The Munroe-Meyer Institute’s mission is to be world leaders in transforming the lives of all individuals with disabilities and complex health care needs, their families and the community through outreach, engagement, premier educational programs, innovative research and extraordinary patient care.
There is an old expression – some say it is actually a curse – that goes, “May you live in interesting times.” In 2020, we certainly had our share of “interesting,” both of MMI and in the world beyond. Building our new home. Providing services in a pandemic. Mitigating a cybersecurity attack. Debating local and national events. building institutional racism and rethinking who we are.

But challenges gave rise to opportunities, as well. After hardships, we emerged stronger. And that is what the Munroe-Meyer Institute is doing as we enter 2021 – taking the difficult lessons of 2020 and applying them, as we move into a new home that offers wonderful opportunities of its own.

The institute reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic with speed and determination, providing essential in-person services safely – although there were cases of providers becoming sick, they did not infect co-workers or patients. Meanwhile, MMI transitioned 85% of its services to telehealth – in the process discovering new technological and therapeutic techniques that will allow MMI to serve a larger area of the state, including greatly increasing its rural coverage, in 2021 and beyond.

The cybersecurity attack on the university’s computer network showed our perseverance, as MMI continued services by moving to old-school, paper-and-pencil record keeping. It was time-consuming, certainly, but we learned that MMI is not dependent on a computer network to provide essential services to the families we serve.

As university budget cuts and reduced patient volume in the wake of the pandemic affected the institute, MMI did not compromise on its services. We became a leaner, more streamlined organization, and our amazing philanthropic community stepped in when needed to ensure the families who count on MMI’s programming did not lose out.

In the wake of nationwide calls for racial justice and recognition of institutionalized racism, MMI looked into the mirror and began making changes. Institute-wide discussions and a staff survey provided a blueprint as we move forward, committed to becoming a more inclusive organization. And we can be proud that our inclusion work started well before the national debate, with the Autism Care for Toddlers in Omaha North (ACT) Clinic, which is set to open this year.

The new MMI building will open in the first quarter of 2021. The final stages of the renovation created its own challenges, which we tackled. What is the best color for the walls? The carpets? Where should we put the outside benches? The fence? The result will be a unique environment, built to serve people with developmental disabilities and complex health needs across the lifespan. The opportunities created by our new home will be endless and impactful.

This past year was “interesting,” indeed. I am honored to have spent it serving alongside the amazing, dedicated people of MMI. The events of the past year will continue to have an impact, as they are on all of us. Nevertheless, when needed, they continued, and will continue, to deliver. In interesting times, you discover whom you can count on. You see what commitment is. You learn what passion means.

And that, at least, is not a curse. It is a blessing. Thank you all for being amazing!
These efforts ramped up in 2020, partially in response to growing awareness of institutional racism and bias throughout the United States, accentuated by the killing of George Floyd by police and other acts of violence against Black people. But some initiatives, including the creation of the Autism Care for Toddlers in Omaha North (ACTION) Clinic, have been in the works for much longer.

“We have realized for a long time that we have populations that are underserved,” said Karoly Mirnics, MD, PhD, director of MMI. “We should not leave communities behind, and we should behave fairly to everyone, regardless of race, color, sexual orientation or gender.”

In addition to the bilingual brochures and the ACTION Clinic, the institute has:

- Worked to increase educational opportunities for under-represented groups;
- Created a Diversity and Inclusion Council, co-chaired by Jacqueline Hanks-Berry, an administrative associate for community engagement, andGraceA. Sheff, a cultural diversity coordinator with the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disorders (LEND) program at MMI;
- Held a virtual town hall to begin to identify and address diversity and inclusion issues within the institute;
- Began planning to provide bias-related educational events and training;
- Opened a review by the business office to explore any potential bias-related salary disparities;
- Started a review of promotion and tenure practices;
- Approved 12-15 paid summer internships for underrepresented students;
- Began exploring ways to recruit and retain more diverse faculty and staff, including dissemination strategies to historically black colleges and universities;
- Worked to create a diversity and inclusion statement, to be included on job applications to show potential applicants that diversity and inclusion is a priority at MMI; and
- Created a survey to better understand the climate and culture at MMI.

“Information from the survey was critical to help us understand where we are on these issues, to determine our priorities going forward and to measure our effectiveness,” said Maria Wills, MD, director of the MMI Department of Community Engagement. “It provided valuable insight.”

That insight “hopefully will give us a long-term roadmap as to what we have to do,” Dr. Mirnics said. “We will continually have to evaluate what works and what doesn’t, because ultimately, it’s not about the initiatives, but about changing the outcomes. Do you manage to transform yourself? You can have an endless number of initiatives, but if ultimately nothing changes, you haven’t achieved your goal.”

The virtual town hall meeting was held shortly after the killing of Floyd. Afterward, Dr. Mirnics sponsored a sidewalk message project—people were invited to write a message and the name of a person who died at the hands of police in chalk on the sidewalks near MMI. The results stretched the entire length of the east side of the MMI building.

In North Omaha, MMI’s soon-to-be-opened ACTION Clinic was designed to reach an underserved community. Sponsored with an anonymous private donation, the clinic is a tangible effort to reach underrepresented populations and other families in Omaha who may face barriers to accessing autism services.

