



interworks

Case Study

“It’s a scalable way to support nonprofit business functioning and leaderships development”

Launched over 25 years ago by Jack and Ethel Keller, the JJ Keller Foundation was created with the intention to give back to the community where they lived their lives and enjoyed success. Since then, the JJ Keller Foundation has grown to be one of the larger foundations in the region, giving about \$4 million a year to a host of local nonprofits. Through a partnership with the Best Year Yet Foundation, they began to offer targeted professional development programming to over 70 nonprofits working to solve problems in the community across the greater Wisconsin Fox Valley region. The impact of providing world-class training and tools they would never have been able to access on their own has been powerful, to say the least.

“The beautiful thing is that because of our relationship with the Best Year Yet Foundation, we can offer this programming through our charitable giving as opposed to just paying for a nonprofit to hire a consultant,” says Heidi Dusek, Executive Director of the JJ Keller Foundation. “This way, it’s a scalable option to support nonprofit business functioning and leadership development. **We are creating space in these leaders’ calendars to innovate, collaborate, and be creative at solving some of the complex problems in our communities.**”



The JJ Keller Foundation started by offering EDGE for Professionals to the charities they support. They quickly added Best Year Yet for Teams, which became a key team development program and an individual onboarding program for multiple organizations. From there, they have expanded to include multiple programs in the portfolio including Best Year Yet for Individuals, EDGE for OneNote, and several of the Essential programs to address the people and connection skills deficits brought to the fore during the pandemic.

Heidi not only appreciated the skill building that leads to positive impact, but also the healthy approach to integrating the whole person into the work they do: “We could be doing our work better or more efficiently, effectively, but also more healthy, right? These are healthy practices that aren’t always shared with us... It really opened a door to access high quality content and learning in a way that isn’t most often available.”



Rebuilding Together Fox Valley (RTFV) has turned their EDGE professional development into major impact. RTFV assists low-income, veterans and disabled homeowners with the maintenance necessary to stay safe, warm and independent in their own homes. Executive Director Chip Wood admits that when he first learned about EDGE for professionals, he was skeptical. However, after using the system for a couple of weeks he thought, “Holy cow! This is SO much better than what I was doing!”

The impact was so noticeable that Chip decided to make EDGE for Professionals part of RTFV’s onboarding. His whole team uses EDGE and he leveraged the methodology to create a shared, assigned task list to make sure that all their project tasks are on time. He credits EDGE as the tool that helps RTFV stand out from other nonprofits: **“In a climate where there are so many organizations competing for the same sponsorship dollars, the same amount of volunteers, we’ve got to do something to differentiate ourselves... And I think that starts with our service to our volunteers and to our sponsors. Anything we can do to make sure we are the absolute best at communication and making sure that nothing falls through the cracks is going to make that strategic differentiation from other nonprofits that didn’t go through Effective Edge.”**

Mike Rohrkaste, the Executive Director of the Fox Valley Memory Project, was similarly impressed with and grateful for the EDGE work that the JJ Keller Foundation and Best Year Yet Foundation partnership made possible for them. “We found it to be very helpful, especially for managing emails and organizing and prioritizing tasks. Two months later my team members are still applying a lot of the strategies taught and have tweaked some of the strategies to suit personal needs.” This is exactly the kind of feedback that tells Heidi that the impact is worthwhile.

Lisa Kogen-Praska accepted the role of CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Green Bay, WI in May of 2020. In the face of COVID, she was tasked with building a cohesive team and establishing a strategic direction for their Club program. Through an opportunity offered by the JJ Keller Foundation, Lisa was introduced to the Best Year Yet Foundation. **Best Year Yet and Effective Edge programs were brought in to help the team start to improve capacity, find balance, align on priorities, get strategic, and learn to support and communicate with each other. That turned out to be transformative in ways they didn’t anticipate.** “It was a fantastic opportunity that Best Year Yet helped us seize and maximize because we wanted to put framework around that opportunity rather than just kind of fumble through it,” Lisa said.

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“I would tell any corporate sponsor or foundation that investing in something like the Best Year Yet Foundation is so vital. As a nonprofit organization, **a lot of what we don’t have is the ability to really lean into capacity building; to make our internal structure stronger. So much of the funding we receive is directed toward providing direct services to our clients. That’s incredibly important and obviously the reason we’re there, but for us to operate and have the most impact we can have, we also have to make sure we are effective and efficient organizations.** We need the same tools and resources and support as a for-profit does. But a lot of times, in the nonprofits and our budgets and the challenges we face, we just don’t get that level of investment.”

The impact of that investment is enormous. “This is a meaningful investment for us to continue doing,” Heidi said. “It’s more than just about investing in the leaders of those organizations; it’s investing in the entire organization and all they do. It’s investing in the clients, and the staff, and all the different functions and different aspects that make an organization successful. Our partnership with the Best Year Yet Foundation falls in line with our capacity building portfolio.”

Organizational Impact Highlights:

- **70+ nonprofits served** across the Greater Wisconsin Fox Valley region
- JJ Keller Foundation investment dollars impact boosted through **increased organizational focus, efficiency, and effectiveness**

Learn more about the Best Year Yet Foundation
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