

Grants total nearly \$150,000

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Mark Koch doesn't talk much anymore. But when he reached to grasp his sister's hand Thursday, his affection was plain to see.

Koch has a progressive form of multiple sclerosis that causes brain lesions and interferes with speech.

His sister, Michelle Musumeci, took him into her family's home in Akron last summer.

Help from United Disabilities Services is making it possible for her to care for Koch there and to find ways to improve his quality of life.

Last week, the Lancaster County Community Foundation offered a helping hand to such efforts by awarding UDS a \$20,000 competitive grant.

UDS was one of six social service and arts organizations to receive a total of \$149,972 in funding during the first round of a three-cycle grant series to benefit local nonprofits.

Proposal deadlines for the next two cycles are July 30 and Sept. 24.

The foundation's annual competitive grants program was divided into three parts this year to give nonprofits more flexibility in their missions, said Samuel Bressi, president and chief executive.

"It's real money for these organizations," the people they assist and the community they're striving to build, Bressi added.

The foundation, which oversees a group of about 100 community volunteers to decide how to disperse the grants, has yet to award about \$600,000 in 2010.

On average, Bressi said, one out of every 10 applicants receives funding. Organizations pursuing collaborative goals are of special interest to the foundation, Bressi said, but "it's very difficult to choose."

Also receiving first-round grants are Water Street Ministries, SouthEast Lancaster Health Services, Lancaster County Conservancy, Friendship Community and Gretna Music.

Funding amounts and goals (listed below) vary according to the organizations' goals.

The \$75,000 Lancaster County Conservancy challenge grant was the largest. It will be used to help create and oversee the new 873-acre Welsh Mountain Nature Preserve near New Holland, said Kathie Shirk Gonick, director of land protection.

The conservancy's third and final land acquisition of 404 acres from the New Holland Water Authority is expected to take place by the end of this year, Gonick said. The preserve, to be opened to the public, will protect the headwaters of Mill Creek and will be connected to Money Rocks State Park.



“We still have a long way to go but this is making a wonderful, wonderful dent in this,” Gonick added. “We’re so thrilled” to be a recipient.

Musumeci and Cindy Davidson, the UDS spokeswoman, were pretty happy themselves last week.

Aid for the disabled and their caregivers comes from a confusing patchwork of state, local and county agencies, Davidson said. The foundation grant will assist UDS and its clients in connecting the dots.

“The need is growing exponentially as the population ages” and government support diminishes, Davidson said.

But infirmities don’t just afflict the elderly.

Mark Koch is a testament to that, at 36.

He was a carpenter and electrician before he got sick three years ago. Now, his sister said, he’d just like to feed himself again.

“He’s been pretty much bedridden for the past two months,” said Musumeci, who paused occasionally to push Koch’s glasses back from the tip of his nose.

Koch, who suffers from silent seizures, dementia and depression, also shares the house with Musumeci’s husband and daughter, who gave up her bedroom for her uncle.

UDS furnishes a service coordinator for the family, Kelsey Woerner. The organization handles the paperwork involved in Koch’s care. It also helped Musumeci secure a bed and, on Wednesday, a special chair that enables her brother to recline without losing his balance.

Contractors who work for the organization are finishing a remodeling job that will make the bathroom and bathtub handicapped accessible.

“We know he’s not going to be able to walk again,” Musumeci said, but “we’re trying to build his muscle tone back up and strengthen him.

“We thank God for UDS, don’t we?” she asked her brother.

“Yes,” he said.

Competitive grants awarded May 20 were dispersed under four foundation initiatives: the Capacity Building Fund, Lancaster Environmental Fund, Florence Starr Taylor Fund for the Visual Arts and the Endowment Matching Program.

Water Street Ministries will apply its \$14,972 grant toward its Connecting Through Language Project. The project provides Spanish language training to staff working with the county’s Latino population.

SouthEast Lancaster Health Services is being awarded \$20,000 for its effort to create a grant writing office in collaboration with four other nonprofits.

The Friendship Community has received \$10,000 for its heART of Friendship visual arts program to help artists with developmental disabilities learn how to express themselves and market their work.

Gretna Music will use its \$10,000 grant to establish an endowment.