

PART A

1. **Project/Program Name: Special Friends**
2. **Amount of Funding Request: Annual: \$50,000** **Grant period (2 years): \$100,000**
3. **Organization Submitting Proposal: Benicia Unified School District**

Organization Data:

Name: Special Friends
 Address: 350 East K St.
Benicia, CA 94510
 Phone: 707-747-8300
 Fax: 707-748-2602
 Fed. ID #: 30-0385724

Contact Person:

Name: Jessica Garcia
 Title: Mental Health Coordinator
 Phone: 707-704-7900
 Email: jgarcia@beniciaunified.org
 Fax: 707-748-2602

4. **Year organization legally established: 1850** **State: California**

5. **Project or Program Category (check applicable categories and subcategories):**

<input type="checkbox"/> Safety Net	<input type="checkbox"/> Health & Wellbeing	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
<input type="checkbox"/> Rent	<input type="checkbox"/> Counseling	<input type="checkbox"/> Affordable Housing
<input type="checkbox"/> Food	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Suicide Prevention	<input type="checkbox"/> Job Skills
<input type="checkbox"/> Utilities	<input type="checkbox"/> Domestic Violence	<input type="checkbox"/> Literacy
<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Child Abuse Prevention	<input type="checkbox"/> Parenting
<input type="checkbox"/> Childcare	<input type="checkbox"/> Substance Abuse	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mental Health	<input type="checkbox"/>

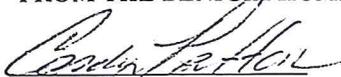
6. **Serving clients (check all that apply):**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Children Under 5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Youth (5-18)	<input type="checkbox"/> Adults (19 to 59)	<input type="checkbox"/> Seniors Over 60	<input type="checkbox"/> Family Unit
<input type="checkbox"/> Low-Income	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Disabled	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. **Anticipated Number of Unduplicated Benicia Residents to be Served: 100**

ORGANIZATION CERTIFICATION: I hereby certify that all information contained in this application and any attachments is true and accurate.

NO CITY EMPLOYEE SHALL BE A SIGNATORY ON BEHALF OF AN ORGANIZATION REQUESTING FUNDS FROM THE BENICIA HUMAN SERVICES BOARD.



Authorizing Signature

Director of Special Services, BUSD

Title

January 27, 2017

Date

Typed name: Dr. Carolyn Patton

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Part B – BUDGET INFORMATION

8. Provide a budget for the project. (Expenses listed in this document should be consistent with the Project Description.) This budget is only for the project utilizing grant monies.

PROJECT EXPENSES	TOTAL PROJECT COST (A)	AMOUNT OF GRANT REQUEST (B)	APPLICANT'S COST (C)
DIRECT COSTS			
Personnel (Direct ¹)	\$ 62,522.10	\$ 49,190	\$ 13,332.10
Benefits (Direct ¹)	15,767.72		15,767.72
Personnel (Support ¹)	13,650 (15%)		13,650
Benefits (Direct ¹)			
Contract Services			
Project-Supplies	750	750	0
Project Equipment			
Transportation (e.g. gas costs, rental)			
Other Direct Costs			
<u>Printing</u>	60	60	0
<u>SUBTOTAL</u>	92,749.82	50,000	42,749.82
INDIRECT COSTS			
(Administrative ¹) Personnel	7,828.98 (10%)		7,828.98
Benefits			
Space Rental			
Utilities			
Telephone			
Office Supplies			
Transportation (e.g. gas costs, rental)			
Other Indirect Costs			
<u>SUBTOTAL</u>	100,578.80	0	7,828.98
TOTAL COSTS	\$ 100,578.80	\$ 50,000	\$ 50,578.80

Column A = Total cost of the proposed project.

¹ Provide names, titles, education and total estimated annual salary. Attach additional sheets if necessary and summarize total here:

Personnel (Direct) refers to Guidance Assistants: Debbie Habegger, Anne Mang, Imelda Paterno, and Joan Burnett (see attached for estimated annual salary)

Personnel (Support) refers to Mental Health Coordinator: Jessica Garcia (see attached for estimated annual salary)

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Column B = Amount you are requesting in this grant application.

Column C = The difference between Column A and Column B, or the costs of the project that are not included in this grant request, if any.

Part B – BUDGET INFORMATION – (continued)

9. APPLICANT SOURCES: Provide sources of other funds for the project. Total amount should correspond with Total C (previous page). Do not include your entire budget here (it should be attached).

