

# Grant Approval Memo



**Grantee:** Stone Soup Group  
**Request Amount:** \$80,000.00  
**Project Title:** Cooperative Youth Engagement: Building Skills, Belonging, and Support  
**Grant Term:** 7/1/2026 to 6/30/2027  
**Trust Staff:** Tina Voelker-Ross

## **Staff Analysis:**

- What does this project do?  
This project will support Stone Soup Group to provide youth-centered engagement activities to strengthen protective factors for Trust beneficiary youth with developmental disabilities. To do so, Stone Soup Group will hire a Youth Services Coordinator to lead the work and facilitate consistent, youth-centered engagement activities that foster peer connection, increased confidence, and skill-building to navigate challenges and access appropriate support. Trust funds are for personnel, travel, space/facilities, supplies, equipment, and other costs.
- Who is receiving the funds?  
Stone Soup Group is a non-profit organization established in 1992 to support families who care for individuals with developmental disabilities and special healthcare needs. Stone Soup Group helps families and caregivers navigate medical, disability, mental health and special education issues. Stone Soup Group has offices in Anchorage and Wasilla but offers services to families statewide at no cost. This project's youth programming will be delivered with a statewide reach, with key in-person engagement activities offered in Anchorage and the MatSu Valley.
- Why is staff recommending this project?  
This project will serve Trust beneficiary youth and transition-age young adults (approximately ages 14–24), with a focus on youth experiencing developmental disabilities and as appropriate, inclusion of youth impacted by traumatic brain injury. Youth and young adults who experience developmental disabilities or traumatic brain injury face persistent barriers to connection, participation, and supportive relationships. These youth are more likely to experience isolation, limited opportunities to practice life and leadership skills, difficulty accessing appropriate support, and challenges navigating school, community, and service systems. A lack of safe spaces and youth-driven opportunities contributes to poorer social-emotional outcomes and can increase risk for crisis involvement, disengagement from school or employment pathways, and reduced overall wellbeing. This project will strengthen protective factors for Trust beneficiary youth through structured opportunities for connection, leadership development, and meaningful participation. The Stone Soup Group is leveraging additional funds from the USDOE OSEP Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) for this project to extend supervisory and data capacity, maximizing impact of Trust dollars.
- Will this be a multi-year project?  
This proposal is for a one-year (12-month) grant project.

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## Trust Five Year Funding History

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Project Title</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Final Expended</u>
2025	Growing Connections & Cultivating Communities	\$2,500	Closed	\$2,500
2024	Hope Grows Parent Conference	\$2,500	Closed	\$2,500
2024	Training Access Funds for the FY 24 18th Annual Reducing Recidivism and Reentry Conference	\$22,500	Closed	\$19,875
2024	Parents Learning Circle: Special Education Lost During Covid-19	\$22,500	Closed	\$22,500
2023	"What's in Your Control?" Parent Conference	\$2,500	Closed	\$2,500
2022	Stone Soup Group Admin TA Project	\$12,650	Closed	\$12,650

## Comp Plan Identification

Area of Focus	Objective	Comments
Area of Focus 1: Early Childhood & Youth	1.5 Youth and their caregivers are connected to their communities	

## Trust Focus Area Connection

Budget Area	Strategy	Comments
Early Childhood & Youth	Early Childhood - Not associated with a strategy	

## Project Description (from grant application)

Many young people in Alaska—especially youth and young adults who experience developmental disabilities or traumatic brain injury—face persistent barriers to connection, participation, and supportive relationships. These youth are more likely to experience isolation, limited opportunities to practice life and leadership skills, difficulty accessing appropriate supports, and challenges navigating school, community, and service systems. A lack of safe spaces and youth-driven opportunities contributes to poorer social-emotional outcomes and can increase risk for crisis involvement, disengagement from school or employment pathways, and reduced overall wellbeing.

