

MERIDEN YOUTH SERVICES

COMMUNITY MINI-GRANT REPORT

Fall 2018



HOW CAN \$250 MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY?

What difference can \$250 make? How impactful can you be with \$250? Just ask those youth groups that were funded for projects through our Meriden Youth Services Community Mini-Grants program!

The Background

In January 2018 the Department of Health and Human Services, Youth Services office, started a mini-grant program enabling youth to be put in a leadership position to make a difference in Meriden. Twice per year, through our State Department of Education Youth Service Bureau grant we allocate funding to provide youth with a mini-grant opportunity. Projects have to be youth-developed and youth-led, under the guidance of an adult advisor at a recognized organization that serves Meriden.

The Process

Twice per year (in the fall and spring) a grant application is created and distributed to youth-serving organizations. One caveat with our application – youth have to take the leadership role, not the adult! Youth have to pick a topic/project they feel would benefit the Meriden community, fill out the application, create a budget, and – the most important piece – submit it on time. Up to \$250 is available for each project, however we consider awarding additional funds depending on the amount of applications received.

The Selection

A committee is put together of Health and Human Services staff from different offices to review applications. City leadership is also invited to join this committee. After awards are determined letters are sent to each youth leader informing them of the grant award.

The Presentations

Upon completion of projects, the youth groups have to attend a wrap up session and present their completed projects. For the Fall 2018 these presentations took place on Thursday, December 6, 2018 in our Teen Conference Room. Despite some technical difficulties each group did a fantastic job highlighting their efforts from choosing their project, shopping for materials and supplies, working on each component of their projects, to finally showcasing their completed project and lessons learned. The pride these students took in undertaking the projects and demonstrating the successful outcome of their ideas created an enthusiasm that was palpable. The following is a summary of those presentations. Presentations can also be found on the Youth Services page of our website (www.meridenhealth.com).



WASHINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL & BEAT THE STREET

Washington Middle School joined forces with Beat the Street to harvest their plantings begun in the Spring of 2018. The Liberty Street garden provided much of the food for the Community Harvest Dinner held on October 10, 2018. The students took turns commenting on the progress of the harvest and meal preparation. One young student's enthusiasm for his eggplant parmigiana was an endearing testament to how much programs such as these mean to the youth in our community. It highlights how critical this program is to foster a sense of achievement and investment in seeing a project through until completion.



There were 23 youth involved in the Community Harvest Dinner, 12 females and 11 males with a diverse ethnic background. These children worked together, literally harvested the fruits of their labor and were able to incorporate a minimal amount of outside foods for a fun, farm-to-table community dinner. The ability to grow one's own food is a valuable life skill as is a community of diverse youth working together for the greater good. This sense of achievement and accomplishment is the foundation of future success in terms of self-esteem, motivation, and community connections.

GIRLS INC



For their project the Junior Leaders and Leaders in Training group at Girl's Inc chose to collect items to help new mothers at MidState Medical Center's Birthing Center. Through this program, called "A Helpful Start", the leaders wanted to collect these items to give all receiving newborns and their mothers a start on the right path in life regardless of their socioeconomic status.

The results of their "A Helpful Start" fundraiser enabled them to purchase newborn sleepers, diapers, wipes, bib, swaddle sacks and burp cloths. These essentials aided in reducing the stressful

transition from a couple/single parent to a family by providing them with items they may not have access to due to financial or time constraints. The Leaders also received a tour of the Birthing Center at MidState.

Thanks to the efforts of 20 enterprising youth participants, 30 new families received gift bags filled with items selected with care and thoughtfulness. The motto of Girls, Inc, is “inspiring all girls to be Strong, Smart, and Bold”.

LATINOS CELEBRATION ACADEMY - LINCOLN MIDDLE SCHOOL



Under the leadership of two students, Latinos Unidos brought together those of Hispanic ethnicity to increase parental and student school involvement through an afterschool activity session at the Lincoln Middle School cafeteria.

Bringing together community leaders, school staff, and students and their families, the Latinos Celebration Academy was able to provide information for the families for whom English is a second language that in turn increased their ability to navigate Powerschool, provide feedback on the school environment, and how they can collaboratively improve student attendance at their school. This group organized a meal, raffles, and a DJ to create a fun filled, informal atmosphere for the betterment of their school community.

The student leaders recognized a need for heightened parental/staff/student interaction for which language is often a barrier. This organization took the lead to facilitate it in an informative setting that promoted collaboration between the students, their families, and school staff. The dedication and effort of the students to promote collaboration despite language and cultural barriers highlights the importance of mini grants as a means to facilitate and encourage our youth to problem solve by thinking outside the traditional means of family and school interactions.



