



Ojai Women's Fund 2024 Grant Nominees

- Boys & Girls Club of Greater Ventura, Inc.
- Lake Casitas Rowing Association
- Interface Children and Family Services
- Livingston Memorial Visiting Nurse Association
- Mesa
- OjaiCARES
- Ojai Raptor Center
- Ojai Valley Land Conservancy
- Poco Farm
- The ARC of Ventura County
- The C.R.E.W.
- Thrive Wellness Workshop

Boys and Girls Club of Greater Ventura, Inc.

Program: Oak View Teen Center

Request: \$15,000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Boys & Girls Club of Greater Ventura is requesting \$15,000 for its *Oak View Teen Center*, which is open year-round and provides daily, free mentor-driven programs for the area's teens, who are primarily from single-parent and/or lower-income earning families. A blend of holistic programs is offered to develop academic success, good character, leadership, health and well-being, and skills/competency development to prepare for life after high school graduation, as well as respond to emerging needs.

COMMUNITY NEED

The Teen Center is the only local gathering place of its kind. Living in a remote location like Oak View and Ojai, often in families working just enough to cover basic living costs, can be challenging for teens who are developing their sense of identity and purpose. It can be daunting for teens to envision much beyond their own surroundings, and lack of transportation or opportunities to venture beyond one's neighborhood can stifle progress. This is the time when teens may disengage and drop out, and mental health issues arise. Families also have unique challenges; the Teen Center connects parents/guardians with community resources and community partners.

POPULATION SERVED

Teens 11-18 years of age (50% male, 50% female) from throughout the Ojai Valley – half from Oak View, and half from other parts of the Ojai Valley. The Oak View Teen Center serves 52% Hispanic teens, 10% other families of color, 38% Caucasian. 96% of our membership come from low-to-medium income (primarily low income) households, including teens from families speaking limited or no English. Currently, 75 teens are registered, with 60 attending on a regular/daily basis (which is appropriate for the size of the location). The goal is to register and serve 100 teens.

PROGRAM GOALS & EVALUATION

Goals: 1) Register and serve 100 teens, 2) Provide strong programs - Education and Career; Character and Leadership; Healthy Lifestyles: Arts; Sports and Recreation; and Special Initiatives – and active participation, 3) Membership and Program Expansions - increase high school memberships; add special arts programming; increase the number of field trips; implement pilot TransfrVR program (virtual reality career exploration program) Implementation: 1) Increase recruitment opportunities, 2) Work with an artist volunteer on advanced art skills, 3) Leverage partnerships to increase field trips for fun and career exploration, 4) Seeking \$25,000 grant to support TransfrVR program. Evaluation: 1) programs will be evaluated through Boys & Girls Clubs of America's National Youth Outcomes Initiative (NYOI), which is a candid self-survey of Club members to gauge participation in programs, goals, behaviors, Club safety, staffing, and more. Key measurements include % free of gangs, improvements in self-confidence, improvements in family relations, increased understanding of course studies, participation in learning opportunities, & participation in at least 5 Club programs on a regular basis.

KEY STAFF AND COLLABORATION

Patti Birmingham, CEO, has over 35 years of Club experience in program and staff development, serving previously as the Club's Director of Operations prior to her appointment as CEO ten years ago. Simon Salem, Director of Operations, has 1 year of tenure. He has a background in childcare and master's degrees in child development and psychology. Vince Serrano, Oak View Teen Center Branch Director, has worked for the Club for 10 years, serving as a program staff member, teen coordinator, and now Branch Director.

EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS

The Oak View Teen Center's total budget is \$264,578. The grant request to Ojai Women's Fund of \$15,000 is to pay the direct salaries of Teen Center staff (\$10,000) and Teen Center program supplies (\$5,000).

Interface Children & Family Services

Program: 211 Supports Ojai Valley

Request: \$15,000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Interface 211 proposes to provide 300 Ojai Valley (OV) low-income, senior, and disabled residents with the best service possible to meet immediate and ongoing requests for health and human service needs, including those related to shelter, mental health, health care, food, rent and utilities, legal aid, disaster/emergency services, and transportation. As a critical resource for OV callers, highly trained 211 Contact Specialists will skillfully assess the caller's situation and provide the most appropriate mental health and substance abuse referrals for 150 OV homeless and at-risk of homelessness callers will be offered the proper referrals to obtain emergency or transitional housing, case management and supportive care and options for rent and utility assistance.

