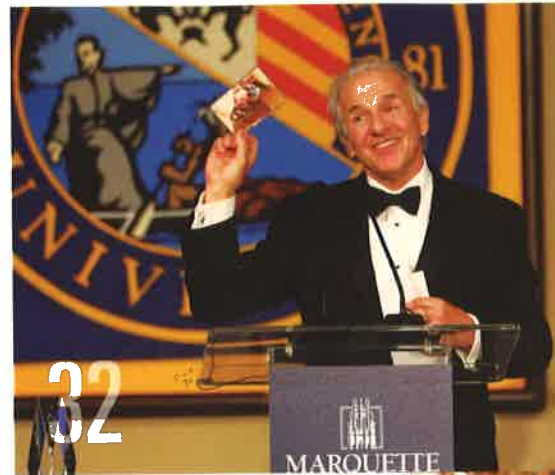


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ABOVE
Alumnus of the Year James Sartori at the 2019 Alumni National Awards ceremony.
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LEFT
The coalition-based effort that won Marquette's President's Challenge started with Drs. Amy Van Hecke and Dessie Levy.
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ABOVE
Good policing is about listening, says Marquette's new chief, Edith Hudson.
PAGE 11

“Before you today, with a cap and gown and broken heart, I am filled with hope and joy”

JACOB ZELINSKI, COMM '19, 2019 COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
WATCH THE VIDEO @ MARQUETTE.EDU/COMMENCEMENT.



ABOVE
Charlie Hoover's Chicago Reach connects young Chicagoans with high-impact nonprofits.
PAGE 37



LEFT
Neal Lofy is committed to helping the victims of human trafficking rebuild their lives.
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“Amy, meet Dessie.”

With those words, a friendship began about a decade ago after their chance meeting. Dr. Amy Van Hecke, a then-new psychology professor at Marquette had opened an autism clinic on campus, and Dr. Dessie Levy, then-dean of the School of Health Sciences at Milwaukee Area Technical College, brought her granddaughter to the clinic for an evaluation. Neither could imagine where this chance meeting might lead.

Their “hello” grew into a dialogue about each woman’s work. They began exploring barriers preventing some children with autism — children of color from city neighborhoods — from receiving the same high-quality care as suburban counterparts. As Levy led Van Hecke on a journey of discovery into the lives of Milwaukee’s central city residents, the pair did something that happens too rarely in cities like Milwaukee. They stepped outside their own communities and comfort zones. They began bridging distances that weren’t so large geographically — a few blocks or a few miles — but extended much farther in terms of time and tradition. As they recognized autism’s relationships to larger unmet needs, their focus broadened into related

BEFORE THERE WAS THE NEXT STEP CLINIC — POISED TO DELIVER MENTAL HEALTH CARE TO FAMILIES IN DESPERATE NEED — THERE WAS A PROFESSOR AND A COMMUNITY PARTNER CROSSING ALL THE USUAL BOUNDARIES.

BY DAN SIMMONS

issues of mental health and trauma. They added allies. A cascade of problems revealed cascading solutions. They dreamed bigger.

Fortunately, Van Hecke, Levy and their partners weren’t working in a vacuum. Since becoming president of Marquette in 2014, Dr. Michael R. Lovell has encouraged members of the university community to engage the communities around them in deeper ways — to be without boundaries and to renew their focus on servant leadership in partnership with those most in need.

Lovell and his wife, Amy, embarked on a quest of their own as they learned of research on the epidemic of trauma — exposures to violence, homelessness, addicted or incarcerated parents — threatening young lives in Milwaukee. They helped to form an organization, Scaling Wellness in Milwaukee, promoting trauma-informed care and community-wide responses to the epidemic.

BRIDGING THE GAP

“THEIR APPLICATION WAS NOT ONLY INNOVATIVE IN HOW IT APPROACHED EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH AND TRAUMA,” SAYS DR. DAN BERGEN, “BUT IT ALSO SOUGHT TO GATHER A BROAD GROUP OF PARTNERS FROM VARIOUS BACKGROUNDS. THAT’S WHAT SET IT APART.”



In the inaugural President’s Challenge competition, Dr. Amy Van Hecke’s team and seven other teams proposing responses to trauma needs in the city vied for a \$250,000 award.

In all, 37 Marquette faculty from eight schools across campus were included in the bids, plus 30 community partners representing 26 different community organizations.

These convictions helped shape Lovell’s early 2018 announcement of the inaugural President’s Challenge grant. Supported by the Johnson Controls Foundation, the award would provide \$250,000 over two years to fund a project that would break old paradigms—or establish new ones—reaching across departmental and college lines and incorporating a community organization as a full partner in a project that aims to change the trajectory of lives in Milwaukee.

In January, these stories merged when Van Hecke and a diverse team of Marquette colleagues and community partners, including Levy, were awarded Marquette’s first President’s Challenge grant. The quality of the eight submitted proposals made for “a difficult choice,” says Lovell. Yet the plan from Van Hecke’s team to create a mental health clinic for children and families in a desperately underserved neighborhood of the city best embodied the bold, collaborative principles of the challenge. “The energy and enthusiasm, the innovation and collaboration” of the group “has been nothing less than awe-inspiring,” exclaimed Grady Crosby, vice president for public affairs and chief diversity officer at Johnson Controls, in announcing the award.

“This clinic will be a missing piece where we can really address the mental health needs and developmental needs of our children and their families,” says Tracey Sparrow, president of Next Door Milwaukee, which will help operate the clinic in space adjacent to its facility in Milwaukee’s Metcalfe Park. Currently, those children face waits of up to a year for mental health services—delays the new clinic will slash practically to zero.

