



**BERRIEN**  
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

For Good. For Ever.<sup>SM</sup>

# Berrien County Gives Back NEWSLETTER

Summer 2025

**INSIDE: BCF Awards \$470k in Scholarships to Local Students**



## Inclusive Playgrounds Welcome All Abilities

It's time for **EVERYONE** to play at two new playgrounds in Berrien County!

Berrien Community Foundation was proud to support – and act as fiduciary for – the new **Kaleidoscope Playground** and **Silver Beach County Park Playground**. Both projects brought adaptive and inclusive play structures to our community.

The Kaleidoscope Playground at Kiwanis Park in St. Joseph focuses on adaptive elements for mobility-aid users: zip lines, swings, merry-go-round, kaleidoscope tunnel, musical instruments and play structures with ramps.

“We’d go around and often times there was not anywhere for our son, Theo, to play,” said project co-organizer Nikki Stusick. “So, we knew we wanted to bring a space here so that no matter your ability there is a place for you to have fun.”

BCF worked with Stusick and the Kiwanis Club of St. Joseph-Benton Harbor to achieve the dream of building this all-abilities playground. BCF awarded a **For Good Grant** along with gifts from many **donor advised funds** to support the project, which Stusick said helped launch their fundraising efforts for the million-dollar play space.

“This playground reflects the heart of what Kiwanis stands for: serving the children of our community and world,” said Kiwanis Club member Julie Kelly. “This is one of our proudest moments. Look what happens when you dream big and the community comes together



*The Kaleidoscope Playground features the “We-Go-Swing,” which features one accessible bay for a wheelchair and one bench seat.*

to support that dream!”

BCF also worked with Berrien County Parks Department to collect over a million dollars to replace the aging playground at Silver Beach. BCF issued a \$50,000 match grant challenge to the community and collected donations throughout the entire fundraising efforts.

The playground features a lifeguard play tower, slides, ramps and other elements that encourage movement, spinning and climbing with tactile, visual and auditory experiences.

**Read More at**  
[www.berriencommunity.org](http://www.berriencommunity.org)

# Backpacks Are Back

The smell of crayons wafting through the air at Berrien Community Foundation can only mean one thing:

**Backpacks For Good is on the horizon!**

We're projecting to give away more than 2,500 backpacks full of school supplies this summer to students in need. At these events, we also connect families with the resources in their communities.

Help us spread the word about the events by sharing our upcoming social media posts and telling your neighbors. If you'd like to volunteer to serve at an event, visit [www.berriencommunity.org/BackpacksForGood](http://www.berriencommunity.org/BackpacksForGood) or scan the QR code below to sign up.

## Backpacks For Good Events:

- **Students Who Live in 49022 ZIP Code**  
5:30-7:30 p.m. Tuesday, August 5, 2025  
Dwight P. Mitchell City Center Park, Benton Harbor
- **Niles/Brandywine Students**  
4-6 p.m. Thursday, August 7, 2025  
Niles High School parking lot
- **Coloma/Watervliet/Hagar #6 Students**  
4-6 p.m. Thursday, August 14, 2025  
Coloma Junior High School parking lot



## Want to volunteer?

Sign up at [www.berriencommunity.org/backpacksforgood](http://www.berriencommunity.org/backpacksforgood) or scan the QR code.



## Online Tool Quickly Connects Teens To Resources

When teens are in need, where do they go? **Berrien Community Foundation** collaborated with **Berrien County Trial Court - Family Division** to launch the **"Teens in Need"** online tool that puts resources at the fingertips of teens and families in crisis in an effort to reduce the number of youthful offenders appearing in court and keep teens in school.

It can be found on Berrien Community Foundation's hyper-local online resource, [www.Help4Berrien.org](http://www.Help4Berrien.org).

The tool allows users to select the issue they are dealing with to pull a curated list of resources and organizations that specialize in meeting those needs. All organizations listed are either located in Berrien County or have programs for Berrien County residents. Topics include teen parenting, counseling,

alcohol and drug use, self-harm, grief support, meeting basic needs and finding low-cost or free after-school activities.

"Help4Berrien was created to be the go-to place for when people didn't know who to turn to get help," said BCF Program Director Susan Matheny. "Help4Berrien is for all of Berrien County, and, if we can add to one of our resources to make Berrien County teens feel better, healthier and happier, that's what we want to do."







