working New Hampshire kids a roadmap to success

No one in Aleiah’s family has ever been to college. “It’s nice to be given this chance,” Aleiah said. She plans to start working right out of high school and eventually get her bachelor’s degree. “I can advance into anything I would like to be.”

The New Hampshire Charitable Foundation is supporting the program — including awarding scholarships to help cover tuition for each student — as part of broader efforts to increase opportunities for young people in need and to help build a strong future workforce to sustain New Hampshire’s economy and communities. The efforts are part of the Foundation’s “New Hampshire Tomorrow” initiative to increase opportunity for young people.

“This program is a great example of what can happen when schools, businesses and philanthropy collaborate,” said Katie Merrow, the Foundation’s vice president of community impact. “The fact that these students will have half their degree completed — with zero student debt — is huge, and will give them a great start in an industry that needs them, and where they can advance and build careers. We hope this will be a model for similar programs elsewhere.”

Goal: 65 by 25

The Foundation is working with partners from education, business and state government to ensure that 65 percent of New Hampshire adults have a degree or high-value professional certificate by 2025. Those partners asked the Foundation to help lead and coordinate efforts toward that goal, including building resources to help achieve it. In this role, the Foundation will continue to focus on providing access to education and training to people who face significant barriers to opportunity. Right now, 54 percent of adults in New Hampshire have a degree or high-value credential — up from 49 percent in 2007.

Michael Turmelle, the Foundation’s new director of education and career initiatives, is charged with advancing that work.

“The Foundation is excited to be working with so many dedicated partners to help New Hampshire reach 65 by 25, and to ensure that those who have not had access to opportunity are part of our workforce solutions,” Turmelle said.

The Foundation has also:

- Tripled the amount of scholarship aid to students studying at New Hampshire’s community colleges, and committed to awarding a half-million a year in scholarships for the next four years to community college students.
- Partnered with the Eastern Bank Charitable Foundation to provide an additional $250,000 in scholarships to New Americans and other students in need for professional training, certificate and two-year degree programs. Those funds were matched with donations from other generous people and businesses.
- Created the Pathways 2025 Fund with an initial $250,000 for grants to advance leadership, collaboration and innovation to achieve 65 by 25 with an emphasis on increased equity and social mobility for young people and families.

A perfect demographic storm

Current demographic trends underscore the importance of these efforts. New Hampshire’s workforce is aging, with a large demographic bubble moving into retirement. New Hampshire is seeing a downward trend in the number of high school graduates — reflective of the overall downturn in population growth.

(Continued, p. 8)
Declining enrollment numbers mean that K-12 schools are already feeling the pinch — particularly those in economically strapped and rural communities. As class sizes go down, costs per pupil for education go up, adding economic stress to communities and forcing some schools to cut programs and staff. Forty-eight percent of graduating high school seniors go to college out-of-state — and many do not return (the number is even higher for students going to four-year colleges — 60 percent of those students leave New Hampshire). Unemployment in the state is low, with jobs going unfilled in the advanced manufacturing, health care and high-tech sectors. And workforce housing is scarce — particularly on the Seacoast and in the Upper Valley.

“Those individual problems have to be understood as part of a bigger issue,” Turmelle said. “Our efforts will be geared toward bringing the right folks to the table to discuss the issue,” Turmelle said. “Our efforts will be geared toward bringing the right folks to the table to discuss the issue,” Turmelle said. “Our efforts will be geared toward bringing the right folks to the table to discuss the issue,” Turmelle said. “Our efforts will be geared toward bringing the right folks to the table to discuss the issue.”

A new sense of possibility

Dean Graziano, coordinator for Extended Learning Opportunities in Rochester schools, is a chief architect of the Rochester program. He worked with Safran, presented the idea to the school superintendent and board, beat the bushes for funding — and is a regular presence in his students’ school days.

“I wanted this more than life,” said the longtime educator who was named the state’s top ELO coordinator in 2017 (and who also holds a law degree). The students in this program have not had the same opportunities as many of their peers, and he sees this program as their chance. “Anyone can get the AP kids a job,” Graziano said, “What about these kids?”

The program is demanding: Students have to maintain passing marks in all of their college and high school courses, and cannot have more than two absences.

The program is already being studied with an eye to replicating it in other parts of the state.

Michael Lovely is also enrolled in the Rochester program. He remembers being homeless and sleeping under a bridge as a 7-year-old. He now lives with a guardian and plays varsity football in addition to juggling his full course load. He is a diligent note-taker in class, and at night, re-writes all of his notes — twice — to help retain the information.

“Everyone thought I was going to fail,” Lovely said, since some assumed he would follow his parents’ turbulent path. “Once this program is finished, there are so many opportunities that we are going to have. We are all going to help each other until everyone succeeds.”

For many of these kids, this program has provided a new sense of the possible.

“No one ever believed in them,” Graziano said. “Now they believe in themselves. Just give them a taste of success, and they will fly.”

