Breakthrough grant to provide skills training

Woods Charitable Fund awarded its 2020 Breakthrough Initiative Grant to Lincoln Literacy Council for the Bridgeway to a Better Life project, which offers job-skills training, mentorship and classes to help people gain the skills needed to acquire well-paying jobs and build careers. Bridgeway to a Better Life partners with the Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development (LPED) and the New Americans Task Force. This grant, pledged for $500,000 over three years, provides for staffing and operating support.

During the pandemic, Lincoln Literacy has staged two drive-through fairs to give out laptops and learning materials. In addition, the agency signed up students for scholarships for short-term certification classes at Southeast Community College and offered tutors to assist these students. The organization has created a new category of volunteer, the job mentor, and recruited and trained 10 volunteers. In tandem with its teacher-prep class, Lincoln Literacy created a short-term paraeducator class, modified its job-prep class to focus on manufacturing jobs, and has worked with LPED to restart the Manufacturing Certificate class.

Clayton Naff, Lincoln Literacy’s Executive Director, said, “Even before the pandemic, many young families in Lincoln were mired in poverty, not because parents weren’t working but because they lacked the skills to qualify for good-paying jobs. Now, the need to close the skills gap is even more urgent. Bridgeway helps people go beyond basic language and literacy skills and on to prep classes that enable them to earn credentials, land jobs, build careers, lift their families out of poverty, and fulfill their dreams.”

This award marks WCF’s third Breakthrough Initiative Grant, which supports promising and groundbreaking programs, collaborations or organizational best practices in Lincoln’s nonprofits.
WCF adjusts work, grants for pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic that affected all aspects of life and business shut down the WCF offices in late March, with restricted activity at the office continuing through the year. The WCF Board conducted both 2020 Board meetings by Zoom, with the May meeting pictured at right. Staff members had many virtual meetings with applicants, grant recipients and those interested in applying throughout the year. In May the WCF Board voted to expand the budget for interim and emergency grants for the year in light of the economic effects of COVID-19 on Lincoln’s nonprofit community. It provided $29,000 in 2020 in grants to organizations requesting special needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic and approved up to $100,000 for similar needs in 2021.

Howell departs WCF board, Suk Wortman begins term

This year marked the end of Candice Howell’s term on the WCF Board, which began in 2015. Candice is Assistant Dean for Student Success and Persistence at Nebraska Wesleyan University. WCF awarded 338 grants totaling $9,006,700 during Candice’s six-year term. For her parting allotment in designated grants, Candice awarded $12,500 each to the Malone Community Center and the Nebraska Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Coalition.

Suk Wortman was elected at WCF’s November meeting to serve as its newest board member. Suk is Director of Direct Marketing at Arbor Day Foundation and has worked in financial tech, bio-tech and agriculture industries. She received a bachelor of arts degree from the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, and volunteers with her church’s capital campaign committee and at the Food Bank of Lincoln.

Organizations paid grants in 2020

ACLU Nebraska Foundation, Inc.
Asian Community and Cultural Center (2)
Center for Legal Immigration Assistance (2)
Civic Nebraska Community Action Partnership of Lancaster and Saunders Counties Community Crops Dimensions Educational Research Foundation Economic Empowerment Center El Centro de las Américas Girl Scouts - Spirit of Nebraska Good Neighbor Community Center (2)
HUB Central Access Point for Young Adults Legal Aid of Nebraska (2) Lincoln Community Learning Centers Lincoln/Lancaster County Habitat for Humanity Lincoln Literacy Council Lincoln Medical Education Partnership Lux Center for the Arts Malone Community Center (2)
Matt Talbot Kitchen and Outreach National Audubon Society, Inc. (Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center) Nebraska Civic Engagement Table Nebraska Cultural Endowment Nebraska Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Coalition (2) Nebraska Writers Collective Northeast Family Resource Center Omaha Performing Arts Society Outlinc Planned Parenthood of the Heartland, Inc. Rabble Mill The Set Me Free Project South of Downtown Community Development Organization Voices of Hope Lincoln Willard Community Center Corp. Yazda