Have you ever wondered what advice you’d give your younger self? It’s an interesting question to ponder on a personal level. But think about it on a community level. What if we could give advice to the past generation of Grant County leaders based on what we know now.

That was the time when child poverty first reared its ugly head in our community. Sadly, the statistics were dismissed. Likely because this problem is sad and ugly and difficult. Or perhaps because they didn’t have all the answers, so it seemed like an insurmountable challenge. After researching and writing this grant, we understand those feelings of inadequacy all too well. The data itself and the story the data tells in this grant may be one of the hardest things we’ve ever had to write and read.

But we realized that there are two ways to see the world—even our small part of it. We can either see the thing we want, or we can see the thing that stands in the way of the thing we want. Perhaps our previous leaders could only see the obstacles; therefore, they literally lost sight of why they set out on the journey in the first place. We understand. This has been our hard truth for decades:

- Rising child poverty numbers
- Low birthweight and premature babies
- Food insecure children
- High percentage of single parent families
- Mothers who smoke during pregnancy
- Low IREAD and ISTEP+ test scores

It’s easy to see how those leaders may have become stunted by fear or overwhelmed by the challenge ahead of them. Throughout this Planning Grant, there have been days where we only saw what was standing in the way of the thing we wanted—an end to child poverty. But those days were fleeting. We had far more weeks and months where we could see the thing that we wanted so clearly that it made the things that are getting in our way—those unfortunate statistics — diminish in size. Our rationale for change is so strong that the obstacles simply became things that we must go over or around.

It’s time for invention.
It’s time for innovation.
It’s time to place a laser-like focus on poverty by building systems and implementing programs that will help our children and families thrive.

We believe we are here for a time such as this. So, we truly have no hard feelings against our leaders of the past. If they had a partner like Lilly Endowment Inc. or the incredible thought leaders that Grant County has today, we believe they would have done what we’re doing right now — facing the bondage of poverty. One day our grandchildren will look back to 2020 as the year we began to thrive again.

As a reminder, we do meet the three eligibility requirements to receive this funding:
1. We have satisfactorily participated in a previous GIFT phase or program.
2. We are legally established as a community foundation in the state of Indiana, and
3. We are recognized as a public charity by the IRS.

We acknowledge that through accepting the $150,000 Implementation Grant, based on our county’s population, that we will be required to fulfill the Implementation Grant Proposal submitted to and accepted by Lilly Endowment Inc. We welcome this challenge and are fully committed to seeing the GIFT VII Implementation Grant and Thriving Mill Township through to completion.

As always, if you need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us at any time. We’re only a phone call away!

With Abundant Gratitude,

Dawn Brown
Community Foundation of Grant County
President/CEO and Donor
Dawn@GiveToGrant.org

Mylon M. Logan
Community Foundation of Grant County
Board Chairman and Donor
MLogan@GrantCoStateBank.com
‘We see poverty every day, but we don’t focus on how we can help it, how we can MAKE the situation BETTER instead of talking about how bad it is.’ — Voices participant Rick Berbereia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | Twelve thought leaders. Four convenings. One word. Why? That question, asked of leaders in the for-profit, non-profit, education, and church sectors has driven every inquiry, every activity, every meeting across our community for the past year as we engage in community-led strategies for systems change. It is what has led to this day, these conclusions, and this proposal. Why? Does Grant County have the highest state child poverty rate? Why is child poverty the most challenging and important systemic issue our community faces? Why? This year, we have asked that question of 275 people living in poverty, 100 residents, 45 influencers, and 18 leaders. Why? Our story: Grant County, Indiana, is caught up in what it used to be. False narratives paralyze us into believing plant closings, brain drain, and the twists and turns of a changing economy preclude our county from becoming a thriving place to live, work, and raise a family. “Grant County is always looking in the rearview mirror, managing demise instead of envisioning a future,” says one frustrated resident. The result: Community values set long ago have not shifted to today’s reality. Grant County ranks among the worst counties in: child poverty (#1); food insecure children (#1); mothers who smoke during pregnancy (#1); single parent families (#2); students passing IREAD at 3rd grade (#6), English/Language Arts ISTEP+/ILEARN in grades 3-8 (#10), and Math ISTEP+/ILEARN in grades 3-8 (#7); median household income (#7); low birthweight babies (#8); premature births (#9); and lack of mental health providers (#12). The data is dense and difficult to read. It is even more difficult to know and face. That is exactly what the Community Foundation of Grant County leadership is committed to do through the systems change strategy outlined in this proposal.

High Priority Challenge & Opportunity: | In Mill Township, where few resources are accessible, 43% or 4,469 residents live in poverty or are the working poor. That’s 4,469 lives — 1,640 of whom are children. 4,469 of the 10,394 residents who every day face a resource desert for needs such as food, childcare and transportation. 4,469 people whose lives will get better.

