



AGAINST THE STORM
FOUNDATION

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**Against the Storm Foundation Partners Again This Year
With Mental Health Advocates of WNY (MHA) to Support
Basic Emotional Skills Training (BEST) Program**

***Funding will continue to provide classroom-based learning to help students
Pre-K through K in the Cheektowaga Central School District
develop healthy social and emotional skills***

CHEEKTOWAGA, N.Y., April 24, 2024 – Against the Storm Foundation, Inc. presented a \$10,000 check to Mental Health Advocates of WNY (MHA) today to support the organization’s Basic Emotional Skills Training (BEST) program. The funding will provide continued classroom-based learning to help students Pre-K through K in the Cheektowaga Central School District develop healthy social and emotional skills. The Foundation made a similar \$10,000 donation last year.

Many Pre-K students are socially and emotionally unprepared for kindergarten. The BEST program is proven to increase skills that enable young students to understand feelings and interact with others in a healthy, socially responsible manner. The lack of these skills can result in poor academic performance, social isolation, anxiety, and other mental health-related disorders.

“The Against the Storm Foundation is pleased to continue supporting child and adolescent mental health in our community,” said Thomas Lillis, president. “Bringing mental health into the classroom at such an early age will hopefully establish a framework for these young people to significantly improve their academic, social and economic outcomes, leading to success in school and in life. This year’s donation was made possible due in large part to the proceeds from our most recent Rock for the Cure event. We are thankful to our sponsors, supporters and those who attended for helping to make this funding possible.”

“BEST is a great social-emotional learning program offered to our students through the MHA,” said Maria Kocialski, a social worker at Union East Elementary. Over the past two years we have been lucky to receive this program thanks to a grant provided by the Against the Storm Foundation. This program has a parent component with it along with classroom lessons given to the grade levels. There are posters and handouts the teachers can carry into the classroom lessons as well. These lessons are for each grade level and they are about six weeks long. Parents love this program as do our teachers and most importantly, the students.”

“For over 10 years, BEST has had the privilege of working with students, staff, and families in Cheektowaga, providing essential social-emotional skills training,” said Melinda DuBois, MHA executive director. “The program equips students with the skills to become “peacemakers” who share and express emotions, manage anger, and problem-solve effectively.

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“These skills are crucial for fostering a solid foundation for both academic and social success. We are deeply grateful for our partnership with Union East Elementary and the generosity of the Against the Storm Foundation, which has enabled us to continue this vital work in the community. This collaboration ensures we can maintain and expand our efforts in empowering students for a brighter future, she added.”

BEST currently serves a diverse population of more than 600 students in the district. The grant from the Against the Storm Foundation will help continue and expand this program in Cheektowaga through the end of the current school year.

About the Against the Storm Foundation

Established in 2019, the Against the Storm Foundation, Inc. is a New York State authorized not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Its mission is to help fight blood cancers and support other causes that will improve the health and quality of life for people in need. For more information visit: <http://againstthestorm.org/>

Mental Health Advocates

Mental Health Advocates (MHA) promotes mental health and well-being in our community and supports individuals and families living with mental illness through advocacy, treatment linkage, and outreach services. The non-profit agency delivers non-clinical services to more than 17,000 individuals each year in homes, schools, hospitals, community organizations, and workplaces across Western New York. MHAWNY.ORG

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