



Lilly Endowment launched its Enhancing Opportunity in Indianapolis initiative to help people like LeAnn Thorne and Lamont Harvey, who were stalled at the bottom of the pay scale in the healthcare field. And Herbert White, who was rejoining the workforce after 17 years in prison. And Kelly DeWald, a single mom who now can afford a home for herself and her three children.

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

Through the initiative, the Endowment issued a broad invitation to human service agencies, community centers, employers, faith-based groups and other community organizations to imagine how funding could help improve the livelihoods of individuals and families facing complex challenges associated with poverty and financial insecurity. It is daunting work in Indianapolis, where some 20 percent of residents live in poverty and another 20 percent live close to it.

In March 2021 the Endowment made nearly \$94 million in grants to 28 organizations that are working to help residents break cycles of poverty and help employers create more jobs that pay a living wage and lead to strong careers.

“Lilly Endowment’s initiative is unique for its truly multi-dimensional approach,” says Mark Muro, senior fellow at Brookings Metro, a division of the Brookings Institution. Researchers there work to help every kind of U.S. community become prosperous, just and resilient.

Projects that the Endowment is supporting, Muro says, are addressing the need for more jobs that provide a living wage, benefits and potential career advancement—jobs that Brookings describes as “good jobs.” The efforts go further, however, by helping individuals find those jobs and be successful in them. Muro’s research found that in 2018, the Indianapolis region had a deficit of 120,000 good or promising jobs.

But, he adds, it’s more than a matter of jobs and skills. Individuals who struggle to find employment and build careers face many challenges—housing insecurity, limited access to good childcare, and the need for mentoring and career networking, among them.

■ LeAnn Thorne, Herbert White, the DeWald family and Lamont Harvey (opposite) are participating in Enhancing Opportunity projects.

“What’s impressive here is the overall philanthropic drive to find the best, truly multi-dimensional holistic approaches to take on a whole range of problems,” Muro says.

Here’s what some of the grant recipients are doing to tackle the persistent challenges of poverty and financial insecurity in Marion County.

Transforming a Community

The main campus of Eastern Star Church is in the Arlington Woods neighborhood on Indianapolis’ east side, an area where 38.2 percent of the residents live at or below the poverty line (compared with 21 percent of all Marion County residents) and household income for residents is \$25,292 (versus \$42,378 for Marion County residents). For years, residents have watched banks and grocery stores abandon the area, and they have watched the decline of safe, affordable housing options.





“For some reason, over the years, between Emerson and Arlington avenues, it seems that there had been investment, even enterprise zones, developed. But this pocket of the community had been left out,” says Anthony Murdock, Eastern Star Church’s executive pastor. “The church felt that if there’s going to be investment and transformation in the community, we were going to have to start it.”

In 2017, congregation leaders launched the **ROCK Initiative (Renewing Our Community for the Kingdom)**, establishing it with these four goals:

- build a sense of community among the people who live and work in the neighborhood,
- enhance the range of housing options available within a one-mile radius of the church,
- grow the overall financial security of residents living in the neighborhood,
- enhance both formal and informal educational opportunities available for neighborhood residents.

■ Anthony Murdock and Leigh Riley Evans (above) of Eastern Star Church are leading the ROCK Initiative.





"It is our commitment to practice love and to provide service to the least, the lonely and the left out," says Leigh Riley Evans, the church's director of community development. "As explained in the scripture (Matthew 25:40): 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

With support from an \$8 million Enhancing Opportunity grant, the church is completing construction of a 60,000-square-foot ROCK Community Center for Youth & Children, which opens in 2022. The center will offer services "designed to enhance social capital and strengthen economic, educational and workforce development opportunities" in collaboration with K-12 and higher education institutions and local employers.

The building is divided into three wings—with separate entrances for elementary, middle and high school students for after-school and out-of-school programming. Designed to take advantage of natural light, the building has windows that open and areas for parents to watch their kids learning and playing. There's space where community groups can gather and a multi-purpose gym for basketball games, town hall meetings, speaker series and other events for up to 400 people.

"We want it to be accessible and welcoming," Murdock says. "This is a changing community."

