

**OPP**<sup>®</sup> **Our Piece of the Pie**<sup>®</sup>  
*Helping urban youth become economically independent adults*



# OUR PIECE OF THE PIE

## MISSION STATEMENT

*Our Piece of the Pie: Helping urban youth become economically independent adults.*

OPP is a youth development agency offering 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.



# OUR PIECE OF THE PIE

## THEORY OF CHANGE

For this population...

...OPP provides the following programming...

...To help participants achieve the outcomes

### Youth Ages 14-24

- *With emphasis on 16-19*
- Over-aged and under-credited students

### Irrespective of Barriers

- In/out-of-school
- Low literacy / math levels
- Justice involvement
- Child welfare involvement
- Teen parenting
- Substance abuse
- Financial barriers
- Disabilities / health issues

### Youth Development Programming

- Needs assessment and identification of academic and/or workforce goals (in collaboration with parent/guardian) using an Individual Success Plan
- Development of social and emotional competencies
- Relationship-centered approach involving engagement, follow-up, tracking and retention

### Academic Programming

- Individual academic plans based on initial educational assessment
- Traditional School Work
- Blended Learning Model
- Supplemental academic support (i.e. tutoring remediation, and intervention)
- Academic, Financial, and Social postsecondary preparation
- Post-secondary retention

### Workforce Development Programming

- Individual career research and planning
- Introduction to career competencies and career exploration through Project-based Learning (Youth Business)
- Intro to entrepreneurial/business skills
- Career Competency Development Training
- Internship Placements
- Job placement assistance
- Job retention (1-year)

### Short-Term Outcomes

- Increased attendance and performance
- Annual Credit accumulation
- Development of career competencies
- Development of social-emotional competencies
- Internship completion
- College enrollment, attendance and performance

### Intermediate Outcomes

- Annual grade promotion
- Demonstrated attainment of Career Competencies
- Demonstrated social-emotional development
- Award of high school diploma
- Employed for 90 days

### Long-Term Outcomes

- Award of postsecondary credential (Vocational certification, associate's or Bachelor degree)
- Employed for 1 year



# OUR PIECE OF THE PIE HISTORY



**1975-2000:**

## **Incorporation & Leadership**

- 1975: Southend Community Services (SCS) founded.
- SCS provides services to meet community needs, such as a preschool childcare center, programs for elementary and high school students, summer youth employment, adult job placement, and companion to elderly programs.
- 1994: Bob Rath becomes Executive Director.



**2000-2005:**

## **Rebranding**

- 2000: \$28-million awarded to Hartford from the US Department of Labor to become a Youth Opportunity! (YO!) site; SCS becomes directing org in 2002.
- 2004: Edna McConnell Clark Foundation invests in SCS through Youth Development Fund.
- 2005: SCS agency changes its name, mission and focus to support only under-served population of urban youth, ages 14-24 -- becoming Our Piece of the Pie (OPP).



**2006-current:**

## **Effective Data Use**

- 2006: Implement Efforts to Outcomes™ case management software and a Research and Org Performance department.
- 2009: National Youth Employment Coalition awards OPP with the PEPNet Award in promising practices. UConn completes a formative evaluation, indicating that the more at-risk the youth, the more they benefit.
- 2010-2014: Formative evaluation completed with Metis Associates. Evaluation Advisory Committee developed.



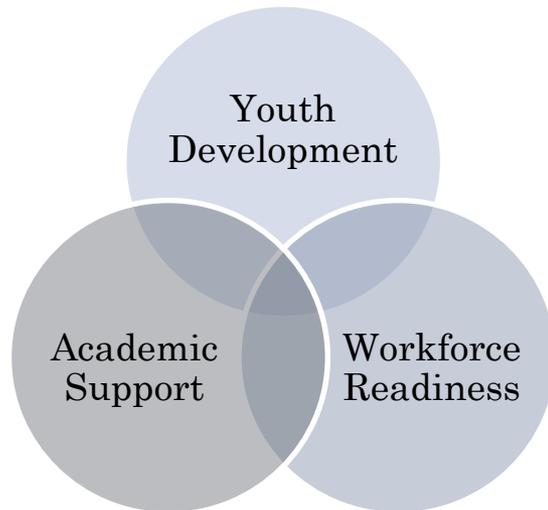
**2009-current:**

## **Growth**

- OPP in High Schools: School model for over-age, under-credited youth developed.
- 2009-2015: Opportunity High
- 2012: Learning Academy at Bloomfield
- 2014: Path Academy Windham
- 2015 Opportunity Academy
- OPP in Communities: OPP refines relationship-centered model in Hartford
- 2012: New Youth Center in Eastern CT
- 2012: Pathways to Careers Initiative, connecting post-secondary programs to labor market
- 2015 Southwestern CT

