



### **Pandemic meant adjustments for Reno County youth philanthropists**

When the members of Hutchinson Community Foundation’s Youth Philanthropy Council last gathered for a grant award program in March 2020, it was an indoor, in-person event.

No one realized at the time that in only a few short weeks a global pandemic would alter the way people meet and gather.

But this year, on March 7, 16 Reno County high school students showed just how much they’ve adapted to those challenges when they gathered once again to award \$3,000 in grants to seven youth-serving organizations – this time in the outdoor venue of Chester I. Lewis Plaza in downtown Hutchinson.

Youth Philanthropy Council engages Reno County sophomores through seniors in a program focused on giving money, time and talents to help make life better for other people. Each year the council accepts project proposals in December and January and in March grants \$3,000 in awards from the Richard W. Dillon Memorial Fund for Youth Philanthropy, established by the Dillon family to honor Dick Dillon’s extensive philanthropic work in the community.

Normally, students meet in person on Sunday afternoons from October through March to practice team-building exercises and learn about community issues. Through these activities, they develop a framework upon which to evaluate grant applications and reach consensus.

This year, however, the council forwent the team-building exercises and tours and panel discussions devoted to community issues and focused solely on the grant process in a condensed January- through-February meeting schedule held via Zoom.

“The lessons we’ve learned in six 2-3 hour meetings will be used for years and years to come,” said Tristan England, Pretty Prairie High School senior and YPC co-chair.

Fortunately, modifications didn’t alter the students’ dedication to the program.

“Despite the shift to an all-virtual experience, the students never missed a meeting, and I think that shows their commitment to and love for this community,” said Sarah Blake, Hutchinson Community Foundation program officer and YPC coordinator.

Nor did the changes diminish the quality of the council’s work, according to co-chair Emma Vogel.

“I am very proud of all the grant decisions we have made this year despite the constraints of meeting virtually,” Vogel, a Trinity Catholic High School senior, said.

Twelve of this year’s council members were seniors, many of them having served for three years, allowing them a unique chance to observe over time how their practice of philanthropy through grantmaking impacts the community.

“Youth Philanthropy Council made me realize how great the people of Reno County are. I never knew there were this many people working behind the scenes for the advancement of our community. It’s really something special, and I’m glad I got to be a part of it for three years,” Dazia Simms, Hutchinson High School senior and YPC events chairperson, said.

Members of the 2021 council are Jayci Moriasi, Megan Pankratz, Elijah Pisano, Sadye Patterson, Dazia Simms and Mason Weathers, Hutchinson High School; Tanner Lindahl and Karl Woelzel, Buhler High School; Laurissa Adelhardt and Emma Vogel, Trinity Catholic High School; Kendall Schoenhals, Haven High School; Tristan England and Keelan Stucky, Pretty Prairie High School; Cory Embers, Central Christian School; and Kayley Brown and Dusti Ryan, Fairfield High School.

The following awards were given Sunday afternoon:

**Boys & Girls Clubs of Hutchinson, “Stronger Together Power Hour,” \$435:** Boys & Girls Clubs' Keystone Club members were inspired to expand Power Hour – a tutoring/mentoring effort – to help their peers at the club by providing an environment conducive for completing online assignments during the school district's hybrid learning period of the pandemic. Funds will be used to continue that work and acknowledge and reward students who participated in the program by holding a Hero's Dinner, which will include coaches and teachers who have helped inspire the students during this challenging time.

**Family Community Theatre, “Enchanted Forest,” \$250:** FCT will purchase resource books of theater games and activities for kids, which student directors will use throughout this year's “Enchanted Forest,” a partnership production with Dillon Nature Center that will be open to the public. The resource books will be used during youth productions for years to come.

**Hutchinson Zoo, “Badger Indoor Exhibit,” \$565:** Hutchinson Zoo staff will recruit interested youth to help with design and construction phases of an update to the badger exhibit. Students will learn about zoo exhibit design, budget considerations and exhibit construction while building positive relationships with zoo staff.

**NAACP Youth, “Healthy Communities,” \$750:** Funds will help purchase a greenhouse for an extended growing season for the NAACP Youth’s urban, aquaponic garden. Produce grown in the garden will benefit local families.

**Pretty Prairie Grade School, “Natural Log Seating,” \$425:** The school will use the grant funding to purchase natural log seating for an outdoor learning area being created in phases on the school's grounds. Students and teachers are excited to have access to fresh air and opportunities for an occasional change of learning environment.

**Salthawk Community Support, “Equipment for The Closet,” \$320:** Funds will help purchase shelving and bars to better organize clothing and toiletries available to Hutchinson High School students in the Salthawk Community Supports initiative, The Closet. Better organization will also allow for more room for students who consider The Closet a “safe and friendly space” to gather during lunch.

**Trinity Catholic High School Key Club, “No Sew Tie Blankets,” \$255:** Trinity Catholic High School's Key Club will purchase fleece material and student members will hand-tie blankets that will be donated to Open Door Pregnancy Care Center this year.

Hutchinson Community Foundation's mission is to inspire philanthropy, collaboration and innovative leadership to strengthen Reno County communities. Since 1989, the foundation has granted more than \$86 million to organizations.