

REPORT ON FFA GRANT TO YSOP
December 2022

1. What problem were you addressing? What solution did you propose to address it?

We created the Connex program in direct response to the pandemic. Seniors and youth had been hit hard by the isolation that came with the pandemic. We felt Connex could provide opportunities for both seniors and youth to transcend their isolation and engage in their communities.

2. What actions did you take? What worked and didn't work toward your objectives? Please share any unanticipated benefits or barriers encountered.

Through our virtual and in-person programs youth reached out to people deeply affected by COVID-19. Seniors, isolated for much of the year, welcomed interaction with students and built new connections. Crossing generational lines provided access to new perspectives and knowledge that we have seen can change lives in unexpected ways.

We have been very successful at being flexible in dealing with the pandemic. Connex works with two groups that had a lot of restrictions during this pandemic. We had to put our in-person programs on hold in the winter as people were starting to isolate once again. We offered more virtual programs during this time. We then saw a greater interest in our in-person programs this summer while our virtual programming was not as popular. Also access to student groups over the summer was very difficult, causing us to suspend our virtual sessions. This fall and winter both our virtual and in-person programs were successful with many participants engaging in multiple programs.

With our two strong program models, we feel we can adapt very quickly to offer what works best for our participants at any given time.

The FFA grant enabled us to engage seniors and youth from underserved communities in the NY/PA/NJ area in virtual conversations. As people felt comfortable, we were able to offer in-person service projects for small groups of young people and seniors. Participants came together to engage in a service project benefiting their community such as making no-sew blankets for youth residing in shelters.

Based on feedback from both seniors and youth we were able to shift the focus of our virtual conversations to move beyond pandemic related topics. Groups discussed a wide range of subjects including career choices, the meaning of service, communication, definition of community and generational stereotypes. We continue to check in with our participants to ensure our programming is relevant and beneficial to both groups.

3. How did you measure success--both quantitative and qualitative? Please include numbers and demographics of people touched by the work.

We evaluated our success by measuring both quantitative and qualitative activities. Quantitatively, YSOP measured the effectiveness of its programs by tracking the number of participants and their hours of participation. For qualitative evaluations the YSOP staff filed written reports on each program and provided anecdotal feedback. We also held a zoom session for senior participants to get their reactions to their participation and suggestions for future work. This winter we are planning to seek feedback through a program evaluation form from both the youth and seniors involved in the programs. Both seniors and students consistently share positive reactions to both the virtual and in-person programs. We have many seniors and youth return for another program.

During the FFA grant cycle we engaged 145 students and 116 seniors in 60 hours of virtual conversations, and 27 hours in 9 programs of in-person service projects. We also held our annual feedback workshop with Connex senior participants and staff.

4. How did partnerships/collaborations enhance or challenge the project?

Partnerships have been crucial to the project. The youth partnerships were challenging because of school schedules needing to coordinate with seniors' availability and student participation at exam period or school vacation times. The senior participants were more reliable in attendance although illness sometimes led to absences. The biggest challenge for seniors in our virtual sessions was their need to have access to computers.

For youth groups we have worked with Pelham NY High School, White Plains High School, Pelham Together (a large youth group), Loyola School in Manhattan, Iona Prep in New Rochelle, Mary McDowell Friends School in Brooklyn (a school for students with learning disabilities), The Greenmount School in Baltimore MD, Sandy Spring School in MD, Poly Prep in Brooklyn. In addition, we worked with Amni Public Charter School in Mt, Vernon NY (a school with mostly low-income African American students) and the Yonkers Youth Bureau.

For senior citizens we have been greatly aided by the Westchester County Department of Senior Services staff who have opened doors to senior centers across the county. We worked with centers in Pelham, New Rochelle, Lewisboro, Ardsley, White Plains and Yonkers. The Pelham Seniors Club has been very active in our in-person intergenerational service projects. We have drawn participants for our virtual Connex sessions from senior residences including Gouverneur Skilled Nursing Facility in NYC (part of the NY public hospitals serving low-income Hispanic and Chinese Americans), Kendal on Hudson, Medford Leas, Foulkways, and Baltimore Friends Home. We also had participating seniors living independently in Vermont, NY, Mass, NJ and PA. The NYYM Meetings, especially Purchase Friends Meeting have been great partners.

5. Include a budget and actual for the project during the reporting period.

See attached

6. What conversations have you had on how to sustain the project after the grant, and do you have plans to share your results with other organizations?

In addition to our plans to continue soliciting contributions from our base of 200 donors, our contract for Connex has been renewed by Westchester County. We have met with various County legislators and officials to report on our progress. We are also discussing with NY State Senators and Assembly members about including Connex in the NY state budget. Such requests are made in January with the state budget finalized in March. If we are included in the budget the funds will come next summer. Finally, we are approaching some local foundations, civic organizations and Friends Meetings that have supported us in the past to seek their current support.

We plan to share our project results with the Westchester Council for Seniors, the Next Stage Aging Network, the Quaker Youth network and the NYYM ARCH program. We also share information on Connex on our website and through posting on various social media platforms.

7. Feedback on your interaction with FFA would be helpful. How have we helped? Made it harder? What else can we do to facilitate your work?

The application with its specific questions helped us clarify our objectives and plans. Susan Hoskins' initial comments were very helpful. We also sent materials to her as we progressed in the year and found her comments on the mid-year review very useful. She also suggested contacts for us to pursue. The FFA staff in no way made our project harder to realize. We could use suggestions about ways to share our results with a wider audience.

8. Additional comments:

With Connex we have learned a great deal about seniors living independently and what they can offer to young people in terms of life experiences. Also, we have found that young people and seniors enjoy working together on projects to benefit their communities. We have found that in many areas the fastest growing population of seniors is in folks over 80. Senior centers are having difficulty attracting people in their 60's and 70's. We want to try holding intergenerational service projects that target younger seniors and students to see if we can reach this important group.