

Incourage Impact

YOUTH



Established in 1994 as a community foundation, Incourage has evolved in response to community need from a traditional grantmaker into a values-led, user-centered and place-based organization stewarding and connecting all forms of resources or capital – moral, social, human, intellectual, reputational, financial and natural – toward a powerful shared vision: a community that works well for all people.

Incourage continues working to enhance and support the activities and efforts of young people.

Incourage has been involved as an advocate, funder and supporter of youth-oriented projects and programs since our inception. We believe that human capital is the most important and valuable asset a community has, and by investing in the next generation, we will continue to shape an inclusive and sustainable local economy.

In 2012, a community survey conducted by Incourage revealed “opportunities for young adults and families” as one of four key priorities for our community, with 59% of residents concerned about retaining young adults and families. We continue working to enhance and support the activities and efforts of young people and invite their input to ensure their connection to and ownership of their community.

incourage

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING



One Teen Leadership project was an intergenerational activity day with seniors and veterans at Lowell Center.

Youth Cluster through the Community Progress Initiative

When Incourage partnered with the Heart of Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce in 2004 to introduce the Community Progress Initiative, youth was highlighted as a specific and important focus group. In 2005, 85 young people from grades 5-12 came together to talk about their future and what was needed to improve life in south Wood County. Ideas the group shared included:

- Create better jobs for teenagers, and add more businesses for better jobs for everyone
- Get a good college education and return to south Wood County to use it
- Bring back downtown Wisconsin Rapids
- Give young people opportunities for leadership and having a say in what happens in the community.

Since then, Incourage has continued to engage youth through efforts like Teen Leadership and now through the Tribune, to help build an inclusive community that works well for all.

Teen Leadership

From 2006-2017, Incourage facilitated a unique, hands-on learning experience that reached 250 local high school

sophomores. Using the guiding principles from *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* by Sean Covey, students studied one habit each month during their school year. Sessions centered on learning and applying these skills toward leadership and community involvement.

In 2009, a grantmaking component was introduced. Teens evaluated grant applications from local nonprofits and then determined which organization would receive a \$2,000 grant award. Recipients included:

- Central Wisconsin Literacy Council: Support basic English literacy, 2017
- Midstate Independent Living Consultants, Inc.: River Cities Clubhouse computer, 2015
- Wisconsin Coalition for Youth: Distracted Driving Kills, 2014
- Boys & Girls Club of the Wisconsin Rapids Area: Keystone Leadership Challenge, 2013
- North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board: Youth Job Center Open House & Resource Fair, 2012
- Pittsville Area Historical Society: A Day at Scranton School, 2011
- Junior Achievement: Job Shadowing Program, 2010.

Students also undertook one major community project, selected and executed by the class. Using their newly-honed leadership skills, they made decisions working together. In past community projects, teens:

- Planned a Senior Prom at a local assisted living community, 2017
- Facilitated an intergenerational activity day with seniors and veterans at Lowell Center, 2016
- Added artistic elements to the Growing Friends Community Garden, 2015
- Cleaned, primed and painted 15 donated bikes for the first rural Bike Share program in Wisconsin, 2014
- Planted trees and shrubs as a vegetative buffer for the Two Mile Detention Pond, 2013
- Built seven Little Free Libraries for each community in the south Wood County area, 2012
- Developed a dog walking path at South Wood County Humane Society, 2011
- Built four portable table-top gardens that are used by low-income, elderly and special needs individuals, 2010
- Restored the low ropes course at YMCA Camp Alexander, 2009
- Developed a classroom garden for children at Building Blocks Learning Center, 2008
- Planned a day of activities for Park Place adult day care clients, 2007

Smartvote

Since 1996, Incourage has supported Smartvote, a voter education project for youth, in partnership with the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Rapids. Smartvote is an enhancement to Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools social studies curriculum. Through it, interested students in grades 9-11 learn about the value of the democratic process, the presidential election and prominent issues. Students have conducted mock debates in 14 public schools, constructed grade school voting booths, held a Smartvote Congress and set up youth voting booths at polls. This project helps future voters learn how to research topics that will make them more knowledgeable voters.

