

# Stronger *independence* neighborhoods and families

## Family and Early Childhood Education at The Opportunity Alliance

As the Community Action Agency for Cumberland County, The Opportunity Alliance has provided Head Start and Early Head Start programming from the earliest days of these programs' inception in 1965. Head Start/Early Head Start is a federal program that promotes the school readiness of children ages birth to 5 from low-income families. Head Start/Early Head Start programs provide a learning environment that supports children's growth in language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, physical development and health, social and emotional development, and approaches to learning. In addition to Head Start and Early Head Start our Family and Early Childhood Education programs include: child care, offered for full days



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opportunityalliance.org

*Children from our Early Head Start program  
(photo by Kathy Kigin)*

throughout the year; Maine Families, a home visiting program where we work in partnership with expectant parents and parents of babies and toddlers to promote healthy growth

*continued on page two*



*Ginny Gentile (left), Chief Financial Officer for The Opportunity Alliance, presents a check to Becky Morse of Bella's Granola, a recent start-up business based in South Portland. Morse will use the funds to expand her business into more markets and create a marketing campaign for more visibility.*

## Next Step Loan Funds Bella's Granola Micro Loans Support Business Startups or Expansion

The Next Step Loan fund, established through a legacy gift from the former Portland YWCA and administered by The Opportunity Alliance, supports small businesses in Cumberland County with micro-loans. These loans are specifically targeted at small enterprises attempting to overcome obstacles to growth and take that next critical step toward independence. Through these loans, The Opportunity Alliance seeks to promote self-reliance, innovation and business development. The amount of the loans range from \$500 to \$5,000. For more information on the Next Step Loan Fund, visit our website: [www.opportunityalliance.org/next-step-loan/](http://www.opportunityalliance.org/next-step-loan/)

the  
**Opportunity**  
Alliance  
community  
news & notes



# the Opportunity Alliance

## The Opportunity Alliance Community News and Notes

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## Early Childhood Education

and development; and nutrition services such as Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and our Summer Food Service Program, where we prepare nutritious meals in our Kids Katering kitchen and collaborate with numerous community partners and volunteers to ensure that meals are available for children during the summer months when school is out. Last year, Kids Katering prepared and delivered 57,558 meals and snacks to summer meals sites across Cumberland County.

Our Family and Early Childhood Education programs strives to provide all children with a safe, nurturing, and engaging learning environment. We help our young learners to gain the awareness, skills, and confidence necessary to excel in their present environment and, as they grow older, in school and in life. In addition to education and cognitive development services, our Head Start/ Early Head Start programs also provide comprehensive services to enrolled children as well as their families. These include health, nutrition, social, and other services determined to be necessary by family needs assessments. Last year our Head Start program served 311 children ages 3-5, and our Early Head Start program served 108 children ages 0-3 for a total of 419 families from throughout Cumberland County.

*We know that quality early learning programs provide essential experiences for infants, toddlers, and pre-schoolers that can actually shape a child's brain architecture.*

Our Early Childhood Education staff has also been very busy with some new initiatives. This past year, in partnership with United Way of Mid Coast Maine, several other agencies, and Mid Coast Health Services, we embarked on the *Best Start Initiative*, an early childhood initiative to improve the lives of children and families in the Mid Coast region through a focus on home visiting. The *Best Start Initiative* will help to ensure that expectant parents and parents of babies and toddlers have access to the most up-to-date parenting information as well as support in one of life's most challenging roles. Funding from the John T. Gorham Foundation, Betterment Fund, a leadership gift from a Brunswick couple and United Way allows us to implement phase one of this initiative. The program has hired a Family Resource Coordinator position that will coordinate the home visiting resources for families receiving prenatal care through Mid Coast Medical Group. This initiative will also allow us to track and evaluate outcomes for home visiting effectiveness throughout the Mid Coast region.

Other initiatives that our Early Childhood Education staff is undertaking have been funded with a \$100,000 Early Childhood Education grant from the Bug Light Foundation. This grant has gone a long way in helping us to improve the

*continued on page three*



## The Opportunity Alliance Receives Greater Portland Council of Governments President's Award

In June, The Opportunity Alliance was awarded the prestigious President's Award from the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG). In receiving the award, The Opportunity Alliance is recognized for "Best Practices in the Regional Consolidation of Critical Community Services."

