RFP 24-78769

**TECHNICAL PROPOSAL**

**ATTACHMENT F**

Please supply ***all*** requested information ***in the yellow-shaded areas*** and indicate any attachments that have been included. Document all attachments and which section and question they pertain to.

2.4.1 General Information

Describe how the agency’s mission/vision statements and range of services and capabilities directly relate to the goals and objectives of this project.

The mission statement of Youth First, Inc. (YF), “to strengthen youth and families by providing evidence-based programs that promote mental health, prevent substance misuse, and maximize student success,” fully aligns with this project’s stated purpose to continue the “development of a strong regional evidence-based school and community prevention program for Indiana youth.” YF’s vision, “communities supporting healthy, safe and successful youth and families,” directly relates to this project’s emphasis on collaboration. Fully described in this Technical Proposal with attached Exhibits, YF’s range of evidence-based programs (EBPs) are delivered via a three-tiered Student Assistance Program (SAP) as defined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). YF’s capabilities to deliver these services have been both demonstrated and evaluated as the State’s designated provider of evidence-based prevention in schools in the Southern Region since 2020. In that role, successful collaborations with subcontractors who are Minority Business Enterprises (MBEs), Woman Business Enterprises (WBEs), and Indiana Veteran Owned Small Businesses (IVOSBs) have also prepared YF to assist the State in achieving its contract goal of 8% for MBE, 11% for WBE, and 3% for IVOSB.

Provide a list of all current full-time staff members that are considered key personnel that will be necessary for successful planning and implementation of this project. Include the following: staff name, position, professional background, and explanation of their contributions to the project. Identify the management staff that would directly handle this contract, including length of tenure with the agency, current responsibilities, and contributions to this contract. If there are plans for hiring new staff to meet the needs of this contract, please provide all details.

There are 20 central office staff and over 88 full-time school-based Youth First Mental Health Professionals (YFMHPs) who will all be key contributors in planning and implementing this project. As new school partners are added, new YFMHPs will be hired. Please see **Exhibit 16 – List of Key Personnel** and **Exhibit 17 – Key Job Descriptions & Resumes** forthese staff members’ qualifications and contributions.

Does this agency plan to subcontract any services required in the scope of work for this project? If yes, please provide a list of services that the agency plans to subcontract out to meet the requirements of this contract, identify the potential subcontractors that will be utilized, and provide a rationale as to why the subcontractors were selected to meet needs.

YF’s bid for this project includes subcontractor services needed to implement the planned scope of work with fidelity to EBP curricula and processes, to best practices established for SAPs and the Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF), and to requirements of State contractors. These services include program evaluation, marketing, printing, “help for the helpers” wellness support for embedded YFMHPs, and training to better promote Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) in the agency’s prevention work. In addition to our already contracted work with YF evaluator Diehl Consulting Group, we also have worked with four WBE/MBE/IVOSB subcontractors under the current contract for the Southern Region. Our plan is to continue those subcontracting partnerships while also adding one more WBE subcontractor in order to implement a footprint-wide universal school- and community-based prevention program, Talk. They Hear You.

RATIONALE: All companies have demonstrated their expertise through past YF jobs and contracts and have submitted cost proposals that are reasonably priced. All six are based in Indiana and committed to equal employment; four are certified as Women’s Business Enterprises (WBE), two as Minority Business Enterprises (MBE), and one as an Indiana Veteran-Owned Small Business (IVOSB).

Evaluation: As it has for more than 17 years, Diehl Consulting Group will rigorously evaluate every tiered activity planned for YF’s SAP, including community-level strategies; YF’s evaluation plan and this subcontractor’s exemplary qualifications are fully described in Section 2.4.3 of this Technical Proposal. Only some of the costs of this plan are included in YF’s bid: costs related to evaluation of the SAP Tier 3 prevention cohort are being funded by other, non-match revenue sources.

Marketing and Communications: Media Mix Advertising will provide design, marketing, printing, and ad buy services to support footprint-wide delivery of one of YF’s planned Tier 1 strategies, the Talk. They Hear You program (TTHY) as well as printing YF evaluation briefs and newsletters disseminated to the community. JAM Printing and Promotions will produce items that are integral to implementing the environmental strategy The Truth Is at selected schools. Thomas E. Slade will provide signage, clothing, and supplies needed for helping school communities recognize and access their YFMHP SAP provider, as well as school-based program items such as Buddha Boards, worry monsters, weighted blankets, stress balls, parent libraries, etc.

