

# THE BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF ALPENA (BGCA)

## A Local Institution That's Always There for Youth

The Boys & Girls Club of Alpena (BGCA) has served youth throughout the local community since 1926. Today, BGCA is practically alone in the region in providing affordable, year-round, out-of-school time (OST) programming, both after school and during the summer.

For a nominal annual membership fee, school-aged youth can participate in BGCA's high-quality OST programs. Parents find it highly valuable, as CEO Bradley Somers put it, "[t]o be able to bring [their] kids to a place that's safe, that has trained professional staff that works with the kids and provides many opportunities, with a free meal each day." BGCA also conducts outreach activities for youth in the community, involving them in special projects, volunteerism, and mentoring initiatives.

During 2020, the pandemic forced many community-based organizations (CBOs) like BGCA to curtail operations. As a result, stress and isolation levels have been raised among young people as positive social interactions and learning opportunities declined.

BGCA nonetheless managed in 2020 to serve an average of 125 youth per day, which was down from pre-pandemic average levels of 165 youth per day—and due to pandemic regulations, there was at the time a waiting list of 75 young people. BCGA leaders are, however, committed to serving as many youth as possible in an effort to ensure each individual student could one day attain their ambitions, pandemic or no.

## SECTION 23E GRANT FUNDING

Enacted on March 9th, Section 23e of 2021 Public Act 3 appropriated \$5 million in pandemic relief funds for grants to CBOs for the provision of OST programs to K–8 children. BGCA opted to submit an individual application, making it one of 57 that the Michigan Department of Education received.

### The BGCA Section 23e Summer 2021 Program

The BGCA's application stated that "[t]his grant opportunity would strategically and intentionally fulfill our mission to serve more youth and provide them with vital development and resources all while being mentored and taught by trained caring professionals." That it did, thanks to the 23e award. The grant directly allowed BGCA to extend its summer programming in several respects: participant capacity and daily program time were substantially increased, and educational content was broadened and deepened.

This impact happened principally through BGCA's ability, with 23e funding,

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On the impact of Section 23e funding in the summer of 2021:

*“We need to do what we can do to encourage these young people **now**, not in two or three years. And this grant did just that, **now.**”*

– Bradley Somers, CEO



to employ five additional summer program staff members instead of the usual two. The increased staff capacity provided more program time and lower staff-participant ratios. The additional staff also promoted more diverse skills and experience and fostered more collaboration as they worked to implement local learning opportunities. Given BGCA's established model to engage all staff in all program aspects, the positive effects of augmented staff were amplified for the summer initiative.

## Operational Components

*Site and Participants.* The program occurred at the BGCA's facility weekdays from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. for 12 weeks. On average, about 200 K–8 students attended daily. (In prior years the program ran weekdays from noon to 6 p.m., and average daily attendance numbered about 125.) BGCA utilizes a member tracking system for each program, and it conducts pre- and post-assessments to gauge participant program interests, experiences, and progress.

*Staffing and Training.* Program staff, all possessing prior experience, is composed of youth-development professionals and volunteers under the supervision of a unit director and CEO. All staff engage in daily program activities and participate in regular professional development opportunities that are locally and

nationally sourced. For the 2021 summer program, staff received additional training from local BGCA partners in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); reading programs; non-violent crisis intervention; and trauma-informed learning. Participants in BGCA's volunteer program, including returning high school and other older students, also undergo a vetting and a comprehensive induction process.

*Curriculum and Activities.* BGCA already had substantial experience successfully implementing its proven programs, which were designed and developed at local and national levels. Its regular summer program was enriched with formal and informal literacy, math, science, and social emotional learning (SEL) curricula. In this connection, BGCA staff prepared a range of fun, age-appropriate programming options with daily activities around the four grant-aligned content and skill areas. SEL was integrated into virtually all the program elements.

## Successes and Challenges

The 23e grant substantially moved BGCA toward what its application called “[o]ur strategic focus: to increase our capacity and serve as many youth as safely as we can with quality programming options and services.” With the pandemic's continuing magnification of

learning loss, BGCA did and does work to meet Alpena families' need for a safe—including a COVID-safe—place where youth would be active, well-fed, and engaged in activities and interactions that developed sound relationships and fostered healthy physical, intellectual, and social growth. BGCA staff witnessed how, after all the ill effects of COVID-19, youth realized the irreplaceable value of education, including that provided by OST programs. Indeed, BGCA has experienced greater numbers of summer students returning—i.e., continuing to benefit—during the school year.

The first round of 23e grants may have made a key contribution to BGCA's good work going forward. BGCA's 23e summer program helped reveal the community need; it also demonstrated that the need could be effectively addressed. According to Mr. Somers, “These grants are wonderful. I love to apply for whatever opportunity our clubs may have. But sustainability is an issue with things like this. We build the capacity, the encouragement, and the programs. Then next year, you have to apply again and don't know if funds will be available.”

That is the question: Will the second round of grants, together with other future funding, be able to maintain and grow the OST program improvements and beneficial effects that occurred the first time?