

	LiGHT Grant Application 2026	
	2026 LiGHT Grant Cover Form and Guidelines	

Name of individual, group or organization: BIGJAWs Youth for Christ

Contact name(s): Jenalee Veenkant & Garrett Bucher

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Name of the program as it would appear on the grant award: _____

GoMAD Retreat Student Scholarships

Describe who the grant award will serve and approximate number affected: 20 Wells County

High School students who need financial assistance to attend

Dollar amount requested: \$3,000 the GoMAD retreat

Would the program be offered if only a *partial* grant from LiGHT is made? yes, with fewer student scholarships

Summary paragraph of the grant award requested: BIGJAWs Youth for Christ requests

> May be utilized for part of the presentation.

\$3,000 to provide 20 full scholarships of \$150 each for Wells County

high school students to attend the November 7-8 GoMAD retreat.

Through recreation, caring relationships, and intentional sessions,
students will explore belonging, identity, purpose, life's challenges
Complete all requested items below: and faith.

1) This Cover Form

2) Project Narrative, 1-5 pages typed, including:

- What need in the Community will this program address? Give evidence to substantiate your request. (i.e., data, letters of recommendation, etc.)
- What do you want to do?
- What is your timeline?
- What results do you expect?
- If partnering with other organizations, please list.
- Describe the program and tell how the funds from the grant will be used based on your budget
- Signature page: To include endorsement of the project or program by the requesting agency's Board of Directors. This page must include a signature of the Board president.

3) Detailed budget

GoMAD: Opening the Door for 20 Wells County Students

Project Narrative | Request: \$3,000 for 20 student scholarships

The Need: Belonging, Connection, and Purpose

For a high school student, one weekend away can create room for something important: the chance to lower their guard, build genuine relationships, and think honestly about who they are and where their life is headed. That is the purpose of GoMAD, BIGJAWS Youth for Christ's two-day, one-night retreat for Wells County high school students. GoMAD stands for "Go Make a Difference," and the retreat is built around a simple idea: a change of pace and a change of place can lead to a change in perspective.

"Among all the trips we take, breakfasts we serve, and clubs we run GoMAD is our premier weekend retreat! There is something powerful about getting away from home. A change of pace + a change of place = a change of perspective." - Garrett Bucher, Norwell & Bluffton Campus Life Director

GoMAD is open to high school students from across Wells County. Students do not have to attend church, identify as Christian, participate in Campus Life, or have any prior connection to Youth for Christ. All are welcome. This openness is important because some of the students who most need a place to belong are not already connected to a youth group or other structured program.

In spring 2026, BIGJAWS surveyed 251 middle and high school students across its five-county service region. Their responses point clearly to the pressures young people are carrying. More than eight in ten respondents, 81.7%, named stress and anxiety as one of the greatest challenges facing teens. Identity and self-worth was selected by 36.7%, making good choices by 34.3%, loneliness by 18.7%, and trusting others by 19.9%. When students were asked what they wanted to learn more about, 49.8% selected handling stress and anxiety, 38.6% selected finding purpose in life, and 31.5% selected making better decisions. When asked to choose the one topic most important to them personally, "What is my purpose in life?" received the largest share of responses.

Although this survey represents BIGJAWS' broader five-county region rather than Wells County alone, the findings reflect the same questions and struggles Campus Life staff hear from local students. GoMAD gives students an intentional, supportive place to address those needs alongside peers and trusted adults.

"My students at Southern Wells are looking for two main things: somewhere to belong and people who care for them. Lots of them are wrestling with self doubt, low self esteem, and isolation."

- Allison Blevins-Wenzel, Southern Wells Campus Life Director

"I found myself, for the first time, in a long time, letting my guard down and genuinely smiling."

- Student Retreat Participant

A Trusted Presence in Wells County

BIGJAWS Youth for Christ currently serves Wells County students through Campus Life at Southern Wells, Norwell, and Bluffton middle and high schools. At Southern Wells, the partnership dates to 1996. In a May 2026 letter of support, Superintendent Dr. Trent Lehman described Campus Life as providing "encouragement, mentorship, leadership development, and meaningful relationships" and creating a safe, positive environment where students benefit from trusted adults who invest in them.

