Individualized, one-to-one therapy is a critical part of mental health recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic changed fundamentally the way we interact with our clients – particularly in therapeutic relationships. Adapting to virtual visits brings a new set of challenges – and a new set of opportunities, which we at People Incorporated are fully embracing.

In 2019, People Incorporated launched a new platform for working collaboratively in a virtual environment. This tool’s virtual meeting platform quickly became the cornerstone of our ability to provide care during Minnesota’s stay-at-home order. This new virtual environment presented both new opportunities and challenges for therapists and clients alike.

“One of the biggest factors in doing online therapy is just figuring out non-verbal cues. It’s definitely harder to read body language and interpret it over the screen. It’s more effort overall.”

For children, the move to virtual therapy was even more profound. “With kids especially – engagement is so different. Normally I’d be playing a game with them in the office while we talk. Now, I’m using computer games online,
ADAPTING THERAPY TO A CHANGING WORLD

playing with chat backgrounds – whatever helps them let their guard down. This is hard for them. Before my office was the safe space, but now that they’re home, they have to make their safe space,” said Boike.

The use of virtual platforms has also brought out new creativity and even some fun in the adaptation of virtual therapy for children. Therapists have utilized online gaming, white board drawing exercises, and art therapy to help youth and teens express emotions and unpack the challenges they’ve faced during the pandemic.

“One of our therapists was using puppets to talk to students when they were struggling to be on video with her. For other students, we’ve been able to incorporate the chat feature for things they find difficult to express verbally in addition to the video chats we’re doing. We’ve learned to screen share to include more video clips or allowed the students to share with us their favorite inspirational music videos or movie characters. We’ve used a lot of scavenger hunts to move kids around and find calming items and spaces within their homes. We’ve been able to incorporate client pets into their therapy,” said Jessica Mathwig-Olson, Director of Operations and lead for our School-Linked care programming.

For some individuals, the move to virtual therapy provided a new opportunity to find support. “We are at our most accessible we’ve ever been. It’s one [aspect of COVID-19] that I think is so cool. I am working with at least five clients who had some barriers to being in the office – severe panic disorders for being out, children without childcare – now I can see them. I can see them on a regular basis,” said Boike. As People Incorporated moves forward, these tools and practices will likely remain available, removing more barriers to care, and getting more people the help they need to move towards mental health recovery.

Many of our clients also continue to receive care subsidized by People Incorporated’s generous donors. Last year, People Incorporated provided more than $800,000 in charitable care, ensuring cost is never a barrier to recovery. Your financial support makes this possible.

The Mental Health Trainee Program
Building a Workforce that Reflects Our Community

To become a mental health practitioner in Minnesota, individuals need clinically supervised experience in the delivery of mental health services. Many of these opportunities occur through unpaid internships, which can be difficult to complete without a financial support system leaving many new mental health workers struggling to balance long hours of practical experience with their financial realities.

“It’s not easy to balance an unpaid internship with another job. Having a paid internship allows us to focus and be immersed in this job and learn from it,” says Hannah Le, a recent graduate of People Incorporated’s Mental Health Trainee program, a paid internship that provides the hours and supervision necessary for graduates to advance in the mental health field.

People Incorporated believes it is imperative that we have a workforce that represents the community we serve. We are actively working to remove barriers that prevent practitioners from advancing in the mental health field, as well as, finding opportunities to welcome individuals into the field from historically underrepresented groups. We are committed to offering relevant, paid internship opportunities to remove barriers to advancement. Now in its fourth year, the Mental Health Trainee program has successfully engaged 75 percent or more individuals from diverse backgrounds each year, many of which are hired into mental health practitioner roles upon completion of their education requirements.

When Dilini Senadheera first started looking for mental health jobs as a senior majoring in psychology, she had a difficult time finding paid opportunities. Most paid positions required a minimum number of
hours of experience, and most opportunities to gain the required hours were unpaid internships.

I was sure [the Mental Health Trainee program] was another unpaid internship, but then I looked a little further and it was paid, and it was a pretty good ‘out of college rate.’ I thought, ‘This could be ideal to get into the mental health field in some way,’” says Dilini about her discovery of the program.

Dilini joined a cohort of six individuals in the training program last fall. Trainees work on-site at 25 different programs of People Incorporated. This immersive experience allows trainees to learn from experienced practitioners, and have an opportunity to unpack their learning with a mentor and cohort of peers. Additionally, it provides the supervision and hours necessary to complete the State of MN requirement for becoming a Mental Health Practitioner. The Mental Health Trainees also learn the nuances related to 24/7 programming for vulnerable adults and serving a consumer cohort with many barriers. The skills learned in these programs are invaluable.

Dilini says she gained a lot more than the hours required to advance her career.

It’s more than gaining experience – I’ve made lifelong friends and gained mentors I want to have in my life for a long time. It’s been incredibly impactful for me,” she says of her experience.