Mental Health Wellness Support: The Well Counseling and Consulting Group will support YFMHPs who are embedded in school buildings to deliver tiered prevention directly to Indiana youth. The Well will provide virtual mental health and workplace wellness webinars, virtual personal growth training series, a mental health psychoeducation portal, and individualized mental health counseling sessions with trained mental health professionals. Using a vendor based in Indianapolis is an asset for our frontline prevention providers, allowing our team to seek confidential tele-mental health services at no charge from other mental health professionals who are not part of the same community. Whereas YF’s in-house clinical supervision supports YFMHP fidelity to best practices in delivering tiered prevention to students and wellness support to their teachers and parents, The Well Group “helps the helpers,” preventing burnout and enhancing retention.

DEIB: Inclusion and Beyond will again provide consulting services to support all YF project contributors through the continued implementation of Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) assessments for all YF staff in order to articulate and grow awareness of current DEIB competencies and to drive initiatives aimed at strengthening them. Contracted services will range from consultation on the establishment of a YF DEIB Advisory Council to support for YF’s Spanish-speaking staff to individual and organizational delivery of the evidence-based and skills-based IDI strategy.

Describe this agency’s experience in providing school-based and/or community-based prevention services for students, teachers/school staff, parents/caregivers, and the community. Include at a minimum discussion specifically on substance abuse prevention and mental health promotion.

YF has been continuously providing, strengthening, and expanding high quality evidence-based prevention in Indiana for over 25 years. In the late 1990s, YF’s founder, Dr. William Wooten, an addictions treatment specialist in Evansville, IN, identified evidence-based substance abuse prevention as the “vaccine” that could empower young people to avoid the risks and trauma of alcoholism and drug addiction and the Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) as the delivery system for that vaccine. Today, YF employs a team of seven full-time Program Team members to guide the implementation of 14 school- and community-based programs in a manner that ensures fidelity to each program’s design. Three members of this team are Certified Prevention Specialists (CPS), and four are working towards this certification. YF’s Director of Programs Laura Wathen, CPS leads this team: she is a trained trainer for five EBPs, a veteran contributor to the SPF process in multiple counties, and a presenter at the national convention of Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) in Washington, DC.

YF’s early implementation of the SPF process involved collaboration with Evansville educators and the Indiana Youth Survey to collect and utilize local needs assessment data around youth substance use and related risk factors. This data, combined with frank feedback from early program facilitators, all of whom were volunteers and many of whom were teachers, informed the 2002 decision to employ master’s-level social workers, embedded in partner school buildings, for paid, skilled, accountable delivery of a multi-tiered system of evidence-based supports, now fully formed as the YF Student Assistance Program.

Today, YFMHPs serve as highly trained, responsive preventionists who are uniquely positioned to connect school and community leaders, parents, community mental health services, evidence-based program developers, independent evaluation, and over 52,000 students to deliver the “vaccine” that we know can effectively reduce the risk of substance misuse and build mental health resilience in our future Hoosier adults.

Provide outcomes from similar programs that this agency has implemented and/or intended outcomes of selected program(s).

As reported monthly to the State for the last four years, YF activities and outputs consistently meet nationally established fidelity standards of delivery for school and community programs. This fidelity and independent evaluation give us confidence that the following outcomes are being achieved: improved family cohesion and parenting skills; increased Children’s Hope; decreased adolescent drug and alcohol use; increased knowledge and mastery of social skills, emotional expression, personal behavior management, and positive school bonding; and increased overall community awareness of social norms and of mental wellness definitions and practices.

In order to confirm fidelity to EBP best practices and guide improved implementation, YFMHPs and Program Managers administer survey instruments in all tiers and submit the raw data for independent evaluation by Diehl Consulting Group. In the 2022-2023 school year, positive changes found to be statistically significant for Tier 1 program participants included working well with peers, using words to express feelings, and positively managing behavior (Al’s Pals); increased anti-drug and life skills knowledge (LifeSkills Training); improved family cohesion, prosocial involvement, parenting skills, and adult accountability/personal responsibility (Strengthening Families); improved stress management, coping and communications skills, suicide prevention knowledge, substance misuse knowledge and understanding of brain development (Teen/Tween Series which includes SOS).