According to GPCOG's statement, "The President of the Greater Portland Council of Governments commends Michael J. Tarpinian, President and Chief Executive Officer of The Opportunity Alliance, the Board of Directors of The Opportunity

Alliance, and its dedicated staff for their exemplary leadership in the successful consolidation of a wide range of community service providers including the Peoples Regional Opportunity Program, Youth Alternatives and Ingraham, resulting in the implementation of a strengthened and more cost-effective system for the delivery of critical community services designed to build better lives and stronger communities throughout Cumberland County."

## Early Childhood Education

outcomes for children birth to five in our Head Start and Early Head Start programs. With these funds, we were able to train two of our Lead Teachers to be Coach Mentors to improve teacher/child interactions in eight of our Head Start classrooms. Additional funds for the Mentoring Initiative were provided by the Davis Family Foundation, the Edward H. Davis Benevolent Fund of the Maine Community Foundation, and the Wildflower Fund. Bug Light funding also bought computer tablets for the Lead Teachers in all our Head Start classrooms to document the growth and development of the children enrolled. In addition, these funds allowed us to cover the gaps in funding for families who, for a variety of reasons, lose their childcare subsidy. This allows for a continuity of care for children even if their families become ineligible for childcare subsidies. And, the grant allowed us to expand our mental health services for children by enabling our outpatient therapists to attend Family Team Meetings, classroom consultations, parent/teacher meetings, and other activities outside the regular therapy sessions.

Finally, through grants from the Ronald McDonald House Charities, Whole Foods Market, Learning by Giving, and Norway Savings Bank, we are currently undertaking renovations to our playgrounds at our Deering Place and East End locations in Portland and at our Westbrook location.

Here at The Opportunity Alliance, we are absolutely certain that quality early childhood education is essential for the long-term wellbeing of our community. Why are we so sure? We know that quality early learning programs provide essential experi-



ences for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers that can actually shape a child's brain architecture. In fact, research in both neuroscience and economics tells us that quality early childhood education is the most efficient way to affect school and life success and to reduce social expenditures in later life. This same research tells us that returns

are greatest for the most at-risk children, reducing costs later on in special education, remedial classes, and even incarceration. Early interventions for economically disadvantaged children, writes James Heckman, a Nobel laureate in economics from the University of Chicago, "raise the quality of the workforce, enhance the productivity of schools, reduce crime, teenage pregnancy, and dependence on our social safety net." Early childhood education is an investment in our community's future that we at The Opportunity Alliance are firmly committed to.

**JOIN US!** in building a  
**stronger community!**

*Make your donation to  
The Opportunity Alliance online:*

*[www.opportunityalliance.org](http://www.opportunityalliance.org)*

*or email Katie Paye:*

*[katie.paye@opportunityalliance.org](mailto:katie.paye@opportunityalliance.org)*



## Annual Event Honors Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions

Speaker of the Maine House of Representatives Mark Eves was the guest speaker at The Opportunity Alliance's annual recognition of Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions at a luncheon held in their honor at the Italian Heritage Center in Portland, Friday, June 27, 2014.

The Foster Grandparent Program and Senior Companion Program offer volunteer opportunities for men and women over 55 years of age interested in activities addressing critical community needs throughout Southern Maine. Foster Grandparents are matched with children with special and/or exceptional needs supporting school readiness in child development centers, academic success with K-12 students and in homes reducing

### *Last year:*

*129 Foster Grandparents volunteered 109,916 hours supporting over 1,629 children in 49 schools and child development centers;*

*36 Senior Companions volunteered 25,677 hours supporting the independence of 380 frail elders through the provision of 2,924 home visits, 178 rides to medical appointments and 1,028 rides for essential errands.*



*Speaker of the Maine House of Representatives, Mark Eves, pictured with Fran Seeley, Foster Grandparent, Portland, and Stella Dalrymple, Foster Grandparent, Portland, at a June 27th luncheon to honor our Senior Volunteers.*

isolation and stress for families with children with special needs. Senior Companions make independence a reality for frail elders, and their caregivers, by providing companionship to increase socialization, transportation which provides access to medical appointments, grocery shopping and essential errands; and in-home and site-based respite.

Each Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion volunteers 15-40 hours a week keeping a consistent schedule that fosters a strong and mutually beneficial mentoring relationship between Volunteer and child or elder with whom they are matched.

## Summer Lunch Program in Cumberland County

### Serving Nutritious Meals to Children and Teenagers

The Opportunity Alliance's Summer Food Service Program collaborates with numerous community partners and volunteers to ensure that nutritious meals are available Monday through Friday for children during the summer months when school is out. More than half of the students enrolled in the Portland Public Schools alone depend on free or reduced-price school lunches and breakfasts for nine months of the year.

