

Youth Literacy Grant Proposal

Coalition for Refugee Resettlement Youth Literacy Initiative

Children Served By Program: 25

Program Goals, Objectives, & Impact:

The goal of the Coalition for Refugee Resettlement Youth Literacy Initiative is to provide an informal academic program that supports refugee youth in achieving grade level performance in school. Most of the youth served by the program received their elementary schooling in refugee camps. For all of these youth, English is their second language. As a combined result of limited language proficiency, lack of prior formal schooling, and low literacy levels within the adult population, these youth are unprepared for the structure and content rigor of the traditional American high school.

Our objectives for achieving the goal of grade level performance among refugee youth includes:

- * Fifty hours of one-on-one literacy tutoring that matches youth with college-aged tutors who are trained in adolescent literacy strategies.
- * Weekly homework help in math and science with college students majoring in these discipline areas.
- * Quarterly workshops to guide youth through the process of making decisions about post-secondary education and job training, including the college application and scholarship search processes.
- * Provision of school supplies so that youth can satisfy their academic needs without concern for material shortages.

As a result of this project, we anticipate that 25 Somali Bantu youth will complete the full program, with 75% of these participants demonstrating marked improvement in school. Indicators of success can vary, but may include grade-level performance according to standardized tests administered by Roanoke City Public Schools, letter grade improvement in a major subject area, or passing the Standards of Learning exams required of all Virginia students. The program will also conduct its own assessment to measure impact and gain insight about increased capacity in school.

Program Description:

This program is geared to Somali Bantu youth whose families came to this country on refugee status after living in refugee camps for approximately 10-15 years. The program provides participants with strategies for academic success, as well as opportunities to apply their new skills and competencies to furthering the goals of their community. Youth who participate in the program sign a contract indicating their commitment to complete a minimum of 50 hours of intensive tutoring,

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participate in weekly homework help throughout the school year, and attend at least two of the quarterly workshops. In addition, participating youth agree to volunteer a minimum of 10 hours either helping younger children through the Coalition's homework program or tutoring adults enrolled in English as a Second Language Classes. Participants are required to document their hours each week. Youth who fulfill the minimum requirements for the program will earn a certificate of completion and be recognized at a year end community celebration. Youth who demonstrate significant gains as a result of their participation receive special awards.

This program provides a structured opportunity for teens to improve their grades in school, as well as to boost their confidence as they negotiate a new culture and social world. The program also guides youth in thinking about their options for the future in a country that is vastly different from that of their parents. Because the program was developed in collaboration with Somali Bantu elders who were denied education in their home countries, there is strong community support for youth participation. The opening session for the program will incorporate the elders in speaking to the youth about the importance of education in building self-sufficiency and strengthening the future of the Somali Bantu in the United States. Likewise, the closing event will recognize the youth for their academic achievements and their role as emerging community leaders.

Implementation Plan:

Conversations with Somali Bantu youth revealed a need / desire to strengthen reading and writing skills in order to better understand advanced subject areas and be better prepared to apply for college. Thus, this program centers on literacy tutoring focused on reading and writing strategies that are developmentally and cognitively appropriate for adolescent learners. Participants are assigned a tutor with in-depth training in adolescent development and reading / writing strategies. The tutor spends fifty contact hours minimum with their learner over the course of eight months. Throughout this time, tutors customize the literacy plan to meet the specific interests of the learner, using materials ranging from popular fiction to magazine articles and song lyrics to reinforce the reading / writing strategies. Tutoring occurs in homes or at the public library adjacent to the apartments where most participants live.

In addition to sustained literacy tutoring, Virginia Tech students from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) majors will be available throughout the week at the Landsdowne Community Neighborhood Networks Center (LCNNC) for drop-in homework help. Homework help will be available to any middle or high schooler living at Landsdowne Apartments, however program participants will be required to attend at least once a week. Likewise, the quarterly workshops on post-secondary education and career planning will be held at the LCNNC and be open to all residents, with participants required to attend at least two of the four sessions.

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Timeline:

Youth participants and tutors are recruited from August through the second week of September.

Tutor training occurs the second week of September with subsequent sessions in November, January, and March.

Program opens with the community event in mid-September.

Tutoring and homework help occur weekly through early May.

Workshops occur bi-monthly.

The program celebration and awards occurs in mid May.

Sustainability:

CSECP has a three-fold plan to sustain this program going forward:

First, we will incorporate the Youth Literacy Initiative into our existing program budget focusing on second language proficiency and literacy. The Best Buy grant will seed this new initiative, which can thereafter be carried forward through our overall program budget.

Second, we have drawn upon existing university resources, community assets, and a broad volunteer base to design a program that is both low-cost and effective, and therefore sustainable beyond the term of the grant.

Third, we are working in full partnership with the Somali Bantu community who have requested programmatic assistance and are prepared to provide leadership in identifying participants and supervising their completion of program requirements. Community buy-in is critical to building a strong foundation for the program and for ensuring its continuation for as long as the need exists.

Measurement:

CSECP will measure program impact through pre and post learner surveys that are cross referenced with standard academic measures used by Roanoke City Public Schools. At the program's start, tutors will query youth about their reading and writing habits, to determine what--if any--literacy strategies they employ, using a Learner's Survey developed by the School of Education at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Program staff will likewise obtain baseline information from the schools regarding participants' language proficiency and academic performance levels.

The results of the Learner's Surveys will help to structure the tutoring program insofar as it will identify areas of strength and weakness in students' literacy habits. Tutors will record progress and observations throughout the eight months of tutoring. After 50 hours of tutoring, the tutors will again query their learners using

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the same Learner's Survey. The Program Evaluator will review the results to measure how well the youth have applied the strategies conveyed through the tutoring program. Additionally, the Evaluator will cross-reference these results with standard measures such as SOL scores, letter grades in major subject areas, and teacher analyses of grade level performance.

The desired outcome is for 75% of the participants to demonstrate a performance increase in one of the standard measures listed above, and to report that they are intentionally applying the reading and writing strategies to their classroom work. In addition to seeking out impact data, the program will listen for stories and examples of how youth participation in the program has boosted confidence in school and social interaction, advanced language proficiency, promoted involvement in volunteer or community activities, and resulted in concrete plans of action for their futures beyond high school.