Positive changes found to be statistically significant for Tier 2 program participants included children’s hope, coping skills, family conflict, and school engagement (SAP group sessions); improvements on the WhyTry Index (WhyTry); decreased use of e-cigarettes/vaporizer, LSD, and marijuana and decreased binge drinking (C.A.S.T.); improved knowledge of drug use harm/consequences and mood/stress perception (Reconnecting Youth).

Positive changes found to be statistically significant for Tier 3 program participants included improved coping skills, resilience, decision making, school bonding/adjustment, mood management, and decreased behavioral concerns as identified by students, teachers, and parents (SAP direct services).

How does this agency intend to fully incorporate Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) and/or Health Equity (HE) into this project?

In alignment with the YF Board of Directors’ formal statement in 2021 that “conscious commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice is essential to fulfilling our mission to strengthen youth and families,” YF SAP providers will implement DEIB best practices defined by the SPF with cultural competence and responsiveness informed by disaggregated outcomes data and strengthened by subcontracted training described in this bid proposal. The project’s YFMHPs will be clinically supervised in both group and individual settings and thus have regular exposure and engagement with colleagues who also prioritize and seek to improve DEIB.

In addition to YF foundational attention to and work on internal DEIB competencies, YF will continue working to make meaningful connections with communities of color through targeted invitations to program participation, a growing body of translated curricula, data-informed program offerings, and increased bilingual YFMHP presence.

Describe the agency’s plan for ensuring at least one (1) staff coordinating, managing, and/or implementing prevention programming funded by this contract obtains required Certified Prevention Specialist or Certified Prevention Specialist – A certification within the first year of the contract. If the agency currently has a staff member that meets this requirement, please provide the staff member name, current job title, and length of time that the staff member has held certification.

Director of Programs Laura Wathen has held her CPS for four years, along with Program Managers Salita Shively (two-plus years) and Alyssa Sieg (one-plus years). Our other four full-time program staff members are in progress on their CPS certification.

**2.4.2 Financial Information**

What (if any) other DMHA specific grants/contracts has the agency received in the last five (5) years?

YF has received two DMHA Regional Block Grants to deliver selected prevention programs in Posey County (2024-2026) and in Vanderburgh, Dubois, and Pike Counties (2020-2024). Additionally, YF has received one DMHA Community Catalyst Grant to deliver a comprehensive SAP at Martinsville and Mooresville High Schools in Morgan County (2022-2026-extension), including Reconnecting Youth and Teen Series.

Provide a list of any other state or federal contracts or grants that this agency has received and executed in the last five (5) years that demonstrate the agency’s ability to carry out the work described in this proposal. Please include a summary of the scope of work and describe outcomes.

**State grant (2024 and 2023)** Recipient, IN Dept. of Health Office of Minority Health Together We Will – funding supports provision of the SAP in two Orange County (2024) and two Daviess County schools (2023). Outcomes: Pending. **Federal grant (2020-2023)** Subrecipient, U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Opioid Involved Youth Initiative: City of Evansville – YF worked with the Mayor’s Substance Abuse Task Force to improve public safety and reduce opioid and other substance use and the associated trauma it causes in youth and family members. Provided EBPs at schools in areas with high rates of overdose and drug-related arrests. Outcomes: Established a policy and procedure that allowed the police department to share contact information for families of impacted youth so they could be connected to evidence-based prevention and intervention. Delivered programs that reduced risk factors and increased protective factors in youth and families. **Federal grant (2013-2023)** Recipient, SAMHSA/CDC Drug Free Communities – Implemented the SPF and served as fiscal sponsor for the Warrick County Cares Coalition; provided evidence-based social norms marketing prevention strategy. Outcomes: Statistically reduced the gap in perception of alcohol, marijuana, and prescription drug use of high school students in Warrick County. **Federal grant (2023 to 2028)** Partner recipient, the U.S. Dept. of Education: Evansville Promise Neighborhood – funding supports the implementation of SAPs in six schools within the defined Promise Neighborhood boundaries; a new Parent Engagement Coordinator will provide accompanying communications and activities. Outcomes: TBD.

Demonstrate the agency’s ability to oversee and manage accounts payable/receivable for suppliers, the ability to pay promptly for continuation of services, the ability to submit timely claims for services rendered, and the ability to effectively track and report expenditures specific to this project/funding source.

