



For many years, I have been integrally involved in the disability field as a parent, advocate and executive. It has fueled a life-long passion to champion the rights and opportunities of individuals with disabilities, making a tremendous impact in how I live and give back to the community. I'm very proud to be part of AWS Foundation.

The positive impact of the Foundation on improving the lives of those with intellectual and developmental disabilities continues to grow. This year, 84 grants were awarded totaling nearly \$3.3 million. We worked to build our grant-making activities and to play an even greater role with building a more inclusive community. This would not have been possible without the true dedication and hard work of our board of directors and small, but highly skilled staff. I genuinely and deeply thank them for their exceptional work over the past year and their willingness to step up to answer the call to action.

This report to the community highlights just a few of the wonderful grants made in each of our five priority initiatives. It illustrates how select grantees used Foundation funding to enhance the lives of those with disabilities. They achieved success in a wide variety of ways – from expanding family activities and social programs, to providing support for early diagnosis, new educational tools and job readiness opportunities.

After completing 10 years of service, Andy Brooks departed the board this year and received our gratitude for his leadership. We welcomed Dan Skekloff, Larry Adelman, Sherri Miller and Tim Dirig to the board, and look forward to their energy and insight in discovering new ways to fulfill our mission and achieve our vision.

This year kicked off the AWS Foundation's 10th anniversary. As we celebrate the progress our grantees continue to make through our grant-making activities, we look forward to new collaborations during the coming year that will bring people of all abilities closer to complete inclusion in all aspects of community life.



Tom O'Neill and Patti Hays

Tom O'Neill
Chairman, AWS Foundation

Patti Hays
CEO, AWS Foundation

Have you ever traveled to where everyone spoke an unfamiliar language? Or maybe it was all so new and you felt uncertain which train or bus would get you to your destination. Maybe ordering food was a challenge. You were outside of your comfort zone and the temptation might have been to hang back. The hotel room felt safer... more protected. Now, think what minimized that anxiety and discomfort. A friendly face? Encouraging words or a welcome invitation from a local? One positive experience might have been the reassurance needed to take another risk or try something new.

As we finish our ninth year of operation, we are confident that the more than \$3M in awarded grants has helped provide for that bit of guidance, patience, support and access. Whether devoted to education and employment, transportation, social enrichment or any of our other initiatives, those dollars helped dozens of organizations reach throughout the northeast Indiana community, and invite people with disabilities to more actively live their lives and experience the abundant resources of this region.

This community report profiles just a few of the many grants made by AWS Foundation this year. Some dollars funded groups helping to lead individuals a little closer to a new job. Some enabled a community site or activity to be truly welcoming to everyone. They all helped open a door, provide a word of encouragement or move that seemingly out of reach goal just a little bit closer. We are proud to help provide that community access to help those with disabilities GO. DO. BE. FREE to enjoy life's great wonders.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Back Row (left to right)
Dick Teets, Dan Skekloff, Todd Jacobs, Don Steinger,
Joe Doust, Mike Cahill, Robert Stone, Tim Dirig

Front Row (left to right)
Chris Cathcart, Sherri Miller, Tom O'Neill,
Tracie Martin, Larry Adelman

The world is ours for the discovering.
There is so much to do and see in our
diverse, dynamic community alone.
Physical boundaries and intellectual barriers
are merely a state of mind for the majority
of us – but for people with disabilities,

Go. Do. Be. Free.

they are all too real, and often,
unnecessarily restrictive. By exploring
alternative programs and expanding
opportunities, AWS Foundation aims to
redefine “our world” so that it is universally
inclusive for all people of all abilities.



GO

Helping a person with disabilities reach outside their comfort zone and beyond their usual routine can have a dramatic influence on their lifestyle. If we can broaden boundaries through adaptive, readily accessible transportation, we can empower and enrich lives.

DOOR-TO-DOOR BUS SERVICE IS A MOBILITY GAME CHANGER.

