

GATES PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Rev. Laura Bachmann
Pastor, Head of Staff

Collaborative Ministry Grant Report Presbytery of Genesee Valley Gates Presbyterian Church and YWCA of Rochester

March 15, 2022

Grant awarded: \$500

From the GPC perspective

What were you hoping to accomplish?

As part of GPC's Collaborate Ministry Grant with the YWCA, we planned to hold a summer carnival for the families currently housed at the YW and also engage in monthly family gatherings to be held at the YW and attended by families from both groups. The larger purpose for this work is to continue building a partnership that will help sustain the work we intend to do in the future once GPC's partnership with Pathstone has been funded and the Churchview Commons affordable housing units are completed. The YWCA will be providing the supportive housing services for this project which will include units specifically for families transitioning out of the YWCA housing to permanent living situations.

Who was touched by your project or program?

About a dozen GPC volunteers gathered to plan and run the carnival as a gift to the YWCA community. Not only did families from the YW attend the event, but we also welcomed a number of neighborhood families who walked past the venue and asked if they could join us. Various booths offered pizza and drinks, face painting, free books and stickers, and various games. We were also fortunate to borrow an inflatable bounce course from a local YMCA and the dunk tank from First Presbyterian Church of Pittsford – both of which were enjoyed by all.

How did this grant energize or transform your congregation or community?

The carnival itself offered a welcome opportunity for our two communities to gather in person. GPC welcomed one of its youth who shared her artistic skills at the face painting booth, while another managed the dunk tank. Meanwhile, the rest of the team welcomed folks to the additional stations and spent time talking with those who came out. For a few GPC'ers this was the first chance they had to be in person with others in the community as they had joined the church during the pandemic. Relationships were strengthened in the shared work and play, much laughter and joy echoed in the park and even the sudden thunderstorm that brought our event to an early close did not dampen the spirits of those who participated.

As we welcomed neighbors to the party, we encountered happy surprise that such a thing would be happening and a willingness to embrace the joy of just being together unexpectedly – something we all seem to value so much more after months of forced separation. There is still much work to do but this was a solid first step in growing our work together.

What did you learn from this project and what obstacles did you experience?

Although we were able to hold the carnival as planned, the increase in COVID cases made the family gatherings planned for the fall impossible and we had to settle for providing the YW with family blessing bags at Halloween and Christmas. Our project was also impacted by the departure of key staff members from both the YW and GPC. These staff members had done the lion's share of the work on the partnership for this project and both were gone by the end of September. This has slowed our partnership down as we have had to build new relationships and shift the work around to remaining staff members.

During the course of the project, we were reminded how hard this work can be given the unstable circumstances experienced by the single moms in this program. We encountered people in crisis during the carnival as well as experiencing a lower attendance than we had hoped to draw in. People at GPC remained wary about being in large gatherings and some of the moms involved in the program at the YW chose not to attend the event.

What are your next steps?

We continue to work on ways to be in partnership together leading up to the opening of the building in Gates. Although the pandemic continues to prevent most in person work together, we continue to meet and brainstorm future collaborations. In some ways, we are in a holding pattern until the building opens, at which point we will be able to connect to the specific families who will move into that space and with whom we can then begin to build some longer-term community. In the meantime, GPC continues to provide furniture, clothing and other items as needed for the women in the YW program and we hope to run our carnival again this summer.

Please share a story of where you saw God in this project.

I saw the Holy Spirit's fingerprints all over this event, from the generosity of GPC's various neighbors who loaned us items for the event (particularly the bounce course and the dunk tank), to the outpouring of resources for the games tables and the joyful way people from both communities joined in to participate in the day. I particularly witnessed the radical hospitality we all hope we embody in the faces of one family who just happened by and asked, clearly without any hope that the answer would be yes, whether they could join in. When we said, "of course, come on in!" and offered them food and books and games, they responded by joining in the fellowship and conversation. It was a moment when our diverse backgrounds and life experiences did not matter – we were just people talking to one another and sharing the simple joys of the day – something to appreciate in a time when we are so divided in so many ways.

From the YWCA perspective

YWCA values the contributions and support of our community and building a strong partnership with Gates Presbyterian has brought such joy and value to our participants. Our children and families desperately needed an escape from the isolation and hardships caused by the impacts of the Covid Pandemic. In partnership with YWCA, volunteers from Gates Presbyterian planned and executed a fun and engaging carnival that included interactive games, activities, food and fellowship. It helped bring exposure to YWCA's mission that translated into additional in-kind support. The friendships this created helped our children and women feel like they

were cared for. It gave kids a break from isolation and boredom, which greatly improved their mental health. Today, we are still receiving support through donations and outreach to our team.

This relationship helps establish a strong foundation that will allow us to build momentum towards a stronger community when we begin to build Churchview Commons- a new housing development program located at Gates Presbyterian. We have gained great momentum in the development process and capital funders often prioritize projects that have built a sense of neighborhood and support for the women and families who will one day live at Churchview commons. Having the resources to produce a carnival was an investment in community, wellness and future possibilities. We are so grateful for the support.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Laura Bachmann, Gates Presbyterian Church
Carrie Michel-Wyne, YWCA

