

**THE NEED:** MANY URBAN AREAS IN THE UNITED STATES ARE SUFFERING FROM THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY, ILLITERACY AND UNEMPLOYMENT. BY ANY MEASURE, OUR URBAN YOUTH ARE AT RISK. MANY BECOME DISCONNECTED AND DISENGAGED IN SCHOOL, CHARACTERIZED AS OVER-AGE, UNDER-CREDITED (OU) YOUTH, AND WHEN THE TRADITIONAL SYSTEM STOPS WORKING FOR THEM, THEY DROP OUT.

### THE ECONOMIC IMPACT

When the system fails these OU youth, leading them to drop out of high school, they are not the only ones to feel a long-lasting impact. A recent commissioned study by Andrew Sum estimates that, on average, every high school dropout in Connecticut costs the state more than \$500,000 over his/her working lifetime. With only 79% of Connecticut's students graduating from high school in four years, the detrimental economic impact of ignoring OU students is enormous. This impact is not only felt in the state of Connecticut, but nationally, as well. Sum's report also estimates that each high school dropout across the nation costs the U.S. an average of \$300,000 over his/her working lifetime.

### THE OUTCOMES

OPP focuses on two long-term outcomes for our youth: education (graduation from a two- or four-year college or university or a vocational certification) and employment. We measure these, along with intermediate outcomes to determine a youth's success. During our last three fiscal years (July 2007 through June 2010), we have served thousands of OU youth in our Pathways program, achieving the following results:

- Nearly 50% of high school drop-outs reenroll in high school after they come to OPP.
- In the city of Hartford, 50% of students graduate high school on-time; at OPP, 81% of eligible youth are graduating high school.
- On average, 77% of eligible OPP youth enroll in an Associate's, Bachelor's or vocational program.
- Over 61% of OPP youth are obtaining an Associate's, Bachelor's or vocational certification within five years.
- Over 78% of eligible OPP youth retain employment for 12 months or more.

### THE FUTURE

OPP is currently planning to expand its Pathways program into schools and communities, both in Connecticut and nationally. Our model can work for over-age, under-credited youth anywhere, and with growing recognition of our program, we will have the opportunity to prove that across the nation.

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**Our Piece of the Pie.**  
*Helping urban youth become successful adults*



## THE SOLUTION

At Our Piece of the Pie, Inc.® (OPP®), we believe that with access and opportunity, all youth can succeed. With the mission to “help urban youth become successful adults,” OPP has successfully structured its programs and services to lead at-risk or disadvantaged youth, ages 14–24, toward the goals of achieving a college degree or vocational credentials and/or obtaining rewarding post-education employment. Through innovative methods, OPP seeks to re-engage over-age, under-credited youth and help them find a realistic “pathway to success.”

## THE PROGRAM

*Pathways to Success* is OPP’s signature program, and the cornerstone of our services. This youth development strategy offers a relationship-centered approach to help young people access and attain a mix of the educational, employment, and personal skills that contribute to their success. There are two core elements of this strategy. First, each youth should have an individualized plan based on an understanding of their dreams and aspirations, allowing them to map out a realistic path from where they are to where they want to be. Second, every young person needs a caring, consistent adult in their lives who can advise them along their journey. At OPP, this is a Youth Development Specialist (YDS). On a practical level, the YDS is the guide to the services we offer young people. A YDS helps each OPP youth to create an individualized plan based on their own goals, incorporating the education and employment services that we have to offer. However, on a less tangible level, the YDS is the one who builds a trusting relationship with the youth, convincing them to stay on track and pursue their dreams.

\*\**Clearing The Path: Creating Innovation Space for Serving Over-Age, Under-Credited Students in Competency-Based Pathways,*” by Chris Sturgis, Bob Rath, Ephraim Weisstein and Susan Patrick, January 2011

## THE SERVICES

Based on the situation and need, OPP offers the following programs and services that assist with the youth’s journey along his or her pathway:

- **Academic Support and College Planning & Retention Services**—OPP offers extended day academic tutoring, supplemental education services, and comprehensive college and career guidance services to youth and their families. In addition, the agency offers college preparation activities like practice and preparation for the SATs, financial aid workshops, campus tours, assistance with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) applications, and continuing support while students are enrolled in college.
- **Career Competency Development Training**—OPP offers several programs to prepare youth for employment. These programs engage youth as young as 14 years with our hands-on “work and learn” Youth Businesses, which offer youth, ages 14 to 18, the opportunity to produce goods and services in the areas of woodworking, multimedia, art & fashion and computer training. The Youth Businesses also engage youth in occupational skill building and life and employment skills training. Other career competency development services include job-readiness training, job shadowing, internships, and job placement with area employers, as well as referrals and job coaching as needed after employment is achieved.

## THE SCHOOL

In our most recent venture, OPP has opened a partnership high school in Connecticut with Hartford Public Schools. Opportunity High School (OHS) is designed to serve 200 students who, upon entry, do not have the appropriate number of credits for their age and intended grade (i.e. in 9th grade for the second time or 17-years-old, but only in 10th grade)—over-age, under-credited youth. The school recognizes that the traditional high school model may not work for many youth, and reaches out to offer these young people another option that includes recuperative education strategies. The model, backed by national foundations such as Carnegie Corporation

of New York and Nellie Mae Education Foundation, utilizes the following competencies:\*

- **Academic competencies** that recognize progress in recuperation, closing gaps in basic literacy and math, as well as the full range of skills to prepare students for college and careers.
- **Efficacy competencies** that include 21st Century skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity; learning how to navigate new environments; social-emotional literacy; and, the competencies to make the transition to college and careers.

Best of all, the OHS model is really helping these OU youth. Take Leslie, a Hartford youth—Leslie is 18-years-old. Based on her success today, you would never know that she was once a high school dropout. Just a couple of years ago, Leslie became disconnected from school and stopped attending. She spent a year on the streets of Hartford with fellow dropouts, watching the gap widen between her friends who had stayed in school and those who had dropped out. Leslie didn’t like the feeling that her friends in school were passing her by, but she couldn’t see a way to make the traditional high school setting work. This was when she turned to OPP for help. After OPP helped her to carefully consider her future, Leslie decided to re-enroll in school—this time at Opportunity High School (OHS). At OHS, she has the daily support of a YDS to help her through the rigorous academic curriculum of the Hartford Public School system. Now, Leslie is in her final year at OHS, and has a plan for her future. She is excited about her studies and plans to go to college and become an Intensive Care Unit nurse. To Leslie, OHS isn’t just another high school; it’s the place where people believe in her and allow her to believe in herself.

OHS re-engages disconnected youth by infusing the youth development principles of OPP’s Pathways program into the school’s academically rigorous culture. The school recognizes that providing individualized attention, intensive support services and college/career preparation will help these students to reduce the barriers that they face every day, and put them on the path to academic and employment success.