

Garden of Prayer Youth Center  
Five Year Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025

---



Prepared by:  
Michael Maloney, M.B.A., L.C.P.C., C.W.E.L.  
657 E. Court St. Suite 200  
Kankakee, IL 60901  
Phone: 815-933-2493  
E-mail: [michaelmaloney@gopyouthcenter.org](mailto:michaelmaloney@gopyouthcenter.org)  
Website: [www.gopyouthcenter.org](http://www.gopyouthcenter.org)

## Executive Summary

Garden of Prayer Youth Center is vastly approaching its silver anniversary (25 Years), to God be the glory! This milestone is the launching pad for our next five-year strategic plan. We are revising our mission statement, logo, and current organizational structure as we march forward into the next phase of our journey. During the previous five years, Garden of Prayer Youth Center faced challenges based upon the uniqueness of the state of Illinois. Spanning three state administrations, our organization faced significant challenges but ultimately enjoyed a number of triumphs. However, the challenges led to us assuming some debt while growing.

We experienced a number of obstacles that included a shortage in DCFS Licensing Monitors and an abrupt termination of the Early Head Start partnerships causing us to close one of three sites and a loss of \$728,000 in annual funding. Our Teen REACH program went unfunded for two of the last five years and the Community Youth Employment Program went unfunded for last two years. Due to funding challenges listed above, during the last five years we have had to acquire loans to cover operational expenses and to secure the funding needed to start up two new programs (foster care, girls group home). Additionally we experienced turnover of key clinical and human resource staff as a result of the competitive job market and DCFS delays in funding new projects as well as changes in DCFS policy and direction.

Garden of Prayer Youth Center experienced planned and unplanned triumphs. Our planned triumphs include being awarded an Early Head Start contract, securing a specialized Foster Care contract, establishing the Child and Adult Care and Summer Food Programs, increasing donor contributions, opening child care centers, and achieving CARF (Commission on Accredited Rehabilitation Facilities) and NAC (National Accreditation Commission of Early Learning Leaders) accreditations. We added two new board members (Tamara Thomas, Ph.D. and Michelle Priester, Ph.D. with extensive experiences in program development and grant writing. Unplanned triumphs include securing an Emergency Foster Care contract, securing a counseling contract from DCFS, securing a contract to provide Parent Mentoring, opening a second child care center with additional space for school age programming, securing additional funding for after school and summer camp programs, and licensing a second group home specifically for the placement of survivors of sex trafficking. Lastly, we have become a certified Trauma Informed agency.

While achieving a majority of the goals we set out in our previous strategic plan we failed to achieve the following:

1. Reaching annual revenues of \$6,000,000
2. Relocating and expanding our administrative site
3. Expanding operations into three other states

Garden of Prayer Youth Center is in a unique position to experience exponential growth. The conditions are favorable due to a number of factors:

1. Our Unwavering Faith in God and the Power of Prayer
2. The Experience, Intellectual Capital, Influential Power of our Board of Directors
3. The Experience and Education of our Executive Management Team
4. The Passion, Drive, and Commitment of our Mid-Management Team
5. The strong partnerships with our local units of government and government agencies
6. The Audience and Respect we have with the Department of Children and Family Services
7. The national attention and focus on Human Trafficking and Opioid Addiction

## Authorization

Garden of Prayer Youth Center's Strategic Plan was approved 1/16/2020.

## Key Risks

Garden of Prayer Youth Center has provided residential group home services and after school programming for the last 12 years. Funding has primarily come from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Department of Commerce of Economic Opportunity, and the Illinois State Board of Education. Funding is restricted and time sensitive. Our primary risk is the lack of diversity in our funding. This risk has been diminished slightly as our contributions have reached 5% of our gross revenues and discretionary funds have exceeded 30%. Additionally, we have added parent out of pocket child care fees, child care subsidies from the Illinois Department of Human Services, and the South West Organizing Project as new funding sources. Although we continue to rely on state funding, there is some comfort in having the support of new DCFS administration as our organization has been considered by the state as an agency worthy of investing in based upon our outcomes and innovative ideas in producing placements for hard-to-place youth. In fact, we have been requested by the state to expand our placement programs for the purposes of serving more DCFS youth in care. The importance of diversification of income is still important. We will begin to explore investing in low risk stocks and securities as we expand our programs.

