



# **Bolder Options**

## **A Model Program for the Twin Cities and Beyond**

A Position Paper  
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## Table of Contents

<i>Executive Summary</i> .....	<i>page 3</i>
<i>History of the Organization</i> .....	<i>page 3</i>
<i>Determining the Need</i> .....	<i>page 4</i>
<i>Principles of Successful Programs</i> ....	<i>page 9</i>
<i>The Bolder Options' Model</i> .....	<i>page 13</i>
<i>The Bolder Options' Vision for Success</i> ....	<i>page 21</i>
<i>References</i> .....	<i>page 25</i>

## ***Executive Summary:***

Bolder Options' comprehensive truancy intervention program coordinates family, community, school, and county resources in a united effort to combat truancy and juvenile delinquency. It is a program which offers more than just an opportunity for an adult to form a relationship with a youth, but it focuses on forming healthy habits, building confidence, instilling trust, and improving quality of life for youth and their families. In order to accomplish these goals, Bolder Options believes that the quality of the programming supersedes the quantity of youth served. Research proves that in order for a mentoring program to form a positive and long-lasting impact on a youth, it must be a well-structured program which emphasizes quality at every level of the organization; provide continual training of staff and volunteers; emphasize a high-level of commitment from youth, families, mentors and staff; and, furthermore, focus on evaluation in order to continually make things better.

For the past 15 years, Bolder Options has offered a nationally acclaimed mentoring program to youth throughout the Twin Cities. This position paper is meant to highlight why Bolder Options is successful at what it does based on national and local research. It will illustrate its unique program components which make it a model program that can be replicated to fit the needs of our own community and beyond.

## **History of the Organization:**

Bolder Options was established in 1993 as a response to a community needs assessment that determined there was an urgent need for mentoring programs in the Twin Cities. As a result, the Minneapolis Jaycees Charitable Foundation (MJCF) established a task force of representatives from Hennepin County Probation, Operation De Novo (Hennepin County's diversion program), the Minneapolis Police Department, public school authorities, and other citizens from the community to conduct a needs assessment of high-risk youth in the Twin Cities. The task force agreed unanimously that a void in one-on-one mentoring opportunities existed and recommended the creation of a youth mentoring program that would use structured activities and athletics to motivate at-risk youth. Bolder Options became an independent 501(c) 3 in June of 1998.

In 2004, a growing need for quality mentoring and intervention programs in Saint Paul drove representatives from Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS), SPPS Truancy Intervention Program (TIP), the Saint Paul Police's juvenile unit, and Ramsey County Attorney's office to meet with representatives from Bolder Options to discuss the possibility of expanding its innovative mentoring program to the Saint Paul community. After Bolder Options was recognized as one of the best charities in the nation on the Today Show in 2006, Bolder Options gained the capital, funding, and political and community support to pursue this expansion. Saint Paul Mayor Coleman hosted a number of meetings and events to announce the arrival of Bolder Options. The agency hired a Saint Paul Program Coordinator and began serving youth in January 2007.

The Bolder Options philosophy is summarized in its mission, vision and values statements:

***Mission:*** *Teaching youth to succeed in all of life's races*

Teaching: We involve kids in mentoring relationships with positive role models from the community.

Youth: We serve at-risk youth, ages 10 to 14.

To Succeed: We support youth-mentor pairs in running or biking training, adventure learning, goal setting, and volunteer service. We educate youth about healthy habits.

In All of Life's Races: We provide the structure and support for healthy relationships and positive behaviors.

***Vision:** We are committed to building a community of caring relationships in support of our youth.*

***Values:** We value youth. We believe in the power of positive relationships. We work to build a strong community.*

## **Determining the Need**

Over the past two decades, dozens of studies have demonstrated that mentorship is a successful strategy in preventing truancy and delinquency. Bolder Options is an innovative mentoring and direct service intervention program that currently serves 120 youth annually from Minneapolis and Saint Paul who are truant or at-risk for educational failure, dropping out of school, or getting involved in criminal or delinquent activities. Participants are between 10 and 14 years old and are referred by probation and diversion agencies, truancy or juvenile court, schools and community organizations. Youth are referred to Bolder Options because they are either truant or have committed a crime and are system involved. The Bolder Options' model is based on research-based youth development practices which have shown significant results in the lives of youth. As a result, the program sees an average retention rate of 60% in the program, youth have shown improvements in school attendance and performance, exhibited an increase in healthy habits, and have set positive life goals.

Bolder Options' youth face significant challenges in their lives. The following section illustrates the current environment that many of these youth are living in. Statistics were aggregated from the cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, the Minnesota Department of Education, and local school districts.

Homicide rates for youth are higher in the United States than in any other developed nation. In fact, it is the second leading cause of death among young people ages 10-24. Youth who reside in areas of high crime rates are typified as "at-risk" because of the multiple risk factors that they face each day. In addition, many of these youth have become a part of a cycle of intergenerational crime.

### **The Need in Minneapolis:**

Eighty Minneapolis residents between the ages of 15 and 24 years died as a result of homicide between 2003-2006 accounting for almost half of all deaths. (City of Minneapolis 2007) Of 57

homicides in Minneapolis in 2006, half occurred within a six square mile area in North Minneapolis. According to city of Minneapolis officials, youth violence in Minneapolis increased following severe reductions in state funding, including a loss of \$3.27 million in after-school enrichment programs, a loss of \$364,000 in Youth Risk Behavior Grants from the tobacco endowment funds, and a loss of \$700,000 for youth development and parenting support geared towards teen pregnancy prevention.

In Bolder Options' Minneapolis program, approximately half of the youth live on the North side and half live on the South side, but the majority of youth waiting to be enrolled in Bolder Options are from North Minneapolis and the numbers continue to increase. As a result, the need for youth programming in North Minneapolis has become poignant during the last few years. The youth referrals for youth living in North Minneapolis far exceeds the number of referrals from South Minneapolis, and currently Bolder Options has a waiting list for North Minneapolis youth and mentors waiting to be matched.

