

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PHOTOS ATTACHED

LOCAL FOUNDATIONS PARTNER TO SUPPORT YOUTH EMPLOYMENT



Makeeda Bandele of New London, a participant in the Eastern Workforce Investment Board's Summer Youth Employment Program, harvests a cabbage in F.R.E.S.H. New London's garden.

NEW LONDON, CT — Twenty-five more low-income young people have jobs this summer, thanks to a partnership of three local charitable foundations in the Southeastern CT Funders Collaborative. Together, the Liberty Bank Foundation, the People's United Community Foundation, and the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut Foundation provided \$24,500 to enable the Eastern Workforce Investment Board (EWIB) to hire additional youth for its Summer Youth Employment program.

The funders recently visited

F.R.E.S.H. New London, where young workers

were picking several varieties of peppers they had grown. F.R.E.S.H. is a nonprofit urban gardening program that teaches youth about organic farming and nutrition, while providing fresh, locally grown produce at low or no cost to people in inner-city neighborhoods. Despite the 90-degree heat, the teens were eager to show off their harvest and explain what they had learned about sustainable agriculture and the benefits of organic, locally grown foods. "I learned how bad for you the food at McDonald's really is," said one student (although he admitted he still eats there.)

For several of the students, this experience was their first job. When asked what they had learned about working, Nickeury Rodriguez replied, “Being responsible.” Fellow worker Jorge Medrano added, “Working as a team.” There was a strong spirit of camaraderie among the diverse group of teens, several of whom were still learning English.

EWIB’s Summer Youth Employment program receives most of its funding from state government, but consistently has many more young applicants than the funds can support. This year, 398 of the 769 students who applied were able to work at 158 worksites all over eastern Connecticut. The New London program, which includes F.R.E.S.H., enrolled 140 students, 79% of whom qualified for free or reduced price school lunch, and 74% of whom were minorities.

“We were able to hire more students because of the funding we received from Liberty, People’s United, and the Chamber,” said program director Cindy Alvarez of New London Youth Affairs.

“We all remember the lessons we learned on our first summer job,” said Sue Murphy, executive director of the Liberty Bank Foundation. “It’s important that every teenager have that experience.”

“That first job is where youth learn the basics of the working world: being on time, being dressed appropriately, and doing what’s expected of you,” said Dianne Kent, Liaison for the People’s United Community Foundation. “That knowledge provides the foundation for your entire working life.”

Tony Sheridan, president of the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut, agreed, saying, “We’d like to see these young people work hard, grow up, finish their educations, and



Nickeury Rodriguez shows off a pepper picked from the garden at F.R.E.S.H. New London, where he is working for the summer.

then come back here to eastern Connecticut and start their own businesses. And we'll be here to help them when they do."

Students work 20 hours a week for six weeks at minimum wage, earning about \$900 for the summer. Several of the teens noted that they are using their hard-earned paychecks to buy school clothes for themselves. "I don't want my father to have to pay for my clothes," said Nickeury. "I can take care of that myself now."



Teens participating in the Summer Youth Employment program at F.R.E.S.H. New London display their harvest to funders of the program. Left to right: Gregory Morel, Sharmeine Gregor, Makeeda Bandele, Max Edouard, Tsering Samdup, Chloe Murphy, Nickeury Rodriguez, Danielson Duperval, Sincere Stokes, Aliana Davenport, Dianne Kent of People's United Community Foundation, Tony Sheridan of the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut Foundation, and Jorge Medrano

Since the SE CT Funders Collaborative began supporting EWIB's Summer Youth Employment program in 2012, almost \$179,000 has been donated to provide about 160 additional jobs for local youth. Formed in 2012, the Collaborative includes 12 area foundations and corporations who partner from time to time to provide collective funding for initiatives of common interest. Other projects that have been funded include the New London County Fund to End Homelessness and the Secure Jobs CT pilot in southeastern Connecticut. Over the years, participants in the Collaborative have included AT&T, the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern CT Foundation, Charter Oak Credit Union, the Community Foundation of Eastern CT, Dime Bank Foundation, Dominion Resources, the Edward and Mary Lord Foundation, Liberty Bank Foundation, People's United Community Foundation, Pfizer, Sea Research Foundation, and the SI Financial Group Foundation.

Since its inception in 1997, the Liberty Bank Foundation has awarded over \$9.9 million in grants to nonprofit organizations within Liberty Bank's market area. The foundation seeks to improve the quality of life for people of low or moderate income by investing in three areas: education to promote economic success for children and families; affordable housing; and nonprofit capacity building. Along with its grantmaking, the foundation strives to foster the convening and collaboration of nonprofits, funders, business, and government to address community issues.

Established in 2007, People's United Community Foundation was formed to help support programs and activities that enhance the quality of life for citizens in the communities that People's United Bank serves. People's United Bank, founded in 1842 and serving customers from New York to Maine through a network of more than 400 branches, is the largest independent bank headquartered in New England. The Foundation places special emphasis on programs designed to promote economic self-sufficiency, education and improved conditions for low-income families and neighborhoods. The funding priorities of the Foundation include affordable housing, community development, and youth development.

The mission of the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut Foundation is to promote initiatives that enhance and enrich education and economic opportunities for children and families in the Chamber's service area. The Foundation is a business community based nonprofit foundation affiliated with the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut.

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