Another critical risk is the limited pool of educated and experienced candidates for employment for skill-laden positions. Only 20% of county residents have a bachelor's degree or higher. Economic conditions have made hiring more competitive in that manufacturing and food service jobs that do not require a degree pay just as much as human service positions that do require a

degree. Improving benefits and compensation packages are a primary focus for employee retention and to ensure that our organization is competitive in attracting the talent needed to grow.

## History

Garden of Prayer Youth Center is the only African American Licensed Child Welfare Agency in Kankakee County serving over 1,000 kids annually. We are a CARF accredited organization that has two licensed child care centers with one center accredited by NAC. We also operate an award winning Afterschool program that focuses on education, recreation, and parent support, parent training, and parent advocacy. In the fall of 2018, we began implementing the Parent Mentor Program funded by the South West Organizing Project and ISBE. Our agency has a DCFS licensed group home program and two foster care programs with eight (8) foster homes. This organization was founded by Vurnice Maloney based upon a vision from her mother, Doris Jordan (Mother Jordan). It was the mission of Mother Jordan to keep families together by providing those in need with food, shelter, access to education, mental health services, and most importantly, love. This love produced hope, belief and faith and created a future for these kids who grew up to be doctors, nurses, politicians, electricians, and other professionals. In 1979, Mother Jordan purchased another home and left the farm house and land in Momence to Vurnice Maloney for her to operate a group home and a campsite during the summer. In 1995, Garden of Prayer Youth Center was incorporated as a 501c3 nonprofit organization. Vurnice Maloney served as the Executive Director until 2006. Mrs. Maloney established a number of programs including Teen REACH (after school program), My Second Home (post adopt counseling and respite), Youth in Crisis (residential), and Summer Camp. Under the leadership of Mrs. Maloney, the organization became an award winning organization and gained state recognition. We are an award winning and state recognized organization. In 2002, President Michael J. Madigan, Speaker of the House, honored us with House Resolution 629. This resolution commended GOPYC for services we provided to at-risk families. In 2004, we simultaneously won both the Governor's Home Town and Governor's Cup Awards, for the number of volunteer hours of service we provided the families in Kankakee County.

Upon obtaining a contract from the Department of Children and Family Services in 2006, Mrs. Maloney transferred leadership of the organization into the hands of her son, Michael Maloney. To date, Garden of Prayer Youth Center organization has grown from annual revenues equaling \$287,000 to \$2,719,000 within the last 12 years with revenues nearly doubling in the last five years. We are the largest African American owned and operated business in Kankakee County. We've grown from six part time employees to just under fifty full and part time employees. We've expanded from two to six sites and we have increased our client transportation fleet from

two (2) to eleven (11) vehicles. Our programs now include a teen male residential program, specialized foster, emergency foster care, outpatient behavioral health, early childhood education, parent mentoring, Teen REACH afterschool, summer camp, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Summer Food Program. Early childhood education, foster care, parent mentoring and the food programs were all initiated within the last five years.

### **Mission**

It is the mission of the Garden of Prayer Youth Center to improve the well-being of at-risk children, adults, and families by providing educational and mental health services that places them on a path towards success. *This mission statement will be revised to read that our mission is to plant the seeds of HOPE in children by providing mental health and educational services that will produce success.*

### **Vision**

It is our vision to become the leading Christian child welfare agency that provides disadvantaged children with opportunities to succeed. We want to be viewed as the “Walmart” of child and family welfare services.

### **Values**

- We value our Christian beliefs and biblical principles as the foundation of our service delivery.
- We value diversity and inclusion when providing services.
- We value the safety and well-being of children.
- We value the input and strengths of the client, their families, and their community when planning and implementing programs.
- We value our employees exhibited by training and appreciating dedicated and professional staff.
- We value fiscal integrity and good faith in conducting business.

