

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Morgan Schare

Mschare@groupgordon.com

(212) 784-5713

**Deaconess Foundation Awards \$450,000 to Organizations Dedicated to Youth and Older Adults
in Eastern Missouri and Southern Illinois**

*The community-stewarded grantmaking approach identified key cross-generational themes in the
types of support needed by both seniors and young people*

ST. LOUIS – December 9, 2025 – Today, [Deaconess Foundation](#) (Deaconess) announced the recipients of \$450,000 in grant awards for community-led organizations supporting seniors and young people, demonstrating its strategic intent to respond to community needs and bridge critical gaps while advancing liberation across seven generations. A total of \$350,000 was invested with organizations that support seniors through the Seniors Community Revitalization & Development Fund (Seniors Community Fund), and \$100,000 was invested to support five youth-serving projects through the NextGen Grantmakers initiative. Both the Seniors Community Fund and NextGen Grantmakers are transformative community-directed funding initiatives that put decisions into the hands of the people – in this case, adults over the age of 55 and young changemakers, respectively – who are a part of the generations for which they are looking to provide solutions.

“The future of philanthropy must reflect the lived experiences of the people and communities it serves,” said Bethany Johnson-Javois, President and CEO of Deaconess Foundation. “We take the time to listen to and learn from the members of our community. We understand what their needs are and then work with them to meet them. The Seniors Community Fund and NextGen Grantmakers embody Deaconess’s larger commitment to setting an intentional intergenerational strategy.”

Following the inaugural grantmaking cycle of the NextGen Grantmakers initiative, the priority areas identified by young people were found to be closely aligned with those elevated by older adults. Across both groups, five key areas emerged: (1) safety and stability, (2) health and mental wellness, (3) self-determination and independence, (4) community and social connection, and (5) access to housing and social support. While the specific needs vary among the generations, both groups expressed an overlapping need to create environments where individuals across age ranges can thrive safely. For example, within the area of safety and stability, seniors prioritized support for home modifications and meal plans, while young people emphasized access to safe housing and enrichment activities.

There are also common threads among the recipients each group selected. The organizations chosen prioritize the most invisibilized members of the community; they each take a holistic approach by offering support across multiple service areas; and each organization is community-led and driven.

[The Seniors Community Fund](#) was launched in partnership by the [Community Health Commission of Missouri](#) (CHCM) and Deaconess Foundation in 2023. The Fund is led by a Senior Advisory Board comprised of older adults, meaning that all funding decisions are made for seniors, by seniors. The Senior Advisory Board selected 14 grant recipients that operate in areas including safety, transportation, and health navigation support.

The 2025-2026 Seniors Community Fund grant recipients include:

- **Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House** to build a secure, well-lit parking lot adjacent to its facility, improving safety and access for seniors, staff, and visitors.
- **Mission: St. Louis** for the Minor Home Repair Program to provide free safety-focused home modifications that reduce fall risks, prevent hazards, and support aging in place with dignity and independence.
- **Rebuilding Together Saint Louis** for critical home repairs and safety modifications for older adult homeowners, ensuring independence, stability, and well-being.
- **Hitz Memorial Home** to repair sidewalks at their facility to ensure the safety of residents, staff, and guests.
- **Ignite Hope's Wheels of Connection** for the expansion of its senior transportation and social engagement, blending practical support with therapeutic care to reduce isolation, and improve health and quality of life.
- **Mercy Hospital St. Louis Senior Transportation Assistance** for safe, reliable discharge transportation for senior patients, ensuring dignity, access, and support for those without family or resources.
- **St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired** to sustain its transportation program, providing essential rides for clients with vision loss to access medical care, services, and community activities.
- **Rx Outreach** to expand its Fill the Gap program, providing free medications, counseling, and navigation services to older adults in St. Louis.
- **Vitendo 4 Africa** for transportation, translation, and culturally tailored health education that improve access, independence, and well-being for immigrant and refugee seniors in St. Louis.
- **Housing Provided for the Elderly, Inc (HOPE)** for case management, benefits navigation, and relocation assistance to help low-income seniors in St. Louis secure affordable housing and remain stably housed.
- **Claudie's Urban Community Gardens** for the Growing Produce for Seniors program to establish community gardens at senior housing to produce fresh food and offer workshops that promote health, independence, and social connections for older adults.
- **Criminal Justice Ministry** for its Foundations First Housing program, providing safe housing, transportation, and case management to help older adults reentering St. Louis after incarceration.
- **Guardian Angel Settlement Association** for the Graceful Guardians program that helps low-income seniors in St. Louis overcome transportation and navigation barriers to access essential services, maintain independence, and improve well-being.
- **St. Louis Health Equipment Lending Program (STLHELP)** to expand access to free, refurbished home medical equipment that improves mobility, safety, and independence for older adults across the St. Louis region.

