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November 26, 2008

TO: Celeste Burke, Associate Dean for Research and Faculty Development  
FROM: Alvin Mares  
RE: Research Enhancement Grant Proposal

Dear Celeste,

Please find enclosed my grant proposal entitled, "Ohio Youth in Transition (OYIT) Alumni Support and Assistance Project (ASAP)".

Thank you in advance for reviewing this proposal.

Sincerely,

Alvin Mares, PhD, MSW



## Ohio Youth in Transition (OYIT) Alumni Support and Assistance Project (ASAP)

A research proposal submitted to the College of Social Work

Alvin S. Mares, Ph.D., M.S.W.

November 26, 2008

### **BACKGROUND**

Youth in transition – defined herein as emancipating or former foster youth and former homeless/runaway youth who are between the ages of 18 and 24 – face enormous challenges establishing independence and self-sufficiency. They lack the “bundle” of financial, housing, emotional, and counseling/advising support typically provided by parents to their children during this early stage of adulthood. Many have had unpleasant experiences in school, due to changing schools frequently, poor academic performance, developmental delays or learning disabilities, mental health and behavioral problems, etc. – all of which contribute to more than a third of such youth dropping-out of high school. Gainful employment that pays a living wage is difficult to find, which makes it difficult to secure safe, secure, and stable independent housing. Many of these young adults “couch surf”, or staying with relatives, friends, or acquaintances’ homes or apartments temporarily, before moving-on to another person’s place. This transient lifestyle makes it difficult to receive mail, have reliable access to the phone and voicemail, and places them at increased risk of abuse by their hosts. Few have a driver’s license, much less an automobile, when they turn 18, and are therefore limited to where they can live, work, and go to school by the distance that they are able to walk, ride a bicycle, take a bus, or ride with others. Few have health insurance. Some have alcohol and/or drug abuse problems. Others are arrested and convicted of committing various crimes, such as dealing drugs, theft, burglary, which makes it more difficult yet to obtain employment and to secure independent housing. Finally, social services available to “able-bodied” young adults are quite limited, except for single mothers. Thus, the need for assistance and support is great, but the services are few – and even more so during an economic downturn/recession such as the current condition in our country and in Ohio.

### **SOLUTION-FOCUSED BRIEF THERAPY**

Solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) was developed in the early 1980s by deShazer, Berg and colleagues at the Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee (deShazer et al., 1986). This forward-looking, strengths-based approach emphasizes constructing solutions rather than resolving problems. The primary goal is to enable individuals to find solutions to their problems, which is accomplished through helping the individual to imagine how he or she would like things to be different and what it will take to make that happen. Solution-focused therapists

assume that the solution, or at least part of it, is already happening in some part of the individual's life, and needs only to be identified and used more extensively in the more "troubled" areas of one's life. SFBT is brief, generally lasting fewer than six sessions, and can be done with individuals, families, or groups. Key techniques utilized in such work include (a) the use of the "miracle question" (i.e., pretend that a miracle had happened and a solution to the problem is imagined); (b) the "scaling question", which asks individuals to rate on a 10-point scale how things are today; and, (c) a "consulting break" near the end of each session which includes compliments (positive focus) and homework (Gingerich & Eisengart, 2000).

A SFBT-based, small group intervention may be helpful for youth in transition for several reasons. First, the shifting of focus from problems and deficits to solutions and existing skills may be particularly helpful to young adults who experienced and survived through times of great difficulty as youth to envision a brighter, more positive, and hopeful future. Second, the relatively simpler, shorter-term, and less costly nature of this work, when compared to other therapeutic approaches or interventions, offer likely greater feasibility and accessibility among the large number of youth in transition needing assistance/support. Finally, there is a sizeable published literature on SFBT (e.g., literature reviews by Gingerich & Eisengart, 2000; Kim, 2008) to help inform the development of a "youth in transition" pilot intervention and to compare the findings of such a pilot study to advance the state of knowledge within this the field of SFBT and within the independent living/aftercare services and supports specialty area of child welfare.

