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About Kessler Foundation Program Center

Kessler Foundation Program Center, a division of Kessler Foundation, focuses on solutions to address the persistently high rates of unemployment among people disabled by injury or disease. Through strategic funding and philanthropic leadership, Kessler Foundation has invested more than \$20 million in organizations and programs to increase the participation of people with disabilities in the workforce. Creating job opportunities through development, placement, employer education, and social enterprise has enabled greater independence and economic self-sufficiency. The Foundation also sponsors *ThinkFirst*, an injury prevention program for schoolchildren, and *WheelBlazers*, a wheelchair racing team.

2011 Grants: More than \$2.7 million awarded by Kessler Foundation.

Grant Programs

Kessler Foundation offers three grant programs that advance our mission to improve quality of life for people with disabilities through discovery, innovation, demonstration, application, and dissemination.

- **Signature Employment Grants** fund new pilot initiatives, demonstration projects, or social ventures that lead to the generation of new ideas to solve the high unemployment and underemployment of individuals with disabilities in the United States and US Territories. Grants range from \$100,000 to \$250,000; maximum of \$500,000 over two years. Here are some highlights:
 - **Brain Injury Association of Florida, Inc.** (Tallahassee, FL) – To improve employment outcomes for individuals with traumatic brain injury, including those receiving SSI/SSDI, through state-wide collaborative community action teams: \$350,000.
 - **Hudson Community Enterprises** (Jersey City, NJ) - To expand current business operations and establish an enterprise content management business in Trenton, New Jersey to employ people with disabilities: \$250,000.
 - **National Telecommuting Institute, Inc.** (Boston, MA) - To launch a national home based telework pilot project with employers committed to hiring people with disabilities: \$250,000.
 - **University of Alaska Anchorage Center for Human Development** (Anchorage, AK) - To pilot a customized self-employment model for working age adults with brain injury using a Participatory Action Research team approach, and develop a sustainable structure within Alaska's employment service system: \$425,000.
 - **University of Hawaii** (Honolulu, HI) - To develop "EmployAble" a model virtual reality employment orientation and support center using Second Life as a platform to provide training, networking, mentoring and employment resources for people with disabilities and employers: \$425,000.
- **Community Employment Grants** fund strategies to support recruitment, hiring, placement, education, training and retention primarily for New Jersey citizens with disabilities. Grants range from \$25,000 to \$50,000 for one year. Here are some highlights:

- **Advancing Opportunities, Inc.** (Ewing, NJ) - To offer a supported training and employment program in the hospitality field for students with physical disabilities graduating from transition programs: \$40,000.
- **Cornell University** (Ithaca, NY) - To increase employment outcomes and economic impact for veterans with disabilities in New Jersey by building benefit and work incentives planning capacity in non-profit organizations: \$50,000.
- **County of Middlesex** (New Brunswick, NJ) - To provide transportation, between residences, transit hubs, and employment centers, to accessible bus and rail service for individuals in Middlesex County, NJ, who are not served by other accessible transit services: \$48,048.
- **The G.I. Go Fund, Inc.** (Newark, NJ) - To pilot and test a customer service employment initiative aimed at placing disabled veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan wars into sustainable careers through counseling and training: \$30,000.
- **Jewish Vocational Service of Metro West** (East Orange, NJ) - To provide a 2-week career camp, with vocational evaluation, exploration, and transition summer program for students ages 14 -21, with mobility and or cognitive impairments: \$35,000.
- **Special Initiative Grants** fund a broad range of projects and organizations that operate within in the broad spectrum of rehabilitation and physical disabilities. Grants range from \$5,000 to \$20,000 for a term of one year. Application is by invitation only. See below for highlights:
 - **Disability Education Forum of New York, Inc.** (Niskayuna, NY) - To produce a collection of video stories about employment of people with disabilities: \$20,000.
 - **Multiple Sclerosis Association of America** (Cherry Hill, NJ) - To provide mobility and safety items to New Jersey/Philadelphia area clients with MS who qualify for the Equipment Distribution Program: \$10,000.
 - **New Jersey Department of Human Services** (Trenton, NJ) - To provide funds to emergency food assistance providers for capital improvements, enabling people with physical disabilities to access the facility: \$15,000.

Also in 2011...

- **NORWESCAP for Arthur & Friends**
 - February 2011 - featured on Mrs. Obama's White House blog - 'Let's Move'
 - June 2011 - Received NJ Heroes Award, presented by First Lady Mary Pat Christie
- **Summit DD MicroEnterprise Program**
 - Received 2011 Best Practices Award from Ohio Governor's Council on People with Disabilities
- **Kessler Foundation Wheelchair 10K at Ridgewood Run** sponsored its first African racers from the Ghanaian and Zimbabwean National wheelchair racing teams.
- **ThinkFirst** reached more than 8,000 students, K-12.

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