

## Michael Manzella Award 2025



The Michael Manzella Award is presented to a graduating senior at Yale's Timothy Dwight College who, "through the qualities of kindness, dedication, and courage," most inspired his classmates. This year's award was presented to Natalie Brown. Presenting the award are Frank Manzella (Michael's brother) and Joan and Frank Manzella.

## Join MMF at "The Game" on November 22nd, 2025



Every other year, the MMF joins forces with Michael's former a cappella group, The Society of Orpheus and Bacchus, for a fun and festive morning of tailgating before the Yale-Harvard football game in New Haven, CT. Through fellowship and singing, we remember Michael and celebrate a grand tradition! If you plan to be in the New Haven area on November 22nd, check the **MMF Facebook page** for details and join us!

## FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Fellow MMF Supporters,

It's both humbling and inspiring to see how far the MMF has come over the last **31 years** — and how powerfully your generosity continues to extend our impact of courage, creativity, and compassion.

Our **Fellowships Program** invested \$17,500 in four dynamic Yale undergraduate Fellows, each pursuing work that beautifully reflects our mission. These stories are not just inspiring — they are living proof of how we nurture talent and compassion across generations.

- Groundbreaking **leukemia research** in Yale's Isaacs Lab
- **Music education** for children in rural Ecuador
- Promoting **youth digital and AI literacy** with an original children's book
- Sponsoring **contemporary classical composition** at the Bowdoin International Music Festival

Our **Grantmaking Program** distributed \$15,000, while growing in reach and purpose. We proudly renewed our partnerships with **DreamYard** and **Friends of Karen**, continuing to uplift creativity, resilience, and families in crisis.

And this year, we expanded our relationship with **Hear Your Song**, whose music-based work with pediatric patients perfectly echoes Michael's spirit. It's deeply rewarding to see children transform their painful emotions into cathartic art.

We also take joy in celebrating **MMF alumni** such as Sam Brakarsh and Logan Klutse, who are now global leaders exemplifying creativity and community engagement. Their accomplishments remind us of why we began this mission more than three decades ago.

On behalf of the Board, I thank you for your continued generosity and belief in our work.

Your support ensures that we will continue touching new lives for decades to come.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Frank J. Manzella  
Chairman

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## MMF Invests \$17,500 in Summer Fellowships for Four Dynamic Undergrads

In our 30th year of Fellowship giving, the MMF proudly supported four Yale undergraduates engaged in impactful summer projects that helped to advance the foundation's mission in the areas of Cancer Research, Youth Development, Education, and the Performing Arts. Hear about their experiences in their own words.



### Lofty-John Anyanwu

**Conducting research related to the leading form of leukemia in children**

My research focused on Acute Lymphoblastic

Leukemia, a cancer that disproportionately affects kids. I did my work at the Isaacs Lab at Yale alongside other undergraduate researchers and a graduate student mentor. To create my molecule, I had to clone the gene responsible for it into bacterial cell lines. This is where I learned to troubleshoot, talking things through with my mentor and lab mates, figuring out why certain clones failed, and coming up with new ways to approach the stubborn ones. **The process sharpened my lab techniques and thought process; it also improved my patience and persistence.** I came to understand why research matters beyond just human curiosity: it creates tools and technologies that make life better for people. When I think back, my favorite moments were the conversations over lunch, sharing ideas and experiences, and realizing I was surrounded by people who cared deeply about their work. Being part of that kind of community made the challenges feel worth it, and it showed me the kind of scientist I want to be.



### Rory Bricca

**Participating in the Bowdoin International Music Festival's Composition Program**

I had a truly lifechanging experience at the Bowdoin International

Music Festival in Brunswick, Maine. I had a full seven pieces of mine performed at the festival, which I will be posting in the

coming months on my YouTube channel and new Substack newsletter (which you can find at [www.rorybricca.substack.com](http://www.rorybricca.substack.com)). My piece, "Temporal Paint (Four Moons)", was based off of four paintings by local Maine artist Ann Craven, who I had the pleasure of meeting. Through all these performances, I have gotten to work with musicians who are not only some of the most talented young musicians in the country but enthusiastic collaborators and good friends who enjoy and appreciate my music. Overall, I would say **this experience was especially valuable for making connections, which is at least as important a part of a composer's career as honing their creative craft.** I am currently planning to take a year off of school before applying to composition master's programs. After attending this festival, I feel confident I can likely get into one of the top programs in the country.



### Stella Choi

**Writing a book to educate young children about Artificial Intelligence**

This summer, I was awarded a fellowship from the Michael

Manzella Foundation to support the self-publishing of my children's book, *Should Leif Trust Birdie the AI?: An Educational Introduction to Digital Literacy* [editor's note: It's available on Amazon!]. I was inspired to write this book after realizing that young children are increasingly exposed to AI tools like Siri and ChatGPT. **I wanted to create an engaging, age-appropriate narrative that encourages kids to approach AI with healthy skepticism and to double-check AI-generated information with trusted adults.** Watching the book come to life visually has been a beautiful and surprisingly nuanced journey. I've

scheduled an author event at the New Haven Public Library in the Fall of 2025, where I plan to run an educational workshop for kids on how to think critically about AI. I'm also in the process of developing a website to house resources and updates.

