

# Impact100 Essex Case Study on Covenant House of New Jersey

## All You Need is Love. And Funders Willing to Support Innovation

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Introduction:** This year, Impact100 Essex completed the administration of our first grant recipient (2017), Covenant House New Jersey (CHNJ). The project focused on instilling resilience in homeless youth in Essex County. In just two years, so many lives have been touched by the Impact100 Essex grant and the work from CHNJ. This summary report serves to convey some of the highlights, challenges, and lessons learned in our inaugural grant giving cycle.

**The Organization:** CHNJ works with the homeless youth through street and community outreach, residential services (a shelter in Newark as well as permanent housing services) and support services to move young people forward on a path to independence.

**2017 Grant Proposal:** CHNJ wished to expand the curriculum within the “Dove Learning Center” (DLC) to serve as a model for educating homeless, at-risk youth centers on developing resilience and hope, proven characteristics for building a successful future. Success had been documented through the DLC pilot project in 2016 encouraging CHNJ to seek expansion of the program.

**Results:** Covenant House enhanced their welcoming Dove Learning Center (DLC), as a place where residents have resources that value them as individuals.

1. Our grant funded the development and implementation of the DLC curriculum (see Appendix 1) and partially funded DLC staff involved in the development.
2. Nearly 90% of young people at the CHNJ’s Newark location participated in the DLC (averaging approximately 100 participants per quarter) to improve their financial literacy, obtain employment, learn and maintain healthy habits, increase positive self-talk, build confidence, self-efficacy and empathy, with the ultimate goal to exit homelessness and remain housed in a positive living environment.
3. Following their pilot program, our grant enabled CHNJ to refine and expand their model for educating homeless and at-risk youth that now serves as a model to be replicated nationally (soon to be rolled out in Atlantic City, NJ).

**Unexpected Challenges:** The search for qualified staff to develop and tailor the curriculum proved challenging and took longer than expected. In the meantime, the DLC Leadership forged ahead and began purchasing, tailoring, and even creating curriculum when, in some cases, they found needed content was not available.

**Unexpected Benefits:** After CHNJ secured the \$112,000 grant, other companies (Microsoft, Audible, Accenture and Salesforce) were also attracted to the DLC and decided to provide technology, training and learning expertise - immediately contributing to their momentum.

**Conclusion:** The Impact100 Essex grant enabled CHNJ to expand their program (positively transforming the lives of homeless youth with education through teaching resilience at the DLC) beyond a beta pilot into an ongoing operation and positioned it to expand further to other NJ locations – and potentially throughout the US.



## Introduction

Impact100 Essex is a giving circle founded and funded by Essex County women in 2017. As we enter our fourth grant cycle, we find it valuable to look back at our first grant awarded to Covenant House of New Jersey (CHNJ). We are excited to share with you a summary of the organization and the proposal, the outcomes, and our relationship with CHNJ while working with them to administer the grant. It has been a valuable experience which will undoubtedly inform how we administer future grants while we continue our efforts to have a transformative impact in Essex County.

In March 2018, members of Impact100 Essex gathered at the Newark Public Library to hear presentations from our four finalists and cast our vote for who should receive the \$112,000 grant. Our four finalists (Covenant House New Jersey, Music and the Brain, NJ Prevent Child Abuse and Spectrum360) each described important, innovative projects. Jim White, Executive Director at Covenant House New Jersey, presented a proposal on behalf of its Dove Learning Center, which our members selected as the recipient of our inaugural Impact100 Essex Grant of \$112,000.

## Our 2017 Grant Recipient

CHNJ is a nonprofit organization that works with homeless youth providing street and community outreach, residential services (a shelter in Newark as well as permanent housing services) and support services to move young people forward on a path to independence. Their parent organization, Covenant House, has been in operation for over four decades helping to transform and save the lives of more than a million homeless, runaway and trafficked young people. Nationwide, Covenant House reaches 74,000 youth every year with housing and support services.