GoMAD builds upon those established relationships while also creating an entry point for students who have not previously been involved. The retreat began in 2009 and has continued for most years since, with a brief interruption during and immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic. Its longevity gives BIGJAWS experience in creating a retreat environment that is welcoming, safe, engaging, and meaningful.

"GoMAD was an incredible event to get uninvolved youth engaged! Relationships and genuine connections were formed that lasted years past the event." - Campus Life Director

What We Will Do

In November 2026, BIGJAWs will host a two-day, one-night GoMAD retreat specifically for Wells County high school students. Recreation, team games, shared meals, large-group sessions, small-group conversations, and informal time with caring adults will work together to create an experience in which students can have fun, form new relationships, and reflect on questions that are often difficult to explore amid the pace and pressure of everyday life.

The retreat's intentional sessions will guide students through four foundational questions: Who am I? Why am I here? What has gone wrong in the world? Who is Jesus, and what does he have to do with me? These conversations address identity, purpose, hardship, hope, and faith in language high school students can understand. Students are welcomed regardless of their beliefs and are given room to listen, ask honest questions, and participate without pressure.

The approach is both educational and relational. Survey respondents indicated that they learn best through interactive settings: 39.0% selected games and discussions, 22.7% individual conversations or mentoring, and 20.7% small groups. Those preferences are reflected throughout GoMAD. Students will not simply sit through presentations. They will talk, play, listen, ask questions, and process what they are learning with adults and peers who know them and care about them.

"GoMAD was a transformative trip for me! I met many, many different people. It was fun!"

- GoMAD Alumnus

Removing the Financial Barrier

The cost to attend GoMAD is \$150 per student. For some Wells County families, that cost places the retreat out of reach, regardless of how much a student wants or needs to attend. No teenager should miss an experience centered on belonging, encouragement, and personal growth simply because their family cannot absorb an additional \$150 expense.

BIGJAWs Youth for Christ is requesting \$3,000 from LIGHT to provide 20 full student scholarships. The request is direct and measurable: every \$150 funded opens the door for one Wells County high school student. Scholarships will be offered to students for whom cost would otherwise prevent or significantly hinder participation. LIGHT funds will be applied to those students' retreat costs, which collectively include lodging, meals and snacks, transportation, recreation and activity supplies, session materials, retreat t-shirt, and speaker honorariums.

The value of the grant extends beyond paying 20 registration fees. It allows 20 young people to enter a setting where they are known by name, welcomed into a group, connected with caring adults, and invited to consider their lives with fresh perspective. For a student who feels isolated, guarded, anxious, or unsure of their purpose, that opportunity can become a meaningful turning point.

Timeline

September–October 2026: BIGJAWs Campus Life staff will promote GoMAD through Wells County schools and existing student relationships, identify students who need financial assistance, communicate with families, confirm registrations, and complete retreat planning and safety preparations.

November 7-8, 2026: BIGJAWs will conduct the two-day, one-night retreat. Staff and trained adult leaders will facilitate recreation, sessions, small-group conversations, meals, and relationship-building activities.

November–December 2026: Campus Life staff will reconnect with participating students through school-based programs and individual mentoring sessions, invite feedback, and document scholarship participation and student-reported outcomes.

Expected Results

The immediate result will be that 20 Wells County high school students who face a financial barrier can participate fully in GoMAD. BIGJAWs also expects scholarship recipients to experience meaningful connection with peers and caring adults, engage thoughtfully with questions of identity and purpose, and leave with encouragement and a stronger sense that they are seen, valued, and supported.

BIGJAWs will track the number of scholarships awarded and the number of scholarship recipients who attend the full retreat. A brief post-retreat reflection will ask students about their sense of belonging, relationships formed or strengthened, what they learned, and whether financial assistance made their attendance possible. Staff will also record observations and participant comments that help demonstrate the retreat's effect.

A two-day retreat cannot promise to resolve every struggle a teenager carries. It can, however, interrupt isolation, begin a trusted relationship, awaken hope, and help a student see new possibilities. Because BIGJAWs staff remain present in Southern Wells, Norwell, and Bluffton schools after the retreat ends, the relationships begun or strengthened at GoMAD can continue throughout the school year.

