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[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** I am rolling.

[00:00:02] **Speaker 2** Can you first just introduce yourself and say what your title is at the school district and otherwise?

[00:00:08] **Speaker 3** My name is Tracy Verwenk. I am the CLC coordinator for the Nacuse School District, and I am Senior Director of Child Care and Community Programs for the Southwood County YMCA. And I just rolled my eyes a lot.

[00:00:20] **Speaker 1** And that's okay. Let's start that over because I also forgot to ask I think it to move right here. Oh, okay. So let's do that.

[00:00:28] **Speaker 4** Tuck it in so we can see all your earrings.

[00:00:30] **Speaker 1** All my earrings.

[00:00:39] **Speaker 4** Oh, Jesus, she just made it brighter in here.

[00:00:42] **Speaker 1** Okay, I'm still rolling, so let's start that again.

[00:00:47] **Speaker 3** Can you please introduce yourself and share what your role is? Sure, my name is Tracy Verwink. I'm the Southwood County YMCA Senior Director of Child Care and Community Programs. And then on the CLC coordinator, which is the grant coordinator for the Nacusa School District.

[00:01:01] **Speaker 2** And just to start, can you give us a little bit of background about the town of Nacusa?

[00:01:07] **Speaker 3** The population is, and I have to check my notes, sorry. The population's 2,409. The United Way of Southwood County and Adams has done an ALICE report last year, and at risk of entering poverty or living in poverty in this community of Nacusa is 57%. So it's just, it's really important that we are here to help the families. Child care, just with everything.

[00:01:39] **Speaker 2** Yeah, because what kind of people are they? What do they do for work, for example?

[00:01:43] **Speaker 3** So a lot of people that live in Nacusa work at the mill, so they should work shift work. Or they work in this community, or they live like in Port Edwards, in Wisconsin Rapids. But if you work in Wisconsin rapids, your kids go to school here. So you can't like come home, pick them up, go back to work, you know, find child care. It's just so convenient that the kids are already in school, they come from their classrooms, they go here to the club, they do activities, they all the fun things with Joe. And then parents get done with work, they come pick their kids up and then they go home, do dinner, whatever.

[00:02:19] **Speaker 1** Can we pass? Theresa, could you just fix your necklace? Just center it a little bit.

[00:02:24] **Speaker 3** It moves when I move. Sorry. Better?

[00:02:27] **Speaker 1** Yep, that looks good. And then I think if you want to cut your hair again.

[00:02:35] **Speaker 2** And you oversee the 21st Century Community Learning Center grant, which supports this Boys and Girls Club of Nacusa program. Can you talk about what that support looks like in terms of what services you offer?

[00:02:47] **Speaker 3** Yeah, so after school, actually it's before and after school. So we open at 6.30 in the morning until school starts. We do enrichment activities. We feed the kids, sometimes breakfast, depending. A lot of kids come to school hungry. After school, they come, we do activities. They go outside, they go to the gym. Help me here. We do homework help, we do career launch, we do snack and again there's a lot of these kids that come in here and have snack and then they don't eat again until they come back in the morning so which is very unfortunate but we have you know food to provide them and we help support the backpack program where the kids get to take home food for the week weekend so that they have food to eat when they're not in

[00:03:38] **Speaker 2** And how many kids or families do you think you serve?

[00:03:43] **Speaker 5** 200 and almost 260.

[00:03:45] **Speaker 3** Two hundred and six.

[00:03:46] **Speaker 2** 60 children are.

[00:03:46] **Speaker 3** Served by the Boys and Girls Club in Nacusa.

[00:03:50] **Speaker 2** And how would those communities be, how would these families be impacted if the Community Learning Center grant was taken away? So, quite honestly.

[00:03:57] **Speaker 3** I wrote some notes down for that. A lot of our families rely on us to cover the cost of child care because the Boys and Girls Club, we can't charge a fee here because of the grant, so that's free child care, which is saving families anywhere between $150 to $200 a week just for care for one child. It would make it difficult for parents to maintain a work in social life. Take that back. Cut that out. It would make it difficult for parents to maintain. A work and home life because they'd have to be home to watch their kids instead of having them come to the program. We provide safe and supportive place for the kids to gather. Some studies suggest that after school programs help reduce crime rates, which is probably a good chance of that happening here. Losing the afterschool programs would exasperate existing inequalities in access to education opportunities particularly for these kids because ninety nine percent of them are low-income it would reduce community engagement the kids come here and they just hang out if they had to go home after school by themselves they would probably be getting into trouble uh... Playing video games You know, when they're here, we know they're safe. We keep them out of trouble. They learn a lot of things. They have a great time with our site coordinator, Joe. He does a fantastic job with the kids. And it sucks that he's leaving on Friday. You don't have to put that in there. I just wanted to yell at him.

