



EASTON ROTARY SERVICE FOUNDATION

Rotary Club of Easton
Easton, Pennsylvania

2886 Hope Ridge Drive, Easton, PA 18045-8144

GRANT APPLICATION

Organization Name Third Street Alliance for Women & Children

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City Easton State PA Zip 18042

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Contact Person Sarah Panovec Title Grants/Contacts Manager

Project Director Nancy Fredrick Title Learning Center Director

Project Title The Learning Center Behavioral Health Initiative

Grant Period 1/1/2021 to 12/31/2021

Total Cost of Project \$45,000 Amount Requested \$ 5,000

Signature of Approving Agency Personnel  Date 3/24/2022

Name of Approving Agency Personnel Alisa Baratta Title Executive Director

For use by Easton Rotary Service Foundation

Date Received _____

Action Taken _____ Date _____

REQUEST SUMMARY

Third Street Alliance is requesting a grant of \$5,000 to launch our Learning Centers' Behavioral Health Initiative. This investment will not only support our commitment to providing quality early education to at-risk children but also allows us to provide comprehensive programming to meet the psychological, emotional, and developmental needs of children and their families, especially those managing the effects of stress and trauma in the wake of the ongoing COVID crisis.

MISSION & HISTORY

Third Street Alliance for Women & Children's mission is to inspire and equip women, children, and families to live, learn, and thrive.

For more than a century, we have worked to address the critical needs of our community. We began in 1909 as the Easton YWCA, where nationally we fought for workers' rights and women's suffrage and locally provided housing to immigrants and young women newly relocated to the city. Over time, the agency expanded to include recreation, health & wellness components and by the 1980's we began to deliver essential community services. Third Street Alliance continues to evolve and change in response to the shifting needs of our community and we continue to draw on evidence-based practices to help us to meet those needs. Our multi-program agency serves our community by:

- Providing affordable quality early childhood education for children 6 weeks to 6th grade including two state-funded Pre-K Counts classrooms, and both summer and wrap-around care for elementary-aged children, ensuring low-income families can maintain stable employment and at-risk children and families receive the support they need for academic success.
- Working collectively to address the root causes of homelessness and providing services to the homeless or near homeless in our community including providing transitional & emergency shelter to women and families, rapid-rehousing rental assistance, coordinated entry, and homelessness prevention and diversion programming for all individuals at-risk for homelessness.

PROGRAMS

Homeless Services

Homelessness is the result of a complex array of individual, social, and economic factors and the services and interventions needed to help them maintain permanent housing can be just as varied. To serve the homeless in our community Third Street Alliance takes a multi-pronged approach to service delivery including prevention & diversion programming, emergency services, and housing support. This approach seeks to prevent homelessness when possible, expeditiously remedy and re-house homeless families when prevention is not possible, and put supports in place to stabilize homeless and at-risk individuals.

Prevention & Diversion -Third Street Alliance provides preventive services that support moderate- to low-income individuals and families to maintain employment, access support networks, connect with affordable housing, access funding, and foster at-risk children's school success. We host the Northampton County Coordinated Entry walk-in access site providing support to all members of the

community seeking assistance from the network of homeless services in the Lehigh Valley. We also provide homelessness prevention and diversion programming that connects at-risk families with prevention services, including rental assistance that aims to keep families stably housed. The **Eviction Conciliation Program** is the latest expansion of this program focusing on those families specifically affected by the state shutdown and identified through the court system, in addition to the stability of the families and the repayment of rental arrears to property owners, this program aims to help alleviate possibly hundreds of hours of court time on eviction proceedings.

Emergency Services- To serve the homeless women and families in the Lehigh Valley we offer both on-site emergency and transitional shelter to single women and families. At the core of our shelter program is the idea that for our families to be successful we must provide specific interventions such as affordable childcare, job skills training, income and housing supports to help them overcome housing instability.

Housing Support -We offer vulnerable populations prevention solutions and reduce the risk of reoccurrence while moving homeless individuals out of homelessness as swiftly as possible. Our housing support programming include housing navigation and HUD-funded Rapid Re-Housing Rental Assistance Program. Our on-site Housing Navigator assists homeless families and individuals with identifying appropriate subsidies (if applicable), searching for and obtaining housing that is safe, affordable, and appropriate. Through Rapid Re-Housing, we provide up to 18 families with short-medium term rental assistance; using the Housing-First model families work with a housing navigator to identify appropriate apartments for their family and receive case management services, in place, and referrals to assistance that helps support their stability (behavioral health, education, employment).

The Learning Center: Early Childhood Education

We envision a community where families are supported by quality learning opportunities and services that help families achieve educational stability and promote a life-long love of learning. Access to dependable high-quality affordable childcare can help families maintain employment and is essential for the positive development of children from at-risk families, making early education a key strategy in homelessness prevention and diversion. High-quality preschool education programs raise academic performance and give children the skills and tools they need to contribute successfully to society. Adults who have participated in early childhood education programs show lower crime rates and higher median income rates; they are more likely to have graduated from high school and are 2.4 times more likely to continue to higher education.

