Proposed Research Project

Title of Proposed Project:
Pathfinder Village, Inc.

Name of Organization:
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Contact Information:

Brief Description of Organization Mission and/or Vision Statement

Founded originally as the first and only community established specifically for individuals with Down syndrome, the mission of Pathfinder Village is to promote a healthy, progressive environment that respects each individual, supporting a life of value and independence for children and adults with Down syndrome and related developmental disabilities. Recognizing the gifts, talents and abilities of each person we support, the Pathfinder Village community enables individuals with disabilities and their families to envision and to create a “life with meaning” that includes friendships, independence, community involvement and the freedom to pursue individual interests and life goals.

Licensed and certified by the NYS Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities, the NYS Education Department and the NYS Department of Health, Pathfinder Village provides a wide range of program services and supports in a carefully planned community campus setting that mirrors a small New England style village. Programs include:

♦ Residential Homes: Households of 5-10 people share family-like living experiences in a neighborhood setting surrounding a village green.
♦ Health Services: Comprehensive health services are provided through on-site nursing staff as well as in collaboration of community health partners such as Bassett Healthcare.
♦ Educational Programs: Pathfinder School is an SED approved 853 private school that serves both day and residential students ages 5-21.
♦ Vocational Programs: Specialized pre-vocational programs and adult vocational programs are offered on site, as well in partnership with area service providers and businesses. Volunteer and paid employment experiences that develop both confidence and real life skills are available for all Pathfinder Village residents.

Enrichment and Recreation Programs: Pathfinder Village provides a wide range of arts, sporting, and community experiences to foster and sustain the personal interests, talents and social inclusion of each resident of the Village.
Project Description: (300 words)

Please begin your statement with a one or two sentence statement of the research question you would like to have answered through a students work.

Would the creation of a mobile fresh fruit and vegetable market make a difference in improving health outcomes of people living in rural food desert communities?

Scientific literature indicates that people of lower socioeconomic status suffer from more obesity-related chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma and heart disease than those of higher socioeconomic status. Otsego County, one of 14 counties in New York State that is considered part of the Appalachian Region, is predominately a rural area covering approximately 1001 square miles with a population density of 62.2 people per square mile compared to the state average of 411.2 people per square mile. As such, the county is less socially-economically advantaged than other counties with a 16% higher poverty rate than the statewide average. Poverty is a concern for the Otsego County Health Department, local school districts as well as health and human service providers.

Similarly, the lack of public transportation systems in these areas have made it difficult for many to not only access critical preventative health care services but grocery stores—many of which are located more than 18 miles away. This has resulted in several “food desert communities” which are defined by the USDA as “parts of the country vapid of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods usually found in improverished areas, largely due to a lack of grocery stores, farmer’s markets, and healthy food providers”. Individuals in these areas tend to rely more heavily on local convenience stores for grocery items which typically do not consist of fresh fruits, vegetables or other healthy food items. Not only does this contribute to a higher prevalence of poor health outcomes but over time also develops an accepted culture of unhealthy lifestyle behaviors.

In an effort to break this cycle and promote better rural health outcomes, Pathfinder Village has recently received grant funding to establish a mobile produce market that will provide fresh fruits and vegetables weekly to those living in food desert communities and whom are considered to be at-risk populations as identified by Bassett Healthcare. There will also be a heavy emphasis on providing various educational outreach and support activities to teach participants how to prepare nutritious recipies, health and wellness tips, as well as provide live cooking demonstrations and promote health screenings. Working in partnership with the Leatherstocking Collaborative Health Partners, Bassett Healthcare, pre/post surveys as well as other data will be collected and analyzed to determine whether these interventions resulted in improved health outcomes of participants. If successful, this collaborative model could be replicated by other community healthcare networks throughout the state.

Statement:

How does the proposed research relate to or may benefit the Upstate Region?

The ultimate goal of this initiative is to utilize a collaborative approach in creating an effective
support model to promote better health outcomes for those living in food desert communities.

**Logistical Considerations:**
*Do you envision having the student work full-time; part-time?*

Working full-time at Pathfinder Village, the Upstate Field School Fellow will work with the Interim Director of the Kennedy Willis Center and mobile market project team. The Fellow will have the opportunity to observe critical market activities in the field, participate in project team meetings, network with key community partners, evaluate and refine program metrics and assist with developing outreach materials to improve program quality and ensure long-term success.

**Training and Skills:**
*What training and skills are necessary to complete this work?*
*Discuss the experiences and skills a student will gain from working with your organization in general. (i.e. opportunity to attend staff meetings; grow in other ways)*

This is a unique opportunity to better understand the complexities of rural poverty as well as the challenges non-profit community-based organizations face to ensure long-term sustainability. The Fellow will have the opportunity to gain experience in areas such as healthcare administration, project management, research activities, grant writing, marketing and public speaking. In addition, because the project is also linked to the strategic expansion of Pathfinder Village adult day service programs, the Fellow will also gain first hand insights into the specific needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities and how collaborative projects such as this can offer opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities to connect with and contribute to the social fabric of their community for a meaningful life.

(***Optional***) **Any supporting Attachments which highlights the need for the project?**