

CREDIT-FOR-LEARNING



Friends Forever International

Durham, New Hampshire

120

Average number of students served during the school year

Main funding sources:

- ▶ Private donors, private fundraising events,
- ▶ ARP ESSER funds from the New Hampshire Department of Education

Empowering youth to build a better world

Learn a coding language, conduct research in a professional lab setting, develop leadership skills, advocate for educational equity, or take a boat-building class: credit-for-learning programs in the afterschool space offer opportunities for students to learn new skills and individualize knowledge acquisition, complementing school-day lessons for middle and high school youth. Through student-centered, active approaches, youth can learn advanced scientific research techniques, foster foundational skills like empathy, resilience, and communication, and safely explore outside of their comfort zones.

Overview

Friends Forever International (FFI) is an international nonprofit that works with students from diverse backgrounds worldwide to develop their leadership abilities while addressing local and global challenges. FFI offers credit-bearing courses in eight content areas, all programs are influenced by the FFI RECIPE (Resilience, Empathy, Communication, Impact, Playfulness, and Effort). The program is headquartered in Durham, New Hampshire, and has two satellite campuses in Annalong, Northern Ireland, and Boom Creek, Belize.

A typical day for students

Participants begin each day with mindfulness and end each day with a team debrief. What happens in between are tailored activities, workshops, and curriculum-focused experiences to cultivate leadership skills. Some recent FFI team activities include meeting with the US Attorney to discuss the Bill of Rights, delivering a storytelling program for students and residents of an assisted living facility, and an 8 day sailing trip along the New England coastline and more. All activities connect with at least one component of the FFI RECIPE and are customized to uniquely challenge the group of participants.

Outcomes

Since they were approved by the Learn Everywhere program in 2021, FFI has had 79 students enroll and granted 198 credits. One FFI student shared how the program helped her in “developing leadership skills as well as learning about things like anger and stress and how to cope...I also really valued getting to interact with community members and volunteering/making [an] impact.” Alex DesRuisseaux, FFI’s Program and Community Engagement Coordinator, said, “At FFI, we believe that education extends beyond the classroom. By participating in these courses, students gain valuable academic credits and develop crucial life skills such as resilience, empathy, communication, and efficacy. We are committed to providing innovative educational experiences that prepare students for success in an ever-changing world.”

Program characteristics

In 2023, the New Hampshire Department of Education approved 81 courses and 40.5 credits in 8 content areas: leadership, social studies, creativity and arts, science, healthy living, adventure education, English, and special education electives. Every course was approved by the New Hampshire State Board of Education after a rigorous submission and evaluation process and adheres to New Hampshire's guiding standards for earning competency based credits. Students have the option to sign up for individual modules or courses based on their educational aspirations.

Intentionality guides each aspect of program design, starting with the application process. Each student who applies to an FFI program receives an invitation for a follow-up interview as a chance to practice their interview skills. All FFI programs are free to participants, including all tuition fees and associated costs, such as transportation, accommodations, meals, and any other necessary expenses for participation in the program. FFI is working with both local and national foundations, corporations, and individuals to ensure this continues as the demand grows for the program. To guide leadership development, FFI co-develops an Individual Leadership Plan (ILP) with every participant, including goals, objectives, and progress metrics during and at the conclusion of the program. As a part of this process, FFI contacts each participant's guidance counselor or teacher, who answers questions about how the student can best thrive in the FFI course or module.

Instructors offer feedback during the program to assess student performance and compile a Final Report with the skills and knowledge the student has learned through the program to earn Learn Everywhere credits. FFI also works with schools and districts individually to earn Extended Learning Opportunity credits.

Program history

FFI began as a grassroots program run by volunteers that focused on conflict resolution, starting with a group of Catholic and Protestant young men who came to New Hampshire in 1986. The program became its own nonprofit organization in 1997. While FFI started as an international organization, in response to the decline in student mental health and well-being and the challenges posed by the traditional education system, the organization has expanded its work to be a pioneer in the field of alternative education. FFI's long-term goal is to work with other state departments of education to create a process so student participation in an FFI program in New Hampshire or at one of their global campuses will translate to credit within the student's state.

The need for credit-for-learning opportunities

Credit-for-learning expands educational opportunities for youth, where young people can explore their interests and delve deeper into subject matter outside of the classroom. These programs provide diverse learning experiences, promote student engagement, and prepare students for life after graduation.



Boosting motivation and engagement



Improving college and career readiness



Addressing opportunity gaps

Read Credit-for-Learning: [Make Learning Outside of School Count](#) to learn more, and check out the [Start-Up Guide for Implementing Credit-for-Learning Programs](#) if you're interested in starting your own.

Recommendations

for mobilizing your alumni network

- ▶ FFI offers continuing opportunities for their graduates to stay engaged. Alumni are the lead facilitators for all programs, act as mentors, present about FFI in their schools, and recruit from their communities. FFI alumni also play a critical role in providing constant 360-degree feedback to enable FFI to continue to evolve and innovate.