COMMUNITY NEED

Economic hardship is a reality for many within the Ojai Valley - elderly on fixed incomes, single parent households, and agriculture workers. These residents struggle to afford basic living expenses, including housing, food and transportation. In 2023, the largest categories of need among OV 211 callers were Housing 38.17%, Individual/Family Supports 12.47%, Mental Health/Substance Abuse 9.89%, and Food/Meals 8.48%. Housing needs run the gamut from emergency/transitional housing to rental payment/deposit assistance. Access to mental health services can be limited for those without insurance or residing in remote areas. Food insecurity affects low-income families, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Lack of reliable transportation compounds the problem. In 2023, Interface facilitated 141 deliveries of food and 429 deliveries of pet food to homebound senior clients of Help of Ojai.

POPULATION SERVED

The demographic profile of the OV residents facing these challenges have characteristics common to the majority of Ventura County 211 callers - female (85%), in the 18-54 age group (56%), and low-income (69%). 28.6% are aged 62+, with 26.9% dependent on disability income. 28.8% are employed, 28.5% have no income, 10.4% are retired, 3.0% receive public assistance, 1.2% are unemployed. 50% are Caucasian, 34.7% Hispanic/Latino, 11.2% Multi-ethnic, less than 2% each African-American, Asian, Native American, Native Hawaiian /Pacific Islander.

PROGRAM GOALS & EVALUATION

Goals: Interface 211 is a 365/day-24/7 critical resource for OV callers searching for assistance with multiple, often chronic, health and human service needs, including those related to shelter, mental health, health care, food, rent and utilities, legal aid, disaster/emergency services, and transportation. Their goal is to provide 300 OV vulnerable residents with the best service possible to meet their immediate and ongoing requests for assistance.

Implementation is immediate, as Interface is an existing program that currently provides assistance to OV residents. Interface hires bilingual staff, trains staff in cultural competency, offers translator services, and partners with critical cultural providers, linking clients to other support services as needed. **Evaluation:** Interface 211 has a robust data collection and evaluation process, which includes a Contact Center data dashboard. The dashboard is updated monthly with multiple data points and can report on a wide range of metrics. Caller satisfaction is made through follow-up calls to evaluate 1) the caller's current circumstances; 2) determine if the caller needs additional assistance; 3) gather feedback on the previous interaction thereby ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the caller's needs and enhancing quality of service.

KEY STAFF AND COLLABORATION

Accredited by Inform USA, sole source for standards & program accreditation & practitioner certification.
Director: Lohanna Almanza, a 10-year veteran of Interface. Operations Manager: Gerardo Gonzalez.

EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS

Funding will support the purchase of HMIS licenses from Ventura County, additional training of 211 Contact Specialists to improve crisis response and real-time care coordination, and help sustain UWW-DoorDash food distribution program of 610 deliveries of food/meals/pet food to Ojai residents.

Lake Casitas Rowing Association

Program: Summer Camps

Request: \$15,000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lake Casitas Rowing Association (LCRA) is requesting \$15,000 to support its *free summer youth camps*, providing Ojai and Ventura youth with access to the unique sport of rowing. High living costs and economic disparities in the region prevent many families from affording extracurricular activities. LCRA's free camps eliminate this financial barrier, enabling over 200 children each summer to experience the benefits of rowing, including physical fitness, stress reduction, teamwork, and leadership development. Unlike more traditional sports like football or soccer, rowing is a "late entry" sport; youth can begin training in middle or high school and be ready to join collegiate teams. By introducing rowing as a viable sport, LCRA opens pathways to collegiate rowing programs and associated scholarships.

COMMUNITY NEED

High living costs present a significant hurdle for Ventura County families, which may limit access to extracurricular activities. Recognizing that rowing is an expensive sport and that the cost to participate poses a considerable barrier, LCRA offers free summer camps for youth in the Ojai Valley and Ventura County. By introducing rowing without any cost, LCRA ensures that economic disadvantage does not prevent participation. Young people can experience rowing as a lifelong sport that promotes a healthy lifestyle, reduces stress, builds teamwork, and fosters long-lasting friendships.

POPULATION SERVED

About 200 students in grades 6 through 12 from Ojai and Ventura schools. During the school year, LCRA visits Nordoff High School and five Ventura Middle Schools to introduce rowing through fun challenges and offers an invitation to join one of the six free week-long summer camps. These schools have minority enrollments ranging from 41% to 73%, with Hispanic students comprising the most significant demographic. Additionally, 40% to 77% of the student population is economically disadvantaged.

