



Connect Mindfully. Live Fully.

## Grant Request to

The Thomas Brown Alton Foundation

How do you have the most benefit to the mental health and wellbeing of youth?

For the past three years, we have delivered the *Path of Freedom, Youth* program at Brashear High School as a form of prevention and intervention for students designated as most at risk. This mindfulness-based curriculum is designed to help those students reduce stress, boost low self-esteem, and increase their resilience so they can better cope with challenges in their lives. Studies show that when mindfulness programming has been introduced to youth in school, students who participate in such programming “were significantly less likely to develop suicidal ideation or thoughts of self-harm than controls. Improvements in affect were correlated with increases in mindfulness in meditators but not controls” (Britton, Lepp, et al.)

As a way to increase our impact, maximize our reach, and sustain this program into the future, we are seeking to train seven educators at Brashear High School to deliver weekly mindfulness lessons to 9th through 12th graders in their classes. Five of these teachers are teaching a course (Leader in Me) where they have committed to incorporate one whole class per week to this program. The description given to student participants of the Leader in Me program at Brashear High School is as follows: *This year-long course will be focused on developing your mindset. We believe that in order for students to change their behavior, they must gain self-regulation skills to change their minds. As a Brashear student, you were pre-selected for this class based on a behavioral evaluation and potential leadership abilities. Our long-term goal is to increase our social and emotional skills, learn to control our anger, and to develop compassion and empathy for self and others. Through focusing on building a ‘growth mindset’ we will learn from our experiences in order to not repeat the same unhealthy, or considered negative, patterns of thinking and behaving which will ultimately lead to academic and life-long success.*

Leader in Me will reach approximately 100 students this year, and then continue every year hereafter. The program targets at-risk youth, who have either been in the juvenile justice system or are ‘frequent flyers’ for detentions or suspensions. These students are at a higher risk for mental health disorders. In one study of youth in juvenile justice, “Nearly two thirds of males and nearly three quarters of females met

diagnostic criteria for one or more psychiatric disorders” (Teplin, Abrim, et al.). Students must want to join the program and have been recognized as having leadership qualities.

This curriculum that we train the teachers to deliver is based on *The Path of Freedom*, which is a mindfulness-based emotional intelligence program originally designed for adult prisoners developed by prison mindfulness pioneers Kate Crisp and Fleet Maull. Awaken Pittsburgh has adapted this program for youth in school and community settings with the authors’ permission.

The curriculum includes training in mindfulness meditation, emotional intelligence, communication, conflict resolution, stress management, and various resourcing and resiliency-building skills. Through this program, young people will develop a skill set to deal with difficult emotions and events ~~in their lives~~, which, in turn, will give them a new positive vision for their lives.

The 20-unit student curriculum includes the following topics:

- What is mindfulness? Why do it? How does our attention work?
- We are each already worthy of care
- What is self-compassion?
- How do I let kindness and compassion in?
- The stress response and auto pilot
- Brain research and working with thoughts
- Living by our values and finding joy
- Holding our seat with difficulty
- State shifting
- Drama triangle: working with relationships
- Blame vs responsibility
- Empowerment triangle
- Mindful speaking and listening
- Culminating field trip

In support of our efforts, Brashear High School is providing (1) a location for all program delivery, (2) release time for teachers to attend the trainings (which includes the expense of substitute teachers); (3) all photocopying of the manual and other materials. Please refer to the letter of support that the Principal, Ms. Kimberly Saffran, provided which is also attached.

In sum, the purpose of this grant is to create a sustainable model of program delivery for Awaken Pittsburgh’s partners at Brashear High School in order to support the

mental health and wellbeing of the most at risk students in their population. Our train-the-trainer curricula will empower our educational partners to maintain the programming themselves, without the need to continually hire external trainers. Although the goal is self-sufficiency, Awaken Pittsburgh is committed to providing ongoing support as needed.

**Citations:**

Britton, W. B., Lepp, N. E., Niles, H. F., Rocha, T., Fisher, N. E., & Gold, J. S. (2014). A randomized controlled pilot trial of classroom-based mindfulness meditation compared to an active control condition in sixth-grade children. *Journal of School Psychology, 52*(3), 263-278.

Mayo Clinic. Mental Illness: Symptoms and Causes. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/symptoms-causes/syc-20374968>

Teplin, L. A., Abram, K. M., McClelland, G. M., Dulcan, M. K., & Mericle, A. A. (2002). Psychiatric disorders in youth in juvenile detention. *Archives of general psychiatry, 59*(12), 1133-1143.