Leading a tour of the area, Murdock and Evans show off some of the changes in Arlington Woods. They point to two schools—the IPS Innovation K-6 Sankofa School of Success and Rooted School Indy, a charter high school—that are bringing innovation to the neighborhood.

And along 30th Street, adjacent to the church, are two multi-story apartment buildings containing a total of 45 rental properties available for \$750 a month or less. On street level, there is a branch of the Financial Health Federal Credit Union and the ROCK Fresh Market, a small grocery store

■ Eastern Star Church (above) and Arlington Woods neighborhood

staffed by neighborhood volunteers that sells, among other things, produce grown at the ROCK Urban Farm. There's a business-incubation space called the ROCK Community Hub, a barbershop and a satellite office of the Indianapolis Neighborhood Housing Partnership. Known as INHP, the organization supports renters and first-time homebuyers looking for affordable housing and is working with Eastern Star Church and six other Enhancing Opportunity in Indianapolis grantees that are helping individuals and families attain housing security.

On the opposite side of the church is Priscilla Avenue. Murdock calls the street "our jewel." It contains 13 houses the church either bought and renovated or built with Habitat for Humanity of Greater Indianapolis or constructed themselves. One of those houses now belongs to Kelly DeWald, a mother of three children.

DeWald found the ROCK initiative through a Google search. In August 2018, she and Jaylen, now 18; Kalora, 15; and Logan, 11, moved from Emporia, Kansas, into one of the apartment buildings Eastern Star had built. In April 2020, DeWald, who works for a company that rents storage sheds, bought one of the houses on Priscilla Avenue, a comfortable three-bedroom, two-bathroom house with a "pretty awesome" back yard.

"It's wonderful to have a brand-new house—something I never dreamed of," says DeWald, who is not an Eastern Star member. "But I wanted to be a part of what they're doing in the community. That was the biggest draw."

"Sometimes my biggest frustration with churches is they live too much *inside* their church. The goal is to live outside your church. Eastern Star puts action behind their words."

—Kelly DeWald, Arlington Woods homeowner



Mentoring 'Returning Citizens'

When individuals leave prison, they often lack the kind of employment that can help them make a successful transition, which is a leading predictor of recidivism. Since 2006, RecycleForce, an electronics-recycling employment social enterprise located near downtown Indianapolis, has given their clients whom they call “returning citizens,” an opportunity. RecycleForce President Gregg Keesling says the goal is to advance them from A (any job) to B (a better job) to C (a career).

Its Enhancing Opportunity grant buys RecycleForce more time to get workers from A to B. That is, more time to help workers strengthen self-esteem, understand what leadership looks like at a worksite, and make the transition from daily life in prison to daily life back in their Indianapolis communities.

A visit to Trusted Mentors, a peer mentoring class at RecycleForce, provides some insight into what clients need to succeed.

Group members discuss issues of trust. How people have made promises but haven't followed through. How not having fathers may have influenced their view of the world. How breathing techniques can help them calm down and think rationally. The group setting is a place for them to vent, to process their lived experiences and to get support from each other.

Learning these human interaction skills takes time, RecycleForce chief operating officer Dustin Jones says. RecycleForce gets federal funding, but that only covers the cost of 120 days of support to help



participants get used to showing up for work, doing the job and earning credentials to help them get a better job.

The Endowment's grant is helping RecycleForce do more. Funding is enabling the organization to extend job training and to support wrap-around services, such as mental health care and support for stable housing. The goal is to help at least 600 participants get jobs that improve earning potential. In addition, RecycleForce wants to help at least 100 of these returning citizens attain supervisory and leadership skills through its peer-leadership program.



■ Peter O'Scanail mentors RecycleForce clients.

RecycleForce works with individuals like Herbert White, who was released on Sept. 1, 2020, after serving 17 years in prison. Before beginning that sentence, he worked the night shift at a manufacturing warehouse in Mooresville, Ind. While incarcerated, he worked in a prison hospice, was certified in auto-body mechanics, filled commissary orders and clerked in the prison law library.

