

Back in 2000, Justice Max Baer (at the time, Administrative Judge of Family Court) observed that many of the families being served by the Department of Human Services and the Juvenile Section of the Family Division of the Court of Common Pleas had needs that were not met by any available government funding stream.

That led to the establishment of the Allegheny County Music Festival Fund (ACMFF). The fund creates a resource that pays for life-enriching opportunities and items that are not otherwise available through traditional government funding. Money for the fund comes from the generosity of county residents, and is disseminated by an advisory committee consisting of professionals from the public and private sectors of child welfare, juvenile justice, human services and the courts.

The ACMFF holds two fundraisers each year which have raised more than half a million dollars to date. It has been used to pay for a variety of items, from classes to camp fees to transportation assistance, and enriched the lives of more than two thousand deserving young people.

This resource has not gone unnoticed. In 2012, it was selected as a Bright Idea by the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the Harvard Kennedy School.

Read on for just a few examples of how a small gift from the ACMFF made a big difference in someone's life.

Marc Cherna
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DHS MAKING AN IMPACT



**Allegheny County
Music Festival Fund**



Daniel

Daniel doesn't like to ask for special treatment. His determination to succeed is obvious. At 20 years of age, he rarely looks back at his six years in the Allegheny County foster care system.

Daniel spent two years at a local Penn State University branch, where the campus was small and his housing was close to classroom buildings. But after getting an

off-campus place in State College, he decided to finally reach out when JoAnn Hannah, Manager of the DHS Independent Living Unit, asked, "Do you need anything?" He admitted that seeing other students riding bikes around campus made him think having a bike could "solve a lot of my problems."

He had every confidence that his need would be met.

Daniel continued:

“JoAnn’s amazing, so I knew as soon as we hung up the phone that she would get on the task of getting a bike.”

JoAnn prepared a request for a bike from the Allegheny County Music Festival Fund. It wasn’t long before Daniel was the proud owner of a black, Jamis 2012 Trailmaker mountain bike. “It’s definitely made a difference,” he says. “I ride it between my home and campus, to see my friends and to work. It’s easier for me to be on time now. And, my feet don’t hurt as much. I’m thankful that the music fund got it for me and that Miss JoAnn helped out.”

Mandy

Mandy was born and raised in Pittsburgh and spent much of her 19 years receiving services through the child welfare system. Upon graduation from high school, and with the assistance of the DHS Independent Living Unit, she enrolled as a business major at the University of Pittsburgh and was accepted at the Johnstown campus. On a whim one night, she attended an on-campus seminar about studying abroad.

She and her roommate considered it “sort of a joke at first. But the more we looked into it, the more excited we got at the idea of going somewhere totally new and different. We did a lot of research about all the different programs and finally decided that the one in Australia was for us.” Mandy and her roommate spent months in preparation. One of the hurdles they encountered was obtaining student visas. Mandy took her concerns to her caseworker and was delighted to hear about the Allegheny County Music Festival Fund, which helped to provide for the visa.

“It was going to be really expensive. I am so happy and appreciative that the fund was available to pay for it,” she says excitedly. “I’m nervous about being away from my family, and being on my own. I’m excited to see how I do when I can only depend on myself.”



Deb

Deb came to the Human Services Building to explore available services, and was connected with a member of the Link staff. Her fears for the future of her son, Tyler, were chief among her concerns. As she explained, he had been “out there in an area with bad kids.” She wanted him to be able to take a different path by engaging in after-school activities that interested him. But, return transportation was an issue. The Link specialist suggested that they submit a request to the Allegheny County Music Festival Fund for funding monthly bus passes. Tyler’s case was compelling. He received funding that year and two additional years. Deb says she is “really glad that they have the Music Festival Fund. Because of it, Tyler was able to stay active in positive things.”

When transit budget shortfalls cut routes and service from the Port Authority’s schedule, Tyler tapped into the fund once again with a request for driver’s education classes.

He took lessons at a local non-profit and looks forward to passing his drivers’ license test. “I’ll have to get a job to pay for the car and expenses, but it will be worth it to have more freedom.”



To learn more about the ACMFF, please visit www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/acmff.aspx.