

Thriving communities

Fall 2016

Back to School with LLBean Backpacks

Young Students Earn Backpacks by Performing Service in Their Neighborhoods

Children in the Redbank and Brick Hill neighborhoods of South Portland celebrated earning their backpacks, donated by LLBean, at a barbecue event in August. The children were invited to perform six tasks over the summer: Be helpful to a neighbor; Get active; Help in the neighborhood; Make a new friend; Help your parents; and Tell us what someone else did for you. They completed a form that was signed by a parent and in return they received an LLBean backpack filled with school supplies donated by Eastpoint Christian Church and the staff of Texas Instruments.

The event was part of The Opportunity Alliance's Resident



From left to right top row around Slugger (mascot of the Portland Sea Dogs): Noor Dherib; Imauri McCollum. Bottom row: Seal Dherib; Mshari Dherib; Miniah Osborne; and Noor Dherib.

Led Community Building efforts in neighborhoods throughout the greater Portland area in collaboration with multiple community partners.

The Opportunity Alliance Awarded Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Grant

Two Year Grant of \$250,000 to Evaluate the Impact of Peer Services in Our Community

The Opportunity Alliance has been awarded a \$250,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that will allow us to evaluate the impact of peer services within our Behavioral Health Home. Peer to peer support has long been used in many areas of healthcare demonstrating long-term benefits for individuals attempting recovery from a variety of physical illnesses. Intentional Peer Support for people attempting long-term recovery from mental illness and co-

occurring disorders brings peer to peer programming to the behavioral health arena with equally impressive results.

Behavioral Health Homes are still a relatively new model of coordinated care for persons living with severe mental illness. The Opportunity Alliance has been a leader in developing the model in

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the
Opportunity
Alliance
community
news & notes



The Opportunity Alliance Community News and Notes

published by:
The Office of Development
& Communications

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South Portland, ME 04106

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Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Grant

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Maine. Our Behavioral Health Home is a partnership between our Community Support Services community mental health program, and several local Health Home Primary Care practices, with a goal of better managing the integrated physical and behavioral health needs of eligible adults. Our Behavioral Health Home is a targeted effort to improve mental and physical health outcomes for individuals living with severe and persistent mental illness and co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders. It is built upon our understanding that prospects for recovery increase when efforts to support the individual are collaborative and focused on the whole health of the person. The client and Care Coordinator work together with the client's medical and mental health providers, supported in the process by our Behavioral Health Home team, which includes a Nurse Care Manager, a medical consultant, a psychiatric consultant, a clinical team leader, and Peer and Family Health Navigators.

The Opportunity Alliance has long supported peer to peer programming for the people who come to us for help. This peer programming can take the form of crisis prevention and intervention, where peers can help

an individual in a mental health or substance misuse crisis become and stay engaged in recovery, or in health and wellness programming, where peers conduct workshops and drop-in groups that focus on community inclusion. Very often, persons living with a mental illness feel disconnected from any sort of community and the natural supports that a community can offer, but in a peer to peer relationship, individuals living with a mental illness or possible co-occurring disorder have the opportunity to build connection and redefine help as a co-learning process. The relationship between the peer provider and the client is one of mutual responsibility.

The project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant will focus on our Behavioral Health Home clients with Serious Mental Illness (SMI) enrolled in Medicaid (MaineCare). The intent of the evaluation is to inform the spread of this model across Maine and possibly further. Rates of Serious Mental Illness for adults range from four to six percent, affecting more than 11 million adults nationwide. There are approximately 51,000 adults in Maine with Serious Mental Illness.

The Behavioral Health Home is a targeted effort to improve mental and physical health outcomes for individuals living with severe and persistent mental illness.

The OPEN Project

Engaging Youth in Issues of Social Justice

The OPEN Project, Organizing Partnership and Engagement in Neighborhoods, is a collaborative program that engages diverse youth to take an active role in the decision-making and dialogue around social justice issues affecting their community. This summer, the OPEN Project's summer internship participants presented *The Comprehension of Racism Summit* before an audience of nearly 75 Portland community members at the University of Southern Maine. Pictured here, the event included researched presentations on topics ranging from access testing in schools to beauty standards and the intersectionality of racism with other identity-based biases. Using dramatized skits of their personal experiences, youth participants then invited attendees into thoughtful dialogues around the community's collective responsibility in the face of institutional and individual racism.



The OPEN Project is funded by the Hudson Foundation and is now in its third year. To learn more about the work of the OPEN Project participants and The Opportunity Alliance's broader youth engagement efforts, please connect with us online at <http://www.myan.org>.