Among the clinic’s collaborators will be Avenue Scholars, a nonprofit organization committed to providing career opportunities to students through education and supportive relationships. The clinic will provide shadowing experiences and other opportunities for Avenue Scholars’ students, potentially clearing a pipeline for future employment opportunities at registered behavior technicians, who assist in delivering applied behavior analysis services, and who could go on to become behavioral health professionals themselves.

The message is a subtle but powerful one.

All of the new brochures for the Munroe-Meyer Institute are written in English on one side and Spanish on the other. They are illustrated with photos of people of different races and ethnicities, better representing the scope of the population MMI serves.

It’s a small step, but it conveys the important message that anyone who comes to MMI is welcome.

This commitment—that all are welcome—and expanded, intentional efforts to communicate this message are integral to diversity and inclusion efforts at MMI.

Mission: Diversify MMI

As the nation fragmented, MMI worked to bring people together.
MMI leaders first met with North Omaha community stakeholders in August 2019 about the goals for the clinic. The meeting, held in North Omaha, explored community reaction to the proposed project, including possible locations, and solicited suggestions about services, outreach activities and other topics. Community meetings continued throughout the planning process. “At the meetings, we started to build relationships with the community,” said Regina Carroll, PhD, director of MMI’s Autism Care for Toddlers Clinics. “We hope to continue that conversation as we go forward with the project, so that the clinic is a trusted part of the community where families receive the same opportunity and level of care available elsewhere.”

Back on campus, Sharif and Hankins-Berry invited the MMI community to take part in the inaugural Diversity and Inclusion Council meeting in late July. The council held its first event—a book discussion of Robin DiAngelo’s “White Fragility”—in November. Three subcommittees also were created to address the areas of education, environment, accessibility, recruitment and retention. “We will not change the world. We will not change this very divided society,” Dr. Mirnics allowed. “But what we can do at MMI is provide opportunities. We can grow. We can make ourselves more representative of the community that we serve and make a concerted, long-term effort to change. That change will be long and incremental, but the journey of 10,000 miles starts with a single step.”

“As women of color, we feel a need to create a more inclusive environment where everyone’s voice can be heard,” Sharif said. “We want as many folks as are interested to be a part of this council, whether they find an interest in serving on a subcommittee or just taking part in the quarterly council meetings, which provide a forum for difficult conversations. We welcome the entire MMI community to take part.”

“We don’t want to become stagnant. We don’t want to just sit around and talk about issues,” Hankins-Berry said. “We want to take action, no matter how modest the step. It will promote a change for the better.”

“MMI’s sidewalk project was held to raise awareness of institutional racism and draw attention to Black, Indigenous and other people of color who had died at the hands of police.”

“As women of color, we feel a need to create a more inclusive environment where everyone’s voice can be heard.”

– Graciela Sharif

– Jacqueline Hankins-Berry
Amy Beyersdorf, MPT

“When the pandemic hit, we already had been thinking for a long time about how to expand our services with telehealth and how to provide the best remote care for all Nebraskans,” said Karoly Mirnics, MD, PhD, director of the MMI Department of Psychology. “We were talking to a colleague who told her organization never did telehealth. They just shut down their operations. They did not have the equipment or expertise—or apparently the motivation. They just stopped providing mental health care.”

“At MMI, the reverse was true. The psychology department’s established statewide telehealth practices, pioneered by Joseph Evans, PhD, more than two decades ago, became a national model, with psychologists from Florida, California and Texas contacting MMI for advice. In addition, the rest of the institute quickly discovered creative ways to provide virtual care and therapy.”

The recreational therapy department created and uploaded a playful series of videos—including a rousing version of the popular Camp Munroe “Moose Song”—and held virtual camps and clubs so that bored kiddos would have something to do. Some speech therapists used green-screen effects to create floating fish and other eye-catching objects to keep children engaged in therapy.

Project SEARCH, a job-training program for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, was able to continue didactic coursework for transition students, which was important because the teenagers were approaching graduation and needed skills to find meaningful work and live independently.

“Surprisingly, there is so much that can be done online,” said Sandy Willett, PhD, director of the MMI Department of Physical Therapy. “We switched to almost an entirely coaching-based system, a model our early intervention providers were already using, to train the family on the exercises and movements. We would demonstrate on the doll or stuffed animal, and then the family would do the maneuvers.”

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Choosing a device is based on ease of access, complexity of the system, language
You’d have to ask the family, ‘what do you feel when you move this child’s arm?’ For
To accommodate clients, the department occasionally had a vendor drop off a
Amy Nordness, PhD, director of the MMI Department of Speech-Language
the software on an iPad they had at home, spread evaluations out over multiple
that and decide how to assess (the families’) understanding. “
With online services, the ability to feel things such as tension in movement is lost,
In the speech department, evaluations for alternative and augmentative
devices into a home to decide what the child needs. “
more, we rely on our sense of touch, so we had to create a verbal model for
Giving patients the opportunity to show us what they need is a huge win,” adding that being able to receive services in

"Choosing a device is based on ease of access, complexity of the system, language
Dr. Nordness called the willingness of insurance companies to support AAC training
sessions over the computer is a huge win,” adding that ability to receive services in
their home increased client compliance. If insurance companies continue to support
distance therapy post-pandemic, it may become a preferred model, she said.