PROGRAM GOALS & EVALUATION

Goals: 1) provide youth in the Ojai Valley and Ventura with the opportunity to engage in rowing, fostering physical fitness, teamwork, and personal development. **Implementation:** 1) host six free summer camps, each lasting 2.5 hours a day for five days, including athletic training and team-building activities. **Evaluation:** 1) the number of new Summer Rowing camp athletes, 2) the area where the new athlete resides, 3) the number of students from low-income neighborhoods, 4) the number of athletes who attend the free Summer Rowing Camps and then join one of the school-year teams using financial aid to do so. (A robust financial aid program funds 25% of the school-year youth membership costs.)

KEY STAFF AND COLLABORATION

Wendy Gillett, Executive Director, oversees all outreach, financial aid, and administrative functions, coordinates the Summer Rowing Camp, and engages with middle and high schools and the community. Eric Gillett, former rower for the US National Rowing Team and Association Program Coordinator, oversees all program activities, including hiring and supervising all coaching staff.

EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS

The LCRA's Summer Camp budget is \$17,502. The grant request to Ojai Women's Fund of \$15,000 is for the salaries of summer camp staff.

Livingston Memorial Visiting Nurse Association

Program: Ojai Livingston Cares

Request: \$10,000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Livingston Cares program in Ojai Valley provides essential services including home health care, caregiver support, and hospice services to all residents, irrespective of financial means. Access to such quality care enhances patients' prospects for full recovery from illness, injury, or surgery. Moreover, it diminishes the likelihood of hospital readmissions, thus easing pressure on the Ojai Valley healthcare system. Additionally, it ensures comfort for the hospice patients and their families. Ensuring equitable access to compassionate, top-tier care is critical for the entire Ojai Valley community.

COMMUNITY NEED:

The Livingston Cares program in Ojai supports residents of the Ojai Valley who lack access to home health care, caregiver support, and hospice services. They prioritize providing accessible care for all Ventura County residents, irrespective of their financial means, and deliver care directly in the comfort of their homes. In 2023, Livingston Cares made a meaningful impact by serving 270 individuals in the Ojai Valley. Of these patients, 46 received subsidized care of nearly \$67,000 in support funds. In 2024, they assisted 117 individuals through April 30th, 21 of those patients under subsidized care.

POPULATION SERVED:

According to the 2023 U.S. Census, 7.4% of residents in the Ojai Valley fall below the poverty line, with 7.8% lacking health insurance among those under age 65. The individuals they assist are predominantly low-income, with many recuperating from accidents, surgeries, or managing life-altering chronic illnesses. A significant portion of our care recipients in Ojai are hospice patients, emphasizing comfort and pain management for those facing life-limiting illnesses. In 2024, they project to provide support to 300 residents of the Ojai Valley through a comprehensive range of home health, hospice, and caregiver services.

PROGRAM GOALS AND EVALUATION:

Goals: Livingston Cares is dedicated to creating a healthier Ojai Valley community by ensuring equitable access to top-tier home health care, caregiver support, and hospice services, irrespective of financial constraints. Their mission revolves around three core objectives: nurturing patient well-being through personalized care, reaching out to communities to increase patient accessibility, and empowering individuals to take charge of their health journey. **Evaluation:** The program's effectiveness is assessed through quantitative and qualitative measures, with data extracted from Electronic Health records and feedback from patients, families, and clinicians.

KEY STAFF AND COLLABORATORS:

Molly Corbett is Livingston's President/Chief Executive Officer with over 30 years of non-profit experience. She provides leadership, guiding the organization's vision and collaborating closely with the Board of Directors. Jamie O'Brien, is Vice President/Chief Clinical Officer. She has been with Livingston Memorial since 1998, serving previously as the Director of Education, Rehabilitation and Palliative Care.

EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS:

Livingston Cares program has a total budget of \$71,620. The grant request to the Ojai Women's Fund of \$10,000 supports funds needed for Ojai residents.

Mesa

Program: Transportation Support - Bike Shed

Request: \$14,160

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Mesa prevents homelessness among young adults ages 18-24. They provide transitional housing and comprehensive services for young adults in Ventura County who are experiencing homelessness with a priority for Ojai Valley residents. Their model empowers individuals to achieve academic goals, increase employment readiness, and improve overall health so they are permanently housed within 24 months and equipped to lead healthy, fulfilling lives. Due to insufficient housing and program supports in Ventura County, Mesa fills a critical gap in care by addressing the unmet needs of young adults and reducing the risk and prevalence of chronic homelessness. This grant will fund a volunteer project to build a custom shed for storing 12 bikes and to provide necessary equipment so that Mesa participants have reliable transportation to school and work.

