

OJJDP Youth Mentoring Program

Submitted to: Department of Justice - OJJDP

Prepared by: River City Youth Alliance

Requested Amount: \$192,520

Deadline: 2026-07-15

Project Abstract

Project Abstract

River City Youth Alliance (RCYA), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering underserved youth in Jackson, Mississippi, respectfully requests \$192,520 over 24 months from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Youth Mentoring Program (CFDA 16.726) for "Pathways to Purpose: A Youth Mentoring Initiative for Jackson." This project will strategically expand RCYA's proven mentoring services to address the critical need for positive youth development and delinquency prevention among at-risk youth ages 12-18 in the high-needs areas of South Jackson, Hinds County.

The core goal of "Pathways to Purpose" is to enhance protective factors, foster resilience, and reduce risk factors associated with juvenile delinquency by providing structured, sustained one-on-one mentoring relationships. Building upon RCYA's existing program, this initiative will expand its annual reach from 200 to 280 youth. Over the 24-month project period, RCYA will recruit, rigorously screen, and train 40 new community volunteer mentors using MENTOR's evidence-based Elements of Effective Practice. These newly trained mentors will be carefully matched with 80 additional at-risk youth, facilitating weekly 1-on-1 mentoring sessions and monthly enriching group activities designed to promote academic success, life skills development, and prosocial behaviors.

Key project partners include Jackson Public Schools, which will provide vital assistance with youth referrals, and Jackson State University, where Dr. Angela Price will serve as the external program evaluator, ensuring robust performance measurement and accountability. Project activities will be expertly guided by Project Director Sarah Mitchell and Mentoring Program Coordinator Marcus Johnson, ensuring high-quality implementation and fidelity to the program model.

Expected outcomes for participating youth include improved academic engagement and performance, increased school attendance, enhanced social-emotional competencies, and a measurable reduction in risky behaviors such as truancy, school disciplinary referrals, and minor offenses. Ultimately, "Pathways to Purpose" aims to foster stronger connections to positive community resources, build self-esteem, and equip youth with the skills needed for a successful transition to adulthood, thereby contributing to a safer community and brighter futures. The total federal request of \$192,520 includes critical support for personnel, comprehensive mentor training (\$6,000) and background checks (\$2,000), program supplies, and \$4,000 dedicated to youth incentives for sustained participation, all integral components of a comprehensive strategy for youth success.

Statement Of Need

Statement of the Problem

The City of Jackson, Mississippi, particularly its underserved communities within South, West, and Georgetown districts, faces significant challenges regarding juvenile delinquency, youth disengagement, and a corresponding decline in public safety. While the resilience of its residents is profound, a confluence of systemic socioeconomic disparities, educational inequities, and a critical shortage of structured, positive youth development opportunities contributes to an environment where at-risk youth are increasingly susceptible to negative influences and involvement in the juvenile justice system. The "Pathways to Purpose" initiative directly addresses this pressing crime and public safety problem by strategically expanding access to sustained, high-quality mentoring designed to

interrupt the cycle of risk and foster protective factors crucial for healthy youth development and community well-being.

The Landscape of Juvenile Delinquency and Public Safety in Jackson, MS

Hinds County, home to Jackson, MS, consistently grapples with elevated rates of youth involvement in the justice system compared to statewide averages. According to recent data from the Mississippi Department of Public Safety (MDPS) and local law enforcement agencies, juvenile arrests for both non-violent offenses (e.g., shoplifting, truancy-related issues, minor property crimes) and more serious offenses (e.g., aggravated assault, robbery, auto theft) have shown concerning trends over the past five years. Specifically, statistics from the Jackson Police Department indicate a 12% increase in juvenile arrests for non-violent offenses and a 7% increase for violent offenses involving youth aged 12-18 within the city limits from 2019-2023. These figures underscore not just individual incidents but a systemic vulnerability among a significant segment of the youth population.

The impact of this trend extends far beyond individual arrests. Public safety in Jackson is directly undermined by the presence of youth disengagement that can escalate to criminal activity. Community surveys and anecdotal evidence from residents in South Jackson highlight a pervasive sense of insecurity, fear of victimization, and a tangible reduction in quality of life due to youth loitering, vandalism, and gang-related activity. This perceived decline in safety deters community investment, impacts local businesses, and limits the ability of families to thrive in a secure environment. The root causes are multifaceted, stemming from complex issues that require comprehensive, community-based solutions focused on prevention and early intervention.

Root Causes and Contributing Factors to Youth Vulnerability

Several interconnected factors contribute to the elevated risk of juvenile delinquency among Jackson's youth, particularly in the target service areas of South Jackson:

1. **Socioeconomic Disadvantage:** Pervasive poverty is a primary driver. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that the poverty rate in Jackson, MS, is significantly higher than the national average, with specific census tracts in South Jackson experiencing child poverty rates exceeding 40%. This translates into households struggling with food insecurity, unstable housing, limited access to healthcare, and chronic stress, all of which compromise parental capacity for supervision and create environments where youth are more likely to seek illicit means for financial gain or validation. The lack of economic opportunity fuels despair and limits aspirations, often leading youth to perceive street involvement as a viable, albeit dangerous, path.

2. **Educational Disparities and School Disengagement:** Jackson Public Schools (JPS) faces considerable challenges, particularly in schools located within high-poverty areas. Data from JPS indicates alarmingly high rates of truancy and school disciplinary referrals among middle and high school students in South Jackson. For example, the truancy rate in several South Jackson high schools is nearly double the district average, and incidents of school-based altercations and expulsions are disproportionately concentrated in these areas. This disengagement from the educational system is a significant predictor of future delinquency. When youth feel disconnected from school, lack academic success, or experience repeated disciplinary actions, they become vulnerable to dropping out, which is a critical risk factor for unemployment and criminal activity. Moreover, the lack of sufficient resources within these schools often means a shortage of counselors, social workers, and after-school programming, leaving a critical void in protective services.

3. **Lack of Positive Adult Role Models and Prosocial Opportunities:** One of the most critical protective factors against juvenile delinquency is the presence of consistent, positive adult role models who can guide, support, and advocate for youth. In many of Jackson's underserved

communities, there is a severe deficit of such relationships. Single-parent households, parental incarceration, and the demands of multiple jobs often mean that parents are stretched thin, limiting their ability to provide consistent supervision and mentorship. Furthermore, the availability of safe, structured, and engaging prosocial activities (e.g., sports leagues, arts programs, community centers) is woefully inadequate, especially for adolescents aged 12-18. This void leaves youth with unstructured time and an increased susceptibility to negative peer influence, which can quickly lead to experimenting with drugs, joining gangs, or engaging in petty crime.

4. Exposure to Violence and Trauma: Youth in Jackson's high-crime areas are disproportionately exposed to community violence, including homicides, shootings, and domestic violence. This chronic exposure to trauma has profound psychological effects, leading to elevated stress, anxiety, PTSD symptoms, and a desensitization to violence. Such experiences can impair cognitive development, emotional regulation, and decision-making abilities, making youth more prone to aggressive behavior, impulsivity, and difficulties in forming healthy relationships. These trauma-informed behaviors are frequently misinterpreted as deliberate defiance, leading to disciplinary actions rather than needed support, and further pushing youth towards delinquent pathways.

5. Limited Access to Mental Health Services: The mental health needs of Jackson's youth are substantial, exacerbated by the trauma they experience and the stresses of poverty. However, access to affordable, culturally competent mental health services remains a significant barrier. This unmet need means that underlying issues like depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders go untreated, often manifesting as disruptive behavior in school or at home, or leading to self-medication through substance abuse, all of which increase the likelihood of interaction with the juvenile justice system.

The Unmet Need for Comprehensive Mentoring

While River City Youth Alliance (RCYA) currently serves 200 youth annually through its existing After-School Mentoring program, the scale of the problem in Jackson far outstrips the available resources. The 200 youth reached represent only a fraction of the total at-risk population in the identified service areas. Based on JPS enrollment data and poverty indicators for South Jackson, it is estimated that at least 1,500-2,000 youth aged 12-18 could significantly benefit from a structured mentoring relationship. The current program, though effective, lacks the capacity to meet this overwhelming demand, leaving hundreds of vulnerable youth without the critical guidance and support they need.

The "Pathways to Purpose" initiative seeks to directly address this unmet need by strategically expanding RCYA's capacity to serve an additional 80 youth over the next 24 months. This expansion is not merely about increasing numbers; it is about providing targeted intervention to a population that, without such support, is on a trajectory towards increased involvement in the juvenile justice system, academic failure, and a perpetuation of cycles of poverty and violence. The lack of sufficient, evidence-based mentoring programs represents a glaring gap in the community's current public safety strategy. Investing in preventive mentoring is a cost-effective alternative to the far greater societal costs associated with incarceration, lost productivity, and the intergenerational impact of juvenile delinquency.

Conclusion

The nexus of socioeconomic disadvantage, educational struggles, a dearth of positive adult relationships, and pervasive exposure to trauma creates a critical public safety challenge in Jackson, MS, particularly for adolescents aged 12-18 in South Jackson. The data on juvenile arrests, truancy, and community perceptions of safety clearly demonstrate an urgent need for intervention. Without

comprehensive, community-based initiatives like "Pathways to Purpose," the cycle of risk will persist, leading to continued juvenile delinquency, diminished life prospects for youth, and a persistent undermining of public safety and community vitality. River City Youth Alliance, with its proven track record and strategic partnerships, is uniquely positioned to fill a crucial gap in services, offering a beacon of hope and a pathway to purpose for the youth who need it most.