To address these challenges, Stone Soup Group proposes Cooperative Youth Engagement: Building Skills, Belonging, and Support, a year-long initiative designed to strengthen protective factors for Trust beneficiary youth through structured opportunities for connection, leadership development, and meaningful participation. Stone Soup Group will hire a Youth Services Coordinator to lead this work and ensure consistent, youth-centered engagement throughout the grant period. This position will serve as the primary facilitator, mentor, and organizer for statewide youth engagement efforts, while also building sustainable structures for youth voice and leadership within Stone Soup Group’s ongoing programming.

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The project will provide youth-centered engagement activities that are cooperative by design—meaning youth are not only participants, but also co-creators who help shape activities, identify needs, and build peer supports. Through facilitated group engagement, peer connection, and skill-building experiences, youth will gain confidence, develop relationships, and build tools to navigate challenges and access appropriate supports.

## Target Population and Geographic Area

This project will serve Trust beneficiary youth and transition-age young adults (approximately ages 14–24), with a focus on youth experiencing developmental disabilities with inclusion of youth impacted by traumatic brain injury as appropriate. Programming will be delivered with a statewide reach, with key in-person engagement activities offered in Anchorage and the MatSu Valley, supported by referrals and participation pathways through partnerships with schools, community providers, family networks, and youth-serving organizations.

## Activities

Key activities will include:

Facilitation of a statewide Youth and Young Adults Council, creating an ongoing structure for youth voice, leadership development, peer connection, and program planning.

Friendship and Dating Workshops, supporting youth in building healthy relationships, communication skills, boundaries, and personal safety awareness.

Souper Gaming Night events in Anchorage and the MatSu Valley, providing inclusive and welcoming opportunities for peer connection, belonging, and relationship-building.

Support for youth involvement in the Shared Vision Collaborative and Key Campaign, promoting youth leadership, advocacy, and meaningful participation in statewide disability initiatives.

Youth outreach and engagement at public community events, such as Disability Pride celebrations and other youth-centered outreach opportunities.

Youth participation in speaking and training opportunities, including Transition Camps coordinated by SERRC, and youth involvement in presenting lived experience perspectives in professional training settings.

Youth leadership development and public testimony opportunities, supporting youth to speak at public meetings and advisory groups such as the SILC, GCDSE, and the DOH Medicaid Advisory Council (MAC).

Exploration of opportunities for trained youth leaders to serve on advisory groups, including potential participation on the Beneficiary Advisory Committee for the DOH MAC.

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Skill-building opportunities focused on communication, self-advocacy, decision-making, wellness strategies, and navigating school and service systems.

Connection to resources and supportive services through warm handoffs when youth identify needs.

Family engagement and caregiver connection, strengthening support systems around participating youth and reinforcing successful outcomes.

## Expected Outcomes

By the end of the grant period, participating youth will:

Increase their sense of belonging and connection to peers and supportive adults.

Strengthen communication, leadership, and self-advocacy skills that support success in school, community, and transition planning.

Improve confidence in accessing resources, navigating systems, and asking for help when needed.

Increase participation in leadership and civic engagement opportunities, including public speaking, testimony, and advisory involvement.

Experience strengthened protective factors related to mental health and wellbeing, reducing isolation and lowering risk of escalation to crisis-level needs.

## Community Support

Stone Soup Group will implement this project in collaboration with youth-serving partners, family networks, and community-based providers who support Trust beneficiary populations. Community partners will help identify youth who may benefit, provide referral pathways, and strengthen coordination so youth experience consistent support across settings. This project aligns with statewide priorities to increase youth wellbeing, expand inclusive engagement opportunities, strengthen protective factors, and ensure youth and young adults with disabilities have meaningful opportunities to participate, lead, and be heard.

## **Grantee Proposed Evaluation Measures (from grant application)**

How much: Track # of Trust beneficiary youth served, # of engagement sessions delivered, and total attendance/contacts.

How well: Track retention and satisfaction (% of youth returning and reporting sessions were welcoming and useful).

Better off: Track % of youth reporting increased belonging/connection and improved self-advocacy or coping skills (pre/post or brief check-ins)

## **Proposed Project Performance Measures (developed by the Trust)**

How much did you do?