COMMUNITY NEED:

There is a significant community need for Mesa. Homelessness increased by 25% in Ventura County in recent years. Currently, there are 300+ young adults living on the street or in shelters, and insufficient housing and services to meet their needs. **Foster Youth:** 20% become homeless the day they age out, 50% are homeless or incarcerated within 2 years of aging out. **Systemic Barriers:** 44% of young adults experiencing homelessness have been in the justice system; 20% of community college students are experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity.

POPULATION SERVED:

Mesa will house 12 young adults with options for children and partners. Ojai residents will have priority as **KEY** best practices cite the strongest outcomes for housing individuals in their home community. In addition to Mesa participants benefitting from having a bike shed and equipment to support their transportation needs, the Ojai community will benefit through the volunteer engagement and involvement of local businesses from which the materials will be purchased and bikes sourced.

PROGRAM GOALS AND EVALUATION:

Goals: (1) Build a 120 square-foot shed to store 12 bicycles (standard and electric), helmets, locks, and associated gear with electrical charging and lighting capabilities, (2) engage volunteers to build the shed so that the primary cost is materials, (3) involve Mesa participants in the build so they learn valuable job and life skills, and 4) strengthen the involvement of the community being a part of addressing homelessness. **Implementation:** The shed design and build will take two weeks and is scheduled for fourth quarter 2024. **Evaluation:** The shed is built with the assistance of the community and Mesa participants.

STAFF AND COLLABORATORS:

Mesa was founded by local Ojai residents Dan Parziale and Kyle Thompson, respectively, an experienced nonprofit professional within the homeless sector, and a successful entrepreneur. Dan is the Executive Director and is joined by four full-time staff with expertise in finance and fundraising; operations, case management; and house management.

EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS:

Building the bike shed has a total cost of \$16,160. The grant request to the Ojai Women's Fund of \$14,160 is for the building materials with the remaining \$2,000 being in-kind labor provided by volunteers and participants.

OjaiCARES

Program: Patient Navigation & Community Outreach

Request: \$10,000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OjaiCARES: **Cancer, Awareness, Resources, Education, and Support** is the community's only dedicated, comprehensive cancer support center, serving over 1,300 individuals and providing over 16,000 services since its inception, all free of charge and with no government funding. A \$10,000 grant from OWF will support OjaiCARES' most valuable services - Patient Navigation and Community Outreach - for those with cancer in the Ojai Valley. They work with other nonprofits to reach the underserved in our valley, supporting clients wherever they are across the continuum of care including assessing clients needs, providing counseling, making referrals, and teaching them how to communicate with the many health professionals they will encounter. Additional free services include integrative care complementing clients' medical plans including oncology massage, support groups, hypnotherapy, Reiki, and other cancer-related accessories and apparel.

COMMUNITY NEED

Prior to 2013, individuals dealing with cancer in the Ojai Valley had to drive to Ventura or Santa Barbara and beyond to receive support. OjaiCARES began because its founder, upon finding the support and community she had been looking for at The Breast Cancer Resource Center of Santa Barbara, realized how valuable such a support center would be for herself and others in her own community. The growth of our client base has borne this out. Increasing information and psycho-social care, while reducing miscommunication, vulnerability, and stress have been shown to improve the outcomes of an individual with a cancer diagnosis. No matter the circumstances or where one is along the path of their cancer journey, having good skills to negotiate and communicate one's needs are critical for self-advocacy.

POPULATION SERVED

In 2023, OjaiCARES provided patient navigation, outreach, and services to men and women, from the unhoused to the affluent with a cancer diagnosis. In the first five months of 2024, 47 unique individuals have been served. They also support their families and caregivers. Clients range in age from 18-90, 80% female/20% male, and have been diagnosed with all different types of cancer in various stages of progression (new diagnosis, recurrence, remission, survivorship, end-of-life) They have begun to make inroads into the Latino community through the Outreach program. Currently, they represent 8% of OjaiCARES clients compared to 20% in the greater Ojai Valley population.

PROGRAM GOALS & EVALUATION

Goals: To support our Patient Navigation and Community Outreach Services, consider the needs of our clients to match them with the right services and providers, and help guide them through the complexity of healthcare systems that they encounter. **Evaluation:** OjaiCARES uses a customized version of Salesforce, a customer relations database, to capture and track detailed information on every client interaction and service we provide. To evaluate the effectiveness of our services, we compile and analyze this information to assess which services are most utilized and what we can add or eliminate to better serve our clients.