The Near North Area of Minneapolis includes 6 neighborhoods south of Lowry Avenue, including Harrison, Hawthorne, Jordan, Near North, Sumner Glenwood, and Willard-Hay. Near North is a diverse community: 58 % black, 14 % Asian, 12 % white and 9 % Hispanic. Compared to other sections of Minneapolis, the Near North area also has a predominantly large number of children per family with an average of 20% more children than other areas of the city. It is also an inner-city community with a predominance of poverty. The percentage of people living at or below the poverty level exceeds the City of Minneapolis by 21 percent. The Near North neighborhoods consistently rate highest in the city for crimes per person. Gangs, prostitution, and drugs run rampant in the streets. According to the March 2007 Twin Cities publication, The Rake, "By year's end [2006], Minneapolis had recorded sixty homicides, thirteen more than in 2005 and the highest number since 1996, when eighty-eight people died violently in the city. Twenty-nine—nearly half—of last year's killings occurred in a six-square-mile area of North Minneapolis."

Unfortunately, the role models for many youth on the North side are the gang members, drug dealers, prostitutes, and other criminals on the street. An independent evaluation of Bolder Options' youth indicated that 85% come from low-income families. 90% live in single-parent households or non-traditional settings and lack positive adult role models. At one of Bolder Options' youth meetings entitled "Gangs, criminal activity, consequences, and making positive choices", 100% of the youth stated that they had a family member involved in a gang or in prison. With little or no guidance or immediate source of support, many of these youth become involved in delinquent behaviors such as truancy.

Truancy rates in North Minneapolis high schools and middle schools exceed 50% and less than 40% passed the preliminary state exams in 2002. In April 2007, the Minneapolis Public Schools closed 5 additional North Minneapolis Schools due to declined attendance and performance.

## **The Need in Saint Paul:**

According to data from the Minnesota Department of Education, the drop-out rate in Saint Paul Public Schools during 2003-2004 was 946 students or 4.8 percent of total enrollment of which 45% were females and 55% males. When broken down by ethnicity, these rates become disproportionate. Black students account for nearly 40 percent of all Saint Paul school district drop outs while Asian and Hispanic students account for 19 and 18 percent respectively. Saint Paul's East Side has been identified as the area of greatest need for programming because of a combination of high crime rates, economic and ethnic diversity, and supportive schools recognizing the importance of mentoring programs. According to a Saint Paul Public Schools TIP report, family problems, chemical use, past criminal activity, gang involvement and abuse or neglect have been closely correlated with continual school absence of these youth.

As a result of discussions with staff from Saint Paul Public Schools, TIP, Ramsey County Attorney's Office, and the Saint Paul Police Department, the following Saint Paul schools have been identified with youth who reside in the Ames Lake community and suffer from high truancy rates or large numbers of at-risk youth:

- Harding High School (37.4% of the youth are absent 15 or more days)
- Johnson High School (37.3% of the youth are absent 15 or more days)
- Battle Creek Middle School (18.7% miss 15 or more days) and
- Cleveland Middle School (23.0% miss 15 or more days)
- Bruce F. Vento and Dayton's Bluff report youth with high needs in need of services.

Beginning in 2007, Bolder Options served 40 youth in its expanded Running Program in Saint Paul. Upon forming a partnership with the Opportunity Neighborhood Development Corporation (ONDC), a non-profit organization that provides housing and basic-needs services to the residents of the housing complexes, Bolder Options opened a satellite site at the Ames Lake Community Center. Located in the Payne-Phalen neighborhood on the (55106) East Side of Saint Paul, the Ames Lake Community Center is located in a high-crime area and is completely surrounded by section 8, subsidized, and low-income housing. Census statistics show that the Payne-Phalen neighborhood, which includes Ames Lake, is home to 31,531 people, where 76% of public school students in the neighborhood were children of color, 22% of families were living below poverty level, and 41% of families were headed by single females. According to ONCD's findings in 2005 regarding the needs of residents involved in its Resource and Referral Services, 25% were unable to pay their rent, 56% required help with basic needs (i.e. food, clothing, furniture), 56% had health/mental health issues, 44% had school related issues, and 13% required assistance finding employment. There are critical youth development needs within the Ames Lake community. Between 250 -300 youth reside in the community. Many of these youth have experienced crime, family violence, concentrated poverty, chronic housing instability, and barriers to positive youth development opportunities within the broader community. Due to high resident housing mobility and high truancy rates, many community youth also lag behind their school age peers in math and reading.

In response to a growing demand for its services, in 2008, Bolder Options worked with Saint Paul Park and Recreation to secure space in the West Minnehaha Recreation Center. By forming a strategic partnership with Saint Paul Park and Recreation, Bolder Options will now be able to provide its programming to the North End, Frogtown, and Midway communities. As a result of this expansion, Bolder Options serves the entire area of Saint Paul that is North of I-94. In addition, the facility includes office, meeting, tutoring, and gym space to enhance the Bolder Options program and to make the location more accessible to the youth that we serve.

### **The Costs and Benefits of Early Intervention versus System Involved Treatment**

Youth mentoring and early intervention programs such as Bolder Options are invaluable to the success of at-risk youth in that they open a new doorway for youth to embark upon a more positive approach to life filled with goals, healthy lifestyles choices, and success. The end result is not only a brighter future for youth, but a direct cost savings to society.

According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice, it costs taxpayers at least 1.7-2.3 million dollars over the lifetime for each youth who gets involved in the justice system and a life of crime. Violence exacts a financial burden on our community by also increasing health care and public safety costs. The average cost for a single incident of homicide is estimated to be \$3 million and the cost for one non-fatal paralyzing injury from gun violence averages \$2-5 million over the victim's lifetime for health care, living expenses and lost productivity. According to information from the Minnesota Mentoring Partnership, every Minnesota high school dropout costs taxpayers \$416,987 over each student's lifetime. When multiplied by the number of roughly 11,000 dropouts (2000-2001 school year data), this single class of dropouts is costing Minnesota companies approximately \$248 million. For Individual taxpayers, this cost conservatively equates to \$2.2 billion or \$908.96 per taxpayer annually.

