September 13, 2021

Dear Dean Swahn and Dr. Tis,

About three years ago, I approached the Wellstar College of Health & Human Services and Dr. Monica Nandan to help develop an innovative solution for helping high school students better address their mental health challenges. Across our country, there had been increasing numbers of school shootings, suicides & suicide attempts, opioid overdose deaths, etc. among teenagers. Most all these same trends were being seen in Georgia and our local community. It was time for a new approach.

The Wellstar College developed an interdisciplinary graduate level Social Entrepreneurship & Innovation course and students from various disciplines were invited to enroll (Social Work, Business, Information Technology, Public Administration, Conflict Management and MSW/MBA). For the next six months after the course, these graduate students met with over 250 high school students across our community to identify and understand the stressors they were experiencing and how they were coping. We created an empowering environment for these high school students to design and develop responsive solutions that would help them the most. Subsequently, these high school students were also invited to brainstorm ideas for designing prevention strategies for young adults. KSU students built out prototypes of these ideas that will be used for construction of the center.

This effort has culminated in the creation of our new nonprofit, YouthCentric, which recently received official 501c3/ tax exempt status. The resulting model for our brick-and-mortar center is innovative, youth-centered, and clear on one thing: for the students, by the students! The center will be composed of five cohesive pods to create opportunities for building life skills, developing a sense of belonging/community, and bringing more life balance. We plan to open our first center in the Kennesaw/ Marietta area in early 2022.

I would like to thank the talented graduate students and professors of the Wellstar College of Health & Human Services for their tremendous efforts and partnership over the past 3 years. Their research and efforts were foundational to developing YouthCentric and to our operating model. Rather than working on hypothetical cases and projects in the Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation course, these KSU students and professors desired a more meaningful, community engaging & impactful learning experience – they wanted to tackle a real need in

P.O. Box 2435, Powder Springs, GA 30127
www.youthcentric.org
their community and help make a difference. They have! The Wellstar College is clearly committed to providing innovative, rich learning experiences and opportunities for their students, and truly values creating community impact through community service and learning. Kennesaw State University should be proud. Thanks!

Sincerely,

Scott Solana
Executive Director  I YouthCentric, Inc.