

# MERIDEN YOUTH SERVICES

# COMMUNITY MINI-GRANT REPORT

Spring 2018



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

What difference can \$250 make? How impactful can you be with \$250? Just ask the 9 youth groups that were funded for projects through our first ever Meriden Youth Services Community Mini-Grants program!

### **The Background**

The Department of Health and Human Services, Youth Services office, wanted to come up with a program that would put youth in a leadership position to make a difference in Meriden. Through our State Department of Education Youth Service Bureau grant we allocated funding to provide youth with just this opportunity. Projects had to be youth-developed and youth-led, under the guidance of an adult advisor at a recognized organization that serves Meriden.

### **The Process**

In January 2018 a grant application was created and distributed to youth-serving organizations. One caveat with our application – youth had to take the leadership role, not the adult! Youth had to pick a topic/project they felt would benefit the Meriden community, fill out the application, create a budget, and – the most important piece – submit it on time. Applications were due February 9, 2018. Up to \$250 was available for each project.

### **The Selection**

A committee was put together of Health and Human Services staff from different offices to review applications. We received 14 applications and, after some difficult decisions, were able to fund 9 at the full \$250 ask (\$2,250 total). Letters were sent out to each youth leader informing them of the grant award.

### **The Presentations**

Upon completion of projects, the youth groups were asked to attend a wrap up session and present their completed projects. These presentations took place on Thursday, June 7, 2018 in our Teen Conference Room. Each completed a PowerPoint presentation that highlighted their efforts from choosing their project, shopping for materials and supplies, working on each component of their projects, to finally 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.

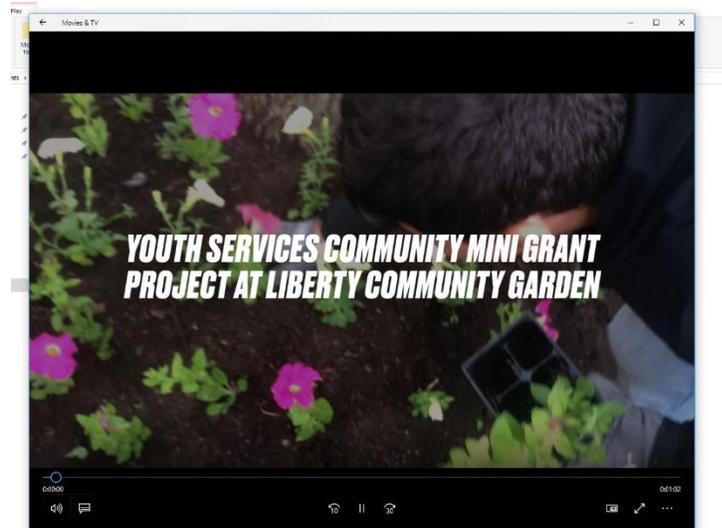


## BEAT THE STREET

The youth members of Beat the Street chose to undertake a Liberty Street Garden Community Clean-up & Beautification project. Through the grant students purchased gloves, garbage bags, soil, and flowers. On June 4, 2018, 15 young girls and boys ages 6-13 gathered to work together to complete their project.

The youth also cleaned up the litter surrounding the site of the Liberty Street garden.

The group dug and planted the flowers to create a beautiful border to their community garden. To celebrate this achievement, the group had pizza and water while they discussed the importance of the project to them and to the community. Their YouTube video, which documented the project, has over 100 views highlighting their investment in their community and the interest it has generated.



## GIRLS INC

These young leaders coordinated a Women in Power themed event held at the Meriden Health and Human Services Department on March 22, 2018. The diverse group paired up mothers/caregivers and daughters to facilitate a discussion about empowering women and promoting self-esteem through a greater sense of unity and solidarity fostered by the example of local female leaders who have earned positions of authority in their respective fields.

The panelists spoke on overcoming obstacles in life and the workplace to achieve their goals. This discussion was followed by a breakout session for crafts which included creating jars filled with positive affirmations to boost one's self-esteem and remain focused on their current goals.

The girls appreciated the opportunity to speak with successful professionals who overcame their own obstacles to achieve their goals. This sense of empowerment allowed them to visualize what hard work and opportunity can lead them to.



## MALONEY'S LITTLE LEO CLUB & MERIDEN LIONS CLUB

Working collaboratively with a strong community supporter, the Meriden Lions Club, Maloney High School's Little Leo Club built a little library to promote literacy and a clothing cupboard for those in need.

Three males and twelve females between the ages of 9-18 undertook the creation and construction of a little library and clothing cupboard which was dedicated on June 9, 2018 at Giuffrida Park. The Record Journal featured this project in the paper on June 14, 2018.

