



I. GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET

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Date 11/21/2025

Contact Information

Organization Name: HopeWorx, Inc.
 Address: 1210 Stanbridge St, Ste 600
 Norristown, Pennsylvania 19401
 Phone: (610) 270-3685
 Website: hopeworxinc.org
 Year Incorporated: 1994
 FEIN: 23-2811078

ED/CEO Name: Sue Shannon
 ED/CEO E-mail: sshannon@hopeworxinc.org
 Board Chair Name: Sue Soriano
 Board Chair Approval (check here):
 Primary Contact Name: Sarah Spath
 Primary Contact E-mail: sspath@theferns.org

Organization Information:

Field/s of Interest:

	Arts, Culture, Heritage		Education, Library		Environment, Animals
X	Health	X	Human Services		Social Justice, Civic Engagement
	Religion		If other, please describe:		

Mission: HopeWorx, Inc crafts an intentional space where peer values and peer support are the essential fiber of our community. We walk alongside you, sharing our own stories of hope, to help you feel safe, seen, and heard.

HopeWorx is also the fiscal sponsor and sole member of **The Ferns Peer-Run Respite, LLC**. The Ferns offers a welcoming environment for people experiencing distress in their lives that recognizes each individual as the expert on themselves while also providing time, space, and connections that support their self-determination, healing, and growth.

Geographic Area Served (If not all of Chester County, specify primary Chester County regions served): Located in Pottstown, The Ferns primarily serves those nearby, with no geographic restrictions on who can stay.

Describe Population Served & Annual Number of People Served. (Include Chester County # &/or % served.): The Ferns provides an alternative to traditional crisis services by offering a place to stay with round the clock peer support for individuals experiencing emotional distress, especially in low-income, uninsured, and under-resourced communities. With an annual capacity of 150, The Ferns hosted 76 guests during its first year of operations (2024-2025), 5 of whom came from Chester County.

Annual Budget of The Ferns

\$ 283,586 # of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff 3
68 % of budget for program expenses 7 # of Board Volunteers
13 % of budget for administrative expenses 0 # of Active Non-Board Volunteers
19 % of budget for fundraising expenses 1,500 # of Volunteer Hours (from the Ferns Board)
100% = total

Top 3-5 funding sources: Open Excellence – The Foundation for Excellence in Mental Health Care; Pottstown Regional Community Foundation; Montgomery County Pandemic Recovery Funds

This grant proposal is for: X Direct Service Programs & General Operating &/or Capacity Building

If Capacity Building Proposal, the focus is:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Contingency Planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	Partnerships, Collaborations	<input type="checkbox"/>	Merger, Closure
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mission, Vision, Strategy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Board Engagement & Leadership	<input type="checkbox"/>	Marketing, Communication
<input type="checkbox"/>	Resource Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	Operations	<input type="checkbox"/>	Technology
<input type="checkbox"/>	If other, please describe:				

Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation: \$ ____7,000_____

Proposal Summary: *(a few sentences, please)*

The requested \$7,000 will support a portion of General Operating expenses that would cover 4 adult guest stays for up to 3 nights each, in a trauma-informed homelike setting. Guests receive compassionate support that promotes self-determination, safety, and healing. Our General Operating expenses also allow staff to engage in impact tracking, which will help us evaluate outcomes and continue improving services.

II. GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

Provide clear, concise information in 1-3 pages. Please be brief.

1. Nonprofit's overall aims, key initiatives, key achievements & distinctiveness

The Ferns Peer-Run Respite, LLC is a wholly owned subsidiary of HopeWorx, Inc - a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a 30-year history developing a community environment where people with mental health challenges create and direct their own paths to recovery. HopeWorx began in 1994 as a grassroots organization employing people with lived experience - known as peers - to design and administer satisfaction surveys for recipients of mental health services in Montgomery County, PA. HopeWorx has innovated peer-driven programs to support social, learning, material, and other needs identified in the surveys.