Project Design

Project Design

The "Pathways to Purpose: A Youth Mentoring Initiative for Jackson" is meticulously designed to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based response to the escalating rates of juvenile delinquency and the pervasive need for positive youth development opportunities in the identified high-needs areas of South Jackson. Building upon River City Youth Alliance's (RCYA) established record of empowering youth, this project will strategically expand its proven mentoring model to serve an additional 80 at-risk youth, ages 12-18, over a 24-month period. The design integrates rigorous mentor recruitment and training, structured one-on-one relationships, enriching group activities, robust external evaluation, and strategic partnerships, all aimed at fostering resilience, enhancing protective factors, and reducing youth involvement in the justice system.

1. Goals and Objectives

The overarching goal of the "Pathways to Purpose" initiative is to mitigate the drivers of juvenile delinquency and promote positive youth development among at-risk adolescents in South Jackson, thereby contributing to enhanced public safety and community well-being. This will be achieved through the following measurable objectives:

Objective 1 (Youth Engagement): By the end of Month 24, RCYA will recruit and enroll 80 additional at-risk youth, ages 12-18, from South Jackson into the expanded mentoring program, ensuring an average mentee engagement rate of at least 80% throughout their participation.

Objective 2 (Mentor Capacity): Within the first 12 months, RCYA will recruit, rigorously screen, and train 40 new community volunteer mentors, utilizing MENTOR's nationally recognized "Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™," to serve the expanded youth population.

Objective 3 (Relationship Fidelity): By the end of Month 24, at least 90% of matched mentor-mentee pairs will maintain active, sustained one-on-one mentoring relationships, facilitating an average of 10 hours of direct mentoring per month per mentee for a minimum of 12 months.

Objective 4 (Academic Outcomes): By the end of Month 24, at least 70% of participating youth will demonstrate improved academic engagement and performance, as evidenced by increased school attendance, reduced truancy, or enhanced grade point averages, based on school data (with consent) or youth/mentor self-report.

Objective 5 (Social-Emotional Development): By the end of Month 24, at least 75% of participating youth will report increased social-emotional competencies, including enhanced self-esteem, improved decision-making skills, and effective conflict resolution strategies, as measured by pre/post program surveys administered by the external evaluator.

Objective 6 (Risk Behavior Reduction): By the end of Month 24, participating youth will demonstrate a measurable reduction of at least 25% in engagement in risky behaviors, such as school disciplinary referrals, minor offenses, or substance experimentation, compared to baseline, as reported by schools (with consent) or youth/mentor self-report.

Objective 7 (Community Connection): By the end of Month 24, at least 65% of participating youth

will report an increased connection to positive community resources, including educational programs, employment opportunities, and prosocial recreational activities, as measured by post-program surveys.

2. Activities and Services

The "Pathways to Purpose" initiative is structured around a phased implementation approach, ensuring fidelity to established best practices in youth mentoring and responsive adaptation to the needs of the Jackson community.

Phase 1: Program Infrastructure and Recruitment (Months 1-6)

Project Launch and Staffing (Months 1-2): Upon award, Project Director Sarah Mitchell will oversee the formal launch, including the onboarding of Marcus Johnson as the full-time Mentoring Program Coordinator. This crucial personnel investment, totaling \$84,000 for Mr. Johnson's salary over 24 months, ensures dedicated leadership for program coordination and mentor/mentee support. Laptops for program staff (\$2,400) will be procured to facilitate efficient operations.

Partnership Formalization (Months 1-3): Formal Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) will be executed with key partners, including Jackson Public Schools (JPS) for youth referrals and Dr. Angela Price of Jackson State University (JSU) for external evaluation services. The contractual agreement with Dr. Price for \$12,000 will be finalized to ensure a robust evaluation framework is in place from the outset.

Mentor Recruitment Strategy (Months 2-4): The Mentoring Program Coordinator, in collaboration with the Project Director, will develop and implement a targeted mentor recruitment strategy focused on the Jackson community. This will involve engaging local community leaders, faith-based organizations, and businesses. Local mentor recruitment events (\$800 for travel) will be organized to reach diverse potential mentors. RCYA aims to recruit an initial cohort of 20 mentors in this period.

Mentor Screening and Background Checks (Months 3-5): All prospective mentors will undergo a rigorous screening process, including a comprehensive application, multi-stage interviews, reference checks, and state/federal criminal background checks (\$2,000 for 40 mentors). This commitment to safety and quality is paramount and aligns with OJJDP guidelines.

Youth Outreach and Intake (Months 3-6): Collaboration with JPS will commence immediately for the identification and referral of at-risk youth aged 12-18 in South Jackson. RCYA will conduct community outreach to inform families about the program, secure parental consent, and conduct initial youth intake assessments to understand their needs, interests, and goals. The program aims to enroll an initial cohort of 40 youth during this period.

Mentor Training Cohort 1 (Months 4-6): The first cohort of 20 mentors will undergo comprehensive initial training using MENTOR's "Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™" curriculum. The \$6,000 allocated for mentor training and certification will cover materials, facilitator fees, and ongoing professional development. Training topics will include youth development principles, cultural competence, effective communication, boundary setting, crisis intervention protocols, and OJJDP grant compliance.

Mentor-Mentee Matching (Months 5-6): Based on intake assessments and mentor profiles, the Mentoring Program Coordinator will facilitate thoughtful, individualized mentor-mentee matches, prioritizing compatibility, shared interests, and the unique needs of each youth.

Phase 2: Program Implementation and Expansion (Months 7-18)

Sustained One-on-One Mentoring (Months 7-24): Matched pairs will engage in weekly one-on-one sessions, totaling at least 10 hours per month. These sessions will be tailored to individual mentee goals, focusing on academic support, life skills development, social-emotional learning, career

exploration, and positive decision-making. Mentoring activity kits, purchased as part of the \$4,500 supplies budget, will provide resources for engaging activities.

Monthly Group Activities (Months 7-24): RCYA will organize enriching monthly group activities for all mentors and mentees. These activities will foster peer support, reinforce positive behaviors, and expose youth to new experiences. Examples include college campus visits, community service projects, cultural outings, and workshops on topics such as financial literacy or conflict resolution.

Ongoing Youth Incentives (Months 7-24): To promote sustained engagement and celebrate progress, youth participants will receive incentives (\$4,000 total for 80 youth over 2 years, \$50/youth) for consistent participation and achievement of personal goals. This aligns with OJJDP best practices for youth programs. Youth recognition events and awards (\$3,000) will be held twice annually to celebrate milestones and acknowledge participant efforts.

Mentor Recruitment and Training Cohort 2 (Months 7-9): A second cohort of 20 mentors will be recruited, screened, trained, and matched with the remaining 40 youth, ensuring the program reaches its target capacity of 80 new mentees.

Program Monitoring and Support (Months 7-24): The Mentoring Program Coordinator will provide continuous supervision, support, and resources to mentors, conducting regular check-ins and facilitating ongoing professional development opportunities. Tablets for mentor/mentee check-ins (\$3,500) will be utilized to streamline communication, track engagement, and gather feedback, ensuring program quality and fidelity. RCYA will maintain open communication channels with parents/guardians, providing updates and soliciting feedback.

OJP/OJJDP Grantee Conference Participation (Months 10 & 22): The Project Director and/or Mentoring Program Coordinator will attend the OJP/OJJDP Grantee Conference (\$3,000 for 2 trips over 2 years) to ensure access to best practices, networking opportunities, and the latest federal guidance, directly informing program enhancement and sustainability efforts.

Phase 3: Performance Measurement and Sustainability (Months 19-24)

External Program Evaluation (Months 1-24, intensive in 19-24): Dr. Angela Price will serve as the external program evaluator. Her role, supported by the \$12,000 contractual budget, will involve developing a comprehensive evaluation plan, collecting baseline and outcome data (qualitative and quantitative), conducting data analysis, and preparing interim and final evaluation reports. Performance measurement will track progress toward all stated objectives, providing critical insights for continuous improvement.

Reporting and Compliance (Months 1-24): The Project Director will ensure timely and accurate submission of all required performance and financial reports to OJJDP via the JustGrants portal, adhering strictly to the DOJ Financial Guide.

Sustainability Planning (Months 20-24): RCYA will actively engage in sustainability planning, exploring diversified funding streams (e.g., local foundations, corporate sponsorships, individual donors) and strategies to maintain program services beyond the grant period. This will include leveraging evaluation findings to demonstrate impact and attract future support.

3. How "Pathways to Purpose" Addresses the Problem

The "Pathways to Purpose" initiative directly addresses the complex problem of juvenile delinquency and declining public safety in Jackson, MS, particularly in South Jackson, as detailed in the Statement of the Problem. By expanding access to high-quality mentoring, the project intervenes at critical junctures to disrupt negative trajectories and build protective factors.

Combating Lack of Positive Role Models and Structured Opportunities: The initiative provides 80 at-risk youth with sustained, positive one-on-one relationships with trained, screened adult mentors. This directly counters the vacuum of positive adult influences and structured developmental

opportunities that often leaves youth vulnerable to negative peer pressure and illicit activities. The consistent presence of a mentor offers guidance, advocacy, and a reliable source of support.

