

Final Report: Realism Is Loyalty's "Each one, Teach One Intensive Youth Mentorship Program" Funded by the City of Grand Rapids SAFE Taskforce and The Wege Foundation

Goals And Stipend Management:

- **Goal 1: Promote Positive Peer Relationships, Positive Thinking, And Enhance Decision-Making Skills**
 - All participants have gained and utilized valuable skills to engage in positive peer relationships, positive thinking, and have all enhanced their decision-making skills. While there has been progress over a 12-week program, it is important to note that continued interaction, reinforcement, and follow-up from mentors is important to continue the longevity of utilizing these skills.
 - During the tenure of the 12-week program Realism Is Loyalty brought in Kellen Dotson from the Kent County Public Defender's office to speak to the participants about decision-making, positive behavior, and appropriate interactions with law enforcement. Participants found Mr. Dotson to be relatable and asked very important questions regarding interactions with police officers and those in authority. This interaction greatly assisted our youth during the summer when very high-profile crimes by youth in the community were occurring. Youth from Realism Is Loyalty were able to remain uninvolved and encouraged other youth outside of Realism Is Loyalty programming to not engage in criminal behavior as well.
 - While tobacco and marijuana smoking are popular among high-risk populations, Realism Is Loyalty set standards and expectations of the Realism Is Loyalty students. Any student that had positive drug-screens, was seen in the community engaging in such behavior, or entered programming with the odor, would lose a portion of their stipend. With substance abuse being prevalent among this population, it was important that Realism Is Loyalty contract with Babe Cass from Bethany Christian Services to provide substance abuse counseling to address behavioral lifestyles and effects of drug use. Students connected well with Ms. Cass and had important questions about vaping and long-term drug use. At the end of programming there were three students identified that could benefit from continued substance abuse counseling and services.

- Realism Is Loyalty also contracted with Ms. Bobbye Moore-Biles, LMSW and Antoinette Miller, MA, LPC to assist with facilitating group, individual, and specific family sessions. Both licensed counselors were able to explain and teach about trauma, coping skills, and how to appropriately deal with emotions. Realism Is Loyalty was able to connect Ms. Moore-Biles to two families of students within the program to provide family counseling services in hopes to improve family relationships and communication. There has been great improvement with both families, but continued support will be beneficial.
- **Goal 2: Increase Financial Literacy And Assist In Job Attainment And Budgeting**
 - Realism Is Loyalty contracted with Lake Michigan Credit Union (LMCU) to provide a 6-week financial literacy program with David Rodriguez. In this program students learned about checking accounts, savings accounts, debt, debt- to-income ratio, loans, credit scores, etc. Four students in programming opened bank accounts, while other participants were unable to gain parental authorization during LMCU programming.
 - Students have mainly utilized their weekly stipends for food, hygiene needs, and many participants have chosen to save their funding for future needs. While there were students that demonstrated an interest and ability in saving and budgeting their funds, 9 youth in Realism Is Loyalty programming had a very strong need for food and hygiene products for themselves and their families. During the summer months when students are not in school, Realism Is Loyalty identified hunger as a significant need amongst this population.
 - Based on assessments and student interest, Realism Is Loyalty brought in a film director, a radio broadcaster, hospitality industry executive, a professor, photographer, computer technician, non-profit manager, and small business owners to speak with students about their experience, education and path to their career. Steve Van Poolen from the Crossroads Bible Church Workforce Development program also provided continuous workforce training and skills throughout programming. One of the main points most students connected with from Mr. Van Poolen were the "Ten things that

require zero talent” which included being on time, work ethic, effort, body language, energy, attitude, passion, doing extra, being prepared, and being coachable. While youth must gain Court and parental approval to become employed, there are 3 students that have become gainfully employed since starting programming with Realism Is Loyalty.