Additionally, we’ll be able to reach parts of Nebraska that weren’t able to get
some of these services before,” Dr. Nordness said. “We had set a goal before the
pandemic to expand our reach across Nebraska by providing therapy services to at least
two new counties. When we set that goal, we had 14 counties that we served.
We’re at 26 now.”

Dr. Stuberg cautioned, however, that after the pandemic, payers might restrict
access to telehealth services once again.

“A lot may depend on the nature of the service provided,” he said. “But being one of
them of UNMC, our mission is to serve the 500-mile campus. And this has been
shown to be effective – this is a mechanism that needs to continue. “
Because of the telehealth efforts, coupled with a slowly growing number of inpatient
services, by November, MMI was providing about 85% of the services it had pre-
pandemic.

“I think that this pandemic fundamentally transformed how we will provide services,”
Dr. Mirnics said. “We’re already talking to Children’s Hospital & Medical Center
in downtown Omaha about possibly hosting a telehealth intake program. That’s
won’t work – this is a mechanism that needs to continue.


clear from the beginning of the pandemic that some in-person services needed
To accommodate clients, the department occasionally had a vendor drop off a
device at the patient’s home for a session, had families download trial versions of
the software on an iPad they had at home, spread evaluations out over multiple
sessions and did use in-person visits at MMI when nothing else worked
However, there were unexpected advantages, as well.

“By providing services to people who are in their homes, therapists are better able to see
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Dedication to Collaboration

MMI’s long-term commitment to collaboration paid off in many ways in 2020.

When Karoly Mirnics, MD, PhD, arrived in Omaha in 2016 to become the director of the Munroe-Meyer Institute, one of the first moves was to gather community leaders and other stakeholders and discuss his vision for MMI. Collaboration was a key part of that vision. Dr. Mirnics told the group he wanted to listen and learn from them and expand MMI’s presence in a responsive and collaborative fashion.

“This community is amazing,” he told them. “We can build something together that is unprecedented.”

During Dr. Mirnics tenure, MMI has built upon what he calls the “four pillars” of collaborative efforts: clinical services, community engagement, education and research.

“If you appreciate the goals and interests of the other enterprises, and they do the same to you, it is really a meaningful collaboration, “ Dr. Mirnics said. “Then around it, you start to gather a halo of partners, families, philanthropists, providers and other community partners, it spreads out and creates more.”

Clinical Services

MMI collaborates with many clinical partners, from larger entities such as Nebraska Medicine and Children’s Hospital & Medical Center to small, rural practices where MMI therapists provide behavioral health services.

Successful collaborations, as Dr. Mirnics said, create more opportunities. Two years ago, MMI began working with Children’s Respite Care Program (CRCP) to provide physical therapy services on site to the medically fragile children in the CRCP respite care program. The CRCP collaboration with the MMI Department of Physical Therapy has been so successful that in 2020, CRCP began working with the MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology, as well.

“This is an exciting opportunity for us,” said Amy Nordness, PhD, director of the MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology and MMI director for clinical affairs. “We’re bringing strong speech and swallowing therapies to the children that CRCP serves, and it’s gratifying to be able to expand our clinical reach to help in this new young age and support their classroom teachers to continue to reinforce speech, language, and swallowing throughout their entire day.”

Other clinical collaborations will take place at the new MMI building, where MMI will work with both the UNMC College of Dentistry and the Truhlsen Eye Institute (TEI) to provide dental and vision clinics to individuals with disabilities and complex medical needs of all ages.

As well of all of MMI’s clinical collaborations, this one addresses an area of need for the children who MMI serves. “Oral health care is important for everyone, regardless of age,” said Jill Wallen, BDS, assistant dean of extramural activities and outreach and chair of the UNMC Department of Oral Health Care at the College of Dentistry. “But it is particularly challenging for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. BDS-I to find a provider who understands their unique needs and is flexible and willing to work together toward a common goal.”

The UNMC College of Dentistry has a strong history of collaboration with MMI – the college’s program at the CRCP is the only one in the state. Dentistry was located in the MMI building when Dr. Wallen arrived at UNMC in 2011.

“I see this as the closing loop, coming back full circle and strengthening that really great relationship we have with MMI,” said Dr. Wallen. “The end result will be a care experience unlike any other.”

The wonderful thing about working with MMI is that they are so committed to taking care of these families,” said Richard Logan, BDS, assistant professor in the UNMC Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences, who was part of the TEI team that helped design the vision clinic. “Whenever you’re working with people who are focused on improving health care for the children, (it’s) always good.”

“A lot of times, children with intellectual and developmental disabilities either don’t get access to specialty services or they get very nominal access,” said Dr. Logan. “We have ophthalmologists and optometrists who have a passion for taking care of these families.”

Community Engagement

MMI has longstanding relationships with many community partners, such as Whytock, or the Down Syndrome Alliance of the Midlands, Autism Action Partnership, and Avenue Scholars, a high school-to-work program.

MMI has been easy to work with,” Dr. Dorsey said. “They’re organized, and we’ve had a longstanding partnership with MMI, and we have great respect for MMI and what they do.”

“Or we’ve had a longstanding partnership with MMI, and we have great respect for MMI and what they do,” Dr. Dorsey said. “One of our founding board members, who then became as the Sunshine Foundation in the early 2000s and until his passing, said Dr. Dorsey. “There is a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done in providing the services that the population we care for deserves,” said Melonie Welsh, MS, director of the MMI Department of Community Engagement. “It’s the biggest impact, we must collaborate with other organizations to grow and build on each other’s strengths – to deliver better services and move the needle for clients.”