The following costs are a sample of system-involved annual costs for treating a juvenile who has committed a property crime:

#### **Costs of treatment (per year) (SROI Analysis, March 2007)**

Juvenile correctional facility \$40,200  
Placement in group home \$56,100  
Residential treatment \$75,300  
Cost of post-treatment probation \$2,340

Youth Intervention programs can save communities money over both the short and long-term because they decrease the need for more costly approaches to treatment for the youth and their families and they reduce the social repercussions of crime and other results of high-risk behavior by reducing the prominence of these negative behaviors. In the statewide analysis Analyzing the Social Return on Investment in Youth Intervention Programs performed by the Wilder Research Center and the University of Minnesota in March 2007, researchers found that “effective intervention programs are likely to produce some of the highest returns of any youth programs since they deal with more concentrated populations, many of whom have been identified through truancy, juvenile crime, or other problem behaviors.” Outcome data indicated that an effective

comprehensive program such as Bolder Options costing around \$2,000 per participant returns benefits of \$4.41 for every dollar of cost. Moreover, the program returns \$13.22 for every State dollar invested, assuming a 2 to 1 match of other funding. The benefit of reducing truancy by one day leads to a lifetime earnings gain of \$2,367 along with increased tax revenues of \$882 for a total of \$3,249 per person served by a successful truancy reduction program. The SROI Analysis also found that effective youth intervention programs like Bolder Options produce the following benefits:

- Reduced truancy-resulting in reduced school costs and, ultimately, reduced high school dropouts and increased lifetime earnings
- Improved school performance-leading to increased graduation rates and higher earnings
- Reduced near-term court costs-saving court costs through youth diversion programs
- Reduced costs of adult crime-both the crime losses of victims and the societal costs of prosecuting and incarcerating adult offenders
- Reduced needs for social services-both near-term cost of family counseling and long-term costs of public assistance
- Improved health outcomes-including reductions in teen pregnancy, reduced or delayed use of tobacco, alcohol, or illicit drugs

**Cost-Benefit Ratio of Participating in Intervention Programs** (SROI Analysis, March 2007)

Benefit	Benefits per Individual
<b>Crime Reduction:</b>	
Reduced Court Costs	<b>\$675</b>
Reduced Treatment Costs	<b>\$402</b>
Reduced Future Crime Costs	<b>\$36</b>
<b>Truancy Reduction:</b>	
Reduced School Costs	<b>\$300</b>
Increased Graduation Rate (lifetime earnings)	<b>\$7,310</b>
Enhanced School Achievement	<b>\$1,054</b>

<b>Total Benefits:</b>	<b>\$9,786</b>
<b>Total Program Costs:</b>	<b>\$2,000</b>
<b>Benefit-Cost Ratio – Return on Investment</b>	<b>\$4.89</b>
<b>Total Benefits/State Costs</b>	<b>\$14.68</b>
<b>Total Benefits/Public Costs</b>	<b>\$2.33</b>

## Principles of Successful Programs

The following section describes both the public and political environment which currently exists allowing for the success of youth intervention programs such as Bolder Options, as well as key elements of successful programs based on research from current experts in youth development and program assessment. The demand for and recognition of the success of youth intervention programs is on the rise. Many communities across the nation, such as the city of Minneapolis, are implementing community-wide, collaborative approaches to solving truancy and juvenile crime. Research proves that there are vital program components that must exist in order for such programs to be successful: structured relationships, consistency and duration, volunteer screening and training, intensive supervision and support and community-based resources are the most critical elements that are discussed. Following the discussion of these principles for success, a thorough description of the Bolder Options model is highlighted. As is portrayed, the Bolder Options model is one which is based upon these key elements of research and community support.

### Public Support:

Public policy is a tool to not only shape the ideas of people, but is also influenced by the opinions of the general public. More than at any other time, people are beginning to understand the positive benefits of youth intervention programs and their need in creating a better life for young people and society in general.

New polling data on Americans' attitudes about youth, race, and crime reveal strong support for juvenile justice reforms that focus on rehabilitating youthful offenders rather than locking them up in adult prisons. Survey findings from the Center for Children's Law and Policy in Washington D.C. show that the public recognizes the potential of young people to change. Nearly 9 out of 10 (89 percent) of those surveyed agreed that "almost all youth who commit crimes have the potential to change," and more than 7 out of 10 agreed that "incarcerating youth offenders without rehabilitation is the same as giving up on them." The survey also showed that

the public supports redirecting government funds from incarceration to counseling, education, and job training programs for youth offenders. 8 out of 10 favor reallocating state government money from incarceration to programs that increase the capacity of youth to become productive citizens. The majority of participants saw schooling, job training, mental health treatment, counseling and follow-up services for youth as “very effective” ways to rehabilitate young people. Less than 15 percent of those surveyed thought that incarcerating juveniles was a “very effective” way to rehabilitate youth. (Center for Children’s Law and Policy, 2007)

### **Local Political Support:**

In addition to a growing consensus among public opinion across the country, the support for youth intervention programs has grown exponentially at the local level. The city of Minneapolis responded to the increasing public demand for action by commissioning a study and plan of action called the *Blueprint for Action to Prevent Youth Violence*. One of the main goals stated by the city of Minneapolis is to connect every youth with an adult: “The Youth Violence Prevention Steering Committee’s *Blueprint for Action to Prevent Youth Violence* recognizes that youth violence is a public health epidemic that requires a holistic, multi-faceted response that aims to achieve goals such as “Connect every youth with a trusted adult.” Other goals are to “Increase the number of quality mentoring programs available to youth along with proper training for mentors of all ages and backgrounds.” “Increase the number of high-quality community-based youth programs, services, and opportunities for leadership training.”

### **Research-Based Results**

In order to provide the most comprehensive and strongest evidence of the effectiveness of mentoring in the lives of youth, Bolder Options has based its program model on research performed by the utmost experts in the field of mentoring and public policy. Over the past two decades, dozens of studies have demonstrated that mentorship is a successful strategy for preventing truancy and delinquency. The Quantum Opportunities Program study, funded by the Ford Foundation between 1989-1993, shows that students from low-income families who have a mentor are more likely than those who do not to (University of Colorado, 1993):

- Graduate from high school
- Enroll in college
- Have fewer children
- Have fewer arrests
- Become involved in community service
- Be hopeful about their future

What are the qualities of such successful programs? A growing number of studies have revealed a significant association between youth’s involvement in youth intervention programs and positive developmental outcomes. However, specific program components should be present in order to ensure this success. Some of the most notable characteristics are structured relationships, consistency, duration, and a community-based approach of programming.

