

THE OPP JOURNEY: RELATIONSHIPS MATTER



Our Piece of the Pie.[®]
*Empowering Youth To Succeed In
Education and Employment*

2024

ANNUAL REPORT

ACHIEVE



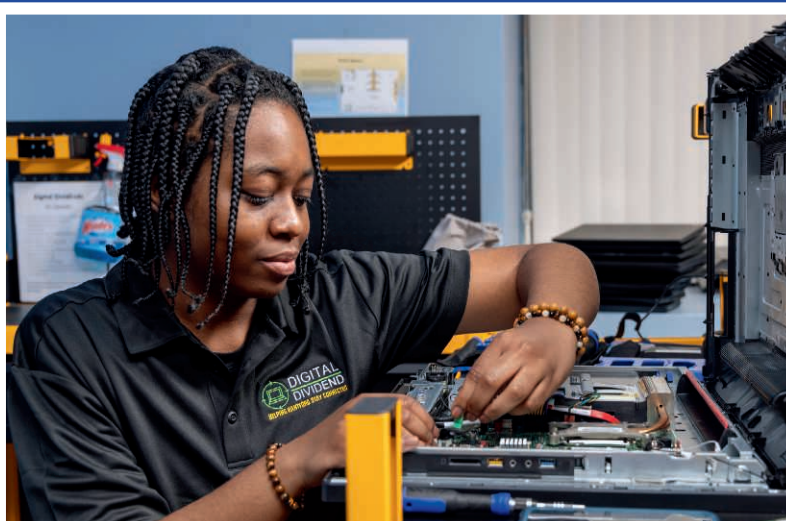
Our Piece of the Pie

Empowering youth to succeed in
education and employment.



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Message from the CEO and Board Chair

Relationships Matter. At Our Piece of the Pie, we understand that each young person comes to us full of potential that they may not even recognize. To grow, you have to feel comfortable being uncomfortable, taking the time to look within and figure out who you are and who you want to be. That can be tough, especially when the barriers around you seem too large to let you dream. Our job is to build trust between youth and their Youth Development Specialist, developing an authentic, deep relationship that allows young people a safe and supported place to dream, grow, and thrive.

As you read the stories in this Annual Report you will hear from young people about these relationships and how important it is to have someone believe in you and work in partnership as you strive to reach your goals.

We also invite you to watch our most recent video at <https://bit.ly/TheOPPJourney> to see these relationships in action.


Goals achievement doesn't happen overnight, and there is rarely a straight path to success. Our Engagement and Retention Specialists work with each young person as they enter our programs, connect them to their Youth Development Specialist, and then follow up with them in the year after they complete their OPP journey. We work hard to earn young people's trust and let them know we are invested in their success.

As OPP looks to the future, we rely on our 49 years of experience serving the Greater Hartford community. We constantly look for ways to deepen our impact. The recent report *Young People First* details recommendations that provide a framework for the future of Hartford and all of Connecticut. We were pleased to participate in the development of this report. Relationships matter and we know that together with the broader youth-serving community we can make an even greater impact for our young people.




Hector Rivera, Jr.
President & CEO




Rashani Swaby
Board Chair



Young People First



119,000 young people in CT are disconnected from the very systems designed to support them in becoming successful adults and community members. The systems are disjointed, and this lack of communication and coordination leads to confusing, redundant, and ineffective services for youth.

In October 2024, the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) released *Young People First*, a forward-thinking plan with recommendations for implementation designed to intervene before youth become disconnected. The plan, which builds upon Dalio Education's 2023 report: *CT's Unspoken Crisis: Getting Young People Back on Track*, recommends possible solutions to core issues many youth and the organizations who serve them face, including:

- Strengthening career-connected learning and pathways from education to work
- Funding and providing capacity building to existing nonprofits serving severely disconnected young people to ensure coverage across CT's highest-need communities
- Scaling transitional employment programs, apprenticeships, and summer employment programs
- Improving visibility and understanding of the number of at-risk and disconnected youth and strengthening accountability at state, regional, and local levels
- Launching the Connecticut Youth Service Corps

The full report can be read at <https://bit.ly/119KYoungPeopleFirst>

Meet Our Leaders



OPP's Executive Team

Pictured left to right:

Kim Johnson, Senior Director of Development and Strategic Initiatives

Chanda Robinson, Chief Operating Officer

Rosa Plaza, Senior Director of Human Resources

Hector Rivera, President & Chief Executive Officer

Kimberly Williams-Rivera, Senior Director of MIS and Performance

Girard Dawes, Senior Director of Youth Engagement

Patricia Moro, Chief Financial Officer

Our Mission

Relationships Matter

Our Piece of the Pie, Inc. (OPP) empowers youth with the key competencies needed to overcome barriers and succeed in education and employment.



