



ALIVE & FREE

A PROGRAM OF COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS, INC.

Supporting Youth Impacted by Violence in Rockford

Program Overview, Impact, Budget & A Request for Sustainability Funding

The purpose of this document is to request funding to sustain Comprehensive Community Solutions' Alive & Free Program following the loss of state-supported RPSA funding, which is ending due to the expiration of federal COVID-19 relief funding allocated through the State of Illinois.

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Program Summary & Impact

Comprehensive Community Solutions, Inc. (CCS) Alive & Free Program is a year-round, trauma-informed youth development and violence prevention initiative serving youth throughout Rockford, Illinois, particularly within the city's most economically distressed and violence-impacted neighborhoods. Alive & Free was designed to address the root causes of violence while helping youth strengthen social-emotional learning, improve academic engagement, reduce behavioral incidents, and develop the tools necessary to make healthy decisions, build positive relationships, and become productive community leaders. The program operates through school partnerships, after-school programming, mentoring, workshops, case management, family engagement, and community-based activities grounded in evidence-based trauma-informed practices.

Alive & Free utilizes a holistic framework that integrates mentoring, emotional intelligence development, restorative practices, violence prevention, leadership development, conflict resolution, career awareness, and service learning. Youth receive individualized support through structured mentoring sessions, social-emotional learning workshops, behavioral health assessments, and positive youth development activities. CCS staff work collaboratively with schools, families, and community partners to reinforce positive behavioral outcomes and create safe, supportive environments where youth can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

The program has demonstrated measurable and significant outcomes during the 2025–2026 fiscal year. Alive & Free exceeded its annual assessment goal by completing over 60 new assessments—200% of its target—with three months still remaining in the fiscal year. Participants achieved a 20% increase in math performance, a 3% increase in school attendance, and a 50% reduction in school referrals at McIntosh Elementary and Guilford High School. Staff also facilitated approximately 1,800 workshops and supported youth in completing 360 community service hours while participating in 16 educational and cultural outings throughout the region.

Alive & Free places a strong emphasis on trauma-informed care and emotional wellness. Participants demonstrated substantial growth in emotional intelligence, self-regulation, communication skills, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Through interactive SEL workshops, restorative practices, and mentoring, youth developed the ability to recognize emotions, manage stress, resist negative peer influence, and navigate challenges peacefully. Surveys showed that 92% of participants reported increased workforce readiness and improved emotional wellness, while many participants demonstrated stronger leadership skills, healthier peer relationships, and greater confidence in school and community settings.

CCS's organizational commitment to trauma-informed care further strengthens the Alive & Free Program. In FY26, CCS earned an overall trauma-informed organizational score of 112.09 on the Capacity Building Assessment Tool for Organizations (CBAT-O), significantly exceeding the benchmark required to be considered trauma-informed. The



assessment highlighted CCS's strengths in cultural responsiveness, staff support, trauma-informed supervision, and evidence-based practices.

Through Alive & Free, CCS continues to build safer schools, healthier relationships, stronger families, and more resilient communities. By combining trauma-informed behavioral health strategies with mentorship, education, leadership development, and community engagement, Alive & Free is creating measurable, lasting change for youth and families throughout Rockford.

Who Does The Alive & Free Program Serve

The Alive & Free Program serves youth ages 11 through young adults age 24 throughout Rockford, Illinois, particularly those living in communities disproportionately impacted by poverty, trauma, violence, school disengagement, and limited access to supportive resources. The program primarily works with elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and youth programs through partnerships with schools and community partners, while also supporting at-risk youth involved in broader CCS community programming.

Alive & Free is specifically designed to support youth who may be struggling with behavioral challenges, emotional regulation, exposure to violence, academic difficulties, peer conflict, family instability, or other trauma-related stressors. The program provides trauma-informed mentoring, social-emotional learning, behavioral health support, restorative practices, leadership development, and violence prevention services to help young people build resilience, improve decision-making, strengthen relationships, and successfully transition into healthy adulthood.

Program Model

Alive & Free delivers a comprehensive trauma-informed model built around four core components: Screening & Assessment, Trauma-Informed Psychoeducation, Therapeutic Services, and Service Linkage & Resource Navigation. This framework is designed to identify trauma early, provide behavioral health support, stabilize youth and families, and connect participants to long-term community resources and services.

Youth receive individualized assessments using evidence-based tools such as the IM+CANS, ACES Questionnaire, Mental Health Diagnostic Screening Tools, Suicide Assessments, Nutritional Assessments, and Trauma Assessments to identify emotional, behavioral, environmental, and trauma-related needs that may contribute to violence, instability, or school disengagement. Through trauma-informed psychoeducation, Alive & Free helps youth and families understand the effects of trauma, violence exposure, toxic stress, and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) while teaching emotional regulation, self-awareness, stress management, communication skills, and healthy coping strategies to interrupt cycles of violence and retaliation.