The Learning Center at Third Street Alliance is one of only a handful of PA STAR 4 facilities in Easton, allowing us to provide the very highest standard of education. We provide early childhood education for children ages 6-weeks to 6 years, 2 Pre-K Counts classrooms for at-risk low-income children aged 3 to 5, 2 Pre-K Counts Infant & Toddler classrooms that act as a feeder program to Pre-K Counts, and summer, before, and after-school care for school-aged children up to 6th grade. Currently, we also offer full-day school-aged childcare with virtual learning classrooms to accommodate the hybrid model of learning the Easton Area School District has implemented. Over 27 school-aged students rotate between in-person classes at their Elementary School and virtual classrooms at The Learning Center.

Recognizing the importance of quality early childhood education as a template for future academic success has allowed us to provide early educational interventions as well as enrichment activities designed to level the playing field. We use Creative Curriculum a widely used PA Learning Standards-aligned early childhood curriculum backed by research and based on the child development learning theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Erikson. Our teachers plan their lessons based on the interests of the students using the concept of purposeful and productive play, giving educational ownership to our students, and creating a sense of pride in learning at an early age. We are fortunate to have both a STEAM lab and a library on the premises for our classrooms to utilize. With both of these resources, students can explore the arts, experience hands-on science, technology, engineering, robotics, and math concepts, or any other subject they may be interested in allowing them to expand their general knowledge and be a proactive partner in their education. The Learning Center takes a holistic approach to the education of children, so their physical and emotional development is also of great importance. Students have use of our on-site gymnasium and outdoor playground for fun and exercise, benefit from enrichment yoga and mindfulness activities, and have private time in our new sensory room, which allows teachers a place to provide individualized attention to children working on emotional self-regulation skills.

DESCRIPTION OF NEED

This past year has brought unprecedented challenges to the world, to our country, and to our community. While none of us has been left untouched by the COVID-19 crisis, the effect it has had on our children is staggering. Routines, social interactions, and friendships are among the most important factors responsible for a child's normal psychological development. The pandemic has broken those routines and isolated children from their friends, relatives, and social networks, making an already challenging situation far more difficult, especially for those dealing with preexisting trauma.

Early research from the National Survey of Children's Health and the National School-Based Health Care Census has found that the quarantine has had a significant impact on children's behavior and emotional health. Children subjected to quarantine in pandemic disasters were found to have an increased likelihood of developing acute stress disorder, adjustment disorder, and report four times higher scores of PTSD compared to those who were not quarantined. These studies also found 85.7% of parents reported changes in their children's emotions and behaviors during the quarantine. The most frequently observed changes included increased clinginess or regressing in behaviors in younger children, and increased anxiety, irritability/anger, depression, difficulty concentrating, restlessness, loneliness, and general nervousness in older children. These findings mirror observations made by our teachers and reported to us by both Learning Center parents and school district teachers.

Children of all ages are struggling but the most dramatic changes have been observed in our Pre-K and School Age classrooms. Children in these classrooms have been demonstrating a complex set of emotional responses that have manifested as defiance, non-compliance, and general disruptiveness. These behaviors result in frequent interruptions to lessons, require teacher interventions, and are distracting to the rest of the children in the class. In our School Age classroom children's defiance has resulted in their refusal to log-on to required school district classroom zooms and refusal to complete work which is negatively affecting their grades and their attendance. We have also seen a marked

increase in the escalation speed of behavioral outbursts; leaving little time for proactive teacher intervention. Children's ability to self-regulate their emotional and behavioral responses has been severely diminished, our teachers are seeing atypical responses to disappointment, exaggerated reactions, lack of empathy, and increases in the severity of outbursts, which include attempted elopements, self-harm, and physical aggression. When these behaviors occur, the learning stops, not just for the child in emotional turmoil but also for the whole classroom.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Throughout the pandemic, Third Street Alliance has been at the forefront of strategizing responses and mobilizing efforts to address the immediate and emerging needs of at-risk families. While quarantine has undoubtedly kept many families physically safe and healthy, the repercussions of prolonged quarantine are proving to be demonstrably detrimental to the behavioral, social, and psychological development of children. Exposure to adverse childhood experiences has documented effects of lifelong physical and mental health problems. To ameliorate long-term mental health implications, it is imperative that we act quickly to address the needs of our vulnerable young people and their families with comprehensive interventions.

