

# Community Organizations

[00:00:00] **Jason Hibbs:** From producing videos with police, intense training in the gym, feeding families with taco nights, and a lot of other creative ideas in between, nearly 20 Lucas County non profit groups received grants ranging from 5, 200 to just under 30, 000 in one case. And the goal is community engagement to reduce racial and ethnic disparities.

It's part of Strategy six in the Lucas County Safety and Justice Challenge where \$300,000 were spread between community groups that applied for and were granted a piece of the MacArthur pie. In this episode, we're going to look at what some of those groups are doing, how this money was spent, and if you find yourself questioning, admittedly like I did, is this how they're really supposed to spend this money stick around.

Because at the end, I have a representative from the MacArthur Foundation with an answer that might surprise you. Welcome back to the Rethinking Jails and Justice podcast, produced by WGTE Public Media and made possible by support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge, which seeks to reduce over incarceration, Thank you by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails.

I'm your host, Jason Hibbs. And I appreciate you for listening to the Rethinking Jails and Justice podcast, especially if you've listened to every episode thus far. Maybe you live in Toledo, Lucas County, or the greater region. Maybe you're another MacArthur community curious about how the money was spent here.

Or you're just interested in this very important topic of criminal justice reform. There are a lot of podcasts out there and we thank you for listening to this one. And in fact, Another podcast was just added to the scene, thanks in part to the MacArthur Community Engagement Initiative.

[00:01:52] **The Tune Podcast:** Welcome to the Tune, the Urban Narrative Experience, where we bridge the gap between community and grassroots organizations that promote peace, environmental, social, and economic justice.

[00:02:03] **Jason Hibbs:** That is the official podcast of the Junction Coalition. Their CEO is Alicia Smith.

[00:02:10] **Alicia Smith:** That Junction was developed as part of our business district. That's why it's called the Junction. And a coalition is a group of people

from all over coming together. It's not just about Junction. It's about a better quality of life.

It's part of our mission. And our vision is to actually see people hold it, do it, be it. The change.

[00:02:34] **Jason Hibbs:** Smith says she's a former educator with a passion for empowering people to do the hard work. And sometimes that's simply facing and sharing their own story, which can help inspire others.

[00:02:47] **Alicia Smith:** The one thing that I continue to stand on as an educator, kindergarten teacher, to principal, to a professor at the university, the one thing that I continue to stand on is you can't tell people what they haven't touched, seen, or experienced.

And you can't do for folks if you've never heard their voice. So with that being said, the MacArthur Grant was able to provide us an opportunity to create something what we call the TUNE. The Urban Narrative Expression. No one can tell you your narrative. We need to shut up and listen. So that people can actually tell you, how did I get this way?

What was my first experience as a kindergartner being suspended and then being found isolated and stigmatized? Those are the things that we want to hear for the parents who were pushed out. They didn't drop out. They were pushed out of schools. They were pushed into the juvenile system. Into the court systems, into the criminal justice systems.

And many times those stories are never told because those individuals are so harmed and traumatized. They don't feel like they have a voice. Junction took that money and gave them a voice via the podcast, the tune.

[00:04:00] **Jason Hibbs:** With more than 20 episodes already produced, Smith says the series not only gives community guests a voice, but helps empowered listeners by telling them, for example, how to get records expunged for the ability to legally drive.

What drivers should expect when they're stopped by a cop, and how to start a career in the labor unions.

[00:04:21] **Alicia Smith:** That's what creating something should do. It should create opportunities. Because everybody wants to talk about problems. We want to talk about opportunity.

[00:04:30] **Jason Hibbs:** Now, there is so much more that the Junction does.

They have four pillars. Economic justice, environmental justice, social justice, and peace education. And in fact, all of that All of the organizations that we are going to talk about today do so many more things that we just don't have time to talk about. Remember, the purpose of today's episode is an overview of how the MacArthur Community Funds were spent.

At the junction, there was an emphasis on communication, and this next group is also creating community funds.

