



BERRIEN
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

For Good. For Ever.SM

Berrien County Gives Back NEWSLETTER

Winter 2026

INSIDE: Grant Writing Workshops Slated For February



Rx Kids delivers financial support for expecting moms

Berrien Community Foundation is proud to join Berrien County Health Department, Corewell Health Lakeland and The Sam Fund to invest in healthy babies through the launch of **Rx Kids**, a direct cash assistance program supporting new moms as they navigate the expense of welcoming a baby.

Successfully piloted in other Michigan communities, Rx Kids received bipartisan support to expand into high-needs areas, with the state covering 90% of program costs. The Sam Fund led efforts to secure the local match.

“As far as we’re concerned, Rx Kids is great news for Berrien County,” said Alan Mussman, Sam Fund advisor. “We all do better when we all do better.”

For the next three years, moms residing in **the cities of Benton Harbor, Niles and Buchanan, and Benton Charter Township** could benefit from the program. See sidebar for more information.

“When families have the resources they need to meet their basic needs, they make amazing choices,” said Alyssa Stewart, Rx Kids director of philanthropic partnerships.

Local mom Candious Clabin will benefit from the program. “With us being first-time parents, there are a lot of unexpected expenses we are trying to prepare for. When I learned of this program, I knew it was going to help us in so many ways.”

As the fiscal agent, BCF is investing over \$95,000 and is calling on the community to **support moms and babies now**.

“With enough funding, we can grow this program to lift up even more moms and babies,” said BCF President Lisa Cripps-Downey.

To learn more or to support the program, visit www.berriencommunity.org/rxkids.

How It Works

**Receive \$1,500 during pregnancy
+\$500/month for baby’s first 6 months**

Must reside in:

- ✓City of Benton Harbor ✓City of Buchanan
- ✓City of Niles ✓Benton Charter Township

Will need to provide: medical proof of pregnancy, proof of residency, ID

*Rx Kids does not impact
other state benefits*

Benefits of Rx Kids

based on results from participating communities

For every \$1 invested:

- **\$4 saved from Department of Health and Human Services**
- **\$1.57 in local economic impact**



Increased prenatal care



Decreased low birth weight and preterm births



Decreased Neonatal Intensive Care Unit admissions



Decreased Child Protective Service referrals

BCF Senior Care Kits Bring Comfort to 1,150

When volunteers delivered Nancy's gift-wrapped package, she was surprised and grateful for the heavy box full of essential items, including a bottle of lotion which she desperately needed.

"This is a beautiful gift," she said. "(These kits) make such a difference and that's so important."

Thanks to our friends at Meals on Wheels of Southwest Michigan and Area Agency on Aging, **1,150 Senior Care Kits** made it out to low-income, homebound seniors throughout Berrien County.

Now in its ninth year, BCF continues supporting seniors through this project because of what data shows: 1 in 10 of Berrien County seniors are living below the poverty level. When out-of-pocket medical costs are factored in, that number becomes 1 in 7.

Senior Care Kits are possible because of the incredible generosity of volunteers, donors and partners who freely give their time and resources to support some of our community's most vulnerable seniors.



Nancy, left, opens her Senior Care Kit.

Below are: Helen, Will and Bill.



BCF Awarded \$150K to Boost Local Food Access

Berrien Community Foundation received a \$150,000 grant from the **Michigan Health Endowment's Rapid Response Fund** to strengthen local food systems for pantries and food service agencies. BCF leads the **Southwest Michigan Food is Health Collaborative**, a network of community partners working to make healthy, local produce more accessible.

"Our health is closely connected to the food that is available to us," said Dr. Sarah Gendernalik, founder of SBG Health Strategies and strategic coordinator of the Food is Health Collaborative. "When people don't have consistent access to healthy food, chronic health conditions become harder to manage."

A portion of the grant will purchase local produce and proteins. The majority of funding will help build the structures needed for a strong local food system, including software that allows pantries to purchase what their clients need from farmers as well as investments in cold storage and nutrition education.

While BCF is the grant recipient, all dollars will go to other organizations to support the food system.

"Our responsibility is to build structures that hold up over time," said BCF President Lisa Cripps-Downey. "This investment helps us do that in a way that reflects the needs and strengths of our community."



Fresh, local produce is loaded into a vehicle for distribution during the kick-off of the Nutrition Exchange Program in late 2025.