## BCF Awards More Than \$470,000 in Scholarships

Berrien Community Foundation awarded more than \$470,000 in scholarships to support the academic journeys of **84 Southwest Michigan students.**

BCF hosted its “Wicked Adventure” Scholarship Celebration June 17 at Hidden Pointe Event Hall in Benton Harbor. Inspired by the movie musical “Wicked,” the evening celebrated the “magic of education” and how being different – being yourself – is what makes you powerful.

“A scholarship is not just a financial gift – it’s an investment in a student’s potential to change their life and the world around them,” said Lisa Cripps-Downey, BCF President. “Behind every scholarship is a donor whose generosity creates a lasting impact, empowering students to achieve more than they ever imagined.”

BCF offers scholarships for graduating high school seniors, students currently in college, adults returning to the classroom and students going into the skilled trades. Scholarships are established by donors to support students who excel in academics, community service, the arts, or are pursuing a particular career path. Volunteers from the community sit on review committees to make award recommendations to the BCF Board of Directors.

### Interested in starting a scholarship?

Contact BCF President Lisa Cripps-Downey:

Phone: (269) 983-3304

Email: [Lisa@berriencommunity.org](mailto:Lisa@berriencommunity.org).

## T.E.A.M. Bulletin

*Teens Exhibiting Able Minds*

BCF’s youth advisory committee T.E.A.M. is made up of high school students from across Berrien County. They plan volunteer projects, make youth program funding decisions and reviews grant applications.

At their most recent meeting, T.E.A.M. members reviewed a packet of youth-focused grant requests. They awarded a \$6,500 grant to Ready for School, which promotes early literacy during pediatric checkups.

The program, offered at InterCare clinics in Eau Claire and Benton Harbor, provides children with age-appropriate books and offers guidance to parents on the importance of reading together at home.

T.E.A.M. is proud to support this effort to help young children build vital literacy skills.



*T.E.A.M. members from the 2024-2025 school year.*

# BCF Welcomes Zac Mansfield As Summer Intern

Zac Mansfield is the latest addition to the BCF team, joining as the community service intern for the summer. His main focus is helping with many of the behind-the-scenes activities in preparation of Backpacks For Good.

Community service is a large part of Zac's life — he volunteers with the Boy Scouts, at the River Valley Senior Center and just about wherever else he finds.

"I'm excited to work at BCF because I love to help people by volunteering," Zac said.

A Bridgman High School 2024 graduate, he is currently studying business at Lake Michigan College.

"One of my favorite parts of the job is helping my coworkers and the idea that I'm going to be helping families," said Zac.



Zac Mansfield



## Philanthropy Corner

### Considerations for a philanthropic retirement

If you've recently retired, you may still be figuring out the ideal balance of activities. If you've been retired for several years, you might still be trying to figure it out! Research shows us that finding purpose is an essential component of a happy and satisfying retirement.

Retirement offers a unique opportunity for individuals to rediscover their sense of purpose beyond the confines of a traditional career. Berrien Community Foundation's team and charitable tools can play a pivotal role in this journey. Here's how:

**Check in on tax planning:** For starters, BCF can work with you and your tax advisors to ensure your charitable giving is reflected in your estate and financial plan to achieve the impact you're seeking.

**Involve the next generation:** Many retirees have

more time to include family members in their personal charitable giving activities and strengthen family bonds. BCF can work alongside you and your estate planning advisors to name family members as advisors or successor advisors to your donor advised fund. This is a great way to strengthen family bonds while building a legacy of generosity across generations.

**Build a legacy:** Many people update their estate plans just after they retire. As you work with your tax and estate planning advisors, consider incorporating a gift in your estate plan that will allow your charitable legacy to live on for generations.

We look forward to working with you throughout your retirement years to ensure that your community dreams are fulfilled through the power of charitable giving. Please reach out anytime at 269-983-3304!

### Upcoming Grant Deadlines

**For Good Grants - October 1**

**Frederick S. Upton Foundation Grants - October 15**

**Howard Facilities Grant - November 1**

**Howard Youth Grant - November 1**

To apply, visit [www.berriencommunity.org/grants](http://www.berriencommunity.org/grants)