Hoping to create a training tool for law enforcement and to help with officer recruitment and retention, Anita Mason, the president of the Toledo Lucas County African American Police League, says her group has invested in video production equipment as they work on an oral history project involving interviews with four generations of black police officers.

The purpose, to highlight their experiences and perspectives. And she believes that highlighting black voices within the law enforcement community will help increase understanding and help officers of color feel seen and hopefully stay on the force.

[00:05:42] **Fonda Royster:** Open Arms is a non profit that was established because of the increased numbers of homelessness, specifically for ages 16 to 20.

[00:05:51] **Jason Hibbs:** You may remember Fonda Royster, the formerly homeless youth turned juvenile court domestic violence specialist and founder of Open Arms Transformational Living, what she describes as the homeless helping homeless kids, as she has a home now, but her non profit doesn't.

[00:06:09] **Fonda Royster:** I started off in the park, feeding the homeless out of my pocket.

I still have four kids

[00:06:19] **Jason Hibbs:** She says her community engagement grant dollars were spent on basic necessities for kids in dire need.

[00:06:32] **Fonda Royster:** It's not just the homeless kids, it's marginalized youths. Let me break that down a little further. We've had kids in the school

where they come in with literally lingerie and it's did your mama see you with that on? And they're like, Ms. Fonda, my mama picked it out.

Baby, you ain't about to wear that today. That's a scenario that we deal with. Also, we have kids that are experiencing intermittent homelessness where they're borrowing different people's clothes where they Never had they haven't had their own in a while and you can tell cause if they're a size two and they're wearing clothes that can fit me or and again, it's that food piece, right?

Because if you hungry, I don't ask parent permission or a caregiver's permission or a teacher's permission to feed a child. You call me a relative called, listen, I get a lot of calls from family members. Hey, my little sister, she's in this situation and she's hungry. That's how we're there at.

[00:07:26] **Jason Hibbs:** She means that literally and says she often drives out to meet kids and young adults wherever they are and that many of them are in vulnerable places because they're hungry, homeless, and often exploited.

[00:07:39] **Fonda Royster:** We'll stock you up with enough food. to help you get straight. We helped to make sure the kids are in a safe space because we don't have housing for our kids that's under 18. They can go to safety net. Unfortunately for our kids that's over 18, even if they're in still in school, they can't go to safety net.

They have to go to the adult shelters.

[00:08:03] **Jason Hibbs:** Another group is using food to bring people into evening programming to help improve their lives. The BELIEVE Center promotes, supervises, and funds youth sports education and activities, and collaborates with agencies to provide comprehensive services to youth and families, help young people develop their talents, and encourage them to become future community leaders.

The Believe Center's Dr. Vincent Riccardi says the MacArthur grant money helped pay for Midnight Run events, which is an evening program where youth and young adults play basketball and engage in other productive team building activities to keep them off the streets. He says the grant also paid for special themed taco nights, which brought in large crowds.

This next group was founded in 1919 and inspired by the dire need for social and recreational opportunities for African American youth of Toledo. The Frederick Douglass Community Association is one of the oldest black

organizations around. A spokesperson says they offer youth recreational activities and summer programming, distribute food in an after school and summer program, and organize various community events.

They say the MacArthur Grant money was used specifically for Bridges Out of Poverty Programming, weekly classes aimed at helping people better engage in civic life and improve their quality of life by understanding the so called mental models of poverty, wealth, and income. The impacts of individual behavior, community conditions, exploitation, and politics.

They say many of the participants are homeless and shelter residents who are trying to make a better life. And many do, in some cases, by gaining employment, housing, and reuniting with their kids. These successes are celebrated at a graduation ceremony every year. and a banquet when the program concludes, you may also remember Tremaine Rayford.

[00:10:06] **Tramain Rayford:** Yeah, so I grew up in the Toledo, Ohio area. I played sports. I was a musician, lived with my mom and my two other brothers. My father was not around. I recall seeing my dad probably three or three or four times before the age of 18 or 17, I should say. And when I saw him, I was waking up out of a coma.

