

# Gannett Foundation Proposal

## Needs Statement

### Goals and Objectives of the project to be funded:

The overall goal of the *School Support Project* is to increase parental and community involvement and student engagement and achievement in Westbrook, Maine elementary schools through the following school-based activities, provided at no cost to parents or students.

- ❖ Mentoring
- ❖ Group enrichment activities

This is a new project that extends important services to individuals and groups not served adequately through other programs and institutions. This current school year (2006-7) we are piloting a program at Congin Elementary School of which Principal Peter Lancia and the Westbrook School District are fully loyal and supportive. Group-mentoring activities are provided during the school day based upon the requests of the students, school, and community. Some activities include yoga, salsa dancing, knitting, crocheting, scrap booking, and various arts and crafts. We have also matched six mentors one-on-one with students who benefit from additional caring adults in their lives. Tutoring will be provided as needed.

The first year (2007-2008) of the project, for which we seek funding, we will continue providing eight to ten mentoring matches, daily activities for up to twelve students per activity and tutoring as requested. Funding is to cover twenty-eight weeks during the school year. Enrichment activities will include physical activities, art, music, dance, arts and craft and other projects requested by students.

The second and third years of the project will include after school programming at Congin and Canal Elementary Schools.

### Constituency to be served

At the heart of the problem are Westbrook elementary school students seeking caring adult role models to provide guidance and support. The absence of one-to-one relationships with consistent caring adults sends these young people the message that they just don't matter. Many of these young people perceive that opportunities many of us take for granted are out of their grasp. They are cut off from our economic system. At the same time, many parents and community members who *could* provide steady long-term relationships with these children are themselves isolated and have skills and talents that are neither valued nor utilized.

Due to budget limitations, the Westbrook School Department offers very limited regular after school or enrichment programming for mentoring, academic remediation and tutoring, enrichment offerings, or intramural activities during the latchkey hours. Students in grades K-8, in particular, experience a lack of activities available in the community. The city does offer several athletic

programs to children of all ages. Unfortunately all programs require a participation fee, transportation and parental permission. For some youth, these requirements present an insurmountable barrier. Offering these programs, at no cost, during school hours removes all three of those obstacles.

The current gap in services leaves many children *without*:

- ❖ Structured supervision during the latchkey hours of the day when youth are likely to participate in at-risk behavior.
- ❖ Access to remediation time or homework assistance
- ❖ Participation in physical activities to augment the abbreviated physical education program offered during the school day
- ❖ Cultural enrichment programs, activities for hobbies, and recreational activities
- ❖ Access to a computer lab for students and their families to master research and technology applications in their daily schoolwork and life
- ❖ Family literacy activities for parents and students

## **Community Profile**

Westbrook is a city in the Portland metro area with a population of 16,142. (U.S. census 2,000) Once a thriving mill town, Westbrook saw a period of economic decline when foreign competition and the age of the mills drastically reduced its workforce and production. The town has evolved to an increasingly diverse population, ranging from families living considerably below the poverty line, including newly-arrived refugees and immigrants, to a recent influx of upper middle class families building houses appraised at over \$400,000. The resulting socioeconomic disparities are significant:

Peter Lancia, principal of Congin Elementary School states, “I am seeing children in third, fourth, and fifth grade already disengaging from school. Many struggle with relationships with both peers and adults. We have a growing number of socially needy children who would benefit from the support of caring people in the community and a school that keeps them involved. We have already seen a huge interest in the activities provided by Maine Time Bank during the school day. Every activity has a *waiting list* of participants! We also have a need in our community for after school programming, activities like those offered during recess, that keep kids involved with structured activities. Many children are home alone after school or are in unstructured settings. This project would allow us to encourage better choices for their personal time.”

## **Some community statistics**

- ❖ **40%** of adult population over age 16 in Westbrook is functioning at a level 1 or 2, the lowest of five levels defined by the National Adult Literacy Survey. These adults do not quite have the literacy skills required for many of the tasks needed in the twenty-first century workplace and for full participation in the activities of everyday civic life. *Source: National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) data <http://www.casas.org/lit/litcode/Detail.CFM?census AREAID=5800>*. This means a significant percentage of children enter kindergarten having little to no exposure to print, placing them immediately at a distinct academic and social disadvantage from which they may never recover without support services.