Strategies & Programs | In 2015, Grant County’s No. 1 child poverty ranking became a leading community headline and a rally cry for change. A movement called Thriving Grant County was born. Thriving uses the nationally recognized Collective Impact Framework driven by local residents who are imagining a brighter future. The goal is for community members to work together to create long-term sustainable change beyond a single program. The Community Foundation is growing its community leadership footprint by: 1) Transitioning Thriving into a supporting organization under the leadership of the Foundation; 2) Building a prototype community — Thriving Mill Township — that drives systems change; 3) Replicating the successful prototype in additional Grant County townships; and 4) Sharing the learnings and best practices of the systems change model across Indiana and beyond. GIFT VII Implementation grant funds and Thriving partner-donated contributions will be used to grow Thriving’s staff and capacity in resource navigation, evaluation, data analysis, and sustainability. The newly-branded Thriving Mill Township team will launch in a small and manageable geographic location which leverages a population well suited for scaling significant impact and promoting long-term ownership of sustainable solutions — all indicators recommended by our GIFT VII Planning Grant consultants. Here are collaborators for three Thriving Mill Township networks:

Three Network Collaborator teams & responsibilities | Thriving Mill Township will partner with:

1) TALENT PIPELINE | PROGRAM MANAGEMENT & ADVOCACY:
- Mississinewa Community Schools
- Gas City Area Chamber of Commerce
- Project Leadership

2) FAMILY WELL-BEING | PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION:
- YMCA
- Mississinewa Community Schools
- Family Service Society

3) COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT | PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION, MANAGEMENT & ADVOCACY:
- Indiana Family Health Council
- Ball State University
- Indiana Wesleyan University

Grant amount requested: $150,000 | Implementation timeline: April 2020 — June 2021

Primary contact: Community Foundation of Grant County President & CEO Dawn Brown
505 W. Third St., Marion, IN 46952 | Dawn@GiveToGrant.org | 765-662-0065
Challenges & Opportunities: A Study in Child Poverty | Childhood poverty has been a systemic issue in Grant County for more than two decades, surpassing the state average every single one of those years—making it our highest priority locally. Grant County has also had the unfortunate distinction of having the highest child poverty rate in the state four out of the last six years, with one in three Grant County children living in poverty. For these reasons, childhood poverty remains the focus of the Foundation, supported heavily with evidence revealed in the GIFT VII Planning Grant.

The challenge is moving the needle on an issue that has pervaded Grant County, a community of 68,000 people, for generations. Consider this reality as depicted in the graphic at right which shows how Grant County compares to Indiana and U.S. averages from 1997 to 2018. Yet, with that discovery, it became painfully obvious that the Community Foundation does not have the capacity to act aggressively across our entire county. Therefore, it became evident early on that a hard choice would have to be made to right-size our geographic footprint with our team’s capacity. In order to truly impact Grant County’s poverty as a whole, we would need to develop a prototype model. This revelation highlighted an incredible opportunity to develop a replicable prototype in one of our townships that’s suffering with the most hardships — preferably one in which their leadership was up to this uphill challenge. It was then that our focus shifted and our search for a smaller community with high poverty and low resources began. Our goal became the creation of poverty-crushing model that was both effective and manageable while also being easily to replicate in other Grant County communities once tested and proven effective. This once seemingly insurmountable challenge suddenly turned into a vision that felt, maybe for the very first time, achievable.

‘I would like to see something end poverty.’ — Voices participant Linda Johnson

Challenges & Opportunities: A Study in Child Poverty | A multi-decade systemic issue

Grant County child poverty surpasses the State of Indiana’s average child poverty rate dating more than two decades.

GRANT COUNTY:
• 4,090 children (31%) live in poverty
• 28,116 people (42%) are working poor

GRANT COUNTY: INDIANA: U.S.


Experts agree on our highest priorities:
1) Child poverty; 2) Adult poverty; 3) Systems creation; 4) Mill Township

GIFT VII Planning Grant Research: A Rationale for Change

To determine our highest priorities for this Implementation Grant, we listened to our experts — both types: Practitioners and Professionals. The Voices Project (VP) convened 34 groups and 275 community residents across a 27-hour period for open conversations with people living in poverty and those serving them. Their faces, and their comments, are visible in the photos and quotes that fill the tops of the pages of this proposal. In fall 2019, 27 hours of audio tape recordings and surveys were collected from participants. We asked them what their biggest challenges were, challenges that prevented them from thriving. We believe that their life experiences make them knowledgeable Practitioners because they are the people actively engaged in the a day-to-day, paycheck-to-paycheck bondage of poverty.

