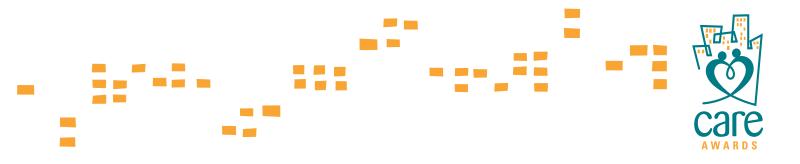




The CARE Report 2021

How Companies in our Region Responded to the COVID-19 Crisis and Beyond





For nearly 30 years, the CARE Awards has recognized outstanding companies proactively making our region a better place for everyone to work, live, and play.

About CARE

About Northern Virginia Family Service (NVFS)

Northern Virginia Family Service's breadth, depth and scope of services ensures that everyone in need, at every stage of life, maximizes their potential and fully contributes to a thriving community. We provide the essential building blocks for financial, emotional and physical well-being, serving as leaders and innovators for the Northern Virginia community. Every year, we empower 35,000+ individuals and families to achieve self-sufficiency.

A Letter from our Leadership

As you know, each year Northern Virginia Family Service recognizes "Companies As Responsive Employers" (CARE) at our annual CARE Awards. The winners are top businesses that demonstrate an unyielding commitment to their employees and our community.

While the CARE Awards have been a focal point for NVFS for nearly 30 years, this year was different for a myriad of reasons. Due to the unprecedented times we have been facing as a society, we felt it was valuable to explore what it means to be a responsive employer during a global pandemic and against a backdrop of ongoing social injustice. Throughout the last year, employers faced new challenges as they determined how to pivot business operations during a pandemic, support employees dealing with competing professional and personal duties, and confront issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion more intentionally within the workplace. We sought feedback from our CARE community to learn how these challenges are being addressed —and where support and learnings were still needed.

The result is *The CARE Report 2021: How Companies in our Region Responded to the COVID-19 Crisis and Beyond*, compiled from information shared by 12 companies that have been recognized as CARE Award winners or as NVFS community partners. Our hope is that this report will offer some best practices and inspiration for those grappling with both the challenges and the opportunities that have resulted from an ever-changing environment, and will highlight some of the tactics being used by those who are working to navigate towards new and innovative solutions within their own businesses.

For nearly 100 years, NVFS has fostered a culture of community and innovation through exemplary partnerships across sectors. In alignment with NVFS values, the companies featured in The CARE Report are moving the needle to make Northern Virginia a better place for all by identifying new ways to work and holistically supporting their employees. Our hope is that strategies outlined in this report will be of value to you and your colleagues as your company reflects on lessons of the past year, and look ahead to a bright future.

Be well and thank you for all that you do for our region.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Berkowitz NVFS President & CEO

Jeghame

George Lane Chair, CARE Committee Principal, Mercer

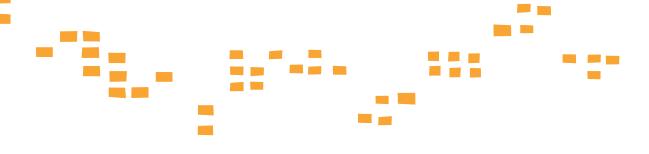




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INTRODUCTION



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Stacey had prepared meticulously for this Zoom.

She was convinced that she had designed a very creative approach to meeting the potential client's needs, and she had detailed notes taped in front of her. Landing a new client in the midst of the pandemic was so important to her company, as well as to her own career. Stacey's eight-year-old son was working on his classwork on the computer on the kitchen table and her four-year-old daughter was surrounded by her favorite toys in the living room. Stacey was at her desk in the den with the door closed. She told the kids to be very quiet and not bother her for the next hour. She even left cupcakes out on the kitchen counter for them.

The Zoom started well, and Stacey was carefully explaining her proposed approach. All of a sudden, she heard a huge crash followed by a shout from her son using a word that was definitely not permitted in their house. She paused a few seconds to see what would happen and thankfully heard her son shout "It's ok!" She smiled apologetically at the potential client and continued with her presentation.

After several minutes, her daughter swung open the door and ran to Stacey. "Mommy! I don't feel good!" And she then threw up all over Stacey's lap and the keyboard. With an "Oh-My-God," Stacey jumped up.



Heart pounding, sweat dripping off her forehead, she realized it was a nightmare.



Have you had this nightmare? Many of us have.

Remember when disruption was all the rage?

