

**PROPOSAL TO FRAMINGHAM STATE UNIVERSITY NONPROFIT GIVING COURSE**

**FROM THE WORCESTER YOUTH CENTER**

**Request:** \$6,000

**Background & Mission**

The Worcester Youth Center (WYC) is a 501(c)(3) organization that provides resources and opportunities to at-risk Worcester youth, ages 14-24, enabling them to become vital, responsible, and contributing members of society. The mission is "to provide a place where young people can build lasting, positive change in their lives." The Center owns its facility and services fall under the following four categories: Academic Support, Creative Expression and Leadership, Health, Recreation and Positive Social Interaction, and Work Preparation. Clinical counseling is provided by Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC). Ultimately, the Center offers outlets that support youth to experience personal transformation. All services are free.

WYC staff and service strategies reflect cultural competence including youth cultural competence. The staff is bi-lingual in Spanish and bi-cultural. The programs at the Youth Center respond to the individual needs of youth and take into account the social context under which they live their lives.

The Center was founded after a high profile incident between police and youth at City Hall. The Center incorporated in 1994 after 3 years of planning by youth, city officials, youth and adult advocates. The founders envisioned a place open, free of charge, to any youth in Worcester, MA. The WYC was designed, by youth and adults, to assist the most under-served youth. We use a multi-pronged approach to set at-risk 14 - 24 year olds on a pathway to a successful future.

Over the past more than twenty years, the Center has increased capacity to serve more youth and offers a wider variety of programs and transitional support activities promoting positive youth development. Its program model recognizes the developmental needs of youth and encourages them during the various phases of their social, physical and intellectual maturation. Today, Worcester Youth Center exemplifies its motto: "not just a place to go, a place to go further."

The work of the Worcester Youth Center is unique and critical. According to the 2010 US Census, Worcester has a higher percentage of families living below the poverty line (18.3% vs. 10.5%) and lower per capita (\$24,326 vs. 33,966) and median (\$5,036 vs. 64,509) family income as compared to national numbers. Neighborhoods and census tracts that are at significantly greater disadvantage include Main South, Great Brook Valley, Graton Hill, Union Hill, Plumley Village, and Lakeside, many of which are in the East Side of Worcester.

Data from the MA Department of Education (2014) shows Worcester Public Schools MCAS scores for all students' Math, English Language Arts and Science (grades 3 – 10) are consistently

lower than other youth in the Commonwealth. Students scoring “Needs Improvement” and “Failing” in grade 10 are nearly double that of other youth in MA: Math (41% vs. 22%), Science (54% vs. 29) and English (24% vs. 11%). The System overall, on a scale of 1 to 5, has a rating of “4” indicating “Needs Intervention”.

Recent data from MA Department of Labor (March 2015) indicates higher unemployment in Worcester than in MA (5.7% vs. 5.0). The Center for Labor Market Studies (2009) show that the Massachusetts teen unemployment problem is more depressing for teen and young adult Blacks (13.65%) and Hispanics (20.2%), particularly males. With higher rates of African American (11.6%) and Hispanics (20.8%) living in Worcester compared to Massachusetts (6.6% and 9.5% respectively), the City is at significant risk for problems associated with low SES, and the Youth Center is a key resource for these youth.

### **Plans for 5 – 10 Years Aligned with New Initiatives**

The Board of Director of Worcester Youth Center along with the Executive Director have developed the following overarching goals for the Center:

- 1). Maintain the health of the organization financially,
- 2). Maintain the health of the organization programmatically,
- 3). Strengthen human resources and program structure,
- 4). Improve the physical program space,
- 5). Improve the reputation and visibility of WYC in the community.

We believe HSE expansion services is aligned with the overarching goals. We anticipate HSE services will be fully integrated mix of satellite offerings. The Center recently was awarded a \$95K contract with the City of Worcester to implement the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI) at the same program location, Friendly House. SSYI is an outreach program targeting the City’s youth most involved with violence, (Proven risk youth) for social services, mental health and job training. This program provides anchor funding around which we will build other services, such as HSE. The HSE is a natural extension programmatically. We have begun to talk to the City to determine if we can allocate a portion of this SSYI funding to the HSE program as some of the youth in the SSYI program will likely be enrolled in HSE, however will not travel to our existing location due to gang turf issues. In the meantime, we are aggressively seeking funding to bring HSE service to that location.

### **Project Description**

This funding will support the expansion of an existing High School Equivalency program (HSE) into a second location at 36 Wall Street in Worcester. The HSE is one of the Worcester Youth Center's hallmark programs. Youth lacking their HS diploma may enroll regardless of their educational level and free of cost. Graduates gain the confidence, experience and credentials to enter post-secondary educational opportunities and employment.

A portion of Worcester's youth have been unable to take advantage of the Center's HSE services due to gang turf lines that make it unsafe for youth on the East Side of Worcester to travel to other parts of the city. As a response, WYC is on the verge of launching its HSE Satellite Program, at Friendly House, in the heart of Worcester's East Side in 2016. This expansion will increase the Center's yearly target from 80 to 100 unduplicated youth; adding 20 at-risk, out-of-school youth, aged 16 – 24, who have not completed HS.

The Worcester Youth Center proposes to serve youth from Worcester's East Side within their own community. The HSE program is markedly different from other adult basic education providers in the City, who caters more to the traditional student who has for whatever reason not completed high school. These program follow a cohort model enrolling students at certain times of the year and ushering them through a group process in unison overtime. Some program use cut off score to ween applicant who are not likely to complete in the proscribed amount of time. The student attracted to the Youth Center student have found that process difficult due to their life challenges

Our program centers on individualized service planning, which is a major factor in motivating them to participate in our program. Incentive are also built into the program, offering a \$100 sponsorship of the HiSet exam and an additional \$100 for successful completion.