GIFT VII Planning Period research and analysis has been completed by two independent, third-party consultants: 1) Thrive Nonprofit Solutions (TNS), led by Kate Bathon Shufeldt, MSW, MPA, that specializes in program planning and evaluation, including working with five Grant County school districts in Lilly Endowment’s Comprehensive Counseling Initiative and 2) e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems, led by 40-year economic development veteran Don Macke who helps communities increase prosperity through entrepreneur-focused development and ecosystem building. We believe that investing our trust in both experienced Practitioners and Professionals will lead to the most well-rounded, strategic Priorities. Next, we will outline our Priorities as recommend by our Practitioners and Professionals.
Opportunity #1 | Child poverty

**Practitioner:** “I have interfaced with many high school and college students who have come from dysfunctional families and those in challenging financial situations in Grant County and would like to see our county develop intentional strategies to give them a hope and a future.”

**Professional:** TNS suggests we dig deeper into our pervasive, systemic problem: Child Poverty. They stated: “For the third year in a row, the county has experienced the highest rate of child poverty in the state. New data released in December 2019 puts Grant County’s 2018 child poverty rate at 31%, once again, the highest in the state of Indiana.”

**Priority:** Experts indicate poverty, specifically child poverty and the co-associated personal and social adverse impacts of poverty, is a strategically important issue for the community.

Opportunity #2 | Adult poverty

**Practitioner:** “I can’t say what I see as financially secure because I’ve never seen that in my life. My mom, my family, they’ve never been financially secure. So that’s kind of a hard question for me because I’ve never been close to that point a day in my life with me and my family.”

**Professional:** The data above provided by TNS pictorially highlights the struggles of our local adults in poverty. This comes as no surprise since we realize that children do not create the poverty on their own. Many times they are brought into the world in impoverished situations that were no fault of their own. Additionally, E2 states, “We recommend serious consideration of seeking out the Annie E. Casey Foundation for its Two-Generational Poverty Framework as a strategy pathway to address poverty alleviation.”

**Priority:** Experts indicate poverty, specifically child poverty and the co-associated personal and social adverse impacts of poverty, is a strategically important issue for the community.
Opportunity #3 | Systems Change and Creation

**Practitioner:** “So, bringing the programs to the people instead of saying, ‘OK, we’re here from 8 to 4, get here or don’t. That’s not helpful most of the time.” Another stated, “Many people talked about how there are a lot of resources, but not everyone knows about them or how to access them or navigate them. It was also mentioned that a lot of these services, such as food pantries, are meant to be more temporary or emergency services. They are not structured in a way that actually helps people out of poverty. Another topic was that the services were not accessible to everyone depending on your income, criminal record, or ability to get around.”

**VOICES PROJECT PARTICIPANT:** ‘It would be nice to have a navigator available to help people run through those difficulties to be able to get the resources because it is overwhelming and especially if you’re already feeling overwhelmed or if you’re already unsure of what you’re doing. Sometimes the unknown is scary.’

**Professional:** “The Foundation has been using the Collective Impact Framework in its poverty work. Based on e2’s extensive national work, the Collective Impact Framework is nationally and internationally recognized, particularly within both the community foundation and community economic development communities. We recommend that the Foundation and its partners continue with the Collective Impact Framework. This strategy – to build a strong foundation upon which Thriving Mill Township will be constructed – is based on conclusions from our planning period that indicate Grant County is a program rich and systems poor community.”

**Priority:** Research shows Grant County is program-rich, but systems-poor. Our response will not be to create new programs to address poverty but rather to step back and establish user-friendly systems of support, including a Thriving Mill Township Resource Navigator. This will allow families to access resources, improving overall quality of life. Creating strong systems is a primary goal of poverty-centric work. These systems will be developed under the umbrella of the Thriving Mill Township collective impact initiative using these five conditions:

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**COLLECTIVE IMPACT CONDITIONS**

1. **COMMON AGENDA**
   - A shared vision for change, a common understanding of the problem, and joint approach to solving it.

2. **SHARED MEASUREMENT**
   - Evidence-based decision-making, shared data collection and shared accountability for the results of the work.

3. **COLLABORATIVE ACTION**
   - Partner engagement in shared mutual activities, working as a system.

4. **CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION**
   - Progress that moves at the speed of trust with consistent, honest and open communication.

5. **BACKBONE SUPPORT**
   - An organization that shepherds the initiative’s work, coordination and success.

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Since Thriving Grant County’s inception three years ago, our community has:

1. **Faced the issue — together.** It was a newspaper headline that inspired our community’s Thriving movement. That headline, published in 2015, declaring our county No. 1 in child poverty, rippled across our community. What happened next was a gathering of 150 leaders and then a think tank of 12 who met for 18 months to seek solutions. Thriving Grant County – and a movement – was born.

