



Grant Finalist Summary

Youth Guidance Mentoring Academy

Project: *The Learning Center at Youth Guidance*

Category: Education

What They Do: Youth Guidance is dedicated to enriching the lives of Indian River County youth through mentoring relationships that inspire trust, self-esteem, and positive futures.

Project Summary: Youth Guidance will expand its all-day Learning Center, the first of its kind in Indian River County, from 4 to 5 days a week. The Center provides low-income children with meals, academic support, life skills and vocational training. Their vocational and life skills programming includes cosmetology, cooking, carpentry, HVAC, plumbing, boat repair, gardening/agriculture, money management, bike mechanics, sewing, welding and car mechanics. The goal: 100% of their students graduate high school on-time and secure meaningful careers to break the cycle of poverty.

More Information: Not every young person is meant to go to college. Twenty percent of low-income children fail to connect to school or the labor market between the ages of 18 and 24 while only 2% of higher income kids fail to make this connection.

Population Served: Each year, Youth Guidance serves 250 low-income children (ages 5-18), the majority of whom come from single-parent homes. Their students mainly reside in the high-need areas of Gifford/Wabasso, Central Vero, and South County/Oslo. Notably, 32% of their actively enrolled students have learning disabilities, including autism, PTSD, ADHD, oppositional defiant disorder, and dyslexia.

Impact: Can best be highlighted by the fact that the company providing the new flooring as part of the Learning Center's renovation is owned by a young woman who was a Youth Guidance student as a child. Crystal Ploszay, the owner of Unicorn Epoxy Flooring in Vero Beach, was a student in the 1990s. Last summer, she came in and spoke to the teen group about how her mentor gave her the encouragement she needed to start her own successful business. Today, she is paying it forward by refinishing the Learning Center's floors at a deep discount as her donation.

In Their Own Words: "I had the pleasure of watching Layloni complete our boat mechanics program this past year. She started off barely knowing how to use a screwdriver, and now knows more about mechanics than most adults! One of her many highlights was working together with her peers to fix an old boat engine and make it run again. Her confidence is skyrocketing, and she now possesses valuable skills that will position her for a meaningful career and a positive future." – *Phil Barnes, Executive Director*

From the Grant Panel Team: "This organization truly changes lives in a quantifiable way! Kids learn to work for what they want and need in a loving, nurturing environment and get to be proud of themselves and self-sufficient while the community gets trained, confident, and happy employees working in a vocation of their choice. Thriving graduates have now returned to mentor and tutor today's students, clear proof that this program comes full circle. YGMA is actively making a happier Vero, one kid at a time."

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Use of Funds: Salaries for 3 PT program staff members; replacing flooring in bike shop, kitchen, and technology lab; dinner for participants (Center is open until 7:30 pm); materials for classrooms (power tools, bike parts, wood, plumbing supplies, etc.); trade school scholarships for promising students

Sustainability: Three-year development in place to expand their network of donors including individuals, corporations, foundations, and granting organizations. Seventy-nine new donors have been added since March of 2020.

Website: www.youthguidanceprogram.org