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.
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DIRECTOR’S MESSAGE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Kasty Mirnicas, MD, PhD
Director and Hattie B. Munroe Professor
Munroe-Meyer Institute

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. Dealing with local uncertainties. In addition, national and local events that forced us to examine institutional racism and what we owe. 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, even 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) Care 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. As we strive to grasp with “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 Midwest. The opportunities created by our new home will be endless and impactful.

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The 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 have reminded me that we are on hand to do good work, that we are on this one all. Nevertheless, when newued, 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, and Graciela Sharif, 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;
- Started a review by the business office to explore any potential bias-related salary disparities;
- 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 Marisa Walls, MS, 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 creating a pipeline for future employment opportunities as registered behavior technicians, who assist in delivering applied behavior analysis service, and who could go on to become behavioral health professionals themselves.

“The message is a subtle but powerful one,” said Mirnics. “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 move 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 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 promise 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

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

— Jacqueline Hankins-Berry
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.

— Karoly Mirnics, MD, PhD

The next move was to scale things up rapidly.

“In the first two weeks in March, we were providing over 95% of the clinical services at MMI face-to-face,” said Vonne Stilburg, PhD, associate director of MMI. “By the first two weeks in April, that had flipped—we were providing 80% of our services virtually through telemedicine.”

Dr. Stilburg noted that Medicaid and other payers had loosened restrictions on reimbursement for telehealth during the pandemic. “They recognized the need, and that decision came down quickly.”

“MMI knows that our population is a particularly vulnerable group,” said Cindy Ellis, MD, director of the MMI Department of Developmental Medicine. “We were able to quickly shift, and the patients worked well with us and were very receptive.”

Beyerdorf and other members of MMI’s physical therapy department used dolls and stuffed animals to demonstrate exercises and help young clients and their parents see the movements they needed to make—and as colorful props to keep children interested during virtual therapy sessions.

“I had used stuffed animals for therapy in treatment probably less than 15 times in 25 years, usually to get a child’s attention,” Beyerdorf said. “I liked my stuffed orange fish, Nemo, because he was colorful and caught the kids’ attention the most. I had Nemo on my head because I wanted the kiddo I was working with to work on balance. I asked him to balance his own Nemo as he walked or lifted a leg.”

Keeping children’s attention was just one of many challenges MMI faced as it pivoted to more virtual services during a pandemic—many of which were not reimbursable previously. Luckily, because of robust telehealth capacity in the institute’s genetics and psychology departments, MMI administrators were familiar with technological needs and had the electronic security in place to meet HIPAA requirements—hurdles that some organizations across the country never overcame.

“At the directors’ level, there was a lot of logistical questions that were coming up, and we offered some systems that we had put in place prior to the pandemic,” said Omar Rahman, MD, director of the MMI Department of Genetics. “We shared our experience and assurance that this could be done—because we’ve done it for pretty complex medical evaluations—but each department figured out how to do it for their needs.”

The genetics department, for example, had portable telehealth carts on hand—designed for use in rural locations—that were placed in areas such as the Fred & Pamela Buffett Cancer Center and the Olson Center for Women’s Health, allowing prenatal and cancer-related genetic counseling to continue almost seamlessly.

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“The pandemic forced changes in how MMI delivered care. One result: An expanded reach. Another: Stuffed animals.

Amy Beyersdorf, MPT, a physical therapist of more than two decades experience, was balancing a stuffed orange fish on her head.

Sure, it’s not the textbook way to provide physical therapy, but in March of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced Munroe-Meyer Institute (MMI) to deliver care. One result: An expanded reach.