The Ferns opened its doors in August 2024, and expands the mission of HopeWorx by establishing a peer respite – an emerging type of nonclinical crisis support that is an alternative to psychiatric hospitalization. Guests stay voluntarily in a homelike environment for up to 3 nights, supported by staff made up of 100% peers. Guests receive the extra support they need to head off a crisis, with the option to stay connected to the work, social network, and wellness activities that support their lives in the community. The Ferns offers a place to go at no cost that is not an institution, with the social support of others who have gone through their own recovery.

The Ferns is guided by the principles of Intentional Peer Support (IPS), which emphasizes mutual relationships, deep listening, and shared learning as tools for recovery. IPS has been adopted across peer-run programs, including at other peer-run respites, and emerging research has shown positive impacts on guests' ability to deal with crisis (<https://intentionalpeersupport.org/research>). The theory of peer support that underpins IPS includes storytelling, exploration of worldviews that result from trauma, developing shared power and responsibility, and managing conflict (Mead, Hilton, & Curtis, 2001). By integrating IPS into every aspect of service delivery, The Ferns ensures that guests receive support rooted in dignity, choice, and trust. In the words of a current staff member:

“I don't see my role as 'fixing' anyone. I see it as walking beside them. I haven't been in their shoes but I had a pair just like them – the silence, the fear, the exhaustion, and that's what makes peer support powerful. When I sit quietly with someone who's hurting we share a moment that words can't always reach. Sometimes healing begins not in conversation but in simply being seen, heard, and cared for.”

2. Funding request

- **What specific needs & issues are being addressed, via what programs and services?**

The Ferns serves individuals experiencing emotional distress, particularly those in low-income, uninsured, and under-resourced communities in the greater Pottstown area. According to the 2025 Chester County Community Health Assessment, “1 in 5 (19%) adults have been diagnosed with clinical depression and approximately 1 in 10 (8%) self-report frequent mental distress” (p. 11). Half of survey respondents rated “mental and behavioral health” as a top health issue, while 1 in 8 rated “stress” as a top community issue (p. 50-51). Among respondents who do not access needed care, 44% identified “cost of services or prescriptions,” 18% identified “no insurance or underinsured,” and 11% identified “lack of trust in the healthcare system” as barriers (p. 62). Internal surveys from The Ferns's first year of operations also confirm these issues.

Despite the need, many avoid behavioral health services—not out of disinterest but because prior experiences with hospitalization, involuntary treatment, and over-documentation were harmful or disempowering. Additionally, for those who can't afford to take time off work or school or who fear being labeled or retraumatized, there are few safe, trauma-informed alternatives.

The Ferns directly addresses these gaps by offering short-term, peer-led, non-clinical respite at no cost, with no insurance requirements or diagnostic barriers. Guests are treated with deep respect and regarded as experts in their own experiences. Our model meets people where they are—providing space to rest, reconnect, and recover in dignity. By eliminating financial and bureaucratic obstacles, The Ferns provides healing and connection when the traditional system cannot.

- **Why is it important to fund this now?**

The Ferns is reshaping how crisis support is provided by offering an alternative to clinical, institutional models and toward peer-led, relationship-based care. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that peer-run respites produce significant positive outcomes. The Survey of Organized Consumer Self-Help Entities conducted by SAMHSA indicated that self-help entities engage in activities that reduce stigma and rights protection (Goldstrom et al., 2006), and peer respite seeks on build on these activities as pathways to healing. Research has shown that peer-run respite guests are significantly less likely to use inpatient or emergency services following their stay compared to individuals who did not access respite services (Croft & Isvan, 2015). With the rollout of the 988 crisis system, SAMHSA has also listed the peer respite model as a key component of a full crisis continuum of care (Brinkley & Volpe, 2024).

