

I. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET

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Date: October 6, 2017

Contact Information:

Organization Name: Southeastern Pennsylvania Autism Resource Center (SPARC)

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Website: www.sparcwc.org

Year Incorporated: 2007

Has your nonprofit ever applied to the Community Foundation? Yes No Not Sure

Has your nonprofit ever received funding from the Community Foundation? Yes No Not Sure

Donor Advised Fund(s) Fund for Chester County Don't know/Not sure

Field/s of Interest:

Arts, Culture & Humanities

Environment/Animal Welfare

Education

Health

Human Services

Religion

Organization Information:

Geographic Area Served (If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served):

Chester and surrounding counties in Pennsylvania; also see clients from neighboring States

Describe Population Served and Annual Number of People Served:

We serve individuals and families dealing with autism and other behavioral challenges. We consult with organizations who interact/serve this population, including schools, day care centers, parent groups, therapy providers, and medical providers, to name a few.

SPARC's service volume has grown from a handful of clients in 2007 to a total of nearly 700 at the beginning of 2017. The average of 90 clients annually has been increasing in 2017 as SPARC now is "in network" with most major insurance providers, thus making services affordable for more clients.

Mission: SPARC is a nonprofit clinic that serves both individuals on the autism spectrum and individuals with a variety of behavioral concerns. We have expanded our historical interest in children and adolescents to include services for adults. We serve clients of all ages regardless of diagnosis, who could benefit from our programs.

SPARC provides both Center- and community-based diagnostic, therapeutic, and educational services. We also provide educational and consultative services to a variety of community organizations, as noted above.

Proposal Summary: SPARC requests funding to support the general operational costs of the clinic in that the change in funding model from primarily private pay to in-network has generated greater client and service demands. SPARC became "in-network" with most insurance providers in early 2015, resulting in increased client demand and services. Proportional to this increase was an increase in accounts receivable (or monies owed to the clinic for services rendered) caused by delayed reimbursements from insurance carriers. Funding will help bridge the gap between receivables and

CCCH GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

1. Organization's history, goals, key achievements and distinctiveness

SPARC is a nonprofit clinic that serves both individuals on the autism spectrum and persons with a variety of behavioral concerns. Although we primarily work with children and adolescents on the autism spectrum, we welcome all individuals, including adults, regardless of diagnosis, who are appropriate for our services. SPARC provides both center - and - community based diagnostic, therapeutic, and educational services. We also provide educational and consultative services to community organizations such as parent groups, schools, daycares, medical providers, and other service agencies.

SPARC was developed as the result of a 2005 needs assessment grant. Dr. Phillip Duncan, a faculty member of West Chester University of Pennsylvania in West Chester, Chester County PA, and Dr. Jennifer Dawson, long time resident and Chester County native, conducted a needs assessment of Chester County and surrounding communities. The goal of the grant was to determine the availability of evidence-based treatment programs for individuals with autism and their families as well as the local availability of highly-credentialed providers for such programs. The results of the feasibility study highlighted both the need for an autism resource center in Chester County that would provide evidence-based services to individuals with autism and their families and the need for highly credentialed individuals to provide those services to Chester and the surrounding counties.

SPARC was incorporated as a federal 501c3 in July 2007. SPARC opened its doors with Dr. Jennifer Dawson, licensed psychologist and Board Certified Behavior Analyst, providing diagnostic and behavioral feeding services to children with autism and their families. At the time, SPARC was housed at the WCU campus and received an initial donation from a West Chester University Foundation Board Member, Mr. John McCarthy, to purchase diagnostic assessment equipment. SPARC continues to enjoy excellent relations with West Chester University and the West Chester University Foundation. However, those organizations play no role in SPARC programs, policy, fiscal matters, or governance. Indeed, part of SPARC's operating costs include the cost of training university students, payment of fees to the Foundation for Human Resource functions, such as payroll and benefits management, and the cost of insurance premiums for the clinic.