# OUR PIECE OF THE PIE ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL

- Relationship-Centered Approach Combining Best Practices from Three Fields:



- Commitment to Continuous Improvement Based in Data

- Integrated into Two Settings:

## OPP in the Community

- Hartford
- Eastern CT (Norwich)
- Southwestern CT (Bridgeport/Norwalk)
- Pathways to Careers Initiative

## OPP in High Schools

- Opportunity Academy (Hartford)
- Learning Academy at Bloomfield
- Path Academy Windham

- Success: ~3,000 youth since 2007
  - 82% graduate high school
  - 77% enroll and 64% complete postsecondary degree



# OPP IN THE COMMUNITY

- Individualized & effective combination:

## Youth Development and Support Services

- Ongoing Relationship with Caring Adult (Youth Development Specialist or YDS)
- Individualized Success Plan / Goal Setting
- Emergency Support Services
- Personal Development
- Barrier Reduction
- Connection to Internal of External Support Services

## Academic Services

- After-School Tutoring/Homework Help
- Standardized Test Prep
- H.S. Course Selection
- College Research & Tours
- College Application and Essay Assistance
- Financial Planning Workshops
- Continued YDS Support Post-College Enrollment

## Workforce Development Services and Vocational Training

- Pre-employment "Work and Learn" Opportunities (multi-media music and video production, fine arts, carpentry)
- Career Competency Development
- Career Counseling
- Internship & Job Placement/Coaching
- Resume Writing
- Vocational Training (Certification in Office Procedures and Technology, and Customer and Retail Services)

- Youth Centers in Hartford (Greater Hartford youth) and Norwich (Eastern CT Region youth) for over 700 youth will add 60 youth SW CT in 2016
- Extended age range through 24, when most organizations stop at 18
- Commitment: Once per week contact; Avg. of 4.5 years involvement for each youth

- Ultimate Goals:

Postsecondary  
Degree/Credential

Meaningful  
Employment



# OPP IN THE COMMUNITY

## YOUTH PROFILE: BLANCA



“I went from being homeless and feeling completely lost to having my own apartment, a promising career and a chance to build a future for my son,” says Blanca Stewart, “and I’m only 18. None of it would’ve been possible without OPP.”

Blanca was first taken away from her mother and placed in foster care when she was just six years old. “I was moved from one foster home to another and I never really felt like I belonged anywhere,” she recalls. “By the time I was a teen, I was ready to drop out of high school, and I had no idea where I was going in my life.

That all changed after she came to OPP when she was 14. OPP helped her get back on track, helping her graduate from high school in 2013. “I can’t tell you how proud that made me feel,” she says.

Blanca also took part in a number of other programs that OPP offers, including internships, career counseling and college readiness. She earned a Certified Nursing Assistant certificate and is currently taking classes at Capitol Community College in downtown Hartford. “My goal is to become a phlebotomist,” she explains. “I really like helping people, and if I can make someone’s life a little brighter at a time when they’re feeling down, that’d make me really happy.”

Blanca has no doubts that she’ll be successful. “In addition to all the tools and training they gave me, OPP has supported me every step of the way. My goal is to make a great life for myself and my son. And if the work that I do makes someone else’s life a little brighter, I’ll feel like I’m changing the world in my own way.”

