

\$1 million milestone Lake County Community Foundation makes a difference

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WAUKEGAN -- More struggling students are reading, more of the county's uninsured are receiving health care, and more immigrants in Waukegan are becoming citizens despite cuts in government funding for social programs.

Why? Because more charitable giving is being channeled, with laser-like precision, to Lake County nonprofits.



2008 Lake County Community Foundation grant recipients include:

- Boys and Girls Club of Lake County: \$10,000 for support of a musical keyboard instruction program.
- Daisy's Resource and Developmental Center: \$5,000 for a consultant to assist with a leadership transition and property sale plan
- Holy Family Parish Immigrant Center: \$15,000 for a community needs feasibility study
- I-PLUS: \$5,000 for consulting for board development and leadership training
- Mano a Mano Family Resource Center: \$15,000 for the expansion of English as a Second Language, General Education Development, and computer literacy courses
- National Immigrant Justice Center: \$10,000 for support of Waukegan satellite office
- National Illinois Council Against Substance Abuse: \$10,000 to support a component of Youth and Family Services - the Parenting Journey
- Reading Power Inc: \$5,000 for a consultant to assist with strategic planning
- Saint Martin de Porres High School: \$10,000 to place students in nonprofit jobs
- Community Resources for Education and Wellness (CREW): \$40,000 to hire a consultant to help Partners for an Enriched Community to help establish one-stop services for Zion's neediest residents.
- Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science: \$49,000 for the development of "Outreach for HealthReach," a mobile screening and referral clinic for the underserved of Lake County.

One such funneler, the Lake County Community Foundation, last month reached the \$1 million milestone for giving. Established in 2003 in partnership with Chicago Community Trust, the foundation serves both those who want to give and those in need. "We have a unique dichotomy in Lake County," said Susan Niederlander, interim executive director of the foundation. "Lake County is probably one of the wealthiest counties in the nation, and yet we have abject poverty. We have great need, and it's growing.

"The more we can educate the donor community and say 'Look what's in your backyard,' the more we can keep money here and improve lives for residents before it gets overwhelming," Niederlander said. Nonprofits are seeing "huge" cuts in federal and foundational grants "at the same time they're seeing huge increases in demand for services, she said.

"They all need additional support," she said.

The foundation does not compete with another, better-known funneler of charitable dollars, Lake County United Way.

Niederlander said the two agencies collaborate and offer different ways of giving.

"United Way has a corporate giving approach," Niederlander said. "As a community foundation, we are able to give to any cause -- environmental, basic human needs, education, the arts. We work a lot with donors and other foundations who can hold their money with us and through us, direct their giving out into the community."

Recent gifts through the foundation -- which has helped 55 nonprofits since 2004 -- will allow low-income children to learn how to play keyboards, train leaders to oversee financial services to the chronically homeless, and increase the number of classes offered in GED, ESL and computer literacy.

Mary Jane Hender, founder of Reading Power Inc., which sends volunteers to tutor struggling readers in North Chicago, will use the \$5,000 grant from the foundation to help hire an executive director to keep the growing program strong.

"Last year we tutored 150 of the lowest-achieving children, all one-to-one, many of them, five days a week," Hender said. "We firmly believe this will be life altering."

Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science in North Chicago and its longtime partner, HealthReach, the county's only free medical clinic, will use \$49,000 from the foundation to implement a mobile screening and referral clinic for the uninsured.

"This important grant will allow faculty and students at Rosalind Franklin University to extend services to the community in a wider range," said Dr. Wendy Rheault, vice president for academic affairs and dean of the university's College of Health Professions. "It will be an interprofessional effort by several university departments to provide improved comprehensive health screenings across Lake County in collaboration with HealthReach."

The foundation relies heavily on the expertise of the nearly century-old Chicago Community Trust in an extensive vetting process for all 501C3 grant applicants, including scrutiny of financial documents. "It's a very intensive process that takes about six months," Niederlander said.