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## **Resources for At Risk Youth**

Low income students have always had a disadvantage in school whether it's due to lack of supplies, nourishment, or a stable family situation, in the past year because of COVID-19 these issues have exacerbated these problems, due to people having to stay at home where these kids could have minimal access to good wifi-signal, again a stable family life, and supplies. This needs to be addressed and we are here to do that, along with our grant request of money to do so, being one of the necessary puzzle pieces to solving this obstacle. Our proposal is to provide useful information for students and their families during these unprecedented times. We will do so by handing out a pack of five magnets to each family with children enrolled in Boston Public schools from grade K-5. These magnets have information on how to contact different services that will help low income students and their families in need through the pandemic. We will talk more in depth about these magnets later on, the idea stemming from reading about the literature of child learning, the effects of the pandemic and the observations of people involved.

### **Group background and our mission**

Our names are Ava Costa, Josimar Martinez, and Thiago Bellizia. We are all college students attending Suffolk University in the fall, and have all come together to request money for a very important cause we believe needs more attention. Coming from all different parts of the world, we all have different life experiences to bring to the table, Thiago coming from Saopaulo Costa Rica, Ava coming from Melrose Massachusetts, and Josimar

coming from Revere, Massachusetts. Although coming from different places, we yet have the same passion for change regarding the topic we are about to inform you all of. We would like to address the inequities in children's success in school. The inequities due to economic factors impact outcomes of children's achievement in school more than people may realize, and it's time to put these disadvantages to rest. While researching about this topic a broad place of expertise we have is the experiences we have all encountered in our lives. Starting off with Ava, she has had experience with the learning environment from a teacher's assistant perspective. She worked at a preschool in her hometown named Teachable Moments for two years. This pre-school was early childhood education so the age range was from infant to pre-kindergarten. This experience has shaped the way Ava views the educational space today. Her appreciation for teachers has enhanced and she has realized how much young student's need the support of their teachers, and family in order to flourish. With the recent pandemic Ava has seen how drastically the classroom has changed, and how important these face to face connections between a student and teacher are. The online learning disparities were apparent throughout the experience of COVID and the preschool. It was harder for certain families to do what was needed for their children when they didn't have the capacity to do so. Ava felt the tension in the air after seeing the negative impacts of COVID on all the students, parents and teachers. She saw the strain put on the entire preschool she worked at, most importantly how disproportionately certain students were able to thrive due to their economic stance.

While Ava was a preschool assistant, Thiago worked in an NGO to help impoverished Brazilian kids by training in a sport called Roller Ski. Training the kids to become ski athletes for Brazil while keeping them off the street and in schools was a major element of the SkiNaRua programme which was endorsed by CBDN (Confederação Brasileira de desportos na neve). Thiago went on a train as a Paralympic athlete and went on to make bonds and valuable experiences with the kids and other athletes seeing how happiness and will power was still strongly found in impoverished areas hoping and fighting for a better life was consistent with the participants of the program. The group would meet every Saturday in USP's campus, one of São Paulo's largest public

universities where the kids would eat breakfast for free and then train. Apart from helping in the training Thiago and his family donated monthly to the project to help with expenses like food for the children.

Unlike Thiago and Ava, Josimar has had some of his own family members working in public school during the covid-19 pandemic. His sister is a 2nd grade teacher at Salem elementary school in Salem Massachusetts. Josimar himself has even helped provide community service in his town by helping hand out groceries, door to door knocking about the covid vaccine, and discussing possible ways to help get our students back into school while following all covid protocols. As of now about 70% of Revere, MA is fully vaccinated and families are able to reach out to their local schools and churches to receive a free meal/groceries. The real goal we are all trying to achieve is to get our kids back into school in a safe and healthy way. Note Thiago was not in the same economic situation as the most of the members of the group and coexisting with different perspectives was very eye opening for both the children and Thiago.