Dilini also highlights the importance of having this program available to recent graduates, “I think in order to have a diverse mental health organization and diversify the mental health field, you have to start with the entry-level positions and move up to more senior-level positions. Making an effort to have those entry-level be a diverse group and representative of the client population is an incredibly important first step.”
People Incorporated is honored by the many donors who utilize philanthropy to live their values. We recently connected with Nancy Reed, and asked her to share her story about how philanthropy helped her and her late husband, Ron, live their values. They have made a significant impact on People Incorporated through the Ron & Nancy Reed Legacy Fund, a special endowment held by The Saint Paul and Minnesota Foundation that provides funds to People Incorporated for scholarships to individuals of color completing master’s level internships that we provide.

“Ron and I both came from difficult family backgrounds, which helped form our desire to give back to our community. I grew up in poverty in a small town in Minnesota. My mother was a widow at a young age who struggled to raise 9 children. Ron grew up in an orphanage in Indiana with his two brothers, a result of his birth parents getting a divorce. This background led us both to pursue professional education in the areas of human services and health services. Ron earned a Masters of Social Work at the University of Michigan with financial assistance from the Masonic Children’s Home where he spent most of his youth. Ron’s career included serving as a CEO of several non-profit organizations, retiring in 2013 from Family Service of St. Paul. He then became a consultant to non-profits until his death in 2014. Nancy earned a Master in Public Health degree from the University of MN with assistance from federal stipends and worked as a registered nurse, nurse practitioner and then as a health care director the last 15 years of her career.

Family was always important to us. Our two sons, one who is biological and one who is adopted from Korea, are now both well-educated and working in helping professions. Our family also currently includes three young grandsons and a puppy. While our sons were growing up, the value of diversity and respect for people from all cultures and communities was emphasized. We spent time with a large extended family including many aunts, uncles, and cousins. We enjoyed traveling also. One of our many family trips was a Homeland Tour to Korea sponsored by Children’s Home Society so that we could learn more about our son’s Korean roots and culture and even meet some of his birth family members.

Because of our values related to diversity and our belief that non-profit organizations needed to include staff members of color to serve their respective communities of color, Ron and I decided to develop a Legacy Fund through the St. Paul Foundation for that purpose. This Ron & Nancy Reed Legacy Fund started while Ron was still the CEO of Family Service of St. Paul. Following a lifetime of service to communities of color, Ron chose to dedicate the purpose of this Fund to financially help students of color to pursue a master’s level education in the helping professions of social work, psychology and related fields. I have personally met some of the students who received the funds through this endowment. I was impressed with the student’s commitment to serve their respective communities as well as with the commitment of the staff at People Incorporated.

Since the Ron and Nancy Reed Fund is an endowment that will continue for years to come,

“...our family is grateful for this opportunity to bring along new generations of social service professionals to serve our diverse communities.”

As our country and our communities become even more diverse, our hope is that these funds will inspire students of color to seek educational opportunities to help their own communities and enhance services in their workplace settings. Also, our hope is that this type of endowment will encourage other potential donors to find a valuable purpose for their financial contributions to the mental health profession and to mental health organizations.”

Our team is ready to help you explore ways you can make an impact. There is no minimum requirement to make a legacy gift. Your support can make a difference now and for years to come.
People Incorporated faces significant financial challenges as we provide care. The suspension of some programs due to COVID-19 safety concerns, increased expenses for hazard pay, technology needs, and healthcare supplies created a significant deficit in our budget. We were too large for the Paycheck Protection Program and too small for relief offered to healthcare systems, leaving a gap that caused painful cuts. While we have made significant strides in bridging this gap with staff furloughs, layoffs, expense cuts, etc., we still have significant shortfall to fill in order to end the year on a positive note. Your gifts ensure mental health care is prioritized and provided in times of instability, crisis, and change to individuals most vulnerable to the trauma these incidents create.

Some good news for you:

› The CARES Act allows taxpayers to take a charitable deduction of up to $300 per taxpayer ($600 per couple), even if you do not itemize your taxes.

› The new law also allows for cash contributions to qualified charities to be deducted up to 100% of your adjusted gross income (AGI) for the 2020 calendar year if you itemize, removing the previous cap of 60 percent. For the 2020 tax year, an individual may elect to apply a new 100% of AGI limit to cash gifts to public charities. Gifts to donor advised funds or supporting organizations are not eligible.

› Please consult with a tax professional for advice specific to your situation. This should not be considered tax advice.

Thank you for helping us create a stronger mental health safety net for your community.
In a normal week prior to COVID, you would typically find People Incorporated’s Homeless Outreach team in libraries, working with individuals who are homeless and hidden, and collaborating with many area nonprofit agencies to help them find food, shelter, financial support, healthcare, mental health services, and more. You would also find staff working at our drop-in center, building trust with people who use the center as a refuge from steamy summer humidity or blustery winter winds. It is here where they might convince someone to take a shower for the first time in weeks. The simple act of showering can often be a turning point for someone’s mental health recovery – a new beginning on a journey to recovery and wellness.

