

# mini grants

# big results

The Heinz Endowments' mini-grants give small projects and organizations in Hazelwood the financial boost they need to help transform the neighborhood.  
by Deborah Todd

**A**cross from the Hazelwood Center on Second Avenue in Pittsburgh's Hazelwood neighborhood, a mid-20th-century three-floor walkup is anchored by a beauty shop painted a bold coral and abutted by a residential entrance shuttered with plywood. Next door, a mom-and-pop store with paper signs touting chicken and cheese fries sits beside a French bakery whose name is etched in gold on a milk chocolate-brown façade. Floodlights with wrought-iron fixtures cast a glow on window-sized photos of baguettes and raspberry tarts.

At the local branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, which is housed in the center, a group of individuals, as diverse as the business district shops, gathers once a month to discuss the community's future. In 2017, the collective of nonprofits, grassroots organizers and residents was the first to receive funding through a Heinz Endowments mini-grants initiative in Hazelwood, now known as "Making a Greater Hazelwood." The awards, part of the Endowments' Learning strategic grantmaking area, provided nearly \$250,000 in funds to a dozen community programs focused on family and child well-being and holistic education.

The idea, said Endowments Vice President for Learning Michelle Figlar, was to form a "collective impact model" where recipients share resources, collaborate and support each other's efforts.

"One day we'd like to see them meeting with policymakers, government organizations and other nonprofit leaders to have the work of the network impact system change," she said. "The goal is that the network will become a part of the Greater Hazelwood Community Collaborative, and they will have a permanent place in the neighborhood."

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Deborah Todd is a Pittsburgh-based freelance writer. Her last story for h was in Issue 1, 2018, as part of the Homewood installment of the "In the Neighborhood" series and looked at the Lighthouse Project, an after-school arts program for local youth.





Laura Johns, president of LEADing to Movement, an Atlanta-based nonprofit consulting firm, and Chad Dorn, a Pittsburgh-based research and policy adviser for the organization, have worked with the grantees since before their first meeting, which Ms. Johns described as an intense discussion surrounding race, class, gentrification and whether the grantees' intentions aligned with residents' desires.

Two years and several tough meetings later, the process is easier and progress is clear. The first round of grantees produced results that spurred a second round of funding for most of the organizations that initially applied, plus six new recipients.

One of the 2019 awards will go toward improving the group's communal hub at the library. Branch Manager Mary Ann McHarg called upgrades to Wi-Fi and furniture, new audio equipment, and storage and window coverings in the meeting space a "longtime dream."

"Even when I would use the meeting room to Skype or do something else, there was always a technological snag," she said. "It was about time we did this for the community."

With new facilities ahead and difficult conversations behind, the mini-grant initiative has helped the divide between residents and outsiders begin to dissipate.

"It has been hard; I don't want to glamorize it. It's not easy and it's not always comfortable to sit in a room and hear all that dialogue," said Ms. Johns. "But it's been very respectful how they communicate and are really willing to listen to each other. They're all in it together trying to serve the same community. With shared goals and a shared strategy, they have really helped each other be successful."

## First-Round Mini-Grant Recipients

The continuation of the Endowments' community mini-grant program is the result of the successes experienced by grantees who participated in the 2017 pilot in Hazelwood. Most of the recipients in the first round received funding again this year to continue their work.

### JADA House International

After Terri Shields survived lupus, congestive heart failure and kidney failure, and then graduated from Carlow University in 2012, she embraced life by helping her neighbors work through their greatest traumas. She began hosting community dinners in her home with themed discussions on "children dying, gun violence, chronic illness—anything that hinders [people] from moving forward in their lives," she said.

What started with Ms. Shields, her mother and a friend in her dining room grew into JADA House International, a community outreach nonprofit that hosts weekly dinner forums at the Spartan Community Center in Hazelwood for adults, teenagers and children. Today, JADA House

## the power of small

Left: During events such as the Greater Hazelwood Family Center Family Fun Day in Burgwin Park, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy shows families how to create structured outdoor play for their pre-school children — such as getting up close to a crawfish — through its Parks Prescription program. Along with Parks Prescription, the Conservancy is assisting with development of the Hazelwood Play Trail, a network of green spaces throughout the neighborhood for creative play.

Right: JADA House International founder Terri Shields, left, gives Rickiya Taylor, center, a high five during JADA House's Teen Night at the Spartan Community Center in Hazelwood. Ms. Shields created JADA House to provide forums for children, teens and adults to talk about issues in their lives, including traumatic events.

### PITTSBURGH PARKS CONSERVANCY



features a space open round the clock for teens, and its programs include a Blast Off school supply giveaway; a senior luncheon sponsored by Ms. Shields' employer, UPMC; and a Christmas toy drive. With the help of a \$25,000 Endowments mini-grant, at least 600 Hazelwood residents were served through her efforts in the past year.

