

MCFI Summary Report

Information about the Applicant

Founded in 1938 as Jewish Vocational Service, our initial focus was to assist immigrant families fleeing oppression in Europe and settle in Milwaukee. In 1990, our name was changed to the Milwaukee Center for Independence (MCFI). In our nearly 85-year history, the agency has provided innovative support for people of all ages and abilities. Our mission, to partner with people of all abilities to advance their total health, serves as the foundation for our vision of healthy and hopeful communities under the guiding values of Understanding People, Leading Success, and Working Together.

Pre-pandemic, MCFI produced and distributed about 23,000 fresh and healthy meals each school day to 90 school partners. The number of school partners increased during the 2021/2022 school year as additional schools looked to MCFI to provide a daily breakfast, lunch, and snack for each school day. Nearly 100% of those schools were eligible to offer free meals to children. In fact, during 2021, more than 3.3 million meals were produced and distributed to more than 15,000 unique children and youth each school day at 110 early education sites and K-12 schools across Milwaukee.

Statement of Need

MCFI plans to develop a fifth commercial kitchen at 27th and Wells in Milwaukee as part of the Near West Side Partner's Concordia 27 initiative. This project addresses the Near West Side neighborhood inequities of food insecurity, housing, health disparities, unemployment, transportation access, and trauma. This kitchen project will also expand culinary training opportunities for both youth and adults with an intellectual/developmental disability (I/DD), previous incarceration, work skills gaps, chronic mental illness, or other barriers to employment; create new 12-15 FTE positions; and provide space for a demonstration kitchen to support health and wellness classes for neighborhood residents.

Clients in MCFI's day program, almost all living with an intellectual/developmental disability, are currently benefitting from the first hydroponic growing system the agency has received. Clients have been responsible for planting seedlings, adding nutrients to the water, watching the plants grow, and then eating the food that they grew as a component of this horticulture therapy. Culinary trainees with I/DD at MCFI's proposed new kitchen will use a hydroponic system to grow fresh vegetables for use in the healthy meals produced and distributed to area children and youth.

Another piece of equipment requested for support by the Wispact Foundation, and one that complements the hydroponic growing system, is a produce washing system. This system uses citric acid and mild agitation to effectively clean produce and extend the shelf life. The result is fresher and healthier fruits and vegetables.

A gift of \$10,000 from the Wispact Foundation will purchase the hydroponic growing system and help support the purchase of produce washing system -both pieces of equipment to be used by individuals with I/DD within MCFI's Concordia 27 kitchen.

Project Goals and Expected Benefits

A gift from the Wispact Foundation to purchase a hydroponic growing system and toward the costs of purchasing a produce washing system supports overall Concordia 27 goals. The total project is an expansion of current services already in place and needed to meet the increasing demand for MCFI services by area schools and early learning centers. The Concordia 27 kitchen project also expands training opportunities leading to greater independent living for individuals with I/DD.

MCFI's first goal is to increase production by 3,000 meals served per school day by 9/30/2023 with a second goal to increase production by 4,000 meals per school day by 9/30/2024. A third goal is to provide culinary workforce training and employment supports to 25 youth and adults with I/DD by 9/30/2024.

Project Implementation Plan

Construction has already begun on the Concordia 27 production kitchen with occupancy expected by June 2023 to meet the demand for food service support needed by schools no later than August 2023. Promotion of, and recruitment for, culinary workforce trainees is expected to begin in August of 2023. MCFI targets year-end 2022 to finalize equipment purchases, including this request to the Wispact Foundation for a hydroponic growing system and produce washing system . This timeline provides an allowance for supply chain issues should equipment delivery and installation be delayed to avoid, or minimize, any impact on the Concordia 27 kitchen operations launch.

Evaluation Plan

MCFI, per Wisconsin DPI and USDA regulations, must strictly track the number of meals produced and is audited several times per year by these agencies for compliance. Training completion and job coaching for individuals with I/DD is also tracked and includes metrics such as days in training until successful completion, attainment of ServSafe certification, and hourly wages and hours per week worked upon job placement as well as eligibility for benefits such as paid time off and access to insurance.

Mara Zywicke is responsible for the food service/meal documentation and audit process. Carrie Belsky is responsible for tracking workforce training documentation . Both staff members are long-term employees of the agency with a significant track record of success in the community.

Budget

The Wispact Foundation is the only funding source to-date that MCFI has requested for these two very specific pieces of equipment. Out of this total \$10,000 request to the Wispact Foundation, funding would be used to purchase the hydroponic growing system at approximately \$5,000 with the remaining \$5,000 to be used toward the purchase of the produce washing system's total cost of \$22,245.

Item	Cost
Hydroponic Growing System	\$5,000.00
Portion of produce washer	\$5,000.00
Total	\$10,000.00

Staff Recommendation

The grant application can be recommended for approval. The grant will provide supplies that directly benefit the disabled individuals participating in the farming program at MCFI. The grant aligns with the initiatives of the foundation.