The three of us together make a great team with the same passion and goal in mind. We would like to help low income families rise above the hardships regarding receiving an equal learning experience for their children. The coronavirus has made problems that much worse for low income families, which is why the urgency has become even stronger. Us three are grounded in the fact that the need for leaning on one another is now stronger than ever. Choosing this topic has been important for all three of us in knowing that young children can't fight for themselves, and their parents can't do it on their own, so making this new voice and source of support for these people is more than we could ask for for an outcome of this proposal.

## **Project Background**

While these being obvious different experiences they also connect from the struggles of pre school children, to the disenfranchised participating in sports and volunteer work. Things have definitely gotten worse with the pandemic. Our larger mission for this grant is to provide information to families in need, and hopefully help ease

the families affected by poverty to an extent. We are hoping to alleviate this stressor for parents with children enrolled in schools by giving them easy access to these resources instead of them having to go through the trouble of finding them on their own, they don't need that added inconvenience on top of everything else they could be going through. By giving the parents this advantage, we are also helping the children involved at the same time, which is our goal. Obviously these children can't be as independent. Due to their young age, they can't be as autonomous and their need for support is heightened compared to a highschooler, or even middle schooler. Which is why we chose to focus on K-5 students, we felt as though the need was more dire and urgent.

Learning, especially for the young kids, is fundamental for the rest of their life, and growth as a person, we will explore how the coronavirus limited learning for low income students. Without a normal learning experience, for example the switch to online interrupted the natural flow of the process. According to a study by Timmons et al, this is what she believes the key pieces of learning are, "Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years identifies four conditions required for children in their learning: (1) belonging-which involves connecting with others and forming relationships, (2) well-being- which focuses on the physical and mental health of students, (3) engagement-which involves creating opportunities for students to explore with their natural curiosity, and (4) expression- which focuses on providing opportunities for students to communicate in a variety of forms (Timmons, Kristy, et al. 2021)". Belonging, well-being, engagement and expression are all 4 really important components of growth in a child as a person and a learner. In some way or another all 4 of these have been impacted by the coronavirus, for example, social distancing, masks, where these children are unable to see your peers expressions, along with belonging and engagement both being altered due to the disconnect of in person connection. The literature continues with another perspective stating, "The teacher produces signals that kick off specific processes in the child's mind, including assumptions about the generalisability and relevance of the received information (see Sperber and Wilson, 1995). With this sender-receiver model, natural pedagogy positions itself within the individualistic and mechanistic tradition of the science of learning (Moll, 2020)". There is a common theme from

both of these articles of the baselines for a child's needs at that young age. In this analysis of the empirical background of child learning by Moll they conclude that learning is not just a one sided situation. In the same Moll analysis, a philosophical discussion of the education of the youth was started and compared viewpoints from the major builders of child learning theory (Rousseau, Piaget and Harris). The conclusions of this discussion are present in the following: "The child asks for her behaviour to be guided by those whom she knows to be more experienced than her. Namely, that you provide me with an example that I regard as a paradigm for what I myself am doing (Moll, 2020)". Here Moll goes to describe how learning is a collaborative effort which connects to our main theme as online learning stunts the flow of information relay from child to teacher. The younger years have a larger emphasis on the importance of learning, "There were unique concerns for the early years, given that learning in the early primary grades focuses on developing early literacy, language, and mathematical skills (Ontario, 2016) that are foundational for lasting academic success (Pinto et al. 2016). These concerns were exacerbated given that the frequency of instruction was greatly reduced with the move to remote instruction." These two texts compare because both are emphasizing the need for in person fluent interaction between student and teacher, when this interaction is halted by a screen, and not always in real time, the instruction can be taken out of context, the children could not understand, and that natural flow of question and answer necessary for communication and growth skills is compromised. This can be hard for kids, especially young students who are still in their early stages of learning, whereas Timmons, et al said, it develops early literacy, language and mathematical skills. Social skills like play-learning which involves engagement and social skills was also found to be problematic in online learning spheres as the same study recounts, "Moving to remote teaching and learning contexts means that if social interactions are happening, they are only occurring through online video meetings, where it is difficult and arguably impossible to develop the pro-social skills for which a play-based early learning environment naturally allows. (Timmons, Kristy, et al. 2021)".

