

Pathways to Success

Volume 1, Issue 2, Winter 2009

OPP
Our Piece of the Pie.
Helping Hartford youth become successful adults

Getting Acquainted at OPP

OPP Celebrates College Youth with 1st Combined College Reunion/Annual Meeting

More than 125 Hartford youth, staff and supporters celebrated the success of Our Piece of the Pie's® college youth during the agency's 1st Annual Combined College Reunion/Annual Meeting on Thursday, January 8th at Hartford Hospital's Education/Research Center.

The evening was highlighted by a speech by



Event emcees and college youth (l to r) Latoya Braham(UConn) and Desiree Milner-McKay(CCSU)

Hartford Mayor Eddie Perez, and music and poems performed by OPP college youth.

"OPP has become the primary youth development organization in the city," said Mayor Perez. "Tonight the young people are the stars."

Currently 330 OPP youth are attending college or

are enrolled in a vocational program. In 2008, 94 OPP youth graduated from a 2 or 4 year college or university or received a vocational certificate.

"Our youth know there are barriers in front of them," said Bob Rath, OPP President and CEO. "But with the help of OPP staff, they know they can overcome them and be successful."

Teresa Frausto, who is enrolled at the University of Connecticut after two years at Capital Community College, earned an internship at Travelers through her relationship with OPP.

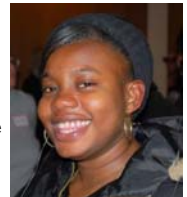
"I've had great mentors who have helped me get where I am today," Frausto said. "Thank you to OPP for all of your support."

In Her Own Words

OPP Youth Attends Historic Inauguration

My name is Claudemay Moise.

The inauguration of Barack Obama on January 20, 2009 was one of the greatest days of my life and it will go down as a monumental moment in history.



Initially, Washington officials were saying that as many as 4 to 5 million people might flood the city for Barack Obama's inauguration.

On this day I saw with my own eyes something I have waited to see all of my short life finally come true. I saw the first African American get sworn in as president of the United States of America, which was the best birthday present I could ever hope to receive.

I loved witnessing the inauguration of President Barack Obama. It was great seeing him and believing that anyone can become anything in the world if they put their

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OPP Helps DCF Youth Plan for the Future

As a Youth Development Specialist at Our Piece of the Pie, Brenda Colon knows the obstacles youth in Hartford face. Family turmoil only compounds those problems, she said.

"For some youth, being displaced from their families makes them feel out

of place in the world," said Brenda.

Brenda works exclusively with Department of Children and Family (DCF) foster care youth.

Currently, there are about 150 youth who

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YDS Brenda Colon tutors a student

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A Letter from the President

These are tough times. We hear it repeatedly on TV and radio, and read it in the newspaper.

There is no doubt that our economy is hurting, and that has a great impact on our family budgets, our 401K plans and undoubtedly organizations like Our Piece of the Pie.

There is reason for optimism, however.

Services to youth will not be interrupted during these difficult times. And, we are on track to open OPPortunity High School in the fall. This partnership with Hartford Public Schools will help those students who have dropped out, or are in danger of dropping out, get back on track and receive their high school diploma.

Our mission, "helping Hartford youth become successful adults," is more focused than ever. Our committed and talented staff works tirelessly to ensure that our city's youth reach their education and employment goals. In the end, their success will fill the region's workforce with skilled individuals. That will certainly mean good things for our nation's economy.

I am also extremely grateful that we've worked together over the last few years to build such a dedicated community of support. We are committed to keeping you updated on how your support makes such a huge difference in the lives of Hartford's young people. We do



it through newsletters like this one, and also our e-newsletter which you can subscribe to at OPP.org. The e-newsletter is a timely way to stay informed about OPP news and events. We welcome your feedback.

I want to thank you for your continued support of OPP. With your help, we are able to look to the future with optimism. We are able to continue to give Hartford youth hope that their dreams can come true.

Best Regards,

Bob Rath
President/CEO

OPPportunity High School Moves Forward

School Designed to Address Hartford's Drop-out Rate

Officials from OPP and Hartford Public Schools are working together to plan the opening of OPPortunity High School (OHS) in the fall.

The Hartford Board of Education unanimously approved the partnership school at its December 16th meeting.

OHS will provide curriculum to over-aged, under-credited students who have dropped out, or are in danger of dropping out of high school.

"Currently we are considering several sites for the new school. And we are interviewing candidates for principal and director for the school," said OPP Chief Financial Officer Ron Macaluso. "This is an exciting time."

The school will be a small, academically rigorous diploma-granting high school which combines the unique skills and expertise of Our Piece of the Pie and Hartford Public Schools.



(l to r) OPP CFO Ron Macaluso, COO Delia Bello-Davila and President/CEO Bob Rath look over plans

March of the Turtles II

OPP Solidifies Continued Partnership with National Geographic



(l to r) Supporter Chris Luginbuhl, OPP VP of Integrated Programs Donna Cathey and UConn Researcher Tobias Landberg tour National Geographic

OPP's partnership with National Geographic to study snapping turtles in the Connecticut River is stronger than ever!

OPP's Vice President of Integrated Programs Donna Cathey and Paul Gemme, Business Manager of OPP's River Wrights Youth Business, traveled to National Geographic headquarters in Washington, DC. on January 14th to outline plans for the future.

Last summer, OPP youth attached National Geographic's famous Crittercam to

several turtles helping scientists monitor the animal's movements in the River.