[00:05:35] **Speaker 2** Just because there was a lot of starting and stopping in that, can we try it one more time? Yeah, sorry. So.

[00:05:43] **Speaker 5** One more thing, Tracy, talk about the partnership you guys have with us with Jacob and then teaching the kids healthy lifestyles.

[00:05:51] **Speaker 4** See, this is why Joel should do this. We have a lot of stuff going on in this place. That's OK.

[00:05:57] **Speaker 5** Well, I mean, you guys do a lot for us, so that's a good thing. I think healthy lifestyles are huge and the partnership for life skills, you know.

[00:06:08] **Speaker 3** That was the thing I couldn't remember, those life skills.

[00:06:12] **Speaker 5** Okay.

[00:06:14] **Speaker 2** Let's try once more. If the 21st Century Community Learning Center grant was taken away, what would that mean for your program? It would

[00:06:25] **Speaker 3** See, I just can't now because, sorry, this is really hard for me. That's okay. We'll reset.

[00:06:33] **Speaker 2** Go ahead, one more time. If the 21st Century Community Learning Center grant was taken away, what would that mean for your program?

[00:06:42] **Speaker 3** Probably have to scale it back immensely because the funding for this program is what helps the kids and if we don't have that funding we'd have to find the funding from somewhere else or the Boys and Girls Club would have to run it themselves and I don't believe we would be able to run a morning program at that point it would be strictly afternoon all the things that they do would be cut back because we wouldn't have the funding to do that so it would just it would make a huge difference we might be able that you can take less kids and that would be an enormous shock for them

[00:07:15] **Speaker 2** And how about for the families? How would that impact them if their kids don't have a safe place to go after school?

[00:07:22] **Speaker 3** They'd probably end up having to go home, they'd probably end up getting in trouble running around on the streets doing God knows what, where if they're here, they're safe. We have so many different activities that they do here. We collaborate with the YMCA, we collaborate with the Boys and Girls Club in Rapids. We do healthy living programs here, we do so many different things and without the kids being here, they can't do that, they wouldn't have access to it. They'd be probably getting in trouble, the crime rate would go up.

[00:07:53] **Speaker 2** Is there anything else you want to add on the CCLC? Well, yeah, I made a few things.

[00:07:58] **Speaker 3** That I would just like to, the after school programs in any district are community hubs that provide safe and supportive places for the youth and families together. We do family nights which I think a lot of times are the only time that families get together is when they have to come to school with their kids. We like an art show, we do a youth and teen of the year, we recognize kids that do great things throughout the year and we invite the families here and if we didn't do that I think the only time they would get to see their families is dinner and then they do homework and then again they go to bed. So it's really important to have all the kids together to have that togetherness and feel like they belong to something important.

[00:08:42] **Speaker 2** Anything else on that? So you also oversee the AmeriCorps program. Excuse me. Let me start over. That's OK. You also oversee The AmeriCorp program, which helps this community in Nacusa get food on their table. Can you talk about that program and how it came about?

[00:09:05] **Speaker 3** Yeah, so we were contacted by the Wisconsin Partnership Program, which is a WPP grant. And they offered for us to write a grant to get an AmeriCorps staff here in our district. So we did that. We got Nikki. She came in and it's all about like the food insecurities. We started a food... Niki started a food pantry, so we went from servicing three families, we're up to 21 families now. We have a couple of churches who do some... Fundraisers and they donate money so that we can buy groceries to donate to the families uh... When americorps was cut out by the federal government cutting the funding we had to stop doing that we had nobody to do it well then we found a different way to go around it. Nikki's now employed by the YMCA and she is able to run the food pantry through the Nacusa School District because we are a partner with the district so she's still able to you know, service those families.

[00:10:08] **Speaker 2** And what did that mean for that week where Nikki was no longer your employee and that pantry didn't... I had to do it for her.

[00:10:16] **Speaker 3** So, I mean, she has everything set up. She contacts everybody. They know when they're coming. So it was just a matter of coordinating, being able to get with those families to get them what they needed. So we were able to run it. It was just, she volunteered that week, basically, just so that we could keep the families eating. Because without the food pantry...

[00:10:38] **Speaker 2** Uh...

[00:10:38] **Speaker 3** Those families be experiencing? They would have to find the means to get to Wisconsin Rapids to the food pantries there. A lot of them don't have a means to get there. We don't a bus system here. It's generally if they can get a ride or something like that because we don't have public transportation here.

[00:10:59] **Speaker 2** Let's see. So earlier this year, the AmeriCorps funding was cut by President Trump's Department of Government Efficiency. Just a few days ago, a federal court actually reinstated the programming. Does that give you any relief?

