

For Immediate Release
Contact: Lauren Coleman
LColeman@ghacf.org



Members of the GHACF Youth Advisory Council worked on a service project this winter benefitting local for-impact organization Hand2Hand.

GHACF Youth Advisory Council Awards Largest Amount of Grants in History

In 2023, the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation's Youth Advisory Council (YAC) granted the largest amount in its history: \$110,600 in awards. Our YAC's 20 high school students from Northwest Ottawa County give of their time as they meet throughout the year to assess issues prevalent to area youth, review grant proposals that benefit youth organizations, and look for opportunities to engage and empower young people.

"The Youth Advisory Council was created to educate youth about philanthropy and engage them in the grantmaking process," said Hadley Streng, GHACF President, who was also part of the initial W.K. Kellogg Foundation Youth Challenge for Community Foundations to establish the youth endowment fund. "The endowment has grown to be one of the largest YACs in Michigan, resulting in significant funding provided to various programs impacting youth. We are inspired by our youth leaders and how the members of YAC intentionally and passionately care for youth in our community."

This work could not be done without generous donors to our Youth Fund. To become part of the long heritage of donors who support the grants made by our YAC members, please visit [GHACF.org/Donate](https://ghacf.org/Donate).

YAC members aligned their grant-making strategy with the [Youth Assessment Survey](#) which monitors health risk behaviors in Ottawa County teens. These include community well-being, physical well-being,

and mental health and emotional well-being. Mental health programs continue to be an important priority for local teens. The survey results show the proportion of teens who report mental health challenges remains at some of the highest levels since 2007, and the number of teens reporting feelings of depression have increased from 19% in 2007 to 30% in 2021.

This year, YAC members graciously awarded grants to a variety of programs supporting local youth mental health initiatives at Arbor Circle, Dunegrass Healing, Grand Haven Area Public Schools, Gracious Grounds, Momentum Center, and Spring Lake Public Schools. These organizations all support mental and emotional well-being for local youth, which leads to a successful, inclusive, and collaborative community providing opportunities for all to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

The grant to **Arbor Circle** supports the rebuilding and implementation of the Raise Your Voice youth leadership program in Grand Haven Area Public Schools and Spring Lake Public Schools. Using evidence-based peer refusal skills and communication methods, the training empowers youth to resist peer pressure with kindness and respect.

The grant to **Dunegrass Healing** supported a weeklong outdoor program this summer in Spring Lake for adolescents ages 13-18, giving local teenagers the chance to connect with nature while identifying and learning about their emotions and mental health.

The grant to **Grand Haven Area Public Schools** supports the Pay It Forward class at Grand Haven High School which helps students learn empathy through experiences with for-impact organizations and members of their community who are marginalized or who have struggled in the past, providing greater leadership opportunities for students and offering “seed money” to create their service projects in the community.

Gracious Grounds supports an integrative youth volunteer program that provides opportunities for Northwest Ottawa teens to partner with residents with developmental disabilities and serve local for-impact organizations and marginalized community members.

Grant funds to **Momentum Center** support a 6- to 10-week-long teen program at local schools offering weekly sessions on coping skills, self-care and stress management, boundaries and relationships, self-esteem, and feelings/emotions.

Spring Lake Public Schools’ Peer Up, a student-run mental health awareness and support group at Spring Lake High School supports collaboration with mental health professionals to co-plan and deliver workshops, to help Peer Up members grow in their knowledge and understanding of how to address issues of well-being within themselves and others.

Additional grants in 2023 include:

Grand Haven Area Public Schools: All Kids Bike Grand Haven — \$4,783 to the Grand Haven Area Public Schools Elementary Physical Education Program initiative to teach young five and kindergarten students how to ride a bicycle, in partnership with a national organization called All Kids Bike that has a mission to teach every child in America how to ride a bike.

Kids Hope USA Zeeland: Mentoring Elementary and Middle School Students — \$6,000 to support six existing Northwest Ottawa County mentoring programs and launch two new programs at Ferry Elementary and Robinson Elementary.

Latin Americans United for Progress: Program Expansion — \$18,000 supported the creation of a one-year pilot to recruit, train and support a bilingual instructor to implement the Adelante program for 8th – 11th grades and Mas Adelante for 12th-grade students at Grand Haven High School.

Loutit District Library: Black History 101 Mobile Museum Visit — \$3,500 to support hosting this traveling exhibit that features over 10,000 artifacts from the trans-Atlantic slave trade to the culture of hip-hop.

Outdoor Discovery Center: Healthy Snack Summer Program — \$8,000 helped support the design and implementation of a healthy snack program during their 2023 summer program, as summer break means limited access to free and reduced lunches.

Ronald McDonald House of Western Michigan: Capital Campaign — \$10,000 supports its expansion and renovation, including adding eight new bedrooms, expanding the kitchen and family room, and creating Family Rooms inside area hospitals. By providing families with a place to stay close to their child's hospital, RMHC West Michigan helps reduce stress, improve mental health, and promote healing.

Spring Lake District Library (SLDL): Refresh Project — \$7,500 supports the construction and furnishing of an updated teen space, as part of SLDL's remodel and repurposing of its existing building.

Tri-Cities Family YMCA: Safety Around Water Training — \$7,960 supported the drowning prevention training for counselors and children participating in the Tri-Cities Family YMCA Summer Day Camp. This program taught life-saving skills to reduce the rate of drowning and water-related injuries in children, invaluable in our region.

###

About the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation

Over the past half-century, GHACF has been regularly recognized as a national top 100 Community Foundation and one of the largest in Michigan. It encourages philanthropy by individuals, families, corporations, and organizations; and serves as a steward of their charitable funds and legacies. In addition to awarding grants, GHACF offers technical support to for-impact organizations, convenes community leaders on issues of importance, and advocates for the for-impact sector. For more, visit ghacf.org.