## **OHIO YOUTH IN TRANSITION (OYIT) ALUMNI SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE PROJECT (ASAP) SOLUTION-FOCUSED INTERVENTION PILOT STUDY**

This study proposes to develop and pilot-test a solution-focused intervention for youth in transition in Columbus, Ohio. This three-year study (December 2008 to May 2011) will consist of three phases. During **Phase I**, the solution-focused intervention will be developed by Dr. Mares, in collaboration and consultation with community experts and transitioning youth from three child-serving agencies in Columbus. This phase is expected to last three months, from December 2008 through February 2009, and will include a review of the published literature (on-going), obtaining of approval from the OSU Institutional Review Board (IRB), and an intervention planning "workday" on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009, which will be hosted by the College of Social Work and will include an estimated 25 community experts, community agency staff, and transitioning youth. Pilot data, including both process and outcome measures, will also be determined during this initial phase of the project.

During **Phase II** of the project, the 8-12 monthly sessions intervention developed during Phase I will be implemented during the period March 2009 (or after the completion of Phase I) through February 2010. Dr. Mares and a designated staff person from each of the three child-serving agencies – Starr Commonwealth Foundation, ViaQuest Inc., and Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio – will co-facilitate the "alumni support groups" among a small group (i.e., 4-6) of young men between 18 and 24 years of age who have successfully completed that agency's independent living program. Quarterly "de-briefing" meetings among co-facilitators will likely be scheduled quarterly during the period July 2009 to April 2010 – starting and ending a few months after the monthly solution-focused intervention (a.k.a., alumni support and

assistance/ASAP) groups. Clinical experts familiar with the SFBT approach may participate in, or possibly even lead, these quarterly de-briefing meetings/sessions.

Note that the term “alumni” refers to the fact that youth in transition often emancipate or graduate from a privately operated, community-based child-serving agency or organization. Each of the pilot agencies/independent living programs is interested in learning more about the transitioning experiences of these youth after leaving their program, in doing more to help their graduates transition towards self-sufficiency, and in involving graduates more in better serving the needs of future independent living clients (e.g., through the development of peer-to-peer mentoring, creation of a youth council or advisory board for the agency).

Also, males have been chosen as the target population for this project due to their (a) increased risk of incarceration post-emancipation, (b) fewer public and private assistance programs, and (c) smaller social support networks among young men, compared to those of young women.

The collection of pilot data will be on-going throughout this second phase of the project.

**Phase III** of the project will involve reporting and presenting pilot study findings at conferences in Ohio, and perhaps nationally, if indicated. A final report will be completed by July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010, which will describe the pilot intervention (both its development and implementation), and youth outcomes at baseline (most likely at session 2) and at follow-up (at session 6 or 10, perhaps the next-to-last session). Abstracts will be submitted for presentation at one or more of the following state conferences: Ohio Independent Living Summit; Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO); ViaQuest conference; and, COHHIO YEP. Possible national conference presentations include: Daniel Memorial; National Independent Living Association (NILA); Casey It’s My Life; and, Child Welfare League of America. Conference presentations are expected to occur throughout the nine-month, 2010-2011 academic year (i.e., Sept. 2010 – May 2011).

After the final report is completed and while findings from the study are being presented at conferences, a follow-up planning workday will be held at OSU in January 2011 – two years after the initial intervention planning workday – to review lessons learned from the pilot and to discuss possible next steps (including ending the pilot, extending or expanding the pilot, etc.). If the decision is made to continue, and possibly expand the pilot project, then a plan for securing extramural grant funding will be included in that “next steps” discussion – which may be on-going throughout the 2011 calendar year.

## **PROPOSED USE OF RESEARCH ENHANCEMENT GRANT FUNDS**

\$5,000 is requested to provide the estimated 15 youth participants (5 per agency) with \$250 stipends to assist them in attaining their self-sufficiency related goals. In most cases, stipend funds will be paid directly to the third party supplier of the desired good or service, on behalf of the youth, to help ensure the responsible use of these funds – rather than simply giving each participant \$250 in cash. Thus, \$3,750 is requested for participant stipends (15 participants x \$250).

