

# I. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET

Date August 31, 2018

## Contact Information

Organization Name: Mighty Writers      Executive Director Name: Tim Whitaker  
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Phone: 267-239-0899      Board of Directors Chair Name: Samantha Stanton  
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Year Incorporated: 2009      Primary Contact E-mail: nlevecchia@mightywriters.org

Has your nonprofit ever applied to the Community Foundation?      Yes \_\_\_ No X Not Sure \_\_\_  
Has your nonprofit ever received funding from the Community Foundation? Yes \_\_\_ No X Not Sure \_\_\_  
    \_\_\_ Donor Advised Fund(s)      \_\_\_ Fund for Chester County      \_\_\_ Don't know/Not sure

## Field/s of Interest:

X Arts, Culture & Humanities      \_\_\_ Environment/Animal Welfare      \_\_\_ X Education  
\_\_\_ Health      \_\_\_ Human Services      \_\_\_ Religion

## Organization Information:

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

Kennett Square, Chester County, PA.

In addition (though not directly relevant to this request), Mighty Writers operates six sites in Philadelphia and one site in Camden, NJ

## **Describe Population Served and Annual Number of People Served:**

From July 2017 to June 2018, we served 2,943 participants in all programs at all sites, up from 2,797 during the same period the previous year. Mighty Writers reaches underserved kids in economically distressed neighborhoods. We run store-front neighborhood sites, easily accessible to kids and families.

**Starting in 2019, MW will be bringing bilingual programming to the Kennett Square community in Chester County. Our proposal seeks support for this expansion to Kennett Square.**

## **Mission:**

Mighty Writers (MW) teaches kids, ages three through 17, to think clearly and write with clarity so they can achieve success at school, at work and in life.

## **Proposal Summary:**

Mighty Writers, a non-profit that teaches students how to think clearly and write with clarity, will offer bilingual after school programs in Kennett Square in Southern Chester County beginning January 2019.

**Annual Budget** \$1,447,650

80 % of budget for program expenses

10 % of budget for administrative expenses

10 % of budget for fundraising expenses

100 % total

18 # of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff

17 # of Board Volunteers

400 # of Active Non-Board Volunteers

13,200 # of Volunteer Hours

**Top 3-5 funding sources:** Pew Charitable Trusts, Lenfest Foundation, Townsend Foundation

**Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation:** \$ 15,000

# Grant Proposal Narrative to the Chester County Community Foundation

## MIGHTY WRITERS KENNETT SQUARE Submitted by Mighty Writers 2018

### Organization's History, Goals, Key Achievements and Distinctiveness

#### HISTORY

Mighty Writers (MW) opened a lively store-front writing center in an historically African-American section of South Philadelphia in 2009. Founding Executive Director Tim Whitaker came from a 30-year journalism career. He was the editor of *Philadelphia Weekly* and previously the editor of *PhillySport*. Founding Education Director Rachel Loeper previously taught ESL, remedial reading, and creative writing. In 2009 MW had 2 staff members, 1 site, 150 students and a budget of \$209,000. Today, MW has 7 locations reaching 3,000 kids, a staff of 18, (12 teaching artists, 6 administrative), 400 volunteers and a \$1.5m budget. We are submitting this proposal to support the opening of a new Mighty Writers site in Kennett Square in Southern Chester County.

In Mighty Writers' free writing programs, the region's best creative minds—writers, artists, innovators, and other professionals—volunteer to teach and mentor local students, ages 2-18. Mighty Writers studios are intentionally located in the neighborhoods that need us most. We use poverty data, school lunch data, and data that is publicly available from local schools to place ourselves strategically at the intersection of need and opportunity. All programs are free to participants. In 2017-2018, the demographic make-up for our participants in all programs was 59% African-American; 22% Latino; 7% white; 4% Asian; 5% other; 3% prefer not to answers.

#### GOALS

Everything we do at Mighty Writers is designed to confront the current literacy crisis. Our programs support students' critical thinking skills and foster their artistic and self expression. According to the Literacy Project Foundation, 50% of American adults are unable to read an eighth-grade level book. The need for literacy enrichment is particularly urgent for African-American and Hispanic students living in poverty. The Annie E. Casey Foundation reported in "Race for Result" (2017) that only 18% of Latino and 17% of African-American fourth graders in Pennsylvania scored at or above proficiency in reading. The same report ranked Pennsylvania 48<sup>th</sup> out of the 50 states in the well-being of its young Latino population and 32<sup>nd</sup> for African-American children.

Particular goals for the Kennett Square site:

- Establish Mighty Writers in Kennett Square beginning January 2019. Run a minimum of 4 weekly workshops between January and June 2019.
- Provide 2-3 camps of one week each for ages 7-14 during the summer of 2019.
- For the 2019-2020 school year, launch daily Academy program for middle and high school students.
- As of January 2020, begin offering Mighty Toddlers and the Teen Scholars program.
- Track effectiveness of programs in reaching goals of increasing student motivation for writing, writing frequency, and literacy proficiency.

#### KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Mighty Writers is committed to reaching as many kids as possible by expanding programming each year, by opening new locations, and by enabling easier and quicker enrollment. Our history of growth over 9 years demonstrates our success in attracting funding, volunteers, and community support. Mighty Writers

programs consistently increase student literacy proficiency and attract capacity attendance (many programs run waiting lists).

Mighty Writers has regularly garnered recognition for its contributions to the lives of youth. At the national level, Mighty Writers was named one of the top 50 arts and humanities-based youth programs in the country by the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities (2014) and NBC/Telemundo chose Mighty Writers' site El Futuro as the winner of their 21st century Solutions grant (2017). Regionally, Mighty Writers has been honored by the *Philadelphia Magazine*, Yelp Gives Local, Philebrity, Philadelphia 76ers, Philadelphia Phillies, the Knight Foundation, the Barra Foundation, and Citizen's Bank.

#### FUNDING REQUEST AND KEY INITIATIVES

Mighty Writers (MW) will open a site in Kennett Square, our first site in Chester County, to provide children in Kennett Square with out-of-school-time writing programs beginning in January 2019. We respectfully request \$15,000 to support **Mighty Writers Kennett Square**.

For the start-up in Kennett Square, MW will provide after school, evening and weekend workshops from January-June 2019. During this time, we'll build our community presence and volunteer base. In the summer, Mighty Writers will run half-day summer camp programs for kids ages 7-17. Starting in September 2019, Mighty Writers will enroll its first group of 20 kids for the daily after school Academy program, from 3-6pm. (This is our most intensive, long-term program.) By January 2020, Mighty Writers will add its Mighty Toddlers as well as weekly Teen Scholars program to the roster and begin to offer one-on-one mentorships for any interested student. All Mighty Writers core programs will run in Kennett Square as of January 2020.

"Migration Stories" will be the first workshop series offered by MW at Kennett Square. The series will focus on arts collaborations with comic book and dance artists, as well as writing activities that allow students to share their fears and experiences around immigration, the proposed wall between the US and Mexico, deportation, family separation, and detention. Other workshops to be offered at MW Kennett Square include Girl Power!, Comic Books, Mighty Travelers, and Fantasy Writing.

We expect to reach 75 students (predominantly Hispanic) during the first six months (January-June 2019), expanding to 125-150 students in the 2019-2020 school year. Our expansion experience shows us that these numbers will reach 200+ subsequently.

#### THE NEED

In 2018, Mighty Writers conducted a market analysis of out-of-school time programs in the Kennett Square area and found none that offer what Mighty Writers does: free, high quality, bilingual and culturally relevant, out-of-school-time writing programs for kids ages 7-17, in their own community, close to home. Such programs are urgently needed in this culturally diverse and high poverty community. Kennett Square is home to the largest population of Mexican immigrants in the state. According to Public Citizens for Children and Youth, childhood poverty in Chester County has increased 55% from 2008 to 2012. The average household income in Kennett Square is \$22,000 annually, with 10,250 students living in poverty. In the Kennett elementary schools, half of underserved students do not achieve grade-level literacy proficiency. At Kennett High School there is a 30% gap in literacy proficiency between underserved students (63.5% are proficient) and others (93.5%).

MW has a strong track record in serving bilingual populations. Kennett Square will be our third bilingual site (El Futuro and Rivera Rec Center in Philadelphia are the other two). MW's program staff at these sites are bilingual in Spanish, as are most of the program volunteers. All instruction is offered in Spanish and English and students are encouraged to read/write in either/both languages. To prepare for a site in Kennett Square, Mighty Writers has been forging relationships with businesses, individuals and other

youth-serving organizations such as the Chester County Chamber of Commerce, the United Way of Southern Chester County, the Philadelphia Union, Garage Community & Youth Center, and La Comunidad Hispana. Some seed funding has come as a result.

#### HOW IMPACT AND RESULTS WILL BE DEMONSTRATED

**General assessment methodology:** Through a custom-built Salesforce platform Mighty Writers tracks enrollment across sites and over years. Survey results, MYAccess scores and report card grades are entered into each student's profile. We measure literacy skills and gains for participants in the Academy and Teen Scholars program through a nationally recognized online tool called MYAccess. Testing with MyAccess is done for all Academy students six times throughout the school year. Teen Scholars produce two writing projects each school year. In 2017-2018, 78% of Academy students achieved grade level literacy proficiency.

Assessment for the **workshops** provided during the first six months in Kennett Square (January through June 2016), will focus on measuring growth in motivation for writing and writing frequency through pre- and post-workshop surveys of the students and parents. (Research shows that when accompanied by writing instruction, writing proficiency increases when writing frequency increases.) The goal is that 80% of students increase their enthusiasm for writing and that 60% increase their frequency of writing on a weekly basis.

For the **Academy and Teen Scholars programs** we measure students writing proficiency through MyAccess. For the 2019-2020 school year, our goal will be for 70% of the participating students to achieve grade-level proficiency by the end of the school year.

Our Mighty programs help students achieve literacy gains, increase their motivation for writing, and connect them to a writing community that is compassionate, inclusive, and ambitious.