



**American Rescue Plan Act of 2021
Tri-Town Youth Services Bureau Contributions
to a Transformative, Equitable and Healthy Recovery**

Introduction

From February- March 2021 Tri-Town Youth Services Bureau (TTYSB) worked closely with Chester, Deep River and Essex Selectpeople and Boards of Finance to review the programs and services provided by the youth service bureau, report on needs of families in our communities, and identify a more structured and equitable process for calculating annual municipal contributions to the agency. These meetings resulted in increased FY22 contributions from each municipality and commitment from each Selectperson to continue to move toward a per capita allocation model in future fiscal years. This municipal support- *bolstered by the final year of Federal Drug-Free Communities Grant Funding*- allows TTYSB to contribute to long-term recovery at the local level. Our FY22 priorities are aligned with goals of the State's ARPA Plan.

CT ARPA Plan + Role of Youth Services

• **Supporting Early Childhood and Family Needs**

TTYSB leads the local Early Childhood Council (ECC) to address the unique needs of young children and their families. ECC members include private preschool directors, Region 4 collaborative preschool staff, Region 4 Administrators, parents and professionals. In September, TTYSB hired an Early Childhood Council Coordinator to spearhead this work:

1. Host playgroups to increase socialization and improve social-emotional development (Top Priority identified in Preschool Director Survey, March 2021)
2. Offer Parent Nights/Support Groups to address challenges and support healthy social-emotional development (Top Priority identified in Preschool Director Survey, March 2021)
3. Provide ASQ Developmental Screenings of young children + increase participation in Region 4 Child Find Screenings of local three-year-old's
4. Advocate for affordable, inclusive childcare in Region 4 (New Priority emerged at ECC Meeting, September 2021)
5. Manage Preschool Scholarship Fund to improve equity and access to preschool

TTYSB has secured private grants in FY22 to cover salary and implement these projects.

• **Addressing Mental Health Impacts**

The network of local human services providers (including social services and school counselors) identified Mental Health Services as a top need presented by households and critical area of focus for long-term recovery (Provider Survey, May 2020). Not surprisingly, TTYSB has experienced a significant increase in demand for its mental health services from 2020-2021.

TTYSB's full-time Clinical Director has maintained a full caseload for the past year, meeting with clients from elementary-aged to college-aged (and parents) regularly in-person or via telehealth. Nearly all private providers along the shoreline are also full or offering very limited appointment openings. There is an urgent need for additional clinical services for children, adolescents, and families.

➤ **Additional Clinician Needed**

To meet the growing need for mental health services, TTYSB must secure an additional part-time clinician (social worker or marriage and family therapist). In Year 1 (FY22) an additional investment of \$15,000 ARPA Funds could add 1 per diem Master's Level clinician (up to 10 hours/week). Health insurance reimbursement would sustain the new position in future years.

➤ **School-based Mental Health Services**

As students reintegrate back into school this fall, the Region 4 schools are already reporting increased challenges with behavior, engagement, attendance, and anxiety. School administrators and counselors are turning to TTYSB to develop collaborative approaches to address students' needs, identify root causes of behavior and strengthen stress responses. TTYSB will pilot limited in-school counseling hours at Valley Regional High School in October, providing a convenient way for students to access the mental health supports they need during the school day.

➤ **School-based Support Groups, Leadership Training + Prevention Education**

TTYSB's 10-year Federal Drug Free Communities Grant was set to expire September 30, 2021. The agency received a no-cost extension to meet the objectives it set forth in its Year 10 Action Plan that were interrupted by COVID-19. The extension covers the salary of TWO key staff positions at TTYSB in FY22:

○ **Youth + Community Engagement Program Director: \$30,000**

Responsibilities: Implement school-based youth programs at elementary and middle schools. Facilitate evidence-based support groups after school (elementary) and during the school day (middle school). Nurture collaboration with school partners, parents and volunteers. Implement community outreach plan which includes consistent communication, public engagement, and education.

○ **Prevention + Wellness Program Director: \$45,500**

Responsibilities: Manage the Tri-Town Wellness Coalition (including an active youth coalition) and implement school-based and community-wide projects related to mental health promotion and the prevention of adolescent substance use, suicide and cyberbullying or mean-spirited behavior. Provide Juvenile Review Board (court diversion) Case Management and Vaping Intervention Program at Valley and John Winthrop.

In Years 2 (FY23) and 3 (FY24) an investment of \$75,500 ARPA Funds/year will sustain these two critical positions at TTYSB and allow youth support groups, teen leadership training and schoolwide prevention education (Grades 6-12) to continue, uninterrupted.

- **Addressing Criminal Justice Impacts**

As stated above, TTYSB's Prevention + Wellness Program Director provides on-going Case Management for all youth referrals from schools, police or parents regarding behavioral/disciplinary issues, conflict resolution or substance use. TTYSB's Juvenile Review Board provides a restorative approach to resolving conflict that includes comprehensive assessment of underlying needs, participation in restorative circle with family and community members impacted by behavior and opportunities for youth to make amends while also connecting to additional supports that may be needed.

TTYSB and Resident State Troopers are encouraging Region 4 Administrators to make direct school referrals for disciplinary cases, because the JRB process provides a deeper level of student accountability than traditional detention or suspension alone can achieve. At a time of increased behavioral challenges, nuisance TikTok challenges that promote vandalism and disregard for school rules and underlying stressors related to re-acclimation to the structured school environment, increased collaboration with TTYSB is necessary. Local police are fully supportive of the JRB process and are seeking to minimize school-based arrests and citations. While police are occasionally utilized to assist with de-escalation at schools, their involvement is not required to address low-level crimes, i.e., frustrating, but developmentally appropriate adolescent behavior.

