

## SUMMARY OF TRC GRANT REQUEST TURTLE WING FOUNDATION CLUB INDEPENDENCE

Amount Requested: \$10,000

Contact Information: Susie Shank / managing director, [susie@turtlewingfoundation.org](mailto:susie@turtlewingfoundation.org), (979)820-8964/cell; (979)505-5090/office; P.O. Box 631, Schulenburg, TX 78956.

**Turtle Wing Club Independence program** would initially be three days a week and would include the following benefits to young adults with disabilities recently aged out of school:

- Transportation would be provided so that the primary caretaker would not have the added expense of time lost at work and transportation expenses.
- The morning would begin with a life skills training workshop. Some of the topics that might be addressed here are how to apply for jobs, understanding appropriate workplace attire and etiquette, along with basic skills for independent living such as personal hygiene, health & nutrition, and money management.
- The participants would then engage in guided work projects brought in from businesses in the community. This would be as volunteers and any income from the projects would help support Club Independence programming and activities.
- The morning would conclude with a lunch shared at the neighboring Navidad Valley Community Connections, which is the new senior center in our community.
- Potentially there would be afternoon opportunities to volunteer or socialize at the Navidad Valley Community Connections center. They play bingo and dominos, watch movies, and participate in creative arts activities. We are still working on the details of that comingling of populations along with a code-of-conduct.
- Transportation would be provided home.
- Social outings would also be organized.

The primary goal will be to continue young adults towards further independence along with providing consulting on working with their local mental health authority, Texas Health & Human Services and the Texas Workforce Commission to ensure they are fully accessing the services that may be provided through these agencies. Where there are gaps in opportunity, availability or accessibility then our program would be available, even if simply as a stepping stone. It would also be available for those young adults who perhaps can work independently or with a job coach to educate area businesses and coordinate with those open to employing adults with these struggles. They still may wish to participate in our program to connect with other young adults and obtain further life skills coaching. A secondary benefit would be that these young adults would be rescued from a life of isolation which many times sadly happens even when their parents are working hard to keep them connected. A tertiary benefit would be that their caretaker would not need to leave their place of employment in order for their child to participate. This program would also provide them some respite. And finally, Turtle Wing would have the opportunity to further develop community awareness and educate and develop connections with employers in the community who may be able to hire these young adults or contract jobs out to Turtle Wing's Club Independence program.

**TURTLE WING FOUNDATION  
REQUEST FOR FUNDING FROM  
TEXAS RURAL COMMUNITIES, INC.**

**Section I: Contact Information**

- a. Contact Person – Susie Shank (P.O. Box 631, Schulenburg, TX 78956)  
Cell: (979)820-8964; Office (979)505-5090; [susie@turtlewingfoundation.org](mailto:susie@turtlewingfoundation.org)
- b. Organization – Turtle Wing Foundation (P.O. Box 631/723 Upton Ave.,  
Schulenburg, TX 78956)
- c. Tax ID Number: 45-3822942

**Section II: Organizational Description**

The mission of Turtle Wing Foundation is “helping children with learning challenges in rural areas achieve their full potential”. Turtle Wing was founded in 2011 in memory of Jackson Allan Hooper. Jack, who was diagnosed with high functioning Autism, passed from this life too soon just prior to his 10<sup>th</sup> birthday, and in doing so sparked a fire within his family and community to help families who struggle with all learning differences. Their struggles while raising Jack and his brother Will, who also had an Autism diagnosis, were very real and they wanted to help other families facing the same struggles. These families not only face financial challenges but also contend with limited resources that living in a rural area present. Turtle Wing predominantly serves families in the tri-county area of Fayette, Lavaca, and Colorado counties, but does reach beyond those counties when appropriate. The three programming areas of Turtle Wing are Early Intervention, Supplemental Services, and Community Education and Advocacy. Some programming highlights include:

- 🐢 Early Intervention: This is a critical focus for Turtle Wing programming. This includes our Hatch Ahead program, which is an early childhood intervention program for children with developmental disabilities ages two and three. Children with developmental disabilities include but are not limited to those with Down Syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Delays. The program is designed to increase functional language and appropriate social behaviors while concurrently reducing challenging behaviors. As a result, the children participating in the program are more successful in home, school and community settings. The Hatch Ahead curriculum and strategies employed are research-based using the principles and practices of Applied Behavior Analysis and Verbal Behavior Development. Additionally, support is provided for behavior coaching, academic interventions and teacher support for the 3K through kinder classes when requested by schools in our service area. The intent is to minimize these challenges during the early education years so that the children can keep their focus on learning as academics become a heavier part of their school day. Finally, Turtle Wing provides developmental screenings in targeted areas. The last few years the focus was literacy and language screenings. We are gearing up to work on providing vision processing screenings and education on early intervention and therapeutic approaches.
- 🐢 Supplemental Service Assistance: Individual families request assistance through an approved provider for services such as speech therapy, social skills, applied behavior analysis, occupational therapy, behavior or academic coaching. A plan of work is submitted by the provider and insurances are applied for where possible.