FROM BOYS TO MEN – NEW OPPORTUNITIES OF GREATER MERIDEN

From Boys to Men is a Saturday morning enrichment program for Latino and African American young men, providing guidance and a positive environment for them to work collaboratively as positive role models for the youth of their generation. Justice Amechi presented on the 40 cancer treatment bags their organization worked tirelessly to compile. Justice noticed that when his Aunt was going to chemotherapy, there were many practical and needed items in a bag she received when she began her treatments. When he asked a member of the staff at MidState Medical Center about the bags, he noticed that the bags men received while undergoing cancer treatment were less applicable to their needs. Justice brought the idea to his group and they worked diligently to acquire many needed items.



In addition to the funds granted through the mini-grant, From Boys to Men sought donations from many outside organizations in order to ensure that the bags presented to male cancer patients contained practical, necessary items that would aid them during their treatment. The Cancer Treatment Bags for Men were well received by the male cancer patients and the staff at MidState Medical Center. Justice presented the contents of the bag during the presentation – the audience was amazed at the amount of items From Boys to Men were able to collect. It truly showed the thoughtfulness and care that went into each bag.



BALL HEADZ ASSIST PROGRAM

Ball Headz, in conjunction with the local Meriden YMCA, provides students between 8-18 years old the means to perform community service that facilitates a positive experience for both the student and the community.

Working with Meriden Housing staff, the Ball Headz Assist program participants identified several areas throughout our city that needed a little sprucing up. They painted fences, a porch for a resident who was unable to do it themselves, and did a variety of cleanups throughout Meriden. Funds were used to purchase safety vests, gloves, goggles, and clean up supplies such as paint and garbage bags. Noting that Meriden students must perform 20 hours of community service before they graduate, Ball Headz Assist teaches them to carry out their tasks in a safe environment



while connecting with fellow students and interacting with adult mentors.

This program highlights the idea that community service invests youth in their community and provides an opportunity for the youth to work together outside of classrooms and on common ground. Approximately 16 students in junior high school and high school participated. In all, this collaborative gathering of students and their mentors fosters a positive foundation for future service to their community, irrespective of fulfilling a school graduation requirement.



SKILLS USA-MALONEY HIGH SCHOOL

The Skills USA-Maloney High School Chapter put together a pet therapy meet and greet for two populations: the Little Spartans Day Care children and the senior at Connecticut Baptist Home. Identifying the benefits of interacting with animals, something enjoyed by children of all ages, it facilitated interactions between two generations of their community. Through pet therapy provided by Farm on Wheels at the Connecticut Baptist Home, the children and the senior citizens were able to improve their socialization and communication skills by interacting together through their mutual affection for animals.



This event brought together two populations that don't typically interact with one another and allowed the children to see the older generation as approachable and fun to be around. The youth at Maloney High School's Skills USA not only facilitated these interactions but noted the health benefits of pet therapy for the elderly such as improving the senior citizens joint and motor skills, reducing their blood pressure and increasing their self-esteem by feeling a part of the community instead of a forgotten member of it.

THE STATS

Below is a summary of program participants:

Total number of youth hours planning/evaluating projects	102 hours
Total number of youth hours put into conducting the projects	132.5 hours
Total number of youth participants	145
Total funds provided	\$2,250

CONCLUSION

Each youth group is to be commended for their hard work and dedication to serving our community. Our office achieved our program goals of building youth-leadership roles in the community, promoting greater awareness of youth-developed and youth-led projects, and investing students in their community on a deeper level. The youth and youth-groups achieved their goals of fostering leadership skills and community awareness of the impact youth-led projects can have in Meriden. And, having a little fun along the way never hurts!

This program had participation from both genders with their demographic make-up reflective of the diverse population of Meriden. Through their efforts, several at-risk demographics were served.

The enthusiasm of all the organizations whose leadership allowed their youth to plan the projects, budget for program expenses, and execute the project continues to resonate with City youth organizations.

This program facilitates leadership skills and encourages our youth to invest themselves as part of the community. The connections made by the youth with each other and those impacted by their positive energy and projects is the foundation for the future success of both the students and the community in which they reside.

Congratulations to those who were funded for Fall 2018 projects. The Meriden Department of Health and Human Services, Youth Services office, offers this opportunity twice per year – in the fall and spring. If you are a youth or youth serving organization interested in future opportunities please contact us at 203-630-4221.