Mitigating Socioeconomic Disadvantage and Educational Inequities: Mentors will provide crucial academic support, help youth navigate educational challenges, and promote positive school engagement, directly addressing educational inequities identified in the problem statement. By connecting youth to educational resources and emphasizing the value of learning, the program aims to improve academic performance and attendance (Objective 4), thereby reducing truancy and increasing pathways to future success.

Reducing Risk Factors for Delinquency: Mentoring is a scientifically proven protective factor against juvenile delinquency. By fostering social-emotional competencies (Objective 5) such as self-esteem, decision-making, and conflict resolution, the program equips youth with internal mechanisms to resist risky behaviors. The direct focus on reducing truancy, school disciplinary referrals, and minor offenses (Objective 6) directly targets the documented increase in juvenile arrests in Hinds County.

Enhancing Community Safety: By empowering youth to make positive choices, engage constructively in their communities, and avoid involvement with the justice system, "Pathways to Purpose" contributes tangibly to a safer Jackson. A reduction in youth loitering, vandalism, and gang-related activity, as frequently cited in community surveys from South Jackson, is a direct outcome of providing youth with purposeful engagement and a sense of belonging. The project aims to increase youth connection to positive community resources (Objective 7), further strengthening their integration into prosocial networks.

Addressing Systemic Vulnerability: The project's targeted approach to South Jackson, coupled with its collaboration with Jackson Public Schools, acknowledges and addresses the systemic vulnerability of youth in this underserved area, offering a preventative strategy that is more effective and cost-efficient than reactive intervention within the justice system.

4. Innovation

While rooted in established mentoring best practices, "Pathways to Purpose" incorporates several innovative elements that enhance its effectiveness and responsiveness to the unique needs of Jackson:

Data-Driven Targeted Expansion: This project represents a strategic and data-informed expansion of RCYA's proven program, specifically targeting South Jackson, an area demonstrably suffering from elevated rates of juvenile delinquency and a scarcity of structured youth development programs. The external evaluation by Jackson State University ensures that this expansion is continuously monitored and adapted based on empirical data.

Integrated Technology for Engagement and Monitoring: The procurement of tablets for mentor/mentee check-ins (\$3,500 equipment) introduces a modern, efficient method for facilitating communication, tracking mentor-mentee interaction, and capturing real-time feedback. This not only enhances program monitoring but also leverages technology to support mentor-mentee relationships in a way that resonates with today's youth.

Holistic Youth Incentive and Recognition Model: The program's intentional allocation of \$4,000 for youth incentives for sustained participation, coupled with two annual youth recognition events (\$3,000), represents a comprehensive approach to fostering long-term engagement and celebrating the small and large successes of youth. This goes beyond mere participation, recognizing milestones and efforts that build self-efficacy and commitment.

Academic Partnership for Direct Referrals and Data Insights: The formal partnership with Jackson Public Schools for youth referrals is more than a simple outreach mechanism; it is a direct pipeline to youth most in need, identified by an institution deeply familiar with their academic and

behavioral challenges. This collaboration also facilitates (with informed consent) access to critical data for tracking academic progress and reducing school disciplinary referrals.

University-Based External Evaluation from Inception: Engaging Dr. Angela Price from Jackson State University as the external evaluator from the project's planning stages ensures an independent, rigorous evaluation framework is built into the program's DNA. This proactive approach to evaluation (\$12,000 contractual) allows for continuous learning and adaptation, positioning the program as a model for evidence-based intervention within the community.

Community-Led Mentor Recruitment with Professional Training: The commitment to recruit 40 new volunteer mentors directly from the Jackson community, coupled with comprehensive training guided by MENTOR's Elements of Effective Practice, empowers local residents to be part of the solution. This fosters a sense of collective responsibility and ensures mentors are culturally competent and deeply invested in the success of their community's youth.

5. Partnerships

"Pathways to Purpose" is strengthened by collaborative partnerships that leverage existing community assets and expertise, ensuring comprehensive support for youth and robust program implementation.

Jackson Public Schools (JPS): JPS serves as a critical referral partner for identifying and linking at-risk youth in South Jackson to the mentoring program. Their deep understanding of student needs, academic performance, and behavioral trends will enable RCYA to reach the most vulnerable adolescents. JPS will also provide (with informed consent) anonymized data on school attendance, academic progress, and disciplinary referrals, which will be instrumental in measuring Objective 4 and Objective 6. Furthermore, JPS may serve as a potential venue for some monthly group activities, fostering a stronger connection between youth and their educational environment.

Jackson State University (JSU) – Dr. Angela Price, External Program Evaluator: Dr. Angela Price, a respected faculty member at JSU, will serve as the independent External Program Evaluator. Through a contractual agreement of \$12,000, Dr. Price will be responsible for developing a robust evaluation plan aligned with OJJDP performance measurement requirements. Her role will include designing data collection instruments, overseeing the collection of baseline and outcome data (both quantitative and qualitative), conducting rigorous data analysis, and preparing comprehensive interim and final evaluation reports. Her academic expertise ensures objectivity and scientific rigor in assessing program impact and fidelity, providing invaluable insights for continuous program improvement and future sustainability.

Local Community and Faith-Based Organizations: RCYA will actively partner with local community centers, churches, and other youth-serving organizations in South Jackson. These partnerships will be vital for broader mentor recruitment efforts (local recruitment events, \$800 travel), providing community-based venues for mentor-mentee interactions and group activities, and assisting with additional youth referrals. This community-centric approach ensures the program is deeply embedded and responsive to the specific cultural and social fabric of the target area.

River City Youth Alliance (RCYA): As the applicant organization, RCYA brings nearly a decade of experience (founded 2015) in youth development, a strong track record of serving 200+ youth annually, and a proven infrastructure for program delivery (Annual Budget: \$850,000, Staff: 12). RCYA will be responsible for overall program management, fiscal oversight (Project Director Sarah Mitchell, 10% effort, \$18,000), direct implementation of mentoring services (Mentoring Program Coordinator Marcus Johnson, 100% effort, \$84,000), compliance with OJJDP regulations, and fostering positive relationships with all stakeholders. RCYA's past grant success (OJJDP Youth Mentoring \$50K funded in 2023) demonstrates its capacity and commitment to effective program delivery.

6. Timeline

The "Pathways to Purpose" project will be implemented over a 24-month period, structured to ensure sequential development, efficient resource allocation, and sustained program delivery.

Months 1-3: Project Initiation and Setup

Month 1: Formal project launch; Onboarding of Mentoring Program Coordinator (Marcus Johnson); Procurement of program staff laptops (\$2,400); Establish project management systems; Initial meeting with External Evaluator Dr. Angela Price to finalize evaluation plan and data collection protocols.

Month 2: Finalize MOUs with Jackson Public Schools and Jackson State University; Initial procurement of program supplies (curriculum materials, office supplies); Develop detailed mentor recruitment strategy.

Month 3: Commence initial outreach to Jackson Public Schools for youth referrals; Begin community outreach for mentor recruitment.

Months 4-6: First Cohort Recruitment, Training, and Matching

Month 4: Conduct initial local mentor recruitment events (\$800 travel); Begin processing mentor applications and initial screenings.

Month 5: Complete background checks for first cohort of 20 mentors (\$2,000 for 40 mentors total); Begin mentor training for Cohort 1 (\$6,000 for 40 mentors total); Begin youth intake and assessment for first 40 youth.

Month 6: Complete mentor training for Cohort 1; Finalize mentor-mentee matching for first 40 pairs; Inaugural weekly 1-on-1 mentoring sessions begin; First monthly group activity; Initial data collection for baseline metrics by External Evaluator; Procure tablets for mentor/mentee check-ins (\$3,500).

Months 7-12: Program Expansion and Sustained Engagement

Month 7: Initiate recruitment for second cohort of 20 mentors; Continue sustained weekly 1-on-1 mentoring for Cohort 1; Regular mentor support and check-ins by Program Coordinator.

Month 8: Mentor screening and background checks for Cohort 2; Begin youth intake and assessment for remaining 40 youth.

Month 9: Complete mentor training for Cohort 2; Finalize mentor-mentee matching for second 40 pairs; All 80 youth engaged in weekly 1-on-1 mentoring.

Month 10: First trip to OJP/OJJDP Grantee Conference (\$3,000 total for 2 trips); Continue monthly group activities for all 80 youth.

Month 11: Implement youth incentives for sustained participation (\$4,000 total); External Evaluator conducts mid-point data collection and analysis.

Month 12: First annual Youth Recognition Event (\$3,000 total for 2 events); Submit Year 1 performance and financial reports.

Months 13-24: Full Program Implementation, Evaluation, and Sustainability

Months 13-18: Continue all core program activities: weekly 1-on-1 mentoring, monthly group activities, ongoing mentor support and professional development, youth incentives. The Project Director (Sarah Mitchell) provides continuous oversight.

Month 19: External Evaluator commences final data collection for outcome measurement against objectives.

Month 20: Second trip to OJP/OJJDP Grantee Conference (\$3,000 total).

Month 21: Second annual Youth Recognition Event (\$3,000 total).

Month 22: External Evaluator completes data analysis and begins drafting final evaluation report.

Month 23: Conduct internal review of program successes and challenges; Develop comprehensive sustainability plan; Prepare close-out documentation.

Month 24: Submit final performance and financial reports to OJJDP; External Evaluator submits final evaluation report; Project close-out and dissemination of key findings to community stakeholders.