Applicant Sources – Other Funding (be specific)		Amount or Value	Indicate if Cash or In-kind
LCAP Supplemental	\$	25,000	In-kind
BUSD General Fund			In-kind
TOTAL	\$	50,578.80	

10. List any prior City of Benicia grants or loans awarded to your organization and the number of Benicia residents served with the funds.

Fiscal Year	Program		Amount	Benicians Served
2016-17	Special Friends	\$	35,640	66 (YTD)
2015-16	Special Friends		31,500	118
2014-15	Special Friends		31,500	126
2013-14	Special Friends		31,500	142
2012-13	Special Friends		29,700	136
2011-12	Special Friends		29,700	141
2010-11	Special Friends		35,000	134
2009-10	Special Friends		35,000	145
2008-09	Special Friends		35,000	156
TOTALS		\$	294,540	1,164

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Part C - PROJECT / ORGANIZATION DISCUSSION (Please limit Part C to 5 pages.)

11. Brief Project Summary (Two to three sentences describing the grant proposal):

The Special Friends program through the Benicia Unified School District is a proven prevention and early mental health intervention model that serves at-risk children historically in kindergarten through third grade by engaging them in a non-directive play setting, supervised by a caring and supportive guidance assistant. The goal of Special Friends is to serve children experiencing mild to moderate school adjustment problems by fostering a sense of belonging, creating enhanced resilience, and allowing the child an environment where they can express themselves and solve problems through play (a child's natural medium).

12. Describe organization's general purpose and activities:

The Benicia Unified School District is the Local Education Agency responsible for providing free and appropriate education in a public school setting to children grades Transitional Kindergarten through 12th in Benicia.

13. List all financial liabilities or pending legal action:

The school district bears financial responsibility for the organization and operation of all educational programs within the district. The district is unaware of any pending litigation.

14. Is your organization applying for other grants for fiscal years 2017-2019? If so, list the project, funding source(s), proposed budgets, and requested amount(s).

At this time, Special Friends does not have any upcoming plans to apply for other grants.

15. At what location will the proposed project take place and how long has the organization been at this location?

The Special Friends program is held in specifically designated playrooms at all four elementary schools in Benicia, including Robert Semple Elementary (est. 1954), Mary Farmer Elementary (est. 1959), Joe Henderson Elementary (est. 1987), and Matthew Turner Elementary (est. 1993).

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Part C - PROJECT / ORGANIZATION DISCUSSION (continued)

- 16. What are your proposed hours of operations for this project? Please indicate hours that actual services will be provided, and how this may or may not differ from the hours project staff will be available to respond to incoming calls, answer general questions, etc.?**

The Special Friends program begins approximately a month after summer vacation ends, allowing teachers to get a chance to know their students and determine which of their students would benefit. The program follows the Benicia Unified School District schedule, pausing during school holidays, and continues through the end of May. The Special Friends session takes place during the school day at a time when classroom instruction would be least affected (this is coordinated with each individual teacher). Instruction in the elementary schools in Benicia takes place from approximately 8:20 AM-3:00 PM. Each student is seen for a weekly 40 minute session over a 10-15 week period of time. Guidance assistants speak to parents in person, via phone and email on a regular as needed basis.

The program coordinator has historically been a School Psychologist and currently is a Mental Health Coordinator who begins work approximately at the start of August and continues approximately two weeks after the last day of instruction. The coordinator is employed by the school district and is available to staff and parents during school and after school hours. Additionally, there are three school psychologists that are assigned to the four elementary schools who are familiar with the program and are available for consult should the coordinator not be available. At the end of each session, the program coordinator and guidance assistants offer to meet with each of the parents to discuss their child's progress which in the program and provide referral for continued services if needed.

Special Friends guidance assistances worked this year for 15 hours per week based on funding. After collecting data on amount of referrals, changing some time that was spent doing paperwork, the need for more time to see students directly continues to increase. The goal for 2017-2019 is to increase all sites from 15 hours per week to 18 hours per week and specifically increase Joe Henderson Elementary from 15 hours per week to 20 hours per week based on referral needs. This year alone, guidance assistants from Joe Henderson Elementary, Matthew Turner Elementary, and Robert Semple Elementary all utilized time on a timesheet to meet student need due to increase in referrals. Our goal to increase time is so that when a student has a need, our services can provide them support immediately.