### **Program’s Purpose Statements**

**The Placement Programs’ purpose** is to restore the youth of today in order to place on a path of success and independence. (*Restore Image, Restore Identity, Restore Purpose, Restore Responsibility, Restore Connections, Build Skills and Habits*)

**The After School Program’s purpose** is to develop girls and boys into young women and men with active and creative minds and a sense of understanding and compassion of others. We stress the total development of each child spiritually, intellectually, socially, and physically.

**Early Education and Intervention Program’s purpose** is to provide children with educational and developmental support that lay a foundation for life-long learning.

**The Out Patient Behavioral Health Program’s purpose** is to provide comprehensive out-patient behavioral health services that restores and strengthens at risk individuals and families by improving well-being and building skills.

## Growth Aspirations

1. Increase number of persons served by 50%.
2. Increase revenues by 67% to increase impact and to establish a reserve of 7.5% of annual revenues.
3. Establish a larger administrative headquarters to accommodate multi-state operations.
4. Secure nationally recognized corporate sponsors
5. Establish a charter/private school to serve students with learning or behavioral challenges.
6. Partner with a non-profit property management and holding company
7. Bolster Spiritual and Christian values in service delivery.

The ultimate goal of this organization is for it to be considered the “Walmart” of child welfare services. It is our objective to provide varied human services to ensure that each person served has every opportunity to succeed despite their economic, social, or racial make-up. It is our endeavor to be nationally recognized as the premier child welfare agency. Our plan is to become a billion dollar organization serving millions of disadvantaged persons.

There are number of critical needs identified in a 2012 needs assessments conducted by Kankakee Public Health Department, the United Way of Kankakee and Iroquois Counties, and other community based stakeholders and a 2014 economic development plan developed by Kankakee County with an award from the U.S. Department of Commerce. Three identified needs that are congruent with our mission statement are a need for childcare, a need for community based mental health services, and a need for employment and job training. To this end, Garden of Prayer has established seven (7) primary strategic objectives that if achieved will address the needs identified for Kankakee County and will move us closer to reaching our goals.

### **GOAL 1: Expansion of placement programs within Kankakee County and surrounding counties.**

**Objective #1** – Expand residential services by six (6) beds. We will focus on providing services to young survivors of human trafficking. Also, we will begin securing a contract for the homeless LGBTQ and/or youth substance addicted population.

**Objective # 2** – Increase foster care homes to 15

**Objective # 3** – Establish an Independent Living Options program for youth ages 19-21 that are in the Department of Children and Family Services care.

**Strategies: Engage the Department of Children and Family Services in accordance with their Strategic Plan to provide more placements for older and complex youth. We will engage local landlords to identify possible housing and apartment units.**

On November 8, 2019, the Executive Director and the Clinical Director met with the new Deputy Director of Placement and Clinical Services, who requested that Garden of Prayer Youth Center expand to serve more youth in care. The request echoes the State’s goals. The DCFS 2020 strategic goals include decreasing the number of youth who are in inappropriate institutional placements – in psychiatric hospitals, in juvenile detention, in emergency shelters or in congregate care beyond the time of its therapeutic value. Ensure that every child, including those



aging out of care, has a strong, healthy attachment to at least one stable, responsible, caring adult. DCFS has placed a greater focus on addressing the placement and well-being needs of their older youth in care. They are putting renewed effort into finding the right treatment and the right homes for our older youth with highly complex needs who have stayed too long in high-end institutional care and who are not prepared to return home or live in foster homes. We need homes and services that are specialized to support their unique needs. We have increased funding for resources for these young adults by \$20 million. In addition, Illinois received a national grant of \$4.5 million to help us work with providers to build a more comprehensive case management model for older youth. As an organization with a core competency for working with older youth, we have been solicited as a provider agency that will serve as a solution. Our strategic plan outlines how we plan to expand to better serve disadvantaged older youth in care. We also plan to develop a relationship with landlords and property management companies in order to have housing options and supplies on hand and at the ready.