2. **Sought resources for the movement.** The Foundation and its President/CEO served as the driver and main champion for the movement, using strong leadership and relationships to engage nine other funders to commit to three years of funding for Thriving Grant County. They did. Thriving Grant County hired its Executive Director. A Board of Directors formed. The past 2 ½ years has been spent doing our best with limited staff and hundreds of volunteers to implement countywide activities, with 13 townships and 5 public school districts, in an effort to thwart poverty in our county.

3. **Devised strategies based on research.** The Thriving Grant County board recently conducted a strategic planning session which indicated the need to right-size staff capacity in order to bring knowledge and access to resources to the most impoverished population which has the least amount of resources to alleviate poverty. The GIFT VII Planning Grant helped narrow down where that focus should be, which leads to our next opportunity.
Opportunity #4 | Mill Township

**Practitioner:** “No one is really doing very well. And for me, I just imagine what it would be like if we maximize each other’s strengths and minimize the weaknesses to create an environment where people felt safe and that the quality of life was equal opportunities for everyone that lived here not just a select few people.”

**Professional:** “Given the pervasive nature of poverty, any programming designed to provide assistance should reach throughout the community and offer services that result in long-term outcomes rather than filling emergency gaps. It also requires a shift in the mindset of the community and policymakers of who is deserving of help and how it should be implemented. The Community Foundation of Grant County could play a vital role in enhancing services and bridging the gaps between community members and organizations to improve the quality of life of the county’s vulnerable populations.” — TNS

**Priority:** The GIFT VII planning grant analysis pointed to an opportunity for a new and more pointed direction for Thriving Grant County with a focus on Mill Township. Mill Township is a Grant County population with high adult and child poverty and little to no access to resources. Current analysis supports the conclusion there is insufficient capacity and resources to undertake multiple communities let alone a countywide initiative at this time. There is strong evidence that leadership and residents in Mill Township, including the two communities of Gas City and Jonesboro, are committed to being strong partners with the Foundation and its partners in this proposed next stage work. Therefore, smartly and aggressively targeting our work in this one community within Grant County makes sense.

1) **Reorganize Thriving Grant County as Thriving Mill Township.** Board approvals from the Foundation & Thriving have been given to transition Thriving to a supporting organization under Foundation leadership that focuses on one Grant County community – Mill Township.

2) **Expand the Thriving staff to build needed capacity.** Resource navigation, community convening, and evaluation are among the skills that will be added to Thriving beginning in summer 2020.

3) **Use the next 12 months to build our foundation.** Thriving Mill Township will use the Implementation Grant and period from April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021 to build a framework for a full community pilot launch in April 2021. These Thriving Mill Township networks and activities will be built upon that foundation, as outlined on Page 6.

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**Mill Township has the second highest number of people living at low-income levels with comparatively few resources to meet their needs.** A family whose income is between 101-200% of the FPL is considered near-poor or working poor. People in this income range work full-time or part-time in above minimum wage jobs but live paycheck-to-paycheck.

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### Why: A Deeper Look at Mill Township

Mill Township has the second highest number of people living at low-income levels with comparatively few resources to meet their needs. A family whose income is between 101-200% of the FPL is considered near-poor or working poor. People in this income range work full-time or part-time in above minimum wage jobs but live paycheck-to-paycheck.

### Opportunity #4 | Mill Township

**% of Grant County who lived below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line in last 12 months**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Township</th>
<th>% of Grant County</th>
<th>% of Mill Township</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grant County</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center Township</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairmount Township</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin Township</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson Township</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberty Township</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe Township</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant Township</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richland Township</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sims Township</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Buren Township</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Township</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Sources:** U.S. Census Bureau; 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

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The barriers to moving out of poverty are real and perceived, physical and emotional, systemic and individual. Since the basic needs of families — finances, shelter, food and nutrition, childcare, and health — are all intertwined, a family cannot move out of poverty through one program or route on their own. The adage of pulling oneself up by the bootstraps sets unrealistic expectations for people when there are so many factors outside of their control.

— Thrive Nonprofit Solutions
DATA REPORT EXCERPT
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF GRANT COUNTY
THRIVING MILL TOWNSHIP

Collective Impact Goal Tree

What do we want to accomplish?
OBJECTIVES

How will we achieve those objectives?
EVALUATION TACTICS

How will we measure our progress?
PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

How will we know if we succeed?
KEY OUTCOMES

We will locate, communicate, and systematize resources that help children thrive.

THE GRAND GOAL:
Mill Township is a vibrant, growing community with thriving families.

Key Outcomes:
- Children are safe while parents are working.
- Children are well fed and able to learn.
- Students are better prepared for the next grade and post high school pathways.
- Families will make healthy choices when planning for their children.
- Mothers are healthy and giving birth to healthy babies.
- Transportation is removed as a barrier for Mill Township residents.
- New systems will be efficient, effective, and easy to access for all who need them to thrive.
- Local employers report students are better prepared to enter the job market.
- Mill Township’s culture & infrastructure supports growing businesses.
- Thriving is a resource hub for thriving families.
- The community is better educated and works together for the betterment of all.
- Mill Township is perceived to be a great place to live and work.

