



## IMPACT100 TRAVERSE CITY

### 2024 FAMILY: FRIENDSHIP COMMUNITY CENTER

<https://www.instagram.com/the.centersb/>

### INITIATIVE: LEELANAU INVESTING FOR TEENS (LIFT)

#### OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVE – IN THE APPLICANT’S WORDS

Leelanau Investing For Teens (LIFT) is the only no-cost, out-of-school program for 6th through 12th graders in Leelanau County. Over 400 middle and high schoolers join LIFT programming 230 days of the year to connect with community mentors and participate in activities that support their development and mental health.

Housed within three school districts, teens spend over 2,725 hours in LIFT’s dedicated classrooms annually. LIFT’s well-loved out-of-school time spaces are the image of thrift and creativity. Tabletops rest on milk crates, couch covers hide stains, and malfunctioning spring-loaded recliners can send an unsuspecting teen flying.

Inspired by research on the impact of the physical environment on mental health, LIFT is updating its classrooms for the first time as a necessary investment in the wellbeing of local teens. LIFT will simultaneously purchase a 12-passenger vehicle to increase accessibility to its programs by providing participating teens with transportation to and from its out-of-school time activities.

*The following sections contain certain key information from the application, as written by the applicant. While detailed financial information has not been provided here due to its confidential nature, each applicant submitted an initiative budget and supporting financial documents as part of their application. Each proposed initiative and the supporting financial documentation has undergone a thorough financial review by our Financial Review Committee and the initiatives proposed by our finalists have met our standards for moving forward.*

#### ORGANIZATION’S VISION STATEMENT

The Center is the heart of a thriving and culturally diverse community where people of all ages come together through programs that embrace differences, promote mutual respect, and encourage support of one another. The Center creates more than a sense of community, it creates a feeling of belonging.

#### ORGANIZATION’S MISSION STATEMENT

We provide a gathering space that enriches and strengthens multigenerational and multicultural relationships in the Leelanau community.

## **DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATION AND ITS HISTORY**

The 170-year-old building that houses the Friendship Community Center, or The Center, has a storied history, including its origins as a funeral home and retail store. In 1986, after sitting empty for a decade, a coalition of local women purchased the building through second mortgages on their homes.

When it opened in 1988, the organization, then known as the Suttons Bay-Bingham Senior Citizens Inc., served 2,600 local seniors. It hosted luncheons and educational programs, formed a kitchen band, and organized health clinics.

The Center's purpose naturally evolved to be a gathering space for Leelanau County residents of all ages and backgrounds to connect and share. For this reason, leadership decided to change the organization's name to Friendship Community Center Inc. in 2001. Our programs and activities now attract hundreds of community members to our building weekly, including potlucks, open mic nights, Spanish classes, art workshops, free meal pick-ups, and physical wellness classes.

In 2017, The Center welcomed a start-up program called Leelanau Investing For Teens, or LIFT. The program was conceived up the road in the home of a young couple who had recently moved to the area. Rebekah and Gerald TenBrink moved to Suttons Bay in 2012, when Gerald began Munson's Critical Care Residency Program for nurses. One winter night, Gerald dropped in on a hockey game at the ice rink in town, where some local high schoolers were playing. After the game, Gerald asked the teens what else they did for fun, to which they responded, "Not much." So, Gerald invited them back to the house for some frozen pizza, and after getting to know each other, they made plans for the following weekend. Rebekah and Gerald's home filled with more and more teenagers weekly, eager to connect with their peers and new mentors.

For five years, Rebekah and Gerald planned fun weekend activities with Suttons Bay's high schoolers. They went on hikes, hosted beach bonfires, played games, and more. In 2017, after receiving her Bachelor's Degree in Social Work from Spring Arbor University, Rebekah decided to formalize this youth collaborative and, with the support of Gerald and invested community members, founded LIFT.

LIFT moved into the basement of The Center and what started as a once-weekly after-school program has quickly evolved into The Center's largest and most recognizable program to date. In fact, it has occasionally been mistaken as its own nonprofit.

In 2020, The Center's Board of Directors hired Rebekah as Executive Director, hoping that her leadership would broaden multigenerational connections throughout Leelanau County. Over the last four years, we have seen that hope affirmed as Leelanau County's teens have become more engrained in the community and, in turn, as more community members have invested in the lives of local youth.

Today, LIFT provides out-of-schooltime mentorship to Leelanau County teens over 230 days of the year at no cost to them or their families. Our middle and high schoolers connect with community mentors of all ages and backgrounds while participating in empowering activities that support their development and mental health.

LIFT has permanent classrooms in Suttons Bay, Northport, and Glen Lake Middle Schools. Every school day, after dismissal, 6th through 8th graders walk to their LIFT room on campus. They start with snacks and some quiet time with friends to transition from their school day. Then, as a group, these teens participate in a planned activity for the day, facilitated by a full-time LIFT Program Coordinator and community mentors. Those activities vary day-to-day but have included hiking, jewelry-making, sewing, cooking, scavenger hunts, and so much more.