Following their selection as our 2017 Grant Recipient, the team from CHNJ immediately began work to finalize plans and logistics for expansion of their Newark youth homeless center to include tablets and workstations, to hire new staff, and to create a curriculum to build resilience and hope. Bolstered by the success they saw in their pilot program, they were eager to fully implement the new curriculum at their Newark location.

## 2017 Grant Proposal

According to a 2016 study, Essex County accounted for almost 20% of New Jersey's homeless population, with over 10% of that population made up of young adults 18-24 years old, many of whom sleep in cars, parks, abandoned buildings, and train stations throughout the year. These young people, typically disconnected from the world of work and education, often had intense histories as victims of violence and negative family and institutional interactions. CHNJ believes housing stability can provide the foundation for these youths to gain their footing, and allow them to work on strengthening their resilience. They found that a curriculum focusing on resilience, a documented characteristic of stability and hope in homeless youth, would help them successfully build a positive and independent future. Based upon the success of a small pilot in 2016, they proposed to utilize our Impact100 Essex grant to expand the Dove Learning Center (DLC) to teach resilience skills.

This particular proposal would use a blended learning approach focusing on 5 content areas (Education, Employment, Financial Literacy, Social Navigation and Physical/Emotional/Spiritual Wellness). Our grant



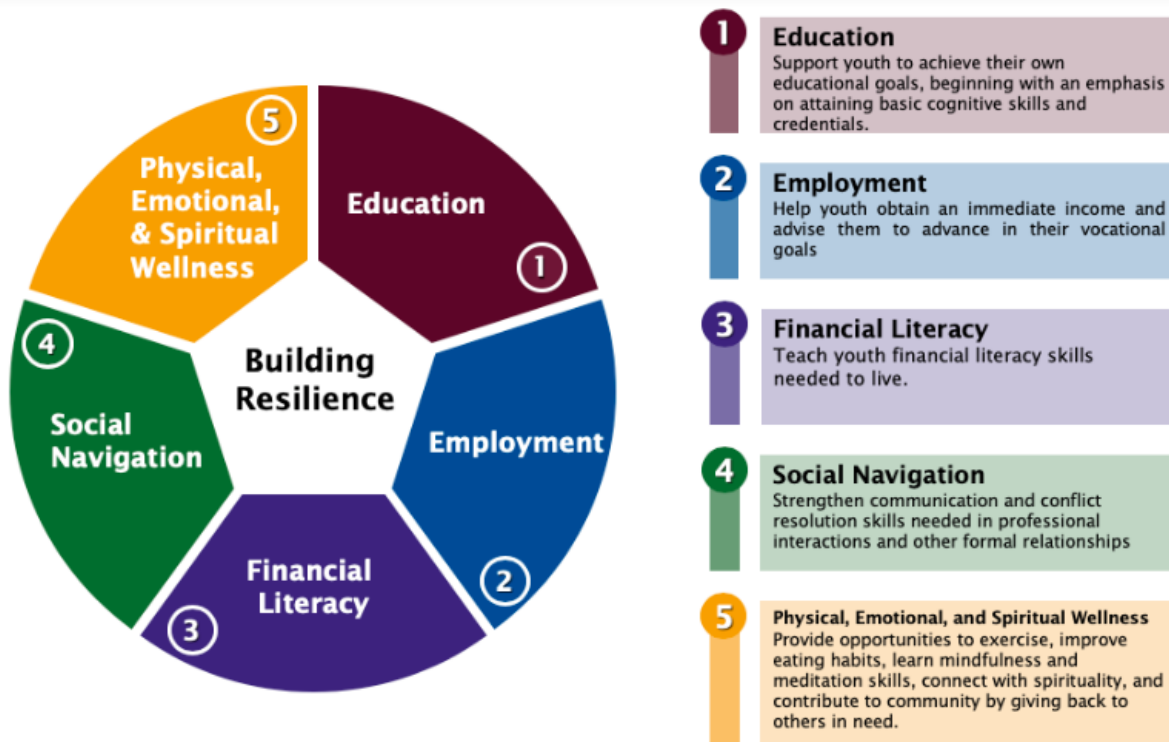
would specifically fund the development of the curriculum while also partially funding the staff necessary to support the development.

