

THE LOWELL Y

State YMCA Network Member, Community Mainstay

For years the community of Lowell, Michigan has been well-served by the Lowell YMCA, one of seven branches of the YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids, which itself is a member of the State Alliance of Michigan YMCAs (Y Alliance). Operating out of its storefront facility, the Lowell Y, a local community-based organization (CBO), has long provided out-of-school time (OST) programs in local schools, both during the school year and throughout the summer. Many area families trust the Lowell Y for providing a safe place where children can enjoy high-quality care while learning and growing through healthy physical, academic, and social emotional learning (SEL) activities and experiences.

Section 23e Grant Funding

Significant help for OST programs was provided in 2021 when Public Act 3, Section 23e appropriated \$5 million in pandemic-related relief funds for grants to CBOs to provide OST programs for K–8 school-aged youth. Given its experience, expertise, and other resources, the Y Alliance mobilized its network members to submit a coordinated grant application that integrated academic and enrichment activities. This work necessitated new staff, which grant dollars went to support. The Y Alliance allocated all the grants to local Ys, closely collaborating with them to revise implementation plans for the enhanced program.

The Lowell Y 23e Program

“It was a godsend!” Youth and Family Director Tyson Hoffman said of this year’s 23e funding support.

Thanks to 23e funding, the Lowell Y was able to expand its high-quality summer day camp programming with sufficient materials to conduct all the activities with more children, and with every child able to participate fully.

With Y Alliance assistance, including content resources and activities aligned with grant requirements, the camp experience was significantly enhanced by the infusion of focused STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math), along with literacy and SEL education.

The funding not only increased camp capacity to serve more families, it also helped maintain essential program components for all participants when unanticipated challenges arose.

For more information about high-quality out-of-school time programming in Michigan, please contact Erin Skene-Pratt, Executive Director, erin.skene-pratt@uwmich.org.



On the impact of Section 23e funding:

“It’s been a game-changer.”

– Fran Talsma, Executive Director, State Alliance of Michigan YMCAs

“It was a godsend!”

– Tyson Hoffman, Youth and Family Director, Lowell YMCA



Operational Components

Site and Participants. The camp was available to K-8 students in the Lowell school district each weekday from 6:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. for a total of 13 weeks in spaces at Cherry Creek Elementary School.

On a weekly basis, the camp served between 75 and 80 youth on average over the course of the summer. Campers came from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds and from every part of the Lowell community.

Staffing and Training. The Y Alliance helped ensure that all seven local staff members, regardless of longevity, had a week of training before the summer program and another week before the school year began. This more rigorous professional development included content centered on child safety, behavioral development, and SEL.

Curriculum and Activities. Local Ys like Lowell already had experience successfully implementing YMCA-supplied programming, such as CATCH, a physical activity and healthy nutrition curriculum.

For 2021, following the Y Alliance grant-supported work, the Lowell Y implemented the enhanced academic content by infusing it into camp activities every day. Thus, a wide variety of active STEAM, literacy, and SEL activities were typically

conducted between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.

More important, Mr. Hoffman said, “The kids got a lot extra out of camp this year.” The Lowell Y fulfilled families’ need for a safe place where children would be active, well-fed, and engaged in activities and interactions that developed sound relationships and fostered healthy physical, intellectual, and social growth.

Successes and Challenges

With the help of Section 23e grant funds, the networked efforts of the Y Alliance and local CBOs such as the Lowell Y benefited many families struggling in adverse circumstances. The challenges of providing high-quality OST programming do not end with one successful summer because the need never ends.

Going forward, both Ms. Talsma and Mr. Hoffman expressed the same concerns about the uncertainty around future funding and the sustainability of the program improvements that were made in 2021. Even in 2021, grant funds were not awarded, let alone disbursed, until after many of the Y summer programs had already begun.