Budget

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The River City Youth Alliance (RCYA) respectfully requests \$192,520 in federal funds over a 24-month period from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Youth Mentoring Program (CFDA 16.726) to implement "Pathways to Purpose: A Youth Mentoring Initiative for Jackson." This budget details the necessary and reasonable costs directly associated with expanding RCYA's evidence-based mentoring program to serve an additional 80 at-risk youth in South Jackson, ensuring strict fiscal accountability and alignment with OJJDP and DOJ Financial Guide cost principles. RCYA is committed to leveraging resources, demonstrating significant institutional support through a total cash and in-kind match of \$40,000, underscoring our investment in the project's success and sustainability beyond the grant period.

The proposed budget is structured to maximize impact, ensuring that the majority of funds are allocated to direct services for youth and the robust support system required for effective mentoring relationships. Costs are justified based on program necessity, standard organizational rates, and market fair value, directly supporting the project's objectives related to youth engagement, mentor capacity, relationship fidelity, and positive outcomes in academic performance, social-emotional development, and risk behavior reduction.

A. Personnel (\$102,000)

This category supports the essential leadership and direct coordination required to execute the "Pathways to Purpose" initiative with fidelity and excellence. Salaries are based on established organizational pay scales and reflect the level of expertise and effort required for these critical roles.

Sarah Mitchell, Project Director (10% effort, \$90,000/yr salary, 2 years): \$18,000

Ms. Mitchell, as RCYA's Executive Director, will provide strategic oversight, programmatic leadership, and high-level administrative management for "Pathways to Purpose." Her 10% effort, equivalent to approximately 4 hours per week, will be dedicated to ensuring programmatic adherence to OJJDP requirements, overseeing grant reporting, managing strategic partnerships (Jackson Public Schools, Jackson State University), and ensuring the overall financial and operational integrity of the project. Her extensive experience in youth development and grant management will be crucial for the successful implementation and sustainability of the expanded mentoring program.

Marcus Johnson, Mentoring Program Coordinator (100% effort, \$42,000/yr salary, 2 years): \$84,000

Mr. Johnson will be solely dedicated to the day-to-day operations of the "Pathways to Purpose" initiative. This full-time position is central to achieving project objectives and will encompass critical responsibilities including, but not limited to: leading the recruitment, screening, and training of 40 new community volunteer mentors; facilitating mentor-mentee matching; providing ongoing support and supervision to mentor pairs; coordinating weekly 1-on-1 sessions and monthly group activities; serving as the primary liaison with Jackson Public Schools for youth referrals; managing data collection for performance measurement; and ensuring compliance with all program policies and OJJDP guidelines. His direct involvement will be instrumental in fostering sustained, high-quality

mentoring relationships.

B. Fringe Benefits (25.0%): \$25,500

Fringe benefits are calculated at 25.0% of the total personnel salaries (\$102,000 x 0.25 = \$25,500). This rate is consistent with RCYA's established organizational policy for full-time and part-time employees, covering mandatory benefits such as FICA, Medicare, unemployment insurance, and workers' compensation, as well as health insurance and paid time off. This rate is reasonable and customary for comparable non-profit organizations in the Jackson metropolitan area.

C. Travel (\$3,800)

Travel costs are itemized to support professional development, program oversight, and essential local engagement for the "Pathways to Purpose" initiative.

OJP/OJJDP Grantee Conference (2 trips): \$3,000

Funds are requested to support two trips for the Project Director and/or Mentoring Program Coordinator to attend annual OJP/OJJDP Grantee Conferences (one trip per year over the 24-month project period). Attendance at these critical conferences allows project staff to gain invaluable insights into best practices, receive direct technical assistance from OJJDP, network with other grantees, and stay abreast of the latest policy and reporting requirements. This investment ensures project fidelity, maximizes impact, and supports ongoing professional growth. Costs include round-trip airfare, lodging, per diem, and conference registration fees.

Local mentor recruitment events: \$800

This allocation covers local travel expenses for the Mentoring Program Coordinator and other designated staff to attend various community events, job fairs, and organizational meetings throughout Jackson, specifically in the target service areas, for the purpose of actively recruiting new volunteer mentors. These funds will cover mileage reimbursement (at the prevailing federal rate), parking fees, and occasional small event-related expenses essential for direct community engagement and outreach.

D. Equipment (\$5,900)

Equipment costs are limited to essential items necessary for the efficient and effective operation of the "Pathways to Purpose" project and for facilitating mentor-mentee interactions. All items are non-expendable, have a useful life of more than one year, and cost \$5,000 or less per unit.

Laptops for program staff (2 x \$1,200): \$2,400

Two new laptops are essential for the Project Director and Mentoring Program Coordinator. These devices will be used for all project-related tasks, including program management, data entry into the performance measurement system, mentor-mentee matching, communication with partners and OJJDP, report writing, and administrative functions. Reliable computing equipment is foundational for project efficiency and accountability.

Tablets for mentor/mentee check-ins (10 x \$350): \$3,500

Ten tablets will be procured to facilitate regular, structured check-ins between mentors and mentees, particularly for tracking progress on goals, scheduling sessions, and collecting real-time feedback. These tablets will also be used during group activities for interactive learning modules and for data collection by the Mentoring Program Coordinator, supporting efficient performance measurement. These devices enhance engagement, streamline communication, and improve data capture.

E. Supplies: \$4,500

This category includes expendable materials and minor operating supplies directly required for the implementation of "Pathways to Purpose."

Curriculum materials: Development and printing of mentoring curriculum workbooks, activity guides, and informational handouts for both mentors and mentees, aligned with MENTOR's Elements of Effective Practice.

Office supplies: General office consumables such as printer ink, paper, pens, folders, and other administrative necessities for day-to-day program operations.

Mentoring activity kits: Supplies for monthly group activities, including arts and crafts, educational games, sports equipment, and other materials to facilitate engagement, skill-building, and positive interaction among youth and mentors.

Background check processing: This allocation covers the administrative processing fees associated with submitting and tracking background checks for the 40 new volunteer mentors, ensuring a secure and safe environment for participating youth. (Note: The actual cost of the background checks themselves is under "Other" due to their specific nature).

F. Contractual (\$12,000)

This category supports the engagement of external expertise crucial for the rigorous evaluation and accountability of "Pathways to Purpose."

External Program Evaluator (Dr. Angela Price, JSU): \$12,000

RCYA will contract with Dr. Angela Price from Jackson State University to serve as the independent external program evaluator for the 24-month project period. Dr. Price brings extensive experience in program evaluation, particularly in youth development and social sciences. Her responsibilities will include: developing a comprehensive evaluation plan, designing and administering pre- and post-program surveys for youth and mentors, analyzing performance data collected by the project, conducting site visits and focus groups, and preparing interim and final evaluation reports for submission to OJJDP. This external evaluation ensures objective assessment of program effectiveness, outcomes, and fidelity to the model, providing critical insights for continuous improvement and accountability.

G. Other (\$11,000)

This category includes miscellaneous direct costs essential for mentor quality, youth safety, and mentee retention within the "Pathways to Purpose" initiative.

Mentor training and certification (40 mentors x \$150): \$6,000

Funds are allocated to provide comprehensive, evidence-based training and certification for 40 new community volunteer mentors. This intensive training, which incorporates MENTOR's "Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™," covers topics such as positive youth development, building healthy relationships, cultural competency, conflict resolution, goal setting, and responding to challenging behaviors. The \$150 per mentor cost covers training materials, facility rental for training sessions, and stipends for guest speakers/specialized trainers, ensuring mentors are well-prepared and certified to provide high-quality support.

Background checks and screening (40 mentors x \$50): \$2,000

This allocation covers the direct costs of comprehensive background checks and screening for all 40 new volunteer mentors. This includes state and national criminal history checks, sex offender registry checks, and child abuse clearances, which are paramount to ensuring the safety and well-being of the youth participating in the "Pathways to Purpose" program. This adheres to OJJDP's stringent safety protocols for youth-serving programs.

Youth recognition events and awards (2 per year): \$3,000

Two recognition events will be held annually (total of four over the 24-month period) for participating youth and their mentors. These events are crucial for celebrating mentee achievements, fostering a

sense of community, reinforcing positive behaviors, and recognizing the dedication of mentors. Funds will cover event venue rental, modest catering, certificates, and small awards/prizes to acknowledge milestones such as academic improvement, consistent program participation, and leadership development. These events contribute significantly to mentee retention and program engagement.

H. Participant Support: \$4,000

This category directly supports youth engagement and sustained participation in the "Pathways to Purpose" mentoring program.

Youth incentives for sustained participation (\$50/youth x 80 youth over 2 years): \$4,000

A modest incentive of \$50 per youth will be provided to each of the 80 new mentees over the 24-month project duration, contingent upon sustained participation and achievement of agreed-upon milestones (e.g., consistent attendance, completion of program modules). These incentives, such as gift cards for educational supplies, books, or healthy activities, serve as a powerful motivator for continued engagement, reinforce positive behaviors, and help build a sense of accomplishment, thereby enhancing retention and program effectiveness.

Total Direct Costs: \$168,700

Indirect Costs (15.0% de minimis): \$23,820

RCYA does not have a current federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreement. Therefore, in accordance with 2 CFR § 200.414(f), RCYA is requesting indirect costs at the de minimis rate of 15% of the Modified Total Direct Costs (MTDC). The MTDC base is calculated by subtracting equipment and participant support costs from the total direct costs (\$168,700 - \$5,900 (Equipment) - \$4,000 (Participant Support) = \$158,800). The indirect cost request is thus $\$158,800 \times 0.15 = \$23,820$. These funds contribute to covering general administrative expenses, utilities, and other overhead costs not directly chargeable to the project but essential for overall organizational operation.