# OPP IN THE COMMUNITY PATHWAYS TO CAREERS INITIATIVE

- Need: Labor Market Demand
- Currently Three Industries

Advanced  
Manufacturing

Allied Health

Insurance &  
Finance

- Support services

## Personal

- Workforce Development Specialists (WDS)
- Individual Success Plan

## Barrier Reduction

- Provide Transportation
- Supply Textbooks & School Supplies
- Uniforms/Professional Clothing

## Academic

- Stackable Credentials
- Tutoring
- Financial Aid Form Assistance

## Workforce Readiness

- Career Competency Development Training
- Internship & Job Placement



# PATHWAYS TO CAREERS INITIATIVE

## YOUTH PROFILE: NASTASSIA



Nastassia, originally from Jamaica, attended school in Hartford until she moved to Florida where she studied business at a local community college, growing frustrated that general courses had nothing to do with her future.

Nastassia dropped out and returned to Hartford in 2013, where she wasn't going to school or working. That's when she saw the PCI Advanced Manufacturing program at an info session, and she was hooked. "It was unlike anything I did in college--it's what we'd be doing in the field," she said. "The number one thing that helped me succeed was my support system. I knew that if I failed, I wouldn't fail alone--my friends, family, and OPP staff were there."

Nastassia soon moved up to level two courses, and was hired as an intern at Mallory Industries in February 2014, and then full-time once she graduated that May. She now works within Quality Assurance. "I love everything about it. One of the best parts is that even though I'm out of school, they take time to make sure I understand the different techniques."

Nastassia plans to further study engineering, staying in manufacturing. "I feel like I can make my mark in the field as a dominant black woman, setting a path for other women. Right now it is so male-driven, and I hope to change that."

"I thank OPP for giving me the opportunity and resources I needed. I'm at a point where I'm truly happy and life is just a little bit easier."

# OPP IN HIGH SCHOOLS

- Re-engaging over-age, under-credited students; supporting them to find success in college, career, and community.
- Innovative Education Strategies

## Blended Learning

- Computer-Based & Teacher Led Instruction
- Personal Computer Stations
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

## Project-Based Learning

- Active Learning
- Practice & Combine Skills in Projects

## Mastery-Based Progression

- Never move back, only forward
- Stick with area until comprehension
- Versus Time-in-Seat

- Individualized Anchored Student Supports

Youth Development

Postsecondary Prep

Workforce Readiness

- Current Schools working with 300+ students:

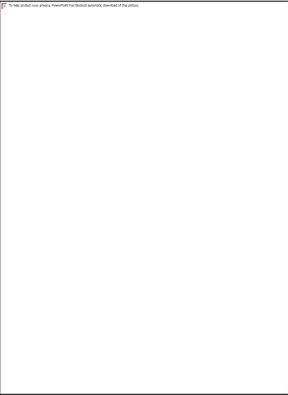
Opportunity High School  
(Hartford, 2009) and  
Opportunity Academy  
(2015)

Learning Academy at  
Bloomfield (2012)

Path Academy Windham  
(2014)

# OPP IN HIGH SCHOOLS

## YOUTH PROFILE: JOVANI



When asked what's different about Opportunity High School (OHS) in Hartford, Jovani replies "it's a life-changing school." Today Jovani is 18 and he will graduate with a high school diploma in June. Before he enrolled at OHS two years ago, when people told him that he wasn't doing anything with his life, he agreed "maybe not, but so what?"

Two years ago, Jovani was getting all F's at a local high school, where he had 115 absences in a single year. When asked about his grades today, Jovani pulls out his phone to show two OHS awards that he received in October -- High Academic Honors and Excellence in Attendance. Jovani had two weekly meetings scheduled with his Youth Development Specialist (YDS), but they both laugh and agree that he actually "stopped by" to meet with her every day since he enrolled.

Recently, Jovani finished his financial aid application -- he wants to go to college to become a paramedic. He is working with OPP's Postsecondary Specialist to write his college essay: "My Worst Failure," about his previous decision to drop out of school and how his mindset changed.

Jovani has demonstrated his understanding of what it takes to succeed in two internships that OPP's Workforce Coordinator placed him in after he completed our job-readiness course. Jovani is "in demand" with employers; both of his workplaces wanted to hire him, but Jovani continues to explore new possibilities and ideas. He has found his own, unsubsidized employment, using the car that he saved internship dollars to purchase and the driver's license that his YDS helped him to study for and achieve.

# MORE INFORMATION

[www.OPP.org](http://www.OPP.org)