Now that the main contexts of child learning and some of its consequences have been seen, you could be wondering, what about the low income factor? In the same Timmons study she says, “Parents expressed deep concerns for the widening of learning gaps, given that students did not have equitable access or equal levels of support or resources available (Timmons, Kristy, et al, 2021)”. Here validates the inequities between low income students and their other peers who might have easier access to supplies necessary for success in this new way of learning. Having tablets available for their children was a necessity for parents in this past year of learning, which is why it’s so important for teachers to understand why some kids might be falling behind more than others. This learning gap is worth considering for the upcoming school year and how we should prepare the kids. This article by Michael Petrilli shines light on how learning should be addressed this year and how we should have been doing it all along, “Teachers should develop individualized plans to fill in the gaps in kids' knowledge and skills and accelerate their progress to grade level.” (Petrilli, 2020). Petrilli shines his opinionated view on how there were obvious barriers in the way certain kids were able to get their work done, he believes that these teachers need to be more hands on than ever before, and that teachers need to make sure that each individual student is getting the attention they need. While all students no doubt struggled with similar problems this past school year, it could be argued that lower income students had more of a disadvantage, along with more worries that arose after the pandemic and sudden shift into this new way of learning, and requirements.

The idea that disenfranchised families and their problems augmented during the pandemic is seen in multiple international studies, we will show statistics from Australia, the Philippines, and the United Kingdom. Without further ado, “Three quarters (73.4 percent) of respondents believed that there were barriers to effective learning. Stress due to the pandemic, lack of access to gadgets, and inability of children to focus on remote learning were the most commonly cited challenges (Cho, Yoonyoung, et al. 2021)”. This Filipino study interviewed hundreds of low income students and their families that show economic turmoil, yet the USA one of the world's most prosperous countries also faced adversity, “Since the pandemic hit, nearly 50% of responding parents in a

new study of low-income families said they had lost their jobs or had decreased work hours and experienced food insecurity, according to Georgetown psychology professor Anna Johnson (Georgetown University, 2020)". It's interesting to compare the two and see such vast differences across such different places in the world. It goes to show that this online learning difficulty is not such an easy fix for anyone, it is not only the United States that are suffering, all we see in the news are sources regarding the United States, notably because it's where we all live, but it's interesting to put perspective to it in realizing we are not alone.

Continuing on the route of surveys and studies, "Three quarters (73.4 percent) of respondents believed that there were barriers to effective learning. Stress due to the pandemic, lack of access to gadgets, and inability of children to focus on remote learning were the most commonly cited challenges (Cho, Yoonyoung, et al. 2021)". In this Filipino study we see the possible negative implications of low income families which does correlate in the literature to paraphrase a Georgetown University Article, the resources made available be it internet connection, teacher assistance, and any likewise helpful element would have profound impacts on student learning. Now for possible solutions one study suggested, "Given high ownership of TVs and to some extent radios, Educational TV/radio is a particularly promising tool for helping students deal with school closures. Interactive radio has been shown to be effective at increasing learning outcomes in a variety of countries and contexts (Cho, Yoonyoung, et al. 2021)". Here in the same study as the one above, a possible solution is found in the data making learning entractive by blurring the lines of entertainment and knowledge acquisition. Other studies suggested boosting social programs and others even asked for tax exempts. For example, a 2020 British welfare study promptly concluded, "To address increasing financial difficulties, we recommend that: the £20 per week uplift to universal credit and tax credits is retained and extended to other legacy benefits (Poverty in the Pandemic: An Update on the Impact of Coronavirus on Low-Income Families and Children. 2020)". Here we see how fighting the effects of poverty is something global and the elevation of people's suffering has been increasing. Poverty being a recurrent, lingering issue since the dawn of time. Political differences in the matter are there to stimulate discussion but most

often create more hardship as disagreements tend to turn violent outside first world countries. Thus it is paramount to keep a positive mindset and always strive for bettering our societies which is another reason why this grant was put into fruition.

