



It Takes A Village

Youth Assistance seeking donations to replenish emergency funds

By Lisa Howard

Although Royal Oak Youth Assistance has been helping kids and families in the community for over 50 years, not everyone knows about the program. School administrators and counselors do, though, and are able to refer families in need to ROYA.

Sometimes that need may be financial. Other times parents may want to participate in family education workshops or confidential counseling sessions. ROYA also pairs trained volunteer adults to become mentors as part of its Mentors Plus program.

“When we can match kids with mentors, it’s an incredibly rich experience for both the mentee and the mentor,” said Sam Lynch, board chairperson for ROYA and principal at Oakland Elementary. “It’s great to know that kids are being positively impacted by ROYA and are on an upward trajectory.”

He said that every year, ROYA’s Youth Recognition Awards are presented at a community breakfast to recognize students who volunteer to help their peers as well as seniors and other members of the community. Attendees at the breakfast also have the opportunity to hear from parents and kids who have directly benefited from ROYA’s programs.



Lynch

Along with offering mentoring and counseling services, ROYA also offers skill-building funds to students whose families may not otherwise be able to pay for “extras” that other kids take for granted, like music lessons, tutoring, or sporting equipment.

The lion’s share of the skill-building budget typically goes to pay for summer camps, but since COVID-19 forced schools to move to online teaching, ROYA has drastically shifted its focus to its emergency needs fund.

“The fund is for families who might find themselves in a bind and need \$50 for groceries or gas or something like that,” Lynch said. “With the immediate rise in unemployment that came along with the pandemic, we’ve disbursed a lot more than usual.”

While ROYA normally gives out a few hundred dollars a month, during the months of March, April and May, ROYA awarded over \$37,000 in grants to 174 kids from 90 families.

“Our question has always been how can we best support kids and their families,” Lynch said, “and in some cases, families have recently needed help with their mortgage payments, in addition to groceries and gas.”

Not surprisingly, the organization is now actively seeking donations to help rebuild its emergency needs fund.

During the first few weeks of the pandemic, ROYA also made sure that Chromebooks and food were distributed to families in need, and the organization partnered with Blessings in a Backpack to enable kids to be more creative while they couldn’t be physically in the classroom. The backpacks were loaded with sidewalk chalk, journals, and arts and craft supplies.

When the school year drew to a close, ROYA delivered graduation packages to families of fifth, eighth and twelfth-grade students and helped organized drive-by parades at the schools where the teachers and staff lined up along the sidewalk to do clap-outs for their graduating students.

Lynch said that having a highly motivated board and staff is why ROYA is able to enrich the lives of so many students in Royal Oak.

“We all have the same goal, which is to help kids and their families succeed,” he said.

As the saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child...or a city that derives its name from a strong and sheltering oak.



To volunteer with ROYA or make a donation, please visit its website at <https://www.royaloakyouthassistance.com/>.

If you’re interested in being a mentor, please call (248) 219-6502 or email micklern@oakgov.com.