KEY STAFF AND COLLABORATION

Executive Director and Certified Patient Navigator and Advocate: Susan Kapadia, Board Member: Tiffany Moises assists Director and oversees data management, OjaiCARES partners with Help of Ojai, collaborates with UCLA/Kaiser Promotoro Program

EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS

This grant will allow OjaiCARES to maintain our core program, patient navigation and advocacy, and add related programming.

Ojai Raptor Center

Program: General Operating Support

Request: \$15,000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ojai Raptor Center (ORC) is a wildlife rehabilitation center specializing in raptor species with a mission to provide rehabilitative care to wildlife in need, participate in scientific research to benefit wildlife conservation, and educate the public about raptors and environmental stewardship. The ORC requests \$15,000 to expand education programs for Ojai students and to replace its Freedom Flight enclosure net. A new partnership with the Ojai Youth Foundation will now enable ORC to provide science-based wildlife and environmental education after-school classes at Nordhoff. The courses will offer a hands-on, experiential approach, covering biological, engineering, environmental, and social dimensions of wildlife rehabilitation while emphasizing the interconnectedness of human and wildlife health. The Freedom Flight enclosure net replacement is an urgent need so that vital physical therapy can continue safely.

COMMUNITY NEED

Protecting wildlife is a critical need to maintain the balance of nature in the Ojai Valley and the healthy ecosystems on which all life depends. Raptors (e.g. eagles, hawks, owls, falcons) are key to healthy bionetworks as they keep the number and range of their prey in check, which impacts other species down the food chain. If raptor health declines, the population of its prey can explode which can reduce species diversity and weaken environmental balance. As noted by the growth in ORC help requests, increasing threats to raptor health in the valley include nest displacement, habitat loss, and orphaned raptors due to human activity. Other threats include illness and injury caused by higher temperatures, water shortages, glue traps, rodenticide poisoning, vehicle collisions, electrocution, gunshots, and interactions with domestic animals.

POPULATION SERVED

ORC's primary geographic service area is Southern California; however, most wildlife patients (45%) are from the Ojai Valley (OV), and most of the people served (45%) are OV residents. ORC fields thousands of calls yearly from OV residents needing help and advice about injured and orphaned wildlife. Its education programs provide environmental and wildlife education to thousands of OV residents annually. ORC serves all residents of the OV, including individuals of all ages, races, ethnicities, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

PROGRAM GOALS & EVALUATION

Goals: 1) in partnership with the Ojai Youth Foundation (OYF) and Nordhoff High School (NHS), expand education programs to include wildlife and environmental education for NHS middle and junior high students. 2) replace the net over the Freedom Flight enclosure, which provides necessary physical therapy for injured raptors and flight / hunt training for young raptors. **Implementation:** 1) 2024-2025 school year: 12 Nordhoff classes (6 in fall; 6 in spring), including an ORC site visit. 2) Net replacement will occur when sufficient funds are obtained. **Evaluation:** 1) number of programs, number of students, and feedback from the students, OYF, and NHS on value of program (delivery, content, impact). 2) completion of the net installation.

KEY STAFF AND COLLABORATION

Wildlife rehabilitation and education are highly specialized fields; the ORC team reflects this expertise. The eight staff - four hospital, two education, two administration/volunteer - hold advanced degrees directly related to their positions and bring decades of relevant experience to their work. Executive Director Kimberly Stroud founded ORC in 2000 after years of working in the wildlife sector. ORC relies on 42 regular and 43 ad hoc volunteers who transport, feed, and care for patients; perform facility and administrative support, and help with events.

EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS

ORC would use \$7,000 for the Education Program and \$8,000 for the Freedom Flight net replacement.

Ojai Valley Land Conservancy (OVLC)

Program: California Native Plant Landscaper Certification Program Request: \$15,000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Habitat restoration with native plants fosters biodiversity that can enhance natural resilience to extreme climate events, but restoration mustn't be limited to isolated nature preserves. OVLC's Rewild Ojai initiative empowers landowners to restore their yards for climate resilience. However, the lack of professional knowledge about landscaping with native plants has presented an obstacle to this movement. OVLC will offer 3 California Native Plant Landscaper Certificate Program courses in 2025. Each course will enroll 30 landscapers for a total of 90 directly served. Courses will be taught in Spanish and English providing local landscapers with capacity-building knowledge and professional development resources. The habitat connectivity created by native plant yards and gardens across the valley will enhance climate resilience for all residents.

