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For immediate release

Federal Grants Expand Civic Heart Community Services' Programs to Empower Justice-Involved Youth in Houston, Place Them on Path of Success

Two Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention grants, totaling \$575,000, will support VOICES and Civic Heart Anti-Gun Violence Arts programs

Houston, Oct. 16, 2023 Last week, Civic Heart Community Services (Civic Heart) received \$575,000 in two grants from the US Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to reduce risk for girls in the juvenile justice system and support high-quality arts programs for justice-involved youth.

For 34 years, Civic Heart, one of the largest Black-founded non-profit organizations in the Gulf coast region, has provided community services that help people empower themselves, programs for justice-involved youth as they create a new beginning for themselves. The new grants will serve to launch a new Civic Heart Anti-Gun Violence Arts initiative and extend Civic Heart's existing VOICES program for another three years.

The new Civic Heart Anti-Gun Violence Arts program will leverage the unique ability of art to reduce risk factors that lead to justice system involvement among young people aged 10 to 17 years old. The hands-on program will emphasize creative inquiry and expression, and include:

- creation of a youth-led anti-gun violence mural;
- an intensive summer theater program, allowing participating youth to explore theater, music, dance, and other forms of artistic expression; and
- elements of youth advocacy and "speaking your truth" through storytelling to create a movement in our communities to speak out against gun violence.

In its fourth year, VOICES is the only program in Harris County to address the unique needs of girls under the age of 17 at risk of being involved or already involved in the youth justice system. Of 185 girls enrolled to date, 95 percent have not reoffended since completing the program.

Rooted in Civic Heart's collaborative model of care, the program offers group therapy, as well as six to 12 months of broad community support and assistance to equip girls with tools to reduce the risk of future justice involvement and place them on a path toward success, stability, and long-term contribution to society. Civic Heart works with the entire family and partners with teachers, coaches, and community leaders to create a more stable and nurturing environment, which allows girls to thrive, and parents to succeed in their role. The organization also works with entities such as the Harris County Probation Department to provide training for probation officers on issues such as mental health, human trafficking, and racial justice. The second round of OJJDP funding underscores the program's success.

"We are deeply grateful for both the funds and the wealth of resources that the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention provides to organizations like ours," said Helen Stagg, Civic Heart Community Services

CEO. “The ability to share ideas, best practices and build local, regional, and national connections strengthens us all, and improves outcomes.”

In addition to VOICES and Civic Heart Anti-Gun Violence Arts, Civic Heart also offers Youth C.A.N. program for boys and young men under 18 placed in juvenile residential facilities in Harris County.

All Civic Heart youth justice programs aim to empower and support youth as they create a fresh start. A positive environment combines sensitive, culturally appropriate, holistic team-based case management with mentors, access to resources, and commitment to individual needs and goals. Both programs create opportunities for participants to “just be kids” – something they often lack in their young lives.

Civic Heart also serves as the intermediary for the Youth Justice Reinvestment Fund, established by the Office of Justice and Safety, Harris County Juvenile Probation Department, and approved for funding by the Harris County Commissioners Court. Building on its 34 years of experience, Civic Heart works with grassroots organizations in Houston neighborhoods that experience high rates of youth justice referrals but lack community resources to build their capacity to do more good, offer more programs, address racial and ethnic disparities, and further reduce youth justice involvement.

About Civic Heart Community Services

Civic Heart Community Services is one of the largest minority-founded social service organizations in the Gulf Coast Region of Texas. For more than 34 years, the organization has successfully developed and implemented outreach, education, prevention, intervention, and collaborative partnerships to serve marginalized and vulnerable communities. The organization offers a wide array of program and services that includes: education, workforce and employment; after-school and summer enrichment programs; housing and supportive services; substance misuse prevention and co-occurring mental disorder treatment; HIV prevention; teen pregnancy prevention; increased access to health care coverage; reentry program and employment; implementing a resident-driven community plan to increase affordable housing and transportation and mobility options, and enhanced civic engagement to address challenges and facilitate a greater sense of inclusion. Learn more at www.civicheart.org.