

Uphill Wellness and Workforce Development Program

@ City of Refuge Dalton

Mission

Our mission is to equip at-risk youth with the education, experience, and resources to become accomplished and contributing community members, employees, and leaders through a focus on holistic, multi-faceted wellness and workforce skills development.

Organization Introduction

The City of Refuge Dalton (CORD) is committed to affecting real change in the lives of those living in the margins of society by addressing the educational, residential, emotional, and physical needs of individuals and families in our community disproportionately impacted by poverty. We are committed to bringing hope, transformation, and resources into environments where difficulty resides. CORD serves more than 2500 people per month, assisting with food, clothing, housing, mentoring, and community resources.

Program Introduction

Uphill Wellness and Workforce Development Program is designed, led, and implemented by two Licensed Clinical Social Workers who each have over a decade of experience working with youth and families, engaging in therapy, crisis intervention, school social work, community resource linkage, and leadership.

In October 2020, we began a youth wellness group called “City Lights.” It consists of approximately 30 students at City of Refuge Dalton. The group is designed for middle and high school students who live in poverty. Currently, 100% of participants in the youth wellness group identify as Latino.

City Lights provides transportation to and from the weekly group and any other scheduled events. This allows many children the ability to participate who may not be able to otherwise. Youth are provided with a hot meal at each group and event. Many of our group participants’ families also have regular food boxes delivered to their home to help with food insecurities.

Staff, interns, and volunteers provide wellness education, group discussions, activities, and interventions to the group. One recent activity was a self-care circuit which allowed the youth to practice various forms of self-care such as physical activity, journaling, mindfulness with hot tea, and using social supports. Other activities have included group dodge ball tournaments, a visit to a jump park, and a few service projects such as preparing food boxes to be delivered to the community. During our 2020 holiday celebration, we were able to provide each youth with a new bike, coat, gift card, and a family gift bag.

The foundation of our youth wellness group is an 8-dimensional wellness model developed by Dr. Peggy Swarbrick, which was adopted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) as a community initiative. Wellness is defined as, “a conscious, deliberate process that requires a person to become aware of and make choices for a more satisfying lifestyle (Swarbrick, 2006). A wellness lifestyle includes a balance of health habits, including adequate sleep, rest, and good nutrition, productivity and exercise, participation in a meaningful activity, and connections with supportive relationships” (Swarbrick, 1997). The holistic approach focuses on the following dimensions: Physical,

Emotional, Spiritual, Social, Intellectual, Environmental, Financial, and Occupational. The dimensions all interconnect and impact one another.

In our weekly groups alone, we have had 378 direct student contacts. Youth interest and satisfaction of our program appear positive as evidenced by our average attendance rate of 76%, despite the unique challenges of COVID and with no attendance requirement. Another positive indicator is students asking if their friends can join the wellness group.

One truly meaningful success story of our program is of a 14-year-old student, "Gloria." We learned that Gloria stopped going to school. Staff visited her home and provided education regarding school attendance and the law, and also provided emotional support and was able to identify past trauma, school stressors, and language barriers. We helped her transition to the high school with a less traditional format and smaller class size. With her intellectual wellness, we saw her love for art and encouraged and provided an opportunity for her to teach a few art classes to a small group of younger children.. Both she and her mother connected with social resources at the City of Refuge. Now, she goes to school, has all A's, and will begin dual-enrollment courses next year. When she shared her school successes with us, you could see the pride in her face! This is the work we want to do and the change we want to see. As professionals, sometimes we encounter barriers of not being able to make an impact until there is a mental health or physical diagnosis, or sadly, until a trauma has already occurred. In our program, we want to be a referral source for students who have early red flags and focus on PREVENTION.

Over the past year, we have also been busy creating a vehicle through which our students can have direct, practical work and life experience. This vehicle is Uphill Coffee at City of Refuge Dalton, where we have a private coffee label and brand. We have a roaster in Canton, GA who roasts fresh, farm-to-cup coffee from their 5th generation organic coffee farms in Honduras. For us, their mission to craft exceptional coffee, practice sustainability, and improve the lives of coffee farmers made the choice an easy one. With Uphill Coffee comes the creation of a new wellness program. Separate from City Lights, this will be a Wellness and Workforce Development program that is designed for high school students. The program will accept referrals from schools, mental health agencies, primary care physicians, and others who see a wellness need in a young person. These wellness needs can stem from any of the 8 dimensions of wellness, such as emotional, financial, physical, and social needs. This program will begin August 2021 and as students participate in the 4-6 month program, they will get hands-on experience through Uphill Coffee.

Problem and Background

In 2018, our community faced a devastating tragedy. A teacher barricaded himself inside his classroom and discharged a firearm. Thankfully, no one was injured, but the emotional trauma was felt throughout the community. This made two important things evident: 1) our health and wellness as a community is suffering and 2) our response to warning signs is lacking.

Through the pandemic, the importance of our health has become even clearer. The risk of COVID complications increases with chronic health conditions such as obesity, type-2 diabetes, COPD, certain serious heart conditions, smoking, etc. As with many communities, Dalton faces challenges when it comes to factors such as physical health, mental health, homelessness, and poverty. Many of these, particularly when combined, put our community members at risk, especially our youth. A few examples include an obesity rate of 35%, poverty rate of 27.6%, and low educational attainment (35% of adults 25 or older without a high school degree or equivalent), all higher than the state average. While ethnicity is not a risk factor in and of itself, it is important to consider when designing our program due to issues of systemic racism and a lack of opportunities available to people of color. higher than average single-family households, and barriers and/or lack of use of mental health, primary care providers, and insurance.

