GRANTEE ORGANIZATION
Hands4Hope – Youth Making A Difference
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SUBMITTING PERSON
Jennifer Bassett, Executive Director

GRANT TITLE
Project Grow

AWARD DATE
June 2013

GRANT AMOUNT
$13,000

DATE GRANT REPORT COMPLETE
6/12/14
1. List the goals and objectives of the project/program followed by the progress made toward achieving each goal and objective.

The goal of Project Grow was to allow Hands4Hope to expand our School Club Program in order to give more youth the opportunity to be a part of this service learning program. The Club program creates an opportunity for youth to connect with their community and augment existing community services, all while developing and nurturing these young leaders into civic minded residents who have compassion for the needy; who engage in action to bring about change; and who work for a safe, vital community.

This grant was expected to allow Hands4Hope to expand its program into three new schools, create the opportunity for 60 more youth to be involved in our club program at the schools, provide a home base for these youth to do their work, and allow us to add another 2,000 hours of youth volunteer time to our program.

With excitement and deep gratitude to the Women’s Fund El Dorado, Hands4Hope was able to achieve the goal of Project Grow and meet the majority of the objectives set for this project. Hands4Hope expanded into four new schools this past school year: Lakeview Elementary, Herbert Green Middle School, Camerado Springs Middle School, and El Dorado High School. Through the expansion into these schools, we were able to engage 146 new young people and expose another 3,099 students, elementary through high school, to needs in the community, giving them the opportunity to take action in their own way. We were also able to maintain the Youth Center in El Dorado Hills as a home base for our young philanthropists, giving them a place to meet, plan, and prep for their projects.

The one objective we fell short on is adding another 2,000 hours of volunteer time. Because some of our young people struggled with getting the necessary approvals and the required club sponsor (a teacher), three of these schools were not able to kick off their programs until early 2014, putting Project Grow four – five months behind. That said, the youth in this expansion program did log 1,002 hours. Had we gotten started when planned, they would have exceeded the 2,000 hours.

2. What difference did this grant make in your community and for the population you are serving? Please provide specific outcome results and/or data to support your impact (e.g. age groups, number of unduplicated clients, ethnic populations, etc.)

The Women’s Fund El Dorado Grant gave Hands4Hope the opportunity to empower and engage 146 youth in a service learning program where they were able explore areas of need in their community; create, develop, and implement projects to support their chosen cause; review and evaluate their project; and celebrate the difference they were able to make as a team.

Youth involved in this program ranged in grades from 5th to 12th and represented a range of ethnic populations and socio-economic situations, as well as developmental assets (set of skills, experiences, relationships, and behaviors that enable young people to develop into successful and contributing adults).

Project Grow, in addition to the above, gave these youth the opportunity to enhance skills, especially in the areas of communication, collaboration, and leadership; have opportunities to act on their values and passion; gain hands-on experience; develop problem-solving skills, and improve their ability to handle uncertainty and become more flexible. It also gave them the opportunity to connect with professionals in the community, including their school administration and agency leaders.
Results of our youth survey conducted at school Clubs in May 2014 indicate: 100% have a better understanding of their community, 100% felt they had made a positive difference for people in the community, 98% felt they had opportunities to develop leadership skills, 100% feel more comfortable communicating with others, 95% feel their confidence has increased, and 100% feel they will continue to volunteer in the future.

In addition to the skills learned and relationships built, these youth made a huge impact on our community. They:

- collected 1,500 pounds of food and donated it to the Food Bank of El Dorado County
- collected 400 pounds (2 schools) of toiletries that are being distributed to local agencies (New Morning Shelter, Mother Theresa Home, Placerville Unified School District, The Center, etc.) and directly to those in need through H4H homeless outreaches
- collected 500 articles of clothing, 20 binders, and 15 backpacks and donated needed items to Foster Family Services, with the balance going to the Green Valley Community Church clothes closet
- ran a fundraiser for Glass Slipper (http://www.theglassslipper.org) to support their program and to increase awareness of human trafficking. The fundraiser was not a huge success monetarily but the group was able to increase awareness.

3. Did you meet any unexpected challenges during the project/program? If so, how did you handle them?

Project Grow did come up against some unexpected challenges. The primary difficulty we encountered was losing our program assistant at the start of the school year, a time when all our Clubs and school programs are kicking off. In addition, scheduling meetings with youth and administrators was tough during the summer and at the beginning of the school year. Our youth also struggled to find “club sponsors”, teachers or administration that were willing to be responsible for their club on campus. This is a requirement of all the schools.

In regard to losing our program assistant, we worked diligently to find a replacement who could focus solely on youth development with the help of Blue Ribbon Personnel, the Nonprofit Resource Center, the local Chambers of Commerce, and our Board members. This proved challenging, we believe partially because of the part-time status of this position and the high expectations and array of qualifications needed to fill this role. Being that we didn’t have funding to increase the hours or pay, I feel we lowered expectations to get the position filled and this did not work out for us. We stayed determined and learned from our mistakes. We got permission to post the job on the County Office of Education website, reworked our screening and interview process, and we agreed not to settle, we agreed to keep the process going for three months if needed, reaching out to additional sources for posting the position as needed. It has taken nine months, with two mis-placed individuals, but we feel we have found the perfect match.