LIFT also partners closely with Suttons Bay and Northport High Schools to organize weeknight activities for local 9th through 12th-grade students while also providing general support to the schools' teachers and staff. High school activities can include skiing/snowboarding, field trips to art shows, movie nights, and more. LIFT high school students also know to turn to LIFT staff and volunteers with academic struggles, mental health concerns, job applications, college essays, and more. We support those teens on an individualized basis through 1:1 mentorship and referrals to other area resources. At the schoolwide level, we co-host school dances and career days, teach leadership classes, chaperone field trips, and even substitute teach at no cost in moments of need.

LIFT is a year-round program that provides opportunities and resources to middle and high schoolers all summer long. Transportation to and from students' homes is even included during the summer months.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF INITIATIVE**

LIFT teens spend over 2,725 cumulative hours in our classrooms across three school districts each year. Everything that makes up our spaces has been sourced through hard work, creativity, and the generosity of community members. As a result, however, LIFT's afterschool spaces do not mirror the social and emotional support we so passionately invest in our teens daily. Tabletops rest on milk crates, couch covers hide stains, and malfunctioning spring-loaded recliners can send an unsuspecting student flying. The majority of our board games are completed with mismatched parts, our puzzles were found at thrift stores with one or two pieces missing, and we use duct tape to repair well-loved sports equipment.

We are incredibly proud of the ingenuity of our program coordinators and their ability to create enriching experiences with minimal resources. We will also likely always be an organization that utilizes sustainable practices to source materials for our programs. However, the current condition of LIFT's afterschool spaces is incompatible with the program's mission to make LIFT teens feel seen, heard, and loved.

After 12 years of working with teens, we have taken the time and care to curate high-impact out-of-school programs. We are proud of the model we've created and that LIFT teens leave our program feeling valued and empowered. An enormous part of that experience are the spaces that house our programs and students. Through thrift and inventiveness, LIFT's Program Coordinators have created positive spaces that meet our program's most basic needs. Yet, we have reached a critical point in our evolution where our facilities are now limiting our impact. As secondhand furniture breaks down and our supply of sports equipment and art tools diminish (due to heavy use) our classrooms in great need of a thoughtful transformation.

With this initiative, we intend to completely overhaul our out-of-school spaces. Inspired by research on the impact of physical environment and design on youth mental health, we have created a plan to redesign and update our classrooms to better align with our goal of empowering Leelanau County teens.

Students consider LIFT's classrooms to be not only safe spaces but places of wonders, where the room transforms as soon as you walk through the door. One day it may be a dodgeball court, the next it's a life-size Monopoly board. It can be a refuge during times of crisis or the highest-energy room in the school. With our programs' and teens' needs in mind, our staff and students created a preliminary list of needed equipment and supplies for our classrooms to achieve the change we're looking for.

Accessibility is a core value for our organization. For that reason, we have also incorporated an additional vehicle into this initiative's budget. Transportation is one of our teens' largest barriers to accessing our programs. We have taken several years to raise funds needed to purchase 8-passenger and 12-passenger vans for our programs. Being in three school districts, though, this means one out-of-school program is inevitably without access to transportation. We utilize our vehicles not only for field trips but also to bring students to and from their homes so that they can still attend LIFT, even if their parents are working late. The purchase of an additional van for our organization will equalize access to transportation for all of our students.

Impact100 TC's support with this grant would significantly impact the over 400 students who utilize our spaces daily by enhancing and elevating our program to the level our teens deserve with a one-time investment.

## **COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED**

LIFT programming is available at no cost to all 6th through 12th graders at Northport and Suttons Bay Public Schools and to all 6th through 8th graders at Glen Lake Middle School. Through LIFT programming, Leelanau County middle and high school students have access to unique opportunities and experiences at no expense to them or their families. They grow alongside community mentors in their social-emotional learning and have a safe place to be with consistent adults at the times of day and year when they would otherwise be unsupervised.

Our out-of-school activities typically attract a diverse group of students from different households, ethnicities, and beliefs. As attendance is not mandatory, our number of participating students fluctuates daily and throughout the year. However, the diversity of our programming helps ensure that we attract every student in each respective school district to multiple LIFT events and activities throughout the year.

There are approximately 86 students between the 6th and 12th grades at Northport Schools; 46% of students are female and 54% are male. The student body is 55.5% White, 26% Native American, 13.7% Latino, 3.4% are two or more races, and 1.4% are African American. 69% of the student body is described as "economically disadvantaged."