## **Structured Relationships**

It is vitally important for a program to provide the training and structure necessary to ensure that a positive and effective relationship can exist between the adult and youth. In one study, “outcomes were most favorable when youth reported experiencing both structure and support from their mentors; by contrast, no benefits were evident for an unconditional support relationship type, thus suggesting a need for mentors to be more than simply “good friends.”(Rhodes and Dubois 2006) The result of such structured relationships allows the adult to be more attuned to the interests and needs of the youth while at the same time have the resources available through the sponsoring organization to adapt his or her approach accordingly. (Rhodes and Dubois 2006)

## **Consistency and Duration**

Regular contact between a mentor and a youth has been linked to positive youth development outcomes because it allows opportunities for a trusting relationship to develop. According to researchers, “consistent and reliable contact with an adult may offer benefits such as increased feelings of security and attachment” (Rhodes 2005). In addition to a consistent relationship, evidence shows that the benefits of a mentoring relationship are also relative to the amount of time spent together. In an analysis of data from a study conducted by Public/Private Ventures of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) found that positive impacts become progressively stronger as relationships last for a longer period of time. The greatest benefits are for youth in relationships that last for 1 year or more and the least for youth involved in relationships that last for less than 6 months.

## **Critical Program Components**

Studies show that, “all available evidence persuades that the following program components are also prerequisites for an effective mentoring program” (Joseph P. Tierney and Jean Baldwin Grossman, 1995):

- Thorough volunteer screening that weeds out adults who are unlikely to keep their time commitment or might pose a safety risk to the youth;
- Mentor training that includes communication and limit-setting skills, tips on relationship-building and recommendations on the best way to interact with a young person;
- Matching procedures that take into account the preferences of the youth, their family and the volunteer, and that use a professional case manager to analyze which volunteer would work best with which youth; and
- Intensive supervision and support of each match by a case manager who has frequent contact with the parent/guardian, volunteer and youth, and provides assistance when requested or as difficulties arise.

## **Positive Impacts of Community Based Initiatives**

The national research group Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) has implemented the most comprehensive and extensive research on the effectiveness of mentoring programs in the country. Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is “to improve the effectiveness of social policies, programs and community initiatives, especially as they affect youth and young adults. In carrying out this mission, P/PV works with philanthropies, the public and business sectors, and nonprofit organizations.” The research examines not only whether youth benefit from various forms of mentoring but also the nature and practice of effective mentoring relationships and the administrative structures that facilitate their growth. Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) conducted the most extensive and widely known mentoring impact report in the 1990’s. This randomized, nationwide study involving over 1,000 youth found that youth who were mentored, compared to controls, were 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs; 27% less likely to begin using alcohol; 52% less likely to skip school; and 37% less likely to skip class. (Tierney, Grossman, and Resch, 1995).

## **Community Based Mentoring versus School-Based Mentoring:**

Research conducted by P/PV, corporate foundations, and educational institutions over the last 15 years has demonstrated that Community Based Mentoring programs (CBM programs) have a direct positive impact on the social and emotional developmental outcomes of youth, particularly on increasing positive behaviors and healthy habits. “Community-based programs are typically characterized by broad youth development goals in contrast to the more specific goals, centered around school success, that typify school-based programs. We know that well-implemented community-based programs result in a wide range of benefits for youth, including reduced substance use, improved academic performance and behavior and improved relationships with parents and peers” (Carla Herrera C. L., 2000). Research also indicates that CBM programs have a secondary positive impact on academic outcomes based on improved self worth, improved relationships with adults and parents, and improved attitudes about school.

According to studies some of the main differences between school-based programs and community-based programs are that school-based programs tend to focus more on youth’s school success and serve more youth with academic needs rather than their over-all interests and personal needs. School-based programs also tend to require a less intensive commitment from volunteers. Despite the fact that SBM programs are easier to operate in terms of staffing, mentor recruitment, and other areas, SBM programs do not make the same positive, longitudinal impacts as CBM programs. The research indicated that the (SBM) programs had a limited secondary impact in the first year, less in the second year, and virtually no impacts in non-academic areas (Carla Herrera C. L., 2000) whereas, community-based programs tend to have a longer-term impact. In P/PV’s longitudinal study on the impact of mentoring on youth, two hundred former mentees between the ages of 24 and 57 that had a mentor for at least a year were interviewed. They found that the average number of years of formal education completed for these former mentees was 14 years, exceeding national average of formal education. 91% of participants indicated that they were employed at the time of the interview and not receiving public

assistance. This contrasts with their parents, of whom 57% were on public assistance during the youth's childhood. The median income was \$30,000 with a range of \$0- \$100,000. (Carla Herrera, 2007)

These results indicate that SBM programs will need to move beyond the school year and reflect a more traditional CBM program approach in order to impact both academic outcomes and social and behavioral outcomes.

## **The Bolder Options Model:**

Bolder Options' innovative, strengths-based intervention program is unlike any other youth program in that it empowers youth through an intricate web of support that encompasses the entire family. The Bolder Options' program combines mentoring, goal setting, athletic activities, learning support, case management, life-skills education, volunteerism, community support, and parental involvement to foster the social and academic success of youth who are at risk of academic failure, dropping out of school, and developing delinquent behaviors. Bolder Options also focuses on developing strong families by providing family centered case management and referrals to additional services throughout the community. As a result of this comprehensive approach, Bolder Options has fostered the social and academic success of over 120 youth each year who are at risk of academic failure, dropping out of school, and developing delinquent behaviors.

### **Understanding the Positive Youth Development Approach**

As defined by the National Collaboration for Youth Members in March 1998, the Youth Development Approach "is a process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically and cognitively competent. Positive youth development addresses the broader developmental needs of youth, in contrast to deficit-based models which focus solely on youth problems." Rather than seeing young people as problems, this positive development approach views them instead as resources and builds on their strengths and capabilities to develop within their own community. To succeed youth must acquire adequate attitudes, behaviors, and skills. Youth development programs seek to build competencies in the following areas: physical, social, cognitive, vocational, and moral (National Collaboration for Youth, 1996)

The Bolder Options activity-based mentoring model and support services are based on numerous studies and best practices in the fields of youth development and mentorship. Basic assumptions of the model are:

#### **For Youth**

- **Goal-setting and completing builds success**

• <b>Positive role models are critical in shaping youth behavior</b>
• <b>Physical activity is a good starting point to set and realize goals</b>
• <b>Building of youth’s strengths will lead to success</b>
• <b>Experiential learning is effective</b>
• <b>Youth need community support (family, school, neighbors) to succeed</b>