To operate with integrity and consistency, we must sustain qualified, emotionally present, and well-supported staff. Among other things, the \$7,000 requested will allow us to support equitable staffing levels, and invest in retention and training. As a non-clinical, non-medical model, The Ferns does not rely on reimbursement from insurance or Medicaid for staffing. This makes philanthropic investment especially vital for operational sustainability. While many crisis systems allocate funding for facilities, technology, or emergency transport, our priority is human connection. Staff are the intervention. Their presence, willingness to sit with someone in distress, and ability to share from lived experience without pathologizing the guest are the key drivers of the positive outcomes peer-run respites are known to produce.

- **How will results & impact be demonstrated?**

Ferns staff collect voluntary data from guests at the following points of contact: Pre-Entrance Conversation, Arrival Surveys, Departure Surveys, and follow-up Phone Interviews. In the first year of operations, 56 out of 76 guests (73%) chose to offer feedback.

Key Findings from Guest Surveys from Aug 2024 – July 2025

1. Guests confirm feeling safe, respected, and comfortable upon entering the respite.
2. Guests report reduced distress, increased emotional regulation, and stronger relationships with themselves and with others.
3. Guests work on personal outcomes, including adopting self-guided strategies for continued recovery.
4. Guests report an increased feeling of being prepared to meet life's challenges after a stay at The Ferns.

Almost all guests reported high satisfaction with their stay at The Ferns, with 96% reporting that they would return to The Ferns and 96% reporting that they would recommend The Ferns to others.

Early themes that emerged from 56 surveys show that:

- 37 guests experienced The Ferns environment as a respite from distressing circumstances in their lives
- 23 guests valued the ability to work on personal outcomes during their stay
- 21 guests valued their autonomy
- 12 guests came because they were looking for an alternative to hospitalization

The following is a typical example of guest feedback:

"I came to the Ferns because I was deeply depressed and anxious. I was welcomed with open arms and profound kindness. I walked into a house, but the staff made it into a home. I did not grasp the depth of my sadness and despair until I was able to experience the joy and warmth the Ferns has to offer. The Ferns has had a profound positive impact in my life. I will be forever grateful for The Ferns."

References

Brinkley, A., & Volpe, J. (2024). *Peer Support Services Across the Crisis Continuum*. SAMHSA.

<https://988crisissystemshelp.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/tacc-peer-support-services-pep24-01-019.pdf>.

Croft, B., & Ísvan, N. (2015). Impact of the 2nd story peer respite program on use of inpatient and emergency services. *Psychiatric Services*, 66(6), 632–637. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201400266>

Intentional Peer Support. (n.d.) Research: Evidence of peer support's effectiveness.

<https://intentionalpeersupport.org/research>

Mead, S., Hilton, D., & Curtis, L. (2001). Peer support: A theoretical perspective. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 25(2), 134–141.

III. ATTACHMENTS

Email this support information. If it is on your website, please provide the [URL](#).

1. Copy of **501 (c) (3)** federal tax-exempt letter
 2. List of **Board** of Directors, with their affiliations **URL:**
 3. Most recent **annual report URL:**
 4. Audited or reviewed recent **financial statement URL:**
 5. Itemized **organizational operating budget** with actual results for prior fiscal year & current fiscal year to date
 6. If capacity building initiative, **itemized budget** (including external consultant's proposal, if applicable)
 7. Current **strategic plan**. If your nonprofit does **not** have a current strategic plan, **explain why**.
- Visit our website to learn more at www.chescocf.org
 - Proposals are only accepted electronically: <https://chescocf.org/receive/apply-for-grants/>
 - **Email proposals to grants@chescocf.org**
 - Proposals are considered "complete" when CCCF has **confirmed** receipt of the **Grant Proposal Summary Sheet, Narrative & Attachments**.
 - Proposals are shared electronically and online with Fund Advisors, Donors & Grant Panels.
 - Per IRS Regulations, applicants must be charitable, tax-exempt organizations with 501(c)(3) certification & cannot be individuals.

Please contact Kevin Baffa, Grants Administrator or Stephenie Stevens, Grants Officer at **(610) 696-8211** or grants@chescocf.org with any questions.

*Connecting people who care with causes that matter,
so their philanthropy makes a difference, now & forever.*