**Results of the Dove Learning Center (DLC)**

With the funds from the Impact100 Essex grant, CHNJ was able to hire employees to help execute their vision of the DLC. A DLC Specialist co-created an interactive learning environment, a DLC Volunteer Manager continues to recruit and manage other volunteers to ensure their service is enhancing the programming and care that is offered to the homeless youth at CHNJ, and a DLC Coordinator developed the DLC curriculum.



The curriculum focused on 5 content areas (Education, Employment, Financial Literacy, Social Navigation and Physical/Emotional/Spiritual Wellness) as depicted in the figure below:



Each of the content areas contained facilitated reflections, independent work, 1-on-1 sessions, small group sessions, specific technology activities, and classroom activities. For more on the specific curriculum, please see Appendix 1 – Dove Learning Center Curriculum.

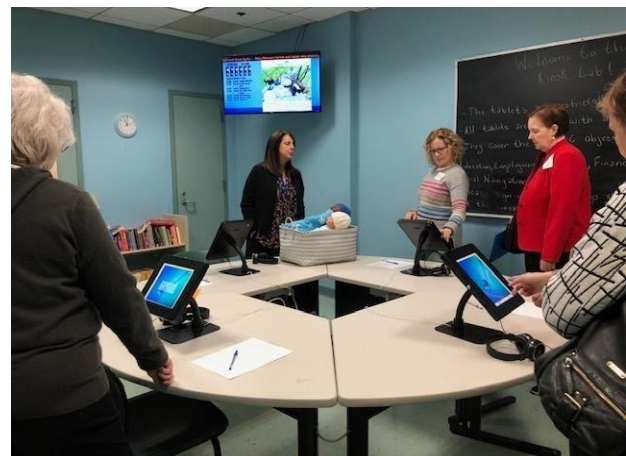
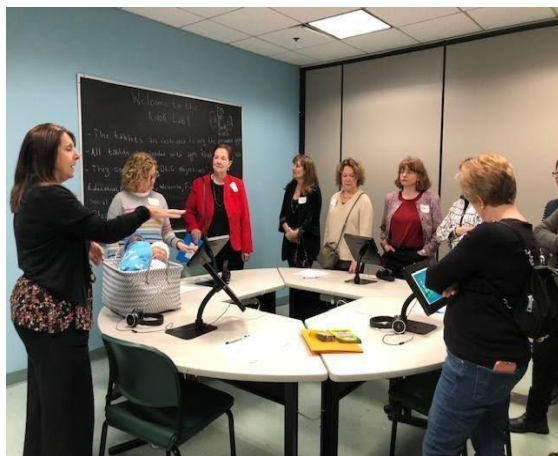
The DLC program enrolled the vast majority of the youth who were being served at the CHNJ Newark location, with approximately 100 DLC participants per quarter. The most popular of the content areas was the Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual Wellness, with the Employment content area being the second most popular.

	2018		2019	
	*Baseline 5/1/18 – 7/31/18	8/1/18 – 10/31/18	5/1/19- 7/31/19	8/1/19 – 10/31/19
<b># of Youth Served at Newark Crisis</b>	119	126	108	133
<b># of DLC Participants</b>	91	103	92	101
<b>DLC Participation Rate</b>	76%	82%	85%	76%
<b>Avg # of activities per participant</b>	18	19.74	22	19.5
<b>Resilience Objectives</b>				
<b>Education</b>	59	72	64	71
<b>Employment</b>	73	90	69	79
<b>Financial Literacy</b>	44	40	36	57
<b>Physical, Emotional, Spiritual Wellness</b>	85	91	80	90
<b>Social Navigation</b>	49	55	61	73

See the picture below for a glimpse of a DLC session in action.



