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Greater Rochester Health Foundation announces \$8.2 million in grants

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The first set of dollars doled out by one of Rochester's wealthiest private foundations funded about a dozen fitness and nutrition programs aimed at driving down childhood obesity, providing vaccinations for thousands of teens, training translators how to interpret medical conversations for refugees, offering home health services for the deaf and evaluating the city's new lead-paint ordinance.

The Greater Rochester Health Foundation had distributed \$8.2 million by the end of 2007, according to a report released last week during a showcase of more than 30 local agencies that have received grants. The foundation began in January 2006 with a \$200 million endowment that resulted from the merger of insurers Preferred Care and MVP Health Plan, but it gave out almost no grant money that year.

The first group of grants awarded have gone exclusively to preventive health care initiatives, like those that provide immunizations or take action against obesity, and programs that aim to improve the health care system.

In 2008, the foundation's distributions also will go toward programs that target low-income neighborhoods, but the granters intend to keep a tight focus on a handful of priorities, said foundation President John Urban.

"We don't make any attempt to dole out money to programs broadly," Urban said.

"We look for high-quality programs in terms of areas of focus."

About one-third of the agencies that have received funding address childhood obesity, the foundation's key initiative. Money given to the Hillside Work Scholarship Connection Eat Well Live Well initiative, for example, funded an eight-week program where students tracked how many steps they took each day and the number of cups of fruits and vegetables they ate.

Other initiatives that received funding ranged from an effort by The Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency to educate patients with minor emergencies about community health care centers, to a University of Rochester program that has provided immunizations to thousands of 11- to 15-year-old adolescents from poor families.

Nearly all of the agencies that received money from the foundation are established in the community, but almost all of the programs funded began in the last year or two.

Agency representatives said that money from the foundation was crucial to their programs, and in a few cases, wholly supported parts of the initiatives.

"The medical community sees a big need for this," said Florian Seger, manager of language services

for Catholic Family Center, which received a \$125,000 grant that completely funded training for medical interpreters.

The foundation had committed \$6.6 million in 2007 to fund ongoing initiatives in coming years, and it plans to give out another \$7.4 million in 2008.

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