



Transforming Teens. Changing Communities.



Wyman Helps Teens Develop Critical Social-Emotional Skills through Community Service Learning in St. Louis



*“Community service learning gives teens the chance to contribute positively to their community, while deepening their **understanding about themselves, their values and their purpose in life.**”*

—Emily Jones, Wyman TOP manager and LMSW

St. Louis County Children’s Service Fund supports Wyman’s Teen Outreach Program® (TOP®) at Brittany Woods Middle School (BWMS). Thanks to the support of CSF, Wyman is currently celebrating its sixth year serving teens at BWMS. TOP teens meet weekly in 7th and 8th grade social studies classes.

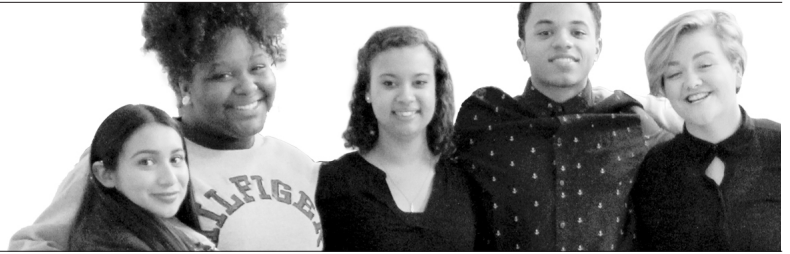
Wyman programs, like TOP, help teens achieve educational success, develop healthy behaviors and relationships, and life and leadership skills. In particular, TOP is known nationally for its ability to improve academic performance, support social-emotional skill development, and decrease risky behaviors, such as dropout, truancy and teen pregnancy.

During TOP, caring and highly trained adult facilitators guide students through a unique combination of engaging curriculum and more than 20 hours of experiential community service that helps teens build strengths and hone social-emotional skills proven to bolster success later in life. These social-emotional skills include emotion management, empathy, teamwork, responsibility, initiative and problem solving.

In 2016, a TOP community service learning project helped seventh-graders at BWMS rediscover Black History Month. The engaging, empowering and experiential project helped teens further develop their sense of self and connections to their world.

Students conducted extensive research to identify lesser-known, yet influential African American leaders who have contributed to society, then created visuals to share their stories and spark conversations about these individuals with their peers.

The project complimented social studies curriculum featuring the Civil Rights Movement. Many students completed posters displaying their favorite leader, along with an inspirational quote.



Emma, who completed a biography on Dr. Mae Jemison, the first African-American woman to travel in space, was inspired by the quote, “Never limit yourself because of others’ limited imagination; never limit others because of your own limited imagination.”

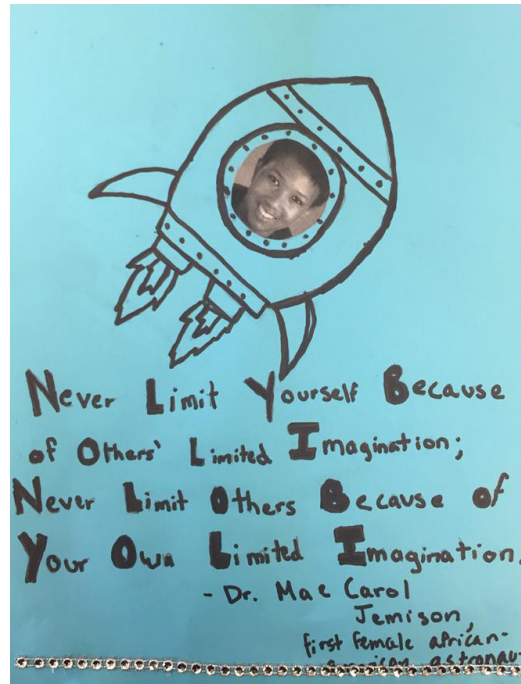
Meanwhile, Ayanna, who completed her biography on Jesse Owens, Olympic gold medalist, was inspired by Owens’ quote: “We all have dreams. But in order to make dreams come into reality, it takes an awful lot of determination, dedication, self-discipline and effort.”

“During the project, I observed students developing their research and presentation skills,” said

Andrew Smith, Wyman TOP specialist and Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW). “Some students also practiced their teamwork skills to create projects in small groups. “It was powerful to see youth gain a better appreciation for black history and why we celebrate black history month through their individual projects,” added Smith.

“Community service learning gives teens the chance to contribute positively to their community, while deepening their understanding about themselves, their values and their purpose in life,” said Emily Jones, Wyman TOP manager and LMSW. “Not only do students who participate in community service learning leave with a sense of accomplishment knowing they had a positive impact on their communities, they also get a chance to connect with individuals and agencies they otherwise wouldn’t experience. Opportunities like these broaden their perspective and help them develop empathy, teamwork and compassion.”

Jones added, “Social-emotional learning (SEL) is crucial in developing one’s ‘full self,’ and the skills necessary to be successful in the world. From deepening their understanding



of their values, to learning effective means for communicating with others, SEL prepares teens to interact with others while staying true to themselves.”

Given Wyman’s ability to improve the outcomes for teens through TOP, its focus on social-emotional learning, and best practices from TOP, including those from BWMS, Wyman was recently selected to be featured in a one-of-a-kind field guide called Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices in Social and Emotional Learning. A product of collaboration between Chicago’s Susan Crown Exchange, eight youth-focused programs across the nation and the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, the piece sheds light on how youth programs can equip teens with valuable social-emotional

skills. (Practitioners can download the field guide and learn more at www.selpractices.org.)

Thanks to support from the St. Louis County Children’s Service Fund, Wyman is thrilled to put these nationally highlighted best practices to use to improve the outcomes for teens in the St. Louis region.

About Wyman

Wyman has been dedicated to serving youth from disadvantaged circumstances for more than a century. Wyman empowers teens, equips adults and strengthens systems. Wyman’s engaging, empowering and experiential programs and services help teens build skills, develop a sense of self and connections to their world. As a result, teens achieve educational success, develop healthy behaviors and relationships, and exhibit life and leadership skills. From thousands of teens in St. Louis – to tens of thousands nationally – Wyman programs and services make a difference in the lives of today’s teens and tomorrow’s leaders. To learn more about Wyman, visit: www.wymancenter.org.