COMMUNITY NEED:

While climate change is a global issue, its impacts are felt locally, and create an urgent need for local strategies. Habitat restoration supports ecosystem functions and enhances a natural community's adaptation and resilience. OVLC has done extensive work restoring native oak woodland and riparian habitats, however, we must expand our efforts to enhance habitat and build connectivity between protected lands to support biodiversity in the Ojai Valley. OVLC has launched the Rewild Ojai initiative to empower landowners to restore their lands for climate resilience. However, the lack of professional knowledge about native plant identification, installation, and maintenance has presented an obstacle for landowners. In March 2024 OVLC hired the Thomas Payne Foundation (TPF) to offer their California Native Plant Landscaper Certificate Program (CNPLCP) locally. The course had 32 participants receiving certifications.

POPULATION SERVED:

OVLC will offer three CNPLCP courses in 2025. One course is offered in English, the second is taught in Spanish, and the third course is determined by the language preference of those on the waitlist. The efforts made by each landscaper and client to remove invasive species, plant native plants, and care for the newly rewilded habitats will benefit the population of the entire Ojai Valley.

PROGRAM GOALS AND EVALUATION:

Goals: To strengthen climate resilience in the Ojai Valley through the biodiversity and habitat connectivity created when residents and professionals build their capacity in native plant habitat installation and care.

Evaluation: Success will be measured by the number of participants receiving certificates of completion, and the feedback collected from post-course surveys.

KEY STAFF AND COLLABORATORS:

The CNPLCP program is led by Tania Parker, Deputy Director who will oversee the project budget and timeline. Claire Woolson, Rewild Ojai & Volunteer Coordinator, coordinates CNPLCP course logistics, advertising, conducting outreach, and supporting course registrants. Sophie McLean, OVLC's Native Plant Specialist, will attend the CNPLCP in-person classes and assist with facilitation.

EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS:

With a \$15,000 Ojai Women's Fund grant, OVLC will provide 3 CNPLCP courses in 2025. The landscaper attendees, and their clients, will advance the valley-wide movement to build habitat connectivity and enhance biodiversity for local climate resilience.

Poco Farm

Program: General Operating Support

Request - \$15,000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Poco Farm is a regenerative learning farm with a purpose to cultivate in our community members and ourselves the compassion, connection, and skill sets needed to thrive on our changing planet. It requests \$15,000 to expand free after-school farm education for Ojai students and to increase the organic food provision for local Ojai nutrition assistance programs.

COMMUNITY NEED

Poco Farm addresses two critical needs for children in the Ojai Valley: mental health and food insecurity. The 2023 Surgeon General's report identifies loneliness and isolation as major threats to wellbeing, linking them to the growing mental health crisis. A Poco Farm survey in 2023 revealed that 200 Ojai middle and high school students identified depression, anxiety, and sleep issues as the top three most urgent health concerns for themselves, their peers, and their families. Poco Farm's program fulfills all six of the Surgeon General's Pillars to Advance Social Connection to halt and heal this "epidemic of loneliness." Highlighting the significant issue of hunger among OUSD students, 41% qualified for free/reduced meals. Poco Farm offers free organic produce to school children and community members facing food insecurity. It is the only Ojai program that offers free on-farm programs with free transportation that simultaneously provides 100% screen-free time in nature; exposure and free access to new fresh foods that students seed, tend, and harvest; farm animal connection; team/community building; and child-led, social/emotional focused, long form, inquiry-based learning.

POPULATION SERVED

Poco Farm serves all Ojai Valley schools with a focus on OUSD's 2,200+ students. These students' racial/ethnic representation is 40% Latinx/Hispanic, 54% White and 6% Other; and 41% receive free/reduced meals. Serving Pre-K through adults, Poco Farm offers free programs to all Ojai children, donation-based workshops for adults, and open farm days for families.

PROGRAM GOALS & EVALUATION

Goals: 1) increase OUSD K-12 class visits 43% (140 to 200) resulting in 8,000 student hours on the farm. 2) increase organic food production 20% (10,000 to 12,000 lbs.), continuing to donate all produce to HELP of Ojai, OUSD Nutrition Services, and local nutrition assistance programs. **Implementation:** 1) provide after-school programs for OUSD students and increase the number of field trips. Field trips begin in September, and the schedule for this popular offering is filling up fast. 2) increase food production with additional farmer / volunteer hours and improved greenhouse efficiency, both of which are already underway.

Evaluation: 1) number of visits, students, and hours on the farm, and feedback from the students and teachers regarding program value (delivery, content, impact). 2) number of pounds of food provided to OUSD and nutrition assistance program locations.