OPP continues to stand united in our commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice, and Belonging (DEIJB) principles. Through intentional actions, ongoing education, and courageous conversations, we create a safe, inclusive, and empowering space where every individual is valued, respected, and celebrated for their unique identity and experiences. We pledge to listen, learn, and advocate for meaningful change in all aspects of our work and interactions. Together, we work towards a future where equity and justice prevail, and where every individual can thrive without fear of discrimination or prejudice. Our commitment to creating an environment where all perspectives are valued, every community is embraced, and every individual thrives is at the core of our collective journey toward a more equitable and inclusive future.

Who We Are



as of July 1, 2023 -
June 30, 2024

Youth Ethnicity

Asian	1%
Black or African American	55%
Hispanic or Latino	38%
Multiracial	1%
White	5%

Youth Age Group

14-15	10%
16-18	44%
19-21	29%
22+	17%

Youth Gender

Female	45%
Male	55%
Non-Binary or Trans Female/Male	<1%

Staff Ethnicity

Asian	3%
Black or African American	33%
Hispanic or Latino	30%
Multiracial	8%
White	26%

Board Ethnicity

Asian	8%
Black or African American	31%
Hispanic or Latino	15%
White	46%



ADEN was driven to find a job and his family suggested that he research organizations that work with Capital Workforce Partners. “It was hard to go from zero experience on a resume to any sort of job,” says Aden. It was through their organization, he found OPP.

Aden was homeschooled his whole life and missed the social aspect of school. As he approached the end of high school, Aden wanted to form connections with people his age. “It could get a little depressing and lonely, being stuck at home.” At OPP, his Youth Development Specialist, Yessica, worked hard to show him his potential and how to use his voice. With her consistent support, Aden has become a leader.

As a Hartford Youth Service Corps member, Aden was part of the landscaping crew, cleaning city parks, landscaping, and doing street cleanups. “Sam (Director of Workforce Services) and Yessica went above and beyond, showing how important it is to keep the streets clean.”

One of Aden’s favorite memories was visiting the State Capitol, meeting legislators, and speaking on his life experiences. “It was a very pivotal moment for my further development; it was a great success for not just myself but everyone [involved].”



Aden at his DCFY internship



Aden with Yessica

Inspired by his meeting with legislators, Aden interned at the City of Hartford in the Department of Families, Children, and Youth (DFCY). After his internship, Yessica worked with the department to develop a position. Aden is now a full-time employee at the age of 20 and is a passionate advocate for his city.

OPP Service Areas

Personal Development

Young People Need **SUPPORT** to Develop & Succeed

- Goal Setting
- Barrier Identification and Reduction
- Problem-Solving
- Relationship-Building
- Mentoring
- Life Skills
- Healthy Emotional Management Skills
- Financial Capabilities



Academic Achievement

Young People Need **OPTIONS** to Learn & Progress

- Alternative Education: OPPortunity Academy – a place where students can fit in and succeed
- Tutoring and Homework Help
- Post-Secondary Exploration and Access (including two and four-year degrees)
- Flexible Schedules – supporting students to learn and earn
- Connect classroom to career – real life experiences strengthening connection to education



Workforce Development

Young People Need **SKILLS** to Earn & Grow

- Learn how to get and keep a job
- Soft Skills (problem solving, team work, communication)
- Service-Learning Projects
- Internships
- Job Placement
- Stackable Credentials (OSHA-10, First Aid, ServSafe, Retail)
- Vocational Certificates (CNA, EKG Tech, Phlebotomy, CNC Machinist, Flagger, ForkLift, Guard Card, Welding)



SHIAN



SHIAN came to OPP in 2020 with a purpose: to “solidify her identity.” With limited resources available during the pandemic, Shian needed a place that wouldn’t turn its back on her and would support her. “OPP was very understanding of my circumstances and worked with me to move forward.” When Shian met her Youth Development Specialist Brandice, “We hit it off instantly, her interest in my goals reassured me that someone was here for me.”