Performance Indicators:
- # of childcare and after school care options.
- Current nutritional programs are being leveraged.
- Pre-school enrollment, post-high school grad plans, internships, & social/emotional referrals increases.
- # of childcare and after school care options.
- Students are better prepared for the next grade and post high school pathways.

Evaluation Tactics:
- Expand childcare and after school care options.
- Locate and inform about nutritious food options.
- Develop program support for educational talent pipeline.
- Open a Family Planning Clinic.
- Communication through education and outreach.
- Research and begin to resolve transportation problems preventing citizens from accessing resources.
- Hire a Resource Navigator.
- Hire a Graduation Pathways Navigator.
- Determine what systems exist, what systems are broken, and what systems need to be created.
- Transition Thriving to a supporting organization of the Community Foundation.
- Establish a physical location in Mill Township.
- Develop and train community leaders in collective impact and community development.
- Thriving is a supporting organization of the Community Foundation.
- Thriving has an official address in Mill Township.
- The number of community partners grows exponentially.

Objectives:
- Pre-school enrollment, post-high school grad plans, internships, & social/emotional referrals increases.
- Children are safe while parents are working.
- Current nutritional programs are being leveraged.
- Pre-school enrollment, post-high school grad plans, internships, & social/emotional referrals increases.
- # of childcare and after school care options.
- Students are better prepared for the next grade and post high school pathways.

Mill Township is a vibrant, growing community with thriving families.

Mill Township is a resource hub for thriving families.

Mill Township’s culture & infrastructure supports growing businesses.

The community is better educated and works together for the betterment of all.

Mill Township is perceived to be a great place to live and work.

We will provide low to no cost family planning healthcare as an affordable option to promote health and wellness.

We will build new systems where broken or no systems currently exist as a way to easily access help.

We will focus all of our Thriving Resources in this one, data-selected township.
On poverty: ‘If you’re not on that side of the coin, you don’t realize that you feel like you’re isolated.’

Obstacles/Challenges | Research conducted in the GIFT VII planning process and a recently-developed Thriving strategic plan point to these challenges:

**CHALLENGE 1:** How to serve everyone in need when there is so much need. Mill Township has 4,469 people living below 200% of the federal poverty line – placing people in the category of poor and working poor. Positive impact cannot happen for all of these lives in the Implementation Grant period alone.

**SOLUTION:** Focus on one need at a time—in a township with the highest number of people in poverty with the fewest resources. Create systems and supports based on the community’s most pressing needs in order to provide people with needed resources to take steps toward economic stability and success. Analyze best practices and implement those in other areas of Grant County.

**CHALLENGE 2:** Fractured relationships among organizations, governments and individuals.

**SOLUTION:** Engage practitioners and professionals in the planning process from the beginning. Foundation and Thriving Mill Township collaborator meetings indicate strong partner commitment.

**CHALLENGE 3:** Lack of a shared vision among the community.

**SOLUTION:** Offer shared learning opportunities open to the community (i.e. A recent Ben Winchester Rewriting the Rural Narrative workshop attended by 140 people). Ball State University and Indiana Wesleyan University are two resources for providing community leadership curriculum.

**Timeline**

A summary of the timeline leading up to the Thriving large-scale five-year initiative.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thriving reorganized as a supporting organization under Foundation. Evaluator identified.</td>
<td>Thriving hiring process; Thriving office established in Mill Township.</td>
<td>Network leaders begin meeting.</td>
<td>Work Plan Development begins.</td>
<td>Measurement dashboards created; Communication/Marketing Plan developed.</td>
<td>Networks launch with community members; Thriving Mill Township one-year public report.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Capacity |** The Community Foundation and Thriving leadership are well positioned regarding internal capacity to execute the work that is Thriving Mill Township. Consider:

1) **LEADERSHIP:** The Foundation is led by CEO Dawn Brown, who led the foundation to a record high income of $6.8 million in FY 2018-19 and manages $30 million in total assets, another record. Thriving is led by Executive Director Cathy Weatherspoon, known for her ability to roll out successful new innovations.

2) **MATURITY:** Donors look to the Foundation for leadership, and it is poised to undertake more complex grantmaking and mobilize community leadership as a way to advance asset development even greater than the past 35 years. This is why establishing Thriving as a supporting organization of the Foundation is the primary way to incubate this vital organization and address the community’s most pressing systemic issue – poverty.

3) **NEEDS:** The Foundation has a responsibility to help lead the community in addressing systemic issues. In order to do that well, we will need to establish Thriving as a supporting organization under the umbrella of the Community Foundation. This incubation period will give Thriving the opportunity to expand their team with subject-matter navigators who will work as a team to develop a poverty alleviation model in Mill Township that can be replicated in other Grant County townships once the programming has been tested successfully marking Thriving’s expertise in this genre.