<b>For Mentors</b>
• <b>Relationship building between mentors and mentees takes time</b>
• <b>Communication is essential to healthy relationships</b>
• <b>Trust and feeling safe is key to building relationships</b>
• <b>Offering support and training opportunities for mentors will lead to program success</b>
• <b>Compatibility is essential for effective mentoring experience.</b>

### **Bolder Options’ Constituency**

Bolder Options currently works with youth in Hennepin County who live in Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, Golden Valley, Saint Louis Park, and Richfield, and Saint Paul. Participants are between 10 and 14 years old and are referred to the program by schools, the Minneapolis Public Schools Attendance Review Board (SARB), Hennepin County Attorney’s Office, Hennepin County Juvenile Probation, and other community agencies because they are truant, at risk of academic failure, and are developing delinquent behaviors. Bolder Options’ 2008 analysis of youth participants indicated that approximately 48% of youth served are male and 52 % are female. The ethnic backgrounds of these youth are 55% African American, 6% Native American, 14% Latino, 2% Asian, 5% European American, and 18% Multi-Racial. 90% of the youth come from low-income families. 90% of the youth live in single-parent households or non-traditional settings and lack positive adult role models. English is not the first language spoken by 11% of the youth. The analysis also revealed that nearly half of the youth surveyed (46%) reported having learning challenges, including ADD, ADHD, Dyslexia, & general learning disabilities. Over 1/3 of those surveyed (31%) reported having mental health concerns, including anger management, anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Fetal Alcoholic Exposure, & Oppositional Defiant Disorder. And a quarter of the youth reported having both learning challenges and mental health concerns. These statistics should be qualified as they often are not

a 100% reflection of reality. Initially, as many youth begin the program they are hesitant to reveal all of their problems, but as the year progresses and youth and parents become more accustomed to the program, a certain level of trust is established and they often reveal additional concerns or problems.

## **Program Design and Implementation**

Participants are referred to Bolder Options by the Hennepin and Ramsey County court systems, Minneapolis and Saint Paul public schools, and other social service agencies in the Twin Cities. They then begin their journey in an intensive intervention program that asks youth to meet with their mentors on a one-to-one basis at least 2-4 hours a week, in addition to program activities and group events in the community. The impact of the program encompasses every aspect of their lives: their health, safety, academics, families, goals for the future and, most importantly, their self-worth. Such a comprehensive approach creates an impact which lasts a lifetime.

Bolder Options is an intensive and highly structured program that asks the youth to meet with their mentors approximately 200 hours a year, in addition to program activities and group events in the community. During the year, youth will: 1.) Participate in running/biking and academic activities with the mentor 1:1 a minimum of 2-4 hours per week; 2.) Make 3 goals and action plans for academic, athletic, and community success at the beginning of the program and again at the midpoint of the program; 3.) Train for and complete three to twelve community races or rides; 4.) Complete two to twelve volunteer activities in their community; 5.) Attend group events; and, 6.) Participate in a variety of community activities that match their interests and abilities. Youth will also attend educational meetings addressing healthy behaviors and positive choices that are facilitated two Thursdays each month. This curriculum provides youth and program staff a forum to discuss topics such as health, nutrition, anger management and tolerance, communication and relationships, chemical health and risky behaviors, violence prevention, diversity, and education.

In January 2007, Bolder Options implemented a satellite site expansion model that has been extremely successful. By serving youth directly in their neighborhoods, Bolder Options' programs have a greater programmatic, academic, and social impact on the youth who participate in the program. In addition, peers and family members are often inspired by the success that the youth achieve, so that friends ask to join the program and parents are empowered to build success in their lives. The central, neighborhood locations of the satellites provide an additional resource to an at-risk community, as well as make the program more accessible to the people it serves, more representative of their needs, and empowers clients to be positive contributors to their communities. Most importantly, youth are allowed an opportunity to take pride in themselves and where they live.

## **Addressing the Greatest Needs of Youth and Families: Forming Healthy Habits**

According to the U.S. Center of Disease Control (CDC) obesity trends are increasing by epidemic proportions. According to the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System of the CDC,

obesity rates among adults in Minnesota have more than doubled over the last decade. Most experts agree that the more obese or over-weight a person is, the more likely he or she is to develop health problems. Obesity has been linked to several serious medical conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, and stroke. It is also associated with higher rates of certain types of cancer. Obese women are more likely than non-obese women to die from cancer of the gallbladder, breast, uterus, cervix and ovaries. Obesity is also costly to our communities and health care systems, particularly when it involves those with little or no health insurance. Research conducted by The World Bank has estimated the cost of obesity in the U.S. at 12 percent of the national health care budget. In 1999 the Lewin Group, a respected health economics consulting firm, examined the costs of 15 conditions causally related to obesity and concluded that the direct health care costs of obesity in the U.S. were \$102.2 billion in 1999. Researchers Wolf and Colditz estimated the indirect costs of obesity due to lost productivity, sick time and restricted activity days totaled \$47.56 billion in 1994. Issues with overweight and obesity typically do not begin in adulthood. 25% percent of U.S. children are overweight or at risk for becoming overweight, and that number is increasing rapidly, according to The National Institutes of Health. Fortunately, there are cost-effective measures that can be taken to address the problem. According to a 1998 report by the National Institutes of Health, weight loss interventions work and result in the reduction of many of the diseases associated with obesity.

Many of the youth at Bolder Options come from homes in which adults do not participate in regular exercise, eat healthy meals, or exhibit other healthy habits. By making biking and running the focus of the mentoring relationship, Bolder Options introduces youth to new activities that can become life-long healthy habits. Through its Healthy Habits Program, the organization provides case management, resources, and information about healthy behaviors to families. Bolder Options believes that the earlier in life that these measures are taken, the greater the benefit to individuals who are at risk for obesity and the communities in which they live. To intervene and prevent the growing problem of obesity in our society, Bolder Options has incorporated its Healthy Habits Program into the main structure of its programming. Based on the strengths of its program model, the Healthy Habits Program involves youth in training and fitness activities based on developing a healthy lifestyle through a yearlong supportive, mentoring relationship.