The recreational therapy department created and uploaded a playful series of videos—such as a nursing version of the popular Camp Murfee “Mousey Song”—and held virtual camps and clubs so that bored kids 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 with Omaha Public School 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 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 movements.”
“You’d have to ask the family, ‘what do you feel when you move this child’s arm?’ For choosing a device is based on ease of access, complexity of the system, language
"To accommodate clients, the department occasionally had a vendor drop off a
"With online services, the ability to feel things such as tension in movement is lost,
"Dr. Willett said.
"With a lot of things, we rely on our sense of touch, so we had to create a verbal model for
"Dr. Nordness called the willingness of insurance companies to support AAC training
"Additionally, we’ll be able to reach parts of Nebraska that weren’t able to get
"By providing services to people who are in their homes, therapists are better able to
"I think that this pandemic fundamentally transformed how we will provide services,
"We're at 26 now.
"Because of its telehealth efforts, coupled with a slowly growing number of in-patient
"A temperature check as people entered the building was just
"Our staff is the best staff anyone could ask for, “ agreed Nicole Giron, MPH, director of the MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology and PMI director for clinical affairs. “We couldn’t send four computer
to potentially establish a joint telehealth portal of some of our services. The big
"A lot may depend on the nature of the service provided, “ he said. “But being one of
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"The institute’s COVID-19 safety measures included creating a single entrance for
"Our families consider us essential, “ said MMI Director Karoly Mirnics, MD, PhD. “There was never a question that these essential services would be provided – the focus was on how to offer these critical services safely.
"Dr. Stuberg cautioned, however, that after the pandemic, payers might restrict
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"Our team did stellar work, “ said Sandra Willett, PhD, director of the MMI Department of Physical Therapy. “People weren’t traveling, they weren’t going out – a lot of people were even having groceries delivered so they wouldn’t have
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"In certain areas, such as severe behavior and pediatric feeding, providers know that
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"We had set a goal before the pandemic to expand our reach across Nebraska by providing therapy services to at
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"A lot may depend on the nature of the service provided, “ he said. “But being one of
"But I can see many different visions as we move forward.
"However, there were unexpected advantages, as well.
"Paying for services, by November, MMI was providing about 85% of the services it had pre-
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"Dr. Willett said.
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**By providing services to people who are in their homes, therapists are better able to see and understand specific, real-world needs and challenges.** – Wayne Stuberg, PhD

**“Choosing a device is based on ease of access, complexity of the system, language support, durability and communication effectiveness, as well as preference,” said Amy Nordness, PhD, director of the MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology and PMI director for clinical affairs. “We couldn’t send four computer devices into a home to decide what the child needs.” 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.**
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 describe 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 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 patients, families, philanthropists, providers and other stakeholders. From collaboration, 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 collaborates with many clinical partners, from larger entities such as Nebraska Medicine and Children’s Hospital & Medical Center to small, rural practices where MMI provides services that the population we care for deserves, “ said Melonie Welsh, MS, MMI’s educational collaborations include working with the UNMC College of Allied Health Professions on the master’s of genetic counseling program, which accepted its first cohort of eight students in 2019. The collaboration – which is 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 genetics program. In 2020, the number of applicants for the program quadrupled from the inaugural year.

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.

“We’ve had a longstanding partnership with MMI, and we have great respect for MMI and what they do,” Dougherty said. “One of our founding board members, when we began as the Sunshine Foundation in the early 2000s and until he passing was former MMI director Dr. Bruce Buehler.

Collaborative have proved invaluable as MMI prepares to open the Autism Care for Toddlers in Omaha North (ACTION) Clinic in 2021.

One of its partner organizations is Avenue Scholars, a high school-to-work program whose CEO, Ken Bird, EdD, has a strong relationship with Dr. Mirnics. Jamar Dorsey, EdD, community engagement director for Avenue Scholars, said he was pleased with the tenet collaboration, which includes not only workforce development work, but also wellness education for Avenue Scholars employees, so they could safely continue to work with teens and young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“MMI has been easy to work with,” Dr. Dorsey said. “They’re organized, and they have a vision of what they want the ACTION Clinic to be. They’ve been very responsive to the community — there is an effort to engage the community in how the clinic can best serve not just the children ages 50 who will receive services, but also a workforce development piece as well.

Education

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“All of the administrative and academic support for the towicacy 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 Palmah, MD, director of the MMI Department of Genetics.

