

“The Cornerstone”

Youth & Community

Multi-Complex Center



A Proposal Modeled for Developing A Sustainable Youth Community Multipurpose Complex that provides an inclusive supportive environment for young adults along with the advancement and growth of our community. Youth and adults of our communities will be involved in the planning and will be even more involved in the implementation of the different programs/activities.

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Encouraging Communities to D.R.E.A.M

(Dare to Reach out, Educate and Mentor a Child)

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Targeted population: Youth between the ages of 12-21 including vulnerable/at-risk youth between the ages of 9 -12

Project Highlights

1. Community Center to be created in response to assessment of needs answers by our young adults as a solution to deter at-risk behavior. Center Program goals include but are not limited to reducing vulnerabilities, strengthening family structures, encouraging educational success, providing a safe social and entertainment space and assistance with career transitions by offering vocational training and career development skills. Projected Activities include:

- ❖ Boxing & MMA Club (Anger & Aggression Diversion)
- ❖ Basketball Court
- ❖ Pool Tables
- ❖ Food Court with Youth employees & volunteers
- ❖ Game room / Computer Lab
- ❖ “Quiet Spaces” Study Room
- ❖ Music Recording Studio
- ❖ Vocational Workshops
- ❖ Educational Resources Center (Computers, GED Workshops, Tutoring etc)
- ❖ Community Rental Space for Revenue Needs
- ❖ Youth Entrepreneurship Classes (Partner with DOL/SBA/Workforce Development)
- ❖ Arts & Culture (Dance Club, Arts & Craft, Creative Writing, etc)
- ❖ Trade Courses (Cosmetology, Culinary Arts, Mechanics)

2. Center will be managed by community youth (supervised by adults) and will facilitate improved community-youth relationships. A study by the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development found numerous positive effects youth have on adults and organizations by being included in decision-making roles. It will also be utilized as a facility aimed at addressing the need for high-quality community-based service opportunities for youth of all backgrounds.

Program Goals

To newly construct or upgrade a building to serve as a youth and community multipurpose complex. Youth (Salaried Youth Board) identify problems within their community then meet regularly to establish a plan to implement solutions to resolve major issues.

- Low family income level, drug & alcohol use or abuse, unwanted pregnancies, health & wellness, gang affiliation, unstable mental health issues and high school dropout rate. These are examples of capacity limitations that have been prioritized as root causes of poverty being faced by young people in this area.
- Incorporate programs that are effective in achieving multi-sector positive outcomes and impact on the lives of our young people.

Objectives

1. Immediate objectives

- To offer constructive opportunities and activities to hundreds of children ages 12 and older while providing a safe social gathering place for young adults.
- To bring in programs and work alongside other charities and organizations to provide tools youth need to succeed
- To begin entrepreneurial projects and programs that can bring financial support to the youth, families and increase community economic advancement
- To offer more programs and opportunities in the arts to the youth

2. Long-term objectives

- To increase the literacy of the youth in McDuffie & in the surrounding areas
- To reduce the amount of youth related crime in the community
- To lessen the socioeconomic divide our communities
- To raise the family income levels
- To increase youth appreciation and understanding of the arts

Expected Results

This proposal supports a center that will be an environment where youth can socialize and explore new ways to help themselves and their community. Through its use, we anticipate and expect a reduction in violence amongst and committed by young adults. We expect to expand available job opportunities for youth transitioning into the workforce and increase career longevity. We envision these youth becoming productive members of our society. While those who embark on other educational and career opportunities returning to give back to our community.

- In its first 5 years, the community center will positively impact the lives of over 300 teenagers and young adults from McDuffie and surrounding communities.
- The positive influence of the center's programs and project leaders will keep the community's youth away from crime and occupied with more fruitful pursuits.
- Education and literacy rates will rise, opening a broader path to post-secondary education.
- The youth will direct their energy and creativity into entrepreneurship, increasing social mobility in the community.
- The community center will create a safe environment where youth will be able to develop prosperous talents and abilities

Focus Areas to obtain these results

1. Social Development
2. Education, Training & Employment
3. Health & Wellbeing
4. Volunteer & Participation
5. Supportive Services & Life Skills
6. Exposure to Arts & Culture

Key Program(s) will focus on:

1. Support, information, capacity building and referrals for the wellbeing of our youth and their families
2. Recreational, cultural, sporting youth programs
3. Intervention programs
4. Educational support
5. Life skills and vocational development programs
6. Provide of a safe, inclusive and supportive environment
7. Preventative and early intervention approach to resolving issues expressed by youth in our community

Background and Justification

Our most recent events, the 2018 and 2019 Dinner Table brought the community leaders, citizens, youth and parents together to discuss ways of curbing gang affiliation and youth violence with a community sponsored dinner. Dr. Mac Bowman, renowned Cardiologist and former resident of McDuffie County was our keynote speaker in 2018 and Marcus Allen, a Thomson alumni and current director of Philadelphia Big Brothers and Big Sisters Club was the 2019 speaker. Youth were given an opportunity to respond to questions regarding improving their quality of life. These Events are based on the concept of earlier generations when families gathered around the Dinner Table to discuss their lives. We believe that our communities would benefit from bringing that concept back in order to reduce youth vulnerabilities while deterring youth violence and delinquency. Our PRIMARY goal is to prevent violence BEFORE it happens.