I have been in a coma for 2. 5 weeks, and it was because I was on drugs and I fell off the balcony at a party. And thank God I got out of the coma. But he was like the third or fourth face that I saw. And I barely, I knew who he was, but I barely recognized him. I was like, I think that's, yeah that's my dad.

[00:10:50] **Jason Hibbs:** Rayford says he woke up from that coma in more ways than one and convinced his stepdad to teach him the things that fathers should. Rayford went on to marry. and felt compelled to help kids who had complicated relationships or no relationship with their father.

[00:11:07] **Tramain Rayford:** I just recall all of the things that I needed when I was in my youth.

I started working with our church and the boys in our church, and I recall what I needed when I was a young man. And working with these young boys, I discovered that all of them, didn't have fathers in their lives. It's probably the number one societal ill that we face in our community.

So I decided to do something, I decided to start an organization geared towards fatherless young men, teaching them valuable yet practical life skills. and social skills to deal effectively with the demands of everyday life.

[00:11:45] **Jason Hibbs:** It's called the program Inc. And its mission is to quote, provide an opportunity for boys to develop their social and life skills, leading them to deal effectively with the demands of everyday life.

[00:11:57] **Tramain Rayford:** So through the MacArthur grant and some other grants as well with the dodgeball and economics Event all of our kids got brand new shirts And you have to put yourself in a position of some of these kids, right? When they go to some of these events, they don't want to be there. Mom is like you're going right?

They like man. I would stay at home play video games. It's Saturday morning I don't want to be up like so they get I think we had, I forget what kind of food we had. We had great food. We had a brand new t shirts that they all, everybody got. We gave out, what did we give out? Everybody got their own little water bottle programming, water bottle.

They. Got wristbands. We just lavish our kids in gifts every time they come. And I think that's why they keep going. It's I need a new water bottle, Mr. Rayford, but we just laugh some gifts and the way that we love on them. It's just, it's crazy. But we also gave away a 500 we gave away a PS five, raffled off PS five.

Gift cards and we gave away 500. It was a 500 check. Someone else named Dustin Dale from beyond the horizon consultant. He came in and said, I'm going to match your 500 gift. And we are going to, the stipulation is they have to open up a CD so they can get 500 right now. To spend. We talked to them about investing.

We talked to them about saving. We talked to them about budgeting everything about money. We talked to 'em about now you have \$500 to work with and then his \$500 is you have an open up a CD and watch your money grow. So that was one of the events. The other event was the Thai event. The Thai event was sponsored by MacArthur Grant.

They got a brand new tie.

[00:13:49] **Jason Hibbs:** Rayford says the Thai event brought in about 75 kids, while the dodgeball and economics event brought in 85. He says behind all the

fun and freebies are lessons in life and teamwork in real time that could be life changing.

[00:14:05] **Tramain Rayford:** You can't get through life without overcoming fear, resolving conflict, being patient at times.

Those are the true life skills that aren't widely discussed. And those are the skills that we, the underlying skills that we talk about through our events. So they're masquerading. We don't say, you're going to learn patience today because I'm staying at home, you know what I'm saying? But we masquerade it.

in our fun events. So

[00:14:34] **Jason Hibbs:** this next group used their grant money to race to success with two C's. Race is an acronym here. Relationships, accountability, consistency, communications and effort. And this message is geared toward kids or eaten with J. R. M. Mentoring says the MacArthur grant dollars helped pay for what is an alternative to school suspension for mostly fourth through eighth graders.

who are referred by their teachers at a handful, but it's important to note not all, but a handful of Toledo public schools. In this program, they emphasize social and emotional learning, respect and accountability, and set specific personal goals for each student. If those goals are met, they are rewarded.