Since 2007, SPARC has increased its highly credentialed staff and the availability of evidence-based programs to the residents of Chester and surrounding counties. SPARC now offers the following programs: Diagnostic Services, Behavioral Feeding Treatment, Social Skills Instruction and Groups, Preschool Readiness Program (SPARCers), Adult Programs for College Bound clients, Adult Programs for Working Adults, and Behavioral consultation with families and school districts.

Key Achievements.

1. Community volunteer training and experience:

SPARC has provided state-of-the art training and hands-on experience with individuals with autism, for approximately over 400 undergraduate and graduate students through September, 2017. Not only do these students provide outstanding therapeutic service to our clients under the supervision of SPARC staff, but upon graduation they also go on to work in Chester County and the surrounding areas. This achievement highlights the intellectual influence SPARC's programs have on the community in that area colleges graduate SPARC student volunteers who become members of their communities, trained and experienced in working with individuals with autism.

2. Volume of clients served:

As of December, 2016, SPARC has worked with over 650 clients since its inception in 2007. SPARC

provides approximately 2500 hours of clinical service to clients per year. As a result of these efforts client children joyfully eat meals with their families at home and in the community, children make and play with friends for the first time in their lives, parents acquire the skills to teach and to maintain adaptive behavior to their children, and professionals (teachers, daycare staff, speech therapists, physicians, et al.) learn to better serve children on the spectrum. With the addition of the adult programs, adults with autism have been increasingly successful in work and home environments and in the greater Chester County community.

Distinctiveness.

SPARC's staff and services are especially suited to address the wide range of needs faced by families dealing with autism and other behavior challenges. All senior and administrative staff (Clinical Director, Senior Consultant, Executive Director) hold graduate degrees in Applied Behavior Analysis. The Senior Consultant, Clinical Director, and Executive Director are also Board Certified Behavior Analysts. All staff have extensive experience with behavior challenges, especially those posed by autism.

Furthermore, SPARC's unique cluster of diagnostic, feeding, adult support, social skills, preschool readiness, and behavior management programs, in addition to consultative services for other professionals, are unavailable in any other single organization in the Chester County region. Thus, the combination of staff expertise and comprehensive service options ideally prepare SPARC to help families face the challenges before them.

2. Funding request:

Description of key initiatives

1. We propose to continue the key initiative of **improved access** to quality diagnostic and treatment services by removing the economic barriers facing families. SPARC will continue its revenue model transition from a "private pay" to "in network" insurance provider. The transition to "in network" provider has come with the cost of larger accounts receivable than we had anticipated, creating a strain on the day-to-day operations of the clinic. As we worked to reverse the proportionality of 90% private pay to 90% insurance coverage, we noticed increases in both call volume and new clients being served (upwards of 30%). However, the lag-time in reimbursement from insurance companies continues to prove challenging to maintaining the organization's daily operations. Funding will help reduce this financial strain as we work to lower the size of receivables.

2. Transition to "in network" has generated a substantial increase in demands for services. As of September, 2017, SPARC's average service backlog is between 6 and 9 months, depending on the specific service. We find this backlog incompatible with our historic goal of providing timely access to all in need, and thus unacceptable. SPARC needs at least 5 months of operating expenses to successfully navigate the revenue-funding transition. SPARC's goal is to raise enough money via grants and donations so that delays in insurance reimbursements will not affect SPARC operations, especially the expansion of staff and services. A second key initiative, then, is to **expand staff and services** in order to meet increased demand while at the same time retaining state-of-the-art quality in those services.

Specific needs and issues to be addressed

Issue to be addressed: In transitioning to in-network provider status, SPARC is supporting over \$55,000/month in accounts receivables attributed to delayed insurance reimbursement. The 6-9 month lag in receivables (\$55,000/month average) from insurance translates to a \$20,000 budget deficit for monthly payroll and expenses. The lag in repayment is a significant drain on a small organization, inhibiting our ability to expand programs and add staff to meet increased demand.