When thinking of what could best help these families struggling during these uncertain times, we felt as though we needed to create something that was practical yet stood out. We knew that these families had a lot on their plate, so we wanted to look for a way to almost bring the information to them. We came up with the idea to bring home a set of 5 magnets to every family in the boston public schools area, with a child in the K-5 grades. Each magnet has a different purpose, each one ranging from about 3 plus resources where they can find help for those certain areas. Our 5 different elements all focus on the things we felt were most important to provide low income families with in order for their child to prosper in school. Our 5 categories are resources to free food, technology help, free school supplies, community centers, and family support groups. The reason for these categories is that we believe all of them bring a different necessity to the table needed for these families. Notably food resources being one of the most dire need for these low income families, the lack in food supplies was common during the pandemic due to economic hardship which was relayed in this quote, “She says some families reported especially high levels of food insecurity – including 61% of Hispanic/Latino families, 52% of American Indian/Alaskan Native families, 43% of Black families and 28% of white families along with Asian families at 33 percent”. These statistics show possible impacted demographics statewide in the USA. The populations most affected being Latinos (61%), and Native Indian families (52%). Our aid will be directed at all low income ethnic groups and races as economic hardship did affect all types of students. As the young grow we are aware it is a delicate period that requires thorough attention and support. Without it there is no guarantee these children will flourish as they should later in life.

Oftentimes these families that struggle with their finances project their anger out on to their kids, leading to trauma and other forms of violence. Prior to schools reopening, many parents dealt with losing jobs or even losing



hours and it was a struggle to make ends meet for a lot of people in Boston. Parents even had to take time off of work as they had to take care of their children as they attended school virtually. It was important for us to create magnets pertaining to family life as families were stuck inside all day together. Providing therapy sessions to children and families living in poverty is a crucial matter as many of these families couldn't afford the cost of hiring a therapist. In an Australian study about Covid-19 the researchers concluded with: "In short, the teachers in this study showed as much emotion about their students' health and safety as they would normally do for their own loved ones. For example, teachers raised concerns about the students being abused at home, especially those coming from single-parent families or living with their guardians. (Dayal, H. C., & Tiko, L. 2020)". The implications of growing abuse in dysfunctional families is a large threat to child well being, yet unfortunately; these are only some of the issues which were heightened by staying at home.

We interviewed Dr. Burke who works at Suffolk University, along with being a senior consultant for the Moakley Center, which is a network effort that connects NGOs and other humanitarian societies together. He also works with government policy and we felt as though his experience was perfect for what we were trying to dig further into. Dr. Burke gave us three very helpful resources to non-profit organizations in Boston, along with a whole new perspective that we had not seen at all in our research. He was aware of the equity problems in Boston from working in public policy, and said how COVID had opened his eyes to the problems of low income families along with the opportunities that are or aren't given to them. He said something notable called "a policy window", where one event happens that dominates the attention of the media and government. He talked about how these events are usually focused by the media one at a time, so some events are thus left in the dark. Before COVID, low income families and neighborhoods were those people in the dark. But now the problems have gotten too big to ignore. Which is why right now is the best time to take action. Dr. Burke was very helpful in widening our perspectives and giving us a new take on this issue, he has vast amounts of experience in this field and we were very grateful to be able to speak with him.

## **Project Description**

Our research on the matter helped morph our main ideas for the magnets, an example being: “Children’s benefits are increased; eligibility for free school meals is expanded; and the two-child limit and benefit cap are lifted. Only then will we ensure that low-income families with children receive the support they need over the difficult months and years that may lie ahead (Poverty in the Pandemic: An Update on the Impact of Coronavirus on Low-Income Families and Children. 2020)”. Here a national-wide British study shines the light on measures to combat those under welfare and unemployment by social programmes and other aids. The idea that family bonds can secure a child's future is very important. Furthermore; having a likeness to the importance of child learning in the pandemic. Many households did not only face relationship problems but technological ones too. This quote brings up the fact of all the different places we needed to hit when deciding what would be most efficient to include on our magnets.