“We looked at where we were sending families to be diagnosed and treated, and it was like this ring around the city,” says Van Hecke. “Why aren’t there any diagnosticians in the city? So we thought, ‘That’s our next big problem.’ And that’s really where the President’s Challenge came in.”

To understand how Van Hecke’s autism clinic on campus grew, a decade later, into a broad-based

mental health clinic set to open later this year, start with Levy. She has served as an ambassador, of sorts, to the central city for Van Hecke and a guide across barriers that can exist between care providers and people needing their care. “Marquette has a gem in Amy, in her work and her compassion,” says Levy. “A lot of people do things because it’s their profession or their job. Amy does it because she has a compassion for people.”

As a first step, Levy invited Van Hecke and Dr. Norah Johnson, Grad ’01, ’09, a Marquette associate nursing professor now part of the Next Step project, to lead a community training on childhood autism, the research focus of both professors. It was part of a schedule of trainings Levy hosted for an influential group of “First Ladies.” Either pastors or pastors’ wives from a network of about 40 local Baptist churches, these women lead outreach to their congregations on difficult topics such as diabetes and obesity. Levy is a First Lady herself, in addition to being a nurse and professor. Her husband, Rev. Dr. Garry Levy, presides over True Love Missionary Baptist Church.

The training went well and yielded progress on a long-running frustration Van Hecke faced: the reality that, despite a central location and fees that adjust based on incomes, suburbs sent plenty of children her way while few families came from nearby neighborhoods, where the need seemed greatest. “I had to ask myself, ‘Why?’” she recalls. “And the answer was that the families didn’t feel comfortable. They didn’t feel like this was a place for them.”

That epiphany had left the native Mississippian asking stubborn questions: How can Marquette, with all its academic resources, best connect with the neighborhoods in the central city? How can the university bridge an overlooked-but-real divide?

The First Ladies helped change that game. Equipped with knowledge from the initial training, they explained the ins and outs of autism to their congregations: the behavioral signs, sources of help and importance of early detection and treatment. To provide continuity after that first touch, a grant to study urban–rural health disparities allowed them to hire two staffers, Troney Small and Ida Winters, as family navigators. The pair took care to the next level, accompanying families to appointments, arranging follow-ups and conducting screenings. Van Hecke describes the navigators, both of whom are African American, as invaluable.

But their involvement opened up new areas of concern. They found that children with autism, and their families, often bear the scars of trauma and mental illness. “We started digging into it and found



Dr. Dessie Levy and Amy Van Hecke at the Next Door playground

that kids with developmental delays are four times more likely to be victims of trauma,” Van Hecke says. “And moms who’ve experienced trauma are more likely to have a kid with a developmental delay. This is a bigger picture than autism.” They also found that families have to endure monthslong waits and travel far outside Milwaukee for mental health care.

The Next Step Clinic represents a melding of all that’s been learned by Van Hecke and her colleagues, on campus and off campus, over a decade. It’s located centrally, in a neighborhood that’s 87 percent African American, in a space already comfortable and familiar to many residents. Next Door is a broad-based neighborhood center, offering programs for infants through adults. It happened to have an empty space for the clinic, which will serve as the new home base for navigators Small and Winters. They will continue in their roles thanks to the President’s Challenge. Finally, an outreach center at True Love will serve as a training hub for ambassadors to provide initial assessments of families, who will be referred to the Next Step Clinic as needed.

“We wanted to bring services that families desperately need in Milwaukee to Milwaukee,”

says Leah Jepson, project director for the Milwaukee Coalition for Children’s Mental Health at Mental Health America of Wisconsin, a co-director and partner in the clinic along with United Way, MATC and others.

Graduate students from Marquette and other area schools will provide care in the clinic, supervised by Marquette faculty, helping to build a pipeline of psychologists and social workers equipped to handle the trauma and systemic racism experienced in the central city.

“We’re very deprived of psychologists in Wisconsin, generally,” Van Hecke says. “If you narrow it to psychologists who know autism or childhood trauma, it’s even worse. So we can solve another problem with this clinic.”

“This grant initiative was unlike anything I’ve seen around the country,” says Dr. Dan Bergen, Grad ’11, executive director of the Office of Community Engagement at Marquette. “It’s not common for universities to put this type of grant money out there.”

“Their application was not only innovative in how it approached early childhood mental health and trauma,” says Bergen, “but it also sought to gather a broad group of partners from various backgrounds. That’s what set it apart.”

Also noted: the existing relationships built over a decade. “It was based on our history of working together,” says Levy. “We were praying for success of this project.” ☺

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

With its diverse on-campus and off-campus partners, the Next Step Clinic leverages an impressive array of expertise to meet a critical community need.

Dr. Iqbal Ahamed
Computer Sciences

Dr. Abir Bekhet
Nursing

Dr. Mary Carlson
Educational Policy and Leadership

Tim Coughlin
Milwaukee SUCCEEDS and United Way

Martina Gollin-Graves
Mental Health America of Wis.

Leah Jepson
Mental Health America of Wis.

Dr. Norah Johnson
Nursing

Dr. Lynne Knobloch-Fedders
Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology

Wendy Krueger
Speech Pathology and Audiology

Rev. Walter Lanier
MATC and MIRACLE Network

Dr. Dessie Levy
General Baptist State Convention and True Love Outreach Center

Dr. Alexandre Martins
Theology and Nursing

Linda Menck
Communications

Dr. Steve Saunders
Psychology

Troney Small
Psychology staff

Dr. Tracey Sparrow
Next Door Foundation

Ida Winters
Mental Health America of Wis.