SPARC has worked tirelessly to keep the cost of programs low for families. Regionally, SPARC programs are the cheapest. Interestingly, SPARC has the highest credentialed staff in the area and also has the fewest full-time paid employees. Since its inception, SPARC has relied heavily on volunteers, including a volunteer accountant and executive director, to keep administrative costs down which in turn has kept program costs low for families. Prior to 2014, SPARC was not an in-network insurance provider. As such, 90% of families paid for services privately. Some families who could not afford to pay for services but who qualified for federal discount rates, took advantage of the availability of a small SPARC scholarship fund. However, rising cost of living expenses coupled with an economic downturn prevented families from covering the costs of services without the help of insurance. As a result, SPARC initiated a change in its funding model, moving to become an “in-network” insurance provider with most major insurance carriers.

Uniting the two initiatives noted above, the ultimate goal is to expand access to services by retaining our commitment to move from 90% private pay to 90% insurance coverage (making services more **affordable** to families) and by increasing program staff and services (making more services **available**). Thus, financial access is enhanced by the first component and temporal access is enhanced by the second.

Organizational impact if initiative is undertaken

The principal organization impact will be the continued provision of uninterrupted services SPARC offers to children and adults with autism despite challenges and delays experienced in moving from family private pay to network insurance reimbursements. The impact of the successful implementation of this initiative lies with the families. Families in the Southeastern PA region will have *timely* access both to services they could not otherwise afford and to the highest credentialed staff in the area.

How will this grant enhance your organization’s capacity? Funds for this initiative will be used to sustain clinic operations while SPARC works to reduce accounts receivables, and to expand operations to meet increased demand. Specifically, capacity will be enhanced by increased number of staff and by increased volume of programs offered. In particular, we anticipate expanding Feeding, Social Skills and SOAR (young adult) programs. All grant monies will be used to support general operations amidst the 6-9 month lag in receivables (\$55,000/month average) from insurance **which translates in to a \$20,000 budget deficit for monthly payroll and expenses**. The lag in repayment is a significant drain on a small organization.

How will this increase in organizational capacity be measured?

1. Percent of clients utilizing private pay
2. Percent of clients utilizing insurance reimbursements
3. Number of additional program sessions offered
4. Number of new staff hired
5. Number of weeks scheduling backlog for each program (compared to current level)
6. Rate (#/month) of new client intake evaluations (compared to current rate)
7. Number of new clients receiving services (compared to current number)
9. Number of months maintaining on-time payrolls despite high accounts receivables.

Activities to implement the initiative.

1. Determine number of clinical program increases for each program, based on demand and available space.
2. Determine number of clinical staff additions to meet program expansion from #1.
3. Begin selection process for new staff – develop job description, advertise, screen, interview, select.

Why it is important to fund this now This funding is critical now because the accounts receivables (delays of insurance reimbursements) is holding steady at \$55,000 (roughly 25% of operating budget). With a relatively small budget and low cash reserves (so as to keep costs low to families), a 2-month or more delay of insurance reimbursements significantly and detrimentally affects the operations of the clinic – specifically, the number of clinical sessions that can be offered. Because the number of clinical appointments is thus limited, children and families dealing with autism and other serious behavior challenges are not receiving treatment in a timely fashion. Research documents that treatment delays for individuals with autism seriously limits ultimate clinical progress.

3. How impact and results will be demonstrated

We expect to see increases in clients using insurance reimbursements up to 90% of all clients. We also expect to see increases in clinical sessions to meet the demand which is currently backlogged. We expect to show an increase in clinical staff serving the expanded programs. We expect to see a decrease in lag time between request for evaluation/treatment and the initiation of treatment. When successful, this initiative will result in more Chester County residents accessing necessary services from highly qualified providers in their own region.