White had skills. What he needed was opportunity. His parole officer helped him sign on with RecycleForce. He went through orientation on Sept. 19, 2020, and during the next year accumulated by his count 15 certificates in areas such as detecting radiation, handling freon and cleaning up hazardous chemicals, personal protective equipment usage and peer mentoring.

White wanted to stay at RecycleForce, but \$11 an hour is the salary cap there. When ERI (Electronics Recyclers International) in Plainfield, Ind., offered him a job on the night shift dismantling flat screen televisions for \$16 an hour, he had to go.

■ RecycleForce clients learn valuable job and life skills at the eastside Indianapolis electronics recycling center.



"It was wonderful to see the transition of Mr. White," says Peter O'Scanail, who administers the Endowment grant for RecycleForce. "He went from feeling like 'I want to stay here; I don't want to leave the nest,' to becoming more confident, more assertive."

White says he had hoped to learn leadership at RecycleForce. He got that, and more.

"If you work the RecycleForce program properly, it will help you," he says. "That means going all-in. It will give you the training and knowledge you need to get that better job." Or, as RecycleForce would say, the "C" or a career.

In his first 104 days at ERI, White's solid work ethic and skills helped him earn a promotion to environment health and safety supervisor, which pays \$20 an hour.

Opportunities to Turn Jobs Into Careers

IU Health's central mission is to make individuals in Indiana healthier, and its definition of health includes financial stability—people being able to cover their basic needs and have good jobs with benefits. That's the thinking behind the Mosaic Center for Work, Life and Learning, which is designed to improve opportunities for entry-level team members who work in areas such as food and nutrition and environmental services (maintenance), to grow its talent pipeline by offering opportunities to people who might want to work in healthcare, and to entice more young people to get into health-sciences careers.

Mosaic Center director Starla Hart says the goal of the program, which began two years ago, is to ramp up workers' skills, getting them to \$18 an hour with benefits as quickly as possible (IU Health's minimum hourly wage is \$16) and, ideally, to \$25-\$30 an hour and beyond.

The Endowment's \$8 million Enhancing Opportunity grant is enabling IU Health to establish a physical space for the center and to hire staff that includes career coaches, financial coaches and social workers. In addition to helping current employees advance their careers, Mosaic Center is developing partnerships with schools, community centers and other Indianapolis organizations to develop pipelines of new healthcare professionals.

Mosaic has shown early success with personnel already on the IU Health payroll. People like Lamont Harvey, an anesthesia assistant and anesthesia team lead at IU Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis. Today, Harvey is earning "high five figures" annually, but in 2006, he was working in environmental services (maintenance) making \$8.59 an hour. His future seemed limited, until someone noticed his growth potential. He took advantage of additional education—which the hospital paid for—and certification, and moved into the sterile-processing department, where medical and surgical supplies and equipment are processed, stored and issued for patient care.

After five years, Harvey wanted to grow more. When a position opened in anesthesia, he was offered the opportunity to get more education and certification. With support from IU Health, Harvey earned three certifications that qualify him for increased responsibility within the hospital that help him keep the anesthesia department prepared for patient care. There's no way that Harvey, the breadwinner for a family of four, could have paid for that training on his own.

"If the opportunity is there, then I'll take it," he says. "But without IU Health helping me with school, I don't think that I would have even looked at it."

Now, he'd like to be an ambassador for the program and speak to students thinking about participating in Mosaic Center programming.

"If they talk to someone who walks the walk, who's come from the bare minimum and grown," he says, "I think they would definitely take more heed."

Mosaic Center helped Harvey move up. It also helped retain LeAnn Thorne, a certified clinical medical assistant for IU Health Multi-Specialty at IU Health West in Avon, Ind.

Thorne started her career as an emergency medical technician but found when she moved from Fountain County, Indiana, to Indianapolis that she could make more money decorating cakes than she could as an EMT. So, she went through a program to become a medical assistant and in 1992 graduated at the top of her class.

When IU Health started offering medical assistant certification through a Mosaic Center pilot project in 2017, Thorne jumped at the opportunity. The additional credential has opened opportunities for advancement, increased pay and additional responsibilities at work. She orders tests for patients, helps coordinate prescription refills, checks in patients, takes their vital signs, schedules lab work and calls patients to relay information from their doctors. She can't make medical decisions, but she can expedite care.