At times in 2020, these relationships helped MMI react to the COVID-19 pandemic – as when the AAP enlisted MMI’s parent resource coordinators to help distribute activity kits containing COVID-19 information and fun, therapeutic activities for families and children with autism throughout the state.

Justin Dougherty, executive director of the AAP, said the project was effortless.

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Community Engagement

MMI has longstanding relationships with many community partners, such as Whytock, or the Down Syndrome Alliance of the Midlands, Autism Action Partnership (AAP). Among many others they have collaborated on the MMI makes the first cohort of eight students in 2019. The collaboration – which is possible by an MMI stakeholder who recognized the value of genetic counseling and invested in creating it – allowed MMI to provide the state’s first and only accredited genetic program in 2020. In 2020, the number of applicants for the program quadrupled from the inaugural year.

All of the administrative and academic support for the tow-year program is provided by the college, while MMI and its clinical partners provide all faculty who teach in the program, both in the classroom and in their clinical rotations,” said Omer Palhme, MD, director of the MMI Department of Genetics. The students’ first year is primarily classroom-based and taught by MMI genetic counselors and physicians. The second year is primarily clinical rotation.

Education

MMI’s educational collaborations include working with the UNMC College of Allied Health Professions on the master’s in genetic counseling program, which accepted its first cohort of eight students in 2019. The collaboration – which was made possible by an MMI stakeholder who recognized the value of genetic counseling and invested in creating it – allowed MMI to provide the state’s first and only accredited genetic program in 2020. In 2020, the number of applicants for the program quadrupled from the inaugural year.

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"They come to see the genetics clinic at MMI and at our partners, such as the Feinberg Peninsula Youth Cancer Center and Children’s Hospital & Medical Center, to do all of their clinical rotations," Dr. Rahman said.

When she arrived in 2018, program director Holly Zimmerman said she was pleased to have MMI’s expertise to get the new endeavor up and running, citing the institute’s “outstanding excellence” as a key building block of the program.

Education collaborations go beyond the academic, as well. During 2020, MMI teamed with the Autism Society of Nebraska (ASN) on a video collaboration to educate individuals on autism and their families and caregivers on COVID-19 safety.

“Collaboration is vital,” said Megan Misegadis, who oversaw the project for ASN. “It makes picking up the phone or sending an email when something is urgent so much easier. Because of those relationships, we were able to come together and move everything online for this hits much easier. Because of those collaborations, the new endeavor up and running, citing the institute’s “longstanding excellence” as a key building block of the program.

Research
Collaboration has been a hallmark of MMI’s research efforts, as well.

In 2020, MMI joined the Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Rehabilitation and Engineering Research Collaboration, the primary source of AAC across the nation.

“Collaboration is not only additive; it exponentially increases the impact,” Dr. Rahman said. "Not only can they help families, but they can educate our students and provide partners with their services, as well as learn more about what we do.”

“We are part of a collaborative network,” said Gina Zaleski, PhD, who attended the meetings when he was director of the UCEDD. “Our role is to inform and add to MMI’s attractiveness as a collaborative partner by increasing the institute’s ability to recruit and retain the world’s best clinicians and researchers and positioning MMI as a global player in IDD treatment, research and advocacy. Together, we are stronger — it is MMI’s basic philosophy.

“Collaboration is not only additive, it exponentially increases the impact,” Dr. Rahman said. "Many of our projects alone are hard to do when you’re a single site but with collaborating, you can do everything alone is wrong. We are not do anything alone — we don’t live in a vacuum."
‘DREAM’ COMES TRUE

After years of planning and a tough 2020, the new, transformational Munroe-Meyer Institute building is a reality.
The people of the Munroe-Meyer Institute have imagined it many times, for many years – creating a space that does not exist anywhere else.

They have dared to dream this for the individuals and families they serve. They have talked to these families, listened to what they needed, what they wanted.

Now, here it is. As MMI opens its new home at 6820 Pine St, near the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s Aksarben campus, “this is a dream literally come true,” said MMI Director Karoly Mirnics, MD, PhD.

“With this new building, MMI is positioned as never before to support the families impacted by intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) care for families, and we turned to these families – experts in their own right – and families they serve. That is what MMI does, at its best. It travels alongside, an active partner with the people and families it serves. It is an inclusive experience for staff, students and visitors. An environment, “where everybody feels they belong and can be successful,” said Alison Topp, facilities planner with the UNMC Department of Facilities Management.

“Since its beginnings, Munroe-Meyer Institute has worked to improve the lives of the people and families it serves,” Dr. Gold said. “This new home gives it a much larger space and increased versatility and flexibility, but the core of the MMI mission – helping those with intellectual and developmental disabilities to overcome challenges, to live fuller, richer lives – remains the same. We are forever grateful to all of the private philanthropists from our community who have invested in this world-class facility and the MMI mission.”

“All of UNMC is excited to see how our colleagues at MMI will continue to grow in their new home to provide even more effective clinical care, education and research, in all of the names of enhancing the lives of the people and families they serve,” said Melonie Welsh, MS, director of the MMI Department of Community Engagement. “Still, we were committed to our mission, and we listened to our community – providers, caregivers and especially the families we serve. They played a critical role in deciding what this building would be.”

