

August 17, 2023

DuPage County Board  
421 N. County Farm Road  
Wheaton, IL 60187

Re: YWCA Metropolitan Chicago Proposal for Funding – Strong Families Parent Mentor Program to Serve Willowbrook Community

Dear DuPage County Board Members,

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago respectfully submits this funding request to increase the number of families we serve through our Strong Families Parent Mentor Program in Willowbrook. Operating under the umbrella of YWCA Metropolitan Chicago since 2017, Strong Families has been a valuable community asset since its inception in 1992. We are the only resource for families with children birth to 17 providing crucial home visitation sessions, guided by a research-based curriculum, at no cost to the families. We have years of experience successfully working with multiple school districts in the county in this capacity including but not limited to Naperville, Bensenville, Addison, Willowbrook, West Chicago and more. Through our partnerships, the Strong Families team can identify which families are at risk for child abuse, neglect and living in high-stress environments. In addition, through our leadership with the Willowbrook Corner Coalition, YWCA Metropolitan Chicago has a significant presence in the community, and we continue to build trust with community members and families.

### Why Our Work is Needed

Like DuPage County, significant barriers due to racial disparities, particularly among Black and Hispanic communities exist in the Willowbrook Corner area. Many families who reside in the unincorporated Willowbrook Corner moved from public housing in Chicago in an effort to find better opportunities for their families. However, the subsidized housing community in Willowbrook lacks resources and amenities that most Suburban areas offer leaving many families living in low-income neighborhoods. The majority of the student population in the Willowbrook Corner is made up of 66.7% identifying as Black students with 12.6% identifying as Hispanic, and 10% identifying as White. The overall poverty rate surrounding School District 180 is 7.41%. However, split by demographics, the poverty rate for Hispanic households is 12.41% and 40.77% for African American households. Overall, 14.82% of residents fall below the 200% poverty line and 4.6% are classified as living in deep poverty. In addition, over 1,000 residents are uninsured with 10% of adults self-identifying as having poor mental health.



These factors all contribute to high stress environments for parents and caregivers. Families in the Willowbrook Corner experience challenges due to systemic barriers stemming from their unincorporated status such as language and generally have little or no access to transportation, healthcare, and basic needs such as food access and housing. Paired with parent/caregiver's lack of knowledge on child discipline, family engagement and developmental expectations, children are vulnerable to child abuse and neglect within the home. There is no shortage of research finding that safe, stable, and nurturing environments play a significant role in healthy child development. Studies find that children who face significant adverse childhood experiences (ACES) such as physical abuse, emotional abuse, or poverty are at a higher risk for heart disease, cancer, or other illnesses later in life. Addressing these experiences early on and providing a solid foundation upon which children can develop and grow can help break the cycle of abuse and poverty and can lead to improved health outcomes across generations.

According to the Illinois Report Card, the chronic absenteeism rate in District 180 is 43.8% with 27.5% of students missing 5 percent or more school days per year without a valid excuse. While school officers tasked with addressing truant students exist in both Anne M Jeans Elementary School and Burr Ridge Middle School, they're over capacity with the number of students not returning to school, which has only heightened after the pandemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of adolescents reporting poor mental health is increasing, highlighting the need for protective relationships for students within schools and their homes. Building strong bonds and relationships with adults and friends at school and at home provides youth with a sense of connectedness. As part of the Strong Families Parent Mentor Program, our Family Support Specialists help develop protective factors within parents and caregivers including coping and resilience so they can in turn build the same skills within their children. Ultimately, this leads to better readiness for school and greater success academically, socially and emotionally.

### Our Parent Mentor Program

Strong Families aims to build family strength, foster family resilience, and minimize the risk of child abuse and neglect by improving parents' skills in problem-solving, gaining concrete support and reducing family stress. We are an accredited child abuse prevention program using the National Exchange Club's Parent Aide Model, evidence-based and grounded in research, as the foundation driving our one-on-one home visits. Each family commits to a one-year weekly partnership with their mentor and receives approximately 54 hours of education and support. Mentors support parents as they develop the capacity and confidence needed to nurture the development of their children, giving them a strong start towards future success. Our work benefits caregivers by helping them understand child development, identify and manage situational stress, strengthen social support networks and increase their ability to connect with needed services.



Specifically, the program addresses five protective factors that are embedded in all of YWCA Metropolitan Chicago's home visitation programs:

1. Parental resilience developed by teaching problem-solving skills, modeling effective parenting, providing support and referrals to services;
2. Social connections developed and fostered through social support building and connecting parents to other necessary services;
3. Concrete support in time of need to help families get through crises such as domestic abuse, mental illness or substance abuse;
4. Knowledge of parenting and child development focusing on appropriate expectations for children's behavior; and
5. Social-emotional competence of children developed by strengthening parental nurturing and communication.

As individuals go through each week of the program, they are more equipped to build healthier parent-child relationships and enhance their child's social and emotional development. The Strong Families Family Support Specialist works with parents and caregivers to develop a family goal plan, which is re-visited weekly. The plan defines goals and outcomes and describes how the family will work toward these outcomes creating a road map to a successful intervention. The plan also allows the Family Support Specialist to determine what other areas need to be addressed like setting up regular primary care visits or connecting families to community resources such as the DuPage County Health Department, DuPage PADS or local food pantries. To ensure caregivers can continue creating a nurturing home environment after they successfully complete the program, we teach caregivers how to develop social support networks and locate resources essential to meeting their family's specific needs. Based on the families' needs and through our partnerships in the community, we provide concrete resources to help establish safe environments for families such as car seats, school supplies, furniture and more.

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago strives to enhance the holistic development of families in our Strong Families program, which is why we also conduct case management services by providing support and assistance to parents with crisis intervention, connecting them with community resources so they can meet their and their children's physical, emotional and educational needs. Creating a referral pipeline with community partners such as the Community House allows parents, caregivers and children to also address and focus on their mental health.



## Building Trust in the Community

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago understands the importance of meeting families where they are. Being present and visible in the community is integral to connecting to community members and building their trust. As families see the work we do, they start to vocalize their needs and in turn voluntarily join in the Strong Families program. This is why outreach and engagement are a vital component of Strong Families. Through the years, we've built partnerships with various entities in DuPage County including government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and school districts, which act as referral sources and aid us in outreach. With the help of our partners, we're able to do tabling outreach at various locations, pass out flyers at community events, engage with families one-on-one by going to areas where they most frequent and even conduct door to door recruiting. However, we reach the greatest number of families through our work with CCSD District 180.

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago has a strong relationship with School District 180, especially the principal of Anne M. Jeans Elementary School and its staff. Strong Families staff are at the school every week, assisting families with food security, answering questions about the program and resources we have available. Over this past year we've built trust, shown leadership and become a part of the community. YWCA Metropolitan Chicago has also been leading the Willowbrook Corner Coalition since 2018. Members of the coalition assist in hosting and participating in events based on community needs, such as education, transportation, or safety events. The current members of the coalition are: Community House, Metropolitan Family Services, Indian Prairie Library, MECCA Center, Pillars, CCSD180, DuPage County Board District 3, Literacy DuPage, PTO, Kindercare-Willowbrook, Hinsdale Lake Terrace, DuPage County Health Department, HCS Family Services Food Pantry, and YWCA Metropolitan Chicago

The Strong Families Community Outreach and Parent Support Specialist facilitates the Willowbrook Corner Coalition meetings, has established a presence in the school building and attends monthly meetings with school administration and social workers to identify and review families in need. Our Strong Families Community Outreach and Parent Support Specialist also conducts trainings on the Ages and Stages Development Screenings (ASQ), given to providers and community partners. The more screenings that are conducted, the more children will get early interventions and support needed to thrive later in life. The specialists also conduct bi-weekly student sessions/ check-ins at the school and/or in the community to continue strengthening students' social and emotional growth.

An essential partner to our work is the Community House, which allows us to connect families and children over for intensive mental health counseling services. With the increasing rate of poor mental health in adults, youth and children, it's imperative we address the issue



headfirst. During home visits, we're able to identify the families not on the radar to receive mental health services and refer them over to the Community House. The Community House offers trauma-informed, family systems based mental health services to young people and their families as well as programming for youth such as after school and summer camps and youth recreation and community events.

### Achievements and Outcomes

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago is confident in its program and the strides it can make in establishing safe homes for children, reducing violence in the community, and improving the quality of life for the families we serve. One of the reasons we are successful is because we meet parents where they're most comfortable, create and monitor goals with parents via home mentoring visits, and act as a liaison to bridge the gap between home and school. Through our work as a community/school liaison, we've promoted activities to encourage healthy family relationships (including using the skills they're developing), guided parents on how to access resources and how to participate effectively in individualized educational planning meetings, and provided ongoing support to school staff and other community members as needed.

In the past 12 months, we've been able to develop, coordinate and implement the following events tailored to families' needs in the Willowbrook Community:

- Car Seat Giveaway - provided 29 car seats to families within the Unincorporated Willowbrook community
- Backpack Giveaway - gave over 115 backpacks (with school supplies) to our families
- Partnered with a local farm to giveaway produce (corn, zucchini and cucumbers)
- Back to school event (Hinsdale Lake Terrace) - provided school supplies and toys to our kids in the complex
- Halloween Parade – reached over 100 families
- PTO Family Dinner – met and gave information to 25 families
- Christmas Parade – distributed program information to 50 families
- Black History Month event – gave information to 19 families
- Outreach Events at Indian Prairie Library – reached 19 families
- Self-Care Event for Moms/Caregivers – provided self-care kits for 70 families
- Safety Expo – provided children's books, mental health information, childcare assistance flyer and child development materials for 30 families
- Back to School event at Anne M Jeans at the beginning of school year

The Strong Families staff has already collaborated on different events lined up for the upcoming 2023-2024 school year.



One of our biggest achievements is facilitating Parent Leadership Groups, which have been expanded to accommodate more parent participants this past year. The purpose of the group is to work in partnership with families to help them identify strengths, needs, and goals for the establishment of a strength-based action plan; provide education around parenting skills, child development, stress management, relationship building, problem solving, and community resources for individual families as needed; present educational materials on child development and parenting; strengthen families' protective factors and build a strong support network; identify early childhood needs, provide feedback; develop leadership and gain support networks; and strengthen relationships between parents. These groups act as a safe, non-judgmental space for parents and caregivers to engage in conversations regarding the various protective factors that ultimately strengthen families. They also give parents the opportunity to take on leadership roles.

We measure success within the Strong Families Parent Mentor Program by determining the parents/caregivers level of growth in developing and sustaining the protective factors. These are re-visited weekly to make sure parents are making progress as noted in their Family Goal Plans. These factors are the essence of building family strength and a family environment that promotes child and youth development. They also act as safeguards, helping parents who otherwise might be at risk to find resources, support or concrete strategies that allow them to parent effectively – even under stress. Our specific, measurable outcomes are to:

- Decrease caregiver's Parenting Stress Index, thereby improving their ability to handle the daily stresses associated with parenting. Parents/caregivers conduct are given the assessment before and after participating in the program.
- Increase caregiver's Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory scores, thereby reducing the risk of abusive behavior. Parents/caregivers conduct are given the assessment before and after participating in the program.

Currently, in the Strong Families program:

- 80% of families who chose to complete all 12-months of the Strong Families Parent Mentor Program Services showed a decrease in their Parenting Stress Index.
- 65% of families who completed the 12-month one-on-one parent mentor program increased their Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory Score (AAPI).

## Our Proposal

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago is requesting support from the DuPage County Board to cover the salary for an additional full-time Family Support Specialist to deliver our parent mentor program to parents specifically in Willowbrook and continued funding as the program grows to add additional Family Support Specialists in years 2 and 3. We are confident we will be able to continue establishing trust with the most isolated and vulnerable families facing abuse and violence in their home and the community. Through our partnership with Avanath, we will be utilizing the space for events, to meet with families, and conduct our Parent Leadership and



Youth Leadership meetings. The space is in close proximity to residents making it an ideal and comfortable space for families to come to.

DuPage County Board – Strong Families Willowbrook Work – Proposed 3-Year Budget

Expenses	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Salary	\$87,000	\$114,500	\$169,500
Benefits	\$20,010	\$26,335	\$38,985
Equipment - Computers	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$1,500
Program Supplies	\$12,000	\$7,000	\$7,000
Travel	\$1,200	\$1,800	\$3,000
Phone Reimbursement	\$600	\$900	\$1,500
Marketing	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000
Staff Training & Development	\$6,000	\$3,000	\$3,000
Contract Services	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000
Storage	\$900	\$900	\$900
Total Expenses	\$134,210	\$160,935	\$230,385
Indirect Cost @12.8%	\$17,179	\$20,600	\$29,489
Total Cost	\$151,389	\$181,535	\$259,874

With this support, we aim to serve 11-15 additional families through weekly home visits per year depending on the needs of each family. Part of our work will also be targeted toward conducting more outreach and finding outlets for youth. We plan to create events tailored to youth such as bringing youth-focused employment opportunities and utilizing our community partners to aid in creating connections between the youth and their community. We also plan to develop a Youth Leadership Group modeled after our Parent Leadership Group.

As part of this work, we plan to maintain an intensified partnership with the Community House so we can provide families with a full array of wraparound services. The Community House is able to provide the concrete services we need for our families. Most of the families we work with are in need of intensive mental health services. Strong Families will identify individuals needing mental health services and coordinate with the Community House to provide a warm handoff while the Community House will determine which parents/caregivers would benefit from our parent mentor program.



## Sustainability of the Program

We know this work is crucial and will be required for years to come. YWCA Metropolitan Chicago continuously looks for a diverse array of funding sources to support its programs. In the same way, we cultivate our existing relationships supporting our Strong Families program and look for avenues that are aligned with our program's mission to maintain its integrity. YWCA Metropolitan Chicago and the Strong Families team are working diligently and have been successful in raising support from foundations, corporations, government entities and individuals.

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago is grateful for the opportunity to continue working with the DuPage County Board to be a part of the solution to reduce violence in the community. Together we can create behavioral change in parents, break the cycles of abuse, violence and poverty by integrating the protective factors into their daily lives, thereby setting them up to reach their full potential as parents, reducing negative impacts on their children, and helping them to lead the community. We are thankful for the tireless work the DuPage County Board does for its residents ensuring each one is provided the opportunity to thrive. Finally, we thank you for giving us this chance to empower parents and families. You can contact me for more information at [peggy.mcguire@ywcachicago.org](mailto:peggy.mcguire@ywcachicago.org) or 630-790-6600.

Sincerely,

*Peggy McGuire*

Peggy McGuire  
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YWCA Metropolitan Chicago

