

5 Years Later: Grant for STEM Program Still Carrying Significant Impact

By Kristen Proffitt

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359 out of 2,984 preschool children were found to be “kindergarten ready” in the 2011 Frederick County Human Needs Assessment- that is 12%. Only 12% of assessed children were found ready for kindergarten by their time to enter school- an amount that, at the time, only seemed to be decreasing each year.

In August of 2014, the first STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Math) Curiosity Academy was launched in Frederick County in efforts to bridge this “education readiness gap”, teaching a STEM curriculum to over 200 preschoolers. The camps were designed to not only bridge this gap in young children, but to make it affordable and easily accessible to families as well.



United Way's funds went towards materials such as Tech Sticks for children to engineer and construct their own towers/buildings.

The STEM Academy addresses this critical community need through offering an out-of-school camp, free for children of selected schools, and located at select Frederick County Public Libraries and schools.

With hundreds of preschool students enrolling each year, durable learning materials and supplies are necessary to ensure the students' and program's overall success. It then becomes vital that additional money is not spent for brand new materials each year to keep the program afloat.

Janet Vogel, current Youth Services Manager for Frederick County Public Libraries, says “what the County funds for us are books, buildings, and staff... Any of the real high quality things [such as the STEM Curiosity Academy] that we're able to offer are as a result of fundraising and donations and grant opportunities. We are really appreciative of the community support that we received.”

United Way of Frederick County plays a large role in that community support. Granting Frederick County Public Libraries a generous \$1000 towards the first STEM Curiosity Academy in 2014, this one-time grant has had a significant impact on the program every year since.

United Way provides grants to fulfill community needs in the areas of health, education, and financial stability, all of which apply to the STEM Curiosity Academy. The money given by United Way in particular was put towards the materials being used to enhance the STEM curriculum such as “books, things like building blocks, we had some balancing scales, different pieces like that that were a little bit higher dollar cost that we needed to be able to start this project” says Vogel.

Vogel goes on to say that, had these materials not been funded for, “we certainly would not have been able to offer the program that first year because they were such an integral part of the program” and that

“because these items are so specific to utilizing STEM learning, we use them for our STEM programming.”

Each book, scale, tiny safety helmet and lab coat (yes, preschoolers in lab coats!) are the same materials still used to carry out this program today as they were five years ago- when they were initially purchased with United Way’s grant.

“The fact that it’s five years that we are able to keep growing and using these materials is really amazing to us” says Vogel, explaining the significant impact of United Way’s grant on the overall success of the program, “if we hadn’t had the materials, perhaps we would have had to cut the program shorter”.

Vogel explains that the durable materials purchased using the grant undoubtedly contributed to the fact that the program has lasted five years and counting (there are currently plans in the making for the 2019 Curiosity Academy). If additional money was spent to replenish these materials each year, there’s a strong chance that the program, and the positive effect it has had on students’ lives, would not have lasted this long.

“The Judy Center continues to use it [the materials] and they continue to see success.” says Vogel, adding that “It [the grant] provided us with those durable materials that we wouldn’t have been able to purchase otherwise in order for us to start the project.”

The STEM Curiosity Academy addresses critical community needs such as education, health and financial stability. United Way serves to these needs within Frederick County through their grants, which would not be remotely possible without the generous support and donations of the Frederick community.

The 2019 STEM Curiosity Academy is currently being planned and designed still using the same high quality materials purchased five years ago. The program only seems to be growing each year and with a thoughtful community of organizations and teachers behind it. More students, teachers, and families will be touched by this program each year because it is able to continue running- and by items purchased when it just began. For this story, there is no end- it truly lives its legacy in the beginning.