[00:11:19] **Speaker 3** Because Nikki's already employed by the YMCA, so she's gonna stay that way now. We're not gonna go backtrack. It's a little scary, actually, because this WPP grant is good till the end of August, and then we'll apply again for next school year. But if we weren't to get that, we would have to try and get another AmeriCorps staff. But people are hesitant, because Nikki lost her job in the middle of her program, and who's gonna wanna apply for a job that they're not really sure if it's gonna keep going or not? You need to have an income, you need to support your family. Even though the AmeriCorps income is small, it's still something. And you can't just not have that income.

[00:12:00] **Speaker 2** What can you say about AmeriCorps as an organization and how it benefits Wisconsin? Do you have a message for lawmakers? Yeah, AmeriCorp is

[00:12:09] **Speaker 3** I've been doing this grant for 10 years. I've had an AmeriCorps staff every year at this school and at the elementary school some years. That staff is so beneficial to helping the kids. They help them with their homework. They help with their reading. They're like an extension of the teacher's day because they're there at the end of the school day. And then they're working with them on their homework They're so beneficial. I just honestly think that they're important for every school to have. AmeriCorps is where it needs to be.

[00:12:42] **Speaker 2** And let's see, are there any local efforts that you know of in NACUSA to keep these kinds of programs running if AmeriCorps or CCLC are cut?

[00:12:54] **Speaker 3** Not that I'm aware of.

[00:12:56] **Speaker 2** Is there anything else on AmeriCorps you want to add?

[00:12:59] **Speaker 3** Just that I think it's terrible that they cut the program. And I think they need to have it back and support it across the board for anybody who has an AmeriCorps staff.

[00:13:09] **Speaker 2** And I want to jump back up to the top. Can you tell me about the community of Nacusa? Who are the people here? And what kind of gaps do you see in the community that you're trying to address through Boys and Girls Club and the food pantry?

[00:13:28] **Speaker 3** There's a lot of poverty here. There's lot of misguided children. There's lots of, sorry, I can't think of a word. What's the word when the kids go home and they don't have anybody there? Yeah, but that's not the word. Latchkey, latchkey, is that it? I'm not sure. Okay, I'm gonna use that word then. So can we start that over?

[00:13:48] **Speaker 2** Tell me about the community of Nakusa, who are the people here, and what kind of gaps do you notice that you try to address in your grant writing and your services?

[00:14:00] **Speaker 3** So there's high poverty here, so there's a lot of kids that just don't have the guidance from their parents. I don't want to say they don't know the guidance, I want to say that they need more guidance because parents have to work and a lot of parents can't be home until you know after six at night. So without this program those kids are going to have nowhere to go and they need somewhere to go and I think our programs, all after school programs, help those kids to be able to feel like they're safe and they're cared for. They have food to eat, they're learning, there's no learning loss. You know, there is like a summer slide, it's unfortunate we don't have a summer program, but it's the same after school. If they don't someone to help them, they are not going to succeed and every child deserves a chance to do something.

[00:14:49] **Speaker 2** Well as they can be. I'm just going to take a look to see if there's anything I want to re-ask. I am just sweating.

[00:15:01] **Speaker 5** Are you looking up?

[00:15:02] **Speaker 2** You Okay, well, I'm going to redo one of these. So if the Boys and Girls Club of Nicosia went away, what would that mean for the families who bring their kids here?

[00:15:27] **Speaker 3** Be devastating for them. It truly would. They need to have something after school for their children to go to. If they have to pay for child care, there are no child cares in Nacusa. They'd have to go Wisconsin Rapids. So they'd have leave their job, come pick their kids up, take them to a child care somewhere, and then go back to work. And I honestly don't know that employers would be supportive of that. There just would be nowhere for the kids to go. And we need somewhere for the kids go so that they're not getting in trouble.

[00:15:58] **Speaker 2** In the 10 years that you've been in this job, has it always been so uncertain?

[00:16:05] **Speaker 3** We've never had, I shouldn't say, the uncertainty is when you write a new grant, whether you're going to get it or not, and if you don't, what do we do next? However, we've gotten the CLC grant two five-year terms in a row now, so we've been fortunate that way, but if this funding goes away, I really honestly don't know what we're going do. Like I said, it'd probably be on a smaller scale, but then we probably won't be able to serve the 200 children that we serve now. Because the funding just won't be there to do that. Is there anything else you want to add? I think that the Boys and Girls Club have done a fantastic job running this program in the middle school. And I'm thankful every day that we have had the staff in the funding to do it. So I'm hoping that they can figure something out. Tracy Brewink, thank you very much. Thank you very, much I appreciate it.