- **Modernize and ease the delivery of human services**

As soon as the COVID-19 pandemic began impacting our region, TTYSB worked alongside the municipalities to increase support and extend the reach of the town social services departments. Specifically, TTYSB secured \$1,500 for each town's Community Fund to provide direct support to families (Community Foundation of Middlesex County COVID Response Grant, April 2020). Executive Director, Allison Abramson met regularly with Deep River's task force throughout the pandemic and was appointed to a committee of the Chester Long-Term Recovery Task Force. Allison continues to serve on the renamed Chester Community Partnership, which utilizes a volunteer-driven mutual aid model to support residents who need to supplement their household budgets to afford basic necessities as identified by the United Way ALICE research: food, housing/utilities, transportation, health/mental health, childcare, and technology.

Outreach to working (and unemployed) families in Chester, Deep River and Essex is a critical component of an equitable long-term recovery plan. The economic impacts of COVID disproportionately affect working families and households that are concurrently experiencing mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, suicidality and/or substance use. It is imperative that we work across sectors to reach more families, identify needs and connect households to the appropriate local supports and government-funded emergency assistance.

Based on our experiences and observations over the past 19 months, TTYSB puts forth these recommendations to Chester, Deep River and Essex:

- Improve intake and referral across sectors (namely TTYSB, Schools and the Town Social Services). TTYSB will develop a more comprehensive intake form that can be shared and utilized among all agencies (TTYSB, School and Social Services) to identify household needs and provide a more detailed preliminary assessment when referring cases to each other.
- Social Services must provide comprehensive Case Management for all clients. Case Management should include a detailed needs assessment, action plan and periodic follow up with each active client. Improved follow up communication with referring agency will ensure all stakeholders are updated on status of open cases.
- Utilize an up-to-date Resource Directory to determine available programs and services and stay current with rapidly changing eligibility criteria for new federally-funded supports in response to COVID. Routinely invite representatives from state, regional and local programs to provide information sessions (or Social Service Help Days) for residents of Chester, Deep River and Essex. e.g., Unite CT mobile van, CT Food Pantry’s Mobile Pantry, Dental or Eye Exams, etc.
- Mobilize volunteers to extend hours of municipal food pantry and/or explore the establishment of a new Shoreline Soup Kitchens + Pantries Food Pantry in Chester, Deep River or Essex. Incorporate Needs Assessment and Case Management into food distribution programs. Most likely, food insecurity in the household is an indicator of additional unmet basic needs at home.

It should be noted that the work of the Chester Community Partnership can be replicated in Deep River or Essex, and TTYSB is ready to provide an overview of the committee’s accomplishments to stakeholders from the other towns. Additionally, TTYSB can provide a more comprehensive examination of the needs in our towns- and the gaps in service- at your request.

At this time, TTYSB asks each municipality to consider investing a portion of its ARPA funds to expand clinical services and sustain critical youth support groups and mental health promotion efforts. A breakdown of these proposed expenses follows:

TTYSB Proposed Expenses	ARPA Year 1 (FY22)	ARPA Year 2 (FY23)	ARPA Year 3 (FY24)
PT Clinician (new)	\$15,000	\$0	\$0
Youth Engagement Program Director	\$0	\$30,000	\$30,000
Prevention + Wellness Program Director	\$0	\$45,500	\$45,500
Total Request	\$15,000	\$75,500	\$75,500
Per Capita Breakdown of Request:			
Chester (27%)	\$4,050	\$20,385	\$20,385
Deep River (29%)	\$4,350	\$21,895	\$21,895
Essex (44%)	\$6,600	\$33,220	\$33,220

Thank you for your consideration. TTYSB looks forward to on-going dialogue about the ways in which our agency can continue to support our communities’ long-term recovery from a COVID-19 pandemic.

First Selectman

From: Allison Abramson <allison@ttypsb.org>
Sent: Monday, October 18, 2021 3:38 PM
To: First Selectman; Norm Needleman; Angus McDonald
Subject: ARPA Funding Request
Attachments: ARPA Request from TTYSB 10.18.21.pdf

Importance: High

Flag Status: Flagged

Hi Lauren, Norm and Angus,

I have not been privy to conversations about how each of the towns intends to use its ARPA funding, but I would like to put forth the attached proposal for your consideration. As you all know, TTYSB has been working hard to respond to increased challenges and household stressors that impact the health and well-being of children in our community.

Generous infusions of Federal funding will be improving many of the state agencies that support children and vulnerable families in Connecticut, but the allocations do not fully align with the needs that have emerged at the local level or the costs associated with addressing those needs within local households. When a crisis unfolds, there is no substitute for the consistent presence of trained professionals in one's own community who understand a family's needs and can help them navigate a confusing network of supports, programs and services that will ultimately help them get back on track.

It has been Tri-Town's privilege to serve alongside our municipal partners and schools to do just that throughout COVID-19. But, as a significant portion of our funding will expire in one year, I ask you to please consider investing a portion of the ARPA funds to support our growth and sustain our contributions to the local long-term recovery efforts.

Thank you so much,

Allison

Allison Abramson, M.P.A. (she/her/hers)

Executive Director

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