The purpose was to make books and clothing accessible and at no cost to members of the general public.

Since the dedication of the library, the group has found that the community is utilizing both the library and clothing cupboard as books and items have been taken and subsequently replaced with new items. Their organization is making an impact on the community one book/one clothing item at a time.

## Local & State

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MERIDEN

### Maloney High School club creates 'community closet' in Giuffrida Park

By Janiece Roman  
Record-Journal staff

MERIDEN — The Maloney High School Leo Club and Meriden Lions Club have created a "community closet" featuring donated items in Giuffrida Park.

Kate Valentin, Leo Club advisor, said the project was almost entirely student-run.

The students "wanted to come up with a project that would carry out throughout the years," Valentin said. "A community project that is kind of sustained."

The community closet features various donated items such as books, sunscreen, cleaning wipes and bandages. In the winter, it will have hats and gloves.

Meriden Lions Club member and Leo Club Co-Advisor Ed Haberli said the Leo Club was founded four years ago as a student version of the Meriden Lions Club.

"We support them financially with what they need to run their club but they are an independent club," Haberli said.

Kim Vu, president of the Leo Club, said the students applied for a \$250 Youth Service Mini-Grant from the Meriden Department of Health and Human Services to complete the project.

"It's a wonderful feeling that at such a young age you can give back to the community," Vu said. "It's great that community members can (participate) by donating."

Vu, 17, said she built the closet with the help of Thomas Gordon, a woodworking teacher, and members of the Leo Club.

Valentin said many of the items were donated or bought by Leo Club members.

She said many of the items placed in the closet are already gone, which means the closet is being used.

"Leo stands for leadership experience opportunity," Haberli said. "Students grow in understanding of leadership in the community."

roman@record-journal.com  
603-317-3420  
Twitter: @myrecordjournal



From left, Kim Vu, 17, president of the Maloney High School Leo Club, Ed Haberli, advisor for the Leo Club and member of the South Meriden Lions Club, and Kate Valentin, advisor for the Leo Club and member of the South Meriden Lions Club, talk next to the new community closet at Giuffrida Park in Meriden Wednesday. Photo by Dave Zapp, Record-Journal



The new community closet features donated items, including books, sunscreen, cleaning wipes and bandages.



## MERIDEN UNITED LACROSSE/MERIDEN BOYS & GIRLS CLUB

Working in collaboration, Meriden United Lacrosse and the Meriden Boys & Girls Club brought together over 20 male and female youth for their "Meriden United Cleans Up" project.

Those in attendance participated in cleaning up Washington Park which includes a community playground, basketball and tennis courts. It is also the current practice field for Meriden United Lacrosse.

The group purchased gloves, garbage bags, and new garbage cans to aid in keeping Washington Park clean once their project was completed. The clean-up project involved not just local youth, but



**Meriden United Cleans Up**  
Saturday, April 7, 2018  
9:30 AM  
Washington Park

MU is getting together to clean up our fields! Join us for a team effort to get the trash up at Washington Park (and Falcon Field if we have time) so the fields are clean and safe for practices and games. We'll have gloves and trash bags available. Bring your sticks for a game of catch too!  
Please RSVP so we can anticipate how many will attend.  
Call or Text Kate Maldonado: 860-550-0992  
Snacks and beverages will be provided.

their parents and coaches as well highlighting the importance of adults leading by example. The youth worked with Meriden Parks and Recreation to pick a spot for new garbage cans in the park.

Through their efforts, this group made a difference in their community by leaving the park cleaner and helping maintenance efforts of the Parks and Recreation Department with the increased number of garbage receptacles.

## NATHAN HALE STUDENT AMBASSADOR SQUAD



The Nathan Hale Student Ambassador Squad proposed a Nathan Hale Rocks project in association with the Kindness Rocks project. The mini-grant funds were used to purchase paint, brushes, river rocks, markers and clear acrylic spray to coat the finished rocks.

On June 8, 2018, students from the Ambassador Squad and all Nathan Hale students met in the school's cafeteria to paint and decorate rocks with positive affirmations to be placed at various locations throughout the City of Meriden. That's almost 550 student impacted by a \$250 mini-grant!

The entire student population worked together to achieve the goals of becoming a closer student group and to make a positive impact on the community around them through the placement of the rocks and kind sayings on them.

## WASHINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL

Washington Middle School's (WMS) 7<sup>th</sup> grade student representatives proposed a "Be the Difference" project.

The "Be the Difference" project is a means to promote a healthy school environment through acceptance and kindness.

