

# Out-of-School Time Stories

## BOOST Grantee and Behavioral Health Spotlight: LIFT Youth Center



GEORGIA STATEWIDE AFTERSCHOOL NETWORK

LIFT Youth Center is a beacon of hope and inspiration for middle and high school students in Catoosa County, filling a crucial gap in afterschool programming. Co-founded by Tina Pinkston and Chrissie Brown, the center emerged in response to the devastating impact of school gun violence and the desire to build additional safe spaces for youth. With a mission to support at-risk youth, LIFT prioritizes behavioral health workshops and mentorship programs, fostering personal growth and resilience. Tina explained, “We initially hoped to be very prevention-oriented, not necessarily working with at-risk kids. But it turns out that a good 60% of our kids are already struggling, whether it’s their own trauma or family issues at home.” In response to these needs, LIFT expanded their offerings to include tier one and tier two behavioral health services.

Through its innovative approach centered around workshops focused on well-being, connectedness, and mentorship, LIFT builds a vibrant community for students in grades 6-12. **“Throughout each month, our students have the opportunity to participate in workshops that are on topics such as suicide prevention, trauma, building resilience, reducing stress and anxiety, relationship skills, emotional regulation, and preventing self-harm,”** said LIFT co-founder Chrissie Brown, “Often times deeper



### Youth Served in Year Two:

397 in Afterschool

49 in Summer



### Grades Served:

6-12

### Counties Served:

Catoosa

### Programming Offered:

Year Round

### BOOST Grant Purpose:



Expand Access



Reduce Barriers



Increase Quality

### OST Government Funding Sources:

BOOST

### Behavioral Health Supports:

Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports

### Website:

<https://www.LIFT-ringgold.org/>



conversations will result from those workshops, where students share their own mental health struggles”. Today, the program serves nearly 400 students, offering them opportunities to explore their passions, develop essential life skills, and connect with caring adults who empower them to thrive.

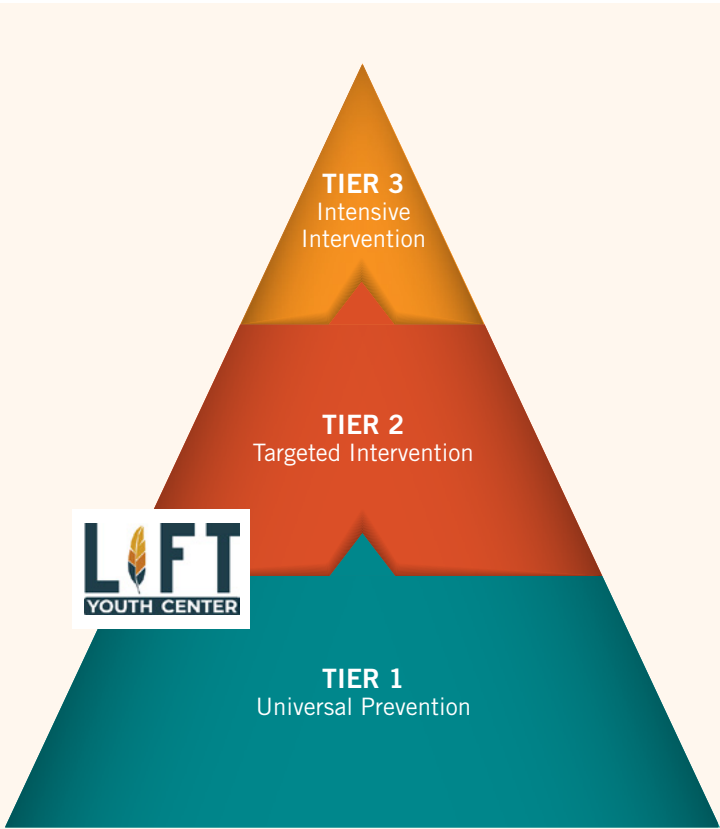
LIFT Youth Center welcomes a diverse range of students, with approximately 54% coming from low-income households. By focusing on early intervention, LIFT aims to prevent at-risk behaviors before they escalate. Many participants face significant challenges, including trauma and family instability, but the center provides them with the tools and community they need to overcome obstacles. For example, LIFT facilitates trainings for afterschool students with the Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) method of suicide prevention, which empowers students to assist not only themselves, but others dealing with mental health challenges. In the past year LIFT has trained 85 students in QPR. To measure the impact of their mental health supports, LIFT surveyed 76 students at the end of the 2023-2024 school year and **93% of LIFT youth reported that their mental health had improved, with 74% reporting improvements in their communication skills.**

