

2020 Finalist Grant Project Summary Overview

Note this summary is a resource for IMPACT members to determine their voting choice.

Date/Time Submitted: 10/9/2020 6:08 PM
Last Submitted: 10/9/2020 6:08 PM
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Organization Name:: Westonwood Ranch

Project Name:: Program LIFT OFF

Please provide a brief (700 word) summary of the project that shares:

- **What problem or need it is addressing in the community**
- **How the funds will be used**
- **How the project will be impactful/transformational**
- **How the project will be financially sustained in the future**
- **Why Impact100 members should be excited to vote for it**

Project Summary::

Too many teens with exceptionalities complete high school without any productive work skills or adaptive skills needed for independent living. College is not the next step and they are grossly underprepared to step into employment. What do they do? Almost 90% of these youth graduate from high school and are promoted straight home to the couch. Parents are desperate for options and are often left no other choice than to leave their own jobs to become a full time caregiver. Instead of stepping into the next phase of young adulthood, they step off a service cliff. Westonwood Ranch bridges this gap - our program is a space where diverse talent is recognized, marketable skills are taught, and unique employment opportunities are offered.

The LIFT OFF program at Westonwood Ranch is an extension of our comprehensive program for teens and young adults affected by Autism and related disorders. LIFT OFF is designed to bridge service gaps as teens exit the school system and are thrust into society without post secondary or transitional program options. This program will provide hands on, experiential learning in actual small business operations in our aquaponics farm and gourmet pet treat bakery located on our holistic campus.

We need your help! What better investment can one make than an investment in human lives? We need your support to LIFT barriers to employment via the launch of our new transitional program. The grant award would provide 15-17 financial scholarships for individuals who are economically disadvantaged, to attend the 6-9 month program, allow us to fund two new direct care staff positions, and give us the ability to fully complete construction of our designated program LIFTOFF space (space is currently roughed in). Further, this grant award would help us expand our current small business teaching models and allow us to purchase growing supplies and offset the cost of our greenhouse utilities. Last but not least, this investment will also allow us to implement 4 IMPACTful Educational Workshops in our region that focus on inclusive hiring and accommodations for individuals with disabilities in the workplace.

To truly answer unmet social needs in a transformational way, small steps by grassroots movements often inspire and pave the way for change on a much grander scale. With a 10 yr push for educational standards reform, we still find our educational system evaluating students with test scores...and where does this leave our youth who are "differently-abled" and how do their gifts and talents get recognized when they don't fall into standardized assessments? With limited opportunities to develop as a whole person, creativity and practical abilities are often viewed as less important. The consequences are detrimental. Employment and community living outcomes for individuals with intellectual disabilities in our region, state and nation are bleak. Without effective transitional programs, these individuals are trapped in a pattern of perpetual poverty and our society misses out on the value of human potential. Our program is a step in the right direction to break the chain and fundamentally change the provision of education and life skills to a population that we continually let fall through the cracks.

We are cognizant of the importance of sustainability across all of our programs and as a potential investor in our mission, it is important that you know that the proposed transition to work program is a part of our overall strategic plan. In our fiscal year and multi year financial forecasting we include multiple strategies to ensure the long term sustainability of all of our programs, primarily through our pursuit of diversified revenue streams. Operations of two micro business enterprises are designed to provide an additional stream which in turn, support our programs. We have received an additional \$25,000 grant towards this initiative from the Orkin Foundation in Atlanta, GA.

We want your investment in our

mission to leave a mark on society. Every single one of us has something to offer and we all have an inherent desire to contribute to society in some way - those with disabilities are no different. We are asking for your partnership - help us spur positive change in the lives of so many human beings who deserve a chance to shine.