

## **Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Gainesville, FL - The Bridge Community Center Literacy Program**

**From:** Leah Galione <[leah@gainesvillevineyard.org](mailto:leah@gainesvillevineyard.org)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 13, 2020 12:59 PM  
**To:** Colin Murphy <[cmurphy@childrenstrustofalachuacounty.us](mailto:cmurphy@childrenstrustofalachuacounty.us)>

Dear Children's Trust:

I hope this finds you well. I am writing to you today as the Director of a program funded by CTAC during 2020. I would like to express some concerns and also requests as you consider CTAC's activities for the rest of the year and into 2021.

When the RFA for the Children's Trust was released in 2019, it specifically encouraged innovative new programs. Responding to that and with the support of my board, I quit my job and created The Bridge Literacy Program, a one-on-one tutoring program focused on closing the literacy gap between black and white school children in Gainesville. The program has been enormously successful. In less than a year, all of our students have leapt ahead 1 to 2 grade levels. I've accomplished this by partnering with volunteers from seven different agencies (Greenhouse, Aces in Motion, UFLI, Great Leaps, Gainesville Thrives, Greek Giving Initiative, UF Chapel of the Incarnation) and by forming crucial relationships with Williams Elementary and Lincoln Middle Schools, offering to tutor their lowest-performing students. I currently have 20 students in the program and I am working to add 30 more as more volunteers are trained.

I and my volunteers have managed to do this despite the difficulties COVID has brought on us. Instead of halting our program when schools closed in March, we pivoted to an online format, retrained volunteers, and made sure all of the students in our program had the technology and access to internet they would need to continue to succeed in school and in our program. This took a lot of time – time that I had otherwise planned to spend on seeking grant opportunities – but it was necessary to keep our students engaged and learning in this very difficult time.

Throughout this year and into August, I had the expectation that CTAC would put forth a new RFA in September. This, I was led to believe, was why our budgets had to be revised for March-Sept 2020. While I know there was no guarantee our program would be awarded a second round of funds, I never for a minute thought CTAC would leave programs that it had helped start high and dry after less than a year, in the middle of a pandemic, once a school year had started.

From what I have gathered from recent CTAC meetings, another RFA is not likely until April, which means funding may not resume until summer 2021, nearly another whole year. This puts our program in serious jeopardy of ceasing unless other funds can be found – a difficult task during a pandemic-induced financial crisis. Without it, this will likely become just one more half-hearted failed attempt to help close Gainesville's education gap.

I know your job is a tough one and you are trying to be good stewards of the tax dollars that I and the other residents of Alachua County contribute through our property taxes. My understanding of CTAC's mission is that those dollars are meant to fund programs that benefit our county's children – especially those that are

falling behind and do not have the resources many of their peers do. Now with schools only half open and our poorest community members suffering the most, these children are in great danger of falling even further behind than they were.

I strongly urge you to reconsider your decision to halt new funding until next summer and to instead assess the programs CTAC is currently funding and make a decision to bridge support for programs until the end of the school year when another round of funding is launched. Our program specifically would need \$53,500 to run through the school year, stripping out all but necessary costs. When we consider that higher literacy rates in early learning are linked to lifelong health, wealth and quality of life benefits, it's a bargain. And it's exactly the sort of thing CTAC should be doing.

I am sure we are not the only program in this situation and we aren't asking for special treatment. However, I am entreating the board to not abandon organizations like ours that are doing exactly the sort of work CTAC was commissioned to fund and who will likely not make it until next year without additional funding.

Thank you for reading and considering what I've said here. I continue to be grateful for our county's willingness to invest in children's lives in meaningful ways through the Children's Trust and for the work you are doing to make that happen.

Sincerely,

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