



Champions of Wayne receives sustaining gifts from Helppie Family Charitable Foundation, Jeff and Lisa Styers

Program operations to be combined with The Guidance Center

SOUTHGATE and WAYNE, Mich., July 28, 2021 - Champions of Wayne (Champions), the educational incentive program established at Wayne Memorial High School in 2008, has received a pledge of \$550,000 from the Helppie Family Charitable Foundation. The grant, to be delivered over five years, is designed to be the sustaining financial base for Champions. Helppie Foundation co-founders Richard and Leslie Helppie have been the primary sponsors of Champions since 2009 and have contributed more than \$1.3 million since that time. Champions also has received a commitment from Jeff and Lisa Styers, adding another \$50,000 to their generous support as founding donors.

Simultaneous with the grant from the Helppie Foundation, Champions has announced that its operations will combine with The Guidance Center (TGC). TGC, established in 1958, is one of Wayne County's premier non-profit organizations, which last year served 16,000 children and adults with early childhood and mental health supports among a vast array of other services as part of the 25 programs operated by the agency throughout Wayne County.

The Champions program, open to all students at Wayne Memorial High School, combines adult mentoring, academic and life goal setting and achievement recognition that results in individualized prescriptions for success and financial rewards. The program's founding sponsors are Richard & Leslie Helppie of The Helppie Family Charitable Foundation and Jeff & Lisa Styers of Arrow Cares.

As Champions joins The Guidance Center, the Champions mission remains unchanged and continues as originally developed and maintains its name. Historically, it has received major funding from The Helppie Family Charitable Foundation, which continues at this transition and for the next five years as the program is operated and expanded at The Guidance Center. The agency also will seek additional and new funders to achieve the goals of the program and enhance student impact.

From its inception in 2008 with a small number of student champions (the student participants are referred to as champions) the program has grown significantly, reaching 600 students and 130 mentors in some semesters. Academic improvements are seen in 65 percent of the champions. Champions who successfully achieve their goals for a semester receive a \$200 incentive that is celebrated at an awards banquet. At the end of each semester students look forward to the awards and recognitions banquet that includes inspirational speakers, shared

success stories, and individual recognition. To date the program has provided more than \$600,000 in awards at banquet celebrations to the student champions.

The Guidance Center President & CEO Kari Walker, who is an alumna of Wayne Memorial High School, states, “The goal is to serve all students at Wayne Memorial High School and work to expand the effective program to other school districts in Wayne County.” Walker has been serving as board chair for Champions of Wayne.

Dr. James Anderson, principal of Wayne Memorial High School, adds, “Since coming to Wayne Memorial in 2019, I have seen firsthand how Champions of Wayne impacts students' lives in positive ways. This partnership between Champions of Wayne and The Guidance Center solidifies the future of the program and continued success.”

Richard Helppie, co-founder of the Helppie Family Charitable Foundation says, “Champions of Wayne has had a material positive impact on both individual students and the learning culture at Wayne Memorial. Leslie and I have long sought a way to give Champions a pathway to perpetuity. By combining with the outstanding management of TGC, we believe that the program’s future is very bright.”

Key points:

- The mission and the student-facing activities and the principles of goal setting, mentorship, reward and recognition remain.
- Champions of Wayne now operates as a defined and specific program within TGC’s Children and Youth Services.
- The Helppie Family Charitable Foundation continues to fund the program through a formal multi-year donor agreement. New and additional funders also are needed.
- The Guidance Center now provides staff, fund raising and administration.

For those who have been part of Champions of Wayne over the years, your commitment and involvement are tremendously appreciated. The Guidance Center looks forward to continuing to move forward with your help, while inviting others to become part of the Champions of Wayne tradition to motivate students as they reach for excellence.

About The Guidance Center

Since 1958 The Guidance Center has been committed to its mission to: Nurture development. Foster resilience. Cultivate well-being.

Throughout the last six decades the agency has maintained a collaborative relationship with its local communities and schools to support adults and children experiencing mental health difficulties and other challenges. A group of concerned residents and educators recognized the need for mental health services in our area and joined forces in 1958 to help form The Guidance Center. Since then we have worked as a team to respond to the needs of children, adults and families in southeast Michigan.

The agency operates a wide range of 25 programs and services at 23 locations. Our expertise in mental health and wellness, early childhood education, free preschool for low-income families, intellectual and developmental disabilities services and support, mentoring, substance abuse,

supported employment, Kids-TALK Children's Advocacy Center, the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC), and research and evaluation helps more than 16,000 members of our community annually work on their own personal triumphs in life.

About The Helppie Family Charitable Foundation

The Helppie Family Charitable Foundation was established by Richard & Leslie Helppie with a primary focus of providing support to medically and educationally underserved children. The foundation also supports programs of excellence in civic, educational and artistic areas to provide financial and in-kind community support to local and national non-profit organizations.

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