Entrepreneurs were all vying to become the great hero disrupters in their industries. Well, a new disrupter was foisted upon the world in 2020, and this one has not been a hero disrupter, but a villain disrupter. COVID-19 has turned the business world – and of course, the whole world – on its head.

The tragedies of this pandemic in terms of human life are overwhelming, and the number of unemployed and hungry are tragically huge. However, in the corporate world there have been silver linings. There have been hero disrupters among the difficulties, and these may well stay with us for the long-term. Leadership and management eyes have been opened to new ways of doing business, and these newly opened eyes may well lead us to renewed prosperity over time.

This report will explore what some of our past CARE Award winners and community of champions have learned during the 2020 disruptions. These disruptions to business as usual have been due both to COVID-19 and to increased understanding of the urgent need to confront issues of social injustice.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Every wall is a door." Our best business leaders understand that, and they have found their doors. We hope you will gain some new ideas from reading this report about the responses - the hero disrupters - of some of our award-winning regional leaders, and will be able to customize these ideas for your own companies.





COVID-19 PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

So what are the problems that suddenly smacked companies in the face? And how did they respond?



When companies suddenly had to switch to all remote work, not all employees were set up for total telework. Some needed updated computers and screens, and some needed software. Many employers found that employees' personal laptops didn't have good enough cameras and speakers. All companies in the study either allowed employees to borrow equipment — even chairs and desks — or purchased what was needed for them.

Monument Wealth Management had a unique hardware issue — their advisors need to use double screens — so the firm supplied additional screens to employees who needed them. All these types of issues were straightforward, and many companies solved them quickly.

However, the pivot to virtual was somewhat harder for companies that had a strong in-person culture like **National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation (NRUCFC)**. Nonetheless, NRUCFC also rose to the challenge and provided individual IT assistance and equipment, and their managers were asked to work one-on-one with employees to make the virtual environment successful.



Kids at Home

Kids do have a tendency to act like kids. They need help and they need attention. Just imagine, if you do not have children at home, trying to do a full day's work, which probably includes a number of Zoom and video calls, and needing quiet time to think and write, while also becoming the teacher for your children's remote classrooms, while also just being a parent, while also trying to keep a household running with food and clean clothes in it. Are you exhausted just reading that sentence? Imagine living it. This is why COVID-19 has also resulted in what is called a "she-cession." Mothers are still predominately responsible for running the household.

While many higher salary jobs could transition from an in-person to a remote work environment, low-wage jobs such as hospitality and retail have seen women hard-hit by layoffs. For professional level employees, many women have found that continuing full time work has been just too hard with kids home all day and needing to be supervised for their virtual schooling.

McKinsey & Company's report, COVID-19 and the Great Reset: Briefing note #26, October 7, 2020, discusses their annual Women in the Workplace study. They note:

"[The effects of the COVID-19 crisis] have exacerbated gender disparities and their implications for women at work, especially for mothers, female senior leaders, and Black women across America. In addition to being laid off and furloughed at higher rates than their male counterparts during the pandemic, women are — notably, for the first time in our research on the topic — considering downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce altogether at staggering rates. The exodus might include as many as two million women. That would raise a significant barrier to achieving gender parity in leadership roles in years to come."

Flex Professionals' business model is to recruit people for part-time, flexible jobs, and they have a large number of moms among their placements. They too have found that mothers are dealing with the brunt of this crisis, and they are seeing a sharp decrease in candidates even for part-time jobs.

So what are companies doing about this overload on parents?

Companies know that employees with children are in a very difficult situation. Most companies have totally embraced flexibility and told employees that they have to continue to work their full eight-hour day, but any eight hours within the 24 are ok. Of course, employees have to be available when meetings are set and they must meet client needs, but employers have learned that flexibility works.

Evans Consulting says it celebrates interruptions and tells employees not to apologize for having to work from home. They note, "We are all accustomed to little faces peering into cameras during Zoom meetings."





Companies realized that many employees were feeling frustrated and isolated as they adjusted to the changes. These emotional issues have been a major issue impacting morale and employee engagement, so companies have exerted a maximum of effort to meet these challenges. The CEO of **Titania Solutions Group** called every single employee. She noted that without the pandemic, she would not have had the opportunity to have had such a personal isolated phone call with everyone. The company feels that doing this will bring long-term value to the company and its culture.

B&A stood up the *B&A Cares Program*. In March 2020, they engaged a registered counselor to reach out to all employees and contractors. The counselor provides weekly check-ins with employees. B&A has found that people living alone are having the hardest time — both young single people and older folks. The counselor also emphasizes the opportunity to engage with B&A's EAP provider for employees who are really stressed. B&A feels that the check-ins provide them a good pulse on what is happening, and whether they are communicating enough as an organization.

