

Pathways to Success

Volume 3, Issue 1. 2011



Seizing the OPPportunity

Opportunity High School Holds First Graduation

In 2007, recognizing the drop-out crisis in Hartford, Our Piece of the Pie and Hartford Public Schools (HPS) sought a solution for those overage, under-credited students. Many students were failing in the traditional school setting and needed something different.

After two years of planning, OPP and HPS opened Opportunity High School (OHS) in August of 2009. OHS combines the academically demanding culture of HPS with OPP's proven youth development principles. The school



provides the three R's necessary for academic success: *Rigor, Relevance* and *Relationships*. The school is a small, academically demanding, diploma-granting high school, which combines the unique skills and expertise of OPP and HPS. School governance is a joint responsibility between the school system and OPP.

On June 15, 2011, less than four years from inception to execution, the first graduation ceremony for OHS was held and 41 students walked across the stage. The ceremony was heart-warming as the collection of proud students and their to execution, the first graduation ceremony for OHS was held and 41 students walked across the stage. The ceremony was heart-warming as the

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Summer Youth Employment Celebrated

On August 12th, OPP unveiled its first outdoor mural at the YWCA Hartford Region: The Growing Tree Early Learning Center, celebrating the creative efforts of our summer youth participants. The mural will stand as an uplifting symbol of hope and renewal in the community.

OPP's Multimedia Youth Business announced its new name of Media United in Sound and Entertainment, or

M.U.S.E. This summer M.U.S.E. premiered two new youth music video productions at Real Art Ways from its summer programming. M.U.S.E. allows youth to learn the fundamentals of the music recording and video production business while teaching teambuilding, interviewing, writing skills, and auditioning. Youth are trained in state of the art equipment and software including keyboards,

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A Star is Born

Deena Mundle featured as Star of the Quarter

This spring, OPP introduced a "Star of the Quarter." This individual could be a youth, staff person, member of the community; anyone that has had a positive impact in the last three months.

This quarter, OPP recognizes Deena Mundle as its newest Star! Deena came to OPP at the age of 16, after being referred through Casey Family Services. During her time as a youth at OPP, Deena played a major role on the Youth Advisory Board and spoke with government officials regarding youth employment funding.

Deena is an advocate for foster care youth. She has attended several national conferences through Casey Family Services and is currently working on a state-wide project to bridge the housing gap for foster youth whom have aged-out of the system. This summer, Deena was hired as a Youth Employ-



ment Specialist for OPP, responsible for job placement and retention of youth through Capital Workforce Partners' Summer Youth Employment and Learning Program.

Deena has returned to Central Connecticut State University for her senior year, majoring in Criminal Justice. She is looking to make an impact in the lives of justice involved youth and has gone above and beyond to ensure that she will serve as an amazing role model and mentor upon graduation. "I have been given so much throughout my time at OPP and now I just want to give back and help others anyway I can," said Deena.

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Youth producing music for the song to be featuring in their music video

OPP Supporters Sip, Sail and ‘Do Good’

Spring Fundraiser Raises More Than \$80,000

On the evening of June 9th, the Lady Katharine’s *Mystique* set sail down the Connecticut River. While many remember this evening for the gloomy clouds and torrential downpour, those who attended got a chance to enjoy a fun-filled evening as the weather calmed and the cruise commenced.

No one could rain on OPP’s parade! Sip ‘n’ Sail 2011 helped OPP raise more than \$80,000 to support programs and



Wine sampling with local wine representatives

services aimed to *help urban youth become successful adults*. While on board, guests tasted wines from across the globe supplied by ten distributors. Distributors were generously sponsored by Super Cellar Warehouse Liquors of Avon. In addition, over 20 silent auction items were available — including a youth-built canoe, symphony tickets, spa packages and much more!

Former OPP youth and designer of OPP’s new website, Linda Valentin, spoke about her journey through OPP and its contribution to shaping her into the woman she is today: a college graduate with a degree in graphic design. Contact Linda at Valentin’s Invigorating Designs for all your graphic design needs at lindaiv1228@yahoo.com!

“This was a great way for OPP supporters to get together and celebrate what



their contributions have meant to helping urban youth achieve their goals,” said Bob Rath, President/CEO of OPP.