**Sustainability |** Thriving Mill Township is a five-year movement in the making. Consider, the Community Foundation: 1) In 2015, assembled 150 leaders to raise the flag about childhood poverty; 2) In 2016, led an 18-month think tank using collective impact to create systemic change; 3) In 2017, birthed the visionary movement Thriving Grant County, securing a $450,000, three-year commitment from 9 funders; 4) In 2018, engaged leaders in a public report outlining Year 1 outcomes — raising $1.7 million; 5) In 2019, led a year-long GIFT VII planning process that engaged people from low incomes as practitioners whose voices should be heard in collectively addressing our community’s most pressing challenge — poverty; 6) In 2020, stepped forward to lead Thriving Grant County to greater levels by making the strategic decision to develop a replicable prototype community — Thriving Mill Township; and 7) In 2021, as evident in this proposal and letters of support, is committed to Thriving Mill Township and to presenting our community’s story, need, and case to the nine founding Thriving funders and others. Foundation leadership has determined Thriving Mill Township is worth the risk. Just as important is the opportunity to create a model that can and will be replicated to eliminate poverty in small communities in Indiana and across the nation.
Dear GIFT VII Grant Reviewers:

In 2015, Grant County’s rating of No. 1 in the state of Indiana for the percentage of children living in poverty became a leading headline for the community, which rallied together to seek solutions, resulting in the formation of Thriving Grant County, a collective impact initiative that grew out of a series of meetings with community stakeholders.

Collective impact is a process that enables communities to address complex social issues. It is not just another name for collaboration. Collective impact takes long-term commitment by a group of invested community members from different sectors to a common agenda for solving specific social problems. It is the intersection of shared interests that becomes the focus of collective impact work. While organizations still have their own work to do and missions to achieve, they realize they have a compelling and overlapping area of interest. When organizations from different sectors realize they need each other to achieve their vision for the community, the opportunity for significant change becomes possible.

It is within this framework that Thriving will commit $132,740 in funds to launch Thriving Mill Township with a dual commitment to secure additional funding in subsequent years.

Recently, the Thriving board of directors approved our reorganization as Thriving Mill Township, a supporting organization under the leadership of the Community Foundation of Grant County. As a part of this reorganization, Thriving commits to concentrate its efforts on one community in Grant County that has the highest number of people in poverty with access to the fewest resources.

Thriving will expand its staff beyond its Executive Director to meet newly identified needs, including resource navigation and community convenings. Thriving will coordinate and support three Mill Township collective impact networks: Talent Pipeline, Family Well-Being and Community Development. These three networks will focus on developing programs and initiatives that grow Mill Township into a vibrant community where all families can thrive.

We appreciate the Community Foundation of Grant County’s leadership role in launching Thriving Mill Township and look forward to the impact this work will have on our community.

In partnership,

Cathy Weatherspoon
Executive Director
Thriving
March 9, 2020

Grant Reviewers
Lilly Endowment, Inc.
2801 N. Meridian St.
Indianapolis, IN 46208

Dear GIFT VII Grant Reviewers:

Mississinewa Community Schools is the K-12 education provider for Mill Township, serving approximately 2,500 students in our two elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. In our corporation, 63% of students participate in the free- and reduced-lunch program. That represents 1,594 young lives.

Last spring, our school corporation turned to a group of experts to determine the top five barriers to school success for our students. Our experts: Our very own Mississinewa students. They did not hold back, as is evident in these answers from students in Mississinewa grades 1-3 who gave these responses in explaining why they struggle in school:

• 6 out of 10 are grieving the loss of a family member or close friend.
• 6 out of 10 identify stress as a barrier to succeeding in school.
• 5 out of 10 fear making mistakes.
• 5 out of 10 identify ‘people talking about me or bullying me’ as a barrier to school success.
• 4 out of 10 feel sad all the time.

These results were not isolated to elementary students. More than half of Mississinewa students in grades K-12 report that stress impacts their ability to succeed in school.

These survey results point to the work Mill Township needs to do. Mississinewa Community Schools is pleased to write this letter of support for Thriving Mill Township – a community-led initiative designed to address systemic poverty in the Mill Township area in an effort to help our families, and our community as a whole, thrive. Mississinewa served on the original committee that launched Thriving Grant County three years ago and continues to play an important role in initiatives that are a part of that effort, including being a critical player in the formation of the Grant County Comprehensive Counseling Coalition and host to monthly Coalition meetings.

Mississinewa Community Schools looks forward to participating in the three networks that Thriving Mill Township will build: Talent Pipeline, Family Well-Being and Community Development. We commit to being leaders in the Talent Pipeline and Family Well-Being networks, assisting with the creation of college and career pathways for our students, building a talent pipeline matched to quality jobs in our community, and addressing the growing social emotional needs of our students and their families.