YF has managed numerous contracts, subcontracts, grants, and MOUs as well as a continuous flow of large and small cash donations. In 2021, YF’s Director of Finance Jackie Cooper-Galey, CPA, successfully transitioned the agency’s financial software platform from QuickBooks to the cloud-based Sage/Intacct platform. All financial transactions including government funding receipts and disbursements flow through Sage/Intacct, which follows a standard accounting format that conforms to GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles), and are subject to annual audits by Kemper CPA Group, LLP. Through various internal control mechanisms such as approvals and segregation of duties, YF is able to maintain the integrity of its financial statements, resulting in unqualified audit opinions and no material adjustments. In addition, as the current DMHA contractor for the Southern region, YF underwent a DMHA audit in Fall 2023. The full contract year 2021 was audited with just one finding for an outdated payroll policy.

Demonstrate the agency’s ability to hire and retain a 1.0 FTE Grant Coordinator to oversee this contract. If the organization’s plan is to utilize a current staff member, describe how the agency will ensure the employee is dedicated solely to this project. Discuss the plan to fill the staff’s previous role and/or describe plans to reorganize workloads.

In light of the State’s February 21 Q&A response that “The 1.0 FTE requirement may be split as long as grant coordinator position duties and responsibilities can be accomplished as needed for the contract,” YF plans to meet all coordinator position responsibilities and contract requirements through existing staff. The geographic and service reach and complexity of programming that exists at YF is such that numerous people on our staff already hold the responsibilities outlined as a suggested contract coordinator job description in Attachment N. YF is therefore committed to meeting all contract requirements utilizing these various existing positions while at the same time not asking for state contract dollars to pay for any of that work, as we prefer to have state contract dollars solely devoted to directly serving the prevention needs of Indiana youth. The allocation of contract coordination activities to existing YF staff can be seen in **Exhibit 16** (Key Personnel), and no portion of the salaries for staff charged with carrying out contract coordination activities have been included in **Attachment D** (the Cost Proposal). This approach, in which we are neither seeking state contract dollars to fund the required contract administration work, nor including any expenses for time spent doing this work in our match, will ensure that YF avoids any possibility of supplanting other funding.

Describe the agency’s current and proposed funding structure that will allow the agency to meet the match requirement of **at least 35% but no more than 50% of the total project cost.**

YF’s bid for this project rests on the same financial framework which enabled the agency to bring over 70% in matching funds to its 2020 contract and to its subsequent renewals. This framework ensures multiple stakeholders are invested in the work for the long-haul. We believe every sector benefits from our prevention model, so every sector should also help fund and sustain it. With this blended funding approach, YF ensures free, equitable SAP services for any child enrolled in a partner school, invites the community to have skin in the game, and stretches the state’s investment much further. As outlined in our Cost Proposal, YF will bring a 48.4% match, meeting the requirement of at least 35% but no more than 50% of our bid’s total project cost.

A key requirement to sustaining such a diversified funding structure is the ability to accurately account for how large numbers of restricted donations, grants, and contracts are spent. Accordingly, YF has strengthened its accounting capacity as it has expanded its footprint: changes include a more powerful accounting platform (Sage/Intacct), a new CPA reporting to the Finance Director, more secure IT processes, and more. The enhanced ability to account for where, when, and how revenue is spent will allow YF to apply contract funds and qualified match dollars in accordance with our proposal.

Discuss the agency’s capacity and plan for sustainability of the proposed and/or implemented programs and services described in this proposal if the dedicated state funds in this award are no longer available.

Built and refined over 25 years of steady growth, YF’s financial framework is a component of a broader sustainability plan designed to continuously support day-to-day operations and core program delivery while building the best path forward for strategic growth. This plan has six objectives. 1) Increase YHMHP positions, school partners, and students and families served; 2) Enhance evaluation tools/processes to gather more meaningful data; 3) Secure and manage resources to achieve greater impact and sustainability; 4) Diversify funding structure through private support, fee-for-service MOUs with schools, and public dollars; 5) Generate greater investment from private foundations, businesses and other donors through cultivation, solicitation and stewardship, including planned giving; 6) Build the capacity to replicate our service model and outcomes. The fact that since 2020, the State’s investment in school-based prevention has gone beyond dollars to include multiple high-value workshops and retreats has further helped position YF for long-term sustainability. Ultimately, the work of YF is predicated on the hope that one day mental health won’t need promotion because most of us will have it.

2.4.3 Program Plan Information

Name the region(s) this agency plans to target as defined in the scope of work (Northern, Central, Southern). Describe the organization’s experience and familiarity with the region(s) the agency is proposing to serve.