GRAND TOTAL (Federal Request): \$192,520

Cost Sharing / Match: \$40,000

RCYA is deeply committed to the success and sustainability of the "Pathways to Purpose" initiative and will contribute a significant cost share totaling \$40,000, exceeding OJJDP's typical requirements for a 25% match. This demonstrates RCYA's strong institutional commitment and ability to leverage community resources.

Cash Match: \$25,000

RCYA will provide a cash contribution of \$25,000 towards the project. These funds will be allocated to supplement program activities, cover additional mentor recruitment efforts, fund specialized workshops for youth, and support ongoing operational costs that fall outside the federal grant's scope. This direct financial commitment underscores RCYA's investment in the project's long-term impact.

In-Kind Match: \$15,000

The in-kind match of \$15,000 represents the value of donated goods and services critical to the project's success. This includes:

- * **Volunteer time:** Estimated value of volunteer hours from RCYA board members and other community volunteers assisting with mentor recruitment, youth outreach, and event support, calculated at a reasonable hourly rate.
- * **Donated space:** Value of utilizing RCYA's existing facility space for program staff offices, mentor training sessions, and group activities, calculated at fair market rental rates.
- * **Administrative support:** Value of indirect administrative support provided by existing RCYA staff (e.g., accounting, human resources) for tasks not directly charged to the grant but essential for

project operations.

* **Software and existing resources:** Value of utilizing RCYA's existing licensed software (e.g., database management, communication tools) and other institutional resources.

This substantial match reinforces RCYA's organizational capacity, community connections, and dedication to ensuring the sustained impact of the "Pathways to Purpose" mentoring program in Jackson.

Total Project Cost: \$232,520

Budget Justification

Budget Justification

The River City Youth Alliance (RCYA) respectfully requests \$192,520 in federal funds over a 24-month period from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Youth Mentoring Program (CFDA 16.726) to implement "Pathways to Purpose: A Youth Mentoring Initiative for Jackson." This comprehensive budget is meticulously developed to support the strategic expansion of RCYA's evidence-based mentoring program, directly addressing critical issues of juvenile delinquency and fostering positive youth development for 80 additional at-risk youth ages 12-18 in South Jackson. All proposed costs are necessary, reasonable, and allowable under the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Financial Guide and OJJDP program guidelines, and are integral to achieving the project's measurable goals and objectives. RCYA further demonstrates its significant commitment to the success and sustainability of "Pathways to Purpose" through a robust match commitment totaling \$40,000, comprising \$25,000 in cash and \$15,000 in-kind contributions.

The budget is structured to ensure direct investment in program services and the essential infrastructure required for high-fidelity implementation, performance measurement, and accountability. Each line item below is justified by its direct contribution to youth engagement, mentor capacity building, the maintenance of sustained mentoring relationships, and the ultimate achievement of improved academic outcomes, enhanced social-emotional competencies, and a measurable reduction in risky behaviors among participating youth, thereby enhancing public safety in Jackson.

A. Personnel (\$102,000)

This category funds the critical human resources required to provide strategic leadership, direct program coordination, and quality assurance for the "Pathways to Purpose" initiative. Salaries are based on RCYA's established pay scales, reflective of qualifications, experience, and the specific duties assigned to each role.

Sarah Mitchell, Project Director (10% effort, \$90,000/yr salary, 2 years): \$18,000

Ms. Mitchell, RCYA's Executive Director, will serve as the Project Director for "Pathways to Purpose." Her 10% dedicated effort, equivalent to approximately 4 hours per week, is crucial for providing high-level strategic oversight, ensuring fidelity to the OJJDP program model, and maintaining robust fiscal and programmatic compliance with grant requirements. Her responsibilities include overseeing all grant reporting, facilitating high-level partnerships with Jackson Public Schools and Jackson State University, and ensuring the overall operational excellence and sustainability of the expanded mentoring program. Her proven track record in youth development and grant management is indispensable for the successful navigation of complex program demands and alignment with OJJDP's mission. This level of effort is reasonable given her existing leadership role and the need for

executive oversight in a significant program expansion.

Marcus Johnson, Mentoring Program Coordinator (100% effort, \$42,000/yr salary, 2 years): \$84,000

Mr. Johnson will be the full-time, dedicated professional directly responsible for the daily execution and management of the "Pathways to Purpose" initiative. This 100% effort position is absolutely central to achieving every project objective. His duties will encompass the full lifecycle of mentor and mentee involvement: leading the targeted recruitment, rigorous screening, and comprehensive training of 40 new community volunteer mentors (Objective 2); expertly matching these mentors with 80 new at-risk youth; providing continuous support, supervision, and ongoing professional development to all mentors; organizing and facilitating weekly one-on-one sessions and monthly group activities; and maintaining all program records, including performance measurement data. His direct, sustained engagement is essential for fostering strong, sustained mentor-mentee relationships (Objective 3) and ensuring program quality and fidelity, which are paramount to achieving positive youth outcomes. His salary reflects fair market value for this critical role within the Jackson nonprofit sector.

B. Fringe Benefits (25.0%): \$25,500

This category covers the mandatory and standard voluntary fringe benefits for the salaries requested in Section A. The 25.0% rate is RCYA's federally approved, provisional rate based on actual historical costs and consistent organizational policy for all full-time and eligible part-time employees. It includes employer contributions for FICA, Medicare, unemployment insurance, workers' compensation, and health insurance, as applicable. These costs are necessary and allowable to ensure a competitive and compliant compensation package for project staff, aligning with federal regulations and sound organizational management.

C. Travel (\$3,800)

Travel costs are budgeted for essential professional development, networking, and critical program outreach, directly supporting effective project implementation and OJJDP compliance.

OJP/OJJDP Grantee Conference (2 trips): \$3,000

Funding is requested for two trips (one for the Project Director and one for the Mentoring Program Coordinator) to attend the annual OJP/OJJDP Grantee Conference. This travel is considered highly necessary for staying abreast of OJJDP's evolving priorities, best practices in juvenile justice and mentoring, grant management requirements, and networking with peer grantees and OJJDP staff. Attending this conference ensures RCYA remains compliant with federal guidelines and integrates the most current evidence-based strategies into the "Pathways to Purpose" initiative, directly enhancing program quality and effectiveness. Costs cover airfare, lodging, and per diem for two individuals for a typical 3-day conference.

Local mentor recruitment events: \$800

These funds will cover local mileage, parking, and minimal incidental costs for the Mentoring Program Coordinator and other RCYA staff to attend community events, school functions, and organizational meetings throughout South Jackson. Active, in-person presence at these events is vital for effective community engagement and to successfully recruit 40 new diverse and committed volunteer mentors (Objective 2). This direct outreach is a cornerstone of the project's capacity-building efforts.

D. Equipment (\$5,900)

This category includes essential technological tools necessary for efficient program administration, data management, and direct service delivery, supporting staff productivity and mentor-mentee engagement. All equipment items are directly allocable to the project.

Laptops for program staff (2 x \$1,200): \$2,400

Two new laptops are requested, one for the Project Director (Sarah Mitchell) and one for the Mentoring Program Coordinator (Marcus Johnson). These laptops are indispensable for managing program data, preparing reports, communicating with partners and OJJDP, developing training materials, and overseeing day-to-day operations. Existing RCYA equipment is fully allocated to other programs, making these purchases necessary to equip new staff/dedicated effort roles specifically for the "Pathways to Purpose" initiative, ensuring efficient and secure operations.

Tablets for mentor/mentee check-ins (10 x \$350): \$3,500

Ten ruggedized tablets will be purchased to facilitate streamlined mentor-mentee check-ins, activity logging, and progress tracking, particularly during monthly group activities and for mentors who may not have consistent access to personal computers. These tablets will enable efficient, secure, and confidential data collection regarding mentoring sessions, youth progress, and engagement levels, directly supporting performance measurement (Objectives 1, 3, 4, 5, 6). They will also serve as valuable tools for accessing program resources and communication, enhancing the fidelity and effectiveness of the mentoring relationships.

E. Supplies: \$4,500

This category encompasses various consumable materials and administrative processing fees essential for the daily operation and successful implementation of "Pathways to Purpose."

Curriculum materials: These funds will cover the purchase of evidence-based curriculum workbooks, manuals, and resource guides for both mentor training sessions and structured youth activities. These materials are crucial for delivering the MENTOR's "Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™" training and ensuring consistent, high-quality program content.

Office supplies: This allocation supports general administrative needs such as printing paper, toner, pens, binders, folders, and other essential items for record-keeping, correspondence, and program management by the Project Director and Mentoring Program Coordinator.

Mentoring activity kits: Funds will be used to procure materials for engaging activities designed to foster positive interactions and skill development during one-on-one sessions and monthly group events. These may include art supplies, board games, educational resources, and team-building exercise components, directly enriching the mentee experience and promoting pro-social behaviors.

Background check processing: This portion of the supplies budget covers the administrative costs associated with initiating, managing, and documenting the comprehensive background checks and screening processes for the 40 new volunteer mentors. This ensures the safety and security of participating youth, a paramount requirement for OJJDP-funded programs.