The building will lead to better outcomes and experiences for families that receive services at MMI, said Ted Friedland, a member of the Community Advisory Committee and the father of a child who receives services at MMI. “I realize it’s only brick and mortar – but it will be brighter and more inviting, more convenient from an access perspective, even just in terms of parking. Also, the Aksarben campus location is going to give the institute a lot more visibility in the wider community.”

With the new building, MMI is positioned as never before to support the intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) community as it strives for awareness, acceptance and opportunity,” Dr. Mirnics said. “This building will fuel a palpable change in the IDD community, and in the wider community, as well, as we work toward together toward those goals.”

That is what MMI does, at its best. It travels alongside, an active partner with the families it serves, providing resources across the lifespan through skilled providers, cutting-edge therapies and a passion for its mission. It empowers families to create and reach goals.

Munroe-Meyer Institute’s mission is to be world leaders in transforming the lives of all individuals with disabilities and complex health care needs. Not. Dr. Mirnics notes, to simply “improve,” or “heal.”

To transform. This new building allows MMI to transform the way it serves families.

“We created a unique building, the most advanced facility in the nation for those ‘improve’ or ‘help.’ With this new building, MMI is positioned as never before to support the families impacted by IDD, “ Dr. Mirnics said. “We wanted to create a new standard in IDD care for families, and we turned to these families – experts in their own right – to discover what they wanted that facility to be.”

UNMC Chancellor Jeffrey P. Gold, MD, called the new building a “newsworthy event into the institution’s second century.”

“We have been really pleased with the services we have received over the years with MMI teachers, providers and community stakeholders to create this new home. Through the challenges of 2020, they pressed to keep everything on schedule. A new home, full of possibilities, built to advance the goals of MMI’s families.”

“We wanted to build a premier facility, but there was no other entity with MMI’s comprehensive collection of programs and services to model it after,”said Alison Topp, facilities planner with the UNMC Department of Facilities Management. “Still, we were committed to our mission, and we listened to our community – providers, caregivers and especially the families we serve. They played a critical role in deciding what this building would be.”

The building will lead to better outcomes and experiences for families that receive services at MMI, said Ted Friedland, a member of the Community Advisory Committee and the father of a child who receives services at MMI.

“From the onset, they have been very open to our input, “ Friedland said. “We are extremely excited about this new building.”

“We have been really pleased with the services we have received over the years from MMI, and I feel the new building is only going to enhance our experiences,” he said. “I realize it’s only bricks and mortar – but it will be brighter and more inviting, with many new amenities, and that is going to be really beneficial not only to our son, but also to all of the children who receive services at MMI.”

“The accessibility is going to be monumental, “ Friedland said. “It will be so much more convenient from an access perspective, even just in terms of parking. Also, the Aksarben campus location is going to give the institution a lot more visibility in the wider community.”

The lobby at the building’s main entrance

The physical aspects of the building, which is more than double the size of MMI’s former home, are apparent – more room for growth of existing programs and the development of new ones, ample parking, the new – how it could change the experiences, and the lives, of MMI families. She challenged designers and contractors to think outside the box, using careful design choices to enhance the MMI experience for families served.

Additional offices, designers kept an eye on the clinical spaces top-of-mind to create a more inclusive experience for staff, students and visitors.

“An environment” Welsh said, “where everybody feels they belong and can be successful.”
An environment that both appeals to kids, yet does not feel only child-oriented to clients across the lifespan. This environment accommodates an operational shift to bring the families to one space and have each provider come to them, also enhancing multidisciplinary collaborations and elevating coordinated treatment plans.

Dental, optical and healthy nutrition and wellness clinics to help patients get needed services from specialists who understand their unique needs, including an optical shop, a panoramic X-ray machine and three negative pressure dental rooms to ensure airborne isolation during dental procedures.

An integrated Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders (iCASD) that is nearly double its current capacity, moving from three to six early intervention classrooms and doubling the number of severe behavior treatment rooms, as well.

Adventuresome, accessible play spaces inside and out, all built for making friends while building skills and strengths.

An indoor splash pad, including several memorial fixtures that MMI kiddos will recognize from the outdoor splash pad at the old building.

A dedicated maker space that includes a 3D printer, precision cutting and drilling devices, soldering equipment and other tools — enough to create nearly any assistive device, such as orthotics, support devices or other items used to assist in the performance of daily activities, that a determined therapist can imagine.

A larger sensory-motor laboratory, to provide cutting-edge services and research.

A virtual reality lab that will include an omnidirectional treadmill, which lets a person move in any direction, allowing MMI engineers to transport VR users into battles against aliens. In collaboration with physical and occupational therapists, they already developed VR/AR software of a realistic hair salon and airplanes to help prepare children for the real-life experience - or any other therapeutic scenario MMI innovators can dream up.

A soundproof audiology booth, staffed by trained audiologists, to allow for on-site hearing checks.

A pool area that features two pools, allowing for both specialized therapy and fun, with a water slide and even a water volleyball net adding to the excitement.

A vegetable garden, for classes or relaxation and skill development.

A dental office.

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A gyn and other exercise opportunities to help encourage physical activity, leading to longer, fuller lives.

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An inviting outdoor plaza, featuring the sculptures, benches and picnic tables, that serves as an open and welcoming space for those arriving for a visit.