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- a. Number (#) of unduplicated Trust beneficiary youth (> age 14) and transition-age young adults (ages 14-24) served during the reporting period, broken down by age range and primary beneficiary category.
- b. Number (#) of engagement sessions delivered during the reporting period. For each engagement session, please include the following:
  - i. Date
  - ii. Location
  - iii. Title and brief description of activities
  - iv. Number (#) in attendance

How well did you do it?

- a. Provide a narrative describing the project timeline, activities, successes, challenges, and any lessons learned during the reporting period. Be sure to include information regarding outreach activities used to spur participation, including any partnerships with schools, community providers, family networks, and/or youth-serving organizations.
- b. Number (#) and percentage (%) of participants who attended more than one engagement session during the grant reporting period.
- c. Number (#) and percentage (%) of participants who felt the engagement session(s) was welcoming and inclusive.
- d. Number (#) and percentage (%) of participants who felt the engagement activities offered through the program were useful and pertinent.

Is anyone better off?

- a. Number (#) and percentage (%) of participants who increased their sense of belonging and connection to peers and supportive adults.
- b. Number (#) and percentage (%) of participants who improved their communication, leadership, and/or self-advocacy skills.
- c. Number (#) and percentage (%) of participants who improved their confidence in accessing resources, navigating systems, and/or asking for help when needed.
- d. Three statements from participants that describe how the project has impacted them.

## **Sustainability (from grant application)**

Stone Soup Group anticipates this project will continue well beyond the one-year Trust Partnership grant term. During the grant year, we will intentionally build sustainable program components—including replicable engagement materials, youth leadership opportunities, and a strengthened partnership and referral structure—that can be maintained with reduced ongoing costs. In addition, Stone Soup Group is committed to shifting the financial support of youth activities away from grant dependency by developing targeted sponsorships for key events such as Souper Gaming Night, Friendship and Dating Workshops, Youth and Young Adults Council, our annual Santa Party, and the Parent Conference. Securing sponsorship support for these community-building activities will allow future grant dollars to be focused more directly on sustaining essential personnel costs, including the Youth Services Coordinator role. This strategy reflects both our intent and ability to sustain this program long-term, while honoring how deeply we value consistent, direct connection with youth

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experiencing disability and their parents. Outcome data gathered during the grant period will further strengthen future funding requests and demonstrate continued impact for Trust beneficiaries, ensuring continued investment in meaningful youth engagement and family support.

## **Who We Serve (from grant application)**

The population served by this project aligns directly with the Alaska Mental Health Trust’s defined beneficiary groups. Trust beneficiaries include Alaskans who experience mental illness, intellectual and developmental disabilities, substance use disorders, Alzheimer’s disease and related dementia, and traumatic brain injuries. The Trust also supports prevention and early intervention services for individuals at risk of becoming beneficiaries. Stone Soup Group’s Cooperative Youth Engagement: Building Skills, Belonging, and Support focuses on Trust beneficiary youth and transition-age young adults (ages 14–24) who experience developmental disabilities and/or mental illness—two core Trust beneficiary groups. The project also intentionally includes youth impacted by substance use disorders and traumatic brain injury when appropriate, ensuring that participants reflect the broad spectrum of Trust-defined beneficiaries.

This project will make a measurable difference in the lives of Trust beneficiaries by increasing supportive connections, strengthening protective factors, and improving individual capacity to navigate systems of care. Specifically, youth participating in Cooperative Youth Engagement will:

Build meaningful social connections and peer support networks, countering isolation and promoting sustained engagement in positive community experiences.

Develop practical skills in communication, self-advocacy, problem-solving, and wellness strategies, which are essential for success in school, employment, and community life.

Gain confidence in accessing resources and supports when needed, increasing their ability to prevent escalation to crisis-level needs.

Experience enhanced feelings of belonging and self-efficacy, which research shows are protective factors for mental health and long-term wellbeing.

By strengthening these capacities, the project advances the Trust’s mission to improve the lives of beneficiaries through prevention, early intervention, and service engagement. Programming designed and led with youth voice ensures that Trust beneficiary youth not only receive support but also take active roles in shaping their own pathways to wellbeing.