Turtle Wing attempts to make accessing these much needed services possible by bringing the expense down to that of a typical co-pay through scholarships. Also under this programming area Turtle Wing supports Learning Labs which are targeted learning opportunities for children performing below academic expectations that may benefit from more direct, small group instruction designed to help with math, reading and language skills. Turtle Wing presently funds Learning Labs on four campuses in our service area. Coordination through Hatch has pulled in Title I funds to alleviate some of the financial responsibility along with the assistance of additional private funding. One program Turtle Wing launched in 2014 and just recently expanded is Turtle Tweens (8-12 year olds) & Teens (13-17 year olds). This is a monthly social skills outing group which provides a chance for children with social skills needs to spend a Saturday participating in fun activities, working on social skills, and establishing and maintaining friendships. An applied behavior analysis therapist provides a lesson and is available for coaching during the outings. Participants with social skills, communication, sensory, and behavioural needs are encouraged to attend. This coaching approach in a more natural and less therapeutic environment has improved carry-over and presents truer behavior of participants. The newest supplemental services program in development is an Equine Therapy program. Turtle Wing utilizes Mini Horse Helpers for some of the Turtle Wing children who deal with social/emotional issues. This year we are working to develop a horseback Equine Therapy program. This will incorporate hippotherapy. The term hippotherapy refers to how occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech-language pathology professionals use evidence-based practice and clinical reasoning in the purposeful manipulation of equine movement to engage sensory, neuromotor, and cognitive systems to achieve functional outcomes. In conjunction with the affordances of the equine environment and other treatment strategies, hippotherapy is part of a patient's integrated plan of care. This year we will help train a speech therapist and an occupational therapist with the goal of initiating services March 2017.

Community Education & Advocacy: Turtle Wing collaborates with Parents as Teachers (PAT) implementing our Day Care Provider program. This includes bringing the PAT curriculum into the three largest facilities in Weimar and Schulenburg and offering developmental screenings through PAT at all participating day cares. Additionally, Turtle Wing organizes continuing education workshops for parents and staff that focus on child development. The conditions being addressed by the Day Care Provider Program focus around the family dynamics presented by both parents working and children spending most of their waking hours with a day care provider in a center. Child care providers play a critical role in the healthy development of children. Often, they have the responsibility of nurturing and educating children. The families depend on them for reports and observations on how their children are progressing. Many times it is the Day Care staff that will have the opportunity to see the children interact with their peers and notice delays as they present themselves. Other community outreach activities include Autism Awareness Games at numerous area high schools and little leagues in the Turtle Wing service area and our Parent Support Network. Even if a family doesn't participate directly in programming, the Parent Support Network provides information, coaching for working with the services in place through the mental health authority or school districts, and an opportunity to connect with other families

facing similar challenges. Our Turtle Wing Family Picnic this year was a huge success!

Currently, 165 children are receiving direct services through Turtle Wing programs. Hundreds more are impacted by the education and advocacy programs that occur throughout the year. Turtle Wing works closely with local providers including but limited to: Hatch ([www.hatchlearning.com](http://www.hatchlearning.com)), Beyond Therapy ([www.beyondtherapy.care](http://www.beyondtherapy.care)), Schulenburg/Weimar Area Parents as Teachers program ([www.sw-pat.org](http://www.sw-pat.org)), Miniature Horse Helpers ([www.minihorsehelpers.org](http://www.minihorsehelpers.org)), and PALS ([www.palsotclinic.com](http://www.palsotclinic.com)). The geography we serve sits right in a funder's "void" if you consider the larger funders serving surrounding metro markets. Turtle Wing has successfully developed relationships with a number of regional family foundations and grantors. Through hard work the foundation has expanded its programming from a first year budget of \$40,000 to a budget this current fiscal year of \$170,500. The first year, programs were only through one provider and the foundation was 100% volunteer run. Currently we have a number of providers, have expanded outreach and collaborations, and have a part-time managing director working to drive the professionalism of the organization and develop sustainable funding sources.

### **Section III: Program Description**

- a. The program Turtle Wing is applying for funding for is our Turtle Wing Club Independence program. This would be specifically for students who have recently aged out of the school system (so they will be at least 21) with most participating in the first wave being in their early 20's. They will all have a disability that makes it difficult to work in a typical work environment without assistance. This need was identified as Turtle Wing has essentially help raise some of the children in our programs. The families are desperate for feasible options here in our rural community that will provide their children the benefits that having a job can provide such as: money management skills; a connection to the community; social and emotion growth; increased independence; improved well-being and health; and a greater sense of accomplishment and self-worth. Many of the programs through government agencies cause conflict for our families as they 1) don't meet the stringent qualifications, 2) require extensive travel to facilities that is inhibitive 3) involve older adults and not age appropriate peers or 4) are trying to maneuver the system and are on a waiting list or are running into barriers to realistic options for their families.
- b. Our Club Independence program would initially be three days a week and would include the following benefits to those families in need:
  - Transportation would be provided so that the primary caretaker would not have the added expense of time lost at work and transportation expenses.
  - The morning would begin with a life skills training workshop. Some of the topics that might be addressed here are how to apply for jobs, understanding appropriate workplace attire and etiquette, along with basic skills for independent living such as personal hygiene, health & nutrition, and money management to name a few.
  - The participants would then engage in guided work projects brought in from businesses in the community. This would be as volunteers and any income from the projects would help support Club Independence programming and activities.
  - The morning would conclude with a lunch shared at the neighboring Navidad Valley Community Connections, which is the new senior center in our community.