As a Thriving Mill Township partner, our school system will:
1) Provide training for the Mill Township community and service providers in the areas of graduation pathways and our new Early College High School programming,
2) Magnify and continue to support social and emotional programming and training for faculty, students, and families,
3) Make our faculty and staff available for participation in the work of the Thriving networks, and
4) Offer meeting and office space for Thriving meetings and community gatherings.

We appreciate the Community Foundation of Grant County’s leadership role in launching Thriving Mill Township and look forward to the impact this work will have on our community.

In partnership,

Tab McKenzie
Superintendent
Mississinewa Community Schools

Lezlie Winter
Assistant Superintendent
Mississinewa Community Schools
March 9, 2020  
Grant Reviewers  
Lilly Endowment Inc.  
2801 N. Meridian St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46208

Dear GIFT VII Grant Reviewers:

7,467 combined residents live within the borders of only two cities in Mill Township — ones we have the privilege of governing as mayors. Those cities: The City of Gas City and the City of Jonesboro. More than the river flowing between our two cities connects us. We share one school corporation and a rich community history — one full of pride, hard work, and a strong belief that the place we call home is the best place to raise a family, retire, and live.

In Mill Township, where our two cities are located, there are 10,395 people. 4,469 of these people live in poverty or are the working poor. 1,640 are our children. Accessing resources is a barrier for our families. Consider: Just one of Grant County’s 33 childcare providers is in Mill Township. In the results of a Community Foundation Voices Project in fall 2019 that asked residents about lack of resources, people discussed having to drive into Marion, a neighboring city, for their child’s care even though they do not live or work in Marion.

While our two cities are not the largest cities in Grant County, it is clear that our communities, which have the second highest poverty rates in our county, have the least amount of resources to meet the needs of people who live in that reality.

For this reason, the City of Gas City and the City of Jonesboro are pleased to collaborate on writing this letter of support for Thriving Mill Township — a community-led initiative designed to address systemic poverty in the Mill Township area, in an effort to help our families, and our community as a whole, thrive. The City of Gas City and City of Jonesboro have leadership poised for long-term collaboration.

**As Thriving Mill Township partners, we commit to:**

1) Serving as advocates with our city and town councils in participating in and promoting collective impact and other trainings that support community collaboration.

2) Determining how best our governments can serve the needs of Thriving Mill Township, and

3) Exploring available funding that can be directed toward Thriving Mill Township programming.

We look forward to working collaboratively as a community as we implement this collective impact initiative and commit to participating in the three networks that Thriving Mill Township will build: Talent Pipeline, Family Well-Being and Community Development. As leaders of the governments that serve the two cities in Mill Township, we will serve in the Community Development network, supporting a system that works systematically to improve quality of life and place.

We appreciate the Community Foundation of Grant County’s leadership role in launching Thriving Mill Township and look forward to the impact this work will have on our community.

In partnership,

Bill Rock  
Mayor  
City of Gas City  

Bob McNutt  
Mayor  
City of Jonesboro
March 9, 2020

Grant Reviewers
Lilly Endowment Inc.
2801 N. Meridian St.
Indianapolis, IN 46208

Dear GIFT VII Grant Reviewers:

A healthy local economy is driven not by hardship, but by jobs that provide a sustainable living wage. As the Gas City Area Chamber of Commerce, we embrace this truth. We do so in the context of another, harsher truth: Government assistance payments for people living in hardship is the No. 4 economic driver in the county in which we serve.

It is clear our community needs to tackle old problems with new solutions. In this, the Gas City Area Chamber of Commerce stands ready to not only serve but to lead in the areas of entrepreneurship, civic engagement, and leadership. Consider that in the entirety of our full county, 1 in 39 citizens have to be engaged in nonprofit community service through quality board members for the 425 nonprofits that exist throughout the county to lead effectively. The Chamber and its membership are committed to helping fulfill those leadership needs in Mill Township. We recognize that many families in the community we serve are struggling to make ends meet. 4,469 of our Mill Township residents live in poverty or are part of the working poor. We know we can do better – for these individuals, and for all the residents who call Mill Township home.

The Gas City Area Chamber of Commerce is pleased to write this letter of support for Thriving Mill Township – a community-led initiative designed to address systemic poverty in the Mill Township area in an effort to help our families, and our community as a whole, thrive. We look forward to working collaboratively as we implement this collective impact initiative and commit to supporting the three networks that Thriving Mill Township will build: Talent Pipeline, Family Well-Being and Community Development. As an entity that promotes growing businesses and entrepreneurship, we will, in particular, be involved in the Community Development network, supporting work to systematically improve quality of life and place.