The demand is growing for direct transportation for the disability community — whether it's a need to get to and from a job every day, a medical appointment or social function across town. In 2017, Citilink Public Transit anticipates 58,000 passenger trips with an additional 22,000 free, fixed route trips for Access eligible riders.



While the \$2.50 fare for Access service is twice the fixed route bus fare, the average cost to provide the service is \$27 per trip. Access service is expensive and simply isn't a sustainable option without financial support. That's where AWS Foundation steps in.

Through a grant that helps fund this specialized bus service, the Access service is able to meet the growing demand and exceed the federal public transportation requirements.

Despite a nationwide decline in public funding for transportation, AWS Foundation believes transportation is a critical component to supporting

inclusion. Citilink's commitment to provide access and mobility for members of the disability community echoes the Foundation's mission to help individuals live as independently as possible.

“I appreciate my bus driver who takes me to work every day.”

—Torri Woodward, Citilink Access rider





SPECIAL ABILITIES DAYS ENHANCE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE FOR ALL.

Developed by Science Central, The Special Abilities Day series has been a success story since its inception. A groundbreaking initiative, Special Abilities Day was launched in 2014 as an opportunity for people with alternative learning styles to experience the wonders of science in a supportive, sensory-friendly, interactive and hands-on environment.

With a shared passion for fostering inclusion, Science Central has made modifications to traditional programming to welcome everyone – quiet rooms, adjusted light and sound, plus special activities designed to stimulate sensory pathways. Special Abilities Days not only allow Science Central

Being an active participant in the community is not always a guarantee for individuals with disabilities. Along with our community partners, AWS Foundation works to inspire a sense of belonging and empowerment through inclusive social, recreational and arts programs for all.

to provide valuable professional development, sparking a broader dialogue among its staff, it has also set an example for teaching centers everywhere. In the enlightened words of the museum's Education Director Jenny Young, "Strangers interact and differences dissolve."



"Strangers interact and differences dissolve."

— Jenny Young, Science Central Education Director



DIFFERENCES CREATE BEAUTIFUL HARMONY AND BOUNTIFUL GOOD WILL.

The voice of inclusion echoes throughout Huntington County thanks to the beautiful harmonies of the Joyful Songsters. An all-are-welcome, all-ages choir recently formed within the Children's Choir of Huntington County, the Songsters are a diverse, talented group.

Magnified sheet music, song selection, and the demands of rehearsing and performing are adapted to vocalists' needs. The Joyful Songsters' operating costs are funded through a partnership with AWS Foundation.

With three formal concerts and numerous "sing-outs" in the community, the Songsters regularly perform in area churches, but also appear in larger venues such

as the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum where they sang the National Anthem at a Mad Ants' game. Though community support has been extraordinary, the true purpose of the choir is to uplift anyone who might benefit from an expression of joy. According to Choir Director Denise Gilliland, "The singers have formed a community of love and respect for one another, and for what they do." In the words of one grateful choir member, "I get to make a difference in someone's life." Their status as ambassadors for the disability community is undeniable.



ABLE

The pursuit of personal interests and passions can lead to great reward and a lifelong desire to learn. With our community partners by our side, we're making significant strides in developing vocational education and employment opportunities that will benefit many.

AUTHENTIC COLLEGE EXPERIENCE BUILDS SKILLS FOR LIFE.

We all want to feel like we're connected and valued for our achievements. The ABLE Program (Achieving Balance in Life through Education) gives high school students with cognitive disabilities a college campus experience when they're ready to begin transitioning to post secondary education and independent living.

Developed by Huntington University, the program was given a boost by AWS Foundation after initial seed funding expired. The grant has helped fund a full time coordinator to grow and sustain the program, along with paid peer mentors who assist students with auditing classes, completing assignments and making social connections. Today, ABLE is thriving with seven students currently enrolled and a goal to double enrollment by Fall 2018.