Program Design and Implementation

We are seeking support to continue, evolve, and expand. Since we began our wellness initiative with youth, we have worked with the resources available to us, including a functional space, vans to assist

with transportation, and valuable volunteers and interns. We have learned a lot through our experience, as we have faced successes and challenges. We have collaborated and sought consultation and feedback from community members and experts, including Dr. Peggy Swarbrick, the creator of the Wellness Model noted above. In addition, we were able to softly launch Uphill Coffee.

Through the summer of 2021, we plan to gear up for our more targeted, referral-based Uphill Wellness and Workforce Development Program, set to begin in August 2021. This will entail continued efforts to implement our marketing campaign and introduce our new program to the community and the helping agencies in town. We will continue to add to our stable of business partners who will be assisting through presentations, field trips, and mentoring. We will also be working very hard at establishing Uphill Coffee as a legitimate business that is financially viable, as well as an exciting new outlet for the Dalton community.

Starting August 2021, we will take referrals for Uphill Wellness and Workforce Development Program from community members, specifically school personnel, physicians, and mental health providers. We will offer three rotating groups of approximately 16-20 youth for the 2020-2021 school year. Each group will run approximately 10-12 weeks. Clear attendance requirements and behavior expectations will be communicated and enforced. The program will focus on the following components:

- Assessment of individual wellness strengths and needs
- Creation of individualized Wellness Plans for each participant
- Linkage to community resources to address higher-risk needs, such as food insecurities, housing needs, mental health, physical, vision, dental, abuse, violence, etc.
- Linkage to community resources for lower-risk needs (ex. gym memberships, yoga classes, the local library, music and art classes, etc.)
- Students will participate in a 1 ½- 2 hour program group each week, which will include:
 - Wellness education and activities, group discussion
 - Job-skills and life-skills education and activities
 - Workforce presentations by a variety of local business partners
 - Field trips to local businesses
 - Youth-appropriate financial curriculum provided by Regions Bank
- Students will have the opportunity to participate in the planning and implementation of community wellness events hosted by Uphill Coffee
 - Each month Uphill Coffee will host a Wellness Event which may be a workshop, dynamic speaker presenting a potentially life-changing topic, Open Mic night, concert, art exhibit, etc. The wellness events will serve the community while also giving youth in the program work experience. Youth will provide the cafe service, plan and market the event, and learn about the nuts and bolts of running a successful business. The possibilities are endless.
 - Each Wellness Event will be in support of one or more of the Eight Dimensions of Wellness. A collaborative approach between Uphill staff and youth will be used in selecting an exciting, relevant, and impactful Wellness Event. After an event is selected, Uphill Wellness will be in charge of the event's success. Youth will work in 3 areas: Marketing, Event Planning and Preparation, and Event Implementation. Each area will include a business mentor from the community who will guide and assist the youth. As youth research, market, and facilitate the event, they will be furthering their knowledge, awareness and exposure to the wellness domains.
- After graduating from the program, we plan to assist youth in finding work or volunteer opportunities; this also helps local businesses find hardworking, conscientious, and healthy employees who are better equipped for personal success, job success, and community success.

Short-term Objectives

- Increase participants knowledge and awareness of the 8 dimensions of wellness

- Increase participants awareness of strengths and needs
- Increase participants overall individual wellness
- Increase participants access to physical, mental health, vision, and dental services
- Increase participants workforce skills
- Increase participants movement and activity
- Increase participants water intake
- Increase participants healthy food choices
- Increase participants positive social interactions
- Increase participants participation in meaningful activities
- Increase participants leadership skills
- Increase participants coping and stress-management strategies
- Increase work experience
- Increase understanding of money and finances

Needs for Execution

In order to execute our proposed plan, our current financial need estimate is approximately \$120,000 and is outlined below. This need begins immediately, and the estimate includes financial support lasting through our pilot phase ending 6/1/2021.

Item	Cost	Units	Total
Personnel-LCSW (PT)	45,000	2	90,000
Family Engagement Liason (PT)	5,000	1	5,000
Technology	5,000	1	5,000
Participant Wellness Package (shoes, shirt, step tracker/fitness watch, water bottle, wellness workbook)	160	60	9,600
Uphill Coffee Equipment	10,000		10,000
Total			119,600

Future Program Vision:

Our vision is to change culture. We want to focus on prevention. We want to listen and pay attention to the red flags and warning signs before something catastrophic happens. During the pilot phase of Uphill Wellness and Workforce Development Program, we plan to design, implement, and collect data which will demonstrate our program is effective and impactful in the lives of those we are serving. Through our Wellness Events, we hope to change the community as well by inspiring and exposing people to brave and exciting ideas that challenge the status quo, that encourage people to invest in their hobbies and talents, and in children, family, and community.

Looking past our pilot phase, we see our program potentially growing into a Youth and Family Wellness Center and/or a brick-and-mortar community coffee shop where wellness could not only be taught, but also practiced directly on our campus. Through our experience as social workers we see the value in taking preventative measures to ensure success in life. Many children have prevention built into their lives through engaged parents, caring coaches, involved teachers, or kind youth pastors. But many kids simply do not have these preventative safeguards in their lives for a multitude of reasons. We want to change that.



Life's Uphill.

Be kind. Drink good coffee. Keep climbing.

