

The Osborne Association, Inc.
2021 Easter Offering Grant Update to Marble Collegiate Church
January, 2022

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Reporting Period: Fiscal Year 2021 (May 1, 2021 – December 31, 2021)

Date of Report: January 31, 2022

Overview of Supported Programs

This final report covers the period of May 1, 2021 – December 31, 2021. During this period, funds from Marble Collegiate Church supported one of Osborne's comprehensive community-based programs, Harlem FamilyWorks. Harlem FamilyWorks is a community-based healthy relationships and positive youth development program that targets families living in West/Central Harlem that have one or more children under 21 who have an incarcerated parent (or step-parent, grandparent, or sibling). This program is one of the core interventions that Osborne offers for families and children in Harlem, alongside our West Harlem Community Restoration and Reentry Project (WHRRP), which offers reentry and restorative justice services to the 103 people indicted and incarcerated as a result of a 2014 NYPD take down of group-involved young adults in the Grant and Manhattanville NYCHA Houses, and their families. Harlem FamilyWorks offers a critical service that nearly no other local programs do: it specifically focuses on the needs of the family members and children of justice-involved people, who are often ineligible for services targeted at justice-involved residents but who have a variety of needs that we have the expertise to address through family-focused programming and support. Harlem FamilyWorks' services include after-school strengths-building, peer support, educational programming for children impacted by familial and community incarceration, healthy relationships courses, benefits enrollment, individual case management and crisis support, restorative justice circles, community-building events for youth and their families, building strong ties to people with similar experiences, addressing their mental health, educational, social, and health needs, and other activities to support young people and their families in achieving their potential.

Unfortunately, the core funding for Harlem FamilyWorks concluded in October 2021, when Osborne's grant from the Manhattan District Attorney's office ended. Osborne has continued to provide family-focused support for people affected by the criminal legal system in West Harlem through WHRRP and video visiting since that time, and is actively seeking new funding to restart Youth Experience Success and Healthy Relationships groups in Harlem.

Our Harlem programs support and build community among children and families that share the experience of—and the ensuing stigma, trauma, educational challenges, and other life barriers, especially for children, that result from—a parent or family member's incarceration or arrest. Harlem FamilyWorks includes video visiting to connect children to incarcerated loved ones; afterschool youth development groups; case management support; peer support services designed to destigmatize the shared experience of incarceration and improve the well-being of affected children and their families;

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and, during the pandemic, reentry support for individuals returning home from prison or jail and individuals in the community facing economic, schooling, mental health, and other ongoing challenges.

The Harlem FamilyWorks services are built on a platform of two curriculum-based multi-session interventions that we currently offer:

- YES (Youth Experience Success) is a developmentally appropriate intervention for adolescents and young adults ages 12-19 who currently have or recently had an incarcerated parent. We designed YES with the support of the Youth Development Institute in 2014 and have successfully offered YES to youth impacted by parental incarceration in Harlem since 2017. The sessions are grounded in principles of positive youth development and include strategies for coping with the loss of a parent to incarceration; managing the stigma of having an incarcerated parent; maintaining ties with the incarcerated parent; managing stress; workshops on health and healthy relationships online and in the real world; “know your rights” training for guiding interactions with the police; achieving educational success in middle and high school; workshops on the college selection process, job-readiness and self-defense. All workshops are delivered within the context of young people’s unique family situations, and provide opportunities for them to discuss their parent’s incarceration with their peers, a subject that is core to their concerns yet often hidden from friends.
- Healthy Relationships is a 6-session program offered to incarcerated parents and their partners and/or the caregivers of their children in the community. Osborne has been facilitating the course in NYS prisons since 2005 and in community settings since 2015. These six sessions are delivered in the evenings once a week, and seek to improve people’s capacity to navigate the challenge of supporting children impacted by parental, familial, and community incarceration. Topics covered include: understanding the impact of parental incarceration on children; navigating state and city corrections systems; the impact of incarceration on families, relationships, and intimate partnerships; effective communication and co-parenting with an incarcerated parent; managing conflict; and reentry and reintegration. Groups are designed to teach caregivers strategies to work as a team with a child’s incarcerated parent to promote relationship satisfaction (in the case of those in a relationship with the incarcerated parent) and to promote healthy families for themselves and their children. It includes techniques that caregivers can use to improve communication, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. Importantly, it also decodes the often complicated inner-workings of New York’s criminal justice system, helping caregivers to explain to the children in their care what is happening to their parents behind bars (including preparing for visiting), and what resources are available to them.