Students are on campus throughout the day attending classes, participating in extracurricular activities and cultivating new friendships. Learning to make personal choices, set goals and try new things builds their confidence and desire to pursue more than they ever thought possible, which includes going to college, getting a job and living independently. Program Coordinator Erica Marshall echoes the sentiment, "We have found that when we raise our expectations, the ABLE students rise to the occasion."



EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT



BE ANYTHING

BE WHOEVER YOU WISH TO BE.



“When I think about integration, I think about discovery and exploration.”

— Jim Allbaugh, President & CEO, Carey Services

EXPLORATION AND DISCOVERY GUIDE ARTISTIC AMBITION.

More than just developing artistic expression, the Creative Abundance Program develops skills and communication through the creation of art. Carey Services of Marion recognized a need to shift from the traditional sheltered workshop model to a program fostering more choices in meaningful daytime activities.

With funding from AWS Foundation, they've not only nurtured a new group of artists, but an enthusiastic audience of art buyers. Participating artists sell their work at The Creative Hearts Studio in downtown Marion, at the Open Air Market, First Friday festivals and other retail outlets.

There is reward for those with loftier artistic ambitions — some have become commercially successful while learning new and different life skills. In addition to the satisfaction of a project well done, there is greater job satisfaction among the direct support staff who received a two-week training residency funded by AWS Foundation. Truly a win-win that holds abundant promise.



MINOR MODIFICATIONS HAVE A MAJOR IMPACT IN THE CLASSROOM.

The Sensory Lending Library at Adams Central Elementary has already made a noticeable difference for students with sensory issues. Students are benefiting from an array of therapeutic items that help support and manage their sensory needs, and lead to improved classroom learning.

Thanks to a Mighty Money grant by AWS Foundation, the school purchased 80 unique items available to teachers organized in a library type setting, which includes weighted lap pads, ball seats, and hand and feet fidgets. Tools such as scented pencils, dot daubers and slant boards are available to help complete tasks, and items like the trampoline and spin disc offer sensory input and output after a task is completed.



According to Nicole Pett, intense interventions teacher, the Sensory Library has been an enormous source of support in the classroom. “The feedback has been great. Almost every teacher has said they were able to find something that benefited the student.” Given this early success, program expansion is already in the works.



ACHIEVEMENT ENHANCED FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.

Acquiring best learning practices alongside peers in a general education classroom is a winning scenario for students with disabilities at Northern Wells' Lancaster Central Elementary School.

Led by special education teacher Kathi Runyon and with an AWS Foundation grant, the school was able to invest in and implement sensory tools designed to be embedded in the curriculum of 10 general education classrooms, as well as alternate academic materials, to generalize communication skills.

When learners attended general education classes this past school year, teachers witnessed tangible results on a daily basis. Interestingly, the progress was not exclusive to the students with disabilities. Classroom wide improvements such as

academic achievement and a greater sense of community were reported. For students with disabilities, task completion time and skill acquisition has improved.

By following the same routines and employing adapted approaches to tackle the same assignments, the 17 students who participated in the program have experienced the rewards of classroom collaboration and their hard work.

“A student with very limited verbal speech was able to give presentations alongside his whole class thanks to a voice-assistive communication app.”

— Kathi Runyon, Special Education Teacher

FREE

There is a feeling of freedom that comes with caring for your own needs. With the right modifications in place in a home, a person living with a disability is able to live more independently. For the caregiver, these accommodations lend peace of mind. For the individual ready for independence, it means a boost in confidence in many areas of life.

WELCOME RELIEF FOR VULNERABLE HOMEOWNERS.

What would the future look like if all homeowners had the support they needed to maintain healthy households? If neighbors were connected in positive and practical ways so that whole communities functioned better? With the help of operational funding from AWS Foundation, NeighborLink Fort Wayne continues to connect those equipped with skills and readiness with those at risk of diminished health, isolation and quality of life.