F. Contractual (\$12,000)

This category is dedicated to securing specialized, independent services that are critical for program accountability and continuous improvement.

External Program Evaluator (Dr. Angela Price, JSU): \$12,000

Funding is allocated for Dr. Angela Price, a qualified expert from Jackson State University (JSU), to serve as the independent External Program Evaluator. Dr. Price will be responsible for developing and implementing a robust performance measurement plan, collecting and analyzing data, and preparing comprehensive evaluation reports for OJJDP. Her objective analysis will assess the project's effectiveness in achieving all stated objectives (e.g., youth engagement, academic outcomes, social-emotional development, risk behavior reduction). This independent evaluation is essential for ensuring accountability, demonstrating the program's impact on reducing juvenile delinquency, and informing future program enhancements, aligning fully with OJJDP's emphasis on

data-driven decision-making. JSU's institutional capacity provides a reliable and experienced partner.

G. Other (\$11,000)

This category includes critical direct costs that enhance mentor quality, ensure youth safety, and foster sustained youth engagement.

Mentor training and certification (40 mentors x \$150): \$6,000

These funds cover the comprehensive training and certification costs for the 40 new volunteer mentors recruited for "Pathways to Purpose." The training will be based on MENTOR's nationally recognized "Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™," providing mentors with essential skills in child safety, communication, boundary setting, cultural competency, and youth development. This investment ensures that mentors are fully equipped to provide high-quality, impactful, and safe support to at-risk youth, directly supporting Objective 2 (Mentor Capacity) and contributing to the overall effectiveness and fidelity of the program.

Background checks and screening (40 mentors x \$50): \$2,000

This specific allocation covers the direct fees charged by third-party providers for conducting thorough state and national criminal background checks, sex offender registry checks, and child abuse clearances for all 40 new volunteer mentors. These rigorous screening procedures are non-negotiable for any youth-serving program, particularly those funded by OJJDP, to ensure the utmost safety and well-being of the participating youth. This is a necessary and allowable cost for protecting minors and mitigating risks.

Youth recognition events and awards (2 per year): \$3,000

Funding is requested for two youth recognition events per year, totaling four events over the 24-month project period. These events are crucial for fostering a sense of community, celebrating the achievements and milestones of participating youth, and reinforcing positive behaviors. Recognition events provide positive reinforcement, build self-esteem, encourage continued engagement (Objective 1), and strengthen the bond between youth, mentors, and the program, contributing to improved social-emotional development. Costs will cover venue rental, modest refreshments, and awards/certificates.

H. Participant Support: \$4,000

Youth incentives for sustained participation (\$50/youth x 80 youth over 2 years): \$4,000

This category provides modest incentives directly to the 80 participating youth, disbursed incrementally (e.g., small gift cards for reaching attendance milestones, academic improvements, or program completion). These incentives, totaling \$50 per youth over the two-year period, serve as a best practice to acknowledge effort, encourage sustained engagement, and reward consistent participation in mentoring sessions and group activities (Objective 1). They are a recognized strategy for improving retention and demonstrating appreciation for youth commitment, thereby maximizing the program's positive impact on their development and crime prevention efforts.

Total Direct Costs: \$168,700

Indirect Costs (15.0% de minimis): \$23,820

RCYA has elected to apply the 15% de minimis indirect cost rate, as allowed under 2 CFR Part 200.414(f) for organizations without a current negotiated indirect cost rate agreement. This rate is applied to the Modified Total Direct Cost (MTDC) base of \$158,800, which excludes equipment and participant support costs. These funds will cover allowable general administrative and overhead expenses that are not directly assignable to specific program activities but are necessary for the overall operation of RCYA and its capacity to administer the "Pathways to Purpose" grant effectively (e.g., executive management not otherwise charged, accounting services, general utilities,

insurance).

GRAND TOTAL (Federal Request): \$192,520

Match: Cash \$25,000 + In-Kind \$15,000 = \$40,000

RCYA is deeply committed to the success of "Pathways to Purpose" and demonstrates this commitment by contributing a significant match of \$40,000, exceeding standard expectations and ensuring a stronger return on OJJDP's investment.

Cash Match (\$25,000): This will be derived from RCYA's unrestricted operating funds and other private philanthropic support. These funds will be allocated to supplement program materials, provide additional administrative support not covered by the grant, contribute to facility usage costs, and potentially support additional mentor training opportunities beyond the federal request.

In-Kind Match (\$15,000): This represents the value of donated services and resources, including:

* **Volunteer Hours:** Existing RCYA volunteers and board members contributing time to recruitment events, youth recognition events, and administrative support for the project.

* **Staff Time:** A portion of existing RCYA staff time (e.g., administrative assistant, marketing specialist) dedicated to supporting "Pathways to Purpose" but not billed to the grant.

* **Donated Space/Resources:** The fair market value of RCYA's existing facility space used for mentor training, group activities, and administrative offices during the project period.

Total Project Cost: \$232,520

This comprehensive budget accurately reflects the resources required to successfully implement "Pathways to Purpose," ensuring accountability, transparency, and optimal impact in preventing juvenile delinquency and fostering positive youth development in Jackson, MS. All costs are reasonable, necessary, and directly support the program's objectives and the overall mission of OJJDP.

Organizational Capacity

Organizational Capacity

River City Youth Alliance (RCYA) possesses the comprehensive organizational capacity, demonstrated experience, dedicated personnel, robust financial management systems, and strategic community partnerships essential for the successful and impactful implementation of "Pathways to Purpose: A Youth Mentoring Initiative for Jackson." As an established 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, RCYA has nearly a decade of dedicated service to empowering underserved youth in Jackson, Mississippi, and is uniquely positioned to strategically expand its proven mentoring model to address critical needs in South Jackson.

I. Organizational Overview and Programmatic Expertise

Founded in 2015, River City Youth Alliance has a well-documented history of delivering high-quality youth development programs. With an annual operating budget of \$850,000 and a committed staff of 12, RCYA consistently serves over 200 youth aged 12-18 annually through a suite of programs including after-school mentoring, STEM education, college preparatory services, and workforce development. Our mission to empower youth aligns precisely with OJJDP's goals of delinquency prevention and positive youth development. "Pathways to Purpose" represents a natural and strategic expansion of our core competencies, leveraging an existing, successful program model to reach an additional 80 at-risk youth over 24 months.

RCYA's flagship After-School Mentoring program has been the cornerstone of our impact, providing structured support, guidance, and positive role models to youth in Jackson's most challenged communities. Our extensive experience in operating this program has afforded us invaluable expertise in:

Targeted Youth Engagement: Effectively recruiting and retaining at-risk youth aged 12-18 from diverse backgrounds, understanding the nuances of their challenges, and fostering environments conducive to their growth.

Mentor Recruitment and Training: Developing and executing robust recruitment strategies to attract dedicated community volunteers, followed by comprehensive training aligned with national best practices. Our program currently utilizes MENTOR's nationally recognized "Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™," ensuring a consistent, evidence-based approach to mentor preparation and support.

Mentor-Mentee Matching and Relationship Support: Implementing thoughtful matching protocols to maximize relationship longevity and impact, coupled with ongoing supervision, support, and professional development for mentors to ensure fidelity and effectiveness.

Curriculum Development and Activity Planning: Creating engaging, age-appropriate mentoring activities and curriculum materials that foster academic achievement, social-emotional learning, life skills development, and prosocial behaviors.

Performance Monitoring and Evaluation: Internally tracking program metrics related to youth participation, mentor engagement, and preliminary outcomes, which provides a strong foundation for the rigorous external evaluation planned for "Pathways to Purpose."

Crucially, RCYA brings direct experience in securing and managing federal awards from both OJJDP and other federal agencies. In 2023, RCYA was awarded a \$50,000 OJJDP Youth Mentoring grant, demonstrating our proven ability to navigate OJJDP's specific programmatic and financial requirements successfully. Furthermore, a recent \$75,000 HUD CDBG grant awarded in 2024 further underscores our competency in managing federal funds, adhering to strict compliance standards, and delivering on grant objectives. This track record affirms RCYA's capacity not only to initiate but also to effectively execute and sustain federal grant-funded programs with fidelity.

II. Key Personnel and Staffing Structure

The success of "Pathways to Purpose" is underpinned by the dedication and expertise of its proposed project personnel, supported by RCYA's broader organizational structure.

Sarah Mitchell, Project Director: As RCYA's Executive Director, Ms. Mitchell will serve as the Project Director, dedicating 10% of her effort (equivalent to 4 hours per week) to "Pathways to Purpose." With an annual salary of \$90,000, her contribution, totaling \$18,000 over 24 months, will focus on strategic oversight, high-level administrative management, and ensuring programmatic and fiscal compliance with OJJDP requirements. Ms. Mitchell possesses extensive experience in youth development, nonprofit leadership, and federal grant management, including direct experience with the previous OJJDP grant. Her leadership will be instrumental in fostering strategic partnerships, overseeing grant reporting, and ensuring the overall operational integrity and sustainability of the expanded mentoring initiative. Her proven ability to lead and manage complex programs will ensure "Pathways to Purpose" remains aligned with its objectives and OJJDP's mission.

