

Food Training Program for Youth Awarded \$250,000; Billings Forge, Our Piece of the Pie, Run Program at Library

Hartford is home to an estimated 6,000 youth, ages 16 to 24, not in school or in jobs who are often referred to as "Opportunity Youth." One of the most significant needs these young people have is obtaining soft job skills, training, credentials, and real world work experience that employers demand.

Some of these young people will receive the training and opportunities they need thanks to a two-year, \$250,000 grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving to Billings Forge Community Works, in collaboration with Our Piece of the Pie that supports an Opportunity Youth Job Training Program. The partnership taps into Billings Forge's experience in managing social enterprises and providing culinary job training at their newly refurbished cafe at Hartford Public Library, with Our Piece of the Pie's expertise in recruitment, case management, job readiness soft skills training, and services targeting Opportunity Youth.

"We are so excited to expand our training to include younger Hartford residents," says Cary Wheaton, executive director of Billings Forge Community Works. "We have seen our adult trainees achieve meaningful employment, support their families, and become fully contributing members of their communities."

Wheaton says the program provides young people with on-the-job experience to boost confidence and provide life skills to increase their chances for success in life.

The program uses The Kitchen at Hartford Public Library to provide unemployed youth between the ages of 18-24 with work as paid interns gaining real life customer service skills and work experience. Participants in the 12-week program will earn the nationally-recognized ServSafe food and beverage safety training and certificate program administered by the National Restaurant Association. ServSafe credentials are required by most restaurants as a basic credential for managers.

Students will be placed in jobs or further training after completing the program.

The project capitalizes on the newly opened University of Connecticut downtown campus, which allowed Billings Forge to extend the hours of The Kitchen cafe. UCONN students will have another affordable option to purchase a sandwich or coffee, while providing Billings Forge with revenue to sustain this program beyond the Foundation's initial investment.

Through a second career-path program, 60 Department of Children and Families (DCF)-involved youth who are still in high school will also gain valuable job readiness and life skills in a 10-week entrepreneurship program. In this re-design of OPP's classroom-based, award-winning youth businesses program, target youth ages 17-19 will see entrepreneurship in practice. Students can try

woodworking, culinary, and/or music/video production, four days a week during one of the three, 10-week cycles per year, which started in September. Hands-on workshops and lessons help students develop soft skills for the workforce, learn more about each larger labor market, and compare the tracks' similarities and differences, and even problem-solve through collaborative projects.

"With this support, Our Piece of the Pie, is fortunate to partner with Billings Forge to provide another track for Hartford youth to find their economic independence," says Hector Rivera, Chief Operating Officer of OPP. "The addition of a culinary track to our postsecondary-to-career pipeline programs is a great one, as it's always been a field of interest and sustainability for Opportunity Youth."

The two-year program will phase in participants for each career pathway and will adapt and strengthen the program with lessons learned along the way. During this first phase, the Implementing partners will seek longer-term national and other funding to sustain the program. Projected outcomes of the project include:

- Serving 46 youth in year one: 16 youth out-of-school and work, and 30 DCF-involved youth in school.
- Recruiting and serving 62 youth in year two: 32 opportunity youth and 30 DCF-involved youth.

From among the 108 participants, at least:

- 80 percent will complete nationally recognized Career Competency Development training.
- 80 percent of customer service participants will complete on-the-job-training and internships.
- 90 percent of customer service participants will be placed in employment or post-secondary training, with 70 percent retained at 90 days.
- For the entrepreneurial training, 100 percent of the youth will be enrolled in high school and 80 percent will demonstrate personal growth in communication, self-management, teamwork, or problem solving;
- 80 percent will demonstrate knowledge of basic business plan principles; 80 percent will complete two products through the class; and 80 percent will report developing relationships with adults beyond their social workers.

Foundation funding supports a portion of the Billings Forge opportunity youth cafe manager; a youth development specialist at OPP; youth stipends, transportation, and incentives; education materials; uniforms and tools; food and facility costs; plus credentialing and other expenses.

"Providing all Greater Hartford residents with access to career pathways and career advancement that lead to economic security is a strategic priority for

the Hartford Foundation," said Hartford Foundation director of grants and partnership investments Judy McBride. "There are so many young adults neither in school or working who want and need training and a job. This program responds to that need. Billings Forge Community Works and Our Piece of the Pie are both organizations with strong track records. This project will allow the two organizations to combine their experience working in economic development and job training, to benefit underserved at-risk youth."

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for Hartford and 28 surrounding communities. In 2015, the Foundation celebrated ninety years of grantmaking in the Greater Hartford region, made possible by the gifts of generous individuals, families and organizations. It has awarded grants of more than \$680 million since its founding in 1925. For more information about the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, visit www.hfpg.org or call 860-548-1888.