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Dear Committee Members,

Our agency, supported by the YIP grant, is dedicated to preventing and intervening in high-risk behaviors among youth. We focus on helping students develop responsible decision-making skills, peer conflict resolution strategies, and positive relationships with caring adults. Our work takes place in Forest Lake Area Schools, primarily at Linwood Elementary, where Lakes Center staff diligently provide all 431 students with opportunities to build a sense of self, connection, and community care through diverse activities. Fifth and sixth-grade students participate in Lunch Clubs covering topics like health, internet safety, creative expression, book clubs, and career exploration. They also engage in student leadership groups that organize school events and foster community spirit, taking pride and ownership in their contributions. Additionally, sixth-grade students take part in community service projects, supporting their peers, community members, and the school forest. Recognizing the pressures faced by school systems, Lakes Center staff offer small group and individualized support to students working on enhancing their social, emotional, and behavioral skills.

The YIP grant is essential to making these transformative opportunities possible for the youth we serve. It helps provide access to unique opportunities and materials that enrich students' learning experiences in all areas of our program. This funding has allowed us to implement top-tier prevention curriculums on drug and alcohol awareness for fifth and sixth graders. After completing these programs, students consistently report a decreased likelihood of engaging in underage substance use, having learned about its effects. The grant has also enabled us to create STEAM challenges and social emotional lessons designed to build conflict resolution skills and decision making. In service groups where students practice creative expression, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving, we've been able to bring nearly every student-led idea to life, empowering them to see their ideas, hard work, and creativity make a real impact on their community.

I strongly advocate for the full funding of the YIP grant. As a former kindergarten teacher, I have witnessed firsthand the profound effects of equipping students with the tools, opportunities, and care they need to make positive and healthy life choices. When I share about our program with educators at other schools, their immediate response is, "When do we get that at our school? We need that." The YIP grant is needed. The work facilitated by agencies like ours supported through YIP funding is invaluable and cannot be lost. These programs change lives, strengthen communities, and deserve unwavering support.

Abbey Hinze

Enrichment Coordinator