❖ According to 2000 U.S. Bureau of Census data, 12.4 % of the families in Westbrook with related children under 18 years are in poverty; 18.4% of families with related children under 5 years are at the poverty status. Over one-third (37.2%) of female-headed households (no husband present) with children under 18 years in Westbrook are below poverty level, or 207 families. Over half the families (55.4%) headed by females and with related children under 5 years of age are below the poverty level, or 123 families.

❖ 52.2% of the students participating in the school lunch program received reduced or free meals *Source: Maine Department of Education School Food Service Reimbursement [http://portalx.bisoex.state.me.us/pls/doi\\_sfsr/sfsrdev.ed287.ed287\\_report](http://portalx.bisoex.state.me.us/pls/doi_sfsr/sfsrdev.ed287.ed287_report)*

❖ About 25 % of the K-5 students come to school each day without a snack from home.

❖ 3.0% of the population receive Temporary Assistance to Need Families (TANF), the highest in the region. *Source: Maine Department of Health and Human Services*

❖ According to the *MYDAUS/YT 2006 results*, Westbrook students have significantly higher substance abuse than the state average. (See appendix 1)

❖ Even more alarming is the high rate of substance abuse from Westcott Junior High School, clearly illustrating the need for early intervention (see Appendix 2)

❖ While most Maine towns have experienced a decrease in Teen Pregnancy Rates since 1993, Westbrook has seen a significant increase of 14%. *Source: Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Maine Center for disease Control, Office of Data, Research and vital Statistics 2005 and 2006*

Jeremy Ray, principal of Canal School, states, “The mill closures have left us with a legacy of unemployment, lowered expectations and a decrease in blue collar jobs. As a result, we have thousands of workers traveling farther distances to find employment. This leaves the children unsupervised - sometimes into the night, and I’m seeing many children making poor choices as a result. 70 to 75% of our students in my elementary school are latchkey kids.”

### **Community and volunteer involvement**

Time Bank communities provide an experience of human interdependence that is not based on charity or money payments. Time Bank programs are connecting neighbors and helping to bridge the growing disparities in education, economic opportunity and quality of life. The concept is simple. Time Bank members help themselves by helping others. You help a neighbor in need and earn one credit for every hour offered. The person you helped is debited one credit hour that s/he has earned helping someone else. One hour of service equals one credit, regardless of the service.

As an incentive to increase parental and community involvement, parents and community members earn Time Dollars by providing mentoring, tutoring and facilitating small group activities. Members can then spend their time Dollars on any of the hundreds of services provided by other members. As a further incentive, we will be providing members with a stipend to cover the cost of transportation and childcare.

To create a sustainable world, we need to change what people value. The most powerful way to change people's values is by giving them a new experience and having that new experience reinforced by people around them that they respect. We submit that this is the type of interdependence that is integral to creating a sustainable culture.

## Sustainability Statement

### Qualifications to carry out the project

❖ The project coordinator, Kathy Card, is a professional educator with more than twenty years experience coordinating community programs, teaching, tutoring and advocating locally and nationally.

❖ Portland Time Bank is the acknowledged national model for the Time Bank movement. We have a nine-year successful track record partnering with non-profits in Greater Portland such as the Preble Street Resource Center providing services for the homeless, True North Health Center, and Catholic Charities Immigrant and Refugee Services. One such collaboration, *Bridging the Gap* at the Adams Elementary School, created community reciprocity by involving students, parents, and teachers in the Time Dollar Network. The fifth grade class of Adams School joined the East End Time Bank. They earned Time Dollars doing community service and spent Time Dollars receiving community service over the course of the school year. The student's parents were also involved and required to earn and spend Time Dollars. In return the student received an internet-ready home computer.

❖ The Westbrook School District has numerous successful support services in place including the Coordinated School Health Program with a full-time Health Coordinator, The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center collaboration with the Windham Schools. The school district has an operating budget of 30 million dollars for 2007-08.

❖ William Davis Ph.D., Director of the Institute for the Study of Students at Risk at the University of Maine in Orono who is assisting us with the development of training on the impact of Poverty on Learning, has had extensive experience as an administrator, teacher, researcher, and consultant. He has published widely in the fields of education, psychology, and mental health. His current major areas of interest are child poverty, interagency collaboration, and the school's role in student mental health.