Youth and parents also benefit from a healthy lifestyles education curriculum which teaches them how to incorporate healthy living and food choices into their day-to-day lives. The nutrition component of the curriculum is implemented by a personal trainer and registered dietician. The dietician was hired in 2008 to facilitate quarterly nutrition meetings for youth in Minneapolis and in Saint Paul. The Nutrition Meeting is 2-3 hours long--the personal trainer and dietician teach youth about nutrition while the youth prepare a healthy meal from scratch and serve it at a banquet. In addition, nutrition resources are provided to the youth and family so that they can utilize the lessons learned in the home. During nutrition meetings, youth also learn about nutrition and the food pyramid, as well as physiology, goal setting, physical education and self-care. In order to sustain the benefits of these meetings, mentors are trained to model and discuss nutrition and healthy eating habits with their youth.

In addition to eating healthy and exercise, youth also participate in discussions about peer pressure and substance abuse. According to research, youth who participate in mentoring programs with positive adult relationships, exhibit fewer tendencies toward anti-social behavior such as drug and alcohol abuse. According to a study by Public Private Ventures which analyzes the impact of mentoring programs on the lives of youth, mentoring programs prevent the onset of drug and alcohol abuse. As a result, “delaying the onset of the use of illegal drugs and alcohol decreases the likelihood that the youth will engage in problem behaviors, such as criminal activity and school failure” (Public Private Ventures, 1995).

Forming Healthy Habits has become the guiding force of Bolder Options’ new program developments. In 2009, the agency will implement a "group mentoring" component into its programming. Group mentoring will be led by the Saint Paul Program Coordinator. The coordinator will meet with youth who are waiting to be matched in the program two Tuesdays a month for athletic activities at a satellite site/park. The group mentoring component will be in addition to the youth’s weekly training with a mentor, the monthly race or bike ride, the monthly group program activity, and the bi-monthly youth meeting about healthy habits and positive behaviors. In addition, Bolder Options will be opening a youth center in 2009 at its headquarters. The drop in center will offer youth the opportunity to come to a safe place where they can learn how to better choose how to use their free time by participating in healthy and constructive activities for their minds and their bodies. A Wii Fit, pool and air hockey tables, and active games, as well as computers and support staff for academic enrichment.

## **Importance of Mentor-Mentee Relationships:**

### **Mentor Training:**

Training and support of mentors and matches are critical. “Mentors who receive more than six hours of pre-match training and orientation tend to spend more time with their mentees and report having the closest, most supportive relationships whereas those who receive less than two hours of training report having the least close and supportive relationships. Similarly, mentors who report having at least monthly contact with program staff once their matches had begun tend to develop closer and more supportive relationships than those with less frequent contact. Having interests in common is an important factor in the mentor’s ability to develop a close and supportive relationship with youth, suggesting that program staff need to consider youth’s and volunteers’ interests during the matching process” (Carla Herrera C. L., 2000).

The safety and success of the youth in the program is of the highest priority at Bolder Options. Mentors must be at least 21 years of age. All mentors, volunteers, and staff must go through a vigorous screening and training process. An application must be completed and three written references must be provided. A national, state, and county criminal background check, sexual offender check, and child and domestic abuse checks are completed, as well as a driving record and insurance check. All interviews, orientations, and trainings must be completed, the 3 written references must be returned in the mail, and all background checks must be submitted to the Bolder Options Volunteer Coordinator before the mentor is deemed acceptable to be matched with a youth and the information is passed to the Program Coordinator.

In order to insure the success of the relationship between youth and mentor, Bolder Options provides each mentor an intensive training program and support system that extends throughout the mentor's one-year commitment and beyond. Training sessions help to support mentors in addressing the special needs of truant youth. Mentors attend an initial orientation, interview, and training with role-playing activities. Mentors are then required to attend a 2-3 hour follow-up training after they have been matched with their youth for two to eight weeks in the program. This permits them to address any challenges that have arisen and discuss activities and strategies that are working well. "Coaches Corner" trainings are held every other month to provide additional support and information to mentors around subjects of youth development, communication, boundaries, risky behaviors, goal setting working with the school to support learning, and developmental assets. In order to give mentors a sense of community and support, Bolder Options organizes monthly social activities mentors currently involved in the program. Finally, Bolder Options Program Coordinators provide intensive case management to support the relationship between the youth-mentor-parents. This includes bi-weekly check-ins with the mentors, monitoring the progress and completion of goals, and monitoring the relationships.

### **Parental Involvement:**

Because youth need to be served in the context of their families, and the home environment can either be a contributing factor in truancy and delinquent behavior, or help in effecting positive change, Bolder Options places an important emphasis on supportive family involvement and services. Parents are included in the intake process and are encouraged to attend Bolder Options activities, as well as award and graduation celebrations. Parents attend a youth-parent meeting about youth development and communication. Home visits take place at intake/sign up, match and as needed throughout the year. Mentors are matched in the youth's home and Bolder Options staff provides ongoing case management, education and referral to other community resources and service providers to deal with any issues that arise during the program.

### **Assessment of Outcomes:**

Bolder Options continues to exceed the national mentoring success rate of 45% by accomplishing an average annual success rate of 60% in the last 10 years. In order to insure that it is meeting its goals, Bolder Options has implemented an on-going evaluation tool which tracks vital program statistics. Bolder Options has contracted with the consulting firm of ACET, Inc. to assist with evaluation. ACET is an independent research corporation specializing in the evaluation of PK-16 educational and community-based projects and has extensive experience in conducting high quality research and evaluation in multicultural/bilingual settings throughout the state of Minnesota and nationally. ACET serves a variety of clients in the design of rigorous scientifically based research methods, the implementation of formative and summative evaluation processes, test score and survey analyses, database development, and focus groups. Findings are used to 1) verify that certain aspects of the mentoring strategy are achieving desired outcomes; 2) inform future program planning and program refinements; 3) report program data to funding agents, referral sources and other key partners. In addition, ACET Inc. is working with Bolder Options to develop and implement longitudinal measures for evaluation. Bolder

Options will track graduation rates of youth who complete the program, as well as conduct surveys that monitor the mentoring relationship after program completion.

Bolder Options staff, mentors, parents, referral sources, and youth participants themselves are all involved in data collection. Specific methods include:

- Youth surveys/assessments at intake, 4 months, and program completion
- Youth-mentor check-ins on a weekly basis
- School attendance/ grades
- Activity logs/program records
- Mentor surveys/assessments 4 months and program completion
- Parent surveys/assessments at intake, 4 months, and program completion
- Parent attendance at events
- Focus groups

The following indicators are measured and evaluated by ACET, Inc.:

***Youth will learn lifelong health habits***

- Activities (all graduated youth will attend at least half of all scheduled meeting; and all will complete at least one race).
- At least 50% of youth will develop awareness of healthy resources; and at least 50% of youth will report use of community health activities and events.