A WELCOMING STATE FOR ALL

By Allyson Ryder, associate director of Leadership New Hampshire and member of the Governor’s Advisory Council on Diversity and Inclusion

My path to working on diversity and inclusion started in a pretty unlikely place: a small community north of Concord, Boscawen, where I was born and raised, it is the definition of homogeneous. My neighbors, classmates and friends all shared similar identities: white, straight Christian. To be anything else was to be starkly “other.”

I stayed in-state for college at a small, private university, which exposed me to geographic diversity more than anything else. It wasn’t until nearly a decade later, when I began to engage more intentionally around LGBTQ and mass incarceration issues that I started to understand the complexities of peoples’ experience. Now, I work in a capacity that highlights the importance of diversity. At Leadership New Hampshire, we are committed to developing leaders for New Hampshire who understand that we need everyone pulling together on behalf of our communities, our children, our workforce and our economy.

Since 1992, Leadership New Hampshire has worked to build a community of informed and engaged leaders through its 10-month program. Each year, about 40 leaders from varying backgrounds participate, learning about our state’s major systems including education, healthcare, environment, the economy, criminal justice, the media, arts and civic discourse. Participants learn from each other, incorporating the perspectives of their fellow associates.

The model has been very successful, but we knew New Hampshire was not the state it was when the program was established in 1992. We recognized that the program needed to reflect these cultural changes. If we hoped to fulfill our mission of creating a community of informed and engaged leaders, we had to invite more people to the table and examine the systemic disparities that create obstacles for some of our neighbors.

In doing so, we join many organizations and people, including Governor Sununu, working to make New Hampshire a more welcoming state for all.

We all need to share responsibility for that work. I have to demonstrate my commitment by weathering missteps and continuously educating myself. This work cannot be done by one person or one identity — it’s a collective effort that requires a vested interest by many. We all need to be having these conversations — even though they are difficult.

My own French-Canadian family found a welcoming place in New Hampshire by meeting others who helped them find places of worship, stable jobs and spaces that celebrated their culture. I am proud to be a part of the efforts to ensure that New Hampshire continues to diversify and that we find ways to ensure that all feel valued in the communities of our great state.
THE STATUS OF WOMEN

The New Hampshire Women’s Foundation published its inaugural report on the Status of Women in New Hampshire with the help of a $25,000 grant from the Elizabeth B. Carter Fund. The report is the only New Hampshire publication that brings together essential data about New Hampshire women in a single document.

LEARNING IN THE FIELD

At the Enfield Shaker Museum’s Field Ecology program, high school students are learning about local ecology, land use history and the connection between human activity and the environment. A $4,500 grant from the Wellborn Ecology Fund is helping support the place-based learning program.

PORTSMOUTH SCULPTOR AWARDED ARTIST ADVANCEMENT GRANT

Sculptor and printmaker Sachiko Akiyama of Portsmouth was awarded the 2018 Piscataqua Region Artist Advancement Grant. The $25,000 grant, one of the largest unrestricted grants to an individual artist in the United States, was created by generous people in the region and has been investing in the work of Seacoast-area artists for 16 years.

KEEPING KIDS HEALTHY

A $20,000 grant from the Oliver J. and Dorothy Penniman Hubbard New Futures Fund is helping Communities for Alcohol- and Drug-Free Youth keep young people safe and healthy; and a $5,000 grant from the Pomegranate Fund is helping that organization with energy-efficiency measures. CADY works with schools and communities to promote healthy environments and promising futures for New Hampshire’s young people.

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HELPING NH BOYS REACH THEIR POTENTIAL

Sixteen donor-advised fund holders recommended grants totaling $43,550 in 2018 to help New Hampshire boys attend the Mayhew Program. The residential summer program helps at-risk boys believe in themselves, work well with others and strive to reach their potential. The summer program is paired with mentoring during the school year.

A ROOF OVERHEAD

Grants from the KMFG Fund, the Stuart S. Draper Charitable Fund and an anonymous fund totaling $16,500 are helping Harbor Homes in its mission to create and provide quality residential, health care and supportive services to individuals and families who are homeless and/or living with behavioral health disorders.

A HAND UP

A $4,000 grant from the Ira S. and Gertrude S. Hubbard Memorial Fund will help the Fall Mountain Food Shelf supply food and personal care items for those in need.

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ON A MISSION

CIVIL LIBERTIES
TO PROTECT AND DEFEND

Jeanne Hruska, ACLU-NH’s policy director, is a policy wonk with a tenacious streak

Jeanne Hruska was leaving the State House after a morning spent conferring urgently with legislators and sitting coiled at the edge of her seat through a series of roll-call votes on high-profile bills. As she made her way through the State House lobby, she was stopped by one of the most influential Democrats in the New Hampshire Legislature, who thanked her for her work on a controversial piece of legislation. She took a few more steps, and an influential Republican stopped her and thanked her for her work on the same legislation. She spent the rest of the day fielding questions about the legislation filed, and work actively on roughly 1,000 pieces of proposed legislation in the state legislature. Sometimes the organization’s positions are popular, sometimes unpopular. But Hruska and her ACLU colleagues are laser-focused on mission: “preserving the individual rights and liberties guaranteed in the Bill of Rights and the Constitution.”

