



AGAINST THE STORM
FOUNDATION

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**Against the Storm Foundation Partners for Third Straight 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 young students in the Cheektowaga Central School District develop healthy social and emotional skills

BUFFALO, N.Y, February 26, 2025 – Against the Storm Foundation, Inc. presented a \$10,000 check to Mental Health Advocates of WNY (MHA) today to help fund the organization's Basic Emotional Skills Training (BEST) program. The funding will provide continued classroom-based learning to help students Pre-K through Kindergarten in the Cheektowaga Central School District develop healthy social and emotional skills.

BEST currently serves a diverse population of more than 630 students in the district. The grant from the Against the Storm Foundation will help not only continue this program, but also expand it in Cheektowaga through the end of the current school year.

"The Against the Storm Foundation is proud of its commitment to child and adolescent mental health in our community, in particular a program with such effective and proven results," said Thomas Lillis, president. "This is our third consecutive year in support of the MHA's efforts."

"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 a decade, the BEST team has had the privilege of working alongside the incredible staff, students, and families at Union East Elementary, delivering our social-emotional curriculum and equipping young learners with essential skills in emotional regulation, problem-solving, and self-expression," said Melinda Dubois, MHA executive director. "Building these foundations early helps students feel secure and supported in their school environment, paving the way for both academic achievement and social success."

We are incredibly grateful for our continued partnership with Union East Elementary and the unwavering support of the Against the Storm Foundation. Their generosity and commitment to these students have been instrumental in allowing us to meet the growing needs of the school. As Union East expanded with three additional classes this year, the support of Against the Storm ensured that every Pre-K and Kindergarten student continued to receive the support of the BEST program without interruption," she added."

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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.

Lillis said this year's donation was made possible due in large part to the proceeds from the Against the Storm Foundation's most recent Rock for the Cure and its Cornhole for a Cause and Fall Bash held last September. We are thankful to our sponsors, supporters and those who attended these events for helping to make this funding possible."

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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