

Petoskey HS Area Community Foundation Grant

Name of Project:

Recruitment and Retention of Emmet County Foster Homes

Amount of grant funding requested: \$7,000.00

Mission: (500 characters) (486 characters)

The mission of the nonprofit Child & Family Services of Northwestern Michigan (CFS) is “To ensure the safety and well-being of children, youth, adults, and families in times of crisis, challenge, and life transition.” In 1937, Dr. Mark Osterlin brought the Children's Aid Society to Traverse City to address the needs of his struggling young patients. Since then, CFS has consistently focused on children’s good health and well-being, specializing in mental health supports for youth.

Executive Summary. What will you do with Community Foundation Funding. Please draft an executive summary of your proposed project and why it matters. 1000 characters. (949 characters)

Emmet County is an important service area for Child & Family Services of Northwest Michigan. Over the years, we have worked with dozens of Emmet County foster families and children, strengthening them on both the personal and the family level. Funding requested at this time is in support of this continuing effort—an effort made to ensure that foster families and children are well-supported, and that recruitment for new families is ongoing, so that we never have to move a child out of her own community in order for her to be safe and loved. As foster families adopt or close their foster care licenses for other reasons, those homes must be replaced so that new placements of children into care can be made. Qualified homes in the area where children already live are ideal--so that children are not uprooted from their home community and school. This request is to help fund Recruitment and Retention activities for Emmet County foster homes.

Project Goals. In doing this project, what do you hope to accomplish by the end of the grant period? Please list the specific, measurable goals your organization will hold itself accountable for, if awarded a grant. 1000 characters.

We expect that this grant will benefit our 6 current Emmet County foster families and the children they serve. We expect to recruit 2-3 new foster families from Emmet County in 2021, and serve up to 9 foster children in just this one-year period.

Motivation. Describe what motivates you. Why is now the right time to pursue this particular project? What personal observations, community anecdotes, research data, etc., indicate a demand for action? 1500 characters. (1328 characters)

There are about 12,000 Michigan children in foster care as of September 2020 (Michigan Department of Health and Human Services). Children in foster care are twice as likely to suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) than US war veterans (National Institutes of Health). Working with children who have been traumatized by abuse and neglect requires a high level of training and experience, which is

why it is so important for us to maintain foster families who have the knowledge and training to work effectively and successfully with them.

The demanding job of foster parenting typically means that a family who becomes licensed will actively foster for 2-3 years. Inadequate reimbursement and lack of benefits (health, liability, and disability insurances, for example) contribute significantly to foster parent “burnout.” Caring for children who often have severe emotional or behavioral challenges also contributes to the relatively short length of time families choose to foster. To offset these challenges, CFS provides retention activities for Emmet County foster families including support groups, trainings, and respite opportunities to foster parents. We will also use funds for COVID-related expenses that families incur, such as technology needs for remotely connecting with educators and caseworkers.

Community Foundation Alignment. How will this project help advance the Community Foundation’s own mission to “improve the quality of life for all people in Emmet County?” 1000 characters. (755 characters)

Foster families play a special role in CFS’ efforts to provide loving and safe homes for young victims of abuse and neglect. These families willingly choose the tough job of raising a child or children not their own. All of these youngsters have been affected by the difficult lives they led before coming into foster care. As victims of abuse and/or neglect, they often need special supports, guidance, and medical and/or psychological treatment. This Recruitment and Retention Project recognizes the challenges all foster parents face, and provides ways to ease the burden they have willingly shouldered. We are only as strong as our weakest link, so to speak, and by lifting up and healing our most vulnerable, all people in Emmet County thus benefit.

Project Workplan. How will this project be done? Describe major actions you will undertake and the timeline necessary to complete them. 2000 characters. (1992 characters)

CFS staff will carry out and attend Emmet County recruitment activities and community events and distribute materials as appropriate. We offer virtual orientations and essential trainings through Zoom. Potential foster parents will benefit from these efforts because information about our services, the foster care process, and support systems will be easily accessible and understood. We advertise the need for foster home with social media outlets, which allow us to target specific locations as well as demographics that might have higher interests in caring for children. We also advertise with billboards, print ads, and digital ads on various websites of interest to the residents of Emmet County.