Having established strong partnerships with over 40% of area schools as a trusted prevention partner, YF is again targeting the Southern region as defined by DMHA in its bid for RFP 24-78769 contract funding. Additionally, we will seek approval to continue using State Contract funding for services in Morgan County. The attached **Exhibit 18 – Youth First Map of Services** shows our current footprint and potential for expansion.

YF as an organization is native to the City of Evansville in the Southern region, and we are proud of our success in attracting and retaining many YFMHPs who grew up near or even graduated from the school in which they now provide relationship-based prevention.

Describe the extent of the need for evidence-based prevention programming in the schools and communities within the agency’s chosen region. Include evidence substantiating the need. This may include outside data sources/references or internal evaluations conducted.

As detailed in **Exhibit 19** - **County Health Rankings Data** and **Exhibit 21 – Youth First List of Counties, Needs, Plans,** evidence from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s project County Health Rankings (CHR, 2023) combines with YF 2023 SAP Tier 1 participant demographic data and 2023 partner school needs assessment interviews to substantiate an urgent need for evidence-based prevention programming across the Southern Region.

In Orange County, for example, YF data showing high rates of substance misuse among caregivers for SAP-served students parallels Adult Smoking and Excessive Drinking rates in CHR, which track with school administrator reports of exploding vape usage in their student populations. In another example, YF’s largest county of the Southern Region (Vanderburgh), CHR data showing a trend of high suicide rates parallels YF data on the prevalence of suicidal ideation in SAP-served students. Concerning CHR rates of Poor Mental Health Days and Frequent Mental Distress align with school administrators’ concerns around an increase in poor self-regulation, anxious behaviors and peer conflict. And CHR reported increases in adult smoking mirror increased self-reporting of nicotine vaping by SAP served students and almost unanimous concerns from school administrators around student vaping.

It’s important to note that CHR data presented in **Exhibit 19** reports measures of mental health, child well-being, and substance show rates (highlighted in red) that are higher than the Indiana state average, and that we are tracking these measures in our seven Next Phase Growth Counties.

Describe the agency’s capacity to deliver school-based and/or community-based services across the selected region, including a description of current and/or proposed community partners/subcontractors and how they will help satisfy the requirements of this proposal and/or enhance the current or proposed work.

Under the current contract, the agency is implementing 230 school and community-based prevention programs and is supervising 88 embedded master’s-level mental health professionals across the Southern region. Over the past 26 years, YF has built trusted capacity to provide new LEA partners with a uniquely comprehensive set of strategies to introduce effective substance abuse prevention and mental health promotion in their communities. For example, we have learned that the deployment of services can be time consuming. Initiating services involves multiple layers of relationship building and securing buy-in from administrators, counselors, teachers, parents and other community resources. Our President & CEO and VP of Strategy & Operations work with school leadership to ensure mutual understanding and commitment, including financial resources. Our VPs of Development and Marketing & Communication build awareness and secure sustainability resources from the community to keep our service affordable to schools. And our VP of Programs & Services and her management team lay the groundwork for a successful placement, including orienting principals to our model, assessing school needs/culture, screening applicants and involving principals in the selection process, and training/supervising our mental health professionals. YFMHPs in turn build relationships with a network of allies to connect families and schools to community resources. Even with the cooperation of school leadership, it can be difficult to pull individual students out of the classroom for meetings, bring together small groups of students for social skills development, schedule consultations with parents and teachers, or motivate families to follow up on referrals. Our YFMHPs are very intentional about building rapport with school stakeholders and community collaborators to most effectively assist students. Please see **Exhibit 20 - YF SPF Identified Community Referral Partners** for a visual representation of this capacity.

YF plans to satisfy the requirements of this proposal in three ways. Regarding the requirement that 100% of enrolled students in partner schools receive a Tier 1 Universal “dose” of prevention, YF will utilize subcontracted support from Media Mix Advertising and three other vendors to deliver SAMHSA’s Talk. They Hear You. program in all counties under this contract as well as multiple other school-specific Tier 1 programs. Regarding the requirement that state-funded delivery of Tier 2 Selected prevention be capped at a maximum of 15% of enrolled students, YF will utilize its custom-designed data management software to track the max number in each school. (Last year the number was well under that cap.) Regarding the requirements that Tier 1 Indicated prevention be capped at a maximum of 5% of enrolled students and that those students have all received Tier 1 and Tier 2 service, YF has reviewed data of students receiving Tier 1 Direct Service and counted those who 1) had a formal DSM diagnosis when beginning service, 2) did not have a diagnosis but the YFMHP believed they should, and 3) did not have a diagnosis nor did the YFMHP believe they needed one. In every school, the count of students in the third category came to less than 5% of that school’s total enrollment. The cost to provide Tier 1 prevention programming to that type of student during the contract period has been calculated and presented in this application’s Cost Proposal.