- 17. Describe the project associated with this grant request. Include the goals to be achieved and the strategy that will be used to meet the goals. Be specific when discussing what will be achieved as a result of your program.**

The Special Friends Program succeeds by hiring nurturing adults and providing on-going supervision and training in topics relevant to child development, school adjustment/protocol, and non-directive techniques in the playroom. This carefully trained and supervised guidance assistant

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maintains a specially-equipped playroom and sees each child individually over a 10 to 15 week period for visits that are 40 minutes in length. Historically Special Friends Program has served students in grades kindergarten through third grade but guidance assistance always worked with students through fifth grade given the need. Through this grant we are expanding the ages for referrals focusing on transitional kindergarten through third grade but including our fourth and fifth grade students if needed.

The ultimate goal of Special Friends is to serve children experiencing mild to moderate school adjustment problems by fostering a sense of belonging, creating enhanced resilience, and allowing the child an environment where they can express themselves and solve problems through play (a child's natural medium). Oftentimes our Special Friends students have experienced the recent death of a loved one, divorce/separation, a recent move, out-of-home placement, difficulty making friends, extreme shyness, and/or feeling uncomfortable at school. Special Friends presents a unique opportunity that is often not allotted to them in their daily lives or even in their classrooms, where increasing demands are focused so heavily on academics. In fact, play (particularly child-driven play) is known by researchers to actually increase problem solving, focus, and academic skills!

There is a special "magic" behind Special Friends' success and yet we have science to support it! The research supporting the benefits of play as well as how essential the attachment to a caring adult is to a child's well-being is continually growing. According to Kenneth Ginsburg in the American Academy of Pediatrics. "undirected play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills. When play is allowed to be child driven, children practice decision-making skills, move at their own pace, discover their own areas of interest, and ultimately engage fully in the passions they wish to pursue." He notes further, "Children's developmental trajectory is critically mediated by appropriate, affective relationships with loving and consistent caregivers as they relate to children through play" and "play is integral to the academic environment. It ensures that the school setting attends to the social and emotional development of children as well as their cognitive development. It has been shown to help children adjust to the school setting and even to enhance children's learning readiness, learning behaviors, and problem solving skills."

Increasing numbers of children are considered "at-risk in our schools, many of them experiencing adjustment issues that, if left unaddressed, can become much more intensive later on. There are very few other resources providing social-emotional prevention in this community, particularly to early elementary students.

The program has several specific goals, including the following:

- Provide social-emotional prevention services to at-risk youth in elementary schools in Benicia.
- Help foster resiliency, positive self-concept and sense of belonging in children in Benicia.
- Increase school adjustment in all participating students (measured).
- Provide twice-monthly training to prepare staff to work effectively with students.
- Screen all Transitional Kindergarten through Third grade students to identify need.
- Collaborate with local mental health practitioners, teachers, school psychologists, staff, and Student Study Teams at the schools in referring students with needs beyond the scope of the

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program.

- Meet with all teachers in Transitional Kindergarten through third grade to identify students in need.
- Obtain informed parental consent to serve students.
- Serve at least 100 children per year.
- Provide the opportunity to conference (in-person or by phone) to all parents who are interested.
- Submit quarterly reports to BHSF.
- Obtain sufficient data to quantify student progress through the use of an adaptation of Walker McConnell Survey (WMS), Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), and Participant Data Instrument (PDI) in pre and post session assessments.

This current grant proposal is requesting an additional \$14,360 (annually) to increase guidance assistance hours that were cut previously due to budget constraints. Along with previous cuts, the need based on documentation of referrals has continued to increase over the years. Guidance assistants are considered classified employees in BUSD and are also projected for a pay raise for the upcoming school year, contributing to the request for an increase in funding.

- 18. If the proposed project involves direct services to youth, please indicate the number of volunteers providing direct services, how those individuals are screened and trained, specific duties assigned to volunteers, and how volunteers are supervised. If the proposed project does not involve direct services to youth, please indicate "N/A".**

The Special Friends Program does not use volunteers. All Special Friends staff (four guidance assistants and one coordinator) are employed by the Benicia Unified School District. All employees of Benicia Unified School District are fingerprinted and background-checked prior to beginning their employment. Employment is contingent on a clear criminal background. Special Friends are trained twice monthly by the coordinator overseeing the program on topics relevant to the playroom, as well as child development, school procedures, and safety. For example, protocol for reporting child abuse (as all employees of BUSD are mandated reporters) is thoroughly covered every year. Special Friends guidance assistants are evaluated every two years by the supervising coordinator. Regular site visits, contact with other employees at the sites, and parent reports ensure the coordinator frequent and accurate feedback on each guidance assistant's performance. In addition, the coordinator is supervised by the Director of Special Services for Benicia Unified School District.

