WOOD FAMILY FOUNDATION’S PITCH IN PROGRAM
ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

JUNE 2019
Overview

ABOUT
The Wood Family Foundation’s Pitch In program (Pitch In) partners with middle schools to equip students in fourth through eighth grade with the skillsets and mindsets necessary to successfully transition to high school.

WHY WE INVESTED
Pitch In bridges the gap between middle and high school to ensure students are prepared for success in ninth grade and beyond. Often deemed the “make it or break it” year, ninth-grade performance is predictive of long-term academic outcomes. Yet, many Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students enter ninth grade unprepared, facing declines in performance. Through holistic programming focused on building skillsets and mindsets critical for long-term success, Pitch In is equipping students to excel in high school and beyond. The organization welcomed a new executive director, Laura Muriello in February 2018. Muriello has an ambitious vision to establish Pitch In as an evidence-based blueprint for middle school success and traversing the middle-to-high school transition point. She endeavors to significantly increase students’ academic and social emotional skillsets and empower all students to achieve their highest potential. With deep education and middle-school knowledge and a track record of building strong organizations from the ground up, Muriello is poised to take Pitch In through its next phase of development and growth.

GRANTEE SINCE
2019

INVESTMENT TO DATE
$100K

CURRENT NUMBER SERVED
90

LEADERSHIP
Laura Muriello
Executive Director
Our Assessment

PROGRAM
The transition to ninth grade is a critical moment for students. Successfully navigating the transition impacts everything from students’ odds of finishing high school to their odds of attending and completing college. Yet, most students enter high school unprepared. Trends over time reveal that students consistently see an increase in course failure and a decrease in GPA when they transition from eighth to ninth grade. Pitch In is addressing this by partnering with students in fourth through eighth grade to equip them with critical skills leading up to this transition and, in turn, dramatically changing students’ long-term trajectories. The 2018-2019 school year represents the first time Pitch In is tracking academic outcomes and the organization is deeply committed to applying a data-driven approach to their work. In the coming year, Pitch In will engage in a comprehensive strategic planning process to assess its program and ensure it is setup to drive significant, long-term impact.

LEADERSHIP
Pitch In is led by a visionary executive director who has an exceptional track record. Muriello brings deep experience building high-impact programs from the ground up, strategically designing solid teams with complimentary skills, and developing strong cultures that foster professional development. In less than a year, Muriello has had a tremendous impact at Pitch In. She has refined the organization’s vision, codified the model, launched programming in a second school site and strategically expanded her team. Pitch In has a lean management team. Muriello is supported by a seasoned development director with extensive knowledge of the Chicago landscape. In addition, the organization’s 10-person board of directors has played an active role in expanding Pitch In’s presence and shaping its direction. In the coming year, it will be important that Muriello and her team determine the staffing plan needed to support growth, including how to strategically build the management team.
Our Assessment

**OPERATIONS**
Pitch In has a strong operational track record that it will need to build off as it seeks to codify and expand programming. Financially, the organization has been able to meet operating expenses annually and has started to build its reserves. Over the last three years, revenue has hovered around $900,000. As the organization looks to support growth, Pitch In recognizes the need to diversify its fundraising strategies and build a broader base. The organization is poised to do so with an experienced development director on board. Additionally, as Pitch In looks to expand – operationally and programmatically – it is prepared to assess its current infrastructure to ensure it is well-positioned to continuously use data to inform decision making.

**SCALE**
Pitch In has an opportunity to capitalize on a sizeable addressable market given the need in the middle-school space. While the organization has not historically sought to grow, with its new executive director at the helm, Pitch In is focused on expanding its footprint in Chicago. Early on, Muriello made progress on this front. The organization expanded to a second school site for the first time, growing from nearly 70 students in FY18 to more than 90 in FY19. In the year ahead, Pitch In will engage in strategic planning to solidify its vision for expansion and ensure it has the necessary strategies in place to acquire needed resources.
Grantee Performance

KEY OUTCOME

Pitch In’s key outcome data is forthcoming and will be included in the next assessment.

REVENUE
In millions

SCALE
Students served
Our Impact

INVESTMENT TO DATE

MANAGEMENT SUPPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Investment launched in January 2019. Management support project to begin later this year.
Contact Us

For more information, contact:

Doug Scott
President, A Better Chicago
dscott@abetterchicago.org
312.674.7067