At OPP, Shian learned three invaluable lessons: how to advocate for herself, how to accept and learn from failure, and how

to broaden her understanding of what she could achieve. “I see Brandice like an older sister; I respect her and hold her in high regard and can go to her with anything at a drop of a dime.” Brandice has even accompanied her on college tours. For Brandice, she “sees herself in Shian” when she looks at the hard-working and motivated person Shian is.

Shian is pursuing an Associate degree in Business Administration at CT State Asnuntuck. Her engagement on campus reflects her evolving confidence and commitment. She is the President of the Student Government Association and serves on the Student Advisory Committee for the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities Board of Regents. Beyond academics, she has interned with OPP’s Development team, sharpening her professional skills while giving back to the organization that supported her through challenging times.



Shian with OPP’s Development Team



Shian with Brandice

“I came to OPP disempowered, but as I make my transition out, I am proud to be a confident and eloquent young woman.” Shian anticipates graduating in May and is currently exploring options for continuing her studies at a four-year college. With new skills, a supportive community, and unwavering determination, Shian is well positioned to pursue her entrepreneurial dreams and thrive.

Impact of OPP in FY24

\$2 MILLION

PROVIDED IN YOUTH WAGES/STIPENDS FOR WORK EXPERIENCES

1,037

YOUTH SERVED

40,000

DOCUMENTED STAFF
ENGAGEMENTS WITH YOUTH

631

YOUTH PARTICIPATED IN
CAREER-FOCUSED TRAININGS

341

YOUTH IN
SERVICE LEARNING

417

YOUTH EMPLOYED AND
MAINTAINED EMPLOYMENT

YOUTH EARNED IT CERTIFICATIONS WITH
HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE REFURBISHING

120

COMPUTERS FOR
COMMUNITY DISTRIBUTION



As someone who grew up dealing with frequent moves and instability at home, Elijah needed a space to plant his feet and grow socially, academically, and professionally. "I had just moved back to Hartford, and my dad saw an OPP advertisement online."

At OPP, he met Deion, an intern, and their relationship blossomed. "It was hard for me to have the motivation and support systems to do things for myself," says Elijah. Deion then became a Youth Development Specialist, and Elijah was one of his first youth. An intertwined journey of growth, leadership, and discovery soon began. Elijah joined the Hartford Youth Service Corps in September 2023 and began to come out of his shell. Deion encouraged him to speak his truth, reminding him, "You are worthy to be in any space you enter."

As Deion's understanding of youth development strengthened, so did Elijah's leadership qualities. Deion persistently challenged Elijah to develop his skills, both of them learning grace and patience as their relationship grew stronger. Due to his confidence, voice, and leadership growth, Elijah was invited to join OPP's inaugural Youth Leadership Council. His purpose is to give back. "I like community outreach, helping out my community, especially with people in similar situations as me."



Elijah landscaping

With Deion's persistent support and encouragement, Elijah has learned how to listen to his youth counterparts and share their ideas with key OPP staff.

Elijah graduated from Classical Magnet School and is now attending Manchester Community College, studying Social Work and pursuing an interest in fashion.



Elijah with Deion and OA's Director of Youth Development Brenda

OPP in the Community

This year our youth and staff represented OPP at numerous conferences, forums, and interviews. We are proud to share our mission with local and national organizations!



Tow Youth Justice Conference



ORTV Featured Interview



NYEC Forum



Hartford Police Chief Forum



CCM 119K Commission Panel



Dalio Education Grantee Convening

Denieke knew OPP was different from the moment she stepped foot in the door. “The energy was so very calm and positive.” At her previous school, Denieke struggled with attendance: school just wasn’t working for her. After her grandfather died her motivation plunged even more. A graduation specialist referred her to OPP and OPPportunity Academy.

Even at OA, Denieke still struggled with attendance. Her Youth Development Specialist, Ms. Colon, continued to reach out with support and check-ins. “Starting OPP I still had problems with attendance, I barely came to school. I was missing A LOT of classes. My YDS at the time Ms. Colon took her time to come to my home with a dismissal form saying that I will be removed from OPP because of my bad attendance.”



Denieke pictured with Dalio Education's CEO Barbara Dalio, OPP's CEO Hector Rivera, and OPP staff at Senator Chris Murphy's youth voices roundtable.

OPP provided the safe space she needed, helping her to get back up when she fell and learn from her mistakes. “Before OPP, I didn’t know where I was going and wasn’t sure if I would be a dropout. Now I feel motivated to finish my degree.”