Two time capsules, flanking the walkway, so that in the future, members of the MMI community can review artifacts from the year 2020.

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The new features enabling this will include, but are not limited to:

- Dental, optical and healthy nutrition and wellness clinics to help patients get needed services from specialists who understand their unique needs, including an optical shop, a panoramic X-ray machine and three negative pressure dental rooms to ensure airborne isolation during dental procedures.
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It’s about people. The building exists to serve people, and it is designed to provide both a catalyst and an opportunity for skilled and passionate providers to make a positive impact in the lives of those they serve.

— Melonie Welsh, MS

Community rooms for use by MMI’s community partners, set just off the main entrance for visibility and accessibility, provide MMI visitors with even more support and information about other community resources. Current plans call for the rooms to be available for partners’ use from Friday, providing more access for clients and enhancing collaboration. “Our goal is that every person or caregiver who comes through our door will find what they need,” Dr. Melonie said. “This new building will allow us to provide them with the best care and best opportunities to meet their goals throughout their life.”

It is all located just off the Keystone Trail, allowing for additional recreational or physical therapy possibilities, and right next to the University of Nebraska at Omaha’s Peter Kiewit Institute, allowing MMI faculty to collaborate with engineering providers to make a positive impact in the lives of those they serve.

It’s about people.” Welsh said. “The building exists to serve people, and it is designed to provide both a catalyst and an opportunity for skilled and passionate providers to make a positive impact in the lives of those they serve.

“With a centralized space to store high-tech equipment, we’ll be able to explore assistive technology in a way that we haven’t been able to explore before,” said Sandra Willett, PhD, director of the MMI Department of Physical Therapy. “With a virtual reality lab, which includes a multipurpose space for innovation, Pathology and MMI director for clinical affairs, for example, sees several possibilities in the building’s apartment space. Dr. Nordness, the apartment is especially attractive as a testing ground for assistive technology.

“At its core, this building is about being able to expand opportunities and access to quality care services for all individuals and families and participants,” she said. “This new building will allow us to provide them with the best care and best opportunities to meet their goals throughout their life.”

Further enhancing the care experience for clients, this integrative model allows MMI clinicians to access institute experts from many areas, potentially exploring how to rework interventions for greater impact. Patient care coordinators will assist families during their treatment visits, serving as advisers and integrators of the various services.

The simulated home environment, including a residential-style router, will allow the department to test assistive technology from personal devices – something that was much more difficult in a university setting.

“The indoor splash pad and other virtual reality efforts will include portable virtual reality systems with configurable environments.

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The new building, at 6902 Pine St. in Omaha, is set to open in the first quarter of 2021. The acquisition and redevelopment of the building will effectively double the institute’s current size to more than 220,000 square feet, in response to the exponential growth in the population served.

The University of Nebraska Foundation continues to seek contributions to support the programmatic costs associated with the institute.

Major donors included:

**Lead benefactors**
- William and Ruth Scott Family Foundation
- Weitz Family Foundation
- Suzanne & Walter Scott Foundation
- Hattie B. Munroe Foundation

**Principal benefactors**
- Clarkson Regional Health Services
- Holland Foundation
- Robert B. Daugherty Foundation
- The Lozier Foundation
- The Munroe Foundation

A Note of Thanks

As the building opens, Dr. Mirnics offered thanks to the many supporters who made this dream come true.

“This building has been the dream of many wonderful people,” he said. “We are grateful to all of them. The families and individuals we serve, who told us what they needed and helped us make this happen – the families who trust us to care for their loved ones. The MMI providers, so amazingly dedicated and skilled, who dreamed big with us. The advisory and board members, who provided many diverse perspectives and innovative ideas. The leadership of the university, and the University of Nebraska Board of Regents, who helped make this new home possible, and the University of Nebraska Foundation, who partnered with us on this monumental endeavor. The leadership of the city and state, who shared the dream. The design and construction teams, who gave such wonderful form to it. The visionary leaders, who built this amazing enterprise over the past 100 years. And, last but not least, the amazing philanthropic community for the unprecedented support we received. Without them, none of this would have been possible.”

A Note of Thanks

"We'll be able to add a physical feel to the simulation,” said James Gehringer, PhD, director of the lab. “Visitors using the headset will be able to reach out to touch a countertop, and see how a ‘countertop’ feels for them to touch. We can also create simulated street curbs or rocky paths – there are a lot of new possibilities.”

And these programs are only a beginning. As the institute staff begins to adapt to the building’s possibilities, new and creative programs and services will spring up across all departments. Even departments that have not yet created new services are aware of the building’s potential.

“We will continually brainstorm about what new services we might provide we would like in the new building,” said Omar Rehman, MD, director of the MMI Department of Genetics. “We will be exploring new, multidisciplinary clinics that can take place. There is a great collaborative spirit and our proximity to Children’s Hospital & Medical Center will allow for new collaborations. We see a lot of opportunity, and we’re starting to gather our ideas.”

But amid the state-of-the-art equipment, the larger space, the painstakingly reviewed color scheme and building layout, one thing remains the same.

MMI’s passionate commitment to its mission and the families it serves.

“Although it’s wonderful, the building is, in the end, only a building,” Dr. Mirnics said. “What is most important is what the building will allow us to provide – the best, most comprehensive, most integrated family-centric care for IDD in the world. And we will be doing that in MMI’s new home for decades to come.”