- 2018 Dinner table (Goal = Assess) – Identify the Needs according to the community youth
- 2019 Dinner table (Goal = Strategize) – Utilizing resources to Address the needs identified in 2018
 - Resource Fair (Added to provide resources to parents & youth)
- 2020 – 2021 – *Not attainable due to Covid-19*
- 2022 – (Goal = Respond) - Develop & implement strategic projects and programs designed to fulfill the identified needs of community youth.

The following questions were presented to our youth & our Leadership Panel for answers at the 2018 Dinner Table Event.

- What leads youth to joining gangs and how can we prevent this?
 1. Many of the kids related to beginning (trying out) drugs because of not having anything else to do or being bored. Others stated that “everyone else” was doing it. The most common listed reason for joining gangs was “not feeling loved.” Many were enticed by gangs because it seemed to be the “cool” thing to do and members appeared to have money. Some of the other reasons listed for joining gangs were to feel protected and to feel like they are part of a family. In order to prevent gang affiliations, youth stated that the best thing is to ensure the child is loved, instill confidence in them and teach them about the negative aspects of joining gangs.

- What can educators do to minimize violence in school-aged children?
 1. Ensure that educators are properly trained on how to handle violence and how to positively address at-risk youth.
 2. Teach youth about the consequences of gang participating and provide lessons on real life experiences.
 3. Encourage youth to participate in positive activities and illustrate the effectiveness of having future career or educational goals.
 4. Encourage youth to become socially involved by getting to know their peers in school.

- Does tensions between surrounding counties play a part in youth violence?
 1. Yes. Some youth felt that issues in surrounding counties with gangs and violence bleed over into McDuffie County. Youth stated that they see other youth have issues with youth in another county and believe they must take a stand to defend their own “streets” or area. These youths take matters into their own hands which leads to more violence.

- Would better communication with adults help alleviate violent behaviors?
 1. The majority of the youth participating said yes it would. They stated that in issues such as bullying or gang participating, youth should be able to talk to parents, educators or ministers without fear of getting into trouble. They requested that parents become more open with communicating with them and living a lifestyle that portrays non-violent tendencies.

- What is the root cause of violence in our communities and what problems do we face in the future?
 1. According to the youth, the most common cause is “not feeling loved.” Many of the youth expressed concern over kids looking to the streets to find “love.” They also addressed the fact that some youth “don’t feel good” about themselves and look for acceptance from youth in similar situations. Other concerns over causes is drugs, bullying, alcohol, peer pressure and broken homes (parents spending more QUALITY time with children).

- Are mental health issues a factor in youth violence? What can we do to help get our youth to participate in mental health treatment?
 1. Yes, mental health issues are a factor in youth violence. Undiagnosed mental health issues lead to behavioral problems in youth. Parents should “get over” the stigma of seeking professional health for our youth’s mental health. Failing to do so leads youth to act aggressively, participate in substance use and other violent behaviors.

Today, we are working towards reducing delinquent behaviors that lead to negative interactions in our communities.

According to the latest U.S. Census reports, approximately 24.9 (21,312) of McDuffie County’s population consists of youth age 18 and under. Warren County’s population of this age group is approximately 20.1 % (5,254) and Jefferson county’s is 23.3% (15,326).

According to the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice's latest report, there were 10,526 Youth Supervised (on average) by the Division of Community Services. Of these:

- 230 In Adult Jails
- 331 In DJJ Youth Development Campuses (YDC's)
- 502 in DJJ Regional Youth Detention Centers (RYDC's)
- 324 In Community, Non-Secure Residential Placements
- 9,139 in the Community, At-Home and Under Supervision Services

In 2018, DJJ Provided mental health treatment to 2,607 youth in RYDC's (37%) and 604 youth in YDC's (73

The problems the community center would help resolve:

- Lack of constructive opportunities and activities
- High rates of juvenile crime and violence
- Very low family income levels

The need for a community center was determined:

- After collecting surveys from youth, parents, and local community leaders during our 2018 and 2019 Dinner Table Events
- After discussions with local educators, District Attorney, Juvenile Court Judge, Mental Health Providers, other non-profit organizations and law enforcement

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

All finances and programs will be planned and monitored in a checks and balances system. The members of the board and officers will work together in planning for the yearly expenditures prior to the start of each New Year. Administrative Management Officials will control the management and monitoring of expenditures and operations.

From the CEO

We are most grateful to the support we have received from our supporters and are continuing to strive to do our part in advancing opportunities for young adult success in McDuffie and Surrounding counties. We recognize that our passion cannot exceed the work it requires to ensure that every child has the tools and skills they need to fulfill their dreams. Vulnerabilities associated with poverty “Does NOT make one a failure.” We hope to continue what was started with the Dinner Table in 2022 when our country begins to return to some normalcy. These events boast enormous amounts of FREE FOOD for all to enjoy, all while having open conversations WITH our youth. We learned that we have to be more vigilant in ensuring that our children feel loved and safe in their home environment so that they don’t feel the need to turn to drugs, alcohol, the streets or violence. We need to get away from the stereotypes associated with mental health as well as dedicate time to their educational needs. These are things we are already aware of but have failed to provide many real-life solutions to.

I appreciate our community and leader’s commitment to the Dinner Table which is based on the idea of previous generations of families sitting around the table discussing their daily lives. Many of our kids come from a complex set of circumstances and it is in the fabric of my identity to work towards easing the crisis we are facing with the those who will one day become leaders themselves.

*Kimberly Y. Usry
Founder/CEO
Our Children’s Village, Inc.*