## **GOAL 2: Enhance childcare/early intervention services that appeal to a more diversified consumer/customer base.**

**Objective #1** – Provide extended care services within our Childcare centers for ages 6 weeks – 12 years of age.

**Objective #2** – Provide on-site developmental therapy services.

**Objective #3** – Expand our Parent Mentor program by 25%.

**Objective #4** – Increase the percentage of private paying parents to 25% of childcare revenues.

### **Strategies:**

- **Engage in a needs assessment/focus group to determine the needs of targeted consumers.**
- **Provide incentives/perks that would appeal to target consumer base.**

The most recent available data show that only 13 percent of 2-year-olds attending child care were in settings rated as high quality. The first years of life are a critical period for child development. As research across neuroscience, developmental psychology, and economics demonstrates, early social-emotional, physical, and cognitive skills beget later skill acquisition, setting the groundwork for success in school and the workplace. However, an analysis of nationally representative data shows that 65 percent of child care centers do not serve children age 1 or younger and that 44 percent do not serve children under age 3 at all. Consequently, child care centers only have the capacity to serve 10 percent of all children under age 1 and 25 percent of all children under age 3. High-quality child care during this critical period can support children's physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development. Attending a high-quality early childhood program such as preschool or Head Start is particularly important for children in poverty or from other disadvantaged backgrounds and can help reduce the large income-based disparities in achievement and development. While rural areas are more likely to meet the definition of child care deserts, the majority of the young children in a recent study are found in suburban ZIP codes. Now that our agency has achieved accreditation for providing child care, we are planning to establish a third child care center that will be located in a more affluent area. Although we are currently operating two successful centers, our current centers serve low

income families. Low income families tend to be more transient with regard to employment and housing. This places a challenge on projecting income and staffing patterns. To this end, we are endeavoring to serve families in higher income areas. We also plan to expand our current early education services to benefit more families in need. As our teaching staff continues to advance in their education, our organization has also identified additional areas of focus for them to gain a broader experience and to improve their pay. These additional areas include Parent Mentoring, Developmental Therapy, and Early Childhood Mental Health Services (Caregiver Connections).

### **GOAL 3: Develop alternative treatment and service approaches.**

**Objective #1** – Develop and establish a spiritual enrichment program to supplement clinical and education service delivery and to support our missions programs.

Strategies:

- Initiate best practice review of alternative and supplemental programs that successfully implement spirituality-focused service provision
- Develop an informed treatment approach/curriculum that support implementation of supplemental clinical and educational service delivery.
- Identify well-trained staff that will implement supplemental service delivery.

To stay true to our Christian values, we plan to formalize our spiritual enrichment activities and transition them into a supplemental program. While 69 percent say they were attending at age 17, which fell to 58 percent at age 18 and 40 percent at age 19. Once they reach their 20s, around 1 in 3 say they were attending church regularly. There are a number of studies that show declining church attendance by youth and their growing disinterest in Christianity. Research findings indicate that dropping out is largely about personal change in the spiritual lives of individuals, and often more about how they feel about church than how they feel about God. To address this exodus, we plan to purposely weave Christian values throughout our programs and services.

### **GOAL 4: Strengthen recruitment and retention of qualified professionals.**

**Objective #1** – Develop a robust employee benefits and incentive plan to improve attraction and retention.

**Objective #2** – Establish and formalize a Leadership Development plan.

**Objective #3** – Create ladders of opportunity for upward mobility.

**Objective #4** – Develop an employee incentive and appreciation program.

**Objective #5** – Increase Board diversity.

Strategies:

- **Recruit faculty committed to our mission**
- **Develop strategies to support and promote professional development and productivity.**



- **Build leadership capacity among professional and support staff.**
- **Provide opportunities for professional development across agency (e.g. mentorship)**
- **Develop and implement new mechanisms for rewarding outstanding staff.**

In our research on compensation, turnover rates, and employee satisfaction, Steven Dashiell highlighted some insights on the increase in turnover, as reported by the Glassdoor survey, in an RPO Voice blog:

- Top employees are already employed.
- More employees are “job hopping.”
- High competition for talent could lead to a wage war.