**Benefactors**

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The Hattie B. Munroe Foundation donated 131 $150 gift cards during the holidays that were delivered to MMi client families in need. The foundation also provided funding for a psychology internship, Camp Munroe and related children’s programs, and two professorships – for the MMI director and the MMI director of research – totaling more than $802,000.

Meyer Foundation for Disabilities

Meyer Foundation for Disabilities held the Walk & Roll for Disabilities on March 7, drawing approximately 450 people. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the OwL Ride was not held in 2020. The foundation worked with the MMI Department of Recreational Therapy to create a yoga program that will be offered in 2021. Additionally, the foundation provided funding for the new MMI building’s kitchen, which will be the home of MMi’s popular Cooking Club, one of the many adult recreational programs sponsored by the foundation.

Munroe-Meyer Institute Board of Directors

The board works closely with MMi leadership to inform the public of the breadth and quality of MMi’s programs. The board annually awards the Rhoda Daubl Blatt and Hattie B. Munroe Foundation scholarships. The board oversees the distribution of holiday gift cards to selected MMi families in need, as well as reviews and approves the MMI Department of Recreational Therapy budget before it receives final approval by the Hattie B. Munroe Foundation board.

Munroe-Meyer Guild

The guild was unable to hold its 52nd Garden Walk in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2021 walk will be held on June 13. Grants still will be awarded to MMi staff who submit proposals for innovative projects and highly impactful training endeavors, due to a generous grant from the Bill and Ruth Scott Foundation. The guild commissioned Omaha artist Lisa Worrall to design artwork that depicts the children’s activities at MMi. The artwork will be displayed near the recreational therapy entrance in the new building in 2021.

Scottish Rite Foundation of Nebraska

On June 27, RiteCare clinicians hosted DriveRite Thru for RiteCare at Lake Zorinsky, a virtual event that raised about $2,500. On Sept. 30, Scottish Rite hosted the RiteCare Classic at Pacific Springs Golf Course, drawing 18 teams and raising $18,100 for speech-language therapy for Nebraska children. In place of the Friends of RiteCare dinner, an appeal letter was sent asking past guests to support RiteCare services. In total, Nebraska Scottish Rite Freemasons will donate about $900,000 for speech therapy through the UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute and an additional $90,000 for speech services through the University of Nebraska at Kearney in 2020.

Community Advisory Committee

In 2020, the MMI Community Advisory Committee continued to provide critical input on MMi initiatives such as the building project, programmatic planning and organization in preparation for MMi’s transition to the new building. The committee serves as a valuable working partner in guiding the institution’s activities by representing the voice of the community and its local participants. It has provided a critical sounding board in shaping both the current and future path of MMi.

2020 Walk & Roll for Disabilities
The MMI Standouts recognized at the January 2020 Celebration of Excellence included:

**Community Service Standout: Kim Bainbridge**

Bainbridge is recognized as a go-to resource for MMI staff, families and agencies for insight on disability services, as well as for innovative partnerships with numerous organizations in the community. In 2019, Bainbridge presented to more than 400 parents, teachers, and students.

**Spirit Standout: Annie Woodruff-Jamison, DPT**

Woodruff-Jamison is recognized by colleagues for her relentless efforts to identify and support programs in the intellectual and developmental disability community. She is a frequent volunteer at MMI community engagement initiatives. Colleagues also appreciate her ability to mediate during difficult conversations.

**Educator Standout: Kevin Luzynski, PhD**

Since the inception of the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) doctoral program, Luzynski has made significant commitments to teaching and advising his students. He has received national and international invitations for tutorials.

**Researcher Standout: Nicole Rodriguez, PhD**

Rodriguez's signature research methodology incorporates clients and their families in the determination of socially valid outcomes. This approach is highly respected among her colleagues.

**Support Staff Standout: Sue Steiner**

Steiner is recognized for building an online portal that markedly improved the delivery and management of the community program, called “Rooted in Relationships.” She is a master of listening and incorporating stakeholders’ feedback into projects. She is noted for her ability to provide a series of comfort to colleagues in the face of challenges.

**Staff Clinical Provider Standout: Amy Beyersdorf, MPT**

Beyersdorf’s clinical expertise in schools has receive effusive praise and subsequently resulted in renewal of critical school contracts. Her mentorship consistently serves as a catalyst for collaboration. Beyersdorf’s efforts have yielded a tripling of feedback into projects. She is noted for her ability to provide support during the pandemic.

**Faculty Clinical Provider Standout: Mindy Chadwell, PhD**

Chadwell is recognized for her outstanding ability to build rapport and inspire new collaborative efforts in schools. Her clinical expertise in school-based mental health has been recognized by leadership across multiple districts. She has received multimillion-dollar funding from the Department of Education.

**2019 MMI Standouts**

**2020 Gold U Awardees**

- **Jacqueline Hanks-Berry**
  - Hanks-Berry is the consummate team player, willing to collaborate and execute as a member of a team while providing leadership and mentoring to others and soliciting and accepting feedback.
  - She provides both personal and professional support throughout the MMI community.

**2020 Silver U Awardees**

- **Amy Beyersdorf, MPT**
  - Beyersdorf has been a leader and innovator since arriving at MMI. As the leader of the outpatient services, Beyersdorf and her team work during the pandemic to execute activities, navigate a changing landscape of reimbursement and compliance, and above all, offer quality care.