The course focused on the individual needs of each particular student, versus a cohort model with all student at similar levels. In our model, addresses the needs of student who score on the Test for Basic Education (TABE) at 2<sup>nd</sup> grade or 9<sup>th</sup> grade level. In addition, accommodation are made for those who encounter "life's problems", they are able to work at their own pace, versus being asked to leave the course due to non-attendance.

Our case manager provide supportive care when required to assist them to address barriers that cause instability in their lives. Our philosophy is to keep them engaged so that they can acquire soft skill necessary to develop and improve daily routines leading to stability.

The Transtheoretical social change theory is at the center of our program model. This theory demonstrates how people can change behavior starting with unawareness or their condition through mastery of their own destiny. I unique feature of this model is that it factors in the certainty of individual setbacks as part of the change process. These 6 stages are align with our services model outlined below.

- **Stage1:** Youth demonstrate interest in pursuing their high school equivalency certificate by registering for and taking the 1.5-hour TABE placement test, receive 30-minute intake to create an individualized learning plan based on TABE results and student input, and are given a class schedule. (Outcome goal- 20 youth enroll)
- **Stage2:** Youth attend class and receive 1:1 assistance to improve their knowledge in five core subject areas: Reading, Writing, Math, Social Studies and Science, based on their needs and goals. Learning goals and progress tracked in student's file using their learning plan as a guide. (Outcome goal- 80% increase at least one grade level)
- **Stage3:** Youth are assisted to register for and schedule their HiSET exam once educational staff deems them ready to pass the five-subject test. Graduations are

offered twice/year to graduates with their families, friends and community members. (Outcome goal- 15% take HiSET exam, 10% graduate)

- **Stage 4:** Youth are referred to career-related assistance, either to enter the workforce or post-secondary college or training. (100% referred, 10% enter post-secondary education)
- **Stage 5:** Follow up is provided at 1 month, 3 month and 6 month intervals to offer support services, including additional educational support, to keep them engaged in their employment or education. (follow-up to 100% of participants)
- **Stage 6:** Invariably students will face the potential of regressing to a prior to completing any stage, this is due to many factors. When this occurs we re-engage them where they left off and support them to continue towards their goal.

Concurrent to the HSE program offerings, youth are provided ongoing wrap-around services that allow them to participate at the highest level possible, e.g. transportation and behavioral health.

The impact is great; According to the Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery Commission of Massachusetts, youth who drop out are more likely to need public assistance, to end up in a correctional institution, to make less money and "are not equipped to meet the labor force requirements of Massachusetts' increasingly sophisticated economy". With their high school equivalency certificate, youth gain an increased sense of self-confidence and self-worth, access increased earning potential and can enter post-secondary education. Earned wages contribute to tax base and potentially reduce need for public assistance for some participants.

## **Funding**

The Worcester Youth Center has income from diverse sources. Our 2016 budget shows 52% coming from government sources (2% federal, 17% state, and 33% city). Corporate giving is 9%, foundations 34%, 4% individuals and 1% other. Our largest funder is the City of Worcester which administers several restricted state grants through to WYC. WYC also has a healthy mix of unrestricted funding through foundations and individual donations that support the Center where spending is prohibited for example core services such as administrative functions and to support programming when funding gaps exist.

The existing HSE program is funded mainly through the Charles E. Shannon anti-gang violence dollar administered by the City of Worcester (\$77,000). In addition, the program receives funding from several foundations including Hoche –Schofield (\$7,000), DCU Kids (5,000), Price Chopper's Golub Foundation (1,000), Hart Foundation (\$3,000). Other unrestricted funding is allocated to the program as needed. However, this new initiative will require more than the normal gap funding to execute properly.

Additional funding would be required to fully implement the proposed HSE services at the satellite location at Friendly House. The budget is provided below.

WORCESTER YOUTH CENTER  
HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY SATELLITE BUDGET  
JANUARY-DECEMBER 2016

<b>Personnel</b>	
Program Director (.1FTE)	\$ 5,200
Satellite Instructor (.5 FTE)	\$ 20,800
Satellite Case Manager (.5 FTE)	\$ 16,848
Payroll taxes / fringe	\$ 7,713
	\$ 50,561
 <b>Non-Personnel</b>	
Space	\$ 3,000
Workbooks, instructional materials	\$ 1,000
WRTA bus transportation	\$ 1,050
Healthy snacks	\$ 720
HiSET test fees	\$ 300
Graduate incentives	\$ 200
Admin	\$ 5,683
	\$ 11,953
	<b>\$ 62,514</b>

**Staffing**

The staff reflect the diversity of the population it serves. Worcester Youth Center serves a diverse population in the City of Worcester, MA. Our membership is 62% male, approximately 30% Latino, 20% African-American, 10% Sub-Saharan African and 40% identify as Multi-ethnic and Other. Our staff consists of bi-lingual and ethnically diverse persons who are understand and appreciate cultural, gender and gender orientation differences. Our High School Equivalency instructor (Sonya Campbell) is bi-lingual in English and Spanish. The instructor has a Master’s Degree in Development Psychology and has significant history as a teacher in English Language Art and Mathematics.

In order to fully implement the HSE services in the satellite location will require a 20 hours onsite instructor and 20 hour case manager. We would seek staff who have experience teaching in non-traditional setting and possess the ability to work with diverse individuals, including ethnically diverse people and low income persons. They will also have bi-lingual language capacity.

If funded with the \$6,000 request, WYC would match an additional amounts to be able to immediately hire an instructor, while continuing to raise funds for the rest of the budgetary items. Additional funds will be raised through grant writing and targeted appeal requests.