

FR1ENDS of the CH1LDREN

Central Oregon

August 8, 2023

Dear Deschutes County Administrators and Board of Commissioners:

Friends of the Children Central Oregon respectfully requests \$100,000 in funding from Deschutes County's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds, under the Equity-Focused Services funding area, to support the expansion of our 1:1 mentorship program to La Pine, Oregon. The requested funds would enable our organization to work with La Pine youth facing the greatest obstacles, confronting systematic disparities and promoting healthy environments for these children and their families.

Friends of the Children Central Oregon was founded in 2017, joining the now 25-site national network that impacts generational change by providing youth who are facing the greatest obstacles with long-term relationships with professional mentors – 12+ years, no matter what. Using a rigorous, research-informed child selection process, we intentionally enroll children from low-income households who are facing systemic obstacles and who have experienced multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Once enrolled between ages 4-6, each child is paired with a professional mentor ("Friend") who provides an intentional, stable relationship and 1:1 support for 3-4 hours per week – every week, every month, every year, for 12+ years.

The data emerging from the pandemic is clear: more children, especially children of color and those living in poverty, have fallen further behind academically and are experiencing increased behavioral and mental health challenges than prior to 2020. Rural communities, which already faced significant disparities compared to urban settings, experienced additional challenges through virtual learning such as more limited technology access and availability of caregiver support, combined with recent increases in housing expenses and skyrocketing inflation. In response, we have been working with the Bend-La Pine School District and local community leaders to prepare for service expansion to La Pine, where the need for our services is vast and local schools, partners and families have expressed a desire for our services.

The requested grant would enable the launch of this expansion by hiring two full-time professional mentors, called "Friends,". Each Friend will work closely with 8 youth, who are identified in kindergarten through our highly collaborative selection process. Friends will spend four hours of one-on-one time with each of 16 youth living in La Pine every week, integrating at least 30 minutes of academic support into their ongoing activities with each child. Friends and youth will spend time together in the classroom, at our Ranch, and out in the community. Interactions will be flexible and informal, but never random. Friends join youth in their classrooms, supporting school success and positive peer relationships; in their homes, strengthening family relationships and promoting positive identity development; and in their communities, supporting youth in discovering their talents and passions, or what we call "sparks."

We believe that any child, in any situation, can succeed, even those facing the most obstacles. Our program creates equity in education through youth empowerment and granting youth agency in their academic experience, both of which lend to improved academic and social-emotional outcomes. We appreciate your time and consideration and look forward to speaking with you in more detail about this initiative. Together, we can make generational change.

Respectfully submitted,



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