***If you are a new applicant:*** For each proposed region, include the following information for areas you propose to serve.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| County | Proposed School District and/or School *OR leave blank if community targeted initiative* | Targeted Need | Proposed  Goals/  Outcomes | Proposed Program (s) to address need and produce outcomes | Prevention Tier |

***If you are a previous regional model awardee:*** List all counties and school districts/schools you served at the conclusion of SFY 2024. Then, describe plans for expansion within established areas, based upon regional data. Expansion can include adding districts, schools, programs, or community initiatives.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| County Served | Implemented School District/School *OR leave blank if community targeted initiative* | Targeted Need | Implemented Program (s) to address need | Prevention Tier | Proposed Expansion Plans (if any) |

Then, complete the following for any proposed expansion into new counties in the chosen region(s):

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| County | Proposed School District and/or School *OR leave blank if community targeted initiative* | Targeted Need | Proposed  Goals/  Outcomes | Proposed Program (s) to address need and produce outcomes | Prevention Tier |

**You may utilize a chart format or narrative to satisfy the completion of this response. Attachments are acceptable if needed. Please refer in the shaded box to any attachments included.**

YF’s chart providing full completion of this response is attached as **Exhibit 21 – Youth First List of Counties, LEAs, Needs, Programs & Plans.**

Provide description of all prevention programs and/or initiatives proposed and/or implemented in the above response. Indicate the type of program (evidence based, evidence informed, etc.), identify the prevention tier, and site the source of information. Identify the target population(s) to be served by the programs as supported by disaggregated data. Target population(s) must include elementary, middle and/or high school students and their parents/caregivers, teachers/school staff, and/or the community. Include educator wellness programs if applicable.

**You may utilize a chart format or narrative to satisfy the completion of this response. Attachments are acceptable if needed. Please refer in the shaded box to any attachments included.**

**If selected program(s) are not evidence-based**, please explain the benefit of utilizing selected program instead of an evidence-based program to meet the indicated target population and identified need.

YF’s chart satisfying completion of this response is attached as **Exhibit 22 – Youth First List of Prevention Programs**.

***If you are a new applicant:*** Provide a timeline to meet the needs of the planning and implementation phase for any proposed programming, including relationship development, staffing, readiness assessments, logic model development, execution, and evaluation.

***If you are a previous regional model awardee:*** Provide a timeline to meet the needs of the planning phase for any proposed expansion and continued implementation of previously established programming. Include discussion related to relationship development, staffing, readiness assessments, logic model development, execution, and evaluation.

YF’s timeline for implementation and expansion is attached as **Exhibit 23 – Project Timeline**.

Describe the agency’s experience with multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and schools’ MTSS teams. Please discuss schools in which the agency either currently provides service or the agency is proposing to provide services through this contract which utilize an MTSS model and describe how this prevention work will be incorporated into the school’s process.

In keeping with the three-tiered model recommended by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and fully endorsed by SAMHSA, YF’s Student Assistance Program is an effective delivery system for universal, selected and indicated prevention strategies to reduce substance misuse and related risk factors, while addressing the unique culture of each school community. While YF’s model involves a single mental health professional who builds relational bridges between youth and the many different elements of a community’s system of care (see **Exhibit 20** for specific examples), each YFMHP is trained to integrate their work with a school’s existing MTSS, RTI, or SEL team. YF has more than two decades participating in, leading, or co-leading prevention teams at every point on the spectrum of complexity, longevity, and implementation; our unique model of group supervision means that YFMHPs can glean positive strategies and awareness of pitfalls to avoid and bring that wisdom back to their particular school team. For small school corporations with scarce resources and little SEL infrastructure, like Paoli or Loogootee, the affordable YF SAP model brings invaluable expertise to their school buildings.

Describe the agency’s experience with SAMHSA’s Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF). Please provide an example of the agency’s utilization of this process.