This year’s sponsors included: Bank of America, ING, Lindberg & Ripple, Cigna, Prudential, Travelers, Citizens Bank, Halloran & Sage, Hartford Hospital, Sovereign Bank, and the Technology Group/Whittlesey & Hadley.

There are already plans in place for Sip ‘n’ Sail 2012 next spring! For more information on sponsoring, attending or volunteering, please contact Cassandra Sullivan at (860) 761-7371 or Cassandra.Sullivan@OPP.org. Hope to see you “on board!”

Stanley Frank’s Generosity

Just a month ago, Stan Frank, President of Gem Jewelry, knew virtually nothing about Our Piece of the Pie; but, after spending a morning with CEO Bob Rath, Stan opened his heart as well as his wallet, writing a \$10,000 check to the agency!

Stan has experienced his share of struggle throughout his life. Having grown up attending North-West Elementary in Hartford and



Bob Rath (OPP CEO), Stan Frank (Gem Jewelry President)

then proceeding on to Weaver High School to finish his formal education in 1955, Stan feels a connection and desire to give back to those growing up facing similar circumstances.

Appearing in court several times as a young boy, Stan seemed to be going nowhere fast. Then, in 1965, Stan decided enough was enough. He cleaned up his act, followed his passion in sales, found a life part-

ner, Jean Frank, and opened Gem Jewelry. After years of building an extremely successful business, which now consists of four stores throughout central Connecticut, Stan and Jean remained consistently involved in supporting community programs. For over 15 years, the Frank’s hosted a holiday party for hundreds of less fortunate Hartford children at the Charter Oak Cultural Center. They gave money to various charities, including a \$20,000 donation to Stan’s Alma mater, Weaver High School, in 2006.

Now, two years after Jean’s death, Stan continues to carry on their legacy of generosity in the community of Hartford. “I want to give back. I’ve been so fortunate in my life that it’s only right to spread those lessons and wealth with those who I feel I can impact the most,” Stan proclaimed.

The Grossman Family Foundation believes in Pathways

In June 2011, OPP was awarded a significant grant by the Grossman Family Foundation. The grant will fund the establishment of an Evaluation Advisory Committee, the hiring of a Researcher, and allow OPP to retain a third party evaluator. This third party evaluator will be tasked to perform an implementation evaluation of OPP’s Pathways to Success model, both in the Hartford community, and at Opportunity

High School. In addition the evaluator will assess what is needed to conduct the impact evaluation. These experts will help to integrate rigorous program evaluation into the culture of the agency, so that OPP can continue to serve urban youth in the most effective ways possible. An external evaluation of the Pathways model will let us show funders far and wide why they should support OPP!

A Recipe for Success

A Special “Thank You” goes out to Take a Brake Bakery for co-hosting the first ever “Pie Day” on August 11th. OPP and the Pie Brake Truck parked in State House Square of Downtown Hartford where all Pie proceeds from the day went to helping OPP further its mission of helping urban youth become successful adults.

A Letter from the President

Take Action, Create OPPortunity.

With the new fiscal year, OPP is emboldened by this mantra. There are many areas where you, our staff, our youth and the community can Take Action and Create OPPortunity.

Between July 1, 2010 and June 30, 2011, OPP served 1,119 youth. 1,119 youth that are now equipped with resources, tools and a roadmap of where they are to where they want to be in the future. Those youth that are Taking Action and Creating OPPortunity have yielded some impressive results!

Just this past June, 41 students at Opportunity High School, with support from family and school faculty and staff, created opportunity for themselves by graduating high school. By earning a high school diploma, each of

these students are now poised to become productive members of our community.

Beyond Opportunity High School, youth throughout OPP have been taking action and creating opportunity.

There are 289 youth currently enrolled in a postsecondary program -- 228 of whom are at a two- or four-year college or university! Another 87 completed their postsecondary program -- 28 graduated from a two- or four-year college or university!

Well on their way to achieving economic independence, 625 young people completed Career Competency Development Training. In this course, youth create portfolios, learn work and life skills, practice interviewing and prepare for internships or jobs.



We are also fortunate to have a group of supportive friends, foundations, corporations and government entities that are taking action and helping OPP serve more and more urban youth. We're confident that this group will continue to take action and introduce additional resources to OPP.

Last year was a great one and this year is shaping up to be even greater. There is much to be excited about in the coming months; stay tuned!