"I try to be a warm, friendly face for IU Health," she says. "Patients appreciate that they're treated like people and not like numbers."

Without Mosaic Center, Thorne says, she would be back at the lower end of the pay scale, "and I don't know if I would still be here. I was getting tired of that and I might have left healthcare. It certainly kept me in the healthcare field and made my life better."



■ | LeAnn Thorne and Lamont Harvey are advancing their careers at IU Health through the Mosaic Center.

An orangutan is shown in a large, modern indoor enclosure with a glass and metal structure. The orangutan is looking towards the camera. In the background, there are various enrichment items like a hanging ball and a hammock.

How a Midwest Zoo Became a Global Player in Conservation



**There was a time
when the Indianapolis
Zoo—once called the
Washington Park
Children’s Zoo—was
a local attraction
nestled inside an
eastside city park.**

These days the Indianapolis Zoo is a sprawling complex of wildlife habitats that anchors the west end of the White River State Park. It is home to an aquarium and botanical gardens, and it typically attracts more than a million visitors annually, many from beyond Indiana’s borders.

It’s also home to the Indianapolis Prize, conservation’s richest and most prestigious award, as well as the Global Center for Species Survival, the world’s only centralized resource for conservationists working to preserve wildlife around the globe. Both have been funded by a series of Lilly Endowment grants designed to strengthen the zoo’s commitment to support worldwide conservation efforts.

How did what was once a modest little zoo in a small park in a mid-sized city in the American Midwest become a multi-faceted, internationally known conservation powerhouse? By thinking big.

■ The Indianapolis Zoo’s Simon Skjodt International Orangutan Center (opposite top) and the Oceans Exhibit (opposite below). Amanda Vincent (above) won the Indianapolis Prize in 2021. Rob Shumaker (right) is the zoo’s president and CEO.

The Indianapolis Prize

“Conservation is one of the most crucial aspects of any zoo’s mission,” says Dr. Rob Shumaker, president and CEO of the Indianapolis Zoo. Conservation is also the heart of the Indianapolis Prize, a biennial award recognizing an individual who has made extraordinary contributions to wildlife conservation. The winner receives \$250,000. An additional five finalists receive \$50,000 each.

Since first being awarded in 2006, the Indianapolis Prize has raised the Indianapolis Zoo’s visibility internationally, Shumaker says. “The Indianapolis Prize distinguishes us within the zoo community in this country and around the world. It’s a point of pride for our institution because it makes clear that we are committed to conservation and communicates that commitment locally, nationally and internationally.”

The 2021 Indianapolis Prize (the 2020 award was delayed for a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic) went to Dr. Amanda Vincent, the world’s leading authority on seahorse biology and conservation. Founder of Project Seahorse at the University of British Columbia in Canada, Vincent was the first person to study seahorses in their natural habitat, document the worldwide seahorse trade and create a seahorse conservation project. A finalist for the Prize in 2010 and 2016, Vincent was the first marine conservationist to win it. It was gratifying, she said, both professionally and personally.

“Conservation is a slog,” Vincent says, speaking via Zoom from her home in British Columbia. “If you’re trying to effect change, you work really hard. You hardly get time for a respite. So, winning the Indianapolis Prize was validation of all the hard work I’ve been doing for so long.”





It was also validation that all that hard work meant something, arriving as it did at a point when she was exhausted and dispirited. “It was a kick in the pants at a time when I needed it.”

The Indianapolis Prize has birthed two offspring—the Jane Alexander Global Wildlife Ambassador Award and the Emerging Conservationist Award. The former, which

debuted in 2012, is given to a public figure with an abiding commitment to conservation. The 2021 award went to His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco.

The Emerging Conservationist Award will be given for the first time in 2023. It’s a \$50,000 award that will recognize a conservationist under the age of 40 who is making significant contributions to species conservation.

While the Indianapolis Prize has a positive impact on the lives of its recipients, it also benefits its bestower. “The Prize brings distinguished conservationists to the zoo,” Shumaker says. “Over time, we’ve built a group of elite conservationists we can consult with, which has boosted our ability to function in really elevated ways in our own conservation efforts.”