The goal of the Learning Center's Behavioral Health Initiative, in our pilot year, is to improve the behavioral health of our students, support our families, and ensure a safe learning environment in all our classrooms. We have already begun to lay the groundwork for a successful program, some of the actions that we have taken so far include:

- Reducing classroom size and increasing teacher-to-student ratios.
- Professional development including trauma-informed training for all teachers and communication and relationship-building training for teachers in the school-aged classroom.
- Engaging Pinebrook Family Answers and Unconditional Childcare to provide classroom observations and one-on-one mentoring to help teachers develop strategies for proactively identifying triggers and addressing problems.
- Suggesting additional supports and referrals for evaluations to families with children who are struggling.
- Discussing strategies with School District teachers, existing support staff, and parents to ensure we are working in concert.
- Introducing new classroom materials to keep things novel and fun and providing additional self-regulation and mindfulness tools.
- Providing access to our sensory room, which provides a place for children to explore, work on their self-regulation skills, and allows a place for teachers to provide individualized attention and support.

Despite the steps we have already taken we simply do not currently have the staff to adequately address the myriad needs of our children and their families. Your funding will allow us to continue to expand upon the work we have begun, purchase needed supplies and tools to work with our students and hire a full-time Behavioral Health Specialist to provide the expertise and additional classroom resources necessary to help our children thrive. The Behavioral Health Specialist will plan, develop, and

provide programming to meet the psychological, emotional, and developmental needs of the students and families in our Learning Center, especially those managing the effects of stress and trauma. Dividing time between all classrooms the Behavioral Health Specialist will conduct classroom observations and children's needs and strengths assessments. We are a big proponent of the idea that behavior is communication, which is especially true in young children that may lack the sophistication to self-evaluate and articulate their feelings. One of the roles of the Behavioral Health Specialist will be looking at what the student's behavior is telling us and help us take a proactive approach, rather than a reactive one.

OBJECTIVES

1. Assist families to obtain Early Interventions, evaluations, and other services including coordinating early assessments of children at-risk for educational, social, and behavioral developmental delays, and liaise with assigned third-party behavioral intervention service providers.
2. Work one-on-one with a child diagnosed with a behavioral problem.
3. Develop comprehensive behavioral plans for each classroom.
4. Conduct team meetings with the family and our educational team to focus on the needs and goals for the child, family, and classroom.
5. Model the implementation of the behavioral plan with the family and provide coaching and training to both the parents and teachers.
6. Provide emergency classroom crisis intervention and behavior de-escalation support.
7. Provide the tools and classroom supplies necessary to assist children to engage with the learning process.

EVALUATION METRICS

The outcomes we will track and report on include:

- 100% of children age 0-5, remaining in the Learning Center for at least 90 days will be evaluated using Pennsylvania state assessment tools (G.O.L.D.) and meet or show progress meeting developmentally appropriate benchmarks, including social and emotional benchmarks
- School-aged children will demonstrate increased compliance with behavioral and educational expectations, including developmentally appropriate coping mechanisms and self-regulation skills.
- Teachers will report a reduction in the number of disruptive outbursts that halt classroom learning; demonstrated through teacher-completed pre-initiative surveys and then evaluated quarterly.
- Improved monitoring of key behavioral objectives with children and families showing progress towards meeting agreed-upon goals.
- Parents will demonstrate increased engagement; 75% of families contacted for additional supportive services will accept and follow through with the Behavioral Health Specialist within 90 days.
- Parents will demonstrate the ability to advocate on behalf of their children and understand their children's rights to education and access to accommodations and supportive services. Families

and/or the Behavioral Specialist will reach out to local agencies, school district personnel, and existing collaborations to ensure that the child and families' needs are met. The Behavioral Specialist will document any follow-up communication needed to meet a child's needs, weekly. A monthly report of advocacy will be tallied. At least 4 contacts for advocacy will be completed monthly and on an as-needed basis.

DEMOGRAPHICS

In 2020, The Learning Center served 139 children with 89% from low-income families in the Lehigh Valley, predominantly Northampton County. All children in the Learning Center are expected to benefit from the Behavioral Health Initiative.

PROJECT BUDGET

Expense	Budget
0.5 FTE Behavioral Health Specialist	
Salary & Benefits	\$ 27,000.00
Office supplies (computer & printer)	\$ 1,000.00
Misc. classroom materials (art, social, recreational, etc.)	\$ 5,000.00
Classroom furnishings	\$ 9,000.00
STEAM Material for classrooms	\$ 3,000.00
Total Expenses	\$ 45,000.00

Additional Funding

Our Pre-K Counts and ITCS contracts will cover 50% of salary and benefits for the Behavioral Health Specialist, this funding has already been secured.

Pending funding:

- Easton Rotary Foundation - \$5,000
- Will H. Beitel Childrens Foundation \$7,000
- Easton Kiwanis Foundation \$5,000
- Donald B. and Dorothy L. Stabler Foundation \$10,000
- Keystone Savings Foundation \$5,000

Future Funding Sources & Strategies for Sustainability

Third Street Alliance will continue to seek funds from public and private sources to fund this project. We believe that ultimately funding for this program should be fully funded through our existing contracts.

Additional Attachments to follow:

- 2019 Audited Financial Statement
- 2021 Board of Directors
- IRS 501(c) (3) status letter

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