Approximately one year after we selected CHNJ as our grant recipient, they invited our Impact100 Essex members for an insider view of the Dove Learning Center. Nearly a dozen members braved the weather on a cold day in February 2019 to see the effects of our grant first-hand. Our members loved touring the Newark facility and the opportunity to see the technology lab available to the students through our grant. Not a single woman walked out of there unmoved by the mission of the CHNJ and the impact of our grant that was already evident.



### **Unexpected Challenge**

One of the key components of our program funding was to expand the DLC curriculum. Unfortunately, the intended hire to write the curriculum informed CHNJ (on what would have been her first day) that she would not be starting work at the DLC. That was a difficult setback, and it took longer than anticipated to find a suitable replacement.

CHNJ quickly adapted and a key in-house employee reallocated her time and responsibilities so as to be available to complete this new endeavor. This entailed purchasing and tailoring the DLC curriculum, as well as writing additional curriculum when it was not available for purchase. We were impressed with their nimble ability to accomplish what they set out to do, despite preliminary challenges that could have halted the project.

### **Unexpected Benefits**

Fortunately, the unexpected benefits far outweighed the challenges. The Impact100 Essex grant became a catalyst for companies (including Microsoft, Audible, Accenture and Salesforce) to get involved - supporting the DLC with technology, training, learning expertise and more. It immediately and significantly contributed to the DLC's momentum. In addition, the expertise and guidance provided by our Impact100 Essex grant administrators, led by Mindy Propper, was invaluable for CHNJ.

### **Grant Administration Learnings**

As we began to create our grant administration process and reports for our first grant award, we realized how critical it is for the applicants' proposals to be very clear about the specific outputs and results the applicants are aiming to achieve. CHNJ was gracious in working with our team to clarify the targeted deliverables. We subsequently refined our grant application to include the specificity we learned we need.

### **Making an Impact**

From Sara Rosen at Women@NJ PAC, and an Impact100 Essex member, we know that "Women give differently than men. We're not just about giving, but about relationships with the organizations we support. Women don't just write checks; we are hands on!"

Nothing is more hands on than monitoring the milestones and timelines through our grant administration process. Jim White, Executive Director of CHNJ notes that our grant administration check-ins "helped keep us accountable, on track and focused on the KPIs. It played a role in driving a great outcome. The impact100 Essex involvement was a commitment to us and the results show. Without the \$100,000+ grant from Impact100 Essex, this DLC program would never have lifted off the ground so quickly and would not have attracted other funding to keep it going, let alone allowing it to expand to places like Atlantic City."



Jim White also shared about the early days of their idea for the DLC. He said,

*“When we applied for the grant, we had a concept for the Dove Learning Center that we were incubating. Our approach is to follow more of a business model than a nonprofit model, meaning that we like to do a small test of an idea, prove the concept, then ‘take it to market’. As opposed to seeking funding for an untested idea, that we have no experience with.*

*That’s where Impact100 Essex came in. We had a start with the Dove Learning Center concept, but we really needed a partner who understood the challenges we faced with homeless teenagers, could see how our vision could come to fruition, and then help us get the program more fully realized. The Impact100 Essex grant was exactly what we needed to get us off the ground, and the catalyst to make this project reality.”*

In a recent interview, we asked Mr. White to elaborate on the importance and need for what they were considering at the DLC. He told us:

*“Our young people need education, employment. But they need more than that. They need resilience. They need the tools to build the resilience required to stay out of homelessness. That’s where the idea of the Dove Learning Center (DLC) came from. The concept is to help young people build the areas of competency/resilience so as not to return to homelessness.*