Evans Consulting created a cadre of internal coaches. Coaches are selected from manager-level employees and receive ongoing training and support. The coaches lead various cohort meetings. Evans has found that microbreakout groups are very effective.

Most companies greatly increased their communications.

They produce more frequent employee newsletters; they hold more all-hands meetings; they have lots of Zoom events like coffee hours and happy hours in which creative games are played; and many began new affinity groups, especially for parents.



Evans Consulting wanted to try to replicate their "water cooler culture" so they use Microsoft Teams as a communication tool. People bring up whatever they want to share with each other - birthdays, new babies, sharing workouts, etc. They also have specific channels to discuss more serious topics such as social injustice and DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access). Other companies gave attention to trying to recreate the ability to have "ad hoc work conversations in the halls" through online communication tools. National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation (NRUCFC) also found Microsoft Teams an effective tool for communication and collaboration. Monument Wealth Management has a video "huddle" each morning and a video team lunch every Wednesday.

Many companies emphasize wellness with information put on internal websites, as well as virtual meditation and fitness challenges.

Virtual volunteering is also embraced widely, both for the good it does in the community and for the mental health advantages to employees participating in giving back. Many of the activities can involve employees' children. Virtual groups of parents sharing helpful advice were also formed in several companies.

Sending periodic gifts to employees such as t-shirts, food packages, and gift cards is also a way companies have tried to show employees that they are valued. From a **B&A** employee: "Thank you, **B&A** Management! First Omaha Steaks, then the B&A masks, and now Cheryl's Cookies. You all are too awesome! Really appreciate everything. Hope you all are staying safe and doing well."

Dev Technology noted that most companies started out fast with lots of morale-building activities on Zoom. But they realized that people were getting burned out on happy hours and games, so they pared back a bit. They have found much more interest in substantive team-building activities.

Leadership Fairfax (LFI) was in a unique position to gauge employee stress with their cohort of people coming from many different employers. Karen Cleveland, CEO, found that some people started out angry, and that they actually went through a cycle of grief. Parents in the group were especially stressed. This LFI cohort had months of discussions working through their feelings, and they started making pledges to help each other out. They were drawing on their empathy, and they were learning to deal with ambiguity. They were also learning that it is ok for leaders to be vulnerable. Karen found that the COVID crisis gave LFI the opportunity to work on leadership skills that otherwise they might not have.



In a Forbes article, The Impact Of Covid-Related Stress On Employee Engagement, author Adi Gaskell talks about the need for business leaders to act as servantleaders and recognize and support the emotional struggles of employees during the pandemic and afterwards. As our local leaders navigate this crisis for themselves, they will certainly remain more aware of employees' personal challenges as they move forward.

UNITENDED IMPACTS AND OPPORTUNITIES



Event-Focused Business

Pivoting for event-focused businesses was complicated. **NRUCFC** always did many in-person events. After pivoting to virtual, they were relieved to find that it worked out fine. They plan to retain some virtual events even when the pandemic is over. **Manhattan Strategy Group** also produced many events and had held many site visits. They identified the higher-level technology they needed, and they hired an experienced remote events coordinator.



Client Relations

Obviously, companies do not want to lose the confidence of their clients. **Dev Technology** intentionally increased their communications with their clients. **Titania Solutions Group** emailed every client, thanked them for their flexibility, and assured them that they remain very mindful of the mission.



Outreach to the Community

Many companies have enhanced their community involvement during the pandemic. **Evans**Consulting added to their usual community efforts, including donating to the research team at Virginia Tech for PPE production. **ENSCO** employees made masks for hospitals. **BBG** launched a new virtual step challenge to support NVFS' pandemic efforts. **Titania Solutions Group** gave a \$1,000 impact bonus to each employee and told them: "If you need it yourself, use it. If you don't need it, use it to support restaurants or charities." Employees used the bonus for food banks, education supplies, Meals on Wheels, supporting school lunch programs, and more.



The Digital Divide

We have all been aware of the "digital divide" — the fact that poor communities often do not have access to broadband or current hardware and software. **NRUCFC** has been expanding broadband emergency grants in rural America. They also issued their first ever Sustainability Bond to help finance rural broadband and renewable energy projects. In addition, CFC co-op members have set up Wi-Fi in their parking lots so children can do homework. This issue also motivated **Highlight Tech** to support distance learning tools for disadvantaged students.