And Eden pointed out this is safer than suspension, which is being sent home, because most of these kids don't have anyone to watch them during the day. Avis Files is the Director of Family and Supportive Services for Pathway Incorporated, a home relief fund emergency services program which has a mission to reduce poverty by creating pathways to self sufficiency and inspire.

[00:15:45] **Avis Files:** So with the MacArthur grant money We received the the portion of the grant that works with returning fathers. So fathers that are coming home and returning citizens who are dads, who have children 17 years of age or less. And so what we're serving them with is our Inside Out curricula, which is parenting curricula for dads.

Kind of learning how from when they were incarcerated, how do you make the transition coming home. Some of them introducing themselves to their children again. And that's what we do. And we mainly do it at the Volunteers of America, but we do also target certain zip codes.



[00:16:23] **Jason Hibbs:** Files says the MacArthur funding allowed her to reach an additional 40 men by offering the program for free while they were living in the halfway house.

[00:16:31] **Avis Files:** We go in to the VOA to do this. We go into the VOA. Yes, we are in the facility doing this. So they're not coming out. We're actually going in. The idea is to go in while they're still at the halfway house before they come out to try to get as many communities, so they get in case management. So they're not only getting the services, but they're getting case management.

We're asking them off the top. Hey, what's going on with you? You need a job, from the onset, what do you need? What are we, what's going on? And we shaped the program like that because if you put it in a box and you click a quarter and go this is what we're going to do for you. Check check.

Then you're not seeing the individual. So some people want to get their GED. Some people want to go to work right away. Some people are like, I really don't know what I want to do because I've been in and out or So This is my first time and I don't know what to do. How does this work?

First of all, we want to teach you that you gotta be a good dad. So how do we get you to understand all of these things? Who you are as a man? Do you know who we are? Because I want to tell you once again, this is who you are. What's your values?

[00:17:29] **Jason Hibbs:** While she's thankful for the grant money, she admits she's frustrated.

She wishes she had the funding to track success rates. She'd like to see more collaboration across the community and more investment in the community organizations doing the work on the ground. She once elected leaders and businesses that hire formerly incarcerated people to do more.

[00:17:52] **Avis Files:** We just got to do better.

That's just my cry. We've just got to do better. We've got, we need more money. We need more energy. We need more time. We need more resources and to be able to do the work and you've, somebody's got to study it.

[00:18:05] **Jason Hibbs:** Alan Richardson with the All In Boxing Academy says his program expanded beyond boxing to support nearby families by addressing children's needs first and then the broader community.



He says they invested in organized community sports activities, Kwanzaa events, and community service. He said they organized winter programming focusing on fitness, nutrition, and education, and ran flag football and basketball leagues for 200 K 6th grade kids, which emphasized character development. He says they also held events at Scott High School, provided meals, and organized Wednesday classes for Open Gym Nights, which features mentoring and tutoring for area kids.

He says they also collaborated with the Behavioral Health Agency for art projects and social emotional learning. Next, trying to quote, revolutionize the culture and infuse it with health and wellness, end quote, this community organization spent their grant money in a way that caught the attention of the local news.

[00:19:07] **Alexis Means:** 13 Action News reporter Alexis Means is live with the story. All new at six. Alexis, Diane, this is an organization that's focused on health and wellness and disadvantaged communities, and they're also reaching out to help former inmates growing up in central Toledo, the owner of Go Time Grind Fitness.

Deandre Gaston says he did not live in a thriving community.

[00:19:31] **Deandre Gaston:** I didn't see gyms. If it wasn't a Rinky Dink boxing gym. I didn't see even business owners in my community if they weren't, working on the black market,

[00:19:40] **Alexis Means:** he says, without the tools to create a good life, he turned to a life of crime.

[00:19:45] **Deandre Gaston:** That landed me right in the penitentiary,

[00:19:48] **Jason Hibbs:** determined to make a difference. After his release, Deandre Gaston opened the go time grind fitness center and what he described to me as quote in the center of a struggling community in quote to bring fitness. Health and Wellness there. The grant helped him launch the Hood to Health program, which helps formerly incarcerated people train and earn the certification to become a certified fitness trainer, while providing the space to bring their clients, time, and the business training to start their own careers in fitness.