*Furthermore, the other thing we know is that kids learn differently, so we came up with a blended learning model. For example, we want to teach kids about saving. In order to maximize retention, reaching as many kids in the most effective way, we need to teach savings in 5 different ways. There are savings games, there is 1-2-1 tutoring, there is online learning available. What we’ve learned is that by teaching it in different ways, the retention has increased. And we keep learning and looking at what’s working and not working, and updating our learning modules.*

*87% of kids who come to Covenant House in Newark, come in and participate in the DLC. That shows it’s the welcoming, engaging environment we set out to provide. There are a lot of kids who come here who didn’t do well in school. Creating an environment that’s inspiring and engaging is needed to support their learning. This space that we’re sitting in today, it looks more like a WeWork space than a homeless shelter. This is absolutely unique. And it sends the message to the kids that they are worthy of dignity and respect, and they respond accordingly.”*

When we asked what he sees in the future, Mr. White explained, “We’re now also in the process of taking the momentum here in Newark to our location in Atlantic City. That has taken a bit longer than I hoped. I’m impatient! But I’m very pleased that we can now focus on making that happen.” Expansion of this program to another location is exactly what we envision resulting from our impactful funding.

Hearing from the Executive Director and seeing the positive results help validate the impact of our grant. What really drives it home is humanizing it with someone's personal story. We encourage you to read below to **learn about Michael's story** (referenced on the CHNJ website):



Michael is 21 years old and is currently living in his own apartment, but the journey to Covenant House was long and painful.

He grew up in a Brooklyn neighborhood that was ravaged by gangs, drugs and violence. His single mother consistently chose her boyfriends over her kids, which took a huge emotional toll on Michael and his sister. His cousin was murdered in an act of gang violence, but Michael was determined to avoid the same fate.

When he was 16, his family moved to Irvington, NJ where he was frequently kicked out of the house with his belongings tossed out the window to the curb. He couch-surfed between friends and family, unsure of what tomorrow would bring. One of his coldest and darkest nights was spent in Irvington Park where sleep was the only time he was unaware of his hunger pains. Michael knew he wanted to do more with his life.

Michael managed to graduate high school, and learned about Covenant House from a friend. When he walked through the doors, he quickly discovered it was a place where he could get food, a warm bed, and lots of love. He attended the Dove Learning Center where he learned how to budget and save money. He was encouraged to save when he saw the rapid growth in his bank account and managed to accumulate over \$4,000.

Beyond the Financial Literacy program, Michael took advantage of other DLC opportunities and became a peer leader and a mentor to others. He also volunteered in the community by packing boxes at food banks and distributing food to those in need at Penn Station. Michael said, "I knew first-hand, what something as simple as a sandwich would mean to them."

Michael left Covenant House having his own apartment and a job. He aspires to become a Correctional Officer and to attend college. He holds on to the belief that with hard work he will be able to attain his goals. He says, "Covenant House is a place full of support that feels like family."



## Conclusion

Our 2017 Impact100 Essex grant accelerated the DLC program's momentum (hiring more employees, attracting additional funding) and enabled the CHNJ organization to increase its impact on positively transforming the lives of homeless youth.

CHNJ's Mr. White shared some final observations about their experience with Impact100 Essex.

*"What you're doing, and the way you are going about it, is making a difference in people's lives. \$100,000 is a significant grant, even for a larger nonprofit like us. The Impact grant gave us the flexibility to do something creative. You guys are truly supporting innovation, and meeting that spot for funding where an organization has a baked idea, but they need a funder who can support them in taking risk to realize their vision. Kudos for that innovative approach. Please, keep up the good work."*

Given our mission to engage women in collective giving, provide transformative grants to organizations that reach underserved populations in Essex County, and spur organizations to do something remarkable, we are proud of the outcomes achieved by our first grant recipient. We are excited to currently be working with Schools That Can Newark, our 2018 Recipient, and Meeting Essential Needs with Dignity (MEND), our 2019 Recipient.