- Seven of the students in programming completed 41 hours of community service, two students completed 31 hours of community service, and 6 students completed 20 hours of community service and were excused from additional hours based on participation in other programming (work, counseling, or Court requirement). During the program students have volunteered with Cops For Kids, CompRenew, Stop The Violence campaign, Mom’s Demand Action non-profit, LifeQuest, Deceleration Of Peace engagement, Saturday Food Program, and assisting elderly community members.
- **Goal 3: Decrease juvenile detention admittance and recidivism among youth participants**
 - Throughout programming there were two students that were admitted into detention based on a violation of their probation and one student that went AWOL during programming, but none of the students received any new charges. One previous participant became incarcerated at the start of programming due to a crime alleged to have been committed prior to Realism Is Loyalty’s mentorship program. This student was replaced in the program due to inability to participate, but Mr. Chapman has continued to provide support to the youth and his family. The remaining participants have not been admitted into detention or committed any crimes since the inception of programming.
- **Goal 4: Increase post- secondary education and/or vocational programming enrollment for graduating seniors (& ensure all students school age are enrolled for Fall 2019 school year)**
 - Realism Is Loyalty currently had one participant that is of age for college enrollment. This student received a scholarship and is enrolled at Grand Rapids Community College. All other students were enrolled in Grand Rapids Public Schools (or an alternative) for the start of the Fall 2019 school year.
- **Analysis of pre-risk assessment & post-risk assessment**
 - During the Realism Is Loyalty pre-risk assessment, substance abuse, social support, time management/motivation, and criminal behavior were all identified as consistent barriers to success for the youth participants.

Among our 15 participants, marijuana and opioid use has been prevalent prior to programming. Realism Is Loyalty also have identified few participants that occasionally utilize tobacco. Realism Is Loyalty have engaged with every family prior to the start of the program to gain consent and parental interest and commitment in programming. Realism Is Loyalty continued family contacts to ensure participants are receiving family support and have completed counseling referrals for those that are struggling.

- As a post risk-assessment, high-risk youth need continual community and family support. While it is important to have mentors and support within the community teaching and exhibiting appropriate behaviors, youth also need reinforcement in the home. Additional programming and services that include family supports would be beneficial in future programming. Marijuana and tobacco use are barriers for three of the youth that have participated in programming.
- Continued services and support to keep additional students from utilize marijuana as a coping mechanism is important as well. Time management has seen incredible improvement with students attending school, completing 20-41 hours of community service, meeting with their probation officers, work for some students, and managing their additional requirements for Court and not receiving any new law violations. Kent County has seen a significant string of youth groups participating in violent crime and Realism Is Loyalty is proud of all 15 students for remaining crime-free throughout the summer and through programming.
- **Analysis of attendance, participation, and stipend management**
 - Group programming occurred every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday in 4-hour increments during the 12-week program. Group sessions have occurred and covered positive peer relationships, drug use, and criminal behavior. On average, there is a 57% full-day attendance rate for daily group sessions. There have been excused absences for participants due to employment, summer school, counseling, illness, and conflicts in programming required by the Court. With excused absences, there has been a 78% attendance rate in programming. Realism Is Loyalty had three participants that were replaced in programming due to a change of placement out of the State of Michigan and incarceration. These last-minute changes affected the participation in group sessions. Mentors are consistent in meeting with participants either the same day of a missed group, or the following day, by utilizing a one-on-one meeting to ensure participants are still on track. There is a current total of 394 one-on-one contacts within the 12-week program among the participants since the inception of the program. Youth have participated well during group sessions and engage well with all facilitators and guests. Realism Is

Loyalty found that group sessions can get off track with excitement on certain topics and found that smaller group settings allowed for students to stay on track. Mentors divided some group sessions at the end of the program to get better engagement and understanding.

- Realism Is Loyalty has found that food and hygiene products have been the primary source of spending for participants. Many of the high-risk students rely on school lunch programs for food availability during the school year. In the summer months, many of our students were thankful to not only eat during programming, but to have a stipend to ensure they were able to have breakfast, lunch, and dinner on days without programming.

- **Quarterly Survey Analysis**

- In the quarterly survey analysis, participants found a great connection and sense of belonging to the group. It did take time to build rapport with some of the participants and for them to feel comfortable with new and familiar faces in the group setting. Realism Is Loyalty received feedback about the difficulty of so many participants wanting to speak at once in a large group setting. Due to this, facilitators focused on dividing the group into smaller sessions. Smaller sessions ensured all participants were comfortable speaking and the session were more controlled. Participants have strongly suggested that the mentors, instructors, and class visitors have been relatable, informative, and have provided reliable community resources for them.

- **Reduction of violence and difference in the community & the difference this grant has made for the population served**

- While there is currently one youth that is incarcerated for a crime alleged to have occurred prior to involvement in the program, no other youth has been involved in the recidivism. There has been an uptick in the City of Grand Rapids with crime and youth participation, but Realism Is Loyalty is proud that none of the youth in our program have participated in those crimes. Realism Is Loyalty participants are encouraged to avoid all violence and to encourage friends and siblings to avoid it as well.
- This program has assisted 15 youth and their families with an ongoing support from Realism Is Loyalty mentors. Many of the young men and young women in the program have previously participated in criminal activity, but have been guided in a direction of making improvements and seeing the error in their previous judgement. While the stipend has

assisted with food, hygiene, and other needs, students have learned the value of a dollar and have been provided information on how best to achieve their life goals.