In harmony with the Glassdoor survey findings, [a previous study](#) noted that in today’s economy, employers must advertise or sell themselves to candidates. Passive candidates – employees who are already hired, but are open to moving on to something “better” – are becoming the focus for recruiters. Naturally, this approach leads to passive candidates possibly being open to job hopping and also elevating the field of competition for talent. In certain markets, specifically technical fields, the war is already waging. What can organizations do to keep the talent they have? Balancecareers.com suggests the following:

- ***Put together competitive compensation packages, and review them annually. Have HR provide you with current pay package trends for your industry.***
- ***Offer employees flexibility when possible, such as telecommuting part-time, on-site daycare, or compressed work weeks. Get creative if necessary to provide bonuses and other benefits.***
- ***Ask teams for weekly or monthly updates on their achievements, use these to create programs to offer recognition & praise for a job well done, and encourage a positive, supportive work environment. This is one of the most cost-effective ways to increase employee satisfaction.***
- ***Outline clear career paths that offer challenges to employees, discuss them at annual & mid-year reviews, and encourage workers to bring questions & requests to their managers throughout the year.***
- ***The greatest single influence on employee satisfaction is the direct supervisor. If you are in upper management, make sure your supervisors are well-trained not just in job skills, but in interpersonal skills as well.***

Because the job market has become so competitive and because the intellectual/educational landscape of Kankakee County is lacking, our organization must explore and employ various strategies to attract and retain qualified and experienced workers.

## **GOAL 5: Expand Administrative Operations**

**Objective #1** – Identify a larger site for administrative functions and operations to accommodate agency growth and multistate partnerships.

**Objective #2** – Addition of professional personnel within the Division of Administrative Operations; Quality Assurance Coordinator, Human Resources Generalist I, Communications and Resources Development Coordinator and an Administrative Assistant to support the growth and expansion of our organization.

Strategies:

- Contract local realtors and owners of vacant office space for potential property to lease or donate.
- Review job descriptions and requirements for mentioned Administrative Operations positions.
- Recruit through job fairs, internet postings, or through staff development to fill all open positions.

We have experienced a number of adverse incidents at our current location because we share a building that houses a food pantry, emergency housing services, and a senior center. Parking is limited, we do not have control over who's in the building which compromises safety, we do not have control over emergency response, and the building does not have a working elevator which compromises our adherence to ADA requirements. We currently have 3 office suites totaling less than 2,000 square feet. Due to the growth of the organization, we are in need of 3,000 – 4,000 square feet. As we expand additional administrative staff and equipment will be needed. We will also have to expand our current systems and procedures to accommodate the growth and to address risks associated with the expansion.

## **GOAL 6: Increase discretionary funding to 35% of total agency revenues.**

**Objective #1** – Establish a marketing plan.

**Objective #2** – Grow our donor database.

**Objective #3** – Research capital campaign companies.

**Objective #4** – Increase community awareness of agency's accomplishments and activities.

Strategies:

- Expand fundraising activities
- Enhance fundraising infrastructure
- Develop partnerships and collaboration with foundations and other entities
- Explore global revenue generating opportunities

In order to grow our donor database and increase our corporate and individual contributions, we need to secure professional persons gifted with the ability to fundraise money and to expand awareness of our services.

**GOAL 7: Establish a charter/private school to serve students with learning or behavioral challenges.**

**Objective #1** – Further research the scale of the need in our community. Develop curriculum and educational focus for private/charter school and obtain state approval.

**Objective #2** – Consult with Charter school professionals.

**Objective #3** – Develop curriculum and educational focus for private/charter school.

**Objective #4** – Seek state approval.

**Strategies:**

- Visit private/charter schools.
- Survey local school districts to determine need.
- Attend conferences, informational meetings, and trainings on establishing and opening charter school.

It is our desire to establish and charter/private school to initially educate the youth participating in our placement programs. Currently, our youth do not have the control and capacity to participate in a “normal” public school education program. These youth vary in age, development, social skills, academic level, and coping skills. As a result many of our youth attend therapeutic day schools or alternative schools outside our local area, as far as, 40 miles away. As with a number of other agencies with group home and residential programs, we would like to establish our own school and educational center for the population that we serve, initially, and then expand to establish a leadership and transformational academy.