Participants Served

The comprehensive Harlem FamilyWorks program which includes case management and other various forms of support, served 67 participants this year with the services described above – of those, 42 were adults and 25 were youth. All 25 youth participated in YES across 4 cohorts, with 20 of them (80%) completing the programming. Similarly, all 42 adults participated in Healthy Relationships across 4 cohorts, with all 42 of them (100%) completing the programming. In addition to these programs, during the grant period, 37 video visits took place between the families, as part of Osborne’s larger agency wide Video Visiting program.

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The participant numbers have taken a significant dip since the pandemic began. Before the pandemic, the Harlem FamilyWorks program was halfway through its goal of enrolling 125 families, with 70 families being enrolled. However, when the pandemic happened, in person activities had to transition to become virtual activities. This transition took approximately 2 months to complete and so, during that time, only 1 person was served. After the transition, enrollments resumed and began to pick up. The onset of New York City reopening, allowed some staff to be able to volunteer to host some activities in person, thus allowing Harlem FamilyWorks to operate on a hybrid model. It was a challenging time, leading Harlem FamilyWorks to just barely make its goals.

Goals and Outcomes

Goal #1: To ensure that, despite parental incarceration, youth have a high sense of self worth.

Goal #1 Progress: Participants learned that they did not have to feel ashamed of their legal-system involvement. Participants felt the staff, the program's operations and activities, kept them motivated toward their goals, as a means of bettering themselves.

Goal #2: To ensure that, despite parental incarceration, youth have the opportunity to create and preserve lasting, healthy relationships with family, adults and peers.

Goal #2 Progress: Youth were able to use tools they learnt in the program for school, life at home and in dealing with the pandemic. For example, one young man had a difficult time with transitioning from in person learning to virtual learning. He was able to use the tools and resources provided by Harlem FamilyWorks to connect with a support group and get the advice he needed to adequately adjust. He was then able to reciprocate that support to his school peers who were going through the same experience. Additionally, participants felt supported by their peers and Harlem FamilyWorks staff when opening up about the trauma and stigma they felt. Participants reported they became friends with the other participants in their cohorts. Participants also explained that the program helped them strengthen their relationships with family members, including children. Participants learned that they did not have to feel ashamed of their legal-system involvement, which helped them open up to their families.

Goal #3: To ensure that, despite parental incarceration, youth have the tools to become strong advocates for themselves and for their communities.

Goal #3 Progress: The program was able to instill self advocacy values within the participants themselves, who then carried those values into the community at large. Program staff explained that participants were willing to talk about the trauma of incarceration and the stigma they felt. Staff explained that participants appreciated and found an outlet to express themselves in Osborne's additional virtual activities, including yoga, telehealth, and counseling.

Program Growth

There was a huge increase in Spanish only speaking participants during this period. Those participants are often very close knit within their community and so, they brought those values with them to the program and were able to give the participants of Harlem FamilyWorks a sense of community and belonging. Participants who were bilingual also volunteered to translate for their peers. They often

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advocated for and supported each other. For example, there was one woman who had 5 daughters and 1 baby on the way. The group asked the staff to assist them in celebrating the woman, so Harlem FamilyWorks put together a package of baby essentials for her. This story really exemplifies the mission of Harlem FamilyWorks and the values instilled throughout the program. Additionally, groups and classes were hybrid due to COVID-19. Participants appeared engaged during the virtual workshops, they participated in the group discussions, and answered questions throughout the sessions. Both Healthy Relationships and YES programs were offered in English and Spanish. All adult groups were in Spanish (most participants during this period could not understand the content if it was all in English), and the YES groups were all in English (all of the youth could understand the content in English, but not Spanish).

Although recruitment was a challenge, all the partners of Harlem FamilyWorks appreciated Osborne's willingness and investment in planning a partnership. Partners explained it was easy for their organizations and Osborne to reach a mutual understanding of the goals of the partnership so they could together provide services that met the community's needs. Both Osborne and its partners identified many challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, largely due to the need to shift to a virtual environment and learn how to engage participants remotely and get them interested in doing activities virtually. Also, Osborne's partners were experiencing their own COVID-19 related challenges such as an increase in need for services and expanded caseloads. These issues required Osborne and its partners to constantly change and adapt the program; the partners appreciated Osborne's flexibility and continued willingness to identify and implement solutions to COVID-related impacts. For example, one partner explained they were making changes almost weekly and they appreciated Osborne's understanding and accommodations.

Harlem FamilyWorks Key Partners : Youth Action YouthBuild (YAYB), Apollo Inn, Safe Horizon, and Areté Education, Inc.

