



## BETHANY CHRISTIAN SERVICES

**Program Type:** Youth Employment Program and Sexual Risk Avoidance Education Program

**Agency and Location:** Bethany Christian Services (BCS) in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

**Population Served:** BCS targets at-risk youth ages 14 to 19 living in Lower West Central Michigan, including those from the foster care and adjudication systems, runaway and homeless youth, and culturally-underrepresented youth.

**Program Description:** BCS uses the evidence-based Teen Outreach Program (TOP) curriculum to equip youth with tools to avoid risky behaviors, including non-marital sexual activity, and to develop skills for a successful future. Program components include trauma-informed club-based sessions utilizing the TOP curriculum paired with youth-directed community service learning activities, workforce development, and stipend work experiences. These program components make up BCS' Youth Employment Program, where classroom learning is applied in real-life settings.

BCS' special blend of programming helps youth achieve educational goals, gain employment training, become self-sufficient, and develop entrepreneurial skills. To accomplish this, a case manager works with youth in the program to identify and plan steps to realize their career goals. Some participants gain work experience through one of BCS' two social enterprise partnerships—Rising Grinds Café and Building Bridges Professional Landscape Services. These partnerships offer job shadowing, training and work opportunities. Program participants work closely with industry-certified professionals to gain knowledge, skills and credentials in customer service, landscaping and snow removal. These social enterprises offer youth more than just entrepreneurial development; they provide an opportunity to develop self-confidence and leadership skills.

**Results:** BCS has served 475 students through its sexual risk avoidance grant. Nearly 90 percent of participants reported that they learned new life skills and 20 percent participated in a paid work experience. Students also experienced a 42 percent decrease in school suspensions.

**Program Perspective:** Through BCS' Youth Employment Program, case managers and group leaders play an essential role in motivating and empowering youth to set educational and career goals. Upon completion of the program, one participant said the following about the experience: "I think because our group leaders are assigned to us they see more potential in us than we see in ourselves, so they really work with bringing out that potential out of ourselves."

**Federal Funding Streams Used:** Healthy Marriage Grant (Office of Adolescent Health, HHS) | Sexual Risk Avoidance Education Program (Family and Youth Services Bureau, HHS) | YouthBuild (Department of Labor) | WIOA (Department of Labor)

**For More Information:** Please contact [youthservices@bethany.org](mailto:youthservices@bethany.org)