It also creates greater awareness within their own families. Stories have been shared telling of parents calling schools to ask where they vote because their children are encouraging them to do so.

ARTS & CULTURE

Wisconsin Rapids Community Theatre

In 2006, Incourage provided Wisconsin Rapids Community Theater (WRCT) with administrative support for a \$1.2 million campaign to support the construction of a 200-seat theatre in the Centralia Center. Incourage processed over 500 gifts and tracked 76 pledges for the campaign. Incourage also provided guidance for promotional materials, pledge forms and press releases related to the project. Incourage supported WRCT in securing a \$600,000 dollar-for-dollar matching fund challenge from Gilbert and Jaylee Mead, which was central to the campaign.

With the establishment of this theatre, Incourage also supported a Youth Drama Group and youth workshops that provide opportunities for area young people to learn about acting and stagecraft. Approximately 25 people attend the Youth Drama Group regularly. The group has become an ongoing network, having developed into much more than the original scope of a summer session workshop.

For more information on Incourage investments in Arts & Culture, see Incourage Impact: Arts & Culture.



Smartvote helps future voters learn how to research topics that will make them more knowledgeable voters.

NATURE & RECREATION



A local group of teachers, parents and community members envisioned a playground where all children would play together. They raised money to make the All Children Together Playground a reality.

All Children Together Playground

It is estimated that there are more than 1,000 students with special needs in Wisconsin Rapids and surrounding communities. In the fall of 2008, a group of teachers, parents and community members began raising money to make their vision of the All Children Together (ACT) Playground a reality. This group of volunteers envisioned a playground where all children would play together. Incourage served as the fiscal agent for the project, where local residents and businesses contributed \$200,000 to build the playground. A contribution of \$25,000 from Ruth and Hartley Barker through Incourage, as well as \$7,400 in Community Grant Funds helped them reach their goal. The ACT Playground was completed in 2011.

Located at Grove Elementary School, the playground is open to all children in the community, including children with disabilities, providing the opportunity for all kids to play side-by-side. It incorporates ramps and surfaces that enable all family members to access the playground independently and is the only playground of this type in the south Wood County area.

Speak Your Peace

Incourage established Speak Your Peace in 2008, following a study tour to Duluth. The title and concept were created

by Duluth-Superior Area Community Foundation in 2003. Speak Your Peace is a resident-led project in the south Wood County area to improve communication by reminding ourselves of the basic principles of respect. Based on the work of P. M. Forni, author of *Choosing Civility*, it is not a campaign to end disagreements but instead encourage civil conversations.

Since 2008, hundreds of presentations have been given to south Wood County area businesses, clubs, churches, nonprofits and schools, with thousands of people hearing the Speak Your Peace message. At local schools and school boards, campaigns have been incorporated by students, teachers, staff and administrators to address bullying issues and instill the principles of respect and civility in youth.

Helen's Zoo House and Zoo Programs

Helen's Zoo House at the Wisconsin Rapids Zoo is an excellent demonstration of public/private funding benefiting the community as a whole. This project was made possible by a combination of funding from the City's hotel and motel tax and a private donor, Helen Mead. The Helen Mead Fund for the benefit of the Wisconsin Rapids Zoo held at Incourage, contributed \$75,000 to the \$200,000 project, which was completed in 2007.

Inspired by Helen's love of animals, this building was

constructed to expand learning opportunities and enhance appreciation of the animal world and the environment in which they live. The building provides an opportunity for a wide variety of traveling zoo exhibits to set up at the park. Prior to having this enclosed, air conditioned building, many exhibits refused to come to the zoo because of its lack of a safe, indoor facility.

Beginning in June 2000 – before Helen’s Zoo House was built – Helen had provided financial support to bring outdoor programs to the zoo. This continues today. The indoor and outdoor programs have included the Minnesota Zoomobile, the Raptor Education Group and David Stokes Traveling Wildlife Show. Programs are free to the public, making quality programs accessible and available to residents of all socioeconomic groups. Helen also established an endowment fund that provides annual programmatic support.

