



2021 Grant Finalist Summary

Project LIFT | Pathway Academy of Innovation

The Organization

Project LIFT was founded 12 years ago by a psychotherapist struggling to connect with adolescents in a traditional office setting. He decided to combine hands-on training in the skilled trades with mental health and substance abuse treatment in a shop setting, offering a replacement behavior for substance use plus a career pathway. Project LIFT's innovative delivery of mental health services provides therapy through the unique platform of vocational training. At no cost, at risk 14–21-year-old young men and women engage in hands-on training in a variety of fields mentioned below, while licensed therapists work with them to address issues including depression, anxiety, addiction, trauma, abuse and anger management.

The Program

Pathway Academy offers teens the opportunity to obtain an accredited high school diploma while learning a skilled trade. The Pathway Academy of Innovation, partners with GlobalEd Solutions and Penn Foster to provide blended online curriculums that are facilitated by a certified teacher on site, providing 1 on 1 guidance and instruction to each student resulting in an accredited high school diploma. This academic instruction is combined with experiential learning in a high-demand skilled trade in a real-time industry shop setting, which students receive a paycheck for. The third component is participation in individual and group therapy to address underlying mental health concerns that contribute to academic failure and other unhealthy behaviors. By customizing each student's learning process and connecting them with a passion to learn one of several skilled trades including HVAC, welding, construction, small engine repair, culinary, cosmetology/barbering, screen printing, and auto repair, the program moves students towards graduation much faster than in a traditional school setting. while licensed therapists work with them to address issues including depression, addiction, and trauma.

How will this program impact Palm Beach County?

A 2019 analysis of the most economically disadvantaged towns in each state ranked Belle Glade as the poorest community in Florida, with a poverty rate of almost 40%. The link between high school dropout rates and poverty is well documented, with students and families in lower socioeconomic status percentiles being 5 times more likely to drop out of high school. Unemployment approaching 40% in pockets of Belle Glade contributes to a cycle of intergenerational poverty that results in family stressors and Adverse Childhood Experiences. The majority of students who drop out leave school for non-academic reasons that are directly linked to stressors. These students are in desperate need of a disruptive academic approach that integrates social-emotional supports and give them hope for a successful future that does not necessarily include college.

Measurable Outcomes

- 25 students who have dropped out or expelled from traditional high school will be served
- 80% of the students who enroll will graduate, earning an accredited high school diploma
- 80% of the students will demonstrate a minimum 20% increase in mental health functioning

How will Impact Palm Beaches grant be used?

The grant will be used for part-time wages of a therapist, teacher, and vocational instructor (\$45,627); curriculum and supplies (\$25,512); incentives paid to students (\$23,125); 10 laptops (\$4,000); and TV, projector and mounting bracket (\$1,736). The total program cost is \$110,000. Additional funding for the program will come from family foundations, corporate partners, and individual donors who have expressed interest in helping Project LIFT secure the future of this pilot program, to replicate the success of our Martin County Pathway Academy that has now graduated more than 100 former dropouts.