Denieke graduated from OPPportunity Academy in December 2024 and is planning to join the army. “I’m very thankful for all the staff members at OPP. They helped me a lot, and I wouldn’t have reached this far without them.”



Denieke really did want to keep learning and attending OA, so she asked for another chance. Her new YDS, Mr. Nelson, called her at 7 am every morning to make sure she was awake and had a plan to get to school on time. “We don’t give up on students, even when some may have given up on themselves. We continue to offer something different here – relentless engagement and support,” says Mr. Nelson.

The summer before her last semester at OA, Denieke spent a few hours in jail after an argument with her brother. “Being in that cell helped me understand that I needed to become something. Everything I went through is just motivating me to do better.”



Denieke with Mr. Nelson at her senior capstone presentation

Financial Summary

as of July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

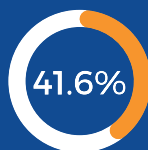
Total Revenue	\$9,538,764
Program Services Expenses	\$7,701,972
Supporting Services Expenses	\$1,947,982
Total Expenses	\$9,649,954
Revenues and Support Over/(Under) Expenses	(\$111,190)
Other Income/(Expenses)	(\$19,367)
Change in Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	(\$130,557)
Change in Net Assets With Donor Restrictions	\$672,583
Change in Net Assets	\$542,026
Net Assets at the Beginning of the Year	\$1,120,882
Net Assets at the End of the Year	\$1,662,908

Details of Expenses

Program Services



Personal Development
\$1,608,241



Youth Employment
\$4,013,095



Education
\$1,299,429

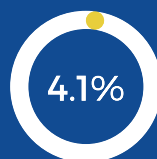


Clinical Services
\$273,312

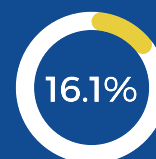
Organizational Management



Data & Accountability
\$507,895



Fundraising
\$398,385



Management/General
\$1,549,597

Champions of Youth

November 9, 2023

Yard Goats Club

Honorees

Hartford Public Schools

Bloomfield Public Schools

Liberty Bank Foundation

United Way of Central and
Northeastern Connecticut

Hartford HealthCare

*OPP Community Leadership Award,
Galo Rodriguez - The Village for
Families & Children*

OPP Alumnus, Alisha S. Henderson



Thank you to our sponsors!

Champion



Ambassador



Partner



Advisors



Friend and Table Sponsors

- Capital Workforce Partners
- Express Kitchens
- Smith Brothers
- Strategic Outreach Solutions
- The Village for Families & Children
- United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut
- Voices of Women of Color
- Whittlesey

OPP University (OPPU): Empowering Staff to Empower Youth

Central to OPP's work are Youth Development Specialists — caring, competent, and compassionate individuals who work closely with each youth to guide them on their journey. OPP University (OPPU) is our internal professional development and talent cultivation department. By fostering continuous personal and professional development, OPPU ensures that staff are equipped to support youth in achieving their full potential while also thriving in their own careers.



Everything you incorporated into the onboarding process has been greatly appreciated. The conversations and reflections we did were incredibly helpful for the job but also to foster community. It has been the best on boarding experience I've had. - OPP Staff

OPPU is a comprehensive onboarding program preparing new hires for a successful transition into their roles and offering ongoing professional development for existing staff. This investment in our people ensures that OPP's workforce is prepared to meet the unique needs of the youth they serve.

Guided by the 6C's of People Development: Consciousness, Connection, Competence, Confidence, Compassion, and Contribution, the framework is a spin-off of decades-long research on Positive Youth Development (PYD) and reflects OPP's continuous commitment to fostering a holistic and strength-based approach to staff development. OPPU ensured staff are not only technically skilled but also emotionally and socially equipped to meaningfully support youth.



Our Supporters

Individuals

Steven Adamowski
Veronica Airey-Wilson
Drew Andrews
Joan Annexy
Megan Bacon
Alex Bellino
Robert Berman
Kelly Bilodeau
Daniel Browne
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Rosa Capo
Maria Carlson
Amy Casavina Hall
Noel Casiano
Stephen Coates
Brenda Colon
Jose Colon
Linda Corbin
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Samuel DeCarlo
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Elizabeth Dietrich
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Doreen Radway
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Tanecia Raphael
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Paige Williams-Menard
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Lisa Wills

DONATE TODAY!



Our Supporters Continued...