In total since 2000, Helen’s fund has contributed nearly \$36,000 to support zoo programs.

Skate Parks

In 1998, a group of local young people identified the need for a skate park in Wisconsin Rapids and organized themselves. Incourage provided the accounting and financial services to support the youth as they led fundraising and publicity efforts. Through a combination of funding including fundraising, Incourage donor and grant support, as well as contributions by other charitable organizations, this group realized its vision. The Skate Park opened in 2002. It accommodates skateboarders,



For both area skate parks, youth organized information, galvanized local support and made presentations to their city councils to make their vision a reality.

aggressive skaters and BMX bikers at beginning and advanced skill levels.

In 2014, youth from Nekoosa organized a similar group to build a skate park in their community. Incourage supported the Nekoosa School District with a grant award of \$10,000 to help fund construction. Recognizing the importance of engaging community members, \$8,000 of that grant was designated to leverage a one-to-one match from resident-raised funds. The skate park opened to the community in summer 2016.

In both instances, youth organized information, galvanized local support and made presentations to their city councils to make their vision a reality.



Over the past two decades, Incourage has provided financial support through grants and donor support to help expand the soccer complex located at Washington School.

Rapids Area Soccer, Inc.

Thousands of local families and visitors participate in the Rapids Area Soccer program each year. This includes recreational, competitive and high school soccer. Over the past two decades, Incourage has provided financial support through grants and donor support to help expand the soccer complex located at Washington School. This includes constructing new fields and providing funding for a concession and restroom building.

Since inception, Rapids Area Soccer, Inc. has been supported by grants totaling more than \$72,000 through Community Grant Funds and other Incourage funds.

EDUCATION



Incourage's donors recognize the tremendous value in encouraging the pursuit of higher education.

Scholarships

Education is a primary resource to enhance individual opportunities, future income and economic development. Thanks to the generosity of its donors and with significant administrative support from Incourage, since inception, Incourage has awarded more than 2,800 scholarships totaling approximately \$1.8 million to area students. In 2017 alone, Incourage awarded more than \$146,000 (190 scholarships) to students pursuing or continuing higher education.

Incourage's donors recognize the tremendous value in encouraging the pursuit of higher education. Building skills and credentials at all levels of the educational spectrum is important. Such assets will be needed to build a strong and inclusive local economy and a community that works well for all people. Additionally, their investment helps young people in our community realize their own potential, and ensures future leaders for our community. A highlight of the scholarship season is the Scholarship Luncheon, where donors meet their scholarship recipients. The main purpose of this event is for donors and recipients to get to know each other, learn more about each other and begin build new relationships and friendships.

School Plus

Incourage's School Plus program encourages educators to design new programs, projects and events that build trust among participants, both in school and in the community. These creative educator ideas enhance relationships and communication through effective teaching, learning and motivational activities. For example, a School Plus grant helped Wisconsin Rapids Middle School teacher Larry Redepinning with his Freedom Pen Project. This project gave 7th graders the opportunity to show their support for service members fighting overseas by making custom writing pens from wooden blanks. Since 2012, students have created hundreds of these pens for service members. Mr. Redepinning noted that after 20 years of teaching, this was one of the most rewarding activities he's been part of.

The School Plus Fund began making grants in April 1998. To date, there have been over 300 grants totaling \$150,961.

Advocates for WRPS Education

Incourage serves as the fiscal agent for this group. Advocates for WRPS is a volunteer community-wide group working to help create meaningful community engagement in the Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools. Its ultimate goal is to enhance education for students by augmenting, supplementing and complementing programs and activities currently being offered within the district. They also raise funds for the Advocates for WRPS Education Fund managed by Incourage, in support of the WRPS strategic plan. WRPS staff, or any community member in partnership with an educator for grades 4K-12, may apply for funding to enhance opportunities for student learning and additional training and to advance the mission of WRPS. The Fund has provided support to a variety of needs since 2003. Examples include: a reading improvement program at Mead Elementary; portable microscopes for East Junior High; an improvisational music program at Lincoln High School; and art with recycled materials at Grove and Grant Elementary, among many other worthwhile projects and events.