The Power of Grantmaking

Grantmaking is a powerful tool for change, turning resources into opportunities that strengthen communities. By funding innovative ideas and essential programs, it empowers organizations to address local needs and create lasting impact. BCF recently awarded **\$239,500 in For Good Grants** to Berrien County nonprofits.

Here's a look at how grants have shaped our communities:



Power of Play

Coloma Elementary School students are succeeding in the classroom thanks to a Golden Acorn Classroom Mini Grant that is bridging the gap between lessons and how each individual student learns best.



Power of Community

Supported by a For Good Grant, Benton Harbor Public Library's Library Cafe provide an outlet for those experiencing homelessness to find healing, comfort and peace while learning life skills and drinking coffee.



Power of Connectivity

A For Good Grant supporting the John W. Gast Memorial Trail linking downtown Bridgman to Lake Township Park provides a safe path for cyclists, walkers, joggers, families with strollers, and individuals with mobility devices to enjoy the outdoors.

New BCF scholarships honor local legacies

As students begin applying for BCF scholarships ahead of the February 10 deadline, they'll see four new opportunities made possible through heartfelt acts of philanthropy.

Families created the **Celebrating Miles Kelleher Cross Country and Track Scholarship** and **Tim King Music Scholarship** to remember and celebrate those they've lost. The **Janet W. DeRubbo Scholarship** continues Janet's lifelong dedication to education in Berrien County. And the **100 Women Strong Scholarship** supports Lake Michigan College students, with a preference to a woman returning to school or experiencing a life transition.

Each year, BCF awards around a half million dollars in scholarships to graduating high school seniors, adults heading back to the classroom, current college students and people who are pursuing a career in the skilled trades.

To learn more about these scholarship opportunities, visit www.berriencommunity.org/scholar. Interested in starting a scholarship fund? Contact BCF President Lisa Cripps-Downey by calling (269) 983-3304 or email lisa@berriencommunity.org.



Miles Kelleher



Janet DeRubbo



Tim King



100 Women Strong

Scholarship applications are due February 10.

Apply at www.berriencommunity.org/scholar

Philanthropy Corner

Start the year with a smart giving plan

Happy New Year from Berrien Community Foundation!

We are grateful to work with so many individuals, families, and businesses to support the causes you care about and make our whole community a better place. We look forward to the year ahead!

As always, we're happy to share what's trending across the charitable giving world. Whether you established a fund at the community foundation years ago or recently, or you're thinking about doing so this year, we are here for you.

Many people enter a new year hoping to be more intentional with their charitable giving — but knowing where to start can be a challenge. A few early-year steps can bring clarity and confidence to your philanthropy.

1. Review your 2025 giving with Berrien Community Foundation. A quick look back highlights impact and helps you refine your 2026 plans.

2. Talk with your tax advisors. Understanding how new laws affect your giving — and reviewing estate

plans or beneficiary designations — helps ensure your charitable goals are clear and tax-efficient.

3. Set your 2026 charitable goals.

BCF can connect you with local needs and help you decide when and how to give, from recurring gifts to strategic contributions of appreciated assets.

Thank you for allowing us to serve as your home for charitable giving! We'd welcome a conversation about your goals for charitable giving in 2026 and beyond. Getting a jump on the planning process is a great way to start a new year off on the right foot.

Connect with BCF President Lisa Cripps-Downey at 269-983-3304 or email lisa@berriencommunity.org.



BCF plans Grant Info Tour, Grant Writing Workshops

BCF is kicking off the year helping people learn about available grants and how to write effective grant applications.

The **Grant Info Tour** will make five stops around Berrien County (see below). Nonprofits are encouraged to show up to learn about grant opportunities and get questions answered. To learn more, visit www.berriencommunity.org/grantinfotour. There is no cost to attend and registration is not required.

In February, BCF will hold two **Grant Writing Workshops** to help people brush up on their grantwriting skills – or learn a new skill.



Grant Info Tour

Stop #1

5:30-7 p.m. January 20
New Buffalo Township Library

Stop #2

5:30-7:30 p.m. January 22
Berrien Springs Community Library

Stop #3

5-7 p.m. January 27
Benton Harbor Public Library

Stop #4

5-7 p.m. January 28
Coloma Public Library

Stop #5

5-7 p.m. February 4
Niles YMCA

Grant Writing Workshops

Workshop #1

5-8 p.m. Wednesday, February 18

Workshop #2

1-4 p.m. Monday, February 23

The workshops are free, but registration is required. For more information or to RSVP, visit www.berriencommunity.org/Grant-Writing-Workshop.