KEY STAFF AND COLLABORATION

Grace Bueti Malloy founded Poco Farm in 2014. She has 15+ years of teaching experience and local leadership as founding Board Member of Ojai's Thursday farmers' market and a member of the Ojai Valley Municipal Advisory Council. Dr. Darrell Forthe joined Poco Farm recently bringing 20+ years' experience teaching, including all grade levels. OUSD partners with Poco to provide free transportation for all its students (who aren't within walking distance) to the farm. Food for Thought sponsors all the OUSD 5th grade visits, as well as Nordhoff's science students' year-end feast at the farm. Forty+ volunteers help with the farm programs.

EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS

Poco Farm would use \$15,000 to pay for staff salaries to expand its education and food programs.

The Arc of Ventura County

Program: Ojai Enrichment Center

Request: \$15,000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Arc of Ventura County (The Arc) is dedicated to improving the quality of life for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The Arc is seeking a \$15,000 grant for General Operating Support to benefit the Ojai Enrichment Center (OEC), a Community Integration Adult Day Program, located in Ojai. The OEC supports 55 adults with IDD through various quality programs and services to achieve their goals of independence, inclusion, and participation in their community. The OEC is a vital resource to the residents and community of the Ojai Valley.

COMMUNITY NEED:

The OEC has been a cornerstone of the Ojai community for over 27 years. As the only adult day program available to individuals with IDD, their families and residential care providers in the Ojai Valley, the OEC and its team of 18 dedicated employees serve a vital need in the community. There is a waitlist of 9 individuals who would love to join the program but are unable due to a lack of staff.

POPULATION SERVED:

The 55 OEC participants are supported by 17 Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). The DSPs are the heart and soul of the OEC, they play a critical role in delivering personalized care, facilitating enriching activities, and fostering a supportive environment for the participants. The OEC is a welcoming place for participants to establish friendships, express creativity, and further independence. It also serves as a valuable community resource, by having strong partnerships with community organizations, including the Ojai Valley Amateur Radio Club, the American Red Cross, and the Master Gardeners of Ventura County.

PROGRAM GOALS AND EVALUATION:

Goals: The goal of the Ojai Enrichment Center is to support and empower people with IDD to live their best lives and this is achieved with the support of our dedicated employees. The program focuses on promoting independence, socialization, and community engagement. An Individual Program Plan identifies the individual's strengths, capabilities, preferences, lifestyle, and cultural background. The program utilizes this information to match the person served to a staff member with the appropriate skills, personal characteristics, and similar interests. **Evaluation:** The program's Case Manager documents and measures goals and objectives established for everyone served that are reviewed at least annually with the participant and his/her circle of support. The Arc is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).

KEY STAFF AND COLLABORATORS:

Amber Lundeen, program manager of the OEC for 12 years, has been employed at The Arc of Ventura County for over 20 years. She is responsible for leading a team that includes a Case Manager, Supervisor, and 15 DSPs dedicated to empowering the lives of individuals served.

EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS:

General Operating Support of \$15,000 to increase the hourly wage of the 17 DSPs by \$0.50 per hour. The current State of California wage rate reimbursement to the OEC is based on a 2018 wage scale and is insufficient to recruit and retain quality staff.

The C.R.E.W.

Program: Garden Projects

Request: \$10,000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Green Valley Project Youth Council aims to establish educational native plant gardens at Nordhoff Junior High and High School and Ojai Valley School, addressing the crucial need for green spaces in schools. These gardens serve as therapeutic environments and educational tools, promoting biodiversity, environmental stewardship, and student well-being. Through hands-on involvement in garden design and installation, students develop leadership skills, environmental awareness, and a deeper connection to nature. The program fosters collaboration between schools, students, and community partners, creating lasting positive impacts on participants' academic performance, mental health, and overall community engagement.

COMMUNITY NEED

Green spaces in schools play a pivotal role in addressing a wide range of student needs - mental and physical health, academic performance, social development, and environmental awareness. The Green Valley Project fosters environmental stewards and deepens students' connection to nature and equips teachers with innovative teaching tools, offering a refreshing break from traditional classroom settings.

POPULATION SERVED

At Nordhoff Junior High and High School, the gardens will impact 1,319 students (46% minorities and 38% disadvantaged), 62 faculty members. At OVS Upper campus, 116 students, including 10 international students and 28 faculty members. The Youth Council Program will involve 30 students in the design and installation of the garden - 50% female, 90% - 13-17 years old, 10% - 18-25 years old, 43% people of color, 33% LGBTQ, and 22% with household income under \$50,000.