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COMMUNITY EVENTS



With the community's support, the Teen Fireworks Committee has been responsible for July 4th fireworks celebrations since 2006.

4th of July Fireworks

The Wisconsin Rapids' 4th of July fireworks celebration is a community tradition that area residents have enjoyed for decades. It is especially important for the young people of our community, as a social event bringing people to the Downtown Riverfront District. In early 2006, Wisconsin Rapids cut \$22,000 in funding for its 4th of July fireworks

show from the City's budget. As a result, Incourage organized the Teen Fireworks Committee, an initiative created to help youth develop leadership skills and reach out to area municipalities, businesses, organizations and individuals for their support. This group is now a part of the Mayor's Youth Council.

With the community's support, the Teen Fireworks Committee has been responsible for the past twelve July 4th fireworks celebrations. Since 2006, more than 50 teens have been part of the committee, raising more than \$200,000. The Teen Fireworks Committee is made up of teens from four area high schools: Assumption, Lincoln, Nekoosa and Port Edwards. Each year more than a dozen teens from the local area contribute about 10 hours each, to ensure a collaborative community fireworks celebration.

In the early years, by making presentations to all municipals and asking for support, teens gained valuable experience in understanding local governmental systems.

This initiative also raised awareness for area municipalities to share proportionately in the cost of this event, as the entire region benefits.

The first year that teens asked area municipalities, nine municipalities contributed \$7,140. Over the past nine years, five municipalities have continued contributing: Biron, Grand Rapids, Nekoosa, Wisconsin Rapids and Vesper. Teens have also reached out to hundreds of businesses and individuals who generously contributed then and continue supporting the fireworks today.

Children's Festival

Incourage supported start-up funds for the volunteers who initiated, the Children's Festival in 1995 and provided ongoing support for several years as the festival became established as an annual community event for children. Each year, more than 5,000 children and their parents attend this free event held at Lincoln High School. It offers children an opportunity to learn and try new things at various booths in an atmosphere that is welcoming and open to all regardless of socioeconomic status.

YOUTH-CENTERED ENGAGEMENT



Several focus groups and tours were conducted with local schools to create awareness and get feedback on Tribune Building furniture, layout and programming.

Incourage's investment in culture change, beginning with re-establishing trust and confidence among residents, including youth. Youth of all ages participated in the public meetings, providing their input and ideas. Additionally, area students who were away at college were able to virtually attend meetings through Skype. Following the idea sharing and design phases of work, several focus groups and tours were conducted with local schools to create awareness and get feedback on furniture, layout and programming. Youth were particularly interested in the Culinary Kitchen, Creative Space and Game Room.

An unexpected benefit from engaging youth in the Tribune has been the deep connections that are being made as multiple generations work together. Relationships are being built based on common visions, goals and realizing that everyone can learn from and teach each other, regardless of age.

Tribune Building Project

The Tribune Building Project (tribunebuilding.org) began in December 2012 when Incourage purchased the historic riverfront property along the Wisconsin River with the intent that residents would decide its future use. From the beginning, this was about more than the building. It is a demonstration of a user-centered process toward realizing Incourage's vision of a community that works well for all people. This work builds upon more than a decade of

For example, local young adult and Mid-State Technical College student Ben Joosten shared that he didn't realize how much the older residents enjoy talking with younger residents, or how interested they would be in his opinions. Now, after building relationships and seeing the passion among residents to make a difference, Ben is more optimistic about the future of Wisconsin Rapids.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



The Business Education Alliance is creating greater awareness of the family-sustaining career opportunities in our region.

Business Education Alliance

Three years after the initiation of Incourage's Workforce Central Manufacturing Partnership, it was evident that having come out of the Great Recession and addressing the training needs of displaced workers, businesses were soon going to be directly impacted by the impending "Silver Tsunami" – the aging baby boomers who will be exiting the labor force in droves in the coming years. Data shows that as of 2015, 64% of Wood County manufacturing employees are 45 years of age or older.