Recreational Activities

There were limited one on one in person interactions with families due to the pandemic. Thus, we were only able to have one in person event, Family Day June 2021. This was an outdoor event celebrating the participating families. They played games, had lunch in the park, and were given gift cards. One mom that was expecting a baby also received a basket of baby necessities. All other events were virtual or hybrid. For example, the Financial Literacy Groups hosted by Chase Bank were hybrid and consisted of 15+ families. In September 2021, we also hosted a back to school drive, where families were given school supplies for their kids who were going back to school during the pandemic. Additionally, there were also family activities for participants to engage in, which included open mic and game nights.

Farewell Cohorts and Family Night Dinner

One of the culminating events of the program, the Farewell Cohorts and Family Night Dinner, gave our participants the opportunity to celebrate their participation in the programs alongside their families and friends. This year the event was held in October and participants of YES and Healthy Relationships were able to celebrate their successful completion of their respective programs. It was a touching and exciting

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event for the graduates and those there to support their work and growth through the programs. Participants enjoyed dinner with their families, and received gift cards to commemorate their completion of and participation in the program. Overall, participants shared their appreciation of the workshop content, especially the sessions on incarceration, domestic violence, job readiness, and financial preparedness. For example, one participant specifically enjoyed the workshops on preparing for jobs and saving. Participants enjoyed the facilitators and noted that they kept the content engaging. participants also appreciated the facilitators' different perspectives and lived experiences they shared in the workshops. Most participants commented that the virtual workshop setting was more comfortable than in-person sessions, and they were still able to engage in the discussions.

Budget

Due to the pandemic, as mentioned above, there were fewer participants than prior to the pandemic. This allowed Harlem FamilyWorks the financial room to provide more direct support to participants. Despite this, there were still some limitations. For example, we tried to get electronics for kids to use for schooling. However, the cost, distribution processes and the location (some families lived far distances from our office) and size of families (some families alone had 6 children) were a barrier to getting those electronics to everyone who needed them.

In terms of the future of Harlem FamilyWorks, now that the contract with the Manhattan DA's office has concluded, we are not certain when we can resume YES and Healthy Relationships courses in Harlem. Ultimately, we are optimistic that Harlem FamilyWorks will be recognised for its great work done in the community and hence we will be able to raise funding to run the full program again. Right now, we're continuing with WHRRP, video visiting, and Osborne's Kinship Reentry program in Harlem. Kinship Reentry addresses the underlying challenges that may discourage families from offering people coming home from prison a safe place to land. The program offers families direct cash payments, counseling, and support services that they need to provide stability to returning loved ones. As part of that support, peer workers who draw from their own experiences welcoming a loved one home, work with families to understand and address the effects of prison and reintegration challenges. In addition to diverting people from shelter beds that would cost the City at least five times more, this solution reinforces what we already know, that people who return to supportive home environments have the best chance to rebuild their lives and thrive after incarceration.

Volunteer Opportunities

Prior to the pandemic, there were volunteer opportunities for Marble Collegiate Church members, as well as donations from some of the members of the church which Marble Collegiate used to buy presents for our Harlem FamilyWorks program participants. Through this Marble Collegiate Church has also donated food to our Harlem FamilyWorks participants for Thanksgiving. Marble Collegiate Church has also assisted the Harlem FamilyWorks Program in providing toy and back to school drives. Since the pandemic, however, there have been limited opportunities for Marble Collegiate Church to volunteer with our Harlem FamilyWorks program, especially with most of the events happening virtually. There was only one opportunity where Harlem FamilyWorks hosted a family dinner for its participants and Marble Collegiate Church volunteers dropped off in-kind donations. While there were a few Marble Collegiate Church volunteers that assisted with the dinner, the majority of volunteers that did the actual serving etc. for the event, were from Osborne, in order to maintain health and safety protocols. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Marble Collegiate Church volunteers often support us for other

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Osborne wide programs especially our Kinship Reentry program. In the fall holiday season, through the Kinship Reentry program, Marble Collegiate Church provided Thanksgiving side dishes that were given out to families, a coat drive that consisted specifically of winter items, and toys that were also given out to kids.

Conclusion

The Osborne Association again expresses how very thankful we are for Marble Collegiate Church's partnership and support of our Harlem FamilyWorks program and its participants, as well as other Osborne-wide programs that the church supports through volunteering and in-kind giving. These programs contribute significant and rich experiences to our participants, experiences we would not be able to provide without the congregation's support and generosity. Harlem FamilyWorks is especially thankful for Marble Collegiate's support and collaboration in partnering with us to provide families with thanksgiving baskets and turkeys. Each year, we work together to strengthen our partnership, and we look forward to continuing to build our relationship. We deeply appreciate the support Marble Collegiate Church provides, and are grateful for your understanding of the need for and value of our services to families impacted by incarceration.

Attachments

- ❖ Attachment A - Expense Report
- ❖ Attachment B - A selection of photos from this period's activities, with descriptions