As talked about earlier, food resources were one of our magnets. We connected resources to multiple food banks, and non-profit organizations that are all located within Boston. These parents can go to these places and get good quality food for themselves, and their children. Keeping a family well nourished is one of the most important things for a parent to do, and we know that putting these great organizations right in their hands was a perfect way to solve these hunger issues.

Our next magnet targets resources for technology access. We felt this was important because a lot of these low income families do not have the right access to wifi, computers, or other very essential resources necessary to online learning. It’s notable to think about how some of these children may have a computer in their home, but also could have multiple siblings making it almost impossible to satisfy the educational needs for each child, and disrupts the availability of the device. In an interview done by Timmons, et al, a teacher says this, “Yeah, one of my kids [students] has 5 siblings and two of them are in high school, so my little guy is in grade 2 and his sister is

in grade 1 and they never get on. They haven't been on yet. It's those times, they just say 'my brother he's using the Chromebook'" It's unfortunate to see that this particular student couldn't join his own class because two of his siblings are in highschool, and understandably, got the computer for school over him. Which meant he could not even attempt to try and learn. Many young students are unable to get the education they need in order to grow and flourish in their futures simply because this type of learning requires you to have access to technology. The Boston public library has already taken initiative, by allowing any student to come in and use the computers for school, along with free wifi in the space. This is a great step in the right direction, but obviously they will not be able to accommodate every single student without a computer. In these low income neighborhoods it is also worth noting that the wifi signal could be not nearly as good as a higher income neighborhood would be. Trying to improve the wifi available in their homes, that is up to the neighborhood they are in is an unfair burden to put on these parents. Which was something we most definitely wanted to alleviate for them. Including sources to free computers for students, better wifi access, and more was exactly what we included on this magnet.

The next topic we narrowed our magnet into was school supplies. Undoubtedly school supplies are a necessity for any type of success in school. Some of these low income families cannot afford the proper school supplies needed for a whole year, especially with multiple children, that makes it that much harder to fund the supplies. We felt as though that extra alleviation for parents could be very impactful to steering in the right direction. Student's need a proper, abundant range of school supplies in order to be set up for success. When kids are unable to have supplies for writing, reading, or doing homework, even school work they face a major disadvantage every single day. Compared to their peers who can afford these necessities, and most likely get good grades in return. We included multiple sources for families to go and get free school supplies. One of them running out of Boston Public schools directly.

For the next topic of our magnet, family trouble/support groups was our decision. We included multiple foundations that address differing needs, for example, The Families First Organisation conducts

workshops and connects parents with information on parenting strategies and provides community support and meetings to make sure that the upbringing of their children is the best possible. Another foundation, The Boston Family Resources page includes an interesting foundation which is described as the following: “Child Witness to Violence Project (CWVP) is a therapeutic, advocacy, and outreach project that focuses on the growing number of young children who are hidden victims of domestic and community violence and other trauma-related events”. The CWVP foundation differs from the others for providing care for abused children as most family support organizations focused on bettering parenting and not mitigating traumas.

We felt as though the magnets would be the most functional way of passing on our information. We made it so that parents who are on the go, and dealing with inconvenient situations, would not want to sit and read a long factual statement about what could help them. They know the problems in their lives, and what needs to be fixed, they don't need to read even more about it, so what we did was make it short and simple. A busy working parent can look and see the magnets in a quick pass by. When grabbing a snack, hanging out in the kitchen, the magnets will always be there on the fridge, or wherever else they may decide to stick them. It is also a fun thing for their children to look at with the vibrant color choices and unique shapes we have chosen. We tried to arrange the magnets so that each topic had 3-4 resources the parents could choose from. All with numbers directly to the source of help so that they can get on the phone with someone and it can be in real time and not in any way confusing as it might be if they were just given a link to the website. This way they are connected with someone from the start and can begin to get help as soon as possible. We felt it was more unique than normal things people do because you can put it on your refrigerator, and see it everyday, magnets aren't as popular of a source of advertisement as they could have been in the past, so we also thought it would also be nostalgic to bring that back. A peer of ours remembered how much she used to love looking at all the magnets on her fridge when she was a child, so we knew it was perfect and a fun way to incorporate serious problems. They don't take up too much space, they are given directly to the students on their first day, and it is as hassle free as possible.