In addition, data compiled by partner companies indicated an average of over nine months to fill an open STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) position with an average salary over \$67,000. Simultaneously, there was low interest in applicable STEM courses in our area secondary and post-secondary institutions, with some courses either discontinued or under threat. The Manufacturing Partnership saw an opportunity for collaborative action, and in 2012, they initiated the Business Education Alliance.

During this time, Incourage coordinated a collaborative school board meeting with three area school districts – Nekoosa, Port Edwards and Wisconsin Rapids – to present the data and solicit their support to address the

issues. Key business leaders were in attendance at this meeting and voiced their support for action. All three districts decided to jointly work on narrowing the skills gap, specifically in STEM, and creating greater awareness of the family-sustaining career opportunities in our region.

Today, the Business Education Alliance is a collaboration of four public (Nekoosa, Pittsville, Port Edwards and Wisconsin Rapids) and two private (Assumption Catholic Schools and Immanuel Lutheran School) school systems, Mid-State Technical College, University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point, community organizations and area businesses.

To date, three summer continuing education courses have introduced more than 50 teachers to over a dozen regional businesses. These businesses project hiring needs of more than 1,500 new employees in the next five years.

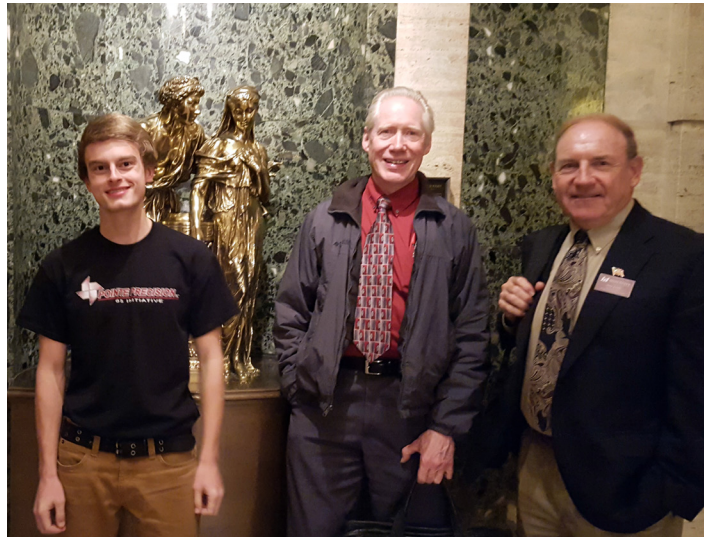
Based on their highly successful collaboration, the Alliance was selected to receive four Constellation Energy to Educate grants totaling \$160,000. These grants provided solar photovoltaic installations at area schools and educated over 1,400 students in renewable energy concepts. To learn more about the Energy to Educate grants, view this video: *Power to the Pupils!*

Youth Apprenticeship Program

At south Wood County high schools, the Youth Apprenticeship program combines school curriculum with job experience for area high school students. Incourage provided the key aspect of successful youth apprenticeship programs – building relationships and connections between the school system and businesses. In addition to technical skills, youth apprentices also learn crucial soft skills for today's workplace. But most importantly, youth apprentices feel like a true part of the organization they are working at, creating a lasting connection to their community.

Prior to the work of the Business Education Alliance, there had been no youth apprentices in the manufacturing sector. Now there are more than 10.

Devyn Koch (youth pictured at right) was one of the first south Wood County manufacturing youth apprentices at Pointe Precision. In 8th grade, Devyn participated in a Heavy Metal Bus tour (supported by Incourage's CEO Peer Council) which introduced youth to local manufacturing. A few years later, his youth apprenticeship high school advisor saw him as a good fit for a local manufacturer,



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Pointe Precision. While there, Devyn gained great experience in machining and manufacturing that expanded his horizons. He now attends University of Wisconsin-Stout, pursuing a degree in mechanical engineering. Additionally, in 2015, Pointe Precision received the 2015 Youth Employer Champion award from the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals.

To learn more about the Youth Apprenticeship Program, view this video: *Are You In? Youth Apprentices.*



Four Constellation Energy grants have provided solar photovoltaic installations at area schools, educating students in renewable energy concepts.