To take a specific look at how much money was awarded to each non profit and when, visit our website [www.wgte.org](http://www.wgte.org) forward slash rjj. So why these non

profits? Holly Matthews, Director of the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and a member of the original grant writing team for Lucas County, says any community group could apply for the Community Engagement Grants.

These grants were intended for neighborhood based programs. The organizations that received funding met the requirements outlined in a Community Engagement Plan aimed at reducing racial and ethnic disparities. Neda Abbasi is a program officer on the criminal justice team at the MacArthur Foundation and says it isn't against the rules for a community non profit to buy a camera or podcasting equipment to further their mission, but she hopes Lucas County Commissioners collaborate with the organizations on the ground.

[00:21:31] **Nida Abbasi:** We try not to be too directive with the sites. We want them, our parameters are you're trying to reduce the populations and the racial and ethnic disparities in the jail. And of course, there's going to be more around that, that Grant funds are not meant to be used for lobbying or campaigning and things like that.

But we have, just aside from sites, like a whole lot of grantees that are researchers, technical assistance providers different strategic allies in this work that are doing really different things. And so we, Try to acknowledge that the grant recipient is going to be the person who knows like what they need the funding for.

Grant money can have different purposes. I think sometimes you want an organization to work on a specific project that furthers like what the grant giver is trying to accomplish. Other times. You are acknowledging that what they're doing is so important. And it's just keep doing what you're doing.

Here's some support. So depending on what the intention was behind Lucas County. Creating those micro grants, whether they were, I was under the impression that it was like an opportunity to do both of those. Yes, we're going to give you an acknowledgement that you're doing this really hard work and we want to support it.

But also if there's a way to it. Bring representatives from all your organizations together to help inform us in a meaningful way. That would be helpful as well. I hope that happens. I think it's still an ongoing process from what I understand.

[00:23:19] **Jason Hibbs:** And you may have picked up on some redundancy here in the programming.

The truth is many of these organizations have the same goal and in some ways they're pursuing that goal in different ways, but it's. Really all about building community, and the stakes are high. Juvenile judges Linda Knepp and Robert Jones told me these community organizations

[00:23:43] **Judge Linda Knepp:** One of the other challenges in working with youth is most of them don't drive.

It's hard to say, oh, there's this great program in Oregon, so just make sure you're there. A youth, in White House isn't going to be able to get themselves to Oregon. So you really have to look at what's available within their little pocket of the community.

[00:24:08] **Judge Robert Jones:** When someone appears in front of an adult court, they can say, you need to go to our diversion.

Adults have the ability to get themselves back and forth. make arrangements for that. Juveniles typically do not.

[00:24:19] **Judge Linda Knepp:** Ideally, we would have every little neighborhood have a spot that we could use to help the youth, have positive social engagement.

Kids want a sense of, Feeling loved, cared for, and the more people that can show that, the better that youth is going to be, so they don't feel so alone.

[00:24:48] **Jason Hibbs:** Thank you for listening. The Rethinking Jails and Justice podcast is produced by WGTE Public Media and made possible by support from the John D. MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge, which seeks to reduce over incarceration. By changing the way America thinks about and uses jails.

I'm your host, Jason Hibbs.

On the next episode of the Rethinking Jails and Justice podcast.

[00:25:23] **Avis Files:** When they go away, are we thinking about their return home? Because we should.

[00:25:27] **Jason Hibbs:** Slowing the revolving door of prison.

[00:25:30] **Avis Files:** How do I help this dad re enter into his family and keep him from recidivism when he's going right back into the neighborhood?

He's going into the neighborhood with these people that are mad. His homeboys are saying, we're glad you're here, want to smoke some weed, get drunk, we'll give you a package.

[00:25:47] **Jason Hibbs:** The local and statewide efforts to reduce recidivism.