The program also provides access to a wide range of evidence-based therapeutic interventions through partnerships with behavioral health professionals, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Trauma-Focused CBT, EMDR Therapy, Solution-



Focused Therapy, Psychodynamic Therapy, Multisystemic Therapy, Functional Family Therapy, Crisis Intervention, and Intensive Retaliation & Gun Violence Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Groups.

A key component of the model is mentoring and the development of positive adult relationships. Alive & Free utilizes both one-to-one and group mentoring models that connect youth with trusted adults who provide encouragement, accountability, leadership development, and long-term support centered around each participant's individualized case plan and personal goals.

Alive & Free also creates structured, trauma-informed environments where youth can safely process emotions, build self-confidence, improve communication skills, and learn peaceful conflict resolution through mentoring, fitness activities, group engagement, classroom learning, and non-combative de-escalation strategies. Through structured life skills development, youth strengthen emotional regulation, healthy stress responses, social awareness, problem-solving, decision-making, relationship management, and strategies to avoid violence and retaliation.

Recognizing that trauma impacts entire families, Alive & Free also provides whole-family and wraparound support services, including case management, transportation assistance, substance abuse referrals, crisis intervention, educational support, housing referrals, and connections to mental health and domestic violence services to help stabilize both youth and families.

The program operates through strong collaboration with schools, law enforcement, the Mayor's Office on Domestic and Community Violence Prevention, the Family Peace Center, behavioral health agencies, and grassroots organizations to address the root causes of violence through coordinated prevention and intervention strategies. The model is intentionally culturally responsive, equity-focused, and community-informed, ensuring that services are accessible and relevant to youth living in neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by poverty, trauma, racism, domestic violence, and firearm violence.

Why This Model Matters

The Alive & Free Model matters because it addresses the root causes of violence rather than simply responding to its symptoms. The program recognizes that trauma, poverty, domestic violence, toxic stress, and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are strongly connected to youth violence, school disengagement, emotional instability, and future justice involvement. Local data found that approximately 70% of first-time justice-involved youth had previously experienced or witnessed violence and trauma, demonstrating the urgent need for early intervention and trauma-informed care.

Alive & Free responds to these realities by creating safe, supportive, and relationship-centered environments where youth can heal, grow, and develop the skills needed to successfully navigate conflict and adversity. Through mentoring, social-emotional



learning, restorative practices, behavioral health support, and violence prevention education, youth strengthen emotional regulation, communication, problem-solving, self-awareness, and peaceful conflict resolution skills.

The program also provides wraparound support and service linkage for youth and families, recognizing that long-term stability and healing require coordinated community support systems. By partnering with schools, behavioral health providers, community organizations, grassroots leaders, and families, Alive & Free builds trust, increases protective factors, and strengthens community resilience.

Most importantly, Alive & Free has demonstrated measurable outcomes in improving school engagement, emotional wellness, workforce readiness, and reductions in behavioral incidents, helping create safer schools, stronger families, and healthier communities throughout Rockford.

Key Highlights

- **Trauma-Informed Violence Prevention Model:** Alive & Free addresses violence at its root by combining trauma-informed care, social-emotional learning (SEL), mentoring, behavioral health support, restorative practices, and conflict resolution strategies for youth exposed to violence, trauma, and chronic stress.
- **Demonstrated Reduction in Behavioral Incidents:** The program achieved a 50% reduction in school referrals among participating youth at McIntosh Elementary and Guilford High School, demonstrating measurable success in reducing behaviors often linked to future violence and school disengagement.
- **Strong School & Community Partnerships:** Due to the program's effectiveness, McIntosh Elementary expanded CCS's presence from 3 days per week to full-day programming 5 days per week, while both McIntosh Elementary and Guilford High School renewed partnerships for the upcoming school year.
- **Mental Health & Emotional Wellness Focus:** Alive & Free completed 100% of its annual mental health assessment goals and equips youth with emotional regulation, self-awareness, stress management, and decision-making skills that reduce aggression and improve long-term resilience.
- **Safe Spaces & Positive Adult Relationships:** The program creates structured, trauma-informed environments where youth develop trusting relationships with mentors and caring adults, increasing feelings of safety, belonging, accountability, and hope—critical protective factors against violence involvement.
- **High-Impact Social Emotional Learning (SEL):** Alive & Free delivers daily SEL workshops focused on emotional awareness, peer influence, self-control, empathy, conflict resolution, leadership, and healthy decision-making. Approximately 1,800 workshops have been completed across CCS programming this year alone.
- **Community Trust & Violence Prevention:** The program intentionally builds positive relationships between youth, families, law enforcement, schools, and community leaders through collaborative SEL outreach events designed to increase trust, reduce fear, and strengthen community cohesion.