As far as our challenge with getting the program kicked off at the schools, meeting with the youth and meeting with the administration, all we could do was wait until everybody was back in town, back in school, and things had settled down enough for the administration to be willing to meet with us. This took some time but we (staff, youth, and supporting parents) stayed focused and were persistent. The youth had to find a sponsor on their own and it was not as easy as any of us expected it would be but they were diligent and kept asking until they found somebody.
4. Describe lessons learned. What would you do differently?

We learn every single day from every experience we have and this project provided lots of opportunities to learn. The challenges we experienced were stressful mostly because we were working with what we now realize was an unrealistic timeline. Now, understanding the challenges of getting Clubs kicked off at the beginning of the year, if the pre-work (paperwork, approval, sponsor) was not in place at the end of the previous school year, we would definitely change the timeline and some of the objectives to go along with it.

In regard to hiring, which was not part of this project but definitely influenced it, we learned that we need to take time, do our homework, set expectations and stick to them, ask lots of questions and then ask more, and to not hire unless EVERYTHING feels right.

5. Has this grant helped a) attract new funds? Or b) increase volunteer involvement? If so, how?

This grant has increased Hands4Hope’s exposure in the community to business people, community-minded people, youth, and families. We have seen an increase in individual donations we know are due to exposure to members of the Women’s Fund. We have been asked to make presentations to other groups who heard about us through your members and have been asked to apply for additional grants because of this. More people know about us and are willing to support our program and outreach efforts, whether financially or through in-kind donations, because of this grant and the exposure we received from it.

Hands4Hope’s youth volunteer involvement has definitely increased due to Project Grow and will continue to grow through the expansion schools where you helped us plant a seed. Word of mouth among youth and parents is how our program has grown to date and this is what will happen with the young people who started with us this year . . . they will bring their friends next year and then their friends will invite friends and it will continue on like that and siblings will follow suit.

Because of where Project Grow expanded the Hands4Hope program, youth are able to grow with our program form sixth through 12th grade, and in one area, kindergarten through 12th.

6. Please provide at least one success story from the project/program that was a direct result of the WFED’s funding. Stories do not need to be lengthy (250 words or less is typically sufficient) and should be written in third person. Please feel free to attach pictures.

All that our expansion Clubs accomplished this year makes me smile, but I am most proud of the persistence, determination, and creativity of the Herbert Green Middle School Club:

A young man by the name of Ethan Weiner decided last summer that he would like start a Hands4Hope Club at his school after volunteering for a couple outreaches and hearing how his sister was helping with the Hands4Hope Club at Union Mine High School. Once school started Ethan gathered a group of friends after school one day to meet the Hands4Hope executive director and learn what they needed to do get a Club started. A checklist of to-do’s was compiled and divided among the youth and they went to work filling out paperwork, getting approvals, and searching for a Club sponsor (teacher liaison).

Once this group of young leaders had everything done to be able to kick off their Club, they promoted it to the student body and held an information meeting. Twenty-five youth attended and at least 20 showed up at every meeting after that. The leadership brought in speakers, and the Club chose a cause to focus on and an agency to benefit: spring clothing and backpacks for
foster children their age through Foster Family Services. They then came up a unique and fun way to conduct their clothing and backpack drive - a lunchtime carnival, with students earning tickets to play the games by bringing in donations. The carnival ran over two days and was completely organized and run by the youth. It was a huge success with over 300 students participating and more than 500 items collected and donated.

Throughout this project the youth worked together extremely well, brainstorming, problem solving, planning, implementing, reviewing, and celebrating. They came up against problems but pushed through, improvising and making adjustments as needed. The success of this project comes from the empowerment these young people felt when decisions were put in their hands, and the joy and excitement they felt when they saw their plan come to fruition and were able to turn over a huge donation to Foster Family Services. The knowledge that they had done something big to impact the lives of foster children in their community brought the biggest smiles to their faces. There is no doubt that these students will continue to volunteer and create projects for the benefit of others.

Photos:
1. Herbert Green H4H Club members getting ready for the carnival.
2. Students making donations for carnival game tickets.
3. Herbert Green student playing one of the Minute-To-Win It games at the carnival.
4. Club members getting ready to sort through and fold the donations.
5. Loading the donations.
6. Ethan and fellow Club members presenting items to the Foster Family Services reps.

PART II: PROGRAM BUDGET

1. Please provide a copy of your approved budget, a list of actual expenditures of the Women’s Fund El Dorado grant funds during the project/program, and an explanation of any differences. (If a portion of your grant remains unexpended, please contact the Women’s Fund prior to submitting your final report.) Please use the Excel spreadsheet Line Item Budget template provided.

Please see attached spreadsheet. Use of remaining funds has been discussed. Please let me know if there is more information you need in regard to these fund right now. I final report will be submitted by November 1, 2014.

2. How will this project/program be sustained in the future?

The Hands4Hope staff and Board of Directors continue to write grants and seek sponsorships to provide funding for the continuation and growth of this project. Our income from individual donations, grants, and sponsorships are on target to date this year to make this happen. We are also in the process of developing a new fundraiser that will be held in the spring or summer of 2015 that will be targeted to net at least $10,000 the first year.

Starting this fall we will also be implementing an annual registration fee to help cover admin and supply costs.

Thank you again for funding Project Grow!!!