Government

Bloomfield Public Schools
Capital Workforce Partners
City of Hartford
Department of Children & Families
Hartford Public Schools
Office of Juvenile Justice and
Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)
U.S. Department of Labor



Community Organizations and Non-Profits

Advanced Behavioral Health
Angel of Edgewood
Bethany Lutheran Church
Chamber of Commerce of Eastern CT
Family Health International
Re-Center Race and Equity in Education
The Village for Families and Children
United Way of Middlesex
United Way of Central and
Northeastern Connecticut
Voices of Women of Color
Women's Fellowship First Church of
Christ Congregational

Corporations

Bank of America
BerryDunn
BJ's Restaurant Brewhouse
Cigna
COCC
Collins Aerospace
CREC
Flex Center LLC
Franklin Trust Federal Credit Union
Full Power Radio LLC
Hartford Healthcare
Hartford Yard Goats
LAZ Parking
Republic Gastropub
ShopRite of Manchester
Smith Brothers
Stanley Black & Decker
Strategic Outreach Solutions
The Hartford
The Main Pub
The Russell Cafe
Walmart
Whittlesey
Workers' Compensation Trust

***OPP can change your life!
OPP takes us through a journey of
working on ourselves. Being here
has proven to me how hard of a
worker I can be and that it is
possible to navigate through life.
- Jordan***

Our Supporters Continued...

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Scripps Family Fund



Foundations

AT&T Foundation
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Colt Park Foundation
Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut
Dalio Education
Dime Bank Foundation
Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Inc.
Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
Jackson Lewis Foundation
Liberty Bank Foundation
Lincoln Financial Foundation
SBM Charitable Foundation
TD Bank Charitable Foundation
The M&T Charitable Foundation
Tow Foundation
Travelers Foundation
Webster Bank Charitable Foundation



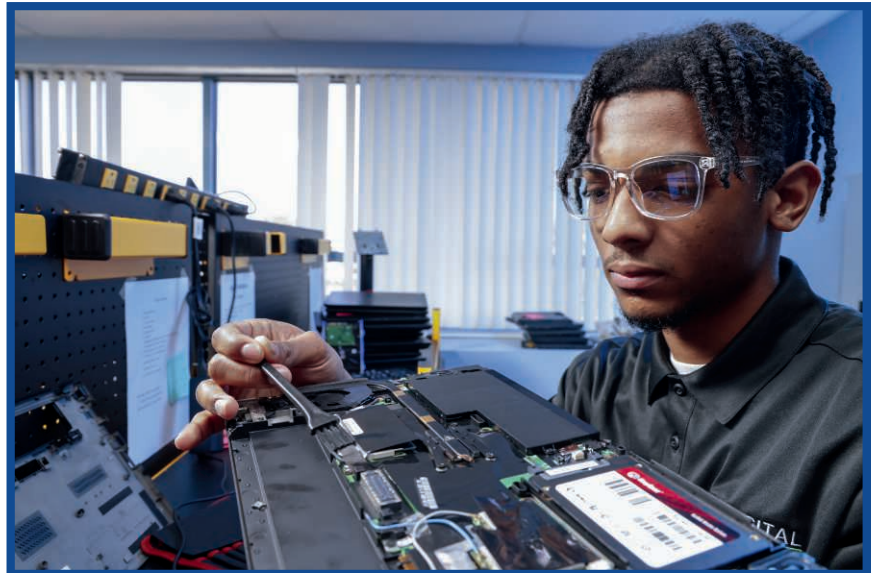


FY24 Board Members

Rashani Swaby - *Chair*
Carl Harding - *Vice Chair*
Meghann Michalak - *Treasurer*
Smitesh Davé - *Secretary*
Alex Bellino
Dr. Noel Casiano
Steve Coates
Margot Early
Nikki Johns
Banning Rauls
Kevin Rivera
Jonathan Stryjek
Nate Swaim

FY24 Program Areas

Digital DividEND
Financial Capabilities
Hartford Youth Service Corps
OPPortunity Academy
Pathways to Careers Initiative
Work to Learn



Follow OPP online!



Our Piece of the Pie



our_piece_of_the_pie



Our Piece of the Pie

Photos by Allegra Anderson Photography, Jennifer Fiereck Photography,
Lasch Photo, and Shana Sureck Photography





50th Anniversary Celebration

October 16, 2025

Hartford Marriott Downtown

5:30 PM

**Visit www.opp.org/get-involved/events
to learn more**

