



Media Contact

youthSpark, Inc.

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youthSpark awarded The Home Depot Foundation Collaborative Innovation Grant to launch new *Transfarming At-Risk Youth* program for exploited and abused youth.

ATLANTA (February 7)—Since cutting the ribbon on their new Youth Services Center in November 2016, youthSpark has expanded services previously solely offered to female victims of victims of child sex trafficking, to now include boys and LGBTQ youth who are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and other victimizations. With the support of The Home Depot's Foundation's Building Community Network, youthSpark is excited to partner with Truly Living Well Center for Natural Urban Agriculture (TLW) on their Atlanta's historic Westside— a farm site to build a new horticultural therapy and vocational program, complete with hands-on learning opportunities designed to support and empower at-risk youth.

While Georgia has a many quality victim services available to survivors, there is a critical component missing to help propel youth into continued success—vocational training and entrepreneurial opportunities. “Our goal is to go beyond traditional therapy services offered to youth inside the walls of our Center based here at the Fulton County Juvenile Court,” said Jennifer Swain, Executive Director of youthSpark. “Collaborating with Truly Living Well allows us connect our youth with opportunities right here in their community to explore new and hidden talents.”

This year, youthSpark and TLW will collaborate on a project to provide 250 youth served by youthSpark and involved in the juvenile justice system with education on gardening, nutrition, and entrepreneurship through TLW's programs, and offer a horticultural therapy program and vocational training for victims of exploitation and abuse. Program topics include landscaping techniques, building and planting gardens, harvesting food crops, preparing nutritious meals, and other farm-related skills. As the Chief Administrative Officer of TLW, Carol Hunter points out that many inner communities lack understanding that growing their own food is an important aspect of food security and self-sufficiency. “We're equipped to introduce these youth to small scale local food production, micro business development, nutrition education, and urban agricultural best practices.”

The project's long-term outcome goals are to reduce recidivism and risky behaviors, and increase stability, positive behaviors, production of fresh produce, and financial literacy by 75%. The intermediate goals are to 1) provide at-risk youth with tools and techniques to maintain positive behaviors 2) provide hands-on education and training opportunities for youth to gain gardening, healthy foods/meal preparation, and landscaping skills, and 3) encourage a healthy lifestyle designed to promote community service and preparation for future success.

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About youthSpark, Inc.

youthSpark's mission is to advocate for youth who need legal and adult protection in abusive and exploitative situations. As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, youthSpark serves at-risk, abused, and exploited youth in metro Atlanta through early intervention services, advocacy, and research. For more information, visit www.youth-spark.org.