"A lot of people come and I'm happy they come. I'm exhausted they come, but I'm happy they come," Ms. Shields said with a chuckle.

#### **New Sun Rising's Digital Bridges Pittsburgh**

Digital Bridges, a technology education and digital literacy program for underserved communities, started in Weirton, West Virginia, in January 2017 through a collaboration of the Weirton-based nonprofit Social Media Advisory Council and the Millvale, Pennsylvania-based nonprofit incubator New Sun Rising. Interest in expanding the program to Pittsburgh existed, but progress was slow.

Then, Constance Capitolis, a member of the advisory council, decided to pursue Heinz Endowments mini-grant funding and, with the support of a \$10,000 grant, the

Digital Bridges Pittsburgh pilot was up and running in Hazelwood in a matter of months. Ever since, Ms. Capitolis said, she and her traveling digital media lab have been a regular presence in the community.

"It's me, my laptops and a mobile hotspot or two. I can teach anywhere — a church, somebody's basement, a park. I'm dying to teach class out in a park!"

Digital Bridges has launched a career exploration initiative with community partner JADA House, and has started a small business and entrepreneurship certification for students with another community partner, the social justice organization POORLAW. Today, Ms. Capitolis is working on the Making a Greater Hazelwood website and running a youth STEM mentorship program out of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh — Hazelwood.

#### **Planned Parenthood of Western Pennsylvania**

When Planned Parenthood of Western Pennsylvania decided to use its nearly \$25,000 mini-grant to spark community conversations about sexual health and encourage STD testing, there was no telling how residents would

#### **JADA HOUSE INTERNATIONAL**



# New Mini-Grant Recipients

The second year of the Making a Greater Hazelwood mini-grant initiative added six organizations whose programs include providing emergency support to families, opportunities for youth to explore their neighborhood's history, and improvements to a community space. The grantmaking strategy for this year continues to focus on building cooperation and coordination among community-based nonprofits.



**Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh** The library will upgrade technology and furniture at the Hazelwood branch, and add storage in the neighborhood library's community meeting room.

◀ **Propel Schools Foundation** The Propel Hazelwood Charter School, in collaboration with community historian JaQuay Carter, will launch the Hazelwood History Makers Club, an after-school program that will teach the neighborhood's history and cultural heritage.

In this April 1958 photo from the Greater Hazelwood Historical Society and Cultural Center, Myra "Sug" Bradley and Roslyn White of Glen Hazel pose in front of what was then Gladstone High School. The image captures the heritage that Mr. Carter, the historical society's founder, plans to share in the Hazelwood History Makers Club he is starting in conjunction with Propel Hazelwood.

▲ **Reading Is Fundamental** RIF is seeking to hire four neighborhood high school students to participate in Storymobile outreach and advocacy, and to explore future careers with RIF and AmeriCorps.

**St. Paul's Lutheran Church** The church will continue its efforts to provide free food, clothing and toiletries to residents in need, and will offer a Sunday meal for all residents, distributing leftovers to the community.

**Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit** The university will expand the Hazelwood Caring for Asthma in our Region's Schoolchildren project, which aims to improve asthma control for residents, increase clinic visits and collaborate with community health workers.

**Community Kitchen Pittsburgh** The organization will continue its ongoing work with Literacy Pittsburgh, and enroll at least 20 residents per year in educational training programs, with the goal of reaching at least 250 residents.

receive the pitch. Two years later, local individuals are getting the word out on their own initiative.

"One very enthusiastic community member who had attended several of our pop-up events began to actively recruit people to get tested for HIV," said Kimberlee Evert, CEO of the regional Planned Parenthood. "She circulated through a community event engaging people in conversations about getting tested and assured them that it was a good choice and they had nothing to fear."

Along with the community conversations, Planned Parenthood kicked off its "Care No Matter Where" initiative with eight pop-up events that included music, games, health and wellness literature, and free STD screening. In May, it began working with Hazelwood Family Health Center to provide free STD testing on Friday afternoons. The organization is currently looking for a permanent space in the neighborhood to establish regular testing hours and to serve as a youth drop-in spot.

## Literacy Pittsburgh

Prior to the mini-grants program, Literacy Pittsburgh staff members had been exploring Hazelwood residents' needs for a year, but weren't connecting with those who required

their services most. A \$15,000 mini-grant provided the organization with enough support to form collaborations with groups already serving clients who needed basic literacy and math skills to advance in the workforce. For example, Literacy Pittsburgh began a partnership with the culinary training and job placement nonprofit Community Kitchen, which brings Literacy Pittsburgh service coordinators to Community Kitchen to teach math literacy that applies directly to kitchen operations.