❖ A.James Artesani Ed.D., Consultant at the Institute, who is assisting us with the development of training on behavior disorders, has had significant experience as a teacher, researcher, and consultant. His areas of interest include behavior disorders, educational methods for students with severe disabilities - including autism, and school-wide discipline.

❖ The Institute for the Study of Students at Risk has numerous major publications on the topic of drop out prevention and at-risk students that can be found at <http://www.umaine.edu/issar/pubs.htm>. The major focus of the Institute's research activities during 2005-2006 will continue to involve student dropout issues and concerns. Details of these projects can be found at <http://www.umaine.edu/issar/projects.htm>

### Evaluation

The project evaluation consists of a comprehensive survey to be completed by the mentors, parents, teachers and social workers. The results will be presented, in part, in a case-study format. The

evaluation process is developed and implemented under the supervision of our partner, the *Institute for the Study of Students at Risk* at the University of Maine in Orono, Maine.

**Plans for continued funding of the project and list of other funding sources, committed and applied for**

This is a new project, so we are just beginning our search for funding.

- ❖ The Congin and Canal Elementary Schools will provide extensive in-kind support including on-site coordination, an adequate project site, office space, facility amenities, money for activity supplies, student referrals, access to professional support and guidance by social workers and program evaluation data.
- ❖ Portland Time Bank members will provide extensive in-kind support including mentors, tutors, activity facilitators, professional child development experts, fundraising and marketing consultants.
- ❖ We are applying for funding through several private foundations including, but not limited to, the Gannett Foundation, the Actuarial Foundation, the Cabot Family Charitable Trust, the Catalyst Fund, Edward H. Daveis Benevolent Fund, Francis R. Dewing Foundation and numerous other possible funding sources.
- ❖ We are in current negotiations to partner with the City of Westbrook and Westbrook Housing Authority.
- ❖ We are also partnering with several corporations such as Hannaford and in negotiations with Disability RMS.
- ❖ We are applying for funding, as it becomes available, through the State of Maine Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Education's No Child Left Behind Act.

## Appendix 1

- ❖ 30.4 % of Westbrook High School students reported having smoked marijuana in the last 30 days compared to the statewide average of 21.4%
  - ❖ 47.5 % of Westbrook High 10<sup>th</sup> graders reported drinking alcohol within the last 30 days compared to the state average of 38.2 %
  - ❖ 23.2% of the Westbrook high School student reported having been drunk or high at school compared to the state average of 19.8%
  - ❖ Only 48,6% of the high school students volunteered for community service compared to 59.4 state average.
  - ❖ 59.5% of the high school students were identified as “at risk” for lower academic achievement compared to the statewide average of 47.5%
- 57.9% of high school students were identified as having a low commitment to school compare to the state average of 48.5%

## Appendix 2

- ❖ 4.9% of the students at Westcott Middle School reported smoking marijuana in the past 30 days compared to the state norm of 3.4%
  - ❖ 9.8% of the eighth graders reported smoking marijuana in the past 30 days compared to the state norm of 6.6%
  - ❖ 24.6% of the eighth graders reported drinking alcohol in the last 30 days compare to the state norm of 20.5%
  - ❖ 57.1% of the middle schoolers are identified as having lower academic achievement than the state average of 42.2%
- 54.1% of middle school students were identified as having a low commitment to school compared to the state average of 49.7%

## Excerpted from an article by BONNIE DeSIMONE of *The New York Times*

### Published: November 14, 2005

- **LEA CUTTER**, a 33-year-old single mother, part-time artist and full-time student in Portland, Me., lives frugally, subsisting mainly on student loans and child support. She had been staying with friends while waiting to get her own two-bedroom apartment, and found a way to finance the move without spending a dime.
- As a member of the Greater Portland Time Bank, Ms. Cutter accumulates "time dollars" by providing an eclectic array of services including child care and creating plaster "body casts" for women who want to document their pregnancies. Last month, she cashed in 10 hours in return for help painting her new apartment and packing and transporting her belongings there.]]
- The people who helped her were all strangers before they arrived at her home, but "If I hired people, they'd all be strangers, too," she said.
- "It's just so great - I banked up some hours watching other people's children, doing what I want to do, and I get to meet people I'd never meet," said Ms. Cutter, whose next Time Banking activity will be helping a member sort receipts for tax preparation.