There are approximately 157 students between the 6th and 8th grades at Glen Lake Middle School (note that LIFT is not yet serving Glen Lake High School students); 45% of students are

female and 55% are male. The student body is 95.8% White, 2.1% Latino, 1% are two or more races, 0.6% African American, and 0.3% Native American. 33% of the student body is described as "economically disadvantaged."

There are approximately 202 students between the 6th and 12th grades at Suttons Bay Schools; 54% are female and 46% are male. The student body is 56.3% White, 21.5% Latino, 15.2% Native American, 5.1% are two or more races, and 1.9% are Asian. 46.2% of the student body is described as "economically disadvantaged."

In total, LIFT directly serves 445 students throughout Leelanau County and indirectly serves at least as many households.

## **NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED AND GAPS IN EXISTING SERVICES**

Long-standing research has proven that the benefits of mentoring and out-of-schooltime programs are extensive and can significantly impact youth mental health and development. Yet, for every child in an after-school program in Michigan, four more remain without access to any after-school programming (Afterschool Alliance).

LIFT was founded from an observed need for safe spaces for local teens. Seven years later, the demand for afterschool programs is "now the highest recorded in [rural] communities" since 2004 (Afterschool Alliance). The barriers that youth in rural communities face in accessing afterschool programs, namely cost, transportation, and a lack of available programs, are exemplified in our area as LIFT begins its seventh consecutive academic year as the only out-of-schooltime program for local 6th through 12th graders.

In line with the Surgeon General's advisory at the end of 2021 on the youth mental health crisis nationally, teenagers in northwest lower Michigan continue to face "significant mental wellness challenges today", according to the Youth Wellness Initiative, hosted by the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation and funded by the Michigan Health Endowment Fund. Moreover, our most vulnerable families face a host of chronic socio-economic challenges that compound these risks for youth. According to United Way, 46% of Leelanau County households are below the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) threshold and, consequently, are more likely to report feeling depressed, anxious, down, or hopeless (Household Pulse Survey).

After 12 years of serving the needs of local youth both formally and informally, we have developed an effective model for youth empowerment that is unparalleled in our community and the greater region of northwest lower Michigan. LIFT successfully mitigates the effects of these risk factors on youth and families in our area as the only free, out-of-school program for Leelanau County teenagers. Empirical and anecdotal data collected internally confirms improved mental health, successful social-emotional learning for students who participate in LIFT programming, and financial and emotional relief for their families.

The initiative proposed here seeks to significantly enhance the impact and services that LIFT already provides to our most underserved teens and otherwise. An overhaul of LIFT's facilities will contribute greatly to our goal of promoting mental health for Leelanau County teens by investing in the design and surroundings of their dedicated out-of-school spaces. The current

inequality between our program and our classrooms has been an ongoing gap in our program. This physical transformation will be just that for participating teens, transformational.

This initiative also aims to enhance accessibility to our programs. As is mentioned above, Afterschool Alliance points to lack of transportation as a significant barrier for rural teens accessing out-of-schooltime programs. LIFT has experienced this same obstacle time and again as teens have had to miss out on field trips due to limited transportation or have been unable to attend LIFT programs entirely due to not having a ride home.

Over the last four years, our organization has worked hard to solicit support from local community members and funders to purchase vehicles for LIFT's programs. We currently own 8-passenger and 12-passenger vans that are utilized daily for field trips or to bring students to or from their homes. As LIFT is now housed in three school districts, this means that one program inevitably goes without this crucial tool to accessing our programs. Written into this budget is funding to purchase an additional 12-passenger van so that we can continue to sustain accessibility for all three school districts.

With support from Impact100 TC, this initiative will elevate LIFT's services and promote accessibility and mental health for over 400 teens in Leelanau County.

## **SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROPOSED INITIATIVE**

Our commitment to sustainability is personified by the thriftiness of our classrooms. We have extended the lifetime of secondhand items through a culture of care and respect that extends to our teens. This one-time, tangible investment in our program will transform LIFT for our students. They will see, not just feel, their community's investment in their futures every time they walk through our doors, which will only increase their feelings of responsibility toward LIFT spaces and resources.

This initiative is one-time, and the majority of the funding is directed toward more permanent fixtures. Therefore, we don't anticipate a need to sustain an addition to our annual budget over time. Rather, a continued commitment to being good stewards of our resources will ensure the impact of this initiative is long-lasting.

The one piece to this initiative's budget that will require cost-associated maintenance is the addition of a vehicle to our fleet. Such ongoing expenses will include mechanical upkeep, insurance, and fuel. LIFT's strategic plan anticipates the addition of a vehicle for every school district that houses a full-time LIFT program. As our fund development plan aligns with our strategic plan, we have already budgeted for these overhead costs. With 172.7% growth in revenue from 2020 to 2021, 59.2% growth from 2021 to 2022, and 37.6% growth in revenue from 2022 to 2023, we are confident in our ability to raise the additional funds required to maintain this new asset for our organization (approximately \$3,000 annually).