Those efforts include supporting the field work of conservationists around the world who increasingly regard the Indianapolis Zoo as an important ally. “Conservation is a massive challenge with a really large number of people involved all over the world,” Vincent says. “The Indianapolis Prize was sorely needed to provide the conservation community with a beacon of recognition.”

It was also the springboard for an even more ambitious undertaking—the Global Center for Species Survival.



The Global Center for Species Survival

If the Indianapolis Prize raised the zoo's

profile among conservationists around the world, its most recent initiative makes the zoo one of the most significant conservation resources in the world. The Global Center for Species Survival (GCSS), an entity created through a partnership between the zoo and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and its Species Survival Commission (SSC), is home to a team of experts from various conservation specialties who assist their colleagues around the world by gathering and disseminating information about various conservation efforts.

Originally conceived in 2017 by Michael Crowther—Shumaker's predecessor who led the zoo in creating the Indianapolis Prize—in tandem with SSC leaders as a way for the zoo to support the work of that commission's 10,000 members, the GCSS headquarters is a newly constructed facility at the zoo. Its purpose is to gather and disseminate information about such critical issues as biodiversity, climate change and illegal wildlife trade. It also helps the IUCN determine species in danger of extinction and develop plans to save them.

Riley Pollom is GCSS coordinator of marine conservation. Previously he worked on projects for Parks Canada, the Wildlife Conservation Society in Canada, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Canadian Wildlife Service and the Calgary Zoo. He moved to Indianapolis to join GCSS staff because its mission aligns with his own, which is to help conserve and restore the planet's biodiversity and ecological integrity.

Besides working on behalf of the SSC's members, Pollom and GCSS's other experts will work with zoos, aquariums and botanical gardens around the world. "We provide connections between the SSC and this community to ensure the conservation work happening in the zoo community is aligned with and complements that done in the field," he says.

GCSS staff of experts will help inform the public about the conservation work being done worldwide. "We want to be an easy source for the public and the media to turn to for information and to connect with conservationists worldwide," says Bill Street, the zoo's senior vice president for conservation, education and life sciences. He is also the GCSS director.

The GCSS will enhance and expand the SSC's ability to develop effective conservation projects, according to Jon Paul Rodriguez, who chairs the commission. "The Global Center for Species Survival has dramatically increased our capacity to provide staff support to SSC groups," Rodriguez says. "Over the last few years, we have increased our emphasis on conservation action, so more effective groups with greater focus on conservation action increase our delivery of international conservation efforts."

Though its focus is international, the center is equally a local asset. It's partnering with area higher education institutions to provide internships to students so they can learn by interacting with GCSS experts. "We want to inspire young people to get involved in conservation efforts and species survival," Street says.

Because it will bring experts to Indianapolis for meetings and convocations, according to Shumaker the GCSS will elevate the city's reputation. That will not only benefit the city economically but also enable the zoo to bring internationally known conservationists to speak at local colleges and universities. Shumaker says, "Being home to the Global Center for Species Survival expands the zoo's institutional expertise, increases its educational capacity and strengthens its impact and reach."

■ Indianapolis Zoo (opposite, above) is raising local, national and international awareness of conservation efforts as it becomes home to the Global Center for Species Survival and through the Indianapolis Prize.



Indianapolis Zoo

Since 2019, Lilly Endowment has made a series of grants to strengthen the Indianapolis Zoo's efforts to raise awareness of worldwide conservation efforts:

- \$4 million in 2019 for the zoo to collaborate with the International Union for Conservation of Nature to establish a nine-member species survival team, which is headquartered at the zoo's Global Center for Species Survival (GCSS)
- \$10 million in 2019, including a \$5 million restricted endowment for the zoo's Indianapolis Prize, a biennial award of \$250,000 that has become known as the "Nobel Prize" for international wildlife conservation efforts, and \$3 million to expand and enhance the space for the GCSS
- \$400,000 in 2021 for the zoo to increase the award for the Indianapolis Prize's five finalists from \$10,000 to \$50,000 each