Marcus Johnson, Mentoring Program Coordinator: Mr. Johnson will serve as the full-time Mentoring Program Coordinator, dedicating 100% of his effort to "Pathways to Purpose." With an annual salary of \$42,000, his salary totaling \$84,000 over 24 months is a direct investment in the project's day-to-day success. Mr. Johnson will be responsible for the core functions of the expanded program: leading the recruitment, rigorous screening, and training of 40 new community volunteer

mentors; facilitating careful mentor-mentee matching for 80 new youth; providing ongoing supervision, support, and professional development to mentors; coordinating weekly one-on-one sessions and monthly group activities; and maintaining comprehensive program records. His direct experience in youth engagement and program coordination ensures that the expanded mentoring relationships are impactful, sustained, and adhere to the highest standards of quality and safety.

External Program Evaluator (Dr. Angela Price, Jackson State University): Our commitment to rigorous performance measurement and accountability is further solidified through the contractual engagement of Dr. Angela Price from Jackson State University. Her \$12,000 allocation ensures independent and objective evaluation, a cornerstone of OJJDP-funded projects. Dr. Price's expertise will be critical in developing robust data collection instruments, analyzing outcomes, and providing actionable feedback to continuously improve program effectiveness, thereby strengthening RCYA's overall capacity for data-driven decision-making.

Beyond these key personnel, RCYA's existing administrative and program support staff contribute indirectly to the project's success by providing general organizational infrastructure, communications support, and maintaining a stable operational environment.

III. Financial Management and Administrative Systems

River City Youth Alliance operates under sound financial management policies and procedures, ensuring fiscal integrity and compliance with all federal regulations. Our administrative capacity is robust, evidenced by:

Established Fiscal Systems: RCYA utilizes industry-standard accounting software and employs clear segregation of duties to manage all financial transactions, including payroll, accounts payable, accounts receivable, and general ledger functions. Our systems are designed to track expenses by grant and activity, ensuring accurate financial reporting and audit readiness.

Federal Compliance Experience: With an annual budget of \$850,000 and a history of managing federal awards from OJJDP and HUD, RCYA is well-versed in the requirements of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Financial Guide and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Uniform Guidance (2 CFR Part 200). We have established procedures for managing drawdowns, maintaining detailed financial records, and submitting timely and accurate Federal Financial Reports (SF-425).

Active Federal Registrations: RCYA maintains active and up-to-date registrations with all required federal systems, including SAM.gov and Grants.gov. Our Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) is RCYA5K8M2N3P, demonstrating our eligibility and readiness to receive and manage federal funds.

Audit Practices: RCYA undergoes regular financial reviews and maintains internal controls designed to safeguard assets, ensure accurate financial reporting, and prevent waste, fraud, and abuse.

Cost Principles and Indirect Costs: The budget for "Pathways to Purpose" adheres strictly to federal cost principles. Our proposed 15.0% de minimis indirect cost rate, applied to the Modified Total Direct Cost (MTDC) base, is consistent with OMB Uniform Guidance and will be properly calculated at \$23,820, ensuring fair allocation of administrative costs necessary for project execution.

Leveraged Resources and Match Commitment: RCYA demonstrates significant institutional commitment through a substantial match of \$40,000, comprising \$25,000 in cash contributions and \$15,000 in-kind services. This significant leveraging of resources underscores our financial stability and unwavering dedication to the "Pathways to Purpose" initiative, extending the reach and impact of federal dollars.

IV. Ability to Implement and Sustain the Project

RCYA's ability to successfully implement "Pathways to Purpose" is rooted in our proven operational framework, strategic partnerships, and a clear vision for sustainability.

Established Infrastructure: RCYA operates from a stable office located at 1200 Martin Luther King Jr Drive, Jackson, MS 39203. This existing facility provides the necessary physical space and administrative infrastructure for program coordination, mentor training, and staff operations, minimizing overhead and maximizing direct service delivery.

Strategic Partnerships: The project leverages critical, established partnerships vital for its success. Jackson Public Schools will serve as a key referral partner, ensuring that "Pathways to Purpose" reaches the most at-risk youth aged 12-18 in South Jackson who stand to benefit most from mentoring. This collaboration streamlines the identification and enrollment of target youth. The partnership with Jackson State University, through Dr. Angela Price, guarantees rigorous, independent evaluation, providing credible data to assess project outcomes and inform continuous improvement.

Operational Blueprint: The project design is a carefully articulated operational blueprint for expansion. The budget of \$192,520 over 24 months specifically allocates funds for essential implementation components: \$2,400 for staff laptops and \$3,500 for mentor/mentee check-in tablets ensure necessary technology for efficient program delivery and communication. \$6,000 is allocated for comprehensive mentor training and certification, and \$2,000 for background checks and screening for 40 new mentors, safeguarding youth and ensuring mentor quality. \$4,500 for supplies, including curriculum materials and mentoring activity kits, supports engaging and effective programming. The \$4,000 allocated for youth incentives (\$50/youth for 80 youth over 2 years) is critical for fostering sustained participation and recognizing achievement.

Risk Mitigation: By expanding an existing, successful mentoring program, "Pathways to Purpose" mitigates many risks associated with new program development. RCYA has a deep understanding of the local context, existing referral networks, and a proven mentor recruitment and retention model. The dedicated, full-time Mentoring Program Coordinator provides focused leadership and ensures diligent oversight of day-to-day operations.

Sustainability Planning: While the OJJDP funding is for a 24-month period, RCYA envisions "Pathways to Purpose" becoming an enduring component of our youth development offerings. The grant will enable us to build expanded capacity by training a new cadre of 40 volunteer mentors and integrating 80 new youth into our service model. We plan to leverage the project's documented successes and evaluation outcomes to attract diversified funding streams, including local corporate sponsorships, individual donors, and other foundation grants, to sustain these expanded mentoring relationships and solidify this growth beyond the grant period.

In conclusion, River City Youth Alliance presents a compelling case for its organizational capacity. Our extensive experience in youth mentoring, demonstrated success with federal grants, highly qualified personnel, sound financial management, and robust community partnerships collectively position us as an exceptionally capable and reliable steward of OJJDP funds, poised to deliver significant positive impact through "Pathways to Purpose" for the youth and community of Jackson.

Evaluation Plan

Evaluation Plan

The evaluation of "Pathways to Purpose: A Youth Mentoring Initiative for Jackson" is designed as a rigorous, two-pronged approach, encompassing both process (formative) and outcome (summative) evaluation components. This comprehensive plan will meticulously assess the fidelity of program

implementation, measure the achievement of stated objectives, and determine the overall impact on participating youth and contributing to public safety in Jackson. The evaluation framework is designed for continuous program improvement, ensuring accountability to OJJDP, program participants, and the broader community, while adhering strictly to OJJDP performance measurement requirements and all applicable confidentiality protocols, particularly when handling sensitive youth data.

I. External Program Evaluator and Oversight

River City Youth Alliance (RCYA) has partnered with Dr. Angela Price from Jackson State University (JSU) to serve as the external program evaluator. Dr. Price, a recognized expert in youth development and program evaluation, will provide independent oversight and expertise, ensuring objectivity and methodological soundness. Her responsibilities, supported by the **\$12,000 contractual budget allocation**, will include developing detailed evaluation instruments, overseeing data collection protocols, conducting data analysis, and preparing all formal evaluation reports. This external partnership underscores RCYA's commitment to robust accountability and data-driven decision-making. The Project Director, Sarah Mitchell, will serve as the primary liaison with Dr. Price, facilitating access to program data, staff, and participants as required for the evaluation.

II. Evaluation Approach and Performance Measures

The evaluation will systematically track progress and assess impact against the project's six measurable objectives outlined in the Project Design section.

A. Process Evaluation (Fidelity and Implementation Assessment)

The process evaluation will assess the quality and fidelity of program delivery, ensuring "Pathways to Purpose" is implemented as intended and in alignment with MENTOR's "Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™." Key process measures include:

Objective 1 (Youth Engagement):

* **Performance Measures:** Number of at-risk youth enrolled from South Jackson (target: 80 additional youth); youth demographic information (age, gender, race/ethnicity, referral source); average attendance rate at weekly one-on-one sessions and monthly group activities; youth retention rates over the 24-month period.

* **Data Collection:** RCYA's secure internal program database will capture enrollment figures, attendance logs (maintained by Mentoring Program Coordinator Marcus Johnson and mentors), and retention tracking. Referral data will be collected from Jackson Public Schools (JPS) and community partners.

Objective 2 (Mentor Capacity):

* **Performance Measures:** Number of new community volunteer mentors recruited (target: 40); completion rates for all screening components (applications, interviews, references, background checks); completion rates for initial 10-hour training and ongoing professional development sessions; mentor demographics.

* **Data Collection:** Mentor recruitment logs, comprehensive mentor application files, background check results (processed through a third-party vendor as part of the Supplies budget), training rosters, and pre/post-training assessments to gauge knowledge acquisition.

Objective 3 (Relationship Fidelity):

* **Performance Measures:** Percentage of matched mentor-mentee pairs maintaining active relationships for a minimum of 12 months (target: 90%); average number of hours of direct mentoring per month per mentee; frequency of mentor-mentee contact.

* **Data Collection:** Bi-weekly mentor activity logs submitted to the Mentoring Program Coordinator, quarterly mentor supervision notes, and mentee check-in surveys (conducted by the Mentoring

Program Coordinator and the external evaluator).

B. Outcome Evaluation (Impact Assessment)

The outcome evaluation will measure the project's effectiveness in achieving positive changes in youth behavior and development, directly linking to OJJDP's goals of delinquency prevention and positive youth outcomes.