You'll also find our team on the streets and in the woods, connecting with people in encampments – both hidden and in the open – offering supplies such as sleeping bags, food, and fresh, clean socks. These empathetic gifts help individuals survive, build trust, and often provide an open door to mental health recovery.

When COVID-19 rocked our community, everything changed.

“For people living on the streets especially, it’s really hard to meet your basic needs – to get food, keep your phone charged, stay warm and out of the elements or cool in the summer, and with COVID, it became even harder for people to stay safe and meet their needs,” says David Katzenmeyer, Street Outreach and Project Recovery Program Supervisor.

With libraries and drop-in centers closed, and most shelters reducing capacity to accommodate social distancing, our team adapted their services to accommodate new needs as homelessness and the prevalence of encampments grew.

› We increased our time in encampments, visiting individuals tent by tent, and creating “drop-in” times at a central access point.
› We offered more essential supplies for outdoor sheltering, such as tents, tarps, sleeping bags, socks, and underwear.
› We created new protocols to allow individuals to still visit the drop-in center for essential services like laundry and showers, while also maintaining social distancing.
› We began offering meal pick-ups in collaboration with some of our outreach partners.

“We were seeing more anxiety and more depression around getting basic needs met, but I'm really proud to say our team jumped in without hesitation into meeting these needs,” says David. “We are providing more meal and food delivery services, more outreach time, and propping up drop-in times in city parks, even partnering with internal licensed social workers to provide more services.”

Despite the challenges, the visibility of encampments and growing advocacy from community members like you for individuals experiencing homelessness allowed staff more time to work in encampments to stabilize people and get them the supports they need.

“We had one individual we had been working with for years, but had a difficult time staying connected because he was constantly having to move – he reported his camp being cleared 18 times in just the few years we’d been trying to help him – on top of trying to cope with a substance use disorder and schizophrenia,” says David. “It was really hard to find him. I’m really, really happy to say that this person is now living in a studio apartment and getting the help he needs.”

Our Homeless Outreach team was featured in the news!
Read the story online by visiting http://strib.mn/3aEZzoQ
Celebrating 40 Years of Sobriety

When you meet Lorenzo “Rock” Rangel, it’s easy to see what he is most proud of in life.

As a Marine, he earned a license to drive a 48,500 lb. tank before he had a Minnesota driver’s license. He wears his service proudly – greeting neighbors in his building by their military rank, long after their retirement.

He’s also very proud of his hard work ethic. As the son of migrant farmers from Mexico, Rock, his parents, and siblings worked hard to pay the bills.

“We were all workers,” says Rock. “I never forgot where I came from. I was a workaholic before I was an alcoholic. Then I reversed the two. I liked the work, but I loved to drink.”

Rock isn’t shy about the negative impact that alcohol had on his life. His marriage dissolved, and he found himself in and out of prison. He had stints of homelessness.

In 1981, he decided to get sober.

“We had to stay for a minimum of 30 days. I think I stayed 90 days. But we had to get a job after our first 30 days,” says Rock.

“We had to get along. People need people. We were all in recovery.

“Some of them from alcohol like me, but others were there for other drugs,” said Rock. “A lot of us had spent a lot of time on the streets and in prison.”

Rock is thankful for the time he spent at People Incorporated, and was excited to see local news featuring our staff still out in the community, helping people struggling with mental illness and addiction.

If it wasn’t for companies like People Incorporated, where would I be? I needed help. You have to want help, and grab it when it comes, but you have to have a place to start,” he says.

Now he’s proud of the example he’s set for his children and grandchildren. He proudly shares stories of his children working, retiring, and raising their children.

“They’re all sober now too. None of them drink or smoke. I got to be an example for them. There is no better life than sobriety,” said Rock.
Following Governor Walz’s announcement of a back to school plan that will have some children in the classroom, while other children will be supported with distance learning, one thing remains clear: No matter how children will return to school, mental health services will be a critical part of the equation.

People Incorporated’s School-Linked programming fills in the gaps in four local school districts where teachers and staff may not have the capacity to meet the mental health needs of their students. Our team provides therapy to students and collaborates with parents, teachers, and administration to create plans that support children when mental health symptoms affect their learning. This creates a more positive learning environment for the entire classroom.

Our School-Linked mental health professionals provide much more than mental health care. As the COVID-19 pandemic rapidly moved education to online learning last spring, People Incorporated staff assisted families by continuing therapy online, connecting families with food resources, helping students access technology, and even picking up and delivering supplies to children who were unable to get their distance learning materials.

As we enter a new school year with many unknowns, our team will continue to adapt their care, providing them the best possible mental health care and wrap-around supports in an ever-changing environment.

“We don’t know what fall will look like in all of our schools, but we do know we will now have more kids who have experienced trauma,” says Jessica Mathwig-Olson, Director of Operations. “We’ll be working with kids to help them cope.”

Your support of People Incorporated makes programs like this possible. Please consider a donation this fall to support mental health care in schools for children in your community. To make a gift, please use the enclosed envelope or visit PeopleIncorporated.org/give.