

Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives
Office of Governor John Kasich
Governor for the State of Ohio
77 South High Street
30th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

March 5, 2015

Dear Community Connectors Grant Award Committee,

My name is Terree L. Stevenson and I am the Director of Multicultural Student Affairs at Ohio Wesleyan University. It is my pleasure and privilege to write a letter in support of the grant proposal submitted to the Community Connectors Program by the Second Ward Community Initiative (SWCI) in Delaware, Ohio.

Race, class, socio-economic status, limited educational wealth and cultural capital inheritance, and narrowed resource accessibility are a few of the social inequalities negatively impacting schooling and students. Such embedded obstacles and systemic barriers can be prohibitive of student's academic success and cognitive development. With its mission aligned with the learning outcomes of the Community Connectors program, SWCI continues to diligently implement strategic "...sustainable, replicable and innovative..." programs and practices "...to strengthen communities, encourage mentoring opportunities and create new pathways for civic engagement that will result in higher educational achievement, higher levels of well-being and health, and workforce readiness for our state" while "...providing unique mentoring initiatives..." that "...encourages goal-setting, promotes character building and instills a sense of hope for the future" and aiding students to "...get excited about their future – to be encouraged to dream big – and learn what it takes to put their dreams and goals into action" (Community Connectors, 2015).

SWCI's Board of Directors and volunteers have established efficacious communication and accountability systems, possess an comprehensive understanding of educational policies, curriculums, and doctrine; affirms, revivifies, and entrusts self-efficacy; identifies and seeks resourceful partners and advocates, creates and administers effective tools to assess programming impact, responsibly manage funding, manifest an extensive knowledge of the needs and display an enduring commitment to the community.

SWCI's tutoring and mentoring programs produce dynamic engagements and robust conversations which enable students and volunteers to cultivate safe, trusting relationships that foster fruitful opportunities to impart positive role model behavior, instill skill sets to make positive and beneficial decisions, and embark on a joint journey supporting mutual learning. The SWCI Community Garden promotes educational components in agri-and horticulture knowledge and initiates occasions to gain and utilize marketing strategies to generate economic revenue, adduce healthy eating options and habits, provide nutritional source within a food desert, and inculcate positive work ethic.

Its annual Community Unity program safely, intentionally, and collectively amasses the residents by distributing essential school supplies, supplying preventive medical testing and information, offering culturally enriching and family-centered experiences, and championing neighborly relations. SWCI's acquisition of magazines, textbooks, novels, biographies, and non-fiction books espouses life-long learning in its Free Library and SWCI is purposefully working to bridge the digital divide by offering access to the internet, software to advance technology skills, and edutainment online activities.

Through its vast programming, Second Ward Community Initiative (SWCI) upholds the 5 principle initiatives outlined by the Community Connectors program: "setting goals to be prepared for the 21st century careers, building character, developing pathways to achievement, building a sense of resiliency, and believing in a positive future" (Community Connectors, 2015). Home Depot, Ohio Health, and other philanthropic organizations believe in the work, passion, and mission of SWCI and awarded this community connecting organization funds to ameliorate the community they live and serve.

Shirley and Harry Hart, Tajudeen Bakare, Cindy Montgomery, other board members and over 50 on-call volunteers have tirelessly worked and determinedly invested physically, emotionally, mentally, financially, and spiritually to insure Second Ward Community Initiative (SWCI) could and would make a positively powerful contributive program that would motivate, inspire, and be a benevolence gift to the community. Working with SWCI for the last seven years has been an honor and blessing. I have been in awe of how SWCI has unified the community and can see residents interface and collaborate on plaguing issues of concern, celebrate their accomplishments and achievements, and rally together to support the students - who are the future leaders of their community.

Second Ward Community Initiative (SWCI) has provided a safe haven for students in the community, modeled exemplary practices to promote initiatives, developed quality and impactful programs, invested personally and professionally to uplifted the hearts and spirits of a community, and have positively changed students' lives. SWCI will continue to make a difference in the community where they live, work, and serve and I know, unequivocally, there are students who, through their experience in SWCI, have been empowered to do and be better, give and care more, dream big and have hope, climb and hold their heads higher. They will be the change they want to see in the world.

Please feel free to contact me by phone (740) 368-3151 or email at tlsteven@owu.edu if you have any questions or concerns. Best wishes in your awarding of grant and I anxiously await hearing that Second Ward Community Initiative (SWCI) received a Community Connectors grant.

Sincerely,

Terree L. Stevenson

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