This is a problem across Cumberland County and nationwide. Summer vacation exposes many of these children to increased risk of hunger and developmental decline. The Opportunity Alliance's Kids Katering program prepares and delivers meals

### *Last year:*

*Our Kids Katering program prepared and delivered 57,558 meals and snacks. The Opportunity Alliance hosts 24 summer meal sites throughout Cumberland County, more sites than any other sponsor in the state.*

to children throughout Cumberland County. The Opportunity Alliance hosts 24 summer meal sites, more sites than any other Summer Lunch Program sponsor in the state.



# Hudson Foundation to Fund Project Addressing Racial Bias

## Project to Build Neighborhood Unity and Connections in Portland's Parkside Neighborhood

The Hudson Foundation, a charitable family foundation dedicated to strengthening communities in Maine, has awarded The Opportunity Alliance a three to five year grant with the first year funded at \$70,000 for the OPEN Project which will address issues of racial bias in Portland's Parkside neighborhood.

The goal of the OPEN Project is to empower a diverse group of youth leaders in Parkside to work together with adults in the neighborhood to build neighborhood unity and connections and to create sustainable positive change in their community. Using best practice approaches, it will attempt to increase the capacity of youth of color to overcome barriers associated with racial bias.

Parkside is the most diverse and densely populated neighborhood in Portland, making it a logical focal point for working to diminish the barriers for youth of color. Moreover, the issue of race and racial tension has been identified by Parkside residents as an area where the neighborhood faces challenges and one where they would like to seek community-based solutions. Refugee and immigrant youth face their own particular challenges. Immigrant adults in Parkside worry about their capacity to guide their children through the U.S. landscape and many feel a lack of community supports to help them. Further, emerging bilinguals are a significant percent of Portland's student population, presenting new challenges for both students and schools.

*... the issue of race and racial tension has been identified by Parkside residents as an area where the neighborhood faces challenges and one where they would like to seek community-based solutions.*

The OPEN Project will work with three of The Opportunity Alliance's programs: Maine Youth Action Network (MYAN); Resident Leadership; and Family and Community Mediation Services. MYAN has extensive experience in developing leadership skills in youth and boosting the capacity of adults to partner with youth leaders; Resident Leadership provides opportunities for community residents to access information, become engaged, develop skills, and increase connections in order to advance their aspirations; and Mediation Services provides training opportunities to youth and adults in conflict mediation. Through the combined efforts of these programs and other community partners, the OPEN Project will provide youth and adults in Parkside with an opportunity to independently and jointly develop their leadership capacity.

The project is a combined effort of The

Opportunity Alliance and its community partners. It will leverage and build upon existing community engagement efforts in Parkside and serve as a model for other neighborhoods.

The Hudson Foundation, based in Portland, has in recent years concentrated on funding non-profits who serve the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and populations, as well as community-based programs that empower at-risk immigrant and refugee youth.



The long-held fund raising tradition of our **Golf for Good** tournament continues on September 22nd at the Woodlands Country Club in Falmouth. The day features a "shot-gun" start to 18 holes, followed by an awards ceremony. For more information, contact Katie Paye: [katie.paye@opportunityalliance.org](mailto:katie.paye@opportunityalliance.org)



# the Opportunity Alliance

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## September is National Recovery Month

### Highlighting Individuals Who Have Reclaimed Their Lives

Every September, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, sponsors National Recovery Month to increase awareness of behavioral health conditions. This celebration promotes the message that behavioral health is essential to overall health, prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover from mental and substance use disorders. One of the core services at The Opportunity Alliance is treatment and support for people seeking recovery from co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders. Several of our programs, including Morrison Place, Community Support Services (adult case management), the Women's Project, and others, will be recognizing National Recovery Month by hosting and participating in events throughout Maine. The Women's Project, will host a talk on September 25th on *Women in Recovery: Challenges Specific to Women in Achieving and Maintaining Sobriety*: at the Family Center, 50 Lydia Lane, South Portland. A light lunch will be provided. If you are interested in attending, email Kelsea Dunham: [kelsea.dunham@opportunityalliance.org](mailto:kelsea.dunham@opportunityalliance.org)



**Helen Pare, (center), Case Worker with the Women's Project, with Wendi DuBois, Vice President, Children and Family Services, (left), and Katharine Yvonne, also a Case Worker for the Women's Project. The three are standing in the gardens of the Blaine House on May 20th. Helen had just been awarded the prestigious Women in Recovery Leadership Award at the annual Women's Addiction Services Council (WASC) Silver Tea.**