CHALLENGES THAT REQUIRE ONGOING EFFORTS



Business Development and Employee Recruitment

These issues are grouped together because they typically required in-person networking, relationship development, and interviewing. Flex Professionals found that business development has been significantly more difficult. In the "before times," they would often develop relationships with potential new clients through speaking engagements and participation in conferences. With Zoom events, there is no post-event social time. Interviewing new employees online has been difficult as well because there is less informal chitchat in the interview, which helped the interviewer learn about the person. They have also found that people in face-to-face interviews make a much more lasting impression than in Zoom interviews. Most companies are facing these new challenges of business development and employee recruitment.



Employees in Different States and Regions

Dev Technology noted the challenges inherent in complying with different sets of rules and situations on the ground.



Employee Performance Issues

Manhattan Strategy Group noted the increased challenges of dealing with performance issues remotely.



Classified Employees

Titania Solutions Group noted that classified employees must be onsite, so enhanced communication with employees and clients is essential to maintain safety guidelines and company culture.



Onboarding

Successfully onboarding new employees is an additional challenge to achieve remotely. Flex Professionals' normal business model is remote work. Their guidelines for onboarding remotely are:

Employees should have a set schedule which can incorporate kids' and
home needs.

П	Employees need a very specific set of job responsibilities which are
ш.	prioritized and have metrics attached.

Ш	Regularly scheduled	communication	times are	essential
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COVID-19 SILVER LININGS AND BUSINESS INNOVATIONS

The pandemic has changed business culture in many organizations in three important ways, and these are major silver linings.

- First, companies now have a better understanding that employees are people with lives! Most are accepting, and even happy, to see children and pets show up on screen.
- Second, the change in mindset to manage by results, not face time in the office, has been amazingly quick, given that this issue has been a general, ongoing discussion for decades.

 This change is, of course, evident nationally, not just in our area. PayPal chief executive, Dan Schulman, said in a Bloomberg Television interview: "I don't think we're ever going back to what was. Some people will forever be at home, and others will be more in the office, but the vast majority will be some kind of three-two hybrid."
- Third, conversations that used to be verboten in the office are now happening.

 And they are now seen as key to a cohesive and productive workforce. Serious conversations about the need for caring for children, about race, and about social justice are now understood to be necessary for having both a productive workforce, as well as being a good corporate citizen.

Here are other silver linings that our respondents identified:



Geographic Impact of Zoom

With Zoom, companies can bring together people — employees, clients, and presenters — in different geographic areas who otherwise would not be able to attend or who would be very expensive to have attend. **B&A** is one of the companies with a scattered workforce. They have found great benefit in having social events virtually.



Virtual Small Group Meetings

A number of companies have found that virtual small group meetings at the beginning or end of day are very useful. Some companies have formed small groups of people for social gatherings who don't ordinarily interact. In this way, people meet a wider variety of their coworkers, and it may help cut through silos — a perennial problem in large organizations.





Remote Work Works

As mentioned above, companies are more comfortable with accountability without visibility. Many companies realize that remote work works. The time saved commuting is sizeable, and many employees report fewer distractions at home. Although some companies felt that employees would lose valuable impromptu connections and feel less connected to the company, work-arounds on these issues have been found. Many companies have said that they will retain a hybrid of in-office and remote work when the pandemic ends.

Monument Wealth Management found that working from home has not hurt communication with each other or with clients, but rather has improved it. Their daily morning video huddles have been extremely helpful. The company says it may never go back to office full time because things are working out so well with remote work, and time is not wasted commuting.

ENSCO employees have asked for a hybrid work schedule with 2-3 days in office and 2-3 days remote, post COVID. Manhattan Strategy Group was also surprised at how productive employees were working remotely. Flex **Professionals** quoted a large consulting firm client who had said they would never hire virtual employees, but after COVID admitted: "Boy was I wrong."

Dev Technology also noted that working from home has turned out to be as productive, or even more so. Their CEO, Kendall Holbrook, summed it up: "We now have the tools, we have the know-how, and we have confidence to do this."



Increased business

Monument Wealth Management found that people had a little more time to take care of personal business that they had put off before, so they were surfing the web trying to find solutions to their issues — one of which is wealth management. Monument was getting more new clients from their website, and therefore hired a digital marketing and social media manager. They plan to continue their increased social marketing presence.



The rise of introverts

B&A has a number of folks whose work involves sitting behind a computer all day. The company used to have live social gatherings, and these introverted types never attended. But B&A has found more participation when events are virtual. Some people could break out of their shell a bit. They will retain some virtual games when the pandemic ends because it is now part of their culture.



