

Community Foundation

of North Central Massachusetts

April 25, 2014

Worcester Public Schools
20 Irving Street
Worcester, MA 01609

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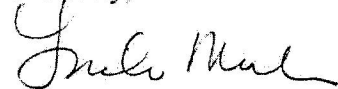
Dear Representative:

Congratulations on your receipt of a grant from the Shine Initiative Fund. Enclosed please find check #3852 in the amount of \$5,000.00 made payable to the Worcester Public Schools.

Please acknowledge receipt of this grant to the Shine Initiative Fund at the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts, 649 John Fitch Highway, Fitchburg, Massachusetts 01420.

Please contact me or Courtney Snyder, Administrative Assistant, should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Linda A. Mack
Director of Gift Planning

cc: Edward F. Manzi

**GRANTS REPORT
2013-2014**

Fund	Grant	Purpose/Priorities	Amount
Community Foundation	Shine Initiative	<p>To provide appropriate support to WPS students, families and staff members by implementing the "train the trainer" model. Funds will be used to increase the mental health literacy of educators, administrators and other staff in the district by having additional support staff trained as trainers in Mental Health First Aid and Youth Mental Health First Aid.</p> <p>The funds from this program will help to meet the following goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand training capacity of WPS for both Mental Health First and Youth Mental Health First Aid • Increase the knowledge, skills and confidence of WPS staff members to recognize the mental health needs of students, their members and colleagues • Establish MHFA and YMHFA as a part of standard preparation of teachers and administrators at both elementary and secondary levels 	\$5,000.00

The SHINE Initiative

Budget:

Tuition for two participants to take the 5-day Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)
Train the Trainer course: 2 participants x \$2,050 each = \$4,100

Materials to be used by the trainers: MHFA manuals for both Youth and Adult
modules. These materials will be used to instruct the target group:

23 youth manuals x \$20 per manual = \$460

23 adult manuals x 17 per manual = \$391

Indirect Cost = \$ 49

Total budget \$5,000

History and Mission of Our Organization

The Worcester Public Schools were established in the late 1800's and currently serve the educational needs of the overwhelming majority of children and adolescents in the city of Worcester. Currently the school district provides educational services to 24,740 students from the preschool through high school levels.

The unique learning needs of certain individual students in our schools was recognized early on with the establishment in 1898 of "Special Classes" for students with a range of exceptional needs that were seen as impediments to their progress in the mainstream educational setting.

Through the present day we have seen an increasingly wider diversity of needs among our students, concomitantly with the increased pressures of poverty, family mobility, homelessness and societal violence all of which have contributed to an increased prevalence of mental health issues among our students.

Statement of Need

While we acknowledge the unique strengths and needs of each student, there are a number of commonly prevalent needs among our students that can be identified by considering the demographic profile of our district and our community. These include:

- 73% of our students (as compared to 37% of the state) meet criteria for low-income status currently qualifying for free or reduced price meals under the family income eligibility criteria of the federal government;
- 44% of Worcester Public Schools students (as compared to 17% for the state as a whole) have a primary language that is not English;
- During the 2012-13 school year over 2,700 students (over 10%) were identified as "homeless" under the McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act criteria that schools are obligated to apply;
- Three agencies located in Worcester are charged with the resettlement of refugee families and unaccompanied refugee minors. Frequently these children, youth and their families are suffering the traumatic effects of war, persecution or other civil unrest in addition to facing the challenges of acculturation and language acquisition.
- Between 550 and 650 students annually are placed in foster homes in the city. Children and youth in foster care generally bring with them serious trauma histories of neglect and/or abuse.
- Families within the city of Worcester, frequently facing unmanageable rents and less than desirable living conditions in affordable apartments have a high rate of mobility (). This frequently undermines the fundamental need of children and adolescents for stable and secure living situations, where secure attachments can be strengthened and young people can thrive.

The Child Study Department of the Worcester Public Schools is made up of approximately 85 qualified mental health professionals licensed through the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as School Social Workers/Adjustment Counselors and School Psychologists. All of these staff members have education and training to the Master's Degree level at a minimum. They serve as the first line of professional mental health support for our students across all 45 schools and programs in the district. They work with students, administrators and faculty in both regular education and special education settings to support the provision of effective instructional and supportive services. These support staff prioritize the supervision of school attendance, clarification of learning, emotional and behavioral support needs for individual students and engagement of families to maximize student success. They are often called upon to intervene in crisis situations, conduct mental health safety and risk assessments, develop specialized plans for behavioral support and assist parents to access community-based therapeutic services for their children or their entire family.

