

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Wisconsin Association for Runaway Services

Application ID: 14AC155804

Program Name: Wisconsin Association for Runaway Services

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

Strengths:

The applicant provides persuasive evidence that the nation has a significant problem in that there are approximately 1.3 million youth who run away from home each year. This is based on existing research provided by the National Network for Youth.

The applicant describes the problem utilizing information from the federal Family and Youth Services Bureau in 2013. The report indicates that there is a lack of community shelters to address specific needs such as food, clothing, shelter, outreach counseling, and aftercare. A report by the Wisconsin Association for Runaway Services (WARS) in 2012 indicates that the major factors that contributed to youth running away were; physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and parent neglect.

The applicant has successfully translated the problem into the following needs; increased street outreach, additional resources for police to respond to runaways, school counselor referrals, reasonable shelter regulations, and sites that rely heavily on volunteers to meet requirements.

A recent 2012-2013 study reported 13,317 homeless youth within the 54 county service areas. The area police departments reported over 1,740 arrests of runaways in the 54 counties, explaining the need for the project.

The applicant provides extensive support to demonstrate the serious need for services for runaway and homeless youth in Wisconsin communities. Statistics reveal the number and extent of the problem, including state and police data about the number of homeless youth and arrests of runaways. The applicant also includes a description of the implications and challenges of the problem, such as the lack of alternatives and social programs for the affected population.

The applicant includes statistics focused on Wisconsin communities to be served by the program, including emphasis on rural unemployment and poverty rates and the lack of resources in the state to address the problem.

A needs assessment was conducted and the results showed a need in the community for the types of services provided by the applicant.

The applicant cites data that is relevant to the counties that will be served and highlights that the problem of runaway youth is highly prevalent in these areas. The applicant does a good job highlighting that these runaway youth will need a specialized approach such as the Wisconsin Association for Runaway Services (WARS) program and that runaway youth do not respond to traditional assistance services.

The applicant describes clearly that the Members will aid in solving community problems through street outreach, providing prevention information, aiding staff in the Basic Center programs and in providing supervision and care to pregnant and parenting teens and their infants. The evaluation or program impact assessment will be conducted by using outreach logs, the federal RHYMIS intake/data collection system and site client logs. The goals, objectives, and Member development will be evaluated by an outside evaluator, Organizational Skills.

Numerous studies are utilized along with literature reviews to provide evidence of an increase in housing stability, improved relationships and self-identity, and consumer satisfaction with the care provided as a result of the interventions.

The program activities (such as provision of food and clothing, counseling, and community outreach) are appropriately aligned with both the set of needs of the recipients and the goals of providing support and avoiding future trauma and recidivism.

The applicant provides an excellent discussion of the specific links between need and interventions in that each activity is designed to respond to a particular need. For example, outreach is intended to address the lack of awareness and the distrust of social services, and training of new volunteers is intended to respond to the fact that most programs have to rely on volunteers to provide services.

The applicant clearly describes the use of AmeriCorps members as a cost effective means to solving the problem of runaway youth. For example, less than \$1 of federal funds is spent per youth contact and only \$125 per youth is spent through the Basic Center Program. The program is also a more cost effective alternative to the foster care system or juvenile corrections.

The applicant provides a thorough explanation of the roles the AmeriCorps members will serve such as Street Outreach, Crisis Intervention, Parenting Teen, Community Outreach, etc., and there is sufficient explanation of what each role would entail. The applicant does a good job throughout the application of stating the specialized approach these runaway teens would need and why coordination with AmeriCorps and WARS would be beneficial to the target population.

The applicant is has clearly met or exceeded all targets in the past 15 years. There have been no compliance issues cited.

The applicant had the goal of 90% positive evaluations. The project exceeded the goal and had 95% positive evaluations.

The applicant has provided similar services for approximately 15 years, and has consistently met its goals and objectives. It has developed similar programs in many local communities.

The applicant has demonstrated that it has met a set of earlier goals consistent with the goals of the proposed program, including number of contacts, recidivism rates, and number of participants at community education events

In 2013, the applicant was identified by the state as the most effective AmeriCorps program in Wisconsin.

The applicant demonstrates successful past performance in recruiting volunteers for service hours.

The applicant's past performance demonstrates success in reuniting runaways with their families. For example, 97% of the youth served by the applicant are reunited with their families or find a safe alternative. Only 2.6% of the youth run away again within 90 days.

The applicant has been funded by AmeriCorps for the past 15 years and has met or exceeded all goals and objectives each year and has been in fiscal compliance each year.

The applicant provides evidence of the program meeting or exceeding all program targets for 15 years. Also, the applicant provides evidence of internal evaluation and accountability measures to ensure program meets compliance requirements and no instances of failing to meet compliance have been stated

Weakness:

Although the applicant states that 13,317 youth in their service area ran away in 2012-2013, no comparative data is given to know whether the need for these services is greater in their service area as compared to other parts of the nation.

For example, only 13 of the 54 counties served have an unemployment rate that meets or exceeds the national level. Only 20 of the 54 counties served exceed overall Wisconsin poverty levels.

The applicant presents little information about the community problems related to runaway youth that are experienced in their targeted communities. For example, no data was given regarding high school dropout rates, school truancy or single parent homes, etc.

The reasons that the applicant states for why this program would be needed are logical and make sense. However, the applicant does not use data to back up these claims.

It is unclear as to whether all of the activities are well aligned with the Theory of Change which demonstrates a logical relationship between inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. For instance it is unconvincing in the explanation of how community presentations will address the problems of the target population.

Limited and unclear information is provided as to the effectiveness of the 40,000 contacts and 3,000 youth providing support to the staff.

The applicant does not provide a context to judge the extent of program success in key areas. For example, the

program reports a recidivism rate among runaways (the percentage who ran away again) as 2.6 percent, but the applicant does not indicate what percentage of runaway youth do so again in the general population.

Although the applicant states that AmeriCorps members are more effective than social workers and police personnel in helping runaway youth, no comparative data was given to show effectiveness.

The applicant states that it received a positive evaluation of 95 % but does not describe what type of information is gathered in the evaluation tool, or describe whom the evaluations are given to: youth or parents/guardians or both.