Youth are currently experimenting to find a safe adhesive that will lead to longer deployments of the camera. The young OPP scientists and National Geographic are planning several more turtle deployments this summer.

"This partnership helps to show our youth that their efforts have credibility," Gemme said. "Their work is being honored by the academic community."

OPP Staff Member Wins National Award

OPP Youth Development Specialist Luis Oyola is one of just three human service workers in the nation to win the Superstar Foundation Award for excellence in performance.

The Superstar Foundation is the first non-profit organization to seek out, recognize and reward the nation's highest performing social service providers.

Luis, who works in OPP's Youth Center South, serves as a mentor to more than 60 youth.

"I want to thank the OPP staff," Luis said. "This award is for the whole team, not just me."

"Luis is a shining example of what our staff's hard work means to the youth of

Hartford," said Bob Rath, OPP President/CEO

Luis, who grew up in Hartford, was moved that he was even nominated.

"I've never won anything in my whole life," Luis said. "It makes me feel that there is real hope out there for the youth of Hartford." Nominations were judged by a panel of industry experts in the areas of youth development, after school programs, adult services and family services.

Luis began working at OPP in 2000 as a street recruiter, actively finding youth who were in need of help and referring them to the agency.

"[The winners] are true superstars in the field of human service. It's clear that the work they're doing is making a positive difference in their communities because they have the evidence to prove it," said Steve Butz, executive director of the Superstar Foundation and founder of Social Solutions, a leading provider of performance management software for the social services sector.



Setting Sail for OPP

All Aboard! It's time to get your tickets for OPP's Sip 'n' Sail 2009 Fund-raiser, presented by Lindberg & Ripple, Inc.

The Lady Katherine's "Mystique" will set sail on Thursday, June 4, 2009 from Charter Oak Landing in Hartford.

The wine-tasting cruise down the Connecticut River will allow OPP supporters to taste some of the best wines from around the world

provided by the area's best sommeliers.

Individual tickets are \$75 (or \$70 if purchased before April 15). Sponsorship and ad book packages are also available.

Last year's event raised more than \$20-thousand for Our Piece of the Pie services and programs

For tickets or sponsorship information, please call Development Director Jo-Anne Leventhal at (860) 761-7375 or email jo-anne.leventhal@opp.org.



OPP Supporters Help Youth Transition to College Life

Care Packages Brighten Up College Students Semesters

The transition from high school to college is always a difficult one. For so many Hartford youth, the difficulties can be amplified because of the lack of a consistent adult in their lives.

The pressures of exams and learning how to adapt to the college life can be traumatic.

This is why OPP has launched a

campaign to send care-packages to its college youth.

"It's the little things sometimes that can brighten a young person's life, and let them know there is someone out there who cares," said Bob Rath, OPP President/CEO.



The care packages contain the creature

comforts that can help ease the tension of school work. Items such as: food (candy, cookies, junk food, healthy snacks); school supplies (pens, notebooks, printer paper); music (CDs, iTunes gift cards).

Each care package includes an encouraging letter from the donor.

The goal of the campaign is to deliver care packages to 100 OPP college youth

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OPP

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Our Mission:

The mission of Our Piece of the Pie, Inc. ® (OPP®) is to “help Hartford youth become successful adults.”

OPP works with Hartford youth, ages 14 to 24, with multiple barriers to independence and economic success, engaging them in programs to help them achieve the long term goals of: a two or four year college degree or vocational certificate; and/or to obtain gainful employment leading to their career goals.

Inauguration (continued) Foster Youth (continued) Care Package (continued)

mind to it. The thing I loved about it was to see so many people stand up united for a common purpose without the violence and disagreements we traditionally see. I believe we finally have a highly educated, eloquent speaker, and a respected public official.

Barack Obama is a wonderful speaker and did an awesome job! One thing I love about his speeches is how he is able to articulate his words to a point that it brings chills down your spine and makes the hair on your body stand up. I think the speech was perfect. He reached not only Americans, but people all over the world.

Claudemay Moise is a 20 year-old OPP participant. She is currently a student at Central Connecticut State University studying business.

have been referred to OPP's Pathways to Success program by DCF. In Pathways, youth are matched with a YDS who helps the young person establish a plan for the future.

Linda, 24, has been a member of OPP for more than five years and is a former foster youth.

“I love Brenda,” Linda said. “When I came to her, I was in a real messed up place in my life. She’s meant so much to my success.”

Linda, who is in her second year at Capital Community College studying business administration, says the financial literacy instruction she’s received at OPP has helped her a great deal. She has been able to save enough money to begin a savings account for her 9-month-old son’s college tuition.

“I would have blown that money a couple of years ago,” said Linda. “Now I’m a lot more careful.”

this semester.

Some students have already begun receiving them. OPP youth Jericha Hatten, a student at the Arts Institute of Philadelphia, received a care package from one OPP supporter in early February after she returned from winter break. She replied by email.

“Thank you so much for the care package. This is my first one ever. I was afraid to open it because I didn’t recognize the name, even though I still don’t recognize it. Lol. But, I know you’re from OPP. I appreciate everything that was sent. I’m excited this year because I graduate in December. Yes!! P.S....the chocolate was my favorite part of the gift. Thanks!”

If you would like to donate a care package to an OPP college youth please contact Jo-Anne Leventhal at 860-761-7375 or by email at joanne.leventhal@opp.org.