

New Dance Marathon committee focuses on relationship with second beneficiary Evanston Community Foundation

In its 19th year of partnership with the Evanston Community Foundation, Dance Marathon's inaugural community engagement committee worked to emphasize DM's relationship with its secondary beneficiary.



Lauren Duquette/Daily Senior Staffer

Monique Brunson Jones, CEO of Evanston Community Foundation, speaks at the kick-off of Dance Marathon on Friday night. ECF has been DM's secondary beneficiary for 19 years.

The community engagement committee, co-chaired by Medill junior Marissa Mizroch and Weinberg senior Justin Marquez, is primarily responsible for organizing community outreach and acting as the liaison to ECF. This was the committee's [first](#) year as part of DM's executive board.

"As students, we live in Evanston and we interact with Evanston somewhat, but we don't really interact with Evanston as a whole," said Mizroch, a former Daily staffer. "By working with the Evanston Community Foundation, we have a really unique opportunity to directly give back to our neighbors, to give back to this community that really does give a lot (to us)."

As of DM 2015, dancers had provided ECF with nearly \$900,000 in grants, CEO Monique Brunson Jones said. Jones, along with ECF vice president for programs Marybeth Schroeder in her remarks during Block 4, both said they believed this year they would surpass \$1 million in grant funds provided by DM fundraising.

"I'd say ... 20 percent (of our grant) funding we get from Dance Marathon," Jones said. "It goes a long way because it comes to us, but we always put it right back out to the community."

As part of their mission to promote more direct engagement between DM participants and ECF, the committee organized a day of service on Nov. 15 in which 40 volunteers worked with three local nonprofits that had received ECF grants from money raised during last year's event, Mizroch said.

“This is our 19th year in partnership (with ECF) and we were like ‘Wow, we are funding so many different programs in Evanston, how can we raise awareness about what social work, what incredible projects are being funded by Dance Marathon in the Evanston community?’” Marquez said.

For the day of service, the volunteers worked with local organizations Community Partners for Affordable Housing, Connections for the Homeless and PEER Services. Mizroch said the Connections group cleaned out a food pantry and sorted donations for the homelessness prevention nonprofit, whereas another group at PEER Services, which provides outreach to local teens and adults struggling with substance abuse, helped set up for a stair climb fundraiser and cheered on participants.

With CPAH, an organization that aims to provide affordable housing units in Evanston, the volunteers worked to renovate an apartment building to be adapted into housing for low-income families. Community relations director Amy Kaufman thanked dancers during Block 4 for their contributions to the organization.

“Our journey with you began on service day when a bunch of you came to help us rehab an apartment building that is now about to be an affordable home for five households,” Kaufman said. “You guys are now in the CPAH tent— we’re not going to let you go.”

Mizroch said the community outreach committee was tentatively planning another service day for Spring Quarter

Ald. Eleanor Revelle (7th) — who introduced Kathy Lyons, executive director of ECF partner James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy, when she spoke to dancers during Block 6 — told The Daily that in her experience serving on ECF’s board for 11 years, she saw firsthand the impact DM’s fundraising has on the organization’s efforts. Revelle and Jones said that DM funding not only assists ECF’s grants, but also helps bolster the organization’s programming.

“It has really amplified the amount of grant money that the foundation has to award,” Revelle said. “It’s been both enriching the pool of grant money and then also strengthening the type of work the foundation can do... to grow nonprofit capacity besides giving grants.”

Jones noted both to The Daily and in her kickoff speech at the beginning of DM that due to the state budget [stalemate](#), Evanston nonprofits dependent on government funding were especially in need of help from ECF and, by extension, DM.

“We are committed to be here for everyone in Evanston,” Jones said. “We’re focused on the whole community, every individual, every family and every neighborhood. ... (Your) money started a great big conversation.”

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