## **Estimated Numbers of Beneficiaries Served Experiencing (from grant application)**

Mental Illness:	10
Developmental Disabilities:	10
Traumatic Brain Injuries:	5
Secondary Beneficiaries (family members or caregivers providing support to primary beneficiaries):	15
Number of people to be trained	1

## **Project Budget (from grant application)**

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Personnel Services Costs	\$65,000.00
Personnel Services Costs (Other Sources)	\$15,000.00
Personnel Services Narrative	<p>1 FTE Youth Services Coordinator to be paid with AMHTA funds to coordinate all youth-related services and activities for SSG. \$65,000</p> <p>.1 FTE Program Director to provide supervision and support to the YSC to be paid with federal DOE Parent Training and Information Center grant funds. \$9,500*</p> <p>.08 FTE Data &amp; Systems Manager to provide support for data collection and program evaluation to be paid with federal DOW Parent Training and Information Center grant funds. \$5,500*</p> <p>* costs for the Program Director and Data &amp; Systems Manager will be paid by SSG's USDOE OSEP PTI grant funded October 1, 2025 - September 30, 2030 at \$250,000 per year.</p>

Travel Costs	\$5,000.00
Travel Costs (Other Sources)	\$0.00
Travel Costs Narrative	<p>Key Campaign - travel to Juneau for Coordinator and Youth March 2027; includes airfare, per diem, lodging and ground transportation</p> <p>Kenai Disability Pride and local outreach - travel to Kenai to for Coordinator and Youth July 2026; includes mileage, per diem and lodging</p> <p>Juneau Disability Pride and local outreach - travel to Juneau for Coordinator and Youth July 2026; includes airfare, per diem and lodging</p> <p>Fairbanks outreach - travel to Fairbanks for Coordinator for introductory meetings with schools and local community organizations who support youth and young adults with I/DD; includes airfare, per diem and lodging</p> <p>Parent Conference - travel to Anchorage for rural Youth x 2 to participate in SSG's annual Parent Conference - includes airfare or mileage, per diem, and lodging</p> <p>mileage reimbursement for local travel in Anchorage and Mat-Su for local outreach, events and meetings - such as Souper Gaming Night, Friendship and Dating Workshops, and community partner events</p>

Space or Facilities Costs	\$2,500.00
Space or Facilities Costs (Other Sources)	\$0.00
Space or Facilities Narrative	<p>cost for lease of Anchorage office</p> <p>cost for janitorial service</p>

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	cost for lease of copier/scanner/fax
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Supplies Costs	\$2,500.00
Supplies Costs (Other Sources)	\$0.00
Supplies Narrative	supplies include snacks and refreshments for youth during activities such as Souper Gaming Night and Friendship and Dating Workshops outreach materials will be updated to reflect input and perspective of youth postage to mail outreach materials to rural communities and schools

Equipment Costs	\$2,500.00
Equipment Costs (Other Sources)	\$0.00
Equipment Narrative	Youth Services Coordinator - cost for new laptop, docking station, monitor, keyboard, mouse

Other Costs	\$2,500.00
Other Costs (Other Sources)	\$0.00
Other Costs Narrative	added user for Zoom VoIP phone system, Salesforce database, Docusign, Clicktime (electronic timekeeping), Bamboo HR, Passportal (password management) contractual IT and network support with Weston Technologies contractual communications support for social media and electronic communications targeting youth and their families with BreeAnn Davis contractual website maintenance support with SunDog Media contractual accounting support with The Foraker Group cost for annual financial audit, to include state and federal single audits stipends to be paid to youth who serve on the YAYA Council, participate in outreach events, review and give feedback for website and program materials, present at conferences or trainings - \$50/ hour, \$150 half day, \$300 full day

## **Other Funding Sources (from grant application)**

USDOE OSEP Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) - SECURED	\$15,000.00
<b>Total Leveraged Funds</b>	<b>\$15,000.00</b>