

# BOOST Case Study

## BOOST Grantee Spotlight: Deep Center

Located in Savannah, Georgia, Deep Center uses writing, art, and culture to empower young people to thrive as learners, community leaders, and change agents. Deep Center was founded in 2008 to combat challenges often associated with poverty, including illiteracy and disproportionately high numbers of youth in the juvenile court system. **With Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) funding, Deep Center has grown its staff and expanded partnerships to provide youth with invaluable opportunities to improve their writing skills, build self-confidence, and plan for college and careers.**

BOOST supports five of Deep Center's literacy, arts, and leadership programs for mostly youth of color and low-income youth in Chatham County, exposing youth to creative writing, poetry, the performing arts, visual arts, photography, and storytelling. Programming also provides youth with field trips, guest speakers, drop-in programming, experiential learning, civic engagement opportunities, and work or career preparation in partnership with the school district and juvenile courts for court-involved students. These tuition-free programs served 512 youth during the 2022-23 school year.



Youth Served in Year Two:  
512



Ages Served:

Middle and High School

Counties Served:

Chatham County

Programming Offered:

Afterschool

BOOST Grant Purpose:

Expand access



Reduce barriers



Increase quality



## Stories that Matter

**“We want to help students find their path to expressing their story and know that their story is enough. They can do fantasy if they want; if they want to write about the day their grandfather died, they can write about that. It’s celebrated. The fact that they’re being brave and they’re bringing their full selves into the space is what we’re asking of them.”**

– Deep Center Staff Member

Deep Center empowers young people to tell their stories outside a formal classroom curriculum in collaboration with professional writers, artists, and mentors. For many students who struggle with writing in school, it is liberating to be encouraged to write about their passions and not feel inadequate because of their grammar and spelling, which are addressed later in the creative process. Creative expression is paramount as students learn that their stories matter.

This student-centered philosophy is central to Deep Center’s whole-child approach. Staff support students inside and outside the program; they are concerned with their development as young adults and citizens with much to contribute to their communities. With a small student-to-adult ratio, Deep Center fosters strong relationships between youth and adults that welcome students to bring their whole selves. Consequently, as one staff member explained, youth “are more likely to come to us and tell us what’s going on and ask for help.” This mutual understanding informs the “wraparound service work” in their programs. Through night and weekend events, such as their annual potluck, Deep Center staff also get to know students’ families, increasing their comfort in sharing personal experiences through their writings.

## Successes

**“Deep constantly challenged me to grow and push past my own self-imposed limits. Whether it was through intensive writing workshops, challenging and perspective-altering conversations, or engaging in community healing exercises, there was never a moment where I wasn’t learning, growing, or reimagining the world through a new lens. Deep taught me that my words are so much more than just words—they are a way for young people to heal generational trauma and reshape the landscape of the future.”**

– Deep Center Youth



***“We hire professional artists to do the covers and to do the spot illustrations inside for the Block by Block book. So when the young people open them, they’re looking at a work of art. So it elevates their writing, as well as the art production that they’ve made. Some of the young people have said, ‘It was excerpts from that book that got me into college.’”***

– Deep Center Staff Member



Through programs like Block-by-Block (a year-long creative writing program that takes students outside the classroom to develop their leadership and community-building skills) and the Young Author Project (an introductory program for middle school students), Deep Center promotes writing as a process of discovery and self-expression. This emphasis on writing across genres to elevate the voices of youth and communities drives participants' creativity and interest in the arts and supports their academic achievement. Program staff describe consistent improvement in ELA grades among participating youth, with many students improving a full letter grade over a semester or year.

But Deep Center is also about more than writing. Staff report striking improvements in youths' self-confidence and trust in others resulting from participation. One staff member recalled, "The site coordinator was talking about poetry, and one young person said, 'Oh yeah, I write, but I'd never show it to anyone.' Through their trusting relationship, she was encouraged to join the Block-by-Block program... She found her voice, and from there, she went and joined the Slam Poetry Team." This is consistent with survey data showing that 81% of participating youth showed meaningful improvement in fearlessness, critical consciousness and awareness, youth leadership, hope, and other measures of well-being. Deep Center programs empower youth to do what they never thought possible, finding strength in sharing their voices with trusted adults and peers.

## Youth With Improved Writing Skills

100%

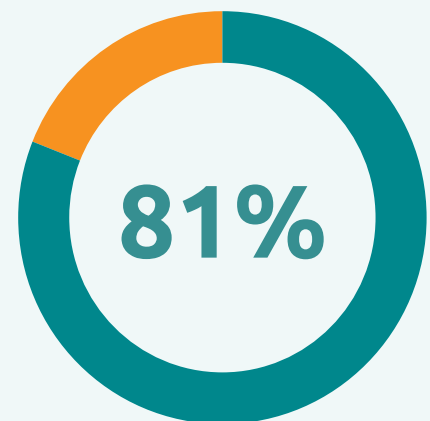






With this newfound confidence comes a rejuvenated faith in the future. **Deep Center integrates college and career support into all its programs, especially the Work Readiness and Enrichment Program (WREP), a collaboration between the Chatham County Juvenile Courts, the Savannah Chatham County Public School System, and Deep Center created to reduce the number of youths being committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice.** Being exposed to different role models across creative fields and, in the words of one Deep Center staff member, “seeing that you can make money doing what you enjoy” encourages youth to pursue inspiring careers. Another staff member recalled, “Just last week, one of our young people said that her experience with Deep has inspired her to think of her future [in terms of] pursuing a more creative path.”

### Youth with Improved Well-Being





## Satisfaction

Deep Center uses validated tools developed with the University of Georgia researchers to measure youth satisfaction, including a pre- and post-survey completed by youth. Among the five Deep Center programs supported by BOOST funds, 153 students responded to the surveys, with an overwhelming 148 youth (97%) indicating satisfaction with their program.

Students were also satisfied with Deep Center's staff, describing them as helpful and sensitive to students' needs and emotions. One student recalled that staff make students feel as if they're "in charge," even without explicitly saying it. Youth satisfaction with Deep Center's programs is also evident in their enthusiasm for writing and other creative endeavors. In the words of one staff member, "Seeing students' growth is amazing! We had to pull teeth to get them on stage and read their writing, and now they volunteer to perform!" Stories such as these show not only how youth engage in the present but reveal how their participation has sparked new passions they will carry into their futures.

## Youth Who Are Satisfied with their Deep Center Program



## SPOTLIGHT DATA SOURCES

- Case study interviews & focus groups with deep center youth, staff, and administrators
- End-of-year grantee report – deep center

*Case study developed by Metis Associates.*



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Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) is a competitive grant program administered by the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network (GSAN) and operated in partnership with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). BOOST offers \$85 million via three-year grants, renewed annually, with funding made available through the American Rescue Plan. The grants program is aimed at promoting evidence-based practices and whole child supports in afterschool and summer learning programs. BOOST is designed to expand access, reduce barriers to enrollment, and increase programmatic quality to improve outcomes for students and families throughout the state. GSAN provides recommendations for grant awards based on rigorous application criteria and offers technical assistance and training to grantees to ensure successful implementation. All grants are approved by GaDOE, ensuring alignment with statewide priorities and goals.