

Blossom IDD Summary Report

Information about the Applicant

Blue Lotus Farm & Retreat Center (BLC) assists those with life challenges of any age by providing accessible outdoor recreational and therapeutic opportunities in a caring, accepting, and inspiring 64-acre day camp setting. This is a place where people may spend a day amongst the trees and gardens, where they can hike at their own pace, where devoted volunteers will help them boat and swim, where they can play, find friendship and unqualified acceptance. For 19 years we've provided care and acceptance while increasing access to nature for many.

BLC assists those with life challenges by providing a magnificent setting outside of the urban landscape allowing accessible outdoor recreational and therapeutic opportunities. Devoted staff and volunteers offer caring and enthusiastic stimulation and support. This 64-acre day camp is beautifully landscaped with trails, gardens, boardwalks, 4-acre pond, heated swimming pool, labyrinth, and many adapted outdoor activities.

Most public spaces are not equipped to handle people with special needs, especially those who are prone to running off, have problems controlling their emotions, or are easily overwhelmed when mixing with the general population. Blue Lotus was created for these individuals, many of whom discover unparalleled confidence and satisfaction here.

In Southeastern Wisconsin Blue Lotus is the sole provider of a safe, private, and engaging day-camp like experience for groups with various special needs and range of profound life challenges. We are fully committed to programming that so markedly enhances the lives of those we serve. Since 2003, BLC has served over 31,500 individuals. We have a small paid staff and rely heavily on our devoted volunteers. Last year, 252 volunteers donated over 4,000 hours to learn our mission and approach, and help in every aspect. Among other things, BLC is a fine example of the power of committed volunteers in the lives of thousands of people.

BLC serves Wisconsin individuals with special needs. We provide education and recreation in a summer day camp setting which pairs well with Wispact Beneficiaries.

Statement of Need

Our goal is to serve people experiencing challenges who would benefit from a day outdoors. For this specific grant we have identified nonprofit organizations who serve those with special needs.

We are requesting \$10,000 to support seven days of joy for seven different nonprofit groups who serve those with disabilities. We would offer a day at Blue Lotus to nonprofit groups such as the following: Milwaukee Hamilton High School Special Needs Summer Camp, Golden Pearl, Portal, Balance, Threshold, and Easterseals.

Project Goals and Expected Benefits

Blue Lotus has experienced much growth over the past few years. During this period, we have continuously assessed our space so as to ensure safety and accessibility and to guarantee that everything is in working order. With the help of hundreds of volunteers and generous voluntary financial support from small grants and individuals, we have successfully completed several projects to maintain the quality of the opportunities that we offer all visitors to Blue Lotus.

We've also grown in the number of nonprofit groups visiting us. We have seen 27 new groups over the last two years. We also are seeing an increased number of group rentals. To continue to provide to the increase number of visitors, we will require additional funding.

Our Objective

Each nonprofit that serves children and adults with special needs would be able to enjoy all the activities that Blue Lotus has to offer. Undoubtedly, they will be invigorated by the outdoors and empowered by trying new activities in a safe, supported environment. Activities will include boating (kayaking, canoeing, pedal boats), fishing, exploring nature trails, swimming, and yard games in an unstructured setting and assisted by professional staff and volunteers. The 64-acre property allows for social distancing, thereby guaranteeing everyone's safety, during the COVID pandemic.

We estimated 210 people will have the opportunity to be inspired and empowered while enjoying a much-needed day in the beautiful outdoors.

Expected Benefits

Liz, is a bright-eyed 12-year-old with cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. With help, Liz – for the first time in her life – went for a canoe ride. She excitedly spotted turtles and frogs sunning themselves on logs. She said, "I felt relaxed, included, accepted and happy." And we heard from Emily, a young gal with Down's Syndrome, "I

love Blue Lotus because no one here makes fun of me." These stories are real, and carry reoccurring themes of

inclusion, acceptance, and happiness.

Their words offer the most powerful documentation of the value of Blue Lotus. Obviously, a lot of the benefits we see are observational and subjective. Yet, there is also research that documents the powerful impact of a Blue Lotus-type setting. Spending time in nature improves the capability to problem solve and think critically, lowers blood pressure, enhances creativity and imagination, reduces stress and anxiety, improves self-esteem, coordination, and balance, and boosts the immune system.

Time spent in nature has a positive effect on mental, spiritual, and physical health. The Blue Lotus setting has an immense impact on those facing the greatest challenges in life.

With each visit we hear and see people experiencing joy. Through surveys, emails, thank you cards, and personal conversations, our visitors explain how Blue Lotus provides them a day of happiness.

Project Implementation Plan

Expand current day retreat programming through collaboration with local agencies. This will include evaluating and making minor improvements to our activities and facilities.

November 2022 – Pick seven days and designate them, Joyful Nature Days provided by Wispect Foundation.

December/January 2022 – Coordinate with seven nonprofit groups who serve those with special needs. Each of the seven groups would have one free designated day at Blue Lotus.

January-May 2023 – Review surveys and meet with the Grounds Committee to plan and prepare and maintain property for the 2023 season. Update nature trail game. Add perennial flowers.

June-September 2023 – Provide seven nonprofit organizations and their clients with a day of outdoor activities. Afterwards, report on the success and improvements needed.

Staffing – Jacqueline Janz, Executive Director, and Lisa Starke, Community Engagement Coordinator, will be responsible for arranging and preparing for collaborative groups.

Other roles – Stuart Natale, Grounds Coordinator, will be assisted by many volunteers to prepare the grounds for visitors in 2023. Dianne Rinn, Group Coordinator, along with many volunteers will ensure all guests have an enjoyable time at Blue Lotus.

Evaluation Plan

Success will be measured in three different ways. First, we administer surveys at the conclusion of organizations' visits. These are completed by agency representatives and they are asked to rate the facility itself, the staff and volunteers, the activities they participated in, and additional information pertaining to their specific outing.

Second, we collect personal testimonies from participants and representatives of the visiting agency both within surveys as well as through conversations during outings. An agency representative who has been bringing older adults from the inner city of Milwaukee to Blue Lotus for several years recently shared "Many of the seniors we take to Blue Lotus are amazed at just how peaceful and quiet it is out there. Little things that we take for granted like a lily pad in the water, seeing a frog, or catching a fish just amazes these seniors. It simply puts a smile on their face. Blue Lotus is a very important part of what we do for less fortunate seniors in our community."

Budget

ITEMS	COST
Outdoor Equipment/Activities	\$2,600
In ground, heated pool maintenance, two person bicycles upkeep, yard games	
Facility/Grounds Preparations	\$2,400
Nature trail and pond maintenance	
Insurance & Taxes	\$1,920
Program Staff	\$3,000
Utilities	\$750
Printing Mailings & Surveys	\$100
Program Supplies	\$1,500
TOTAL	\$12,270
Funds from the 2023 Gala Fundraiser	
will be used to offset the costs	\$2,270
Wispect Foundation Grant	\$10,000

Staff Recommendation

The grant application can be approved. The majority of expenses outlined in the budget can be paid for with Wispact grant proceeds and ultimately the grant provides a scholarship so persons with disabilities can access the farm and enjoy the benefits of the grounds. There is one exceptional item to the budget that cannot be covered and that is the staff salary expense of \$3,000.00. This is off-set with the proceeds from the fundraiser gala of \$2,270.00 leaving an adjustment of \$730.00. The grant can be approved in the amount of \$9,720.00