Doug Berry, Vice President and Partner at Diehl Consulting Group (DCG), states, “Youth First’s approach to substance misuse prevention is firmly grounded in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) recommended Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF). According to the SPF, effective prevention programs should include 1) assessment, 2) capacity, 3) planning, 4) implementation, and 5) evaluation. Emphasizing the importance of the final step (i.e., evaluation), Youth First has partnered with DCG for external program evaluation services since 2005.

“For nearly twenty years, Youth First and DCG have demonstrated a commitment to the SPF’s prescribed combination of process and outcome evaluation. Process evaluation, which addresses the reach or exposure to program elements as well as the extent to which programming is delivered with fidelity, has been critical to Youth First’s ability to make program adjustments for specific contexts (e.g., transitioning to virtual program options during the COVID-19 pandemic). For evidence-based Tier 1 and Tier 2 programs (e.g., Strengthening Families Program, LifeSkills Training, Reconnecting Youth), process evaluation has afforded Youth First the confidence that programming is offered consistently and, as a result, that the outcomes documented in the research base should be observed within the populations Youth First serves.

“Outcome evaluation, in turn, addresses the extent to which expected changes and improvements are observed among participants. In partnership with Youth First, DCG has implemented a combination of instruments published by program developers and proprietary measures to assess outcomes. For students receiving Tier 3 services through Youth First’s Student Assistance Program, demonstrated outcomes across years include a) decreased individual concerns for students from the parent, teacher, and student perspective; b) increased school adjustment; c) decreased problematic behaviors at school; and d) increased protective factors and decreased risk factors. While proprietary, the measures used to evaluate Tier 3 services are supported by research (e.g., Diehl & Frey, 2008) and provide an evidence-informed case that the Youth First Student Assistance Program leads to desired outcomes among participants.”

Discuss the agency’s plan for mandatory involvement in established school and community mental health infrastructures. Include at a minimum discussion related to community coalitions, systems of care, school mental health and wellness teams, and CMHCs.

YF participates in a number of community committees/coalitions in the proposed southern region counties, resulting in close ties to practitioners, agencies and organizations working to address broader, systemic concerns. YF Director of Services Elizabeth Christmas and VP of Programs and Services Laura Keys sit on the governance boards of multiple regional Systems of Care, which gives us a unique opportunity for partnership with community mental health. YF also contributed to the development of the state’s behavioral health strategic plan led by Riley Children’s Hospital and continues to work closely with the IU School of Medicine’s Stone Center to build a youth mental health hub in southern Indiana. Further, YF contributes to Community Health Needs Assessments in multiple counties, the Mental Health Collaborative of Greater Evansville, HOPE Team (suicide response team), Suicide Prevention Coalition and the Vanderburgh Substance Abuse Council along with LCCs in other counties. We serve as the lead agency for Warrick County Cares, a coalition utilizing the Communities That Care (CTC) process to address environmental challenges and risk factors related to youth substance abuse and related concerns.

YF continues to partner with University of Southern Indiana School of Social Work to place Master’s level interns in schools served, with a strong track record of full time hiring upon graduation. USI’s MSW Field Coordinator Bonnie Rinks serves as a volunteer on YF’s Programs & Services Committee which helps guide prevention decision-making.

YF’s partnership with IU School of Social Work has blossomed in the last five years. Working closely with the MSW Field Coordinator Jennifer Hamm, Youth First has placed MSW interns in partnering schools and plans to place more interns in schools near IU Bloomington. In building our relationship with multiple IU campuses, senior clinical YF staff have been guest lecturers, provided vital suicide prevention training, and promoted prevention work as a viable and impactful career path.

Experience in collaborating with Systems of Care has shown that there are often significant needs in behavioral health services in all counties but particularly within rural communities. YF has helped in advocating for capacity building and providing much needed support to youth within school settings. Serving as a catalyst to activate systems and addressing the gaps in service while avoiding duplication has been a primary focus of YF.

Discuss the agency’s plan for mandatory involvement in peer-led school and community-based organizations/initiatives and after school programs (embedded within schools or outside of the school setting).

As our agency’s name implies, YF values youth supporting, educating, and leading their peers in prevention decision-making. Planned programs that incorporate peer-led activities include, but are not limited to: The Truth Is Social Norms Marketing Strategy, In It to Win It, Reconnecting Youth, C.A.S.T., Camp Memories, and YF MHP Small Group Sessions. In all of our programming directed specifically to students, we ask for open-ended feedback from program participants that guides each year’s evaluation and SAP decision-making.