We offer on-going support to our current foster parents. The process of becoming licensed and caring for foster children can be an expensive endeavor, and while we require our foster families to be financially stable, we want to offer assistance as needed so that finances are not a barrier to caring for children. We would like to also have a portion of these funds available to the youth in care in Emmet County, for ongoing needs as they arise. Whether it is a youth that is aging out of care that is in need of

funds to help furnish their first apartment, or a child that would benefit from trauma treatment not covered by their insurance, we want to be able to meet the immediate needs of any youth in our care.

Timetable:

- Foster parent trainings will take place monthly
- Respite activities, most likely on a family basis, will be conducted throughout the project period
- Additional supports (including COVID-related technical, tutoring, and other supports) will be provided as needed over the project period
- Surveys will be distributed including after each respite event and training to gauge enjoyment and productivity and annually to gauge overall satisfaction, needs, and wants
- Assessment of progress toward goals will take place at CFS staff recruitment and retention meetings

Staff bios- Who is responsible for the work? Share the names and brief bios of staff (or key volunteers) who are responsible for the proposed project. 2500 characters. (1097 characters)

Site Supervisor, Harbor Springs Office: Michelle Nichols, MA, Licensed Professional Counselor, has been with CFS since 2017, working in Licensing, Child Welfare Supervision, and as Site Supervisor for the CFS Harbor Springs office. She has a Bachelor's in Family Life Education (2005) and a Master's degree in Counseling (2009) from Spring Arbor University. Michelle spends a portion of her week recruiting and licensing foster parents in Emmet County, as well as overseeing the operations of this satellite office.

Family Support Specialist: Courtney McQuiston, graduated from Ferris State University with a Bachelor's degree in Social Work. She has worked at CFS since October 2019. Her primary role is working with our foster families.

Marketing and Communications Supervisor: Melissa Ryba, LLMSW, began working at CFS in 1998 in the Petoskey area office. She holds a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Social Work, both from Ferris State University. She began her career in the foster care position at CFS, and is now utilizing her experience to spread CFS' needs and mission to the community.

Audience. Who are the target audiences for this project? Include details on age, gender, etc. As appropriate. 1000 characters. (471 used)

CFS currently has 84 licensed foster homes, with six serving Emmet County. CFS recruited a total of 15 new foster families in FY 2020. We received 5 foster parent inquiries from Emmet County, with one of these families becoming licensed this year. This speaks of high potential in Emmet County, but also to the need for additional funding to strengthen and persistently follow-up with recruitment activities. Our dedicated staff placed 168 children in foster care in FY 2019.

Residents impacted. Please estimate the number of Emmet County residents who will be directly impacted by this project.

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Sustainability. Please comment on the sustainability of this project. If you do not receive the full amount requested, how will this project change in the short-term? If this project is on-going, how will you fund it long-term? 1000 characters. (820)

CFS is committed to our respite and retention program and will continue leveraging support for it through our development effort, including grants, special events, and donations. We expect a high level of community support that will continue due to extremely strong community connections and a strong development team, which raised \$1,578,294.02 in FY 2020 (24% of the organization's budget). The CARF International Accreditation Report from March, 2020 found that: *The organization has an extremely positive image and reputation in its service delivery area and is a valued member of the community, as evidenced by the opinions of all stakeholders interviewed and the large amount of money that is generated from community donations on an annual basis. The work and success of the development department are impressive.*

COVID impact. Please comment on your confidence in executing this project, relative to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on our community. Do you feel this project can be successfully executed during/following the pandemic? In general, how has the pandemic continued to affect your organization, (if at all)? 1500 characters. (553 used)

CFS has continued operations throughout the pandemic, by pivoting to virtual meetings and events as needed. We have closed our offices to the public, and anyone entering our building is screened. We continued our recruiting efforts during the three-month shut down via television and radio commercials, social media, and print ads. We also have regular Zoom orientations for those interested in learning more about fostering. The need continues on during a pandemic, and we have done well to continue services for our most vulnerable during these times.