***Youth will exhibit positive behaviors***

- Throughout the program, at least 80% of youth will set and accomplish physical, academic, and personal goals.
- At least 80% of youth will exhibit improved relationships with adults including communication about feelings.
- At least 60% of youth will feel supported through a network of positive relations with friends, family members, school staff, and members of the community.
- At least 90% of graduated youth will participate in at least one community service activity.
- At least 80% of youth will not repeat undesirable behaviors.

***Youth will have improved academic success***

- Youth who complete the program, on average, will achieve at least an 88% (based on Hennepin County attendance rate for 03-04) school attendance rate; at least 80% will have fewer than seven unexcused full and or partial school days in the last semester attended.

- At least 80% of youth will report positive attitudes about school and academic success at the end of the program
- At least 90% of graduated youth will advance to the next grade level.

## **2008 Evaluation Data**

The evaluation of the Bolder Options program focused on three major stakeholder groups: youth, mentors and parents. A combination of surveys and focus groups was used to measure stakeholders' experience in the program. This year the evaluation expanded to include follow-up youth and mentor surveys and focus groups with youth currently participating in the program.

Key questions for the evaluation included:

- To what extent are program activities implemented to help youth set and achieve goals?
- To what extent did program activities contribute to building youth success (academically, socially and physically)?
- To what extent did program processes and approach support overall progress toward identified outcomes? What worked well? What needs to improve? What are the lessons learned?

The following is a summary of outcomes from the 2008 Evaluation:

### ***Outcome: Youth will learn lifelong healthy habits.***

The majority of youth (74%-95%) reported healthy behaviors (exercises daily, avoiding peer pressure, and avoiding smoking, stealing, etc.). There was an increase in daily exercise among the youth, with 74% of the youth indicating that they did it.

### ***Outcome: Youth will exhibit increased positive behaviors.***

The evaluation showed improvement in the number of youth who would resist peer pressure at 81% and substantial improvement in youth who would resist copying or teasing. 93% said they have what it takes to accomplish their goals. There was considerable increase in the youth's positive perceptions of adults and experiencing a trusting relationship with adults. 86%-95% reported that their mentor encouraged them to learn new things and they are comfortable communicating with their mentor about important things. 79% expressed interest in becoming involved in their communities.

### ***Outcome: Youth will have academic success.***

Most youth had positive perceptions of being good in reading, writing, and math, as well as wanting to do well in school and liking school at baseline and midterm. 98% reported they want to do well in school. An increase in number of youths getting their assignments in on time was also reported. 88% of youth reported that they thought Bolder Options can help them in school.

### ***Outcome: Youth will report increased satisfaction with the program.***

The youth reported high levels of satisfaction with the program, as well as reported positive support from BO mentors and staff. 88% of the youth believed that the program can help them reach their goals.

## **The Bolder Options' Vision for Success: A Model to Follow**

Bolder Options is unlike any other mentoring program that currently exists because of its dedication to its values and high-quality program components. The Bolder Options model is unique and successful because of four main elements:

- a focus on healthy lifestyles as a key to personal success in every youth;
- a dedication to a program which uses an integrated system of delivery that encompasses stakeholders from the entire community;
- a belief in program quality over simply numbers served;
- and a reliance on evaluation to consistently improve program quality.

### ***A Vital Program Component: Forming Healthy Habits:***

Bolder Options introduces youth to new activities that can become life-long healthy habits. Instilling these values is important because good health and nutrition support healthy cognitive and social development in addition to the benefits to health. The goal is to not only help youth lose weight, but to help motivate them to maintain a healthy lifestyle. As a result, diseases stemming from obesity such as heart disease, high cholesterol, diabetes and cardiovascular problems will be prevented. Healthy kids lead to healthy adults which leads to significant health care cost savings in the future. Bolder Options believes that the earlier in life that these measures are taken, the greater the benefit to individuals who are at risk for obesity and the communities in which they live. To intervene and prevent the growing problem of obesity and related health problems, Bolder Options' goal is to expand the Bolder Options Healthy Habits program.

The goals of the expansion of the Bolder Options Intervention Project are as follows: 1) 40 youth from each community in need (whether in North Minneapolis, Saint Paul, or areas of Rochester) 2) on an individual level, youth will learn lifelong healthy habits, exhibit increased positive behaviors, and attain academic success, 3) academic performance levels will improve; 4) school attendance rates will increase and truant rates decrease; and 5) youth will report increased satisfaction with the program. Subcategories of these goals include the reduction of recidivism, juvenile delinquency and gang participation by at-risk youth.

### ***An Integrated System of Delivery Produces Results:***

Research proves that in order to be most effective, mentoring programs need to be well-constructed, comprehensive programs. Furthermore, in order to have any kind of significant impact, mentoring programs should also provide youth with relationships that last at least 1 year. According to a research paper sponsored by the Gates Foundation called *The Last Dropout*, the only way to increase high school graduation rates and decrease crime in marginalized communities with limited resources is an integrated system of delivery for adolescents. The research states that relationships (like mentoring), not programs, increase graduation rates. A sense of community (provided by Bolder Options intensive year of activities) is needed so that the youth feel safe, cared for, and are held accountable. And finally, connection to resources and

opportunities must occur (as provided by Bolder Options case management and satellite sites). The research states that the resources and programs should not ship youth to the programs, but rather be accessible and be located where the youth are--these resources should include the programs themselves, opportunities to participate in healthy lifestyles, safety, volunteerism, and medical access. (Milliken, 2007)

### ***Community Collaborations: The Key to a Comprehensive Program***

As a result of collaborating with service providers, community organizations, funders, safety and education providers and families, Bolder Options has become deeply rooted within the communities it serves resulting in a highly valued and sustainable program. Bolder Options is innovative and unique, in that, currently, there is no other mentoring and intervention agency that focuses on serving adolescent youth, provides activity-based and outcome-based programming, provides comprehensive services, has a detailed program structure and incentives, teaches youth to set and successfully achieve goals, and case manages the family. In order to do this, Bolder Options joins with youth serving agencies and organizations throughout the Twin Cities to create a community-based web of support for youth program participants. This collaborative intervention strategy is efficient and cost-effective in that it amplifies the impact made on each participant and creates an integrated web of support for each youth.