“The Seniors Community Fund has given a new voice to the members of our generation. It has helped to elevate our hopes and concerns at a time in life when these are often pushed to the side,” said Rosetta Keeton, a member of the Senior Advisory Board. “Working with the committee has allowed us all to discuss the challenges we share, and to discover the many organizations and

agencies that offer support to our fellow seniors. It's a privilege to provide these wonderful groups with the funds to keep doing so."

NextGen Grantmakers was launched in partnership by [Vision for Children at Risk](#) (VCR) and Deaconess Foundation in 2025, as a transformative, youth-stewarded grantmaking initiative that places funding decisions directly in the hands of young changemakers. Five organizations serving St. Louis Youth ages 10-24 were awarded grant funds to support projects within the NextGen Grantmakers' three priority areas: (1) youth mental health, well-being & emotional intelligence, (2) safety programming for youth, and (3) youth leadership development & personal growth programming.

NextGen Grantmakers' funding has been awarded to:

- **Gentlemen of Vision** to sustain and strengthen their core programming, which has helped transform the lives of more than 1,000 young men in the Greater St. Louis region.
- **DePaul USA** to engage formerly homeless youth in designing, planning, and implementing year-round activities that strengthen community, family, and social connections.
- **Dream Builders 4 Equity** to support their youth mental health and leadership program, including individuals and group therapy sessions and professional development opportunities.
- **Hope Creates** to support their Make Your M.A.R.C.® (Music. Art. Recovery. Connection.) program, which supports youth ages 12-19 who are either in recovery from or at risk of developing substance use disorder.
- **Opportunity House** to support the organization's mental health care services for residents to help them enhance their overall wellbeing.

"Young people are often dismissed or overlooked in decisions that impact our lives. As a participant in NextGen Grantmakers, it was refreshing to have the opportunity to apply my own lived experience, background, and knowledge of the needs of my generation to the grantmaking process," said Alicia Selmon, a member of the Youth Advisory Council. "It was an impactful experience to put myself into the shoes of other young people in the community and ask myself 'What would I want to see from an organization that was supporting me?'"

For more information about Deaconess Foundation's grant and funding opportunities, visit: <https://deaconess.org/funding-opportunities/>.

About The Community Health Commission of Missouri

On March 16, 2023 the St. Louis Regional Health Commission (RHC) and Alive and Well Communities (AWC) announced an affiliation to advance health equity across the State of Missouri and beyond. On July 17, 2024, the merged entity of the RHC and AWC was renamed to the Community Health Commission of Missouri (CHCM). CHCM envisions achieving zero health disparities through community and health system partnerships. We power the connection of community and systems to co-create innovative solutions that yield health equity in all policies and outcomes.

About Vision for Children at Risk (VCR)

Vision for Children at Risk is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the well-being of children, youth, families, and communities. For more than 30 years, we've worked to challenge and transform the deep-rooted inequities in our region's systems, especially those that impact young people and those who care for them.

We believe that sustainable change starts by listening to those closest to the challenges. That's why we center the voices, creativity, and leadership of youth and community members in everything we do. Their lived experiences guide our work, spark new ideas, and inspire lasting solutions.

At VCR, we're committed to empowering families, uplifting communities, and creating spaces where young people are not just heard—but supported, included, and equipped to lead. Through deep collaboration, innovative thinking, and a relentless focus on equity, we work to ensure that every child and youth has the opportunity to thrive.

About Deaconess Foundation

Deaconess Foundation envisions a community that values the health and well-being of all and gives priority attention to the most invisibilized. Deaconess seeks to create conditions where liberation is the lived reality within seven generations. A ministry of the United Church of Christ, Deaconess has invested more than \$100 million to improve the health of the St. Louis community since 1998. Our grants and cultivated relationships support the accelerated change in conditions through policy, advocacy, and/or organizing efforts building and wielding power to transform systems to respond to the will of the people.

The Foundation's advocacy and grantmaking footprint includes St. Louis City, St. Louis, Jefferson, St. Charles and Franklin Counties in Missouri and Madison, St. Clair and Monroe Counties in Illinois. For more information, visit deaconess.org. Follow the Foundation on Twitter and Instagram @deaconessfound and on Facebook at facebook.com/deaconessfoundation.

###