- 19. Why is this project necessary for the citizens of Benicia? How will recipients benefit from your services?**

Over the years, we have seen increasing stressors placed on families and children in our community, including financial, familial substance abuse, parental incarceration, out-of-home placements, domestic violence and child abuse, and a growing class of children with less parental guidance who continue to experience trauma and disruption very early on in their lives. Many of

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these children lack the coping skills to handle these life stressors. We see these stressors have a trickle-down effect in the schools and community. The ability of these students to perform in an increasingly demanding academic environment given all they face is compromised. Research and the public education system are finally recognizing that in order for our children to be fully ready to learn, we must focus on more than just academics; social and emotional learning.

For too long education and our society has existed on a “putting out fires” method where enormous resources are allotted only towards those needs that are most intense. As we know, this is a costly and less effective endeavor. It has been proven time and time again that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure and this is where the tide of education is finally turning. Turning the focus from not just intervention but *prevention* programs are a focus of the Benicia community that was reflected in gathering data from our LCAP last year. Special Friends has been a mainstay in Benicia for almost 26 years and revolutionary in its approach in that prevention has always been its primary focus. The program aligns with Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS) tiered approaches to support not only academic needs but social/emotional develop needs of the child too.

In supporting our schools and students in this way, Special Friends helps promote resiliency so that our children participate in the community and their education as well-rounded and better-adjusted individuals. Stronger academic and social-emotional growth allows the students of Benicia to access more opportunities. Therefore, the support of this program is promoting the overall well-being of our children and families and is an investment in the present and particularly, the future of Benicia.

20. How will outreach be conducted?

At the beginning of each year, all elementary teachers are provided handouts and brochures describing the programs providing updates. Teachers are also provided an online referral link to complete as well as teacher prompt sheets to be used when discussing services with parents that describe common FAQs presented by parents. All principals are also contacted at the beginning of the year by the coordinator to discuss any changes to the programs. Approximately a month after the school has been in session, screenings are conducted. This involves the coordinator and guidance assistants meeting with any elementary teacher in the district for conferences to discuss the programs, as well as their individual student referrals. A roving substitute teacher is hired to step in for each teacher who conferences so that they may have the time and confidentiality to thoughtfully discuss each referral. Students are also referred to the program as a school-wide intervention through SST (Student Study Team) meetings when appropriate.

Additionally, information about the program is shared with PTAs. The program coordinator is made available for staff meetings at each site to answer any staff questions. Information about the programs are disseminated in school newsletters, and brochures are available in the front office at every site. Information on the program is also discussed through the district’s Mental Wellness Subcommittee that meets monthly to discuss mental health supports for all BUSD students with both staff and community members.

Parent conferences with the guidance assistant and program coordinator (either in person or by phone-dependant on parental preference) are made available to every parent/guardian of a child who participated in Special Friends at the finale of their services. Parents are also encouraged to

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complete parent surveys around this time. We find that the “word of mouth” referrals we get when parents share with other parents is an incredibly powerful outreach also!

Finally, Special Friends (along with their “sister” social-emotional program, Second Step), launched a website in September of 2014 that includes detailed program descriptions, pictures, guidance assistance bios, parent resources, contact information, and FAQs:
www.sfss.beniciaunified.org

21. List the specific quantifiable goals of the project.

(Please state your goal in terms of number of individuals, families or groups served. For example, agency will provide X number of individuals counseling services per quarter.)

Report total services provided	Annual goal
# of students served	100
# of individual student contact	1300
# of students served per school site	average of 21
# of staff trainings per year	17

Discuss how your organization will collect, organize and disseminate this data.