**2020 Staff Clinical Provider Standout: Nicole Hackendahl, MA**

Hackendahl shows confidence and creativity in optimizing the delivery of messages about people, accomplishments and attitudes to the community.

**Spirit Standout: Chadwell**

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**Community Service Standout: Kellie Ellerbush**

Ellerbush is committed to ensuring equitable access to health care and has proven a valuable resource to MMI’s families, often helping to identify and access important resources, such as housing and utilities.

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MMI by the Numbers

14 Departments

550 Employees

Revenue Sources

- Clinical service reimbursement
- State/fiscal/school grants & contracts
- Federal grants & contracts
- State appropriation
- Philanthropic/other funds

2020 BUDGET
$42,356,714

Annually, more than $42 million budget, with more than $19 million in federal, state and local grants and contracts and $3.7 million in philanthropy.

2016 2017 2018 2019 2020

MMI Budget 2016 – 2020

Fiscal Year

MMI has more than 40 provider locations with 30 outside of Omaha with more than 50 types of services provided.

Recreational Therapy programs and clubs

Serving approximately 450 families annually.

More than 26,000 hours of service provided to families.

CLINICAL SERVICES

More than
80,000
Yearly Services

serving clients across the lifespan with 75% taking place in the community.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

More than
75
community training activities provided to
4,633 participants.

Approximately
2,186 Hours
of technical assistance.

One of 67 federally designated University Center of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service (UCEDD).

One of 52 Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and related Disabilities (LEND) programs.

80,000 Yearly Services

 Nearly 75% taking place in the community.

24

Approximately

Serving approximately 450 families annually.

More than 26,000 hours of service provided to families.
It has been said that necessity is the mother of all invention. The proverb rang true this year more than any other. The COVID-19 pandemic caused remarkable ingenuity at the Munroe-Meyer Institute. Our practitioners used their vast knowledge to produce new practices to ensure the health and safety of all persons. Some creative changes were small, like transparent face coverings for speech therapy. Others were much larger, like equipping clinics for virtual therapy, learning and treatment.

Many of these changes were more expensive than typical supports, but that did not stand in the way of MMI’s goal of transforming the lives of all individuals with disabilities and complex health care needs.

This creativity could not have happened without your support. Thank you to all those who donated this year. Your support allowed MMI to reinvent the way things are done, without sacrificing its level of excellence. Your generosity paired with the inventiveness of MMI will reverberate for years to come.

In 2021, we will emerge stronger and ready to meet the needs of our patients in a beautiful new location. We look forward to sharing our progress with you.

To learn more about how to make a gift to MMI, please go to nufoundation.org/mmi, or contact Brian Anderson at brian.anderson@nufoundation.org or 402-502-4113.

LABORATORY TESTS

Approximately

65,389 Genetic Tests

Performed in 2020 on

15,656 Individual Cases

More than 130 types of genetic tests provided to over 45 states, as well as international locations.

EDUCATION & RESEARCH

More than

10,000 Participants

in workshops, conferences, teleconferences, and other community education activities in domestic and international forums.

Interdisciplinary training in 2020: 147 students, interns, residents and post-doctoral fellows. Of those, 123 were long term and received more than 300 hours of training.

More than

$7.5 MILLION in research funding annually.

In the last 15 Years

More than 3,500 long-term students received training at MMI.

Over 140 clinical and research fellows trained at MMI.

Over

130 courses and seminars taught by faculty and staff.

More than

130 types of genetic tests provided to over 45 states, as well as international locations.

It has been said that necessity is the mother of all invention. The proverb rang true this year more than any other. The COVID-19 pandemic caused remarkable ingenuity at the Munroe-Meyer Institute. Our practitioners used their vast knowledge to produce new practices to ensure the health and safety of all persons. Some creative changes were small, like transparent face coverings for speech therapy. Others were much larger, like equipping clinics for virtual therapy, learning and treatment.

Many of these changes were more expensive than typical supports, but that did not stand in the way of MMI’s goal of transforming the lives of all individuals with disabilities and complex health care needs.

This creativity could not have happened without your support. Thank you to all those who donated this year. Your support allowed MMI to reinvent the way things are done, without sacrificing its level of excellence. Your generosity paired with the inventiveness of MMI will reverberate for years to come.

In 2021, we will emerge stronger and ready to meet the needs of our patients in a beautiful new location. We look forward to sharing our progress with you.

To learn more about how to make a gift to MMI, please go to nufoundation.org/mmi, or contact Brian Anderson at brian.anderson@nufoundation.org or 402-502-4113.

LABORATORY TESTS

Approximately

65,389 Genetic Tests

Performed in 2020 on

15,656 Individual Cases

More than 130 types of genetic tests provided to over 45 states, as well as international locations.

EDUCATION & RESEARCH

More than

10,000 Participants

in workshops, conferences, teleconferences, and other community education activities in domestic and international forums.

Interdisciplinary training in 2020: 147 students, interns, residents and post-doctoral fellows. Of those, 123 were long term and received more than 300 hours of training.

More than

$7.5 MILLION in research funding annually.

In the last 15 Years

More than 3,500 long-term students received training at MMI.

Over 140 clinical and research fellows trained at MMI.

Over

130 courses and seminars taught by faculty and staff.

More than

130 types of genetic tests provided to over 45 states, as well as international locations.