As a Thriving Mill Township partner, the Gas City Chamber of Commerce commits to:
1) Participating in and promoting collective impact and other trainings that support community collaboration,
2) Determining how best our organization can serve the needs of Thriving Mill Township and programming is developed, such as in the areas of developing and promoting job shadowing and work opportunities, and
3) Exploring available funding that can be directed toward Thriving Mill Township programming.

We appreciate the Community Foundation of Grant County’s leadership role in launching Thriving Mill Township and look forward to the impact this work will have on our community.

In partnership,

Patrick Pearson
President, Board of Directors
Gas City Area Chamber of Commerce
March 9, 2020

Grant Reviewers
Lilly Endowment Inc.
2801 N. Meridian St.
Indianapolis, IN 46208

Dear GIFT VII Grant Reviewers:

Mill Township.
Home to more than 10,000 people.
Almost 5,000 of them living in poverty or are among the working poor.
This is a familiar reality, and I am an expert to the struggles of living in poverty.
I used to be among them.

At the age of 20, I had a child and did not have the means to meet her basic living needs. For nearly four years I was dependent on my local FSSA office for food assistance and also the WIC program. I was determined to do my best to provide for her, but even with working full time at a convenience store, I did not make much money. I was fortunate enough to qualify for Medicaid so that my daughter had coverage for her medical appointments. It was a dark and ugly time in my life. Not only was I stressed about my daughter’s health and safety, but also had constant concerns about having money for rent, utilities, and keeping my car in working order. I felt like my life was constantly replaying the same message over and over ... sink or swim.

My life is very different now. To this day, I still reside in Mill Township. I live and work in the same community that I did 30 years ago. It is apparent that my community is populated with families whose lives are a mirror image of the difficulties that I once faced. I pass these people in the grocery store aisles, at the local parks, and even at local community events. I can relate to them because I once was faced with living in poverty, too.

I am writing this letter of support in honor of them and on their behalf. Our people are worthy.
Mill Township is worthy.

As a middle school services coordinator, I commit to joining the Thriving Mill Township movement in whatever ways I can be helpful. I also commit to helping educate and recruit others about this important work that will help the people I know and love in Mill Township thrive.

Thank you for your consideration.

Connie Johns
R.J. Baskett School Services Coordinator
Mill Township resident
March 9, 2020

Grant Reviewers
Lilly Endowment Inc.
2801 N. Meridian St.
Indianapolis, IN 46208

Dear GIFT VII Grant Reviewers...

Five years ago, a group of Grant County organizations gathered in a room to contemplate our community’s No. 1 state designation in child poverty. That day marked the beginning of Project Leadership’s engagement in a collective impact model to change that community reality. In this proposal, you’ll see one of the outcomes of more than a year of work in this project that our community calls Thriving Grant County. It was my privilege to serve as President of the Board of Directors in Thriving’s first year of existence. And recently, it was my pleasure to make the successful motion in Thriving’s board of directors meeting to take Thriving into a new direction — Thriving Mill Township, an area with the second highest number of people living at low-income levels with comparatively few resources to meet their needs.

What is particularly poignant about this journey is that the collective impact education received during the formation of Thriving impacted another vital innovation in Grant County — the formation of the Grant County Comprehensive Counseling Coalition. For the first time, our five public school districts gathered together in Project Leadership-led work meetings to answer this question: How can we better serve K-12 students across our county in the comprehensive counseling areas of social and emotional learning, college and career, and academics? A model was created. Metrics were identified. And three years later, outcomes are flowing.

The Comprehensive Counseling Coalition and its five school partners and multiple community partners is thriving today. It meets every month to work the plan. And it meets in the same location: Mill Township, which has become a hub for innovation, collective impact, and outcomes that matter.

Project Leadership is honored to write this letter of support for this proposal being submitted by the Community Foundation of Grant County. As a local provider of college and career services that help prepare students for life beyond high school, and as a community partner that has been involved in the development of the Thriving Grant County initiative and the development of the Grant County Comprehensive Counseling Initiative, we stand ready to:

1.) Expand our current facilitating and convening role with the Grant County Comprehensive Counseling Initiative to include facilitation of the Talent Pipeline Network — one of three network areas in Thriving Mill Township.
2.) Implement college and career services that assist students in following successful college and career pathways, including 21st Century Scholar Mentoring, Free Application for Federal Student Aid in-school computer labs, Community Foundation scholarship labs, College Application labs, Scholar Success Program labs, and use of Project Leadership’s College & Career Ready Student Toolkit Curriculum.
3) Commit $50,000 of in-kind services for the Thriving Mill Township Implementation Grant and pledge similar contributions for subsequent years should Thriving Mill Township be selected as a Lilly Endowment, Inc. Large-Scale Funding initiative.

We look forward to the impact this collaborative effort can make in our community and wholeheartedly support this Community Foundation of Grant County initiative.

In partnership,

Tammy Pearson
Project Leadership Director