The students’ first year is primarily classroom-based and taught by MMI’s genetic counselors and physicians. The second year is primarily clinical rotation.
Collaboration with the Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) augmentative and alternative communication technology led to a strong background of evidence-based research in patient care, including collaborations across the nation. In 2020, MMI joined the Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Rehabilitation and Engineering Research Collaboration, which has been a hallmark of MMI’s research efforts, as well. Such collaborations allow MMI to expand its research portfolio while providing partners with decades of established clinical expertise.

Collaborations in AAC are hard to do when you’re a single site – you need large numbers to do that. ” Dr. Nordness said, so the collaboration will allow the institute to expand its research portfolio while providing partners with decades of established clinical expertise.

Collaboration is vital, ” said Megan Mirnics, PhD, director of the MMI Department of Speech-Language Pathology and MMI’s research collaborations will only grow. "Not only can they help families, but they can educate our students and providers about their services, as well as learn more about what we do,” Mirnics said. "Among an afternoon of talks, five in week – we provide a lot of opportunities to bring the disability community together. That’s exciting.

"The new building will provide opportunities that will impact those researchers and positioning MMI as a global player in IDD treatment, adds 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.

Collaborations are not only additive, it exponentially increases the impact, ” Dr. Nordness said. "Anyone who thinks they can do everything alone is wrong. We don’t live in a vacuum. "

"We are part of a collaborative network,” Vijayeo Stuberg, PhD, who attended the meetings when he was director of the UCEDD. "Our role is to inform and help to build systems of support on a state level. "

"We are in constant conversation with these entities, specifically as they raise questions about state issues and policies that impact individuals with disabilities were protected in the provision of services for COVID-19,” MMI provided input into the paper.

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Impacting Policy

One of MMI’s missions is to advocate for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and complex health needs.

In this role, and as Nebraska’s University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD), MMI works closely with the state of Nebraska and other entities, such as Disability Rights Nebraska, to protect the rights of its constituents as part of the state’s Developmental Disabilities Network. The group meets monthly to explore state laws and their impact on the intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) community.

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After years of planning and a tough 2020, the new, transformational Munroe-Meyer Institute building is a reality.

‘DREAM’ COMES TRUE
We created a unique building, the most advanced facility in the nation for those to improve or help.

With this new building, MMI is positioned as never before to support the organizations and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) community as it strives for awareness, acceptance and opportunity.

“The building will facilitate a paradigm shift in the IDD community, as well as the wider community, as we work 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 change in the IDD community, and in the wider community, as well, as we work together toward those goals.

Since its beginnings, Munroe-Meyer Institute has worked to improve the lives of the people and families it serves. “Dr. Gold said. “This new building gives us 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 wonderful facility and the MMI mission.”

“All of MMI’s work is 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, all in the name of enhancing the lives of the people and families we serve.”

Alison Topp, facilities planner with the MMI Department of Facilities Management and Planning, and her team spent countless hours over several years working with UNMC leaders, providers and community stakeholders to fine-tune 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 relationship with many new amenities, and that is going to be really beneficial not only to our patients, but also to all of the children who receive services at MMI.”

“We are extremely excited about the 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 experience,” he said. “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 UNMC location is going to give the institute a lot more visibility in the wider community.”

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

Clinic areas, including the iCASD, which provide families with carefully considered, sensory-friendly environments and spaces for cooperative, multidisciplinary, family-centric teams to gather.

Clinical rooms with adjustable colored lighting to enhance a visitor's sense of well-being.

Observation areas, including a walkway that overlooks both the pool area and the gymnasium, rooms equipped with cameras and additional camera technology even available on smartphones, so parents and caregivers can extend needed independence to their loved one, while still keeping a watchful eye.

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 airplane to help prepare children for the real-life experience— or any other therapeutic scenario MMI innovators can dream up.

Adventuresome, accessible play spaces inside and out, 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 assist in the performance of daily activities, that a determined therapist can imagine.

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.

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A dental office

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

- 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 collaboration 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, growing from three to six early intervention classrooms and doubling the number of severe behavior treatment rooms, as well.

- Adaptable rooms, accessible play spaces inside and out, 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 assist in the performance of daily activities, that a determined therapist can imagine.