Smashing the stigma associated with using flexible policies

Flex Professionals knew there was a stigma associated with flexibility before. There was a compensation penalty for use and people were passed over for promotions. However, they note, the pandemic has put flexibility into the mainstream. Everybody is used to it now. They believe it will become more pervasive in the future and penalties will be eliminated.



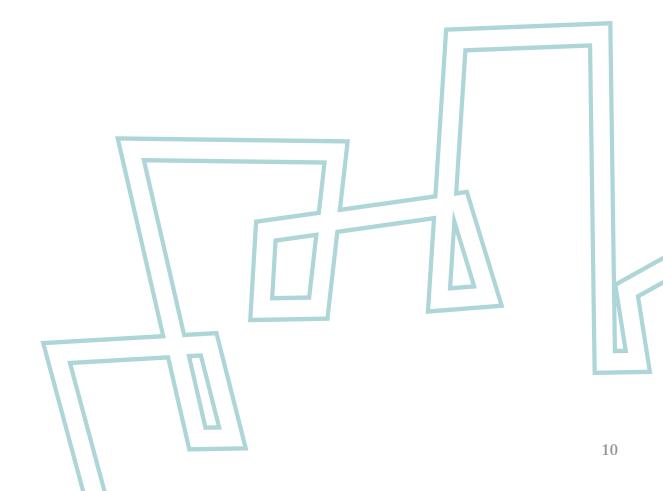
Broadened views of professionalism

Managers realize that employees are real people with lives. Seeing kids and pets on the screen has become normalized. Virtual games to raise morale are common. Employees and managers laugh together, and work does not suffer. A June 5, 2020 Working Paper published by Harvard Business School entitled "COVID-19 and the Workplace: Implications, Issues, and Insights for Future Research and Action" notes that "HR communications should acknowledge the risk of workplace loneliness and the value of social connections...Organizations should identify and implement policies and interventions to support social connections among employees."



"Hoteling"

There has been a realization that remote work will enable some companies to do "hoteling" in the future, and not retain office space for each individual employee. This will save money for the companies on real estate. Of course, this trend will not be a positive change for building owners and developers. **Titania Solutions Group** is already planning to reduce their square footage as many employees will maintain remote work.



EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESS

*referred to as EDI or DELA (diversity, equity, inclusion, and access) throughout the report

As we know, the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 kicked off a nationwide soul-searching focused on racial equity and the criminal justice system. Many, though not all, businesses have risen to the occasion. As Dev Technology noted, this was the impetus for many companies to be more intentional about EDI. The Harvard Business School Working Paper cited above also recommends that "organizations need to reduce inequalities, by reducing selection biases in favor of the demographically privileged."

Monument Wealth Management recognized this problem. They "felt like [they] could be doing more to increase diversity in the financial industry." They focused on attracting a more diverse group of interns and connected with a professor at George Mason University who helped communicate the

helped communicate the opportunities. They also made connections with women's colleges and HBCUs to try to get in front of a more diverse pool. They are investing a good deal of energy to help encourage future diversity in the financial industry as a whole.

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NRUCFC began an engagement with a diversity inclusion professional. This person conducted an all employee survey and began holding all employee sessions on implicit bias and allyship. The discussions have been very candid.



Dev Technology made a commitment in four areas:

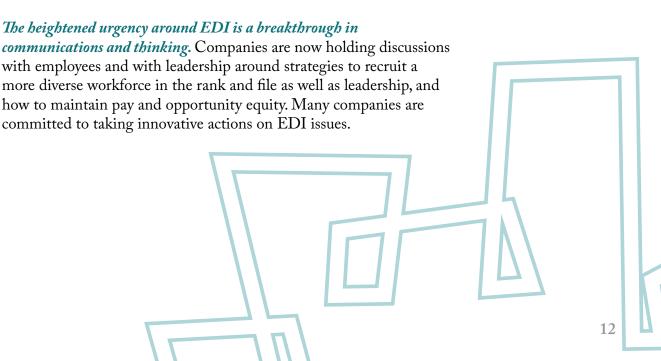
- **EDUCATION** communicate internally as additional programs are put in place so that everyone feels welcomed.
- **PARTNERING** partner with organizations that are diverse in nature such as HBCUs and Black engineer organizations.
- **WORKPLACE** make sure our programs speak to diversity so all employees feel that all can engage; also maintain current data on pay equity and internal job category salary ranges.
- **COMMUNITY** support most vulnerable communities where we work and live by supporting a variety of organizations that assist women and children, veterans, and the homeless.