The 7<sup>th</sup> graders, under the leadership of the mini-grant youth leaders and adult advisor, used the funds to create posters, a short film, and host an assembly to further the concept of the mission of WMS to respect the school, each other, and one's self. Their project goal was to facilitate positive change and reduce social isolation in both WMS and the greater community.

### Be the Difference

There are a lot of people that have gotten bullied and I don't know why. People find the smallest thing wrong with a person and bullies them for it. I want to stop this. I got this idea from last year when one of the 8th grade students at WMS organized the One of a Kind Program. Since she is now in high school and no one is here to keep the program running, so I want to step forward and do it. I hate when people bully because like Joseph said we don't know what the person you are bullying's home life like you don't know anything other than what rumors (which are normally wrong) say. I also always say most people that bully people about small things are trying to hide these small things that they have wrong with family or school, but instead of hiding it you should let teachers or counselors know. I want people to feel comfortable to talk to me or a teacher or any adult in the building and for us as leaders to be able to stop bullying. I want to have people that I trust and know that don't bully to help me start off.

We have a group of 10 7th grade students who feel the same way I do and we have been meeting together once a week to come up with ideas to Be the Difference in our school. We first wanted to send out encouraging notes to all the 7th grade students to let them know that they are important and they matter. We used the quotes below and put a sticky note on every 7th and 8th grade's locker. After that we created signs for the girl's bathroom and put encouraging notes around the mirror. We were so excited when girls started to take positive selfies with the notes and felt like they could take what notes they needed to make them feel better. We needed to keep adding to the sticky notes often.

Stay positive when negativity surrounds you.  
No act of kindness no matter how small is worthless.  
Every champion was once a contender who refused to give up.  
There are too many people in this world just to let one keep you down.  
Be who you are not who the world wants you to be.  
Be the type of person you want to meet.  
If you can dream it you can do it.  
The only cannot be changed the future is yet in your power.  
Don't give up because of what someone said, use it as motivation to push harder.  
The real happiness comes from peace you can  
what someone is to flowers, smiles are to humanity.  
Every day is a journey.  
An obstacle is often a stepping stone.  
A flower doesn't think of competing with the flower next to it, it just blooms.  
Don't go where the girls may lead you instead go where there is no girls and leave a  
coming together is a beginning keeping together is progress working together is  
success.

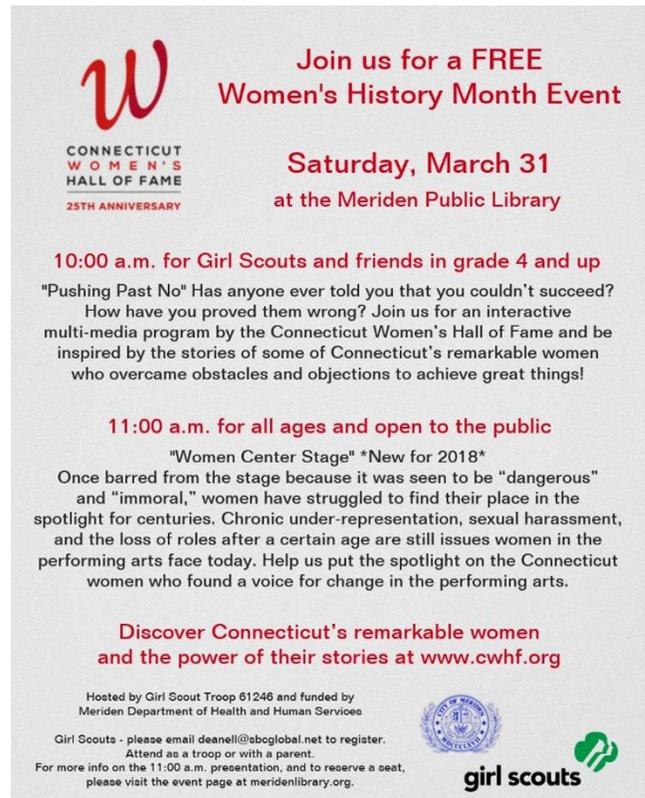
## MERIDEN GIRL SCOUTS

The Meriden Girl Scouts used their grant funds to promote a greater awareness of the CT Women's Hall of Fame in conjunction with March being Women's History Month and the anniversary of the Girl Scouts organization.

The group used the funds for 80 flyers and 3 banners used at their presentation at the Meriden Public Library on March 31, 2018.

Their presentation highlighted Connecticut women in the Hall of Fame with brief histories of each and why their achievements are important.

Each woman in the Hall of Fame provides inspiration for the future leaders in the Girl Scouts and enlighten the public who may not be familiar with the achievements of these remarkable women.