"We teach fractions, word problems, doubling recipes, English to metric conversions," said Literacy Pittsburgh Associate Director Lori Como, "those types of specific skills."

## POORLAW

Founders of People of Origin Rightfully Loved and Wanted (POORLAW), Saundra Cole McKamey and her husband, Terrell Johnson, used their social justice organization's \$25,000 mini-grant to expand services provided through its Hazelwood Youth Media Justice program. That effort helped to train neighborhood youth ages 12 to 21 for their first jobs, provided structured mentoring to youth and young adults, sharpened their social justice awareness, and encouraged youth leaders to take on community projects.



To advance this work, POORLAW formed partnerships with Digital Bridges, JADA House and Center of Life and collaborated with several other groups.

### **Center of Life**

In the aftermath of the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, Center of Life founder, the Rev. Tim Smith, applied for mini-grant funding to create the Hazelwood Diversity Dialogue, a podcast dedicated to exploring race relations in the community. Since the podcast launched in October, there have been nine episodes streamed through Apple and Google Play, some of which featured students involved with POORLAW and JADA House, which also received mini-grants. Multimedia and Technology Manager Douglas Heckman said the \$25,000 grant went toward the purchase of high-quality recording equipment that allowed for recording of up to eight people at a time.

### **Trying Together**

Trying Together, formerly the Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children, rolled out its community vocabulary-building initiative, Buzzword Pittsburgh, in Hazelwood with the help of a nearly \$11,000 mini-grant. The program also is supported by The Children's Museum, Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, Carnegie Science Center, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre and Pittsburgh Festival Opera. Buzzword promotes literacy in children younger than 5 through talk, play and interaction with their environments. Trying Together has hosted Buzzword events with the Hazelwood branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh and the Greater Hazelwood Family Support Center.

### **Unity Through Creativity**

For those experiencing grief and trauma, finding healthy ways to process emotions can be a matter of life and death. The Unity Through Creativity Foundation used \$25,000 in mini-grant funding to launch the Grounding Lab, a studio space that doubles as a sanctuary to help Hazelwood women and teens channel pain through creative outlets. The Lab offers opportunities for meditation, journaling and graphic poetry, and features a health library. The ultimate hope is that residents will strengthen emotional coping skills through their art and that their work will decorate the space as a testament to their progress.

### **Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy**

As residents celebrated the April opening of Hazelwood Trail, a waterfront-adjacent stretch that connects to the network of Great Allegheny Passage trails, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy remained focused on outdoor spaces intended for a smaller demographic. For the past two years,

the conservancy has teamed up with Trying Together and other partner organizations to bring Buzzword Pittsburgh to Hazelwood. The conservancy used its mini-grant of about \$23,000 to partner with the Greater Hazelwood Family Center in incorporating Buzzword into the Parks Prescription Program, an initiative to give parents of preschool-aged children tools to create structured outdoor play. It is also supporting efforts to build up the Hazelwood Play Trail, a scattering of revitalized green spaces in the neighborhood that include playgrounds, art and other features designed to inspire creative play.

### **Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center**

As the Hazelwood Family Center's lead agency, the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center (COTRAIC) struggled to find credentialed infant and toddler teachers and certified bus drivers. So the nonprofit, which was created to serve Native American populations and other underserved groups, used its \$15,000 in mini-grant funding to send 12 residents to Commercial Driver's License certification classes and another two to classes to earn an accelerated child development associate's certificate. In 2019, COTRAIC will target individuals and families who are already providing child care services to offer CDL certification so they can receive subsidized funds for their work.

### **Carnegie Institute / Carnegie Science Center**

With its \$25,000 mini-grant, the science center leveraged a partnership with the Council of the Three Rivers American Indian Center to provide STEM education and outreach at levels ranging from Head Start pre-school to adult education. They also worked with local educators to provide professional development and give parents STEM toolkits for at-home use. For the current cycle, the science center aims to teach at least 68 children in COTRAIC classrooms and to aid 14 classroom educators. It will also serve 60 to 75 families through the Greater Hazelwood Family Center.

### **Three Rivers Village School**

Operating as an independent, tuition-based school that follows an educational model with no required classes, books, tests or homework can be a tough sell in traditionally blue-collar Hazelwood. So, once Three Rivers Village School, which serves students ages 5 through 19, was approved for mini-grant funding, it used its \$25,000 to create tuition grants for two residents and to host community events to find potential students. Admissions Coordinator Maggie Bogdanich said the events helped the team explain the school's mission and model to residents who may have never learned about it otherwise. They are still working to award the tuition grants to neighborhood students. **h**