The remaining \$1,250 is requested to pay a \$50 honorarium to each of the 25 community experts – professionals and transitioning youth – who are expected to attend the intervention planning workday at OSU on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009. If fewer than 25 community participants attend, then unused honoraria funds would be used to cover food and beverage expenses for the day. If more than 25 participants attend, then those additional honoraria costs, along with food and beverage and other workday-related expenses will be paid through professional development funds.

**RELEVANCE TO THE FIELD, SCHOLARLY AGENDA, AND COLLEGE**

As noted earlier in this proposal, the need for assistance and support for youth in transition is great, services are lacking, and a relatively brief and inexpensive, solution-focused intervention may help to empower these vulnerable young adults and to improve their chances of becoming more productive members of society as they work towards achieving the goals that they set for themselves. This pilot project will build-upon last year’s independent living needs assessment and independent living services description pilot work by developing an innovative, low-cost intervention based upon an evidence-based therapeutic approach (solution-focused brief therapy) that is widely used among professionals from various disciplines for many different client populations (Gingerich & Eisengart, 2000; Kim, 2008). In addition to possibly assisting youth in transition and advancing my own scholarly agenda, the College’s visibility and exposure among local counseling professionals outside of social work may be enhanced by both hosting and sponsoring the intervention planning workday, and by providing “life goal” enhancing stipends for 15 promising youth in transition here in Columbus.

**BUDGET**

<b>Item</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Amnt.</b>	<b>Total</b>
Youth stipends	15	\$250	\$3,750
Intervention planning workday honoraria for participants	25	\$50	\$1,250
<b>Total requested</b>			<b>\$5,000</b>

**REFERENCES**

de Shazer, S., Berg, I.K., Lipchik, E., Nunnally, E., Molnar, A., Gingerich, W., & Weiner-Davis, M. (1986). Brief therapy: Focused solution development. *Family Process* 25:207-221.

Gingerich, W., & Eisengart, S. (2000). Solution-focused brief therapy: A review of outcome research. *Family Process*, 39:477-496.

Kim, J.S. (2008). Examining the effectiveness of solution-focused brief therapy: A meta-analysis. *Research on Social Work Practice* 18(2):107-116.

**ATTACHMENTS**

- Support letters from Starr Commonwealth Foundation and ViaQuest Inc.
- Draft agenda for intervention planning workday
- Project timeline



WE SEE SOMETHING GOOD IN EVERY CHILD™

November 21, 2008

Alvin Mares, PhD, MSW  
Assistant Professor  
College of Social Work  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, Ohio

Dear Professor Mares,

Starr Commonwealth is pleased to support your Ohio Youth in Transition (OYIT) Alumni Support and Assistance Project (ASAP). Starr's MyPlace independent living program, located on East Mound Street in the city of Columbus, is designed to provide a safe living environment in a supervised apartment setting and to teach life skills to youth who are emancipating from the child welfare system. We see your project as a vital and innovative effort to bridge the informal support gaps experienced by these youth and provide them with a monthly peer supportive educational environment. We believe this peer support group model will contribute to the successful transition of the group's individual members.

Starr Commonwealth will be pleased to pilot this effort with you at our MyPlace program through the solicitation of volunteer youth who will be emancipating from foster care and from our program. These youth will be expected to transition to their own living environment and pursue educational, vocational or employment opportunities. We believe the ASAP peer support group will not only support these youth but will teach us much about their post emancipation experience which will inform us how to tailor our program to best meet their needs.

Starr Commonwealth encourages any interested party to support this project with funding so we can fully implement this pilot project and give it the best chance for success. You have our support in seeking sustainable funding should the project prove to be the success we hope and expect it to be. We look forward to working with you and partnering with OSU in the months ahead!