PROGRAM GOALS & EVALUATION

We will design and install educational native plant gardens at Nordhoff Junior High and High School and the upper campus of Ojai Valley School. Spring 2024 - students design Nordhoff Pollinator Pathway - create garden concept, learn site specifics, choose plant palette, design layout, create realistic photo rendering, present proposal to Nordhoff faculty. Fall 2024 - update design based on faculty feedback, learn the skills needed to lead community planting events, host two volunteer planting events and one irrigation event. Film a storytelling video to share the process with the wider community. Spring 2025 - new Youth Council begins the above process for the Ojai Valley School educational garden.

Program goals will be measured with pre and post program surveys assessing participant's environmental leadership on a 1-5 scale, skills learned and retention rates. Feedback will be used for improving and developing future programs.

KEY STAFF AND COLLABORATION

Tara Fay: Green Valley Project Program Director, the C.R.E.W., Aja Bulla Richards: Creative Director, Watershed Progressive, David Rogers: Director of Operations, Ojai Unified School District, Annelisa Cohen: Environmental Science Teacher, Nordhoff High, Miles Munding-Becker: Ojai Valley School Marine Science Teacher/AP Environmental Science Teacher & Fields Coordinator

EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS

The requested funds will be used to cover professional design mentoring from Watershed Progressive, purchasing native plants, garden materials, printing and installation of educational signs, and organizing community events.

THRIVE Wellness Workshop

Program: General Operating Support

Request: \$15,000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thrive Wellness Workshop offers therapeutic outdoor experiences to address Ojai's need for 1) individual wellness support, 2) deeper interpersonal connections, and 3) meaningful connection to nature. Throughout the year, our program delivers consistent hiking workshops and camping retreats that focus on personal wellness, self-reflection, group discussion, and outdoor education so participants can feel better, feel more connected with others and spend more time in nature.

COMMUNITY NEED

Thrive Wellness Workshop addresses the need in the Ojai Valley for: 1) approachable mental health support that promotes individual wellness, 2) coming together as individuals for interpersonal connections, and 3) meaningful connection with nature. Modern day stressors pose a unique challenge for each member of our community. We strive to provide an outlet and healing opportunity for people to develop tools for coping and feel less alone in their experience as well as supplemental support of a trained therapist, while not being in a clinical form of therapy.

POPULATION SERVED

Thrive is projected to conduct 34 workshops, retreats, and events in 2025 serving 120-180 community members around the Ojai Valley. We host offerings for youth and adults. 1) all races, ethnicities and cultures. Content provided in English and Spanish and collaboration with diverse community groups. 2) all economic profiles. We keep programs affordable, offer scholarships, and no one is turned away due to inability to pay. 3) all genders. Programs are often designated for certain ages and genders, however, we welcome non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals to groups that suit them. 4) varying abilities. Our workshops can accommodate individuals of varying abilities, any level of mental health need, and all levels of outdoor experience.

PROGRAM GOALS

Our goal is to deliver strong impactful nature experiences by launching offerings that meet the needs of our community and inspire inner healing for our participants. The following events are planned for 2025. 12 monthly Women's Circles, 12 Peaks and Pints, 4 Therapist Hikes, 2 Volunteer Events, 2 Adult Hiking Workshops, 2 Youth Hiking Workshops, and 2 Youth Backpacking Trips.

EVALUATION

Outcomes will be measured by surveying participant's self-assessment of 1) connection to their peers/community, 2) connection and enjoyment of nature and 3) experience with their emotional safety/individual wellness. This feedback will then be organized in a chart so we can analyze outcomes and adjust offerings throughout the year to reach our goals.

KEY STAFF AND COLLABORATION

Creator and Director: Tessa Magill, licensed marriage and family therapist, Brittany Holden - lead workshop facilitator and backpacking specialist, marriage and family therapist associate for OUSD, Cody Norris - lead workshop facilitator and feedback analyst, licensed marriage and family therapist in Ventura, Natalie Pagnusat - Marketing Intern, Sarah Fraza and Emily Redfiels - co-facilitators. Collaborates with Ojai Valley Youth Foundation.

EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS

\$1500 - Safety (Land Use Permits, CPR, First Aid, outdoor safety & outdoor education trainings)
\$2000 - Professional Fees (training, marketing admin, website, marketing tools, printing flyers, bookkeeping, 5% to fiscal sponsor, community outreach coordinator) \$2500 - Supplies (water, food, safety supplies, hiking/backpacking gear, etc). \$4000 - Facilitator Stipends, Admin/Director Stipend - \$3000.