- **Support youth in College, work, and life**
 - The mentorship program currently has three youth that are employed and consistently working. There is also one youth that is enrolled and has received a scholarship to Grand Rapids Community College. Two families have received family counseling services, one family has received emergency transportation services, four youth have received clothing assistance, two families have received assistance with clothing, one family received assistance with emergency housing, and three additional families have been assisted with emergency shut-off notices. All students that have not graduated are enrolled in GRPS or an alternative for the Fall 2019 school year. students have volunteered with Cops For Kids, CompRenew, Stop The Violence campaign, Mom's Demand Action non-profit, LifeQuest, Deceleration Of Peace engagement, Saturday Food Program, and assisting elderly community members. Students have also built relationships with several community members, business-owners, and resources personnel.
- **Lessons learned and Future Plans**
 - a. **Family engagement** is key for continued success for our high-risk youth population. In future programming, Realism Is Loyalty has added parent/legal guardian participation in group settings as well as with one-on-one meetings. It is important for our mentors to connect with parents as well to ensure all services and resources are being utilized for their family's needs.
 - b. **Finding additional unique ways to engage and interact with youth** – Realism Is Loyalty utilized group sessions in a classroom setting and one-to-one contacts in the community as the typical engagement style. Realism Is Loyalty is planning to utilize small group sessions in the community, parental participation, group sessions within the community, and staggered meeting times and lengths to ensure continued interest and engagement in programming. Realism Is Loyalty also noted that bus passes were not key to ensuring participants were in attendance, but instead the times of day, the heat in the summer and the building location all played a role in attendance. By taking those aspects into consideration, Realism Is Loyalty believes participation and attendance will increase.

- c. **Need for long-term mentorship services** – Mentorship services for these youth are a necessity but continued change, growth, and development of new skills will only occur with continued services, availability, support, and reinforcement. Realism Is Loyalty is seeking additional Grant funding from Community Foundations, the City of Grand Rapids, and the Kent County Circuit Court to operate a mentorship service year-round.
- d. **Food is a necessity** – While Realism Is Loyalty was aware of the lack of nutritional food available and supplied for our high-risk population, the youth in the summer program demonstrated there to be a significantly higher need. Food was a much larger expense for the program and most of the youth utilized their stipend to feed themselves, often their only meal of the day.

 - Over the next three years, Realism Is Loyalty is working to provide year-round mentorship services to high-risk youth in the Kent County area. It is imperative to continue to mentor and provide guidance for the youth, while also being a continuous support within the community for students to rely upon.
- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**
 - Realism Is Loyalty had great success in implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. Of the 15 participants in the program, there were 6 girls and 9 boys. Of these students, three of them were 17 years -old, two of them were 16 years-old, and ten of them were 15 years-old. Realism Is Loyalty was consistent in ensuring the guests of the program were representative of the community in age, race, gender, and religion. Our program aligned and were inclusive to organizations within the community and made it a priority for our students to engage and participate in community events and activities to promote different cultures represented within Kent County.
- **Wege Foundation Themes**
 - Civic Engagement: Realism Is Loyalty fostered knowledge, skills, values, and motivation in the lives of the 15 students throughout programming. These students have made incredible strides to improve their civic life. Many of the young men and young women in the program have previously participated in criminal activity, but have been guided in a direction of making improvements and seeing the error in their previous judgement, so much so that students are encouraging their peers to remain crime-free as well.

- Organization Sustainability: Realism Is Loyalty has had tremendous community support, organization leadership, and Board support. There have been various community members to volunteer their time & resources, as well as organizations and counselors to develop relationships and provide services to the youth. Realism Is Loyalty has expanded their grant and community funding bases and is currently budgeting to provide services for a year-long program. Realism Is Loyalty has continued to fulfill it's contract with Kent County Juvenile Detention and is in the process of developing and potentially implementing additional programming.
- Environmental Sustainability: Throughout the program, Realism Is Loyalty has remained conscious of minimizing their environmental impacts and have encouraged students through community service to participate in community initiatives to preserve their environment.
- Realism Is Loyalty is also working to build its organizational capacity through staff and board training, consulting with nonprofit professionals and networking with other community-based nonprofit groups. The goal is for Realism is Loyalty to have dedicated full-time staffing, a physical space for participant meetings and other activities, and sufficient funding to operate its programs year-round.

Photos:

See Power Point file attached.