**Thank You Members!** Real life stories like Michael's are happening at the Covenant House because of the impact of our collective funding. Impact100 Essex serves as venture capitalists, or venture philanthropists, by identifying and funding programs that will transform lives and communities. This cannot be done without the pooled contributions of each member. There are so many worthwhile programs in need of a large influx of funds to get off the ground and we are uniquely positioned to help with the pooled contributions of each member. Thanks for your support!

For the latest news and happenings, don't forget to like and follow us on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn at Impact100 Essex.



Appendix 1 – Dove Learning Center Curriculum

	Facilitated Reflection	INDEPENDENT WORK	ONE-ON-ONE	SMALL GROUP	TECHNOLOGY	CLASSROOM
EDUCATION	Cov Café Cov Chat-Time Management DLC Writers <b>+Cov Chat – Brain Muscle</b>	Homework Study Materials for SAT, College Apps, and ASVAB College Application Tracker	Campus Tours/ HS and College <b>+Expanded tutoring program</b>	Escape Room Book Group Brain Games Insights	Wordscapes  Brain It On Audiobooks- Audible BBC Learning English Multiplication   Grasshopper- Learn to Code Free ASVAB- Practice Test Khan Academy  SoloLearn: Learn to Code Free Spritz Reader  TED Quizlet- Vocabulary Kahoot- Drivers Education	Computer Literacy Rutgers Legal Clinic Drivers Ed Walk me to School Retail Readiness, Job Readiness
EMPLOYMENT	Cov Chat- Teamwork and Collaboration Cov Chat- Conflict Resolution Jobs- Pros & Cons	Job Interview Job Confirmation Employment Self- Assessment Study Materials	Off-Site Visits-Job Fairs Mock interviews Resume Building Email Etiquette Job Search	Make a Meme The Start Up Interview Challenge	Job Search My Best Bets Skills to Succeed	Talk to my Job Accenture: Retail Readiness, Job readiness <b>+Workplace Etiquette</b>
FINANCIAL LITERACY	Cov Chat-Delayed Gratification Cov Chat-Needs vs Wants <b>+Cov Chat - Decision Making</b>	Housing Search <b>+Bank On It homework</b> <b>+Sensibility homework</b>	<b>+Running the Pathways Program</b>	Road Trip Our First Place Budget Beans A New Freedom: 1) Pathway to Better Personal Organization 2) Pathway to Independent Living 3) Managing Your Money <b>+Shopping Challenge</b>	Spent 50 Activities for Financial Literacy <b>+Financial Football</b> <b>+MOCAFI online lessons</b>	Garden State Bank Living on my Own How to Manage Your Money Cents Ability MOCAFI Financial Ed.
WELLNESS	Morning Meditation Mind Matters Peer Leader Program Breakfast Cov Chat-Goal Setting <b>+Healthilicious</b>	Peace Room Art Room JFK Gym Membership Afternoon Affirmations	Pet Therapy <b>+Guitar Lessons</b> <b>+Music Lessons</b> <b>+Bootcamp Workout Stations</b>	Spoken Word Drum Circle Game Meet up? Knitting Project USE A New Freedom: Pathway to Better Hygiene Pathway to Better , Basic Food, Shopping and Nutrition	Movie Night Stop, Breathe, Think Headspace: Meditation and Mindfulness Just Breathe	Sex Ed Yoga Matthew's Art Class Poetry Kit
SOCIAL NAVIGATION	What Would You Do? Healthy Relationships Nurturing Parent <b>+Cov Chat – Dessert Island</b> <b>+Healthy and Unhealthy</b> <b>+Communication/Social Skills</b>	Tech Lab Apps – Skills to Succeed	Peer Leader Debrief Peer Leader Training	Peer Advisory I Know how to Resolve Conflict card game A New Freedom: Pathway to Better Physical and Emotional Health	Working with Accenture on Tech Lab Apps Skills to Succeed	Healthy Masculinity Self-Advocacy_Bootcamp <b>+Game Night</b>