MARCH

STRENGTHENING THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

Patrick Cisler has been at the helm of the Lakeshore Nonprofit Alliance (LNA) and Community SPOKE for the past eight years. During his tenure, he increased the organizations' focus on a healthy nonprofit sector and collaboration between nonprofits, government, and the private sector. As 2020 unfolded, those key strategies helped our community swiftly respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

LNA seeks to strengthen the ability of nonprofit organizations to successfully accomplish their missions by working together. It offers expert assistance, networking, professional development opportunities, gathers data, and supports nonprofits with the understanding that a thriving nonprofit sector contributes to a thriving community. Community SPOKE's mission is to enhance the quality of life for all Ottawa County residents through a strategic, coordinated, and systemic response to human service needs. CFHZ has deep alignment with both missions and supports this work through financial investments and leadership in both entities.

In his role, Patrick has prioritized creating trusted relationships with individuals in the nonprofit, private, and public sectors. "I can clearly recall March 13 when the first of many COVID-19 related executive orders was issued in Michigan. We called an initial meeting with many community leaders to begin strategizing about how our community would respond to the impending human service needs that this pandemic would inevitably create. The response was immediate as partners from all sectors jumped in on a moment's notice to begin preparing for the impacts of this pandemic. It was incredible to see how quickly we were able to develop plans and execute them," said Patrick. "The years of relationship-building through LNA and Community SPOKE paid off as our community was truly built to respond to this moment."

The group that met on March 13 became the founding members of the Care Ottawa County coalition – a group that mobilized to fundraise, begin making emergency grants, launched a website, and shared information with volunteers and donors. Patrick became the de facto coordinator and facilitator for conversations with multiple organizations. He organized daily calls with agendas set up to address each impact area. Nonprofits gave real-time updates about the needs they were anticipating and how partners and funders could best assist in helping them meet their mission in the face of increased service demand. Patrick also worked closely with the county's Emergency Response Team, acting as a voice for nonprofits and working to ensure human services were as effective as possible in the face of constantly changing conditions.

"It's been a real honor to serve the community over the past year. This was truly a moment to deliver on our mission, and I think we did that. Things moved at light speed, but they moved smoothly and in coordination. The innovative projects - from funders combining their dollars for centralized distribution through the Emergency Human Needs Fund, to the Stay Home Fight Hunger social media campaign, or Shopping for Seniors – all of these resulted from connections that had been made and strengthened prior to 2020. It feels great to see LNA's and Community SPOKE's work truly display its value."

– PATRICK CISLER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
LAKESHORE NONPROFIT ALLIANCE AND COMMUNITY SPOKE