- **Youth Voice & Community Safety Leadership:** Alive & Free helped administer the City of Rockford Youth GAP Survey to identify youth perspectives on violence, trauma, unsafe schools, lack of opportunity, distrust of systems, and gaps in prevention services. This ensures youth voices directly inform violence prevention strategies across the city.
- **Academic & Workforce Outcomes as Violence Prevention:** Participants achieved a 20% increase in math performance, improved attendance, stronger classroom engagement, and 92% increased workforce readiness—protective factors strongly associated with reduced violence involvement and improved long-term stability.
- **Restorative Practices & Conflict Intervention:** CCS’s restorative classroom and SEL interventions have shown strong outcomes among high-risk youth, including improved behavior, emotional regulation, conflict resolution skills, and academic improvement among students previously exhibiting aggressive behaviors.
- **Evidence-Based & Trauma-Informed Organizational Capacity:** CCS earned a trauma-informed organizational score of 112.09 on the FY26 CBAT-O assessment, significantly exceeding the benchmark for trauma-informed service delivery and demonstrating CCS’s ability to provide high-quality behavioral health and violence prevention services.
- **Community Engagement & Positive Identity Development:** Youth completed 360 hours of community service and participated in educational outings, leadership activities, and civic engagement opportunities that strengthen positive identity, community connection, and social responsibility.

Budget Overview

The table below outlines the request of funding from the City of Rockford to sustain the Alive & Free Programming through July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027.

BUDGET OVERVIEW		
CATEGORY	Requested Funding From The City of Rockford	Match Funding Provided By WCMHB
Personnel	\$133,120.00	\$42,990.00
Fringe Benefits	\$37,753.00	17,010.00
Program Costs (Supplies)	\$79,969.00	
Contractual Costs	\$50,000.00	\$25,000
Occupancy Cost	\$23,200.62	
Telecommunications Cost	\$2,261.61	
Other Costs	\$13,695.77	
Indirect Costs (15%)	\$60,000.00	\$15,000.00
Total	\$400,000.00	\$100,000.00



This funding allows CCS's Alive & Free program to service 100 youth a year with the services outlined in this document.

Request For Funding

Comprehensive Community Solutions, Inc. (CCS) respectfully requests funding to sustain the Alive & Free Program for the July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027 program year following the loss of state-supported RPSA funding due to the expiration of federal COVID-19 relief funding allocated through the State of Illinois. Alive & Free is a year-round, trauma-informed youth development and violence prevention initiative serving youth ages 11–24 throughout Rockford, Illinois, particularly within communities disproportionately impacted by poverty, trauma, domestic violence, school disengagement, and firearm violence. The program addresses the root causes of violence through mentoring, social-emotional learning, restorative practices, behavioral health support, violence prevention education, case management, and wraparound support services designed to help youth heal, build resilience, strengthen relationships, and successfully transition into healthy adulthood.

Alive & Free has demonstrated measurable impact throughout Rockford during the 2025–2026 fiscal year. The program exceeded its annual assessment goal by completing over 60 new assessments—200% of its target—with three months remaining in the fiscal year. Participating youth demonstrated a 20% increase in math performance, a 3% increase in school attendance, and a 50% reduction in school referrals at McIntosh Elementary and Guilford High School. Additionally, staff facilitated approximately 1,800 workshops and supported youth in completing 360 hours of community service while participating in 16 educational and cultural outings throughout the region. Surveys also showed that 92% of participants reported increased workforce readiness and improved emotional wellness. These outcomes demonstrate Alive & Free's ability to reduce behavioral incidents, strengthen protective factors, improve academic engagement, and increase emotional stability among youth most impacted by violence and trauma.

To sustain and expand these critical services, CCS respectfully requests \$400,000 in funding support from the City of Rockford that will be matched by an additional \$100,000 in matching funds provided through The Winnebago County Mental Health Board (WCMHB), for a total program investment of \$500,000. This funding will allow Alive & Free to continue serving approximately 100 youth annually through trauma-informed mentoring, behavioral health support, social-emotional learning, violence prevention programming, case management, restorative practices, therapeutic services, and family stabilization supports. Continued investment in Alive & Free represents an investment in safer schools, healthier families, stronger neighborhoods, and long-term violence prevention throughout the Rockford community.