Best regards,

Bob Rath
President/CEO

Over 400 Youth Learn & Earn through OPP this Summer



Outdoor mural located at YWCA Hartford Region: The Growing Tree Learning Center

While for many people, summer signifies a period of relaxation and a time to get away, it is typically one of our busiest times of the year at OPP. We look forward to summer just as much as the youth going on school vacation. With many youth wanting to participate in programs through OPP, including its Youth Businesses and area internships, it's no wonder that OPP's halls were flooded with youth this summer.

The Summer Youth Employment program is funded by Capital Workforce Partners, the region's workforce investment board – *Developing Tomorrow's Workforce Today*. OPP was selected as a main center for services, serving more than 400 youth through its Youth Businesses and internship-placement programs.

115 youth, between 14-18 years old, took part in OPP's experiential learning programs known as Youth Businesses. While they were working for six weeks, the participants produced different products in each program: Junior Art Makers (JAM) worked on two murals, one at the YWCA Hartford Region: The Growing Tree Learning Center and the other in the Youth Development Specialist Office of OPP, detailing OPP's Pathways to Success; JAM Fashion worked on a myriad of design and sew-

ing projects, including clothing and accessories; M.U.S.E. launched its first two music videos; River Wrights Boat Builders did an Oil Drum Art project; Summer Scan surveyed the city on community needs and conducted research which resulted in giving away 50 bicycle helmets to promote safety and a public presentation on youth violence at the end of the program.

Older youth were involved in OPP-placed internships. There were 330 youth working for area businesses and organizations including TJ Maxx, Shop Rite, Boys & Girls Club, Aaron's, and more.

While the summer session has come to a close, it is certain that the experiences these youth learned will not only add to their resumes but also equip them for their futures in the workforce.

THANK YOU 2010-2011 LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

- Ms. Claire Burns
- Mr. & Mrs. Michael F. Connelly
- Denise deFiebre
- Mr. & Mrs. Matthew Frazee

- Larry & Kate Greenberg
- Colin & Patricia Karsten
- Patti A. Kate
- John & Mary Little
- Bob & Marilyn Rath
- Mr. & Mrs. David Reis
- John & Lisa Sundean

Interested in learning more, touring the centers or supporting OPP?

Visit www.OPP.org
or contact Lauren Blake at (860) 761-7370; Lauren.Blake@opp.org
today!

OPP

Our Piece of the Pie®

Helping urban youth become successful adults

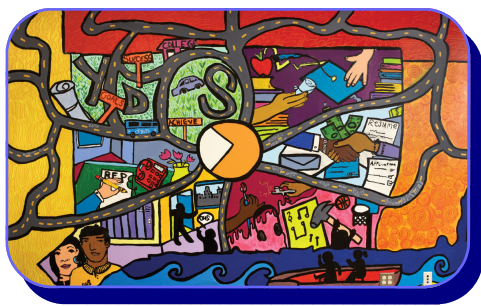
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Summer Youth Celebrated *(Cont'd from pg 1)*

drum machines, digital cameras, music production equipment. They are given the opportunity to assume a number of roles in the process of creating original audio and video content, such as producers, singers and rappers, sound engineers, and videographers.

M.U.S.E. participant Trevin Joseph says "I've been doing Youth Businesses here for about two years and you can do pretty much anything related to M.U.S.E. that you can think of. Being in M.U.S.E. is like being at home... It's just a great environment."

Our Piece of the Pie's Mission:

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

OPP works with urban 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.

Opportunity High School Graduation (Cont'd from pg 1)

collection of proud students and their even prouder parents.

"These 41 formerly over-age, under-credited students earned their diploma. It wasn't always easy, but they did it," says Gerard Dawes, Director of Youth Development Services at OHS.

"Students are not only equipped with a high school diploma, they have toured colleges, explored careers, received crucial workforce training and so much more," says OPP Chief Operating Officer, Hector Rivera. Of the 41 graduates, 35 are enrolled

in post-secondary programs, including vocational trainings and colleges/universities. One advantage for OHS graduates is that they can continue to participate in OPP's Pathways into college receiving academic support (such as college retention services and tutoring) and employment support (such as updating resumes and internships).

A new group of students entered OHS at the beginning of the 2011-12 school year. "We're already looking forward to their graduation ceremonies," Mr. Dawes said with a smile .