Signs of Success at Our Behavioral Health Home

As mentioned in the accompanying article, the Behavioral Health Home model is relatively new. The model's goal is to integrate and better manage the physical and behavioral health needs of people living with a Serious Mental Illness (SMI) as well as, perhaps, a co-occurring substance use disorder. The case managers in our Behavioral Health Home work together with the client to coordinate the care provided by both their primary care physicians and their mental health providers. Ultimately, we would like to see better health outcomes, such as better managed diabetes or hypertension, or fewer hospitalizations and emergency department visits from this integrated approach.

During the time period for fiscal year 2016 (from July 2015 to June 2016), our Behavioral Home served 567 clients and we

are seeing success when we compare these clients to indicators from the previous fiscal year:

- Hospitalizations for our BHH clients went down 4.9 percentage points from the previous fiscal year. Going from 13.9% to 9%;
- Emergency department utilization dropped nearly 9 percentage points. Going from 55.2% to 46.4%;
- and, the Behavioral Health Home at The Opportunity Alliance was identified by MaineCare as a high performer in the area of diabetes care.

New Neighborhood Center to Open in Westbrook

It may not look like much now, but in a few months after hundreds of hours of volunteer work from neighbors and community partners, including the Cornelia Warren Community Association; the Eastpoint Christian Church; the City of Westbrook; and private contractors, humble 34 Reserve Street in Westbrook will become our newest community hub. Integral to Community Partnerships for Protecting Children (CPPC), our neighborhood hubs are part of an effort to strengthen communities and are in keeping with our vision of connecting families to natural and community supports in their own neighborhoods. Currently there are community hubs in Biddeford and three neighborhoods in Cumberland County.



LLBean Donates 200 Backpacks

Just in time for the beginning of the school year, LLBean donated 200 backpacks for the school-aged children in our Children's Case Management; Therapeutic Foster Care; and other programs, including our neighborhood programs. Left, Kelsea Dunham, Development Associate with The Opportunity Alliance, readies the backpacks for distribution to families.

Partnering with the Good Food Bus for Healthy Produce

The Good Food Bus is now a community partner working with Community Partnerships for Protecting Children (CPPC) to bring healthy produce to Westbrook with weekly scheduled stops at St. Anthony's Parish. The Good Food Bus is a colorful, re-purposed school bus turned mobile food market. The Westbrook location is only the newest stop for the Bus which brings its produce to neighborhoods across southern Maine. It accepts cash, credit, debit, WIC, and SNAP/EBT at every stop and participates in the Maine Harvest Bucks program, which provides free fruit and vegetable vouchers for SNAP shoppers when they use their SNAP benefits. The Bus is part of *Good Food Moves*, a 3-year mobile food initiative founded by *St. Mary's Nutrition Center*, *Cultivating Community*, and *Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation*. Additional support comes from USDA Community Food Projects.



A Head Start to Another School Year

Early Childhood and Family Education programming at The Opportunity Alliance began another school year with a pre-service orientation at the Italian Heritage Center in Portland. As the Community Action Agency for Cumberland County, The Opportunity Alliance has provided

Head Start/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 five from low-income families. Head Start/Early Head Start programs provide a



Staff of The Opportunity Alliance's Early Childhood and Family Education programming meets for a pre-service meeting prior to the start of the school year.

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.

Back to School in Portland's Riverton Neighborhood

Resident-Led Community Building Program in Partnership with Riverton Elementary School and Norway Savings Bank

The day before the first day of school, residents of Portland's Riverton neighborhood gathered at the elementary school for a barbecue, fun and games. "The event was a nice way to ease the children back into the school year," said Chris Gorman, Director of our Resident-Led Community Building Program, "and for parents to connect with one another and with teachers and staff prior to the school year." Norway Savings Bank helped to fund the event and other community building activities with a generous donation.

From left to right: David Turner (Assistant Principal at Riverton Elementary School), Kathy Cole (Community Coordinator at Riverton Elementary), Mike Tarpinian, Janice de Lima (Norway Savings Bank), and Chris Gorman.



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Another Successful Summer Lunch Program

Summer Food Services Program Serves Thousands of Meals to Children 18 and under

The Opportunity Alliance's Summer Food Services 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. Many children depend on free or reduced-price school lunches and breakfasts for nine months of the year. Summer vacation exposes many of them to increased risk of hunger and developmental decline. This is a problem nationwide.

This summer, there were open meal sites throughout the state where any child could go for a free summer lunch. The Opportunity Alliance's Summer Food Services program hosts 24 sites (16 in Portland alone) throughout Cumberland County, more sites than any other sponsor in the state. Each summer, we serve more than 55,000 meals and snacks.

The Summer Food Service Program is federally funded and administered by the Maine Department of Education.

JOIN US!
in building a
stronger community!

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The Opportunity Alliance online:
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or email Susan Bosco:
susan.bosco@opportunityalliance.org*