B&A developed their Ideation Platform. They currently have five campaigns going, including an EDI campaign. This technology is built to get ideas from people, even anonymously. The platform also allows people to provide information on how they can take action in their own communities. Over 50% of **B&A's** workforce identifies as part of a minority group (based on race, ethnicity, gender, ability, etc.) and this diversity is a major value to them. They have a very comprehensive plan to engage with HBCUs.

Evans Consulting has a DEIA channel on Microsoft Teams. They found that employees felt safer sharing in three to four people. Evans also conducted a survey and created a council to review the survey results and provide recommendations. They also are having very thoughtful internal discussions about their recruitment efforts. They are working on a policy around how to balance referrals and promoting internally with diversity goals. They also want to increase diversity in their leadership. Further, they want to make sure they are not always going with "majority rules" because minorities need an equal voice.

Flex Professionals has been extremely thoughtful and honest with themselves about this issue. They did an analysis of their candidate profiles and realized that they can do a better job of branching out in recruiting. They started with educating themselves. They brought in workshop leaders on unconscious bias and micro-aggressions, and then they considered their interview questions and job descriptions to determine if they were unjustly weeding out people. They are now researching new places to network and recruit. Their lack of diversity had bothered them for a long time, as they knew that lack of diversity isn't good from a business point of view and that better performing companies have a diverse set of views represented in their staff composition. But the George Floyd murder put their considerations and planning on the front burner.

Leadership Fairfax (LFI) has been able to learn about what is happening in many Fairfax companies. They know that conversations within companies are happening that did not happen in a large, organized fashion before. Conversations about EDI, allyship and implicit bias are ongoing now. LFI understands that equity issues crosscut all areas – education, housing, incarceration, medical care, and more. Each topic that is discussed with their classes will be overlaid with an equity lens. In addition, LFI has grants to hold community conversations, which they will implement in collaboration with Leadership Arlington.

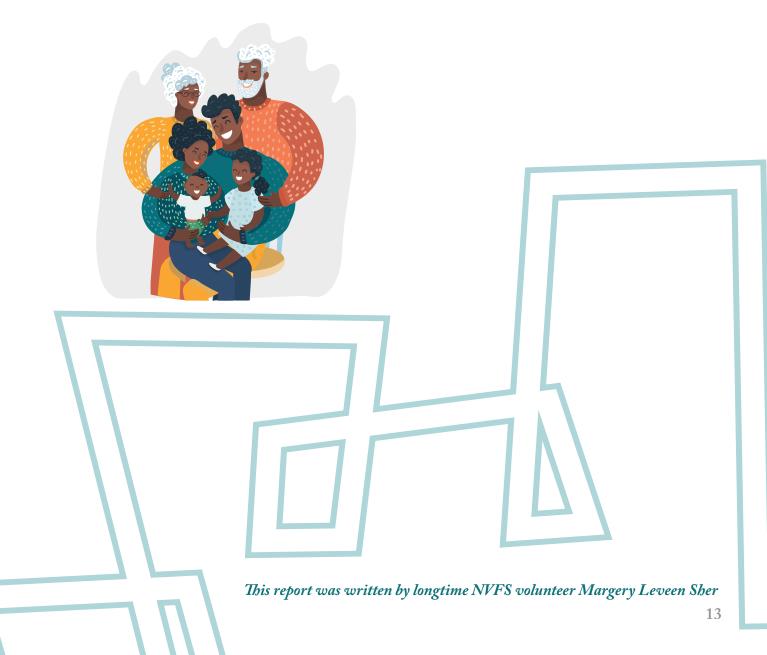


CONCLUSION

Silver linings abound in how our corporate neighbors are creatively responding to the pandemic, as well as to the needs of their workforce and communities amidst the heightened urgency around EDI. These compounded crises have put old ways of doing things to rest.

The crises have forced companies to look at new approaches to work, and they have. They have turned villain disrupters into hero disrupters.

As we continue on this unprecedented journey, however, we must not forget those small businesses that have closed forever, the employees who are out of work, and those who have lost their lives to COVID-19. We must honor their memories by continuing to make the workplace more human and humane and by lifting up all workers, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender. Our award-winning companies are doing a good job of this by transforming themselves internally, as well as stepping up their efforts in the greater community.



THANK YOU!

Thank You to the CARE-ing Companies that contributed to this report:

























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An additional thank you to our CARE Leadership!

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