Twice a year, we hold convenings of the region’s community partners in an effort to educate YF staff on available resources for referral, but also to invite insight on strategies to help families better access these services. Partnership initiatives have resulted from these convenings, such as when a youth-led LGBTQ support group,

Greater Evansville Youth, asked YF to provide suicide prevention education (SOS) to club members and, subsequently, to their parents (QPR).

Discuss the agency’s plan for collaboration with school districts and/or providing supports for school districts in the implementation of all tiers of prevention in school-based services.

As detailed in **Exhibit 21,** YF’s implementation of its 3-tiered SAP in each partner school building will target specific school and community needs as per established SAP practice. The definition of those needs emerges through annual interviews between YF leaders and school leaders, collected program data, and (most importantly) in frequent, consistent communication between each embedded YFMHP and the full array of adults in the building who are engaged with student education and care. Determining the best plan of prevention strategies to address identified needs takes further collaboration on cost, location, timing, student scheduling needs, and required manpower. Educators and administrators play a powerful role in implementing each tier. For example, they encourage parent participation in a Strengthening Families evening program (Tier 1); invite parents and community leaders to the “graduation” of high-risk students completing the Reconnecting Youth program (Tier 2); and use their authoritative voice in newsletters or social media to introduce a YFMHP and explain how to access their help (Tier 3). At the agency level, YF executive staff and board members ensure open lines of communication which often lead to joint grant writing, educator wellness support initiatives, and more.

Provide letters of support from school districts within the proposed region. **The letters should include support for school or community-based prevention specific work only.** Identify the following in the shaded box for reference: county, name of school or school district, categorization of school or school district as urban, suburban, or rural. **Please note in shaded box any attachments included.**

***If you are a new applicant:*** Three (3) letters of support are required. The letters of support must come from 3 different counties within your proposed region and include representation of one (1) rural, one (1) urban, and one (1) suburban school district/school.

***If you are a previous regional model awardee:*** Four (4) letters of support are required. The letters of support must come from 4 different counties within your established region and include representation of a minimum of one (1) rural, one (1) urban, and one (1) suburban school district/school. At least one (1) letter of support must come from a new county.

Letters of support from four of YF’s school partners are attached as **Exhibits 24-27**.

Describe the agency’s experience with independent evaluation of school-based and/or community targeted services and provide an overview of the agency’s plan to evaluate the proposed programs for this contract.

The YF evaluation plan for this project is rigorous and comprehensive, with a methodology similar to our 2023 evaluation plan and full report, attached to this application as **Exhibit 28**. Depending on each program’s parameters, data will be collected for provider output measures; for participant demographic information to allow disaggregation by age, location, race/ethnicity, etc.; for participant risk and protective factors gathered via screened assessments for adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), substance use, suicidal ideation, self-harm, etc.; and for raw data responses to pre-, mid-, and post- program surveys administered to a cohort of program youth and families and delivered in raw form to independent evaluators at Diehl Consulting Group for statistical analysis and aggregation. These data will be collected at pre-, post-, and sometimes mid-program, which will allow YF program implementers an opportunity to identify if the prevention strategies are resulting in meaningful change. Data needed for GPRA reporting to the State will also be incorporated into the evaluation plan.

All data will be collected by YFMHPs and Program Managers and recorded in the YF data management software, run on the cloud-based Apricot Social Solutions platform. YF’s Programs & Services management staff will oversee regular audits of this data and its collection process throughout the contract period.

Understanding that high quality survey administration and data collection is essential for EBP fidelity and prevention decision-making, YF will provide training and review of its evaluation protocols for all YFMHPs in August and before every program launch for all Program Managers. These activities will enable YF and the State to examine the progress of the project, consider barriers that may have impeded progress, and formulate appropriate mid-project adjustments to ensure continual program improvement and effectiveness—in short, to ensure faithful adherence to best practices as defined by the SPF and individual EBPs in the proposed scope of work.

2.4.4 Other Information

What additional information can this agency provide that will assist the state in the evaluation of this proposal?

Mark Arnold, Principal of Washington Jr. High School in Daviess County, says “The needs of our students have only increased in these uncertain times. I can’t imagine not having highly qualified, caring, and consistent prevention support for our students. Partnering with Youth First was one of the most important, impactful decisions that we have made for our school. I can’t imagine a time before Youth First.”