



# 7<sup>TH</sup> GENERATION FOUNDATION, INC.

Healthy Lifestyles. Inspired Communities.

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## Montgomery County Council Special Appropriations Hearing Testimony

December 1, 2020

Susan D. Rich, MD, MPH, DFAPA on behalf of Dream Catcher Meadows

Thank you to the County Council for the opportunity to discuss the Special appropriation to the County Government's FY21 Operating Budget - Department of Health and Human Services - \$312,455 for Children, Youth, and Family Services - Therapeutic Recreation Services for School-Age Youth. Source of Funds: General Fund Reserves. As a Child/Adolescent & Adult Psychiatrist, Founder of 7<sup>th</sup> Generation Foundation, Inc. and Dream Catcher Meadows, and MCPS parent, I will be speaking in favor of therapeutic recreation services for school age youth, highlighting our program at Dream Catcher Meadows.

Background: As the Councilmembers may or may not be aware, 1 in 20 American children – including those in our own County, are affected by prenatal alcohol exposure (1). Children from foster care are often multiply exposed with alcohol and other drugs, with their diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) being missed or misdiagnosed (2). Recently, a Montgomery County Child Welfare estimate indicated that 95% of children in foster care have been prenatally exposed to at least one substance (3). Children with FASD often suffer from additional adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), attachment issues, and trauma-related mental health issues (4). Often, individuals with FASD and ACEs enter a cycle culminating in the "pipeline to prison," which can start when school teachers and administrators misinterpret neurodevelopmental issues and trauma reactions as willful, oppositional behavior (5, 6). These misunderstood behaviors can lead to their placement in special needs schools and/or juvenile facilities.

Target Groups: There are more than 11 special needs schools in Montgomery County, MD, with a majority being within a very short drive of Dream Catcher Meadows (10). Children with special needs have been negatively impacted by the shift from traditional in-person learning to remote/virtual learning necessary during the Coronavirus pandemic. Children and teens from Latino, African American, Native American and other socially marginalized communities could likewise benefit from therapeutic recreational opportunities at Dream Catcher Meadows, giving them respite from the highly stressful remote learning environment (11).

What is Dream Catcher Meadows? Dream Catcher Meadows is an inclusive green care farm animal sanctuary with ongoing and planned therapeutic social, vocational and recreational programs for school age and transitional age youth located in Potomac, MD (7). The farm is operated by the 501c3, 7th Generation Foundation, Inc. (8) and is home to 14 hand raised mixed breed goats, several mixed breed chickens, and a rescued Kune Kune pig named Noah. We also have a biodynamic garden, a compost area where we make our own soil (from kitchen waste, animal bedding and animal dung), a woodworking workshop, a working beehive, and 2 acres of forest. Each of these unique areas on the farm offers a glimpse into environmental science, restorative agriculture, animal care, and the natural world. Such therapeutic farming approaches (known as "green care farming" or "farming for health") is internationally used for improving the quality of life, reducing stress, providing a safe recreational space for socialization, and introducing vocational concepts and job skills (9).

Dream Catcher Meadows offers "a day on the farm" programming for special needs youth and their caregivers, parents or teachers to interact with the animals and nature, earn student service learning hours while participating, and learn about ways to improve the environment in their own backyard. The hand-raised animals offer a unique experience to be

surrounded by gentle, friendly goats on a mindfulness walk through the pastures, culminating in meditation and forest bathing.

Our Aim: We aim to provide "a day on the farm" therapeutic recreation for groups of special needs youth from MCPS, MC Child Welfare and other community-based programs. We would like to support the HHS appropriations to help illuminate the need for therapeutic recreation like our program in our County.

References:

1. <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorders-prevalent-us-communities>
2. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25583914/>
3. Information obtained from A. English, MC Child Welfare and corroborated by L. Merkin.
4. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31842817/>
5. <http://www.spedchildmass.com/event/students-down-the-pipeline-who-gets-punished/>
6. <https://alcoholcampaign.org/2017/03/19/school-to-prison-pipeline/>
7. [www.facebook.com/thedreamcatcherfarm](http://www.facebook.com/thedreamcatcherfarm)
8. [www.7thGenerationFoundationInc.org](http://www.7thGenerationFoundationInc.org)
9. [https://www.springer.com/us/book/9781402045400?msclkid=138d2b5edf6f129294df74ebf8f7f43f&utm\\_source=bing&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=Springer.com%20%7C%20US%20%7C%20Microsoft%20%7C%20Research%20%7C%20CPM%20%7C%20Shopping&utm\\_term=4584070140123874&utm\\_content=All%20eBooks#aboutBook](https://www.springer.com/us/book/9781402045400?msclkid=138d2b5edf6f129294df74ebf8f7f43f&utm_source=bing&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=Springer.com%20%7C%20US%20%7C%20Microsoft%20%7C%20Research%20%7C%20CPM%20%7C%20Shopping&utm_term=4584070140123874&utm_content=All%20eBooks#aboutBook)
10. MoCo Special Needs Schools (examples): Regional Institute on Children and Adolescents (RICA) in Rockville, Katherine Thomas School in Rockville, Ivymount and Maddux School in Potomac, The Lourie Center School in Rockville, The Frost School in Rockville, The Kennedy Krieger School in Rockville, The Nora School in Silver Spring, Newport Academy in Rockville, Fusion Academy in Rockville, The Sienna School in Silver Spring, The Diener School in Potomac, the Carl Sandburg Learning Center in Rockville, and various other MCPS public Elementary/Secondary Learning and Academic Disabilities (LAD) programs as well as Autism and Bridge programs.
11. <https://wtop.com/maryland/2020/11/researchers-black-and-brown-students-are-especially-suffering-from-remote-learning/>

Respectfully Submitted,

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*Electronically signed: 12/1/2020 at 1:36 pm*

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*"We do not inherit the land from our ancestors, we borrow her from our children."  
- Native American Proverb.*