Special Friends was using a reliable evaluation company, Duerr, for the Walker McConnell Survey which provides pre and post information on overall student adjustment that is quantifiable/measurable. With the open availability of technology, we now are using a Google Form that blends components of the Walker McConnell Survey (WMS), Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and the Participant Data Instrument (PDI) for pre and post assessment data. In lieu of paying for Duerr to collect the data, the coordinator will correlate the information from the forms twice a year at the end of each session. This data is collected from teachers and parent input. At the end of each year, we compile the results from this, which consistently illustrate huge gains district-wide and at each school. The growth data will be disseminated to district staff and available to parents via the website.

22. Is this project an existing program or activity provided by your organization? Please explain.

This program has been in existence in the Benicia Unified School District for almost 28 years (est. 1989). It, along with its sister program, Second Step, are staples in the elementary schools for student support and highly regarded in the Benicia community.

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23. Identify similar programs in the community and how yours will differ.

Mental health and counseling services are available in the community and while students may sometimes glean similar benefits in that setting as with Special Friends, Special Friends is not therapy. Firstly, the scope of Special Friends is for students with mild to moderate adjustment issues that do not need intensive services (but without early intervention could potentially move in that direction). Also, Special Friends guidance assistants are not licensed therapists. They build a relationship with the child that is akin to a caregiver or “friend” and is not meant to be therapeutic in nature (which would have very specific guidelines, approaches, and boundaries). Guidance assistant’s special magic with each child is in the formation of the relationship as unconditional and without expectations, making their role very different from that of a teacher’s. Also, the services guidance assistants provide are not only extraordinarily successful, but much more cost-effective! In fact, the cost per student (for the entirety of the services) is averaged at \$487. Prevention works!

24. Describe previous comparable projects or programs that your organization, has undertaken that demonstrate successful administration and implementation.

In addition to Special Friends, Benicia Unified also implements Second Step small group instruction which specifically focuses on providing social skills curriculum in either a small group, facilitated by a guidance assistant, or via classroom, directed by the classroom teacher. This program has not only been highly regarded within the district, but also has measurable and quantifiable success with regard to outcomes. In fact, Second Step and Special Friends work in tandem and under the same coordinator, providing referrals to each other, sharing student information as well as often training together. However, they are very different programs in their methods as Second Step provides explicit instruction while Special Friends is completely child-driven and based on free-form play (not prepared content).

25. For current grantees, If the amount you are requesting in this funding cycle is higher than what you are receiving now, please explain the reason for the increase.

The reason for the increase in request for funding for this grant cycle is two fold. This request in funding increase would make up for budget cut hours from previous years. This year our guidance assistants are all working 15 hours per week which allows them to see 13 students per week (per semester of program). After evaluating the referrals this fall we have seen the need is very increased. At Joe Henderson Elementary we have an increasing need where the guidance assistant is seeing 20 students per week. Therefore, we are requesting to increase each site to 17 hours per week and Joe Henderson Elementary specifically to 20 hours per week. BUSD also is expecting a salary increase to the classified employees starting in the 2017 school year which requires an increase in funding for our staff.

Lastly, the Special Friends Program has historically been implemented as an intervention for students in kindergarten through third grade. Over the years as the laws for kindergarten start ages

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has changed and transitional kindergarten has been implemented, the Special Friends Program has worked with students in transitional kindergarten but have not documented the data separately, demonstrating the increase in earlier prevention. While we believe that the students benefit most from play through third grade, we have always had exceptions and worked with students through grade five. Through this grant we are showing the need by the referrals and students we have taken on in the upper elementary grades which accounts for the need for increased time as well. With the additional grades we are serving around 10 more students in elementary schools.

Thank you for your consideration. We are humbled to have been support by the Benicia Human Services Board all these years and look forward to continuing to provide excellent prevention services for some of our youngest Benicians!

26. REQUIRED ATTACHMENTS: Verify and check off confirmation indicating that the following required items are attached to the original application.

Attachment Confirmatio n	Item No.	Item Description
(x)	1.	IRS Letter of Tax Exempt Status
(x)	2.	Organization's total budget for the current year
(x)	3.	Copy of most recent audit or financial statement
(x)	4.	Names and addresses of Board of Directors
(x)	5.	List of paid principal staff and positions
(x)	6.	Job descriptions for principal staff and personnel <u>to be paid partially or in full with grant funding</u>
(x)	7.	Copy of resolution or board meeting minutes indicating organization's support of the project application.
(n/a)	8.	If a partnership, then of letters of commitment from each organization indicating degree of participation and a budget showing each organization's financial responsibility are required.

Thank You!