

**United Disabilities Services' new program
builds on grants for home modifications.**

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Ardis Goldsborough who has multiple handicaps, watches television from her bed in the renovated part of her West Hempfield home.

Agency gets job done in-house

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Ardis Brandt faces a lot of challenges in raising her 8-year-old granddaughter, Ardis Goldsborough, who has multiple handicaps. But those difficulties are easier to manage than they used to be, thanks to United Disabilities Services.

Because of UDS' Accessible Home Modifications program, her granddaughter now has a bedroom and full bath on the first floor of their rented, two-story house in West Hempfield Township, as well as a ramped entrance and exit that accommodates her wheelchair.

"They were awesome," Brandt said of UDS.

In existence for several years, the home-modifications program has recently added a full-time contractor, Kris Carroll, who oversees all work. It's also expanded to offer private-pay services to the public in addition to the grant-funded projects UDS already does.

Kirk Hummel, manager of Accessible Home Modifications, said the creation of an in-house,

There are waiting lists of city and county residents, but the list is longer for those in the city because less grant money is available to them, Hummel said.

But now Accessible Home Modifications can do projects for anyone, regardless of income. And the money it makes from that fee-for-service work will go back into the program, increasing the pool of funds for grants and shortening the waiting lists, he said.

Eventually, the program also wants to start a small home-repair division, Hummel said, and help people find accessible housing.

Since Carroll came on board, UDS has completed about 30 projects in Lancaster and Lebanon counties, he said.

"We tend to focus on safety issues," Hummel said, such as ramps, barrier-free showers, roll-under sinks and stoves, and wall-mounted ovens.

"We can do a complete bathroom renovation for less

nonprofit construction company allows UDS to save money because it consolidates purchasing.

That, in turn, allows the program — designed to keep individuals with disabilities in their homes as long as possible — to do additional projects for less, and "stretch the dollars that we have," he said.



Ardis Brandt lifts Ardis Goldsborough from her chair in the renovated room of her house. In the background is Ardis Goldsborough's mother, whose name is also Ardis Goldsborough.

"We're able to get our pricing down about 15 percent," Hummel said.

Before Carroll was brought on board last year, the home-improvement projects were handled by different contractors, he said. And not only did that increase costs, Hummel said, it could be stressful for families to find a contractor with experience in this kind of construction.

Now that's not a problem, he said.

Accessible Home Modifications is one of just two independent, nongovernmental programs of its kind in the state, and the only one with an in-house construction company, Hummel said.

It uses grants from several sources to fund projects for people with low incomes. The pool of money includes \$410,000 from the Lancaster County Housing & Redevelopment Authorities; \$175,000 from the state Department of Community and Economic Development; and \$150,000 in pilot-program funds from the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency.

The grant cap per project is \$10,000, Hummel said, but a waiver can cover up to \$15,000 of improvements. UDS also tries to connect recipients with other organizations if more financial help is needed, he said.

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For Ardis Goldsborough, UDS took the living room and split it in half, creating a bedroom and a 6-by-6-foot accessible bath with a roll-in shower and roll-under sink, Hummel said.

A second, ramped door also was installed at the side of the house, he said, which is how the little girl gets outside to meet the van that transports her.

Before, family members had to carry her up and down the steps, both inside and out, Hummel said.

Ardis Brandt also praised her landlord, Clear Channel Communications, which worked with UDS on the project and was very accommodating, she said.

UDS has done modifications for children as young as 9 months and adults as old as 96, Hummel said.

A first-floor bathroom and nurse's station was built for the baby. As for the senior citizen, "all she needed was a stair glide," he said.

Accessible Home Modifications has its own stair-glide dealership, Hummel said.

In many cases, improvements made under the program will keep individuals out of nursing homes, "which makes a lot of sense financially," he said.

Plus, if they had the choice, Hummel said, "people would much rather be at home."



This is the bathroom that was build for Ardis Goldsborough.