**Join us for a FREE Women's History Month Event**

**Saturday, March 31**  
at the Meriden Public Library

**10:00 a.m. for Girl Scouts and friends in grade 4 and up**  
"Pushing Past No" Has anyone ever told you that you couldn't succeed? How have you proved them wrong? Join us for an interactive multi-media program by the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame and be inspired by the stories of some of Connecticut's remarkable women who overcame obstacles and objections to achieve great things!

**11:00 a.m. for all ages and open to the public**  
"Women Center Stage" \*New for 2018\*  
Once barred from the stage because it was seen to be "dangerous" and "immoral," women have struggled to find their place in the spotlight for centuries. Chronic under-representation, sexual harassment, and the loss of roles after a certain age are still issues women in the performing arts face today. Help us put the spotlight on the Connecticut women who found a voice for change in the performing arts.

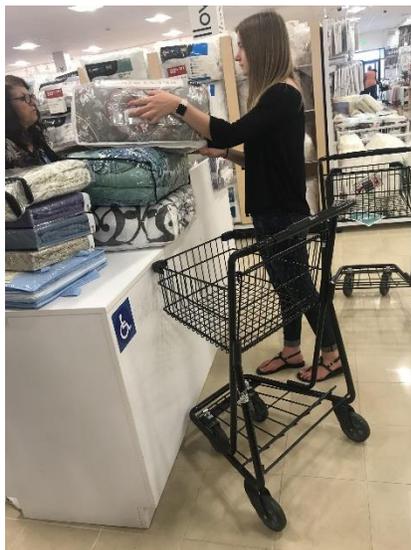
**Discover Connecticut's remarkable women and the power of their stories at [www.cwhf.org](http://www.cwhf.org)**

Hosted by Girl Scout Troop 61246 and funded by Meriden Department of Health and Human Services

Girl Scouts - please email [deenell@sbglobal.net](mailto:deenell@sbglobal.net) to register. Attend as a troop or with a parent.  
For more info on the 11:00 a.m. presentation, and to reserve a seat, please visit the event page at [meridenlibrary.org](http://meridenlibrary.org).

## MERIDEN ROTARY CLUB

The Maloney High School Meriden Rotary Club-Interact Club created a project called The Helping Hands.



The goal of the project was to decorate the new rooms at the Women and Families Center (WFC) for youth who will participate in the new Transitional Living Program.

This program will house a total of six residents ranging from 18-24 years old. The program was designed for young adults suffering from housing instability that will be afforded the opportunity to have a place to live. Applicants would be screened before being considered for the opportunity and there was criteria to be met. Some criteria the applicants needed to meet were the age requirement, possessing a job or actively looking or going to school, convicted of a crime within the last six months, and no history of mental illness.

The youth met with the director of the Transitional Living Program to get a tour of the space and created a list of needs. Through some savvy shopping, the youth were able to purchase bedding and supplies for the rooms. Aesthetically pleasing decorations and items for the rooms will help future occupants who have aged out of traditional youth assistance programs. This underserved population will step into these rooms knowing that youth in their city made a difficult time in their lives a little less stressful.



## SKILLS USA



The Skills USA-Maloney High School Chapter did 2 projects with their funding – 1) stocked the pantry at the Transitional Living Program at the Women and Families Center and 2) put together lunches for the homeless through their Sacks of Love project.

In their application, the members of Skills USA-Maloney High School Chapter noted that the homeless suffer from food insecurity. They also noted that food insecurity is an issue for youth participating in the Transitional Living Program.

The Skills USA members went shopping at a local grocery store for the food items. They were very conscious of their budget and made an effort to purchase foods they felt youth 18 to 24 would eat. They then brought everything to the Women and

Families Center and stocked the pantry!

For Sacks of Love, members purchased healthy, non-perishable food item. Twenty-four bags were filled and then dropped off at Saint Vincent de Paul in Middletown.

Identifying the critical food needs of both the homeless and those just beyond their own age bracket demonstrated their awareness of their community. By investing the funds and the time necessary to execute the project, the Skills USA members brought much needed kindness and hope to two underserved populations.



## 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	122 <b>PLUS</b> All Nathan Hale students (550)! <b>PLUS</b> all 7 <sup>th</sup> graders at Washington Middle School!

## CONCLUSION

Each youth group is to be commended for their participation in our first mini grant endeavor. We 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 program had participation from both genders with their demographic make-up reflective of the diverse population of the City 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.

The Meriden Department of Health and Human Services, Youth Services office, hopes to provide this program again bi-annually – the fall and spring.



Report created 8/3/2018