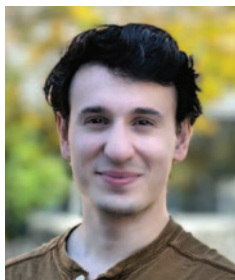


### Tabatha Mireya Stewart

**Interning with the Fundación Teatro Nacional Sucre, and teaching music to rural Ecuadorian children**

This summer, thanks to the MMF, I had the opportunity to undertake two incredible projects in Ecuador. First, I interned with the Teatro Nacional Sucre in Quito, helping with the logistics of their annual FIEQ festival. I supported artist communication and transportation, venue prep, some tech, and lots of general tasks. It was hands-on and fast-paced, but getting to be behind the scenes of such a major arts event—and then attend the workshops and performances—was an amazing learning experience. After the festival, I went to Simiatug, a very rural community in the Andes, to teach choir at a summer camp for kids. Most of the kids had no music training, but I was able to group them in a way that made the ensemble sound cohesive. **It was really rewarding to see them go from giggles to taking the music seriously and being proud of what they were creating.** I want to focus more on working with rural students in the future. This summer made a lifelong impact on me.

## Where Are They Now? Two MMF Fellows Are Making Their Mark!



**Sam Brakarsh**

In 2018, the MMF sponsored undergraduate **Sam Brakarsh** for a fellowship to improve literacy, hygiene and cultural sharing in his native Zimbabwe. After graduating Yale in 2021, Sam earned his Masters in African Studies at Oxford University. In addition to co-founding the Chikukwa Research Trust, Sam has served as Chair of Pan-African Network on Artistic Freedom Summits in both Zanzibar and Addis Ababa. In this role, Sam brings together artists, civil society leaders, and high government officials to secure regional and international partnerships.



**Logan Klutse**

**Logan Klutse** was an MMF fellow in 2019, interning at the Cape Cod Theatre Project. Logan graduated Yale in 2023 with a degree in English & Theater Studies, achieving 9 honors and awards for his literary works along the way such as the John Hersey Prize for his Senior Thesis and Albert Stanburrough Cook Prize for Poetry. After graduation, Logan became a Gordon Grand Postgraduate Fellow at Yale. He currently works as Strategy Consultant at Crimson Education, a university admission support consultancy.

## GRANTMAKING 2025

### Mission-Aligned Grants to Partner Organizations

#### DreamYard

**DreamYard Project**  
([www.dreamyardprep.com](http://www.dreamyardprep.com))

Based on the core values of Create, Connect, Nurture, and Activate, **DreamYard's** programs encourage young people to pursue educational pathways toward higher learning, creative careers, and social action. Located in the Bronx, NY, DreamYard has been a long-time partner of the MMF, and we are proud to continue our support of its creative and performing arts and education programming with a grant of \$5000. [www.dreamyard.com](http://www.dreamyard.com)



#### Friends of Karen

With a \$5000 grant, the Michael Manzella Foundation continues to support **Friends of Karen** in their endeavor to help children who are critically ill and their families. Friends of Karen provide a depth of services, including skilled social workers, financial support for rent and groceries and other illness-related expenses, at no

cost to families. MMF's support helps bring peace of mind and stability to these families during their children's health care crisis. [www.friendsofkaren.org](http://www.friendsofkaren.org)



A newer grant partner for the MMF at the \$5000 level, **Hear Your Song** empowers children and teens with serious illnesses and complex health needs to make their voices heard through collaborative songwriting. In their kid-driven process, Hear Your Song's trauma-informed volunteers support youth in writing, composing, producing, and recording their own songs. Founded in 2014 by then-Yale undergraduates Dan Rubins and Rebecca Brudner, today Hear Your Song partners with

pediatric hospitals, camps, schools, and other nonprofit programs that serve kids experiencing serious health challenges, and all of their programs are available to youth and families free of charge. [www.hearyoursong.org](http://www.hearyoursong.org)







## OUR MISSION



**Michael Manzella**  
(1971 - 1993)

**Michael Manzella**, a gifted scholar, musician and athlete, succumbed to a two-year battle with cancer in 1993 at the age of 21. He left behind a legacy of music, love and inspirational courage. This Foundation was conceived to honor that legacy.

The Michael Manzella Foundation is a not-for-profit corporation dedicated to activities in education, children's causes, cancer research and the arts. We support those individuals and institutions that demonstrate the leadership and potential to make significant contributions in these areas. These goals are consistent with the struggles and achievements of Michael's life.

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