“The thing I am most proud of is that every one of our successes has come as the result of bipartisanship.”
– Jeanne Hruska, policy director for the American Civil Liberties Union of New Hampshire
REMEMBERING RYAN

The Bishop family created a fund to honor their youngest son and give life-changing opportunity to kids in need

Ryan Bishop was an adventurous kid who was happiest outdoors, immersed in the natural world. He loved exploring the woods, fishing, wakeboarding, rock climbing, biking and sitting with friends by campfires. He was a big kid, whose passion, caring and charisma were as large as his 6-foot-5-inch frame.

When Ryan went to college in Utah, he threw himself into the sport of rock climbing and organized countless outdoors trips — bringing friends together to share new experiences.

Ryan died in a canoeing accident in Utah in 2011. He had saved a friend’s life during the tragedy, but lost his own. He was just 21. His family and friends did their best to navigate their own. He was just 21. His family and friends did their best to navigate their own. He was just 21. His family and friends did their best to navigate their own. He was just 21. His family and friends did their best to navigate their own.

Friends and family jumped in to help. They created the Ryan E. Bishop Outdoor Leadership Fund at the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation. Friends and family jumped in to support it. More than 100 people have contributed to the fund with multiyear gifts.

Foundation staff worked to identify organizations that would align with the Bishop’s wishes for Ryan’s fund. Since 2011, Ryan’s fund has been providing substantial support to the Kismet Rock Foundation, a North Conway nonprofit that gives kids in need the chance to attend a comprehensive technical rock climbing program for a week each summer for four years.

Kismet, said Christopher, “is an incredible program which helps at-risk kids in a way that few other programs are able to, and it aligns with Ryan’s whole persona and outlook.”

Andy, 15, of Manchester came over the top wearing a huge smile. Andy has lived through what he describes as “a lot of bumps in the road.” His mother, a food-service worker originally from Honduras, was recently deported.

“They taught me, in rock climbing, to focus,” Andy said. He practiced the art of moving his feet from one foothold to another quickly enough to keep from slipping. And then he applied that principle in school. He started turning assignments in on time. His grades improved, and he even became president of the student council and earned a school trip to Washington, D.C.

His mentors at Kismet, he said, “mentally prepared me” for all of that. He has aspirations to be a chef, and is already enrolled in a culinary arts program.

It is hard to imagine a more fitting way (way) outside her comfort zone to climb rock walls. But she did. Now she walks through the world with a new confidence and sure-footedness.

“I learned how strong I was,” Mayaka said. “And now I push myself to do things. Now, when an opportunity comes up, even when I am not sure, I do it. I take harder classes. And I choose harder books to read.” She has discovered that she loves Shakespeare, has earned high honors and is dreaming of going to the University of California.

Kismet Rock is the kind of program where Ryan Bishop would have loved to be a counselor.

The fund in his name gives life-changing opportunity to kids in need. It is hard to imagine a more appropriate memorial.

“I love the fact,” said Chris Bishop, “that Ryan will always be remembered.”

Kids are selected from seven schools in high-need districts — from Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, to Berlin and Manchester, New Hampshire, and Portland, Maine. The kids are recommended by guidance counselors, apply for the program and are interviewed by staff before being accepted. The number of applicants far outnumbers the available spaces.

Thanks to generous grants and donations, the program is completely free for all participants. (Kismet has also received support from the Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund and other funds at the Foundation.)

Chad Laflamme, who directs Kismet, is a youthful, soft-spoken Air Force veteran whose own childhood was much like those of the kids that the program serves.

“The kids who come to the program are good kids who are vulnerable to breaking their contract with society,” Laflamme said. “Kids who are looking for opportunity, but don’t have access to opportunity.”

And those kids’ lives are shaped — often profoundly — by the experience, connections and consistency of Kismet. One day last summer, Kismet teens were geared up and climbing the 500-vertical-foot Cathedral Ledge. Onlookers gathered at the top, cheering as each climber topped onto the ledge.

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– Christopher Bishop, Ryan’s brother
Gretchen Carlson was a river rat — tooling around the river from the time she could handle a boat, observing every critter that swam and dove and fished.

Now, as program manager at the Gundalow Company, she teaches children about the science and history of Seacoast waterways. And she inspires a whole new generation of river rats.

Onboard the Gundalow Piscataqua, a replica of the barges that moved goods and people around the Piscataqua River watershed starting in the 1600s, Gretchen is all questions to a crew of fourth-graders: “Is it high tide or low tide? Where do phytoplankton get their energy? Do you think seals eat lobster?”

Gretchen is a former elementary school teacher with a graduate degree in climatology; she and her crew of volunteer educators work with about 2,500 kids every year.

On board, youngsters are scientists, navigators, observers — and crew.

The philosophy of the Gundalow’s hands-on environmental and history education is simple: “If you experience it, you will care about it. If you care about it, you will protect it.”