

GUIDED GRACE FAMILY & YOUTH SERVICES

Enrichment and Mindfulness Camps Are Effective

“When we heard about the Section 23e grant opportunity we thought, this is just for us,” Nicole Liggins, co-founder of Guided Grace Family & Youth Services in Saginaw, Michigan. “Saginaw is in dire straits and needs help to support our youth.”

Guided Grace Family & Youth Services (<https://guidedgracefys.com/>), a tax-exempt nonprofit organization, was established to address challenges brought on by Saginaw’s loss of its manufacturing base in recent years. The organization promotes mental health and wellness within the community, but without more funding, its leaders knew it could not address all that should be done. Then Guided Grace received some good news.

SECTION 23E GRANT FUNDING

Michigan Public Act 3 of 2021 appropriated federal funds approved in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act. Specifically, Section 23e of the act provided funds to Michigan community-based organizations like Guided Grace to provide before- and after-school and summer learning programs for children in kindergarten through 8th grade.

The Saginaw 23e Program

With Section 23e funding, Guided Grace was able to offer enrichment and mindfulness camps beginning in June 2021. Activities aligned with the grant requirements were available at multiple sites for students in grades K–8. These youth programs were provided Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m., in reading, math, hands-on science, and social emotional learning. They also provided breakfast and lunch daily and offered tutoring and homework help.

Originally, Mrs. Liggins and other program leaders planned to target children whose families were receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) support, but as they began interviewing youth, they realized that ALL families were struggling through the pandemic. “Clearly, COVID-19 is an equal opportunity pandemic that impacted everyone,” stated Mrs. Liggins. Still, approximately 75% of the youth served did come from families receiving TANF support.



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Operational Components

Site and Participants. Guided Grace used five licensed sites that included its own facility along with a child care center and three churches. At any given time, four sites were operating.

Program space varied site to site from 1,000 to 5,000 square feet; however, all sites provided outdoor spaces for activities. Distributed among the four operating sites, Guided Grace served 60 students on any given day and maintained staffing levels of less than 10 students per staff member.

Staffing and Training.

Curriculum leaders provided direct support to on-site staff through facilitated professional development. Each site was managed by an experienced leader who oversaw the day-to-day management of the program offerings. Site managers had contact with parents and caregivers and oversight of the program aides.

Curriculum and Activities.

Careful thought went into developing an engaging curriculum. Program leaders elected to use Smithsonian Science for the Classroom™, a hands-on science program that brings highly engaging learning and assessment to classrooms. In addition to the core activities, program leaders added a music component. A musical therapist developed approaches that integrated music with the

academic areas. Beyond music, additional learning components included leadership, recreation therapy, and financial literacy.

Technology. Program leaders utilized Basecamp, a multiplatform web-based project-management and communication application to facilitate communications between curriculum leaders, site managers, and program aides. Multiple indicators of student performance were maintained in the Basecamp application. Often, these indicators were collected each day.

Successes and Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic will be one of the most significant trials we face—its impact will last for years. But as in the past, these challenges have been and will continue to be addressed at all levels, internationally as well as in local communities. The enrichment and mindfulness camps provided by Guided Grace and funded by Section 23e of the Michigan Public Act 3 of 2021 is just one example of how leaders in one community—a community in need—worked together to help the children and their families overcome the frustrations and struggles presented by this pandemic.