- The family resource area, which offers seating, Wi-Fi and easily supervised access to the indoor playground for visiting families.

- A kiln for recreational therapy art programs, to create pottery and glass art—some of which will be sold in the gift shop.

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

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

- A garden of edible plants, for classes or relaxation and skill development.

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- 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 airplane to help prepare children for the real-life experience— or any other therapeutic scenario MMI innovators can dream up.

- 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.

- A meditation room to improve relaxation and mental wellness.

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

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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 Welch, MS

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

Still, “it’s about people,” Welch 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.”

Still, the most transformational aspect of the building is not simply in its bricks and mortar.

The new building will allow us to provide them with the best care and best growth opportunities to meet their goals throughout their life. “We want to see if this will really work for the patients in an actual apartment environment,” Dr. Nordness said. “With this space, we’ll be able to simulate what a residential-style router, will allow speech therapists to provide ‘voice banking,’ recording sessions and services that we couldn’t provide before. Previously, we did not have the equipment and opportunities to do that.”

“The simulated home environment, including a residential-style router, will allow the simulated home environment, “Dr. Nordness said. “With this space, we’ll be able to simulate what a residential-style router, will allow speech therapists to provide ‘voice banking,’ recording sessions and services that we couldn’t provide before. Previously, we did not have the equipment and opportunities to do that.”

The indoor splash pad

The lobby area

The new audiology suite, besides being staffed with audiologists and providing hearing checks, will allow speech therapists to provide “voice banking” recording messages before a planned procedure or in cases of degenerative diseases, which could not be done effectively in the old building.

“We want to see if this will really work for the patients in an actual apartment environment,” Dr. Nordness said. “With this space, we’ll be able to simulate what a patient can actually do in their home.”

The simulated home environment, including a residential-style router, will allow speech therapists to provide “voice banking,” recording sessions and services that we couldn’t provide before. Previously, we did not have the equipment and opportunities to do that.”
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

**Benefactors**
- 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.

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. Minnix said. “What is most important is what this 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.”

**A Note of Thanks**

As the building opens, Dr. Minnix 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 MMF 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.

“But, last but not least, the amazing philanthropic community for the unprecedented support we received. Without them, none of this would have been possible.”
Hattie B. Munroe Foundation

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 $80,000.

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 Ovis 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 Daub 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 $10,160 for speech-language therapy for Nebraska children. In place of the Friends of RiteCare dinner, an appeal letter was sent out to past guests to support RiteCare services. In total, Nebraska Scottish Rite Freemasons will donate about $90,000 for speech therapy through the UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute and an additional $80,000 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.
The MMI Standouts recognized at the January 2020 Celebration of Excellence included:

**Educator Standout:** Kevin Luczynski, PhD

Luczynski has made significant contributions to the MMI 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 sense of comfort to colleagues in the face of challenges.

**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 appreciate her ability to mediate during difficult conversations.

**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 a valuable resource to MMI’s at-risk families, often helping to identify and access important resources, such as housing and utilities.

**Support Staff Standout:** Sue Steiner

Steiner is recognized for building an online portal that remarkably improved the delivery and management of the clinical 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 sense of comfort to colleagues in the face of challenges.

**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.

**Clinical Provider Standout:** Amy Bayersdorf, MPT

Bayersdorf is recognized as a go-to resource for MMI clients and its clients. She is a master of listening and incorporating stakeholders’ feedback into projects. She is noted for her ability to provide a sense of comfort to colleagues in the face of challenges.

**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 instrumental partnerships with numerous organizations in the community. In 2019, Bainbridge presented to more than 400 parents, teachers, and students.

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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.

Recreational Therapy programs and clubs

Serving approximately 450 families annually.

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

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

Approximately

2,186 Hours of technical assistance.

MMI by the Numbers

14 Departments

5 supporting philanthropic boards

550 Employees

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.

Revenue Sources

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

2020 BUDGET $42,356,714

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

MMI Budget 2016 – 2020

Fiscal Year

Millions of Dollars

0 10 20 30 40 50

2016 2017 2018 2019 2020

31 32
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.