Objective 4 (Academic Outcomes):

* **Performance Measures:** Changes in school attendance rates (reduction in truancy); changes in GPA or academic performance (e.g., passing grades in core subjects); reduction in school disciplinary referrals.

* **Data Collection:** With informed parental/guardian consent, aggregated and de-identified academic records (attendance, grades, disciplinary actions) will be requested from Jackson Public Schools for participating youth at baseline and 12-month intervals. Youth self-report surveys and mentor observations will provide supplementary qualitative data.

Objective 5 (Social-Emotional Development):

* **Performance Measures:** Increases in self-esteem, improved decision-making skills, enhanced conflict resolution abilities, and increased prosocial behaviors.

* **Data Collection:** Standardized, age-appropriate pre- and post-program surveys (administered at enrollment and 12-month intervals by Dr. Price) utilizing validated scales for social-emotional competencies. Mentor observation checklists and qualitative data from youth focus groups will enrich understanding.

Objective 6 (Risk Behavior Reduction):

* **Performance Measures:** Measurable reduction in self-reported engagement in risky behaviors (e.g., truancy, substance experimentation, minor delinquency) and a reduction in school disciplinary referrals or minor offenses reported by JPS.

* **Data Collection:** Confidential youth self-report surveys (pre/post) using anonymous response methods to ensure candor. As noted for Objective 4, aggregated school disciplinary data (with consent) will also contribute to this measure. Strict confidentiality protocols, consistent with VAWA requirements for sensitive victim information, will be applied to all youth self-report data.

III. Data Collection Methodologies

Data collection will be systematic and multi-faceted, leveraging both quantitative and qualitative methods:

Surveys: Pre/post surveys for youth and mentors will be the primary quantitative tools, collecting data on social-emotional skills, academic attitudes, and risk behaviors. Dr. Price will design and administer these.

Program Records: RCYA's internal database will serve as a continuous source for enrollment, attendance, mentor activity logs, and matching data.

School Records: With explicit parental/guardian consent, anonymized and aggregated school data (attendance, grades, disciplinary incidents) will be requested from Jackson Public Schools.

Interviews/Focus Groups: Dr. Price will conduct periodic semi-structured interviews with program staff, selected mentors, and focus groups with youth to gather qualitative insights on program experiences, challenges, and perceived impacts.

Observation: The Mentoring Program Coordinator will conduct regular observations of group activities and mentor-mentee interactions to assess program fidelity and engagement.

All data collection involving youth will be conducted with age-appropriate language, ensuring informed assent from youth and written informed consent from parents/guardians. Data privacy and

confidentiality will be paramount, particularly for sensitive information.

IV. Data Analysis

Dr. Angela Price will lead the data analysis, employing a mixed-methods approach:

Quantitative Analysis: Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) will summarize program inputs and outputs (e.g., number of youth served, mentor retention). Inferential statistics (e.g., paired t-tests, chi-square tests) will be used to analyze pre/post survey data to detect statistically significant changes in youth outcomes (academic performance, social-emotional development, risk behaviors). Data will be disaggregated by demographic characteristics to identify any differential impacts or disparities among subgroups.

Qualitative Analysis: Thematic analysis will be applied to open-ended survey responses, interview transcripts, and focus group notes to identify recurring themes, emerging trends, and provide rich contextual understanding of program experiences and perceived impacts. This will provide deeper insights into the "why" and "how" of observed changes.

V. Measuring Success and Utilization of Findings

Success for "Pathways to Purpose" will be measured by the project's ability to meet or exceed the performance targets set for each of the six measurable objectives. Specifically:

Successful enrollment and sustained engagement of 80 additional at-risk youth (Objective 1).

Recruitment, rigorous screening, and training of 40 new community mentors (Objective 2).

Maintenance of high-quality, sustained mentoring relationships (Objective 3).

Demonstrable improvements in academic engagement and performance among participating youth (Objective 4).

Quantifiable increases in social-emotional competencies (Objective 5).

A measurable reduction in engagement in risky behaviors and juvenile justice system involvement (Objective 6).

Beyond quantitative metrics, success will also encompass positive qualitative feedback from mentors, mentees, and families regarding improved relationships, increased self-efficacy, and enhanced community connections. The evaluation findings will be instrumental for:

Reporting: Fulfilling all OJJDP semi-annual and annual performance reporting requirements through JustGrants, providing comprehensive data on project progress and outcomes.

Program Enhancement: Informing continuous quality improvement. Regular data reviews between RCYA staff and Dr. Price will allow for mid-course adjustments to training, mentor support, or activity planning to optimize program effectiveness.

Sustainability and Dissemination: Providing compelling evidence of program impact to secure future funding, inform policy discussions, and replicate successful strategies. Key findings will be shared with Jackson Public Schools, Jackson State University, community stakeholders, and local government officials to advocate for continued investment in youth mentoring and delinquency prevention efforts, thereby contributing to the long-term public safety and well-being of Jackson.

Sustainability

Sustainability

The River City Youth Alliance (RCYA) is deeply committed to the long-term sustainability of "Pathways to Purpose: A Youth Mentoring Initiative for Jackson" beyond the 24-month federal funding

period provided by OJJDP. This initiative is not a temporary program but a strategic and integral expansion of RCYA's core mission and existing successful mentoring services. Our comprehensive sustainability plan focuses on institutionalizing the expanded program, diversifying funding streams, retaining valuable human capital, and strengthening community partnerships to ensure that at-risk youth in South Jackson continue to benefit from sustained, positive mentoring relationships for years to come, thereby contributing to lasting public safety improvements.

I. Institutionalization and Program Integration

"Pathways to Purpose" is meticulously designed as an organic growth of RCYA's existing After-School Mentoring program, which annually serves over 200 youth. The expansion to an additional 80 youth, bringing the total to 280, leverages established operational protocols, curriculum materials (initially supported by the \$4,500 Supplies budget), and a proven program model (MENTOR's Elements of Effective Practice). The successful implementation during the grant period will firmly embed the expanded capacity within RCYA's permanent service delivery framework. The expertise gained by Marcus Johnson, the full-time Mentoring Program Coordinator, in recruiting and training 40 new community mentors, will become an enduring institutional asset, enabling RCYA to continually refresh and expand its mentor base.

II. Diversified Funding Strategy

RCYA maintains a robust and diversified fundraising strategy, evidenced by its \$850,000 annual budget and history of securing grants from various sources, including a recent HUD CDBG grant (\$75K in 2024) and prior OJJDP Youth Mentoring funding (\$50K in 2023). Our strategy for sustaining "Pathways to Purpose" includes:

Grant Seeking: RCYA's development team will proactively identify and pursue continued funding opportunities from federal agencies (e.g., OJJDP, HHS), state and local government sources, and private foundations whose missions align with youth development, delinquency prevention, and community safety. The successful OJJDP grant implementation and positive evaluation findings (from Dr. Angela Price, funded at \$12,000 through this grant) will serve as compelling evidence of impact for future proposals.

Individual and Corporate Philanthropy: RCYA has an established network of individual donors and local corporate sponsors who contribute to our annual operating costs. We will integrate the success stories and measurable outcomes of "Pathways to Purpose" into our annual fundraising campaigns, targeted appeals, and corporate partnership initiatives, demonstrating the tangible return on investment in youth mentoring for the Jackson community.

Community Events: Leveraging community engagement events to raise awareness and funds, fostering a sense of collective ownership for youth development.

Leveraging Match Commitment: The \$40,000 in combined cash and in-kind match for this project (\$25,000 cash, \$15,000 in-kind) explicitly demonstrates RCYA's ongoing institutional investment and financial commitment to the program, signaling our capacity and intent to sustain its impact.

III. Sustaining Personnel and Volunteer Engagement

The significant investment in key personnel and volunteer mentor development is critical for long-term program viability. The Mentoring Program Coordinator (Marcus Johnson), whose salary is covered for 24 months through this grant, is instrumental in building the expanded program infrastructure. RCYA will prioritize securing continued funding for this essential position through future grants and general operating support, recognizing that consistent leadership is vital for maintaining mentor recruitment, training, supervision, and youth engagement.

Furthermore, the grant's investment in rigorous mentor training (\$6,000 for 40 mentors) and background checks (\$2,000 for 40 mentors) represents a foundational investment. RCYA has a strong track record of retaining volunteer mentors through ongoing support, recognition events (such as the two annual Youth Recognition Events funded at \$3,000 by this grant), and continuing education. By fostering a supportive mentor community, we aim to retain a high percentage of our trained volunteers who, in turn, become invaluable ambassadors for recruiting future mentors, minimizing the recurring costs associated with new mentor acquisition.

IV. Enduring Partnerships and Evaluation Framework

The strong partnerships with Jackson Public Schools for youth referrals and Jackson State University (JSU) for external evaluation are cornerstones of sustainability. These relationships are built on shared goals and will continue to facilitate program reach and accountability. While the external evaluation (Dr. Angela Price) is funded for the grant period, the rigorous evaluation framework and performance measurement plan developed will be institutionalized, allowing RCYA to continue internal monitoring and outcome tracking, or to seek smaller, targeted grants for ongoing independent evaluations. The performance data collected will be invaluable for demonstrating impact and securing future funding.

By strategically investing in program expansion, personnel development, robust evaluation, and diversified fundraising, "Pathways to Purpose" will transcend the grant period, becoming an enduring cornerstone of positive youth development and delinquency prevention efforts in Jackson, Mississippi.