Community Partnerships

BIGJAWs' primary partners are Southern Wells Community Schools, Northern Wells Community Schools, and Bluffton-Harrison Metropolitan School District, where Campus Life staff maintain relationships with students and school personnel. These school partnerships help BIGJAWs reach students throughout Wells County, including young people who may not otherwise seek out a retreat or youth program. Southern Wells Community Schools has provided a letter endorsing BIGJAWs and affirming the value of its long-standing work with students.

Why LIGHT

LIGHT exists to improve the quality of life for women and children in Wells County through opportunities for encouragement, education, and enlightenment. GoMAD offers all three. Students will be encouraged through fun, friendship, and the steady presence of adults who care. They will be educated through conversations about identity, choices, purpose, challenges, and faith. They will be enlightened as a different setting gives them space to view themselves, their relationships, and their future from a new perspective.

Twenty scholarships mean 20 individual stories: 20 students who can say yes to an invitation, join the group, meet someone new, ask an honest question, and discover that they belong. The full effect of those moments may not be visible within one weekend. As past participants and staff have testified, however, the relationships and perspective formed at GoMAD can last for years. LIGHT's investment will ensure that financial circumstances do not close the door on those possibilities.

GoMAD Student Scholarship Budget

November 7–8, 2026 | Wells County High School Students

BIGJAWS Youth for Christ requests \$3,000 from LIGHT to provide 20 full GoMAD scholarships. Each scholarship covers the established \$150 student registration cost. Because vendor invoices, final attendance, room assignments, meal counts, and donated or discounted services affect the final distribution of expenses, the category totals below will be reconciled to actual costs after the retreat rather than estimated here as if they were confirmed amounts.

Grant Request

Budget item	Calculation	LIGHT request
Full GoMAD scholarships for Wells County high school students	20 students × \$150	\$3,000

Costs Covered by the \$150 Student Rate

Expense category	How it supports the retreat
Transportation and travel	Travel between Wells County, Fort Wayne, and Pokagon State Park; applicable fuel and travel costs
Lodging	One overnight stay at Potawatomi Inn
Meals and snacks	Dinner on November 7 and meals, snacks, and refreshments during the retreat
Recreation	First-day experience at Power Up Action Park in Fort Wayne
T-shirts	GoMAD shirt for participants
Activity and session supplies	Materials used for games, small groups, and intentional sessions
Speaker honorariums	Honorariums for retreat session speakers

In-Kind and Discounted Support

Contributing partner	Contribution	Budget treatment
Power Up Action Park, Fort Wayne	Discounts and/or complimentary items	Reduces recreation costs
Potawatomi Inn, Pokagon State Park	Reduced lodging rates	Reduces lodging costs
LifeWise	Complimentary use of buses	Major in-kind transportation support

Retreat Itinerary and Cost Context

On November 7, students will travel to Power Up Action Park in Fort Wayne and share dinner before continuing to Potawatomi Inn at Pokagon State Park. Games and intentional sessions will take place at the inn that evening and continue on November 8. Partner discounts and donated bus use allow BIGJAWS to stretch scholarship funding while preserving a full retreat experience for each student.

Financial Accountability

LIGHT funds will be restricted to scholarships for Wells County high school students attending GoMAD. BIGJAWS will maintain applicable vendor invoices, receipts, scholarship records, and internal expense reports for the retreat and can provide supporting documentation to The Wells County Foundation upon request. If actual participation is lower than anticipated or the full award cannot be used for eligible scholarship costs, BIGJAWS will contact the Foundation for direction before reallocating any funds.

Board Endorsement and Authorization

GoMAD Student Scholarships | 2026 LIGHT Grant Request

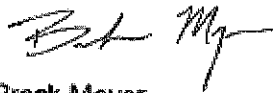
Requesting organization	Youth for Christ of Adams, Blackford, Grant, Jay, and Wells Counties, Inc. (BIGJAWS Youth for Christ)
Project	GoMAD Student Scholarships for Wells County High School Students
Amount requested	\$3,000 for 20 full scholarships at \$150 per student

Board Endorsement

The Board of Directors of BIGJAWS Youth for Christ endorses the organization's request to The Wells County Foundation's LiGHT program for \$3,000 to provide 20 full scholarships for Wells County high school students to attend the 2026 GoMAD retreat. The Board affirms that this project advances BIGJAWS' commitment to helping young people experience belonging, caring relationships, encouragement, personal growth, and opportunities to explore questions of identity, purpose, and faith.