### Growing Impact, Overcoming Challenges

Starting with a modest team of four, LIFT Youth Center has grown to employ ten staff members, thanks to grants and generous donations. BOOST funding has been transformative, enabling the center to introduce programs like outdoor adventure education that give students a chance to step outside their comfort zones. “We do field trips as our primary thing...to do different, exciting, very experience-oriented activities. Our resources locally are huge, like rock-climbing, white-water rafting, and caving – all these things that people come from all over to do in our area, but most of our kids never get to experience because they don’t have the right gear, know the right people, or have the funding to pay for it.”

The center’s programming revolves around the REACH model—Recreation, Education, Art, Community, and Health. Students can choose from an array of activities, from sports and art projects to financial literacy and career exploration workshops. “One day, a student might learn how to cook a meal, and the next, they’re shooting hoops or painting a mural,” Tina explained. “We want them to feel comfortable trying new things, even if they fail at first.” This flexible, hands-on approach has proven effective, with 88% of 128 students reporting they’ve discovered new talents, interests, or skills through the program.

While the center has made significant strides, challenges



Multi-Tiered System of Supports is a comprehensive multi-level prevention and support system that maximizes youth achievement and reduces behavioral problems. MTSS is divided into three tiers of support:

**TIER 1: Universal Preventions**

Proactive supports for all students.

**TIER 2: Targeted Interventions**

Additional help for students, usually provided in small groups.

**TIER 3: Intensive Interventions**

Highly individualized support for students with significant needs.

remain. Transportation and funding are persistent hurdles, especially as LIFT seeks to expand its reach. Proximity to two local schools has mitigated transportation issues for now, but as Tina noted, **“We dream of serving even more students, and to do that, we need sustainable funding and solutions for getting kids here safely.”** Plans to develop a new site highlight the urgency of securing long-term financial support, as the center’s vision grows beyond its current capacity. “We’re excited about the future,” Tina said. “There’s so much more we can do to support these incredible kids.”

### Nurturing and Growing Transformative Spaces

Open mic nights are a highlight at LIFT, showcasing the creativity and courage of its students. In one powerful moment, Tina recounted when a shy sixth-grade girl sang an original song, supported by cheers from her peers. In another instance, a student described the center as a magical place like Oz where “life goes from black and white to color.” These stories underscore the transformative impact of LIFT’s mantra: **Loved as they are, Inspired to be more, Found in community, and Trusted to make a difference.** Nurtured by the program’s strong commitment to the wellbeing of its students, LIFT offers free teen group therapy weekly facilitated by a Licensed Professional Counselor based in Trenton, GA in the evening during the school year. This group is comprised of 10 middle and high school students who are experiencing anxiety and/or depression. Family engagement is equally strong, with regular “Family Nights” fostering both students and parents to connect and share personal experiences. **Parents have expressed overwhelming gratitude for the center, with many calling for its expansion.**

Reflecting on the journey of LIFT Youth Center, Tina was visibly moved. **“Changing lives is our passion,”** she shared through tears. The dedication of the staff, volunteers, and community supporters has transformed what began as a dream into a life-changing reality for hundreds of students. Thanks to grants like BOOST and the generosity of donors, LIFT Youth Center continues to provide a space where kids can grow, explore, and thrive. With an eye toward the future, Tina and her team remain steadfast in their mission: to uplift every child who walks through their doors with love, acceptance, and hope.



### LIFT’s Mantra:

Loved as they are  
Inspired to be more  
Found in community,  
Trusted to make a difference.



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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.