In 2016 alone, NeighborLink mobilized 1,200 volunteers and completed 700 projects. From roof repairs to wheelchair ramp installations, every project type is considered. Even with the wealth of resources poured into the

program, there are still no guarantees that a homeowner's request will be fulfilled. The good news is, the love of our community is present and the desire to help is always there. With greater awareness and access to volunteer opportunities, more neighbors will meet and more needs will be met.



HOUSING
FREE AS I FEEL.
FREE TO FEEL AND BE INDEPENDENT.
AWS FOUNDATION

“Within weeks, NeighborLink had volunteers out here building our wheelchair ramp.”

Kaitlynn Weimer, NeighborLink Client



Go. Do. Be. Free.

Early recognition and readily available access to accurate information and trusted resources is crucial to the discovery process in properly diagnosing physical, behavioral and intellectual differences. For families and caregivers facing potentially complex conditions, the peace of mind that comes from having a support system in place is invaluable.

CRITICAL EARLY DIAGNOSTICS ASSIST AT-RISK MOMS.

For more than two decades, Healthier Moms and Babies has provided prenatal and postnatal care to women at risk of health complications due to lack of access or awareness. The nonprofit was born to help reduce the infant mortality rate in Allen County, one of the state's highest despite our abundant medical resources.

Since health risks don't stop at birth, Healthier Moms and Babies is committed to assisting new mothers with postnatal care to ensure a healthy start. In addition to case managers supervising nutritional needs and medication regimens, they also make home visits to administer the Ages and Stages infant diagnostic assessment. This is an important screening test that detects developmental delays in children and gauges their progress to determine meaningful next steps at a time in a child's life when diagnosis can have the greatest impact.

"Without AWS Foundation, we wouldn't help as many women as we do," said Director Paige Wilkins who works with a team of four case managers supported through an AWS Foundation grant. "We are able to fully staff four case workers, reach 343 pregnant women and babies plus provide assistance where needed." Clients benefit from prenatal and diet coaching through programs like folic acid education, where expectant moms are alerted to its important role in preventing birth defects and given access to essential prenatal vitamins. "When we empower a woman to stay healthy throughout her pregnancy and in the early postnatal months, we have helped her to become the best mom she can be."

"We have helped her to become the best mom she can be."

—Paige Wilkins, Director, Healthier Moms and Babies



DIVERSITY CELEBRATED AT 8TH ANNUAL DISABILITIES EXPO.

Celebrating differences, exploring opportunities and making connections is the name of the game at the disABILITIES Expo, held each May at the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum. This year's event, featuring 114 exhibitors and a wealth of free activities and entertainment, was a smashing success.

As the presenting sponsor, AWS Foundation is proud to provide financial support for this valuable one-stop resource designed to help individuals of all ages and abilities, and those who play an interactive role.



We owe a debt of gratitude to the individuals and organizations that participate each year and show their commitment to improving overall health and quality of life for thousands.

"While we all approach a task or situation in our own unique ways, we are undeniably more alike than different," said Vicki Lee Johnson, Event Chair, who recommends the Expo as a wonderful day of fun, sharing and learning about the many resources the community has to offer.



FREE CHILD SAFETY KITS GRANT INVALUABLE PEACE OF MIND.

Many parents have experienced firsthand the frightening scenario of a child wandering off— but for a child with disabilities, it can have far more serious implications. AWS Foundation has responded to this all-too-frequent emergency situation with a Special Needs Safety Kit designed to safeguard children with intellectual or developmental disabilities.



In cooperation with the Fort Wayne Fire Department, free Safety Kits have been distributed to all 19 neighborhood Fire Stations, and are available to interested parents and caregivers between the hours of 8am to 8pm. In addition, fire stations in surrounding counties have joined in support of and expressed interest in getting involved with the Safety Kit Program. Fort Wayne Fire Chief Eric Lahey expressed hope that “by distributing Safety Kits, children with special needs will have positive interactions with firefighters and think of them as friends they can go to.”