Bolder Options understands that it takes an entire community to support the success of youth. As a result, the organization and its staff have become leaders in the community who seek to share the organization's model mentoring program with others in the field by being involved in local and national conferences and training programs. Bolder Options is incredibly connected on state, metro, and local levels with the youth serving community. Bolder Options is a member of the Youth Intervention Programs Association (YIPA), the Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota, the Youth Community Connections Statewide Alliance, the metro YMCA's, and a variety of community networks and associations. Staff members serve on their board of directors and steering committees. Finally, Bolder Options is committed to providing the highest quality of youth services and adheres to the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics. Bolder Options works to build the forty developmental assets identified by the SEARCH Institute and serves on the SEARCH Institute's Advisory Committee for mentoring adolescents. The expansion to Saint Paul created new strategic partnerships with Saint Paul Park and Recreation, Saint Paul Public Libraries, Saint Paul 2<sup>nd</sup> Shift Commission, and multiple Saint Paul community groups, associations, and networks. These relationships are beneficial for mentor recruitment, youth provider relations, and collaborative programming.

### ***Quality over Quantity:***

There are many mentoring programs out there, but not all of them follow the critical program components which have proven to make an impact on the lives of youth. Many programs focus on matching as many youth with adults as possible, but do not have the capacity to train,

evaluate, case manage, monitor, and collaborate with others – thus, quality is sacrificed and the effectiveness of such programs is questionable. Bolder Options invests the time and financial resources necessary to make its program a success. While other programs have limited requirements that volunteers must spend with youth, Bolder Options requires mentors to commit themselves to intense training and to spend at least 2-4 hours per week with their mentee which is equivalent to 200 hours per year for the 1<sup>st</sup> year.

The bottom line: young people receive safe, structured places to interact with a caring adult and links to basic services that if absent, can prevent them from learning and developing. They need high quality instruction and guidance how to lead a healthy lifestyle. But they also need personal attention; strong, respectful relationships with adults; a culture of peer support, clear rules, high expectations and real assessments; and challenging experiences and opportunities for self-direction, participation and contribution within the organization and the community. The Bolder Options program has invested the time and financial resources to create a program in the Twin Cities which encompasses all of these elements.

### ***Evaluation: the Key to Success:***

Since its inception in 1995, Bolder Options has had a strong commitment to the evaluation of its program. In order to continue to support the effectiveness of its programming, the organization has designed a strategic plan which seeks to increase the capacity of the organization to accomplish its goals while laying the groundwork for continued growth. One of the main strategies for achieving these goals is to transform its current evaluation program into a broader organizational capacity building system. Bolder Options has utilized its evaluation findings to 1) verify that certain aspects of the mentoring strategy are achieving desired outcomes; 2) inform future program planning and program refinements; and 3) report program data to funding agents, referral sources and other key partners. Based on the continual success of this evaluation system, Bolder Options will also seek to utilize evaluation as a tool to enhance and build the capacity of the overall organization. The evaluation results will serve as a basis for improving both the programmatic and organizational elements of Bolder Options. By successfully attaining the measureable objectives of its program, Bolder Options will successfully achieve the goals of its mission while enhancing its services to at-risk youth and their families in Saint Paul and Minneapolis. The information attained from this evaluation system will be valuable not only for the organization as a whole, but for Bolder Options' stakeholders and the community at-large.

How does this impact the future for Bolder Options? Bolder Options has developed the agency capacity and program structure to be easily replicated to satellite sites in North Minneapolis and Saint Paul, and Rochester. As a result, the organization has doubled the number of youth served in the last 5 years and multiple neighborhood organizations, community agencies, recreational centers, and schools have offered Bolder Options space to provide its programming and services. Bolder Options has also been recognized as a model program nationally. In 2004, the federal Office of Juvenile Justice Programs invited Bolder Options to present at its national conference. In addition, the White House recognized Bolder Options in 2005 for the quality of its mentoring program. The benefits of this recognition have had a tremendous impact on the organization. After Bolder Options was recognized as one of the best charities in the nation on the Today

Show in 2006 and voted “Best Charity” by Minnesota Monthly magazine, the organization gained the capital, funding, political and community support to begin its expansion efforts.

### **Sustaining the Program in Difficult Financial Times**

Bolder Options management team, finance committee and board of directors have been working to develop strategies to alleviate the financial strain imposed on the organization by the general economy. The following represents strategies developed to insure that Bolder Options continues to be viable and capable of meeting its financial obligations in the future.

1. The total program expenses for 2009 were decreased by \$48,147. This was accomplished by holding wages flat, and cutting slightly from budget categories where it was determined the organization could save money.
2. Three new members were added to the finance committee in 2009. One of the new members is helping the organization to strengthen its fiscal policy through the development of an improved fiscal monitoring system. One of the early measures in 2009 is to provide more training to the directors in monitoring the specific budget areas that they supervise. The board has required the organization to not exceed any expense items in 2009.
3. Eight new members were added to the Development Committee in order to stabilize income to the organization and develop new opportunities and capitalize on existing resources. A more refined approach to fundraising is being developed to approach major donors with consistency and presenting them with the opportunity to help the organization meet its goals.
4. The Board will participate in a sustainable development retreat led by expert Lori Jacobwith. She will lead a board retreat on maintaining a Sustainable Strategies Model in February 2009.
5. Bolder Options began to follow a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) model in 2008. The organization will continue to follow CQI in 2009 with one of the major areas focusing on improving our development strategies and fundraising.
6. Bolder Options will continue to educate individual donors, corporate sponsors, foundations, and the community through the continual provision of quality reports on program outcomes and the strategic direction of the organization.
7. The organization strengthened its banking relationship by switching to Bremer Bank. This has allowed for more access to products and services provided to us by our banking partner.
8. Bolder Options staff and Board of Directors are committed to helping the families and youth who are part of the program during this difficult time. We are committed to maintaining our program staff to ensure we are available to handle the many emergencies our families are suffering. We applied for \$100,000 in emergency grant money from the Otto Bremer Foundation to be used for families in crisis.

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