YOUTH-FOCUSED ORGANIZATIONS



In 2015, Boy Scouts of America chose central Wisconsin's Samoset Council for a STEM Scout program to engage more youth in the STEM areas.

STEM Scouts

In 2015, Boy Scouts of America chose our area's Samoset Council for a STEM Scout program to engage more youth in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) areas. Now, south Wood County's STEM Scout program serves as a model for other programs across the nation.

The success of our area's STEM Scouts is no coincidence. Years of dedicated work by Incourage, businesses and educational institutions created the positive conditions of readiness. Building trust and strengthening relationships between organizations and individuals accelerates the impact of programs like STEM Scouts, while creating a path for the future success of students and businesses.

To learn more about STEM Scouts, view this video: *Are You In? STEM Scouts.*

South Wood County YMCA

At the South Wood County YMCA, youth have the opportunity to learn, grow and thrive. Time at the Y spent playing, learning and socializing helps kids of all ages grow character values, skills and relationships that lead to positive behavior, better health and educational achievement. Over the past two decades, Incourage has

contributed more than \$303,000 to support our local YMCA through grants and donor support. For example, Incourage provided funding to initiate a scholarship program for the YMCA's eight school-based Kids Clubhouse sites "Before and After School Childcare" program. This supported families who may not qualify for public assistance and could not afford the per hour fee. With Incourage's help, these parents were able to access quality childcare for their children.

Additional examples include: funding to support transportation to swimming lessons for children living in neighboring rural communities, as well as funding to support a new site analysis to explore the feasibility of a new site analysis in the south Wood County area.

Boys & Girls Club of the Wisconsin Rapids Area

Incourage believes that all children should have a safe, secure and nurturing environment during non-school hours. During the past 20 years, Incourage has provided nearly \$1.5 million to our local Boys & Girls Club through grant and donor support. This support helps all young people, especially those in most need, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens. Examples include funding to support the startup of "Character counts here!" This program is based on six core

ethical values: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship, as well as funds to support programming opportunities for the “Torch Club,” a small group leadership and service club for youth ages 11-13. In addition, Incourage has supported a Student Job Fair, where high school and college students can discuss job opportunities with local businesses. During the 2015 “KIDS from Wisconsin Benefit Concert for the Boys & Girls Club,” Incourage helped to offset the cost of admission to ensure that regardless of income, all members and their parents were given the opportunity to attend the concert event.

Childcaring (formerly Child Care Resource & Referral)

Childcaring is dedicated to providing quality child care information, and partnering with parents, care providers, business leaders, and community organizations to make quality care available to Central Wisconsin families.

Incourage recognizes the critical importance of providing quality child care for children from birth to three and beyond, and has provided more than \$100,000 to support Childcaring. For example, Incourage provided funding to support critical needs of children in regulated child care facilities in the south Wood County area. This scholarship aid helped offset child care costs for low-income families entering the workforce or continuing their education. Another grant supported implementation of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Quality Improvement program to promote higher quality child care programs in the south Wood County area.

Boy Scouts Ahdawagam District

During the past few years, the Boy Scouts of America has changed both membership and leadership restrictions to reflect a more inclusive culture. The Scout Oath and Law help instill the values of good conduct, respect for others and honesty. Through a combination of endowed donor support and grants, Incourage has provided more than \$146,000 to support the Boy Scouts.

Incourage has also supported Rotary Special Needs Boy Scout Troop 105, which provides a complete scouting experience to men with special needs, 15 years of age and older. One grant helped purchase new uniform shirts for special needs Boy Scouts and their troop leaders.

Girl Scouts of the Northwestern Great Lakes

Girl scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place. The Girl Scouts are an organization that promotes tolerance and respect for members and volunteers regardless of their race, religion, age, culture, sexual orientation, identity, or socioeconomic background. This aligns with Incourage’s values of equity, opportunity and shared stewardship.

Through a combination of endowed donor support and grants, Incourage has provided more than \$202,000 in support to Girl Scouts of the Northwestern Great Lakes. For example, Incourage has provided “camperships” and helped offset costs to ensure summer program opportunities are accessible to all, regardless of income.