



Vernon L. Odom Fund grants support diversity initiatives throughout Summit County

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The Vernon L. Odom Fund of Akron Community Foundation recently awarded \$16,000 in grants to programs that promote diversity and enrich the quality of life within local minority communities.



Two of the grants supported programs designed to introduce minority youth to careers in science, technology, engineering and math, fields in which African-Americans in particular are significantly underrepresented. According to a National Science Foundation report published in 2013, black men and women comprise only 5 percent of the science and engineering workforce nationwide. In comparison, 69 percent of scientists and engineers are white and 18 percent are Asian.

To help narrow this gap, the Vernon L. Odom Fund awarded a \$1,000 grant to the Biostatistics and Research Awareness Initiatives Network (BRAIN) to send 10 African-American students from Buchtel Community Learning Center to Harvard University, where they will shadow financial analysts, biostatisticians and other health science professionals. During the weeklong trip, students will also have the opportunity to visit historic sites in Boston and Cambridge and participate in hands-on STEM activities such as coding data and analyzing company balance sheets.

“Our goal for the trip is to increase the number of underrepresented minorities entering biostatistics and STEM fields through early exposure at the high school level,” said BRAIN founder and executive director Lillian Prince.

Prince, a statistician who has taught business statistics at Kent State University and the University of Akron, is herself a Buchtel alumna. With the Vernon L. Odom Fund grant, she said she hopes to engage more students in STEM-related careers by introducing them to role models in those fields and encouraging them to pursue their natural talents. “We want to explore the misperceptions that minority students in general have about what mathematical and statistical careers entail by illustrating the types of work that can be done if one possesses an aptitude for mathematics and science,” she said.

Other grants this year will teach middle school students about religious diversity, introduce inner-city youth to organic farming and gardening, and help African-American fathers develop closer relationships with their children.

The following is a full list of Vernon L. Odom Fund grants:

Akron Inner City Soccer Club, for a year-round, after-school soccer program for inner-city youth, \$1,000

Biostatistics and Research Awareness Initiatives Network Inc., to introduce minority students at Buchtel Community Learning Center to STEM-related careers during a trip to Harvard University, where students will shadow financial analysts, biostatisticians and other health science professionals, \$1,000

Boys & Girls Clubs of the Western Reserve, for an after-school program at the Odom Boulevard Branch Library that equips at-risk youth to succeed in the classroom and make healthy life choices, \$1,000

Buchtel Community Learning Center PTA, for the annual Black History Program and Taste of Culture event, which showcases African-American culture through food, music and student performances, \$1,000

Child Guidance & Family Solutions, to provide educational materials on bullying, depression and substance abuse to Spanish-speaking families in their native language, \$1,000

Crown Point Ecology Center, to introduce low-income, minority youth to organic farming and gardening through the 2016 Summer Farm & Science Camp, \$1,000

Dancing Classrooms Northeast Ohio, for a ballroom dance residency program that fosters respect, tolerance and self-esteem among Akron Public Schools students, \$1,000

Diversity Center of Northeast Ohio, to encourage discussions about race relations in the classroom through film showings of “American Denial” in Akron-area middle and high schools, \$1,000

Fair Housing Contact Service, to purchase materials for home buyer education classes that teach money management skills to potential homeowners in order to reduce the rate of foreclosure in Summit County neighborhoods, \$1,000

Fathers and Sons of Northeast Ohio, for the “Developing into Dad Show,” a video series that tells the stories of minority fathers in Summit County who have overcome challenges to build meaningful relationships with their children, \$1,000

Global Ties Akron, to teach fifth- and sixth-grade students in Summit County about religious diversity through the Know Your Community – Know Your World program, \$1,000

Let's Grow Akron Inc., to support community gardens and beautification sites in neighborhoods with limited access to fresh food and green space, \$1,000

Rape Crisis Center, to translate sexual violence educational materials into languages most commonly spoken by Summit County minorities, including Spanish and Burmese, \$1,000

St. Hilary Church, for an after-school tutoring program for students at Helen Arnold Community Learning Center, \$1,000

University of Akron Foundation, to support a workshop that will introduce African-American middle school students in Akron Public Schools to STEM-related careers, \$1,000

Williams Challenge, for a fatherhood education and mentoring program that gives at-risk and absent fathers the support they need to develop positive relationships with their children, including help applying for employment and gaining visitation rights, \$1,000

The Vernon L. Odom Fund was established in 1993 in honor of the late Vernon L. Odom Sr., respected longtime leader of the Akron Urban League. Since its inception, the fund has grown to approximately \$220,000 and awarded nearly \$160,000 in grants to innovative programs that promote ethnic and racial harmony and improve the quality of life within Greater Akron's minority communities. For more information about the Vernon L. Odom Fund or to contribute, visit www.akroncf.org/Odom or call (330) 376-8522.

Celebrating 60 years of building community philanthropy, Akron Community Foundation embraces and enhances the work of charitable people who make a permanent commitment to the good of the community. In 1955, a \$1 million bequest from the estate of Edwin Shaw established the community foundation. As of Dec. 31, 2015, it is a philanthropic endowment of nearly \$184 million with a growing family of more than 520 funds established by charitable people and organizations from all walks of life. The community foundation and its funds welcome gifts of all kinds, including cash, bequests, stock, real estate, life insurance and retirement assets, just to name a few. To date, the community foundation's funds have awarded more than \$131 million in grants to qualified nonprofit organizations. For more information about Akron Community Foundation or to learn more about creating your own charitable fund, call (330) 376-8522 or visit www.akroncf.org.

<http://akronist.com/vernon-l-odom-fund-grants-support-diversity-initiatives-throughout-summit-county-2/>