The district also serves students with significant educational disabilities through the Special Education Department. Currently 20.7 % of our students are identified as having disabilities that warrant the provision of specialized instruction so that they may access the curriculum. Emotional disability is the second highest primary disability category identified among our current students who receive services under an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). This is exceeded only by the number of students identified as having a specific learning disability.

Professional activity data compiled by the Child Study staff for the academic year 2012-13 indicate an increased frequency for provision of crisis intervention services (10,294 as compared to 9,231 for the previous school year), risk/safety assessments (1,636 as compared to 1,023 for the previous year) and School-based Intakes for mental health services (over 500 as compared to 397 for the previous year). Each of these indicators suggests an increased prevalence of mental health needs among our students across all grade levels. It has become important that all school staff have increased understanding of the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders among children and youth and how to respond in a helpful manner.

When the mental health needs of students manifest in unacceptable behavior at school it is important that school staff have the capacity to recognize, differentiate and respond appropriately. While disciplinary consequences may be necessary it is important that the underlying needs of the student are recognized and addressed through the resources of the school, the family and/or the community. Frequently families may need assistance to access the resources of local mental health service providers, particularly our many families who do not have fluency in English or who find it difficult to articulate the challenges of their child to professionals. Unfortunately the focus on maintaining a safe and secure school

environment may cause the mental health needs of the acting-out student to go unrecognized or to be misunderstood. There is an increased risk of disengagement from education and dropping out of school when students are repeatedly suspended for unacceptable behaviors...When these behaviors are, in fact, secondary to unmet mental health needs this disengagement can fuel a downward spiral in global functioning for these students with emotional challenges.

While this situation is increasingly recognized in the national literature on school disciplinary procedures (Rennie Center publication: Act out, Get Out.....)....., traditional educator and educational administrator programs still do not include basic information relative to recognition of mental health disorders among young people.

Plan to Address the Need

Our plan is to begin a systemic effort to increase the mental health literacy of educators, administrators and other staff in the Worcester Public Schools with the funding support of the SHINE Initiative. This would involve having additional support staff trained as trainers in Mental Health First Aid and Youth Mental Health First Aid.

Developed in cooperation with the National Behavioral Health Council, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Missouri Department of Mental Health and recognized as an evidenced-based practice by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Mental Health First Aid and Youth Mental Health First Aid represent effective community education programs. Through provision of these curricula to faculty and staff of the Worcester Public Schools we believe we can develop more supportive school environments across our district in all schools.

The knowledge and skills to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders assess for safety and respond in a helpful manner to a young person or colleague in distress will be extremely valuable for school staff members. Administrative decisions around disciplinary consequences may be better informed by the knowledge and understanding provided by these courses. With this training school administrators and faculty will be better able to advise students and families about accessing appropriate resources to address mental health needs.

During the past two years the Mental Health First Aid course has been provided to staff members from both the school department and local community agencies through a single certified trainer. The material has been well-received by teachers, secretaries, guidance counselors, custodians, nurses, receptionists, community outreach staff and youth workers from the YWCA and Boys and Girls Clubs. Participants describe an increased sense of confidence that they can be helpful to family members, co-workers, friends and the populations they serve.

There has been much interest in the Youth Mental Health First Aid course which has been in development during this time. Now that both the Adult and Youth courses are available our plan is to make these trainings more widely available as part of the professional development of school staff members.

Goals and Objectives with Measurable Outcomes

Goal I

Expand training capacity of WPS for Youth Mental Health First Aid

1. At the next available opportunity have two additional members of the school support staff receive the training to become trainers in Youth Mental Health First Aid.

Measurable outcome: number of trainers who complete the training.

2. Acquire additional consumable manuals in order that the single currently available trainers can provide both versions of the course (Mental Health First Aid and Youth Mental Health First Aid) to additional school staff members

Measurable outcome: number of trained Mental Health First Aiders among school staff

Goal II

Increase the knowledge, skills and confidence of Worcester Public Schools staff members to recognize the mental health needs of students.

1. Increase development of educationally appropriate plans of support for students with mental health needs at school.

Measurable outcome: number of safety plans and behavior support plans

2. Advise students and their families appropriately about resources available to address student mental health needs.

Measurable outcome: number of referrals to school and community-based sources of support for mental health needs

Goal II.

1. Establish MHFA and YMHA as a part of standard preparation of secondary level teachers and administrators.

Measurable outcome: Adoption of these curricula within the teacher training institute.

References:

Rennie Center document:

http://www.dignityinschools.org/sites/default/files/renniecenter_39.pdf

Federal Register of evidenced-based programs endorsed by SAMHSA – see additional attachment