-Potentially there would be afternoon opportunities to volunteer or socialize at the Navidad Valley Community Connections center. They play bingo and dominos, watch movies, and participate in creative arts activities. We are still working on the details of that comingling of populations along with a code-of-conduct.

-Transportation would be provided home.

-Social outings would also be organized.

The primary goal will be to continue young adults towards further independence along with providing consulting on working with their local mental health authority, Texas Health & Human Services and the Texas Workforce Commission to ensure they are fully accessing the services that may be provided through these agencies. Where there are gaps in opportunity, availability or accessibility then our program would be available, even if simply as a stepping stone. It would also be available for those young adults who perhaps can work independently or with a job coach to educate area businesses and coordinate with those open to employing adults with these struggles. They still may wish to participate in our program to connect with other young adults and obtain further life skills coaching. A secondary benefit would be that these young adults would be rescued from a life of isolation which many times sadly happens even when their parents are working hard to keep them connected. A tertiary benefit would be that their caretaker would not need to leave their place of employment in order for their child to participate. This program would also provide them some respite. And finally, Turtle Wing would have the opportunity to further develop community awareness and educate and develop connections with employers in the community who may be able to hire these young adults or contract jobs out to Turtle Wing's Club Independence program.

- c. The program participants would be young adults who have aged out of the school system. There is not a specific disability requirement. This would be open to all students who had the need and were able to meet minimal performance expectations. We will not be able to handle individuals who would require 1:1 attention or if they were not able to handle their personal needs such as utilizing the facilities and feeding themselves. This would be for young ladies and gentlemen and the initial target audience would be those in their 20's. To find those candidates beyond the ones who have already identified themselves, we plan to work closely the with transition specialists at the school districts in our area and hold a parent information meeting in February 2016. Initially we imagine having a **program capacity of 10 individuals** at a time. This may be a transitional number as members enter and exit the program or if they don't come all three days of the week. That may provide scheduled openings for additional participants.
- d. This would be a unique program for our area. The primary challenge is our location. Many times providers through government agencies are located closer to metro markets. Considering the consultative factor, the age of the client, the potential for education, job coaching, and socialization all in one location and close to home - there is not another option in our area. The Sheltered Workshops in place are not necessarily the right fit for these individuals. The facility in town requires an intellectual disability diagnosis. Many of these individuals have IQ's 70+. In speaking with the local counselor for Texas Workforce she confirmed "there are no providers in our area". This would be a program worthy of replication and would best be communicated to other communities through their school district or Partners Resource Network ([prntexas.org](http://prntexas.org))

e. Budget for Turtle Wing Club Independence program:

Transportation\* = 120 miles @ .54 = \$64.80 x 3 days/wk. x 35 wks. = \$6804

\*provided by area church (Crossroads Christian Fellowship)

Life Skills Coach = \$50/hr. x 3 days/wk. x 35 wks. = \$5250

Meals\*\* = \$5 x 10 students x 3 days/wk. x 35 wks. = \$5250

\*\*Meals are being catered next door at the senior center.

Facility Usage\*\*\* = \$250/month x 9.5 months = \$2375

TOTAL FUNDING REQUEST = \$10000

\*\*\*We are utilizing the Boys & Girls Club during hours children are not present.

There will be additional expenses for program oversight and supervisors throughout the day but these are not included here since TRC does not fund personnel. If full funding is not received Turtle Wing will find a way to implement this program.

TRC's support would make a significant difference being that you all are a new funding source for us.

- f. The expected results are hard to measure when serving such a diverse population. As the mission statement states – helping children with learning challenges in rural areas achieve THEIR full potential. Progress that may seem minimal to one not vested in one child's future and with a full understanding of their history and challenges may actually seem like mountains of gain to the parent or educator working with the child. In this situation, statistics will be maintained on the success of the members either gaining access to government programs in place or gaining independent employment. We also complete a Turtle Wing family profile and gather testimonials when appropriate. That will be our greatest tool for measuring success of the social impact of this program and the mental well-being of the members.
- g. The Turtle Wing Club Independence program will run August 21, 2017 through May 25, 2018. The grant funds would be spent throughout this timeframe as described in the budget. There will be a 6 week pilot program this spring to help finalize the best practices for managing the Club Independence members and determining the best way to help meet their needs.
- h. Turtle Wing Foundation has never received a grant from TRC, Inc.