The Children & Youth Fund supports rural youth in Tompkins County

Groton Public Library buzzes with the excitement and energy of middle schoolers at their weekly gathering of the GPL Teen Thing. Reading Minecraft books, building with the new Maker Space, planning a movie night, reflecting on an author visit, learning from a visiting scholar, reading a book club book and eating healthy snacks, these youth flock to the library and relish their time there. The Children and Youth Fund made a grant for this program recognizing the effective leadership of Sara Knobel, Groton Library Director, as she champions the youth of this small community with a population of less than 6,000. Sara has transformed the library into a hub of youth activity in a community that was greatly in need of opportunities for youth engagement.

“This program has offered [Groton middle schoolers] a safe and interesting place to explore and learn. It has also continued to stimulate their curiosity about the world around them and I can only see good in that”, says Groton Junior-Senior School Librarian, Polly Case-Codner, a supporter and collaborator with the GPL Teen Thing.

“With complete honesty, I can say to you that the [GPL] Teen Thing program has made a noticeable difference in the lives of many of our young teens in Groton. In a community that struggles to offer young people a consistent opportunity for success outside of school, the Teen Thing program offers a structured, welcoming environment where teens have a creative outlet, a place for voice, and, most importantly, a positive, nurturing program where the focus is on success and community”, says Mick LeVick, Groton High School Media Teacher and collaborator.
Our rural communities are ripe for engaged programming and ripples run fast through a small community where services are few. Groton Superintendent, Margo Martin, notes that “Sara Knobel does not do anything half way. If she believes a project is worth implementing, she gives one hundred percent effort”. It is due to programming like this that make Groton youth more likely “to become connected to society and become contributing members of our towns when they become adults”.

Tompkins County rural youth have barriers to accessing services that are often more readily available to our downtown Ithaca youth. In addition to supporting the Groton Teen Thing, the Children and Youth Fund have also supported our rural youth with greater access to transportation services, access to therapeutic one-on-one mentoring, family case management, and recreational skill building activities. Its position within the Community Foundation provides the Children and Youth Fund advisors unique access to supporting the most effective programming being carried out to our rural youth throughout Tompkins County.

Written by Janet Cotraccia