

JOHNSTOWN INDEPENDENT

Grant supports Johnstown UMC's freedom school

By [MARLA K. KUHLMAN](#)

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[Johnstown United Methodist Church](#) has received a \$10,000 grant from the [Licking County Foundation](#) to support the Johnstown-Northridge Freedom School, a six-week summer enrichment program that will be held June 15-July 24.

"We are deeply appreciative of the Licking County Foundation's generosity to the scholars of the Johnstown-Northridge Freedom School, said the Rev. Cindee Johnson, pastor of the Johnstown United Methodist Church. "This gift allows children the opportunity to engage in effective and meaningful summer enrichment that builds skills academically, socially and culturally."

The grant will provide general operating support, such as stipends and training costs for staff, educational and program supplies and other day-to-day expenses of the program, she said.

Any child who has completed kindergarten through fifth grade and will attend at least five of the six weeks is eligible, Johnson said.

Registration will be available first to children who enrolled last year, and recommendations are received from principals and teachers. A general announcement for open registration will be made to the community, Johnson said.

The Johnstown-Northridge Freedom School was started in 2013 with the partnership of Johnstown, Alexandria and Croton United Methodist churches in response to the lack of local summer tutoring and literacy activities as part of a national network of Children's Defense Fund Freedom School programs.

The Rev. Eva Marie Wolfe, executive director of the Johnstown-Northridge Freedom School, said the local program is the first rural Freedom School in Ohio.

"Most are in urban areas," said Wolfe, who's pastor of Croton United Methodist Church. "We are the first and still the only Freedom School operating in Licking County. Our three churches chose to begin a CDF Freedom School in this area in 2013 because we were aware that there are few options here for tutoring and summer learning opportunities."

Wolfe said the only charge for Freedom School is a registration fee, so no family is turned away because of an inability to pay.

"That makes community partners such as the Licking County Foundation critically important to the successful delivery of the program," she said.

The Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools program provides six weeks of summer enrichment programming with a purpose to foster an appreciation for reading, increase self-esteem and generate more positive attitudes toward learning.

"We felt that was important to local families and wanted to provide this opportunity for them," Wolfe said. "We also provide the scholars with a healthy breakfast, lunch and snack each day of the program."

The founding pastors of the program were the Rev. Megan Croy of Alexandria UMC, the Rev. John Wallace of Johnstown UMC (who now serves elsewhere) and Wolfe.

Johnson joined the team this year.

"We are very grateful to the Northridge Local School District, who has been providing a location for the program for the past two years," she said.

Johnson said the program was held last year at Northridge Intermediate School, and plans soon will be finalized for the host location within the Northridge district this summer.

"Kids have a lot of fun in the program," Wolfe said. "Besides the integrated reading curriculum, the daily reading time and the guest readers, we provide a variety of afternoon activities and field trips," she said.

Over the past two summers, the youth have learned about nutrition from the Ohio State University Extension Office and about financial literacy from Park National Bank. They also have been visited by Johnstown police canine officers, local firefighters, Ernie Reyes Martial Arts, Inspire Dance and Tumble and the Licking County Community Emergency Response Team.

The school served 46 children and their families during the inaugural summer program in 2013, and 50 children were enrolled last year.

The Children's Defense Fund was started in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by foundation and corporate grants and individual donations.

Since 1995, more than 113,000 K-12 children have experienced CDF Freedom Schools and more than 14,000 college students and young adult staff have been trained to deliver the program.

Licking County Foundation grants administrator Megan Evans said this marks the first time the foundation has supported the local Freedom School.

"We are very happy to do so," she said.

The foundation's governing committee recently approved grants totaling \$734,168 to nonprofit organizations.

Each year, the foundation accepts proposals from area nonprofit organizations as part of a competitive grant-making process to respond to new programs, emerging needs and innovative services that might not be started or would be unable continue without the foundation's support.