By signing below, the undersigned confirm the Board's endorsement of this project and authorize submission of the grant application. BIGJAWS Youth for Christ accepts responsibility for administering any awarded funds in accordance with the approved request, maintaining applicable financial records, and providing grant documentation or reporting requested by The Wells County Foundation.

Sincerely,



Brock Meyer
Executive Director
BIGJAWS Youth for Christ



Dr. Katti Sneed
Board Chair
BIGJAWS Youth for Christ

Thank you for considering an investment that can open the door for 20 Wells County students.



Southern Wells Community Schools

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Dr. Trent Lehman, Superintendent, tlehman@swraiders.com

Lora Warner, Treasurer, lwagner@swraiders.com

Shirley Klowetter, Secretary, sklowetter@swraider.com

May 13, 2026

To Whom It May Concern,

I am pleased to write this letter in support of Youth For Christ and the tremendous impact the organization has had on students at Southern Wells Community Schools for many years.

Southern Wells has partnered with Youth For Christ and Campus Life since 1996, and throughout that time I have witnessed firsthand the positive influence the organization has had on our students and school community. Their consistent presence and commitment to young people have helped provide encouragement, mentorship, leadership development, and meaningful relationships for countless students over the years.

As Superintendent, I deeply respect and support the mission of Campus Life and Youth For Christ. Their staff and volunteers genuinely care about students and work diligently to create opportunities for connection, support, and personal growth. They have been outstanding partners to our school corporation and have always demonstrated professionalism, integrity, and a sincere investment in the well-being of our students.

One of the most valuable aspects of Campus Life is the safe and positive environment it creates for students. Many young people benefit from having trusted adults who invest time in them, encourage them, and help them navigate the challenges they face. The consistency and longevity of Youth For Christ's work in our community speak volumes about the organization's dedication and effectiveness.

I enthusiastically support Youth For Christ's grant application and strongly encourage consideration for funding. The work they do continues to make a meaningful difference in the lives of students and families in our community, and I am grateful for the partnership we share.

Please feel free to contact me if additional information would be helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Trent M. Lehman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Trent Lehman
Superintendent of Southern Wells Community Schools

What Wells County Youth Workers Are Hearing

Selected findings from BIGJAWS Youth for Christ's Spring 2026 General Youth Survey

BIGJAWS Youth for Christ invited middle and high school students from across its five-county service region—Adams, Blackford, Grant, Jay, and Wells Counties—to share the challenges they see among teens, the topics they want help exploring, and the ways they learn best. A total of 251 young people responded. The survey was not limited to Wells County; it offers a regional picture that complements the firsthand experience of BIGJAWS Campus Life staff serving Southern Wells, Norwell, and Bluffton students.

Youth-identified need or interest	Students	Percent
Stress and anxiety is a major challenge for teens	205	81.7%
Want to learn how to handle stress and anxiety	125	49.8%
Want to learn more about their purpose in life	97	38.6%
Identity and self-worth is a major challenge	92	36.7%
Making good choices is a major challenge	86	34.3%
Want to learn how to make better decisions	79	31.5%
Trusting others is a major challenge	50	19.9%
Loneliness is a major challenge	47	18.7%

Purpose Rose to the Top

When respondents chose the single topic that was most important to them personally, “What is my purpose in life?” received the largest share of responses at 21.5%. This result helps explain why GoMAD creates intentional space for students to explore identity, purpose, choices, challenges, hope, and faith.

Students Prefer Relational, Interactive Learning

Games and discussions were the most frequently selected learning format at 39.0%, followed by individual conversations or mentoring at 22.7% and small groups at 20.7%. GoMAD uses all three approaches through recreation, shared experiences, small-group conversations, and time with caring adults.

“I found myself, for the first time, in a long time, letting my guard down and genuinely smiling.” —
Student participant

Source and Interpretation note: BIGJAWS Youth for Christ General Youth Survey, 251 responses, spring 2026. Respondents could select up to three answers for the challenge and topic questions, so percentages should not be added together. Results represent the five-county service region and should not be characterized as Wells County-only data.