Not only is the kit designed to protect children and extend peace of mind to caregivers; it supports other AWS Foundation initiatives, namely education and employment. It gives older kids with disabilities the opportunity to immerse themselves in a project that leverages their unique skill sets and prepares them for employment after graduation.

Scherer Resources, an AWS Foundation grantee and provider of specialized vocational training, hired Fort Wayne Community Schools special education students to assemble the kits. Mike Paff, Scherer Resources' founder cites an overall positive experience for the high schoolers. “They earned wages and practiced soft vocational skills such as teamwork, problem-solving and accountability.” Mayor Tom Henry called the Safety Kit program “a win-win” for the entire community.

Other beneficial uses for the kit include protection from bullying and seclusion, as well as safety prevention methods at school and in the home. With positive feedback and a steady demand coming from the community, AWS Foundation is putting plans in place to continue their availability and to expand distribution to more northeast Indiana communities.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

AWS Foundation strives to make a measurable financial impact across our five key initiatives and throughout our community. Without the remarkable efforts of our various Grantees, we would not be able to fulfill our purpose to reach and enhance more lives. We are pleased to report an exceptional year of giving to 75 deserving area organizations.

General Grants

Total Grants Awarded: **68**

Total Gift Amount: **\$3,255,799**

Mighty Money

Total Grants Awarded: **16**

Total Gift Amount: **\$34,928**

Combined Total:

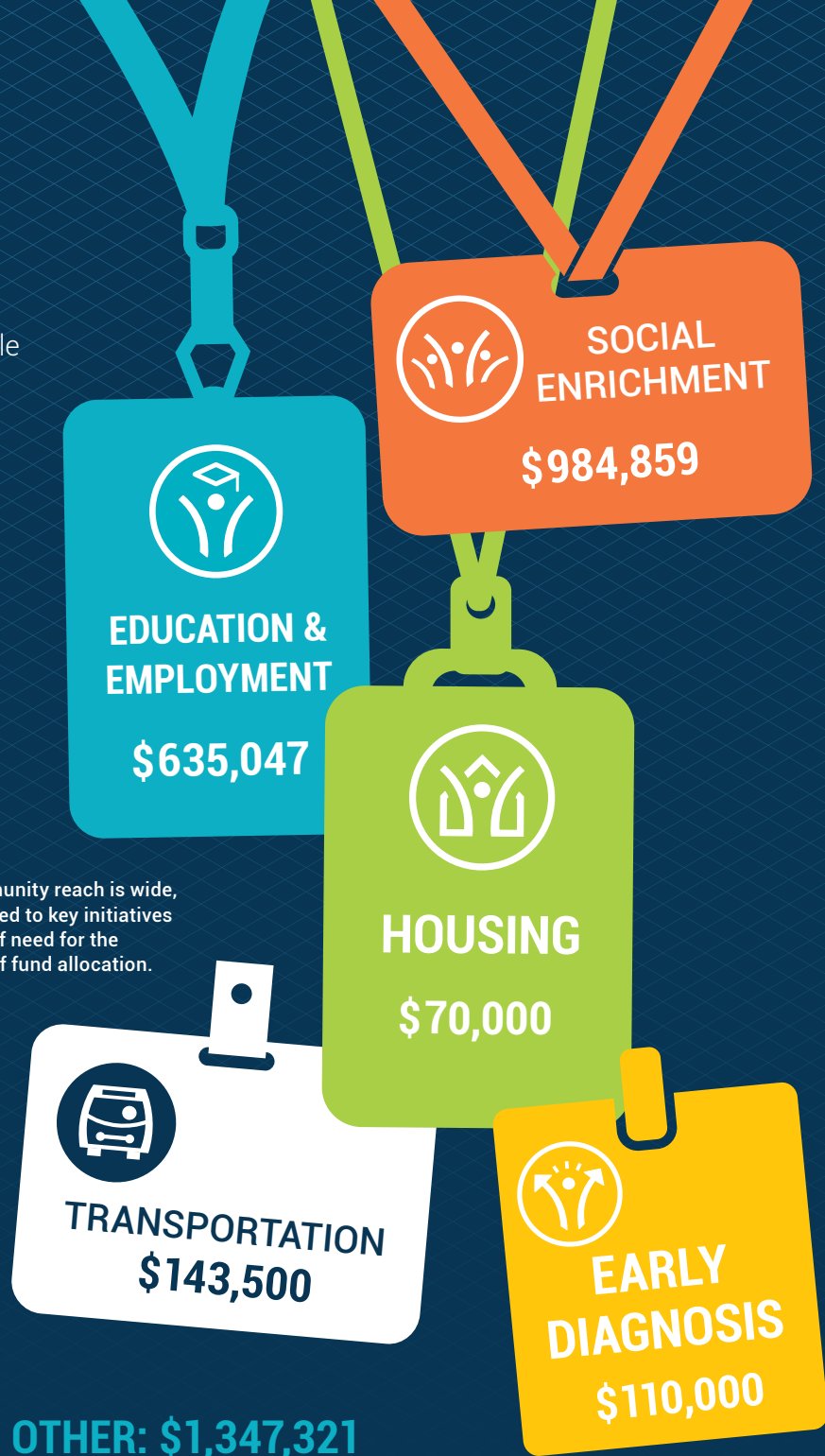
Total Grants Awarded:

84

Total Gift Amount:

\$3,290,727

Our community reach is wide, but targeted to key initiatives or areas of need for the purpose of fund allocation.



2016-2017 GRANTEES

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Adams Central Elementary School | Fort Wayne Youtheatre | Scherer Resources |
| Ancilla College | Friends of the Rivers | Science Central |
| Autism Society of Indiana | GiGi's Playhouse | Shepherd's House |
| Big Brothers Big Sisters | Glorious Gate Rowing | South Adams Schools |
| Bowen Center | Greater Fort Wayne, Inc. | SPEAK MODalities |
| Camp Millhouse | Healthier Moms and Babies | Special Olympics Indiana |
| Camp PossAbility | HearCare Connection | St. Aloysius Catholic School |
| Camp Red Cedar | Heartland Sings | St. Vincent DePaul Society of Fort Wayne |
| Canine Companions | Huntington University | TekVenture |
| Carey Services | Indiana Institute on Disability and Community | The ARC Noble County Foundations |
| Caring About People | Indian Springs Middle School | The Life Enrichment Center |
| Children's Choir of Huntington County | Indiana Deaf Camp Foundation | Turnstone |
| Churubusco Youth Foundation | Indiana Legal Services | United Way of Wells County |
| Citilink Access | IPFW | University of Saint Francis |
| CORE, The Resource Store | Joe's Kids Inc | Visually Impaired Preschool Services |
| Covington Elementary School | Junior Achievement | Volunteer Lawyer Program |
| Community Transportation Network | Life Adult Day Academy | Wellspring |
| East Allen County Schools | McMillen Center for Health | Whitley County Consolidated Schools |
| Easterseals ARC of Northeast Indiana | Mental Health America | Woodside Middle School |
| Embassy Theatre | NeighborLink | YMCA of DeKalb County |
| Fairfield Elementary School | Northeast Indiana Genetic Counseling Center | YMCA of Kosciusko County |
| First Presbyterian Church | Northern Wells Community Schools | Youth Opportunity Center |
| Fort Wayne Children's Choir | Passages | YWCA |
| Fort Wayne Civic Theatre | Pathfinder Services | |
| Fort Wayne Dance Collective | Rise, Inc | |
| Fort Wayne Museum of Art | RSVP of Allen County | |



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Think
differently
about
disabilities.

AWSFOUNDATION.ORG