Sincerely,

M. Lisa Lambert, MS.LSW  
Executive Director  
Columbus Campus

Bryan Brown  
Director  
Public Policy & New Business Development

**Officers**

Martin L. Mitchell, Ed.D.  
President and CEO

Herman J. McCall, Ed.D.  
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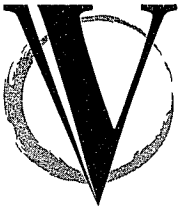
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Columbus, OH 43207  
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FX: 614.491.7216



**ViaQuest**

November 24, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

I would like to indicate my support of Alvin Mares' "Alumni Support and Assistance Project" (ASAP). ViaQuest is interested in being part of the pilot group that will work with Mr. Mares as he provides resource and structure in making the pilot program a reality for the youth in our Independent and Transitional Living programs.

If there is any additional information that you need, please do not hesitate to contact me with your questions.

Sincerely,

Christopher Wolf, M.Ed.  
Vice President of Operations

Phone 614.889.5837  
Fax 614.889.5847  
Toll Free 800.645.3267

525 Metro Place North  
Suite 300  
Dublin, Ohio 43017-5320

Ohio Youth in Transition (OYIT) Alumni Support and Assistance Project (ASAP)  
**Solution-Focused, Small Group Intervention Planning Workday**

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 31, 2009; 10:00 A.M. – 2:00 P.M.**

Co-facilitated by:

Dr. Alvin Mares (OSU College of Social Work); (614) 282-5904; mares.2@osu.edu  
Dr. Tim Conrad (Dublin City Schools); (614) 679-0836; conrad\_tim@mail.dublin.k12.oh.us  
Ms. Lisa Dickson (Foster Care Alumni of America); (614) 787-5257; lisa@miss-lisa.com

Location: The Ohio State University  
College of Social Work  
Stillman Hall, Room 115  
1947 College Road  
Columbus, OH 43210  
(<http://www.osu.edu/map/>)

Parking: ARPS Parking Garage (across street diagonally from Stillman Hall)  
(<http://tp.osu.edu/students/parking/garages/arps.shtml>)

**AGENDA (Tentative)**

10:00 – 10:10 a.m. Partner sharing & introductions  
10:10 – 10:30 a.m. Overview of pilot project (Alvin & Lisa)  
10:30 – 10:50 a.m. Overview of “solution-focused” approach (Tim)  
10:50 – 11:00 a.m. Break  
11:00 – 11:10 a.m. Small group assignments (Tim)  
11:10 – 11:50 a.m. Small group work (with Alvin, Lisa & Tim “roaming” among groups)  
11:50 – 12:00 p.m. Break  
12:00 – 12:50 p.m. Lunch and small group presentations  
12:50 – 1:00 p.m. Break  
1:00 – 1:50 p.m. Discussion and consensus-building (Tim, Lisa & Alvin)  
1:50 – 2:00 p.m. Closing thoughts and next steps (Alvin)  
2:00 p.m. Adjourn

Free parking \*\*\* Free lunch \*\*\* \$50 honorarium paid to all participants

Ohio Youth in Transition – Alumni Support and Assistance Project (ASAP)

**Updated Timeline**

(Rev. 11/26/08)

**Phase I**

- Revise and submit seed grant proposals to OSU ..... Nov. 25<sup>th</sup>, Dec. 1<sup>st</sup> 2008
- Counseling group intervention planning workday at OSU ..... Sat., Jan. 31<sup>st</sup> 2009
- Institutional review board (IRB) approval obtained from OSU ..... Feb. 27<sup>th</sup>

**Phase II**

- Counseling group meetings (at respective agencies/programs) ..... Mar. 2009 – Feb. 2010
- Facilitator implementation review and discussion meetings (quarterly) ... July 2009 – April 2010

**Phase III**

- Final report for pilot study completed ..... July 31<sup>st</sup>
- Results presented at state and national conferences ..... Sept. 2010 – May 2011
- Follow-up consultation/planning meeting with workday and ASAP participants ..... Jan. 2011
- External funding sought to extend, enhance and/or expand pilot ..... Jan. – Dec. 2011