

BRANCHING OUT™

GREATER MILWAUKEE
FOUNDATION

LISC Milwaukee

Funding needs include: \$500 to offer workshops for commercial corridor managers, \$1,000 to cover technical assistance for business and \$2,500 to offer façade grants for store-front improvements.

Agency helps neighborhoods create positive centers of economic activity

The homemade papaya salad and sweet sticky rice sold at the Asian International Market on National Avenue are legendary. Those two dishes bring in people from as nearby as around the corner to as far away as Madison and beyond.

They not only have elevated customers' palates, but also the Asian grocery store's reputation and the prominence of the Silver City business district as a whole over the past six years since owners Bouavanh Schuelke and Bouachanh Phonthavisouk took over ownership.

Healthy commercial corridors like Silver City serve as economic engines within Milwaukee's central city neighborhoods and provide important first impressions for visitors. They either encourage people to learn more about what an area has to offer or they detract people from making a return trip. Knowing that Milwaukee is only as strong as its individual neighborhoods, **LISC Milwaukee** works to make sure commercial districts in vulnerable neighborhoods, businesses like the Asian International Market and neighborhood groups have all the tools, resources and technical and financial support needed to build and grow.

The agency wears many hats in its work: advocate, convener, investor and overall champion for local commercial districts. It doesn't provide direct services but has connections to a multitude of public and private partners who do. With Asian International Market, for example, LISC is helping Schuelke and Phonthavisouk search for a new site to expand their growing business. The agency also is helping Layton Boulevard West Neighbors address a number of vacant and foreclosed buildings located in the district. On the opposite end of the city, in the



Owner Bouavanh Schuelke and her sister both worked at local Asian supermarkets before purchasing the Asian International Market in 2006.

Harambee neighborhood, LISC was part of the team that created a neighborhood strategic plan and brought in resources to implement the plan.

LISC also has covered the costs for business development managers to attend conferences, helped the state recruit participants for its minority business development program and promoted local businesses through advertising and

continued on back page

Funding needs include: \$1,500 to provide teacher training, \$3,000 to cover the costs for participating students and \$20,000 to sponsor the “Next Steps” session.

New First Stage class helps children with autism take ‘Next Steps’ in development

At **First Stage Children's Theater**, staff members often recite this familiar tagline: There are no cool kids at First Stage. There are **ONLY** cool kids at First Stage.



First Stage's Theater Academy, which serves about 3,000 children each year, is the largest theater training program of its kind in the country.

So whether a student is at the top of his class or whether she is the last to be picked, differences don't matter. All students are given the same outlet and opportunities to be themselves and learn important life skills through stage skills.

The professional children's theater will offer the same kind of opportunity for children with autism starting this summer through a specially-

designed Summer Theater Academy class. Called “Next Steps,” the weeklong session will feature smaller class sizes and a specialized curriculum.

First Stage already serves a number of children with autism through its Theater Academy and staff members have seen

the impact those classes have had on their self confidence, self expression and overall social skills. Knowing that many more area children could benefit and wanting to better equip teachers with the skills to best support those students, First Stage decided to create an academy session specifically tailored to meet their needs.

Various other professional children's theatre companies across the country, including the Nashville Children's Theatre and Omaha's Rose Theater, offer classes for children with autism. Some, like the Chicago Children's Theatre, offer performances specifically designed for children with autism. In developing the program, First Stage staff spoke with those companies as well as met with area providers, including the Milwaukee Center for Independence and the Autism Society of Wisconsin, to gather ideas and best practices. First Stage teachers and actors will learn strategies and techniques for how to teach students with autism and other learning disabilities.

The result? A session for students in sixth grade and up held at the end of August following the end of First Stage's traditional summer academy. Classes will feature no more than eight students and also will include a lead teacher, special education professional and teaching assistants. Students will study drama, music and movement and gather at the beginning and end of each day.

First Stage hopes to offer a spring session, expand to include more age groups and eventually offer classes throughout the year as well. ■

Funding needs include: \$250 to support the work of five workers for a month, \$5,000 to design and print health promotion materials and \$34,000 to employ a coordinator to oversee the program.

Health promoter program builds community, better health outcomes

A neighborhood festival. A barbershop. A college campus. A bar. No matter the city or setting, these venues all share one thing in common – they serve as prime outlets for education and perfect opportunities for **Diverse & Resilient** to help impact health behaviors within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

That is what the agency has found over the past decade through its community health promoter program, which engages LGBT youth and adults to conduct community outreach and education to the LGBT community at large.

The program began as a way for Diverse & Resilient to extend its outreach in the community and address emerging health disparities. Over the years, its cadre of volunteers, who each receive a small monthly stipend, has grown from five to more than 100 working throughout Appleton, Eau Claire, Green Bay, La Crosse, Madison and Milwaukee.

Diverse & Resilient offers eight-hour training sessions and also provides ongoing support for the youth health promoters and adult community health workers in mental health, alcohol and drug abuse, tobacco abuse, intimate partner violence and HIV prevention. Volunteers travel throughout the community and raise awareness through formal events, such as staffing a booth at PrideFest, to informal settings, like hanging out at a college student union to talk with students.

Raising awareness and changing health behaviors does not come easily, but the message can be accepted a lot more effectively when delivered by one's peers. The agency has found that the program not only serves as an important way to impact public health, but also doubles as a leadership development



Diverse and Resilient's community health promoter program develops young leaders and disseminates important public health information.

opportunity. Nearly half of the agency's staff initially started as program participants and worked their way up to become youth health promoters or adult community health workers.

Over the years, Diverse & Resilient has seen volunteers work anywhere from a one-time event to multiple programs over a number of years. No matter the length of the formal relationship with its volunteers, however, the agency believes it has created long-lasting public health ambassadors who impact the overall health of their community. ■


BRANCHING OUT

WHAT'S INSIDE

LISC MILWAUKEE

FIRST STAGE CHILDREN'S THEATER

DIVERSE AND RESILIENT

 facebook.com/GreaterMilwaukeeFoundation

 twitter.com/GrMKEFdn

©2012 Greater Milwaukee Foundation

Greater Milwaukee Foundation

BRANCHING OUT



LISC provides financial help and other resources to help businesses like Asian International Market grow and contribute to the vitality of the surrounding neighborhood.

LISC Milwaukee *Continued from front page*

marketing campaigns. The agency primarily focuses on commercial districts in Layton Boulevard and Clarke Square on the south side and Washington Park, Lindsay Heights and Harambee on the north side. But it also supports any commercial district throughout the city that needs assistance.

The agency's foray into commercial corridor revitalization work began in 2004 with the Main Street Milwaukee Program. LISC partnered with Milwaukee's Department of City Development on the economic development program that worked to rejuvenate the city's older commercial districts. That formalized program ended in 2011 due to city budget restraints but LISC continues its focus on business districts, committing new financial resources and technical support. In fact, it is one of four main cornerstones of the agency's new strategic plan, along with real estate development, community safety and building the capacity of neighborhood groups.

Each neighborhood faces its own challenges and LISC's commercial revitalization specialist, along with other staff, strikes a balance between ambitious plans and available resources. In doing so, the agency works to capitalize on existing assets and create stronger business districts and more sustainable communities. ■