Our plans for the design of the magnets initially was a simple coloured phone number but then morphed into each magnet being a puzzle piece that connects into a square puzzle. The idea of the puzzles makes the magnets be useful in other ways as they can serve as a toy for the younger children. The intended meaning behind this is so that the fail and child would complete their little puzzle so they could have all the necessary help needed for learning in the pandemic and thus when worried about something the magnets would come into use. Each puzzle shaped magnet will have three phone numbers for each theme and be differently coloured. Also another benefit of our grant idea being magnets is that they are virtually inexpensive and would not break the bank to supply all of Boston's public school elementary and younger students with a set of magnets.

## **Funding**

For the prices of the magnets first we gathered the number of students attending Boston Public schools up from Kindergarten to grade 5, which was a total of 23,104 in the city of Boston. Then we looked into the price of making one magnet from a website that sells them. We first looked at how much it would be for each student to receive one magnet, which summed up to 3003.52 dollars. After that we found out how much it would cost to make 5 magnets for each student. The total price would be \$15,017.6, yet the total amount for this grant needed is 16,000.00 dollars rounded, so that our team can then create a website later on, similar to a database where it allows families to access all of the necessary help sources, even more variety, and necessities than the magnets. The amount of 16k would also cover transport fees for delivering the magnets to schools which would make the logistics easier, as the budget would also have some leeway for other necessary costs that may turn up. The price again being medium enables easy funding and the money can be overseen by a board of commissions to check that the spending was made correctly with no byasses along with establishing if it was a success. If similar further actions should be fixed, or made even better to mimic or edit future projects. As we are asking for money, we always welcome the idea of any volunteers interested, or willing to help us reach this goal.

## **Timeline**

The scope of the project is one year. We will need 3 months to create all of our magnets with all of the solidified sources on them, one more month to get them into the hands of the Boston Public schools, who will then hand them out to the children, who will then pass them on to their parents. We also need this time to collect all the addresses of the Boston public schools. We will also need around 2 months to make sure the magnets have reached the families we are targeting, this will be extensive, and the production time and shipping of the magnets would total to 7 months. In the next 5 months, possibly longer, as soon as we can get it started, we will be perfecting our project and purpose. During this time we will be meeting with experts in fields we are not yet fully capable of doing on our own, and making new forms of advertisement that will be more narrow and focused on easing the stressor for parents. We are planning on making one final website that will be even more impactful than the magnets, but before we do that we will need your help. Our final website is planning to look like something similar to the magnets, except a broader range of audience and an even more helpful scope. This website will have multiple versions, for the sole purpose of diversity in language in Boston, we will provide all languages we seem fit to include. During this time we will also be collecting data on the usage of the magnets, and we will be keeping in touch with the community by staying in touch in any ways we can. We will host neighborhood gatherings, fundraisers, and other fun events to make connections with the people, and help them feel a sense of belonging. We want to get to know these families, and know them personally, not just as a statistic. By collecting this data, and checking in on the flow of people coming into the organizations we recommended on the magnets, it is a great way for reflection, and improvement in our design. This is why we will need a good chunk of time to do that because change within the people will not happen overnight. We believe one year is a reasonable amount of time to ask for in order to get all of the things done that we aspire to do. If there is a great turn out, and we are seeing great impacts, we would like to extend the time so that we can do even more, and take this project even further. Helping

the lives of even more people. By that time you will be able to see the results and possibly feel more trusting of our mission. Possibly inspiring you to lend any more money that could be necessary, but let's not get too far ahead!. We hope to have influenced at least one of you reading here today. To hopefully contribute in some way to this grant, and help thousands in return, we are not asking for much, just for these people to be seen, and heard.

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