



AGAINST THE STORM
FOUNDATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

***Funding continues to provide classroom-based learning to help young students in the
Niagara Falls City and other school districts develop healthy social and emotional skills***

NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y, June 22, 2026 – Against the Storm Foundation, Inc. presented a \$12,500 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 Niagara Falls City and other school districts in Western New York develop healthy social and emotional skills.

BEST currently serves a diverse population of more than 2,900 students in Erie, Niagara and Chautauqua Counties, including 1,250 students at five schools in the Niagara Falls City School District. Over the past four years the foundation has awarded grants totaling \$42,500 to the MHA for the BEST program, with the original \$30,000 specifically targeting students in the Union East Elementary School in the Cheektowaga School District.

Accepting the check were Melinda DuBois, executive director of the MHA, and Mark Laurrie, a member of the MHA Board of Directors and the retiring superintendent of schools in the Niagara Falls City School District.

"The Against the Storm Foundation is proud of its ongoing commitment to child and adolescent mental health in our community, in particular a program with such effective and proven results," said Thomas Lillis, president. "We observed young students participating in the program and witnessed first-hand the benefits of our support in Cheektowaga the past three years and we are especially pleased to expand our support to assist students in Niagara Falls and other local schools."

"We are incredibly grateful to the Against the Storm Foundation for its unwavering commitment to the well-being of children and families across Western New York," said DuBois. "Their support of the BEST program has allowed us to equip our youngest learners with the social and emotional tools they need to thrive both in and out of the classroom. Investments like these create lasting change and build stronger, healthier communities for generations to come."

" We are so grateful for this funding which supports our belief in giving our youngest students the skills and tools necessary to develop positive and strong mental health," said Laurrie. "Our longitudinal data proves that with this early intervention fewer social and emotional long-term issues become barriers to learning."

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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 annual Rock for the Cure held last October. This year's event is scheduled for Sunday, August 15 at the Sportsmen's Tavern music complex on Amherst St. in Buffalo. "We are thankful to our sponsors, supporters and attendees for helping make this funding possible and we are looking forward to another successful event later this summer," said Lillis.

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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