



### [‘Living the vision of Mary Lyon’: Foundation charts course for continued expansion](#)

By Madison Schofield, Staff Writer, The Greenfield Recorder Published: 10-19-2025

BUCKLAND — With a slightly bigger team and a slightly bigger space, the Mary Lyon Foundation has set big goals for how it can serve the needs of students and families in western Franklin County and beyond.

This past summer, the foundation moved from its classroom office on the second floor of Mohawk Trail Regional School to a bigger room on the first floor, hired its first program director and wrapped up a four-year capital campaign that raised \$5 million, even as budget cuts and policy changes on the federal level are leaving more gaps for area social service agencies to fill.

The Mary Lyon Foundation, established in 1990 and incorporated as a nonprofit the following year, supports families across western Franklin County while continuing the legacy of its namesake, ensuring that all children have the resources to be ready to learn, to succeed in school and to thrive in the wider world. Lyon was a pioneer in women’s education, founding the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in 1837 that would evolve into Mount Holyoke College in 1893.

According to the Mary Lyon Foundation’s [2025 Impact Report](#), released in January, the foundation has distributed more than 640 winter coats, 350 backpacks, 208,000 pounds of groceries and \$250,000 in scholarships to help local students, among other initiatives.

The new space makes the foundation more visible and accessible for students who need to learn about resources, CEO Kristen Tillona-Baker said. The foundation is still working to set up the space, decorate and add signs, but has already seen more traffic.

“People drop by the office a little bit more regularly,” Tillona-Baker said, “so we’re able to have increased communication with people in the building to figure out how we can help.”

In the midst of moving, the foundation also hired Liza Manchester to be its first program director. Manchester, who holds a master’s degree in English language and literature from the University of Rhode Island, has been working in education for more than a decade. She previously worked with Mount Holyoke College and the Northampton-based Collaborative for Educational Services.

In her new role, Manchester said her job is to ensure the Mary Lyon Foundation is meeting the needs of the people it serves, whether that’s by maintaining or expanding existing programs or starting new ones.

“We’re sort of creating it as we see what’s out there and what’s needed,” Manchester said of the role. “There’s a lot of programming that the Mary Lyon Foundation has been doing over the years, so I’m just jumping in to keep moving that programming forward and make it sustainable, but also to pay attention to what grant opportunities are coming up so that we can build and expand programming.”

For example, Manchester said this year the foundation will be able to expand the holiday giving tree. Last year, the program provided Christmas presents to 157 children, but with the support of the M&T Bank branch in Shelburne Falls and the continued support of Greenfield Savings Bank, the effort will be able to reach even more children.

### **Preparing for the future**

As the Mary Lyon Foundation moves forward with its bigger space and team, Tillona-Baker said she hopes to raise another \$1 million to support the needs of students and families.

Manchester added that budget cuts and policy changes for federally funded services mean that many people who were previously able to get assistance with fuel expenses, food, housing, health care, etc., may not be available to access those services any longer. The Mary Lyon Foundation's goal is to help bridge that gap.

"Fuel assistance is coming up. The fuel assistance season starts Nov. 1, but we're already getting a lot of requests," Manchester said. "While people's incomes haven't changed, the guidelines for those [social service] programs have changed, and now families are able to get less services than they were in the past. So then they come to us."

Tillona-Baker noted she is working to limit how much of the foundation's budget goes to operating expenses and administration.

"We're just trying to keep our spending low so that the funds coming in can be used where it's needed the most — on families, students and educators," Tillona-Baker said.

She added that the foundation will be working to leverage its partnerships with other organizations, businesses and community members to stretch its impact as well and reach not only students and families in western Franklin County, but beyond. She said the foundation recently endowed a fund with the Union 38 School District, which it was able to use to send four students to summer camp.

"While we have primarily served West County throughout our campaign, we have expanded our services to Greenfield, to Turners, to the North Quabbin, and the Union 38 School District," Tillona-Baker said. "We're trying to meet everyone where they're at and help them as much as we can."

### **Long-term plans**

As she thinks about what the Mary Lyon Foundation will look like 10-plus years down the line, Tillona-Baker said she envisions a physical space that will house not only the foundation's offices, but a collaborative network of resources available in the county. First, though, she needs to raise the money.

"My eye's always on the money. I have to raise \$1 million, but really it's going to set us up for a capital campaign to build a community center," she said. "I feel like it's going to be a place with comprehensive services and one building where we'll have a health center. The Mary Lyon office will be there, a space where community members can come in to access services with computers ..."

She said she envisions a center with space for a preschool, senior center, community rooms and more. No plans have been solidified yet; the foundation has just begun thinking about how it will move forward with its community partners and plan its next capital campaign.

“This is definitely like a 10-year plan, but it’s something that we’re really excited about and think is what the community needs,” Tillona-Baker said.

In the meantime, the foundation’s women-led team plans to continue serving students and families. Tillona-Baker said they are following in the footsteps of Mary Lyon, who believed the greatest happiness was obtained by promoting the happiness of others.

“I feel like, in a way, we’re living the vision of Mary Lyon through the work that we’re doing and advocating,